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Becoming Political Subjects in the City's Peripheries: *Pobladores* and Housing  
Struggles in Santiago, Chile

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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## Abstract

Social scientists and urban planners have long argued that social movements for housing, especially in metropolises of the so-called Global South, have been determinant in the politicization of the urban poor. Since the mid-twentieth century, the demand for rights to physical presence in the city has resulted in large-scale right-to-housing mobilizations in which lower-income dwellers seek to become homeowners by taking over peripheral empty plots and building themselves their homes and neighborhoods (e.g. Mangin 1967; Turner 1968; Castells 1983; Holston 1991; 2008; Garcés 2002; Fawaz 2009; Das 2011; Caldeira 2015a; Murphy 2015). Scholars have thus suggested that the urban poor, on account of their involvement in widespread practices of city making carried out mostly in the urban peripheries, have become citizens capable of addressing a language of rights to the state.

This dissertation engages in these debates by posing some critical questions: What are the mechanisms through which the urban poor constitute themselves as legitimate rights-bearers when they are no longer the actual builders of their residential spaces? What kind of political subjectivity is formed when their demand for urban rights is performed less through mass land seizures and “autoconstruction” processes (Holston 1991; 2008; Caldeira 2000; 2015a) than through their participation in state-regulated housing assemblies? This dissertation examines the rise and development of housing movements in Santiago, Chile based on archival analysis of past urban mobilizations and ethnographic observation of contemporary housing assemblies. This study scrutinizes thus the ways in which working-class dwellers articulate a rights-based political language and produce new political subjectivities while enrolled in housing programs through which they apply for state subsidies.

Since the 1950s, housing struggles in Chile have been grounded in a kind of social agency known as *pobladores* (urban poor). In the 1960s and early 1970s, *pobladores* made use of two interrelated performances of city making to become homeowners: illegal land occupations and autoconstruction. This gave rise to mass social protests known as “*pobladores* movement” (Castells 1973; 1983; Pastrana and Threlfall 1974; Espinoza 1988; Garcés 2002; Cortés 2014). However, the arrival of Augusto Pinochet’s military dictatorship (1973–1990) drastically repressed these mobilizations. Likewise, it implemented a neoliberal, subsidy-based housing policy, which changed significantly the way *pobladores* obtain and envisage social housing. Accordingly, since the late 1970s state policies conceive housing less as the result of collective practices of city making than as a commodity that the poor can obtain through both state subsidies and private savings (Bruey 2012; Özler 2012). Over the past twenty-five years, post-dictatorial governments have tried to avoid the reappearance of urban movements by preemptively building subsidized housing projects. During the 1990s, the state endeavored to construct at least 90,000 subsidized housing units per year (Arriagada and Moreno 2006). This eventually helped reduce the housing shortage from 918,756 units in 1990 to 743,450 in 2000, which represents a decrease from 53% to 37% in the number of households in need of housing. This reduction of the housing deficit persisted in the following decades reaching 459,347 units in 2013 (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social 2014a).

In that context, by 2000 large-scale land occupations almost totally disappeared, calling into question the very existence of *pobladores* as subjects endowed with a capacity to intervene in the political sphere. However, while the government has massively delivered housing, these subsidized homes are often located in peripheral areas lacking infrastructure and services. This

fact has triggered an emerging process of remobilization in the last ten years in which the new generations of *pobladores* are increasingly claiming the right to “dignified housing” (*vivienda digna*) and a “dignified life” (*vida digna*). Interestingly, the tactics of these new protests consist less of land occupations than of *pobladores*’ enrollment in housing programs through which they expect to obtain subsidized housing.

My dissertation, in this regard, discusses the mechanisms through which contemporary *pobladores* recreate their political agencies when they no longer organize their protests as squatters nor autoconstructors, but rather as “formal” dwellers enrolled in subsidy-based programs. I conclude that the Chilean urban poor, by identifying themselves as *pobladores*, form themselves as political agents capable of dealing with the state on the basis of a rights-based language. To do so, they bring the performative power of the word *poblador* into the present by executing a territorially situated political practices through which they evoke the *pobladores* movement of the mid-twentieth century. This work examines thus how the past informs the mobilizations of the present and how lower-income residents becomes *pobladores* even when the performances of city making that characterized past urban movements are recalled rather than actually performed. Likewise, this dissertation discusses to what extent such a subject-formation process makes possible the emergence of new kinds of citizenship in which *pobladores*, by conceiving of themselves as city-makers, legitimize their claims to have dignified housing and a dignified life.

*To Leila and Emiliano*

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globally structured processes. Teresa Caldeira inspired me to conceive of anthropology as a discipline that can significantly contribute to the study of the urban. Likewise, her deep knowledge of Latin American cities was a stimulus to situate my research on Chilean *pobladores* in a broader regional context.

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Leila came with me to the United State in 2010. She unselfishly accompanied me in the difficult undertaking of pursuing a graduate program far away from Chile, our country of origin. Her presence made me feel cared for. I have no words to express my gratitude for her advice, support, and, even more important, her love. May the completion of this dissertation take us to a new world with little Emiliano, our beloved son!

## Chapter I. Housing the poor in a neoliberal city

Tuesday, June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014, 7 a.m. I met with more than two hundred *pobladores* of the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco—the housing assembly I was taking part in since August 2013—in downtown Santiago. It was a typical winter morning: cold and a little bit foggy, but I knew that the sun would come out of the clouds later. I met with them on the corner of Pío Nono Street and Costanera Andrés Bello Avenue. This area is generically known as Plaza Italia because of the name of the square that is located next to our meeting point. Everyone who has visited Santiago probably knows that for santiaguinos Plaza Italia is important not only for being the place of convergence of four major avenues—Alameda Bernardo O’Higgins, Providencia, Vicuña Mackenna, and Costanera Andrés Bello—, but also for being the favorite location for popular demonstrations. Either to celebrate “spontaneously” a victory of the national soccer team or to start a political march planned in advance, demonstrators usually gather together at Plaza Italia, which makes it a site for constant clashes between the police and the crowd. This explains the permanent presence of law enforcement officers attempting to avoid that these meetings turn into violent protests.

This time, the Don Bosco’s activists went to Plaza Italia to complain about what Rafael—the president of this housing assembly and the spokesperson of the National Federation of Pobladores (FENAPO)—called the “paradox” of the subsidy-based model upon which Chilean housing policies are based. This paradox seems to be pretty straightforward: although most of the members of this grassroots organization have been granted state subsidies to become homeowners, they are not able to do so since private construction companies in charge of the process of homebuilding “are not interested in building housing units for the poor,” Rafael argued. According to him, “real estate developers don’t want to build social housing projects for us because it is not profitable for them”. This phenomenon, Rafael told me when I met him for the first time, was even more patent in peripheral districts like La Florida, the *comuna* where the Don Bosco housing assembly was created in 2002. There the growing increase in land prices had led to a context in which, despite the existence of vacant plots available, “there is no money to pay for all the expenses related to homebuilding.”

The idea of meeting in the early morning in downtown Santiago, which is about fifty or sixty minutes away in public transportation from La Florida, was strategically decided. On the one hand, it is the time when most of *santiaguinos* are going to their jobs, which means that if protesters block one the major avenues, they could easily draw the attention of the media because of the impact that such an action would have on urban traffic flows. On the other hand, for those Don Bosco’s *pobladores* who were not allowed to take the day off, they could arrive at work on time or, if things went chaotic, a little bit later.

On this occasion, things went actually chaotic. After dozens of Don Bosco’s activists attempted to block Costanera Andrés Bello at 7:30 a.m., the police came in and detained six or seven of them. The rest of us who did not get caught gathered together again at Puente Pío Nono and stayed there for one and a half hour. Around 9:00 a.m., someone who I could not identify shouted “let’s go to the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism!” Unexpectedly, we took over two lanes on Alameda Bernardo O’Higgins and began to head to that government department. The crowd, composed mostly of women, displayed Chilean flags and sang the national anthem two or three times during our march. However, people seemed much more passionate when chanting *la vivienda es un derecho, no un privilegio* (“Housing is a right, not a privilege”) and *somos caleta*,



*más que la chucha, somos pobladores unidos en la lucha* (“We’re a lot, a hell of a lot, we’re *pobladores* united in the struggle”).

This dissertation talks about *pobladores*. Specifically, it accounts ethnographically for *pobladores*’ participation in social movements for the right to housing and the right to the city; their modalities of subject formation either as constructors of homes and neighborhoods in the mid-twentieth century or as individuals in need of housing applying for subsidies at the present time; their power to rearticulate political agencies in different historical contexts on the basis of their self-recognition as city makers; their capacity to formulate novel understandings of citizenship through the demand for the right to housing and the right to the city; and their ability to generate new political horizons of urban movements on the basis of the right to have a *vida digna* (dignified life).

### **1. An ethnographic exploration of movements and subjects**

In Chile, the word *poblador* is a class- and territory-based category commonly used to refer to the urban poor. The notion of *poblador* is closely bound up with the term *población*, a concept that, historian Armando de Ramón argues (1985), since the late nineteenth century has been utilized to allude to working-class neighborhoods placed in the peripheries of the city. Accordingly, a common-sense definition of *poblador* would be: *poblador* is anyone who lives in a *población*. Historians Gabriel Salazar and Julio Pinto (2002, 240) point out that *pobladores* have historically gathered together a heterogeneous mass of people whose destiny has been to “micro-colonize the interstices” left behind by the dominant society. As residents of the peripheries, *pobladores* are thus generally depicted as a marginal population located at the bottom of the social ladder whereas *poblaciones* are frequently conceptualized as the urban expression of such a marginal condition. In a recent work, Edward Murphy (2015, 11) suggestively contends however that the words *pobladores* and *poblaciones* have had “specific, varied, and at times contested meanings” throughout the twentieth century. In this dissertation, I will expand on this point by specifically arguing that in specific historical conjunctures the category *poblador*, in addition to being exposed to resignifications, has also worked as a political category of subject formation. In particular, I hold that the Chilean urban poor, by recognizing themselves as *pobladores*, become political subjects capable of addressing a rights-based language to the state in different historical circumstances; a kind of agency that has enabled low-income inhabitants to carry out social mobilizations through which they have developed novel formulations of citizenship and rights. My analysis is based on a close examination of past and present housing movements through which working-class families, by claiming urban rights, have been able to articulate their subjectivities as political agents.

#### ***Pobladores*’ mobilizations for urban rights**

Between the mid-1950s and the early 1970s mass mobilizations for housing exploded in Santiago. The urban poor, until then treated as marginal dwellers (Vekemans 1969), gained significant political recognition by conducting large-scale land seizures (*tomas de terreno*) in the peripheries, building their houses and neighborhoods by themselves—a process known as “autoconstruction” (*autoconstrucción* in Spanish)—, and organizing for improving the condition of their residential spaces. These collective practices of city making gave rise to the *movimiento de pobladores*, a social movement that, by demanding the provision of housing, services, and infrastructure from the state, changed the spatial configuration of Santiago. In those circumstances, the term *poblador* acquired a distinguishable political character. In being

acknowledged as material producers of space, *los sin casa* (“those without housing”) constituted themselves as transformative collective actors, which allowed them to become one of the more recognizable social forces backing the Socialist project of Salvador Allende (1970–1973).

Augusto Pinochet’s military regime (1973–1990), which came to power after overthrowing Salvador Allende’s government, had a profound impact on *pobladores*. On the one hand, it steadily repressed land occupations and carried out massive evictions of the *campamentos* (squatter settlements) located in the wealthiest areas of Santiago (Hidalgo 2004a). On the other hand, it implemented a new, neoliberal model of urban development that opened up the city to the market by striking down urban land regulations. In those circumstances, *pobladores’* actions were severely constrained. Housing mobilizations considerably decreased, especially in the first years of the dictatorship. Lower-income families in need of home, incapable of obtaining housing through land takeovers, started to be characterized as *allegados*, that is, as individuals living in relatives’ houses in overcrowded conditions (Chateau and Pozo 1987; Necochea 1987). To become homeowners, they did not have to autoconstruct their houses anymore but, rather, enrolled in new, subsidy-based housing programs, which were created in the late 1970s as part of the military regime’s “modernizations.” Consistent with the neoliberal orientation of the dictatorship’s reforms, these programs conceived of poor families as rational actors who, by both saving money and applying for housing subsidies (*subsídios habitacionales*), would be able to obtain housing on the market. Homeownership, in that sense, began to be understood as the result of an individual rather than a collective effort.

*Pobladores* were, however, able to assume a renewed political role by shifting the focus of their protests from housing to democracy (Oxhorn 1995). Being one of the most active segments of the working classes in the struggle for democracy, *pobladores* took part decidedly in the *Jornadas de Protesta Nacional* (“Days of National Protest”) by drawing on the social networks and organizing skills developed through their neighborhood associations. This led *poblaciones* to turn into the primary setting for political resistance against the military regime (Schneider 1995; Iglesias 2011).

The remarkable political significance of urban poor stemming from their active engagement in social movements between the mid-1950s and the late 1980s was, however, no longer observable once Pinochet’s regime ended. The center-left governments that followed, after accepting the conditions for transition imposed by Augusto Pinochet, attempted to prevent the proliferation of grassroots movements as a way to maintain the neoliberal economic, political, and institutional arrangement created by the dictatorship. The return of democracy in 1990 marked thus the beginning of a state-led demobilization in which the popular sectors were progressively dismissed as valid interlocutors when it came to discussing the type of social compact that would regulate the new democratic period (Oxhorn 1994; Paley 2001). To manage the risk involved in the potential reappearance of large-scale land seizures, these governments started to allocate considerable public expenditure on subsidized housing projects on the basis of the neoliberal urban policies implemented in the late 1970s. At the same time, *pobladores* were increasingly compelled to enroll in state-regulated housing assemblies (*comités de allegados*) to get housing subsidies and become homeowners. In some authors’ view, the participation of the poor in subsidy-based housing programs was an effective instrument to pacify them and, accordingly, prevent the reemergence of the *movimiento de pobladores* (Hipsher 1996; Özler 2012). By the beginning of 2000s, massive *tomas de terrenos* almost totally vanished (Salcedo 2010), which was for many interpreted as the disappearance of social movements for housing.

The utilization of a subsidy-based housing policy allowed post-dictatorial governments to both drastically reduce the percentage of families who did not own their home from 53% in 1990 to 37% in 2000 and to 19.4% in 2014 (Ministerio de Planificación 2001; Ministerio de Desarrollo Social 2014a). Likewise, it enabled them to efficiently deal with *pobladores*' growing claims for housing, especially in the first years of the transition when the new democratic administrations feared that the advent of a less repressive political system resulted in the irruption of land takeovers (Hipsler 1996). However, the never-seen-before provision of subsidized housing initiated since 1990—materialized in the building 100,000 units by 1996 (Sungranyes 2005)—has had a “dark side” (Ducci 1997; see also Rodríguez and Sungranyes 2005; Tapia 2011): most of the subsidized projects for the poor are located in highly segregated peripheral districts where land prices are cheaper and where private real estate companies in charge of the process of house building are able to ensure their profit margins. This has implied that newer generations of *pobladores* have been forced to leave their neighborhoods of origin to reside as homeowners in peripheral areas lacking infrastructure and services. Homeownership, in that sense, has become a means of segregation and social exclusion for *pobladores*.

The facts just described have triggered an emerging process of remobilization in the last ten years in which the urban poor, by identifying themselves as *pobladores*, are increasingly claiming the right to have “dignified housing” and a “dignified life” in the *comunas* (municipal districts) where they were born and raised. Interestingly, the tactics of these new protests consist less of land occupations than of *pobladores*' participation in state-regulated *comités de allegados* through which they enroll in subsidy-based housing programs similar to those utilized in the 1990s to demobilize the urban poor. I analyze ethnographically such remobilization process by examining how generations of residents aspiring to become homeowners, although taking part in housing programs grounded in neoliberal ideological principles, are able to carry out emerging right-to-housing struggles through which they impugn the segregationist nature of current housing policies.

### **The past in the present**

This dissertation builds upon a theoretical distinction proposed early by Castells (1973) and Pastrana and Threlfall (1974) in their investigations of Santiago's housing movements in the 1970s. Then, these authors distinguished “poor neighborhoods world” (*mundo poblacional*) from “*pobladores* movement” (*movimiento de pobladores*), the former as referring to the socio-cultural, economic, and ecologic dimensions of urban poverty and the latter as designating the political mobilization articulated through the demand for urban rights. My work, in that sense, must be understood as an ethnography of the *movimiento de pobladores*, i.e., of the sum of political performances and social practices through which poor residents seek to transform their current living conditions as dwellers who do not have a home of their own. I am not, however, interested in determining whether housing protests are necessarily subversive urban social movements, nor do I seek to affirm or deny the existence of *pobladores* as revolutionary collective actors. Such elements, I argue in this dissertation, must be subject to ethnographic investigation.

Some decades ago, several social scientists elaborated largely on the capacity of *pobladores* to, first, form themselves as collective actors and, second, carry out transformative mobilizations. To do so, they critically examined the contribution of the urban poor to both Salvador Allende's socialist project and the struggle against Pinochet's dictatorship. For both cases, the conclusion reached by these scholars was quite straightforward: although actively

participating in urban politics, *pobladores* were themselves incapable of constituting a truly insurgent social movement. Because of either the clientelistic subordination of poor residents to political parties in the early 1970s (Espinoza 1982; Castells 1983) or the community-oriented nature of the actions they carried out in the 1980s (Tironi 1986; Campero 1987; Touraine 1987; Dubet et al. 1989), *pobladores'* protests for urban rights were, in these authors' view, insufficient to set the conditions for a revolutionary social change.

Since then, *pobladores* practically disappeared from sociological reflections as subjects capable of intervening politically in the public sphere. Over the past three decades, social scientists have, in fact, understood the term *poblador* fundamentally as a socio-identity category alluding to a heterogeneous aggregation of low-income dwellers exposed to new forms of social exclusions. The political character *pobladores*, in that sense, was progressively disregarded as an object of scrutiny, a trend that became particularly patent in the transition to democracy when the large-scale allocation of housing subsidies resulted in the vanishing of mass housing movements. Since 1990, three fields of research on the Chilean urban poor have thus emerged. The first one has focused on the analysis of how the implementation of a neoliberal mode of development altered the characteristics of poverty and how the poor have subjectively made sense of these changes (Bengoa 1996; Martínez and Palacios 1996; Han 2012). The second one has paid attention to the widespread processes of demobilization of the popular sectors (Oxhorn 1994; Paley 2001) and, with respect to urban movements, the role played by the subsidy-based housing programs in the vanishing of land seizures (Hipsher 1996; Özler 2012; Murphy 2015). The third one has delved into the subjective effects of becoming homeowners among former squatters, which are materialized, for instance, in the rise of nostalgic views of the community ties developed in shantytowns (Márquez 2004) and the acquisition of middle-class values (Salcedo 2010). None of these works, however, has inspected the mechanisms through which the urban poor of the post-dictatorship period reformulate their agentival capacities. When speaking of the political character of *pobladores*, these authors generally look back to the past and narrate the old urban movements of the 1960s and early 1970s, as if this kind of agency depended exclusively on the collective practices that working-class dwellers performed then. Thus, they conceive of *pobladores'* agency as fixed and static in time, which hinders our ability to understand its modalities of rearticulation in circumstances in which the new generations of *pobladores* no longer occupy empty plots to claim the right to housing nor is autoconstruction the driving force of urbanization in the peripheries.

My inquiry aims therefore at, first, examining genealogically the constitution of *pobladores* as political subjects and, second, exploring ethnographically how such a subject-formation process takes place in current housing struggles. This research is thus an invitation to construe *pobladores'* mobilizations and their performances from a bottom-up perspective. That is to say: rather than using a deductive reasoning telling us a priori what constitutes a revolutionary subject or what defines an insurgent social movement, I draw on ethnographic immersion in prospective homeowners' everyday life as so as to comprehend to what extent their actions, imaginaries, discourses, longings, and expectations contribute to the rearticulation of *pobladores* as political subjects. I seek thus to account for the ways in which working-class families, by claiming urban rights through their enrollment in neoliberal housing programs, recreate the agency anchored in the category *poblador* while reframing housing protests. Some questions arise here: What kind of subjectivity emerges when *pobladores* are not autoconstructors but individuals applying for housing subsidies through state-regulated housing assemblies? What is the role of the past, particularly of the old *movimiento de pobladores*, in the configuration of

present housing mobilizations? How do contemporary housing activists conceptualize citizenship and rights when participating in subsidy-based housing programs? What types of rights do they demand from the state and how is the political language through which they verbalize such claims?

## 2. Performative city making

I hold that the category *poblador* allows for the formation of political subjects capable of addressing a rights-based discourse to the state for it is endowed with a performative power, that is, with the power to constitute what it names (see Austin 1962; Butler 1997; Yurchak 2005). This means that the word *poblador* not only describes a part of the working classes but also produces it, which amounts to saying that the act of recognition of the urban poor as *pobladores*—realized through the citation of that term in public discourses—results in a transformation of their subjectivity. I do not, however, reduce this subject-formation process only to linguistic operations of naming. Both Amy Hollywood's (2002) and Alexei Yurchak's (2005) works illuminate a crucial aspect: ritualized bodily encounters can also act in a performative way, which suggests that, like speech acts, rituals have also the capacity to create meaning on the basis of their repetition. In that sense, my exploration of the performative dimension of the category *poblador* is based on the scrutiny of both the social discourses and the ritualized performances of city making that, since the mid-twentieth century, contributed to the emergence of *pobladores* as a recognizable working-class agency.

### Words and actions

In *How to do Things With Words*, John Austin (1962) proposes his theory of speech acts by arguing that language is far from being a referential system. In his opinion, there was a strong philosophical tradition for which statements could only report or describe phenomena. As verifiable accounts, these constative statements could be either “true” or “false” according to their correspondence with the facts that they are describing. However, Austin pointed out that there was a wide class of non-descriptive statements whose analysis did not fit in a framework which conceives of language under a true/false criterion. He called these utterances “performatives” since the verb *perform* “indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something” (Austin 1962, 6–7). “I do,” as the accepted response in a marriage ceremony or “I name this ship *Queen Elizabeth*” as the act of ship naming, he contended, are two examples showing how speech acts perform an action at the time of their verbal expression.

Austin argued that performative utterances, in contrast to the constative ones and their true/false criterion, function under the principle of happiness/unhappiness. The definition of their felicity or infelicity is not therefore a matter of empirical correspondence but rather of execution of rules and procedures carried out in specific circumstances. For any performative utterance to be realized it must thus satisfy a certain number of convention; or, to put it in an example, for the expression “I do” to have performative effect it must be uttered by the groom/bride right after the person socially recognized as the priest, at a specific moment of the marriage ritual, says: “do you accept this man/women as your wife/groom”? A crucial question arises here: What is thus the source of power of the performative? Austin's approach suggests that the intention of the speaker plays a secondary role in this regard. The priest who utters “I declare you husband and wife” may not want the matrimony to occur; or the groom who responds “I do” could have been obliged to get married. Nonetheless, the marriage takes place anyway if the participants follow

the number of procedures established for the ceremony to be done effectively. Accordingly, performative utterances are happy or felicitous only if they are executed as a ritualized action; that is, when they are said by the right persons, to the correct persons, and in the accurate situation.

For later scholars the notions of context, intentionality, and rituals have been crucial to discussing to what extent language can act in performative way beyond the action of a sovereign speaking subject. Jacques Derrida, for instance, holds that the citational nature of linguistic signs entails not only their capacity to be quoted but also a rupture with the context in which they are produced, a condition that he calls “iterability” (Derrida 1977, 180). Derrida’s performativity relies thus on the repetition that characterizes the very linguistic sign rather than the events in which linguistic forms take place. Pierre Bourdieu (1991), in turn, criticizes Austin’s theory by contending that conventions themselves are not sufficient to assure the power of words. The efficacy of the performative, he says, is directly associated with the institutionalization of social rituals in which authorized speeches are pronounced. Rituals are thus effective only when they are perceived as legitimately showing that the speaker does not act in his own name and on his own authority but in his capacity as a delegate. What makes us believe, for instance, that the speech of a judge in a court room is valid is not the execution of standardized procedures themselves but, rather, the fact that we assume that he/she is acting on behalf of the state. The judge would be able to utter performative statements as he/she is the one who represents, “in the theatrical sense of the term” (Bourdieu 1991, 115), the delegation of institutional powers.

How does the performative faculty of both language and rituals result in the constitution of subjects who, however, are not able to intervene in their formation processes on their own volition? Alexei Yurchak’s (2005) anthropological examination of the hyper-standardization of the authoritative discourse in the Soviet Union and Butler’s (1997; 2006) queer theory shed important lights on this point. Yurchak affirms that, after Stalin’s death, the authoritative discourse became ambiguous, which led the Soviet state to mechanically reproduce political discourses as a way to assure internalization of soviet ideology among young people. The systematic reproduction of the official discourse was materialized in the normalization of speeches, political propaganda, newspaper editorials, and marches, which began to be organized according to fixed narratives and images. In Yurchak’s view, this “hegemony of the form” (2005, 36–76) reveals that, in a context of discursive ambiguity, for the Soviet state the performative dimension of discourses became more important than their constative aspect. By ritualizing acts commonly practiced by youth, the state expected that there would be a literal internalization of meanings. Nevertheless, it was precisely the endless replication of authorized discourse what brought about the rise of new, unexpected significations that did not coincide with those initially imagined. Insofar as the Soviet system put the emphasis on the performative dimension of rituals, their constative dimension became increasingly open and unpredictable. Accordingly, the active engagement in standardized activities such as elections, Labor Day parades, or cultural activities did not necessarily entail the emergence of a static and hyper-normalized everydayness. Quite the contrary, it contributed to the structuring of a fruitful period in terms of the proliferations of meanings and significations, which is tellingly expressed in the appearance of an avant-garde artistic scene, new forms of publics and, ultimately, new kinds of subjectivities.

Judith Butler’s approach to gender illuminates also how performative words and rituals act jointly in the formation of subjects. In *Gender Trouble* (2006), she points out that the sedimentation of gender norms comes from the ritual character of the action of gender, which requires a performance that is constantly repeated. Gender, thus, must not be interpreted as a stable identity from which corporeal acts emerge but an identity “tenuously constituted in time,

instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (2006, 191 emphasis in the original). As a public and collective event, this repetition not only reenacts and re-experiences socially established meanings of gender but also provides them with a social legitimacy based on the obligatory frame of heterosexual normativity. For Butler, however, subject formation processes are not only explained by the ritual execution of social practices but also by the action of a linguistic domain over which the subject has no sovereign control. Drawing on Althusser’s work, Butler (1997) states that the subject assumes a linguistic existence through the process of interpellation, that is to say, by means of rituals of ideological recognition in which individuals reach the status of concrete and distinguishable subjects. The subject, thus, arises only when he/she enters the normativity of language, which is constrained by a set of foreclosures determining the domain of the speakable as well as the terms used to name, categorize, and interpellate.

To analyze the formation of subjects we must pay attention not only to how public discourses are organized and how they circulate, but also to the circumstances in which they acquire an interpellative capacity and the types of bodily encounters informing the rituals of interpellation. The key aspect of this process is that both actions and words can take on a performative character and, accordingly, constitute that to which they refer to. In either case, the effect of these performatives in terms of meanings and significations is open-ended, unpredictable, and potentially agentival. Since performatives have to be repeated to operate as such, the iterability framing that repetition—as defined by Derrida—makes possible the rise of a subject whose character, powers, and identities cannot be fully determined in advance. This dissertation can therefore be conceived of as an ethnography of such an indeterminacy.

### **Performances of city making**

The irruption of mass housing protests in the mid-twentieth century came along with the spread of public discourses speaking about *pobladores* as unprivileged dwellers entitled to the right to housing. These narratives—which could be easily found in the media, politicians’ speeches, the Catholic Church’s journals, and in the political propaganda produced by grassroots organizations—depicted *pobladores* as a recognizable working-class subjectivity whose agentival capacities stemmed from two interrelated performances of city making: a) land occupations; and b) autoconstruction of homes and neighborhoods. It is thus through the acknowledgment of the poor as city makers what, I hold in this dissertation, allowed for the formation of *pobladores* as an urban agency.

By land occupations I mean the illegal seize of generally peripheral plots by organized families wishing to become homeowners. This phenomenon, which became common in Latin American metropolises in the 1940s and 1950s, was the direct result of the incapacity of national governments to manage the housing crisis derived from growing rates of urbanization. While some scholars looked at both squatter settlements and squatters themselves as purely dysfunctional in terms of their contribution that they could make to larger social structures (Vekemans 1969; Vekemans, Giusti, and Silva 1970), others envisioned them as the expression of the organizing skills of the poor (Mangin 1967; Turner 1968; Giusti 1973; Perlman 1976; Adler Lomnitz 1977). Anthropologist William Mangin (1967, 67), who studied systematically the rise of *barriadas* in Lima, explicated the occurrence of land invasions in this way: “The formation of squatter settlements is a popular response to rapid urbanization in countries that cannot or will not provide services for the increasing urban population (...) I see the squatter settlements as a process of social reconstruction through popular initiative” (1967, 67). Then, he

went on: “one major contribution [of squatter settlements] is that millions of people have solved their own housing problem in situations where the national government were practically unable to move” (1967, 74). These authors highlighted thus the capacity for collective action of squatters who sought to access urban land, acquire title deeds, and eventually become homeowners by taking over vacant plots.

In Santiago, the illegal seizure of urban land was a modality of political protest that, although utilized by organized *pobladores* in an incipient manner in the late 1940s, was mostly employed between the late 1960s and 1973. During those years, *pobladores* carried out more than three hundred *tomas de terrenos* (Cofré 2011; Murphy 2015), which is explained by the growing influence of the revolutionary left on the urban poor and the generalized radicalization of working-class mobilizations. Either in the late 1940s or the early 1970s, the events surrounding *pobladores*’ invasion of urban land—which was most of the time done overnight with the material support of leftist political parties—had a number of performative actions. Some of them were the act of putting the Chilean flag on the seized land as a sign of victory at the moment of the occupation and the identification of the emerging *campamento* (squatter settlement) with a name that generally evoked progressive ideals or Marxist figures. For both the right and the left it was actually the conjunction of illicit actions and revolutionary symbols what revealed the disruptive, even transformative capacities of those socially recognized as *pobladores*.

*Pobladores*’ performances of city making were not restricted to land seizures. In the same period, the urban poor engaged massively in processes of autoconstruction, that is, in practices of popular production of space through which working-class families built themselves their homes and neighborhoods. Teresa Caldeira (2000; 2015a; 2015b) and James Holston (1991; 2008), who have done extensive research on São Paulo, indicate that the autoconstruction of the peripheries results in the emergence of a kind of subjectivity anchored in the self-identification of the poor as city makers. As autoconstructors, peripheral residents are thus able to develop new agencies, transform their patterns of consumption, and legitimize their rights to the city. Both Holston and Caldeira argue that autoconstruction was fundamentally a private enterprise. “The urbanization of the periphery—Caldeira (2000, 221) says—was left mostly to private initiative, with little control or assistance from government authorities until the 1970s...the process of opening and selling lots in the periphery, which expanded the city dramatically from the 1940s on, was chaotic.” This, Caldeira (2000, 222) goes on, entailed that those workers who bought land to build their houses “discovered eventually that their deeds were jeopardized by some form of illegality.”

In Chile, poor families were also exposed to fraudulent transactions being the so-called *loteos brujos*—illegally subdivided plots sold by fake real estate agents—their most common expression. However, autoconstruction itself was slightly different from the phenomenon observed by Holston and Caldeira. Two elements explain the particularities of autoconstruction in the peripheries of Santiago. First of all, *pobladores* participated in the building of their homes and neighborhoods less as private entrepreneurs than as collective actors. Since the late 1940s, members of housing organizations like the Agrupación Provincial de Pobladores de Santiago (Provincial Association of Santiago’s *Pobladores*) claimed that the state supplied them with construction materials to autoconstruct their residential spaces. There was, in that sense, an explicit political demand for autoconstruction carried out by organized *pobladores* that increased as housing mobilizations escalated. This takes us to the second element, which is related to the role of the state in autoconstruction processes. Unlike the Brazilian case, in Chile the state



strongly promoted autoconstruction through housing programs such as Jorge Alessandri's "Plan Habitacional" (1958–1964) and Eduardo Frei Montalva's Operación Sitio (1964–1970). To become homeowners, *pobladores* were expected to work themselves building their houses under the technical supervision of public agencies like the Corporación de Mejoramiento Urbano (Urban Improvement Corporation, CORMU) and Corporación de la Vivienda (Housing Corporation, CORVI).

As a collective and state-led phenomenon, the Chilean variety of autoconstruction allowed *pobladores* to be recognized by the state as citizen city makers and, accordingly, establish clientelistic relationships with populist governments like that of Eduardo Frei Montalva. The kind of subjectivity that derived from these interpellation processes was, however, far from being subordinated to the state's interests. Quite the opposite, the constitution of new political agencies helped shape never-seen-before urban social movements materialized in the appearance of innovative experiences of popular power (*poder popular*) in *campamentos* during Salvador Allende's administration.

The subsidy-based policies implemented in the late 1970s that currently regulate the allocation of social housing changed drastically the ways in which the urban obtain urban land and housing. Since then, *pobladores* no longer become homeowners by occupying empty plots nor constructing themselves their houses and neighborhoods but, rather, by applying for housing subsidies through *comités de allegados*. How do poor dwellers, then, reconfigure their agencies as *pobladores* when their historical modalities of subject formation—autoconstruction and land seizures—do play a central role in their right-to-the-housing mobilizations? To be clear on this point, the urban poor still take part in some forms of autoconstruction when, for instance, making small-scale home additions or renewing their houses on their own. Likewise, *pobladores* struggling for housing usually *toman* (take over) public buildings, streets, and even vacant plots to draw the attention of the government and have their demands heard. Nonetheless, neither autoconstruction nor land seizures, as observed in the mid-twentieth century, are the dominant forces intervening in the urbanization of the peripheries, nor do families in need of home conceive of these practices as their first and foremost strategy to become homeowners. How, in this context, do they conceptualize their role as producers of space when old practices of city making are no longer present? How do they constitute themselves as *pobladores* when they deal with the state not as autoconstructors but as individuals participating in neoliberal housing programs? These questions take us to another crucial object of inquiry: what types of political agencies develop in such a process of subject formation?

### 3. Citizenships, citizens, and rights to the city

Citizenship can be broadly defined as a regulatory system through which political communities manage their internal differences by distinguishing forms of membership that delimitate the rights of those who are considered full members. Urban mobilizations, in this regard, have contributed significantly to contesting dominant formulations of citizenship by allowing unprivileged and excluded populations to access citizenship rights. Several scholars have examined how residents' advocacy for urban rights in urbanizing societies have led the city to become a renewed political community capable of undermining the foundations of the modern, national compact of citizenship (Holston and Appadurai 1996; Appadurai 2002; Purcell 2003; Holston 2008; Fawaz 2009; Blokland et al. 2015). Profoundly influenced by Henry Lefebvre's (1996) politics of inhabitation, some of these authors conceptualize residency as the core of an "urban" type of citizenship in which individuals and collectivities legitimate their rights claiming

as inhabitants of the city (see, for instance, Holston and Appadurai 1996; Holston 2008; Blokland et al. 2015; Cohen and Margalit 2015). Other studies examining the features of citizenship in an era of global capitalism posit similar questions when discussing the tensions existing between nation-states and emerging types of political allegiance grounded on criteria other than nationality (Ong 1999; Isin 2000; Sassen 2002). Citizenship, as conceived of in Western modernity, is thus challenged by new forms of political membership as well as novel criteria for rights distribution. *Pobladores'* claims for the right to housing, the right to the city, and the right to have a dignified life (*vida digna*) can be examined as revealing this challenge for two reasons: first, because their struggles seek to redefine the nature of social rights in a neoliberal society that, rather than allocating them under the principle of universality, selects the poorest among the poor to distribute welfare benefits; and second, because their capacity to claim rights—or, in other words, the way in which they conceptualize their political membership—is grounded on their self-recognition as citizen city-makers rather than on nationality.

### **National membership**

The growth of modern states in Europe implied not only the reconfiguration of its state's functions, powers, and capacities (see Skinner 1989; Spruyt 1994) but also the redefinition of the meaning of full membership in society, which assumed a new and prevailing mode: national citizenship. The nation, in this context, was seen as a community of shared interests, goals, and projects that sought its political realization in the national state. The regime of citizenship that appeared along with the development of the modern state was thus grounded on the delimitation of a national community that, regardless of its restrictiveness or inclusiveness, was thought of as the instance in which the political sovereignty resides; that is to say, as a defined political community entitled to a set of rights. Citizenship has since been understood as “status” (Marshall 1977; Walzer 1989) that makes those who possess it equal with respect to rights and duties, which means that full members are endowed with the same corpus of rights as well as protected by common law.

The French Revolution, through the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen of 1789, was crucial for the consolidation of the ideas and practices of the national citizenship. The revolutionary dimension of the Declaration was in the fact that every single individual, no matter their social or cultural background, was considered to be born free and equal in dignity and rights. The universal rights of man—liberty, property, security, justice, and resistance to oppression—were imagined as natural and imprescriptible and their realization had to be guaranteed by the nation state. Modern citizenship conceived thus of equality as the capacity of those who participate in politics to exercise the same set of rights. According to Holston and Appadurai (1996), this ideal sought to subordinate older forms of identities—ethnic, tribal, cultural, etc.—to a regime of citizenship on the basis of a political allegiance to a nation. To do so, modern citizenship borrowed from liberalism a specific forms of ethics that made possible the materialization of principles of justice that “do not presuppose or promote any substantive conception of good. Rather, they are supposed to enable citizens to pursue their own ends consistent with a similar liberty for all” (Holston and Appadurai 1996, 193). In the liberal compact of citizenship, equality of rights meant equal opportunity to freely make use of the rights through which emerging nation states began to organize their political membership. Nonetheless, as the authors just quoted suggest, the pursuit of common good or general welfare has been subjected to the dominance of a particular sort of rights, i.e., that of the individual,

which has made liberal citizenship compatible with phenomena of social exclusion. This aspect is at the heart of some critical appraisals of the modern citizenship.

### **Modern citizenship impugned**

Karl Marx's (1978 [1843]) *On the Jewish Question*, a text that came out as a reaction against Bruno Bauer's hypothesis that religion had to be abolished in order for men to be politically emancipated, poses an early criticism of liberal citizenship. For Marx, the secular state, in expelling religion from the sphere of the public to the private, allows man to emancipate himself only "politically." However, this type of liberation is insufficient for bringing about a real human emancipation because the modern state is based on distinction between civil society and political community, which divide the kind of rights with which man and citizen are, respectively, endowed. While the former, he says, is the space outside of the political sphere where man act as a private individual, the latter is the instance where he acquires an imaginary sovereignty infused with an "unreal universality" (Marx 1978, 34). Liberal revolutions are, in Marx's view, thus incapable of promoting substantive human emancipation because they abolished the political character of civil society, giving rise to a social order whose public matters are organized exclusively by the common interest of individual proprietors. In conceptualizing man as non-political, private, isolated, and fully independent, these political revolutions, although necessary for the development of more radical ideas of equality and social justice, maintained the foundations of class-based society. That explains why the political function of modern state is to preserve the rights of the individual, namely, the rights of that "egoistic man ... separated from other men and from the community" (Marx 1978, 42).

Contemporary critical accounts of citizenship point out that the promotion of formal equality among citizens, the founding principle of the liberal project of citizenship, has resulted in the subordination of social difference—be it in terms of gender, sexual orientation, race, etc.—to dominant cultural structures (see, for instance, Young 1989; Pateman 1990; Taylor 1992; Kymlicka 1995; Benhabib 2002). Iris Marion Young (1989) notes that the modern citizenship has understood universality from a twofold perspective: a) as synonym of "general;" b) as a set of norms which are the same for all. These two senses of universality—i.e., as generality and as equal treatment—have contributed to an understanding of equality as sameness, which has homogenized citizenry by expelling their identity claims to the private domain.<sup>1</sup> She holds that "rights and rules that are universally formulated and thus blind to differences of race, culture, gender, age, or disability, perpetuate rather than undermine oppression" (Young 1989, 267). To subvert this problem, she advocates the generation of a "differentiated citizenship," that is, of a special treatment regime which, by granting more rights to deprived groups, would secure the full inclusion and participation of all. Young's proposal echoes Taylor's (1992) "politics of

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<sup>1</sup> This form of criticism is similar to Nancy Fraser's (1990) argument about the exclusionary character of the bourgeois public sphere. According to her, modern public sphere, as defined by Habermas (1991), constituted itself through the permanent subjection of other types of publics whose demands were relegated to the private sphere by making a distinction between state and civil society. In a similar manner, Carole Pateman's (1990) feminist critique construes women's marginalization in the public domain as revealing the patriarchal nature of civil society. Civil society, imagined as an inclusive realm willing to accept everyone, emerged as such through the selective exclusion of women from the public sphere. This is why, she holds, the private has been deemed the realm of family ties, natural subjection, emotion, love, and sexual passion, whereas the public, materialized in the civil society, refers to a universal sphere of freedom, equality, individualism, reason, and impartial law (see also Benhabib 2002). Thus civil society is by definition against women's interests in being based on a patriarchal definition of the public as well as the type of universality it entails.

recognition” and the need to put forward policies aimed at acknowledging public identities that have been shaped by social misrecognition. Taylor, like Young, also defends a politics of difference by arguing that the concept of equal dignity, in being blind to difference, has forced minorities to subordinate their cultural aspirations to a hegemonic culture. For both the special treatment regime is thus the best way to subvert the unequal participation of social groups in politics.

The advocacy for differentiated citizenship and special treatment measures has triggered a number of debates about the unintended outcomes that could result from giving special rights to minorities, women, immigrants, or any class of underprivileged group. Susan Okin (1999), to question Kymlicka’s (1995) demand for multicultural citizenship, holds that the granting of more rights to patriarchal cultures could be used to imprison women in an oppressive and inegalitarian gender status.<sup>2</sup> In her words, “the degree to which each culture is patriarchal and its willingness to become less so should be crucial factors in judgment about the justifications of group rights—once women’s equality is taken seriously” (Okin 1999, 21). For James Holston (2011), the problem of differentiated citizenship is that such a model, in legalizing existing social differences, consolidates and perpetuates them. This, he argues, makes it even more difficult to break down the principles upon which unequal social relations are based. By focusing on the historical development of Brazilian legal system, Holston suggests that special treatment-oriented citizenships turn out to be conservative because it does not contest the very foundations of inequality; rather, it accepts it and reproduces it by organizing social difference according to legalized hierarchy of privileges and disprivileges.

I take both Okin’s and Holston’s reflections as an invitation to think critically of forms of citizenship and politics of recognition that, in spite of being inspired by liberal or progressive ideals, may give rise to new types of oppression and social inequality. As Holston (2008; 2011) suggests, Young’s analysis fails to notice that regimes of citizenship have in fact implemented special-treatment formulations that have been far from promoting substantive social justice. In that sense, it is less relevant to categorize ahistorically citizenships as “difference-blind” or “difference-specific” than, instead, investigate historically and ethnographically how “a citizenship problematizes the legalization and equalization of differences and struggles with the problems of justice that result” (Holston 2008, 32). Nancy Postero’s (2006) ethnographic study of the so-called “Indian” uprising in Bolivia in the early 2000s sheds lights on this point. She holds that the implementation of neoliberalism in that country during the 1990s came along with the enactment of multicultural policies. This form of neoliberal multiculturalism, Postero affirms, rather than making possible the emergence of truly democratic forms of political participation for

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<sup>2</sup> Seyla Benhabib (2002) offers, in this regard, a suggestive approach to multicultural dilemmas of liberal democracies through creation of “deliberative discursive multicultural spaces.” This new sort of public, one in which difference is not restricted to the private sphere, as defended by traditional versions of liberalism, supposes the existence of a legal pluralist model as well as a deliberative and discursive democratic multiculturalism. To create this novel sphere, she asserts, three conditions must be met: a) egalitarian reciprocity, which entails that members of minority groups must be entitled to the same rights (cultural, political, civil, etc.) as members of the majority; b) voluntary self-ascription, namely, the capacity of individuals to adopt the most extensive forms of self-ascription and self-identification; and c) freedom of exit and association, which refers to the liberty of the individual to exit the ascriptive group without any restriction. Benhabib, thus, seeks to generate a non-essentialist approach to culture by pointing out that ordinary political actors can renegotiate their own narratives of identities through multicultural encounters in a truly democratic civil society.

indigenous populations, reinforced the system of exclusion and racial domination that has long characterized Bolivian society.

In my view, difference must be publicly recognized and there must be policies aimed at facilitating the political representation of disadvantaged groups. This, however, cannot be done at the expense of reproducing, either at a societal or a group level, the conditions by which domination, oppression, or exploitation have been established. If what is at stake is the pursuit of more inclusive public sphere, the emphasis must not be put on the advocacy for an ahistorical ideal of differentiated citizenship but, rather, on the creation of the political conditions in which oppressed groups may be fully represented in the decision-making process.

### **Rights to the city, rights to dignity, and urban citizenship**

To what extent *pobladores'* protests contribute to the configuration of a more democratic public sphere where the interests, expectations, and desires of poor dwellers can be fulfilled? This work addresses that question through ethnographic involvement in urban struggles. It particularly reveals that *allegados* committees affiliated with the National Federation of Pobladores impugn the exclusionary nature of subsidy-based housing policies by demanding for both the right to the city and the right to have a dignified life (*vida digna*). Families in need of housing often say that homeownership, although crucial for improving their material conditions, is only one of the many aspects allowing them to acquire a living with dignity; one in which they can not only satisfy their right to housing but also intervene in the decision-making process as urban citizens. The right to the city and the right to have a dignified life, in that sense, can be understood as two claims that speak about a broader reframing of right-to-housing movements in Santiago.

Henri Lefebvre's (1996; 2003) pioneering work on right to the city offers a revolutionary agenda for social change based a powerful political claim: that the city be reestablished as an *oeuvre* able to be produced and appropriated by its residents. Building upon Lefebvre's approach, David Harvey (2012) states that right-to-the-city mobilizations are those urban social movements that fight what he calls "accumulation by dispossession." Neoliberalism, he argues, rests primarily on urbanization through which it produces, accumulates and, in periods of crisis, absorbs surplus value. This entails a form of capital accumulation based on predatory practices—like those of housing markets—in which working-class inhabitants, in being exposed to evictions and displacements, are deprived of the spaces and resources that they have collectively made. The right to the city, Harvey goes on, is thus a collective right through which the working classes can contest the ways in which capitalist urbanization is reproduced through the private appropriation of the surplus value produced by dwellers in their residential spaces.

*Pobladores'* protests for the right to city are expressed in the advocacy for right to "stay put" (Hartman 2002; Newman and Wyly 2006), namely, the right to continue to reside in the neighborhoods in which they and their families have built their life projects (see also M. J. Castillo and Forray 2014). I argue that this "territorial demand"—as conceptualized by FENAPO—discloses the right-to-the-city orientation of the contemporary *pobladores'* movement since it arises from the consideration of the urban poor as city makers whose rights over the spaces they have collectively produced are being denied by market-based housing policies. FENAPO's territorial demand is, however, not advocated by those who actually autoconstructed neighborhoods but, rather, by their descendants. The key aspect, thus, is to comprehend how new generations of *pobladores* articulate their claims by thinking of themselves as heirs of the rights acquired by their parents and grandparents in past housing movements and how such a symbolic identification with the past informs their present agencies.

Housing struggles have also been reframed by the inclusion of the term “dignity” in *pobladores’* political narratives, which illuminates a key phenomenon: the urban poor’s search for dignity in neoliberal Chile not only gives rise to private and domestic social relations through which they ethically signify everyday experiences of precariousness (see, for instance, Han 2012; Murphy 2015), but also to political claims made in the public realm. *Pobladores’* right to have dignified housing and a dignified life, in that sense, compels me to reflect on how what some scholars have called “ordinary ethics” (Lambek 2010a; Lambek 2010b; Das 2012; Zigon 2014) makes possible the constitution of a new political language grounded on people’s everyday life, which helps them rethink the strategic demands of housing movements while endowing their political actions with specific ethical senses.

Through an ethnographic examination of territorially situated struggles, I thus contend that present housing protests allow for a reconfiguration of *pobladores’* views of citizenship. Their subjective recognition as city-makers permits them not only to demand the right to the city and the right to live with dignity, but also to question the system of rights distribution structuring the Chilean citizenship. Housing mobilizations in Santiago, I show in this dissertation, are closely bound up with the formulation a “urban” kind of citizenship, one in which the city, instead of the nation, becomes the foremost political community and residency, rather than nationality, emerges as the primary form of political membership (see Holston and Appadurai 1996; Purcell 2003; Holston 2008; Blokland et al. 2015; Cohen and Margalit 2015). This urban citizenship is framed by specific modalities of collective action within *allegados* committees in which *pobladores* place themselves as worthy, dignified dwellers who have to sweat blood to *llegar a fin de mes* (make ends meet) and become homeowners. In doing so, they generate a political imagination in which the capacity to claim rights—even those recognized as universal like housing, education, or health care—appears as inseparable from the very act of fighting for them. On one occasion a member of a housing assembly said to me “why would you have rights if you don’t struggle for them?” This statement turned out to be profoundly significant for my research as it forced me to reflect on how *pobladores* make sense of the universal character of social rights and how their ideas of universality inform their criticism of neoliberal, subsidy-based social programs. The following chapters contain some of these reflections.

#### 4. A note on methods

This dissertation is based on seventeen months of fieldwork carried out in Santiago, Chile in three stages: between May and July 2011, between July 2013 and August 2014, and between June and August 2015. My analysis of *pobladores’* mobilizations draws on two types of data: ethnographic and historical. The ethnographic data come from around eighty interviews of past and present housing activists, politicians, and state representatives as well as participant observation of the everyday activities of a *comité de allegados* such as general assemblies, meetings with local and national authorities, marches, protests, etc. The historical materials used in this work include press articles, newspaper editorials, statements of political parties, *pobladores’* propaganda, and films produced between the late 1940s and the early 1990s, which allowed me to unpack the discursive elaborations on *pobladores* and housing protests in different historical contexts.

My first ethnographic approach to housing mobilizations happened in 2011 when I contacted the Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha of the district of Peñalolén. There, I conducted dozens of interviews through which I began to delineate what later on would be my dissertation project. That research enabled me to get a broad picture of the contemporary

*pobladores* movement by meeting some housing activists, acquainting myself with the language through which they articulate their political claims, and knowing the strategies used by them to demand the right to housing, the right to the city, and *la vida digna*.

In July 2013, I came back to Santiago for thirteen months of continuous fieldwork. There, I began to participate in the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco, a housing assembly formed in the Población Nuevo Amanecer of La Florida in 2002 by *pobladores* seeking to resist a housing affordability problem caused by the increase in land prices in the district. Initially, I assumed the role of observer by attending general assemblies and public meetings through which I expected to familiarize myself with people's routines, codes, and everyday practices. After two months of observation, I started to assist the social leaders in tasks related to the daily running of a *comité de allegados* such as photocopying documents, designing propaganda, or writing reports on the housing problematic to be disseminated on the social media. Working as an assistant contributed significantly to gaining their trust and confidence, which allowed me to access more reserved meetings such as those held at the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism, the Regional Service of Housing, and the City Hall of La Florida.

When I started to carry out this stage of fieldwork in 2013, the Don Bosco committee was one of the most active associations participating in the Santiago branch of the Federación Nacional de Pobladores (FENAPO, founded in 2010). In the early 2014, some Don Bosco's *pobladores*, dissatisfied with the way FENAPO was leading the struggle for housing, decided to quit their membership in it. Nonetheless, others continued to be active militants of this federation, which permitted me to contact and interview *pobladores* enrolled in housing assemblies from districts other than La Florida. The reflections contained in this dissertation, despite being grounded primarily on an ethnographic involvement in the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco of La Florida, stem also from data obtained in other FENAPO assemblies such as the Movimiento Pueblo Sin Techo (Peñalolén), Agrupación Techo Ahora (La Pintana), and the Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha (San Joaquín and Peñalolén).

Conducting an ethnography of poor families dwelling mostly in overcrowded conditions in relatives' houses has its own complication. My anthropological anxiety about coming in the field, gaining admittance to a housing assembly, and living with one or some of its members crashed with the daily reality of *allegados*. After introducing myself to Don Bosco's *pobladores*, I was permitted to attend this organization's public activities without any restriction. Observing what this *allegados* committee did, how its meetings were performed, or asking *pobladores* about their role in the association was fairly easy. Things, however, were different when it came to gaining access to the domestic life of these activists. At first, I insistently told them about my interest in spending as much time as possible with them in order to build what anthropologists call rapport. "The best way to do so—I often said—is by finding a place to live here in the neighborhood." Nonetheless, I stopped doing that once a young guy who replied to me: "do you want to find a place to live here? So do we... why don't you get into the committee?" Then, he laughed ironically. Later on I realized that, even wishing to have me as their guest, most of my interlocutors went through difficult times trying to make decisions autonomously on how to organize their lives and routines inside the dwellings in which they resided as *allegados*. As my research moved on, I began to hear stories about the hardship associated with this residential condition, which is generally described as framed by both a lack of entitlement to the house and a sense of subjection to the will of the homeowner. For that reason, inviting a stranger over—in this case, an individual who claimed to be a Ph.D. student at an American university—turned out to be profoundly problematic for them. To avoid being considered intrusive, I ceased to ask for

lodging for a couple of months and attempted to conduct the interviews in public spaces. After fourth or five months, *pobladores* themselves searched for strategies to host me in their homes such as looking for a time or a day in which they were sure that the homeowner—generally a parent or a parent-in-law—would be away so that we could talk without being disturbed. As my visits to my informants' homes became more regular, some homeowners began to treat me as an acquaintance of the family, which eventually allowed me to stay overnight in their properties. The findings presented here are thus the result of such an ethnographic involvement, one in which, to secure an anthropological immersion in my informants' domestic sphere, I had to be authorized by them and the proprietors of the houses in which they lived. "When I get my own house we'll be able to talk without being disturbed," an *allegada* told me once I was trying to interview her at her place while her mother-in-law, the homeowner, was sniffing around. Such a way of experiencing the private, I argue in the following pages, not only informs *allegados'* demands for homeownership but also makes possible the constitution of transformative mobilizations.

### Outline of the chapters

Chapter 2 situates the argument of the dissertation in a historical context by analyzing the rise and development of what scholars, describing the squatters' protests of the mid-twentieth century, call the "*pobladores* movement" (Castells 1973; 1983; Pastrana and Threlfall 1974; Espinoza 1982; 1988; Garcés 2002; Cofré 2011; Murphy 2015). Here I demonstrate that current housing activists are able to reformulate the character and orientation of the *pobladores* movement even in circumstances in which they participate in state-regulated housing assemblies. This phenomenon, I hold, is materialized in the rise of new urban demands for the right to the city through which they question market-based housing policies. In doing so, I challenge some authors who conceive of poor families' enrolment in state-led housing programs as an unequivocal expression of pacification or demobilization (e.g. Hipsher 1996; Paley 2001; Özler 2012; Murphy 2015).

Chapter 3 examines how *pobladores* constitute themselves as kind of political agency through their involvement in housing struggles. I first analyze how the processes of city making and "autoconstruction" of the 1960s and early 1970s endowed the urban poor with a capacity to claim rights. I then interrogate how such a capacity is rearticulated at present when *pobladores* are no longer autoconstructors, but rather applicants for state subsidies. This chapter concludes that, although large-scale practices of city building vanished, *pobladores* recreate their political agencies by both reclaiming the legacy of the old *pobladores* movements and generating effort-based narratives through which they signify their condition as working-class dwellers.

Chapter 4 discusses to what extent housing mobilizations allows for the emergence of a form of what some scholars have called "urban citizenship" (Holston 2008; Blokland et al. 2015; Cohen and Margalit 2015). To do so, I analyze ethnographically *pobladores'* claim for the right to obtain subsidized housing within the neighborhoods where they were born and raised. This demand, I affirm, is predicated upon their subjective identification as "heirs" of the urban rights secured by their parents through the processes of autoconstruction of the early 1970s. Then, I show that this particular understanding of rights—understood as a "legacy"—rests on both *pobladores'* self-recognition as citizen city-makers and a conceptualization of the city as a space for political intervention. This phenomenon, I conclude, can be seen as revealing an emerging "urban" type of citizenship.



Chapter 5 explores the configuration of new demands for dignity among housing activists. Here I hold that *pobladores*' pursuit of a life with dignity is not—as suggested by some authors (Han 2012; Murphy 2015)—only a private affair through which they seek to overcome the conditions of economic insecurity, labor precariousness, and social exclusion. I reveal how *pobladores*' claims for dignity enables them to generate new meanings of poverty whereby they impugn the ways in which the state classifies them as a “vulnerable population,” which is the prerequisite for their enrollment in housing programs. Likewise, I show that the utilization of the signifier “dignity” permits the urban poor to verbalize new urban demands such as the right to have “dignified housing” and a “dignified life” through which they reformulate the political horizon of *pobladores* movement.

Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation by reflecting on the shifting nature of housing movements in Santiago, Chile. It elaborates on three points: a) how new generations of urban activists recreate their political agencies by looking to the past as a source of symbolic power, allowing them to think of themselves as citizen city-makers endowed with rights to the city; b) to what extent *pobladores*' understanding of rights and citizenship contribute to questioning Chile's citizenship regime, which rests heavily upon the privatization of social rights; c) to what extent *pobladores*' demands for dignity, which they conceive of as the new political horizon of housing movements, enable them to articulate broader claims for social transformation.

By reflecting ethnographically on the ways in which Chilean *pobladores* constitute themselves as agentival subjects while demanding urban rights, this dissertation uncovers the mechanisms through which poor residents transform social imaginaries of citizenship in a country in which the market has long organized social life. Saba Mahmood (2012) argues that agency entails a process of political and ethical formation whose meanings and senses, rather than fixed in advance, are open to unexpected delimitations. This work aims to contribute to the understanding of the terms in which such delimitations occur in contemporary housing struggles in Chile as well as their transformative potentials.

## Chapter II. Right-to-housing struggles in Santiago: Rise and development of *Pobladores* Movement

### 1. From land seizures to state-regulated housing assemblies

To any scholar interested in the political history of Chile, the phrase “*movimiento de pobladores*” (*pobladores* movement) certainly evokes the rise of widespread housing protests in the 1960s and early 1970s. Such a process of mobilization was powerfully materialized in the execution of large-scale *tomas de terreno* (land seizures) that gave rise to highly politicized *campamentos* (squatter settlements) in the peripheries of Santiago. “*Pobladores* movement” may also allude to vast protests in working-class neighborhoods that, during the 1980s, attempted to restore democracy by destabilizing Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship (1973–1990; see more in Schneider 1995; Iglesias 2011). The phrase in question may even bring to mind two squatter settlements that appeared in Santiago in the 1990s,<sup>1</sup> which resembled those of the mid-twentieth century in light of the events that surrounded their irruption: mass mobilization of families *sin casa* (without a home of their own) who took over empty plots overnight; all of that in a period in which Chilean society went awkwardly through a transition to democracy that had Augusto Pinochet still serving as Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces.

When discussing *pobladores* movement, intellectuals have generally elaborated on two theoretical fields, both of which refer to the capacity of the urban poor to participate in politics as collective actors. On the one hand, social scientists have analyzed the formation of large-scale housing movements that had the emergence of *campamentos* as their most radical expression, a fact that was particularly observable between 1957 and 1973 (CIDU 1972; Castells 1973; Fiori 1973; Pastrana and Threlfall 1974; Espinoza 1988; Garcés 2002; Cofré 2011; Cortés 2014). On the other hand, academic inquiries have long examined the relationship between *pobladores* and the political system as a means to discuss their capacity for proposing an agenda for social transformation as autonomous political agents (Espinoza 1982; Castells 1983; Campero 1987; Touraine 1987; Tironi 1986; Dubet et al. 1989; Salazar and Pinto 2002; Iglesias 2011).

The end of the military regime in 1990 and the arrival of a center-left alliance—the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia,<sup>2</sup> which ruled the country until 2010—not only entailed the advent of a neoliberal democracy but also, drawing on Julia Paley’s words, the demobilization of Chilean society. Paley herself and other authors (Schild 2000; Özler 2012) argue that the demobilization of social movements, as an state-led process, was fundamentally carried out through the expansion of welfare programs oriented towards the integration of the poor into the state bureaucracy. The early 1990s marked thus the beginning of a shifting scenario for popular mobilization in general and for *pobladores* in particular, who were less and less able to have an impact on the political agenda on the basis of their collective action. In those circumstances, *pobladores*—now understood less as political actors than as beneficiaries of

<sup>1</sup> The Campamento Esperanza Andina in 1992 and La Toma de Peñalolén in 1999, both located in eastern district of Peñalolén.

<sup>2</sup> The Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia (Coalition of Parties for Democracy) gathered together, among others, the following parties: Democracia Cristiana (Christian Democratic Party), the Partido Socialista (Socialist Party), the Partido por la Democracia (Party for Democracy), and the Partido Radical Social Demócrata (Socialdemocratic Radical Party). As such, this coalition backed the governments of Patricio Aylwin (1990–1994), Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle (1994–2000), Ricardo Lagos (2000–2006), and Michelle Bachelet (2006–2010).

welfare programs—participated in the new political cycle as a “dispersed social mass” (Salazar and Pinto 2002, 263)

As for housing struggles, Ilgü Özler’s (2012) examination of housing programs accounts for how post-dictatorial governments pacified the urban poor by making them apply for state subsidies through state-regulated housing assemblies called *comités de allegados*.<sup>3</sup> Özler affirms that the spread of social programs under the Concertación, rather than questioning the ideological foundations of the neoliberal project formulated by the dictatorship, sought to strengthen them. The disciplinary and demobilizing nature of housing programs developed since 1990 by democratic governments is also addressed by Edward Murphy (2015) in his well-documented historical and ethnographic study of urban rights movements in Santiago’s peripheries. When depicting the main characteristics of contemporary housing mobilization, Murphy (2015, 240) holds that “the period between 1990 and 2006 was defined largely by a lack of activism among pobladores..., a time of political withdrawal and social atomization.” He goes on indicating that “rather than being a time of national solidarity and political belonging in Santiago’s margins, it was an era that consolidated a domesticated periphery.”

The academic analyses just mentioned, although very accurate when describing the essential characteristics of current housing policies, do not however problematize the ways in which *pobladores* reformulate their political agencies through their participation in state-regulated *allegados* committees. By putting the 1960s urban protests as a sort of theoretical canon allowing them to define the fundamental elements of a truly radical *pobladores* movement, these authors conceive of present housing mobilization as that of pacified, demobilized, and disciplined citizens incapable of proposing a transformative agenda. In doing so, they have overlooked to what extent *pobladores*’ political involvement in *allegados* committees opens up the possibility for restructuring the demand for urban rights.

To challenges these approaches, this chapter seeks primarily to argue that *pobladores*’ enrollment in state-regulated *comités de allegados*, rather than just contributing to the formation of a “domesticated periphery,” has actually played a key role in the reemergence of transformative housing mobilizations over the past ten years. To do so, in the following two sections I account for the historical roots of what social sciences and public opinion have called the *movimiento de pobladores*. In this regard, I start offering a brief description of the urban explosion undergone by Latin American societies in the first half of the twentieth century, a phenomenon that resulted in the rise of both a profound housing crisis and widespread right-to-housing protests. Then, I will present some scholarly debates that, especially between the 1960s and 1980s, elaborated on the existence—or, for some, the inexistence—of the *movimiento de pobladores* in urban Chile. This will help me situate historically current protests for housing and, accordingly, establish a genealogical link between past and present housing movements. This issue turns out to be crucial for comprehending contemporary urban mobilizations as current grassroots organizations often reclaim the legacy of the historical *pobladores* movement when addressing their demands to the state (see, for instance, Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha 2011). Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I take a look at emerging housing struggles carried out by the Federación Nacional de Pobladores—National Federation of Pobladores

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<sup>3</sup> Housing assemblies regulated by the state through the Law no. 19,418 of 1995 on *Juntas de Vecinos y Organizaciones Comunitarias* (Neighborhood Councils and Community Organizations). The *comités de allegados* are thus functional social organization through which poor families, previously characterized as “vulnerable” by the Ficha de Protección Social (Social Protection Survey; see more below and in Chapter V) families are able to apply for housing subsidies.

(FENAPO)—through which poor families are resisting the segregationist character of neoliberal urban policies. There, I focus my attention on two main elements: a) the development of what *pobladores* call “territorial demand”—namely, the demand to obtain housing solutions in their neighborhoods of origin—, which, I argue, can be theoretically understood as a right-to-the-city claim; b) the modalities of collective action resulting from *pobladores*’ involvement in *comités de allegados*, an aspect that I will discuss by showing ethnographic data I collected through a fifteen-month participant observation in the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco.

### **1. The urbanization of Latin American societies**

By the mid-twentieth century, Santiago underwent dramatic demographic changes related to large-scale rural-urban migrations, which were the consequence of two main facts: on the one hand, the progressive breakdown of the agrarian system (*latifundio*) and, on the other, the development of state-led industrialization processes. These transformations resulted in a deep housing crisis which, later on, was decisive for the rise of mass urban protests. Far from being limited to Santiago, these phenomena were observable in many other in Latin America, all of which were experiencing similar economic and political changes during the first half of the twentieth century. A brief account of these transformations will allow me to frame regionally the emergence of *pobladores* movement in Chile’s capital.

#### **Modernizing agendas and urban expansion**

Since the formation of national states in the first decades of the nineteenth century, Latin American countries have made constant efforts to undertake modernizing projects as a means of taking part in Western Modernity. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, Latin American economies depended primarily on agricultural or mining production, which is revealed in the minor importance of industry in the GNP of the most developed countries by 1930: 22,8% in Argentina; 14,2% in México; and 11,7 in Brazil (Almandoz 2008).

To follow the path initiated by the so-called developed countries, in the mid-twentieth century Latin American states implemented an import-substitution industrialization based on the economic theory of Developmentalism.<sup>4</sup> By assuming that Latin America’s underdevelopment was the effect of its condition of provider of raw materials for industrialized countries, Developmentalist thought led these countries to undertake reforms associated with the promotion of national industry on the basis of a strong state intervention (Bresser-Pereira 2011). Developmentalist agendas were, however, confronted with a complex demographic, geographic, and sociological phenomenon: explosive urban growth in the region, which experienced its fastest rates of expansion between 1950 and 1990. In 1950, around 40% of the population lived in urban areas, whereas in 1990 that number reached 70%. Since then, urbanization rates continued to increase but at a slower pace (see more in UN-Habitat 2012, 19).

The sociological significance of urbanization was early defined by Louis Wirth (1938), for whom it refers not only to sharp urban growth but also to the incorporation of traditional societies into an “mode of life”—that he called “urbanism”—developed exclusively in modern cities. In this context, an important part of Latin American narratives of modernity conceived of urbanization as a necessary and unavoidable step for modernization. Latin American national

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<sup>4</sup> Developmentalist theory adopted an historical-structural method to put forward measures aimed at facilitating the development of capitalist economy in the region. It was proposed by economists belonging to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) in Santiago, Chile (e.g., Raúl Prebisch, Celso Furtado, Osvaldo Sunkel, among others).

states looked thus at the formation of large metropolises as a material expression of social, economic, and cultural progress; an ideology that, as James Holston (1989) reveals, showed its most paradigmatic manifestation in the building of Brasília in the late 1950s.

Anthropologists examined this changing scenario closely. In paying attention to the cultural effects of urban growth, a number of ethnographers began to conduct researches that had the problem of urbanization as its backdrop. By making use of either structural-functionalist perspectives (Redfield 1947) or culturalist approaches (Lewis 1951), they sought to enlighten the influence of the urban on small, *mestizo*<sup>5</sup> villages as a means to account for the collapse of, using Redfield's conceptualization, folk societies. Thus, this new scope of analysis encouraged anthropologists to be more and more inclined to scrutinize cultural phenomena in urban settlements. By strongly advocating the need to reorient the ethnographic inquiry toward the city, many scholars carried out studies in urban communities such as poor neighborhood, ethnic enclaves, etc. (e.g. Lewis 1961; Adler Lomnitz 1977 in México City; Mangin 1967 in Lima; Bonilla 1970 in Rio de Janeiro). In doing so, they critically examined the unintended outcomes of Latin American modernization whose most dramatic expression was the spread of "shantytowns"<sup>6</sup> on the city margins. The proliferation of autoconstructed neighborhoods—a phenomenon proper to large metropolises through which, in Mangin's (1967) view, the poor dealt successfully with the housing shortage in Latin America—will however have unexpected political consequences related to the makeup of novel social movements.

### Housing crisis in urban Chile, 1900–1950

In the beginning of the twentieth century, when Chilean economy depended overwhelmingly on the export of natural saltpeter, Santiago's population increased significantly: from having 330,000 inhabitants in 1907, it had more than 700,000 people in 1930 (Almandoz 2008).<sup>7</sup> Although having dissimilar rates of urban growth, other Latin American cities went also through considerable demographic transformations in the same period.<sup>8</sup> In that shifting context, the so-called "social question" became a topic of public discussion in Chile. On the one hand, working-class movements began gradually to demand social and political rights through emerging leftist organizations such as the Federación Obrera de Chile ("Workers Union of Chile," founded in 1909) and the Partido Obrero Socialista ("Socialist Workers Party," created in 1912).<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, new forms of poverty appeared in largest cities, which resulted in an unprecedented housing crisis that forced a remarkable portion of the urban poor to live in overcrowded houses lacking basic services like drinking water, electricity, and appropriate sanitary facilities. In these

<sup>5</sup> According to Claudio Lomnitz-Adler (1992), *mestizo* is a concept usually referring to a particular racial and ethnic group derived from the process of *mestizaje*, that is, from the racial mixture between Spaniards and Indians. This author highlights that *mestizaje* is the "process wherein communities are extracted from their cultures of origin without being assimilated into dominant culture" (Lomnitz-Adler 1992, 39). Thus, it not only entails fracturing the cultural coherence of a subordinate culture but also limiting the conditions for the creation of a new, independent culture insofar as the mesticized groups, in being subordinated to local elites, acquire its cultural status by adopting or reacting against the culture of the ruling groups.

<sup>6</sup> In Latin America, "shantytown" received different names depending on the country they arose. To mention some: *pueblos jóvenes* (Perú); *favelas* (Brazil); *poblaciones callampas* or *campamentos* (Chile); *villas miseria* (Argentina); *asentamientos* (Guatemala); *colonias* (México), etc.

<sup>7</sup> The country's population also increased, from 3,231,496 people in 1907 to 4,287,433 in 1930.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, Buenos Aires went from 663,000 people in 1895 to 2,178,000 in 1932; México City from 328,000 in 1908 to 1,049,000 in 1933; and São Paulo from 240,000 in 1900 to 1,075,000 in 1930 (Almandoz 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Once it joined the Third International, the Partido Obrero Socialista turned into the Partido Comunista in 1922, which exists up to these days.

circumstances, the urban poor started to demand that state ensure affordable living conditions, which was materialized in claims that came from “the consumption of meat to housing conditions” (Murphy 2015, 51).

Scholars like Mario Garcés (2002) and Rodrigo Hidalgo (2002) agree that lower-income groups inhabited in three types of housing: (1) inner-city slum tenements formed through the subdivision of a one-or two-floor house with a single entrance to the street, which were called *conventillos*. The rooms resulting from this subdivision were usually around a central patio, which worked as a common space.<sup>10</sup> According to Hidalgo (2002), *conventillos* were the most representative kind of housing for the urban poor during this period. (2) *Cuartos redondos*—literally “round rooms”—, which were subleased rooms that, unlike *conventillos*, had neither windows for ventilation nor access to any open area. And (3) *ranchos*, namely, precarious houses made of adobe and straw roofs which, as both Garcés (2002) and Hidalgo (2002) suggest, were a typology of housing originated in rural forms of life. By 1910, approximately one hundred thousand people—approximately 25% of Santiago’s population—resided in 25,000 rooms distributed among *conventillos*, *cuartos redondos*, and *ranchos* (Garcés 2002, 30–31). Furthermore, more than 97% of them were room renters, above all in *conventillos* (Salazar and Pinto 2002, 245).

This was the context in which Germán Riesco’s government passed the Ley de Habitaciones Obreras (“Law of Worker Housing”) in 1906, which is not only considered the first housing law in Chile<sup>11</sup> but also a pioneering legal initiative in Latin America.<sup>12</sup> Through this norm, the state sought to *sanear* (“sanitize”) slum tenements by establishing a number of regulations aimed at improving their hygienic condition. As an early homeownership-oriented policy, this law also promoted the construction of housing projects by creating local councils—the Consejos de Habitaciones Para Obreros—through which lower-middle and working-class families could access loans from credit institutions and banks (see more in Murphy 2015, 53–54).

Nonetheless, the Law of Worker Housing “showed soon its total inefficiency” (Garcés 2002, 31) given that it was incapable of both providing the poorest sectors with affordable housing and preventing landlords from raising rent. This fact brought about the foundation of the Liga de Arrendatarios (“Renters’ League”) in 1914, a grassroots organization strongly influenced by anarchist ideals (Grez 2007) that, along with demanding that landlords sanitize *conventillos*, claimed the reduction of 40% in rent prices (Espinoza 1988, 56). The action of the Renters’ League and other poor inhabitants’ unions like the Sociedad de Arrendatarios de la Defensa Mutua (“Renters’ Association for Mutual Defense”) carried out a nationwide strike in 1925 in which *conventillo*’s residents stopped paying rent during six months (for a detailed account of these mobilizations, see Espinoza 1988, 79–117). These protests triggered the passing of two housing laws in 1925, the Ley de Arrendatarios (“Renters’ Law”) and the Ley de Habitaciones Baratas (“Law of Affordable Housing”), both of which “improved regulatory oversight and helped to establish the state’s responsibility in ensuring affordable housing of a minimal quality” (Murphy 2015, 55). In specific terms, while the former attempted to regulate rent prices and endow the poor with more rights to avoid evictions, the latter sought to stimulate the creation of

<sup>10</sup> Similar typologies of housing received other names elsewhere in Latin America: *tugurios* (Perú); *vecindades* (México); *cortiços* (Brazil); etc. The term *conventillos* was, however, also used in Argentina and Uruguay.

<sup>11</sup> Although Catholic Church’s charity organization, inspired by Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* encyclical of 1891, had already developed housing projects for the poor in the late nineteenth century, it is only since 1906 that the state assumes a more proactive role in such an enterprise. See more in Hidalgo, Errázuriz and Booth (2005).

<sup>12</sup> Other countries that passed housing laws in this period were Argentina (1915) and Colombia (1918).

housing cooperatives. This last aspect turned out to be one of the most innovative elements of the Law of Affordable Housing as these cooperatives made possible the building of neighborhoods for workers and employees that began to be called “*poblaciones*” (Hidalgo 2002, 101). All these measures, however, did not result in the building of a considerable amount of housing projects so as to mitigate the lack of 200,000 hygienic housing units (*viviendas salubres*) that the country required in the early 1920s (Hidalgo 2002).

The extensive appearance of shantytowns in the following decades is, however, not only explained by the ineffectiveness of housing policies.<sup>13</sup> Another crucial factor was the implementation, in the 1920s and 1930s, of significant projects of urban renewal aimed at “modernizing” Santiago (Cáceres 1995), which entailed even the hiring of renowned city planners like the Austrian Karl Brunner. Given the growing speculation affecting Santiago’s downtown that came after the execution of large-scale urban regeneration plans, thousands of poor families were physically forced to move out of their neighborhoods, which in some cases involved even the demolition of entire blocks. The press called these events *lanzamientos* (evictions) and, especially for leftist newspapers like, they were orchestrated by *enemigos del pueblo* (“people’s enemies”) who wanted to make profit by expelling the poor out of the city center.<sup>14</sup> In the late 1940s, it was common to read stories of injustice, desperation, and abuses of poor families who, even being up-to-date with rent payments, were dispossessed by unscrupulous landlords carrying out “inhuman evictions.”<sup>15</sup> All of this generated the conditions for the spread of squatter settlements in the peripheries of Santiago. In view of their sudden emergence, which generally occurred overnight, and their proximity to water flows, public opinion called settlements *poblaciones callampas* (mushrooms poor neighborhoods) or simply *callampas* (mushrooms). Pedro Lemebel, a Chilean writer who during his childhood lived in the Zanjón de la Aguada—one of the largest squatter settlements in the 1950s—, relates the rise of *poblaciones callampas* as a quick, unexpected event resulting from the “clandestine” action of poor dwellers who took over empty plots in “the dull quagmire of the fatherland” (Lemebel 2003, 14).

According to Armando de Ramón (1990), approximately 75,000 people lived in *callampas* in Santiago by 1952, which amounted to 6.25% of its population. Two decades later, 456,000 *pobladores* were dwelling as squatters in Santiago’s peripheries, which represented 16.3% of its inhabitants (Santa María 1973). The significant increase of informal settlements accounted not only for the worsening of the housing crisis in Chile, but also for the consolidation of urban mobilizations that, between the 1950s until 1973, had *tomas de terreno* (land seizures) as a preferred strategy to claim the right to housing. It was, in fact, the extensive occurrence of illegal land occupations what allowed *pobladores* to constitute a social movement that will acquire even a revolutionary character.

## 2. The *Movimiento de Pobladores*: Social Sciences Reflections and Cycles of Protests

Between 1930 and 1960, Santiago continued to undergo rapid urban growth. A quick gaze at census statistics shows this sharp transformation: whereas Santiago’s population reached

<sup>13</sup> Other significant public interventions in housing issues during this period came along with the creation of the Caja de la Habitación Popular (“Popular Housing Agency”) in 1936, through which the state engaged directly in the building of social housing. For a detailed analysis of the Caja de la Habitación Popular, see Hidalgo (2000).

<sup>14</sup> “30 Familias Afectadas por Acción del Especulador N° 1 de la Vivienda, Juan Elgueta Ruiz.” *El Siglo*, 07 January 1947, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> “Lanzaron a Cientos de Personas Ayer: En Todos Los Barrios Hubo Desalojos Inhumanos Todo el Día.” *El Siglo*, 15 January 1947, p. 5.

712,533 people in 1930, almost two million people lived in this city in 1960. In the midst of an accelerating housing crisis, some governments tried to put into action reformist agendas. This implied that the poorest sectors acquired a never-seen-before political significance, which ended up with the election of the Socialist Salvador Allende as the President of Chile in 1970. The urban poor assumed thus a leading role in this process of democratization on the basis of both strong grassroots organizations and a close relationship with centrist and leftist political parties.

In such a political scenario, the *movimiento de pobladores* developed as a social movement carried out by poor families in need of housing who, by addressing their claims to the state, demanded citizenship rights, social recognition, and dignity. To do so, working-class residents shifted their forms of protests. Instead of advocating housing rights from inner-cities *conventillos* through rent strikes—such as observed in the 1920s—, since the late 1940s *pobladores* made use of a specific, geographically situated political performance that will become crucial for both the constitution of a social movement and the formation of new working-class agencies: the execution of mass land seizures (*tomas de terreno*) in the peripheries of Santiago. Leaving for the next chapter my reflections on the performative role of illegal land occupations in the emergence of political subjectivities, in this section I will concentrate on how those practices helped to make up what scholars have called the *movimiento de pobladores* (Castells 1973; 1983; Pastrana and Threlfall 1974; Espinoza 1982; 1988; Garcés 2002; Cortés 2014).

My description of the historical progression of this movement assumes that there exists a genealogical link between its past and present manifestations. This means that the current housing protests realized through state-regulated *comités de allegados*, although considerably different from those of the 1960s and early 1970s, can be thought of as belonging to the “same” social movement that reached its highest levels of radicalization through the massive proliferation of *tomas de terreno*. That assumption is based on an argument that, using an already classical anthropological distinction proposed by Marvin Harris (2001), can be depicted as an *emic* account, that is to say, as a description of a social phenomenon grounded on categories produced by the anthropological other. This *emic* explanation relates to FENAPO’s and other grassroots organizations’ view of their struggle as one directly rooted in the housing mobilizations that appear throughout the twentieth century (see, for instance, *Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha* 2011, 49–80). As I will analyze in depth in Chapter III, this idea turns out to be fundamental for contemporary activists since it allows them both to reclaim the legacy of the historical *movimiento de pobladores* and rearticulate their political subjectivity as collective actors.

Based on Sydney Tarrow’s (2011) work, I will illustrate the historical development of *pobladores* movement by showing different cycles of contention or protest. For this author, a cycle of contention is a “phase of heightened conflict across the social system, with rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors” (Tarrow 2011, 199). In each of them, he argues, social movements draw generally on innovative means of protest—what he calls repertoires of contention—as well as new or transformed collective action frames, which permit them to redefine their relationship with the state. The outcome of the cycles of contention, he states, is variable as they can end up in reforms, drastic repression, or a revolution. Tarrow’s conceptualization allows me not only to affirm the cyclical character of *pobladores* mobilizations, but also to conceive of its multiple expressions as the consequence of historically established sociopolitical circumstances. In that sense, the different cycles of protests *pobladores* have taken part in must be understood less as the ahistorical configuration of



spontaneous uprising than as critical conjunctures in which urban struggles challenging a long-term housing crisis escalate. I have divided the presentation of historical *pobladores* movement into three cycles of mobilization, each of which relates to specific scientific reflections on the capacity of the urban poor to constitute themselves a relevant collective actor. In turn, I will depict ethnographically the contemporary *pobladores*' protests in the next section.

### **First cycle of protests (1950s–1970): *Callampas* as an expression of urban marginality**

The first cycle of protests is characterized by the irruption of large-scale land seizures—mostly in state-owned plots—, which gave rise to squatter settlements located predominantly in the urban peripheries. Once settled in the occupied land, *pobladores* sought to become homeowners by demanding two main elements from the state: on the one hand, construction materials that allowed them to initiate processes of *autoconstrucción* (“autoconstruction;” see more in Chapter III); and, on the other, titles deeds as a means to avoid further evictions. To accomplish those goals, *pobladores*—gathered together in local housing assemblies and the Agrupación Provincial de Pobladores, created in 1952<sup>16</sup>—established early a close link with civil society associations like political parties, the Catholic Church, and student unions. Those relationships were determinant for the future development of the right-to-housing movement during this cycle of protests. As I will explain later, the Christian Democratic Eduardo Frei will attempt to carry out his populist government (1964–1970) by instrumentalizing *pobladores*' actions, a strategy oriented also towards breaking the overwhelming influence of the Communist Party on the working classes.

According to sociologist Vicente Espinoza (1998), in this period the *pobladores* movement, still in its infancy, was fundamentally oriented toward the claim of housing-related rights rather than toward the revolutionary transformation of social structures. Espinoza affirms that the rationale of *pobladores* was structured by their interest in solving quickly their housing problem. In that sense, the very act of occupying lands appears primarily as an act of citizenship through which the urban poor sought to be recognized as rights-bearing citizens by the state.

Many scholars hold that October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1957 was a decisive date on the history of *pobladores* movement (Espinoza 1988; 1998; Garcés 2002; Cortés 2014). In the early morning of that day, more than one thousand families who were living as squatters on the riverbank of the Zanjón de la Aguada took over empty plots in the municipality of San Miguel, which later on will originate the Población La Victoria. Rather than describing the incidents surrounding the emergence of this *población*—something that several authors already have done in depth (Espinoza 1988, 248–270; Garcés 2002, 120–150; Cortés 2014, 241–244)—I just want to point out two elements that enable me to assess the significance of this *toma* in the further development of the right-to-housing movement.

First, both the occupation and the subsequent events that made possible the building of the Población La Victoria were far from being the result of the action of poor families autonomously organized or with no political affiliations. Such as shown by the scholars just quoted, *pobladores* received permanent support and assistance from leftist parties—particularly the Communist Party, which was proscribed between 1948 and 1958<sup>17</sup>—, student associations,

<sup>16</sup> Prior to the Agrupación Provincial de Pobladores (“Pobladores’ Provincial Association”), during the 1940s the most important housing organization was the Frente Nacional de la Vivienda (“Housing National Front”). For an in-depth analysis of *pobladores*' grassroots organization during this period, see Manuel Loyola's work (1989).

<sup>17</sup> In 1947, the President Gabriel González Videla (1946–1952) passed the Ley de Defensa Permanente de la Democracia (Law of Permanent Defense of Democracy), also called Ley Maldita or, in English, Dammed Law. This

and the Catholic Church. Second, it is necessary to question the idea, broadly scattered among the Chilean public opinion, that La Victoria was the first organized land seizure in the country and that the autoconstruction processes it brought about were kind of exceptional.<sup>18</sup> That perspective has been to some extent echoed by academic works which, even recognizing the occurrence of earlier mass land occupations (e.g. the Toma Zañartu in 1947) and previous forms of autoconstruction,<sup>19</sup> confer a founding, even mythical, character upon La Victoria as if *movimiento de pobladores* did not exist before the rise of this *población*. As I will explain in the next chapter, both land seizures and the demand for construction supplies to carry out autoconstruction processes—two elements that will be determinant for the formation of *pobladores* as political subjectivities—were already present in their political discourse at least ten years prior to the birth of the Población La Victoria. In that sense, the events that made possible the appearance of this neighborhood, although outstanding, must be understood less as unexpected or extemporaneous than as expressive of a set of transformative socio-spatial practices that had been long performed by the urban poor. Hence, the political relevance of La Victoria occupation is to be found in that, for the first time in Chilean history, a planned land seizure turned into an autoconstructed neighborhood. Its contribution to housing protests, therefore, has to do less with being the founding event of the *movimiento de pobladores* than with its capacity to provide future *tomas de terreno* with a sort of technical, political, and even “symbolic inspiration” (Cortés 2014, 242) when it comes to collectively autoconstructing a *población*.

During this period, there were important attempts to tackle the shortage of affordable housing. The President Jorge Alessandri’s (1958–1964) “Plan Habitacional” (Housing Plan), for instance, tried to do that by centralizing the building of large-scale housing units through the CORVI (Corporación de la Vivienda or “Housing Corporation,” created in 1953). In practice, Alessandri’s plan led to massive displacements of *callamperos* (squatters) to Santiago’s southern areas between 1959 and 1962. These displacements gave rise to densely populated *poblaciones* (e.g. San Gregorio, José María Caro, Clara Estrella, and Santa Adriana) that congregated more than one hundred thousand *pobladores* (Garcés 2002, 197). It is significant to mention that, in most cases, *pobladores* themselves were in charge of the construction of their houses under the technical supervision of the CORVI. As I will discuss in depth in the following chapter, this modality of state-led autoconstruction will be determinant in the makeup of *pobladores* as political subjectivities.

Regardless of the growing concern about housing issues of both Jorge Alessandri and his successor Eduardo Frei Montalva (1964–1970), throughout the 1960s *pobladores* continued to take over empty lands to claim the right to housing. Between 1964 and 1969, there existed 58 large-scale *tomas* in Santiago—most of which (35) came about in this last year (Duque and

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norm outlawed the Communist Party and other leftist organizations on the basis of their role in, the government said, the climate of social instability associated with the emergence of increasing forms of mass mobilization. In addition to persecuting left-wing militants, González’s regime also broke relations with the Soviet Union as a way to take a clear anti-communist position in the midst of the Cold War.

<sup>18</sup> Some newspaper reports that exemplify this sort of idealization are: “52 años de población La Victoria: ‘Avanzar hasta la casa conquistar’.” *La Nación*, October 30, 2009; “Población La Victoria: a 57 años de la primera toma en Chile sigue congelada en el tiempo y vecinos acusan abandono.” *Cambio 21*, October 29, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, Paulo Álvarez’s (2014) work on the Población Legua Emergencia. In it, he documents the existence of some types of community-based autoconstruction in the emergence of Nueva La Legua in the late 1940s.

Pastrana 1972)—, which originated well-known *campamentos* identified with leftist ideals.<sup>20</sup> This resulted in passionate ideological debates materialized in the appearance of several editorial notes both in progressive and conservative newspapers, which elaborated on what *pobladores movement* represented and what its political significance was. The communist newspaper *El Siglo*, for instance, said that “the struggle of people in need of home [*los sin casa*] is one the most exemplary chapters of the country’s social history at present. It is about a movement with a great vitality that grows and reproduces itself on the basis of unity and spirit of achievement of our people. It is a movement that, in spite of repression, threats, and blows, wins its battles and raises its triumphant flags everywhere in the national territory.”<sup>21</sup> On the opposite side of the political spectrum, the right-wing daily *El Ilustrado* argued that the very existence of a severe housing crisis was an excellent battleground for the action of “agitators interested in subverting the social order.”<sup>22</sup>

As lower-income urban residents were acquiring a growing political recognition, they began to be systematically studied by social sciences. Chilean *pobladores*, just like the urban poor of other Latin American countries, were mostly analyzed through the idea of “marginality,” a concept that became a catchphrase when it came to problematizing the increasing significance of squatter settlements. Rather than having a univocal sense, marginality was understood from different perspectives, which brought about the elaboration of a number of scholarly works attempting to explain, among other issues, the capacity of squatters to turn themselves into collective actors. Janice Perlman (1976, 97–131), for instance, accounted for that diversity by showing seven schools of thought that examined in dissimilar ways the socio-cultural dimensions of the so-called marginal man.<sup>23</sup> Regardless of this multiplicity of approaches, these theoretical formulations were generally predicated upon the consideration of marginality as something “dysfunctional” (Cortés 2013, 4). As a consequence, scholars conceived of the “marginal mass”—borrowing José Nun’s (2001) terminology<sup>24</sup>—as politically disruptive due to either their capacity for revolution (Ribeiro 1971) or their contribution to the appearance of some forms of chaotic and inorganic violence (Vekemans 1969; Vekemans, Giusti, and Silva 1970; Bonilla 1970).

In Chile, the theory of marginality was formulated by scholars of the Centro para el Desarrollo Económico y Social de América Latina, DESAL—“Center for Social and Economic Development of Latin America,” based in Santiago, Chile—, which had Belgian Jesuit priest Roger Vekemans as one of its most prominent figures. According to DESAL authors (Vekemans, Giusti, and Silva 1970), Latin American marginality was historically rooted in the ethno-cultural and ethno-social superposition that came along with the Spanish colonization. That phenomenon, they argued, triggered the emergence of a dual society in which traditional,

<sup>20</sup> Some of the most famous squatter settlements that emerged during this decade are: Herminda de la Victoria (1967; see Garcés 2002, 349–365), Violeta Parra (1969; see Garcés 2002, 365–370), and Primero de Mayo (1969; see Murphy 2015, 71–100).

<sup>21</sup> “La Lucha de Los Sin Casa.” *El Siglo*, 31 July 1965, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> “Ocupación de Predios.” *El Ilustrado*, 03 August 1965, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> These are: (1) the psycho-sociological; (2) the architectural-ecological; (3) the ethnographic; (4) the traditional-modernizing; (5) the culture of poverty; (6) the DESAL’s approach; and (7) the radicalism theory.

<sup>24</sup> In an attempt to reframe the Marxist theory of labor for the Latin American context, José Nun (2001, 87) argued that the *masa marginal* was that “afuncional or dysfunctional part of the relative surplus population.” The marginal mass differs from Marx’s industrial reserve army in that, rather than alluding to a surplus labor force permitting capitalists to keep salaries low, it refers to those who can no longer be absorbed as labor force by the capitalist system. Anibal Quijano (1972) will arrive at similar conclusions through his idea of *polo marginal* (“marginal pole”).

indigenous cultures were subjugated by the modern ones, which created a social system based on the existence of two different social groups: those who participate in society and those who do not. Such a premise led DESAL scholars to argue that the Latin American urban poor, as heirs of those historically marginalized, were incapable of fully participating in society given their structural exclusion in socio-cultural, economic, ecological, and political terms.<sup>25</sup>

DESAL's approach to marginality held that the participation of marginal groups in society—or, rather, the lack of it—was composed of two dimensions that remind us of Lewis' (1961) culture of poverty. The first one was the “passive or receptive” (Vekemans 1969, 58), which was linked to the inability of *los marginales* [“the marginals”] to take part in the dominant system of values, the means of production, and the social division of labor. This primary form of marginality, Vekemans said, supposes that the so-called marginal man could not access the resources and services that society distributes among its members. The second dimension of participation was the “active or contributive,” which was associated with the marginal population's incapability of contributing to either overcoming their own disadvantage position or “solving social problems in general” (Vekemans 1969, 59). In DESAL scholars' view, the marginal individuals, in having no “functional integration into society” (Vekemans 1969, 62), were not only disarticulated from one another but also unable to establish relationships with larger political structures unless they fell into clientelistic politics. That is why Vekemans, Giusti, and Silva affirmed that, in Latin America, the “marginal man is a disabled man [*hombre disminuido*], not in terms of his moral values (which sometimes may be heroic) but in terms of his capacity for acting individually or collectively in a rational way” (Vekemans, Giusti, and Silva 1970, 71).

This understanding of *pobladores* as limited, even irrational, marginal individuals was the framework used by the Christian Democratic government of Eduardo Frei Montalva to back his Programa de Promoción Popular (Program of Popular Promotion). The popular promotion framework sought essentially to endorse the creation of state-regulated grassroots organizations to facilitate the integration of the urban poor into state policies. That aspiration, fundamental for Frei's patronizing politics, was materialized through the Ley de Juntas de Vecinos and Organizaciones Comunitarias of 1968 (Law of Neighborhood Councils and Community Organizations), which led to the rise of more than twenty thousand grassroots associations nationwide (Garcés 2002). With respect to housing issues, Eduardo Frei's populist regime thought of *pobladores'* organizations as essential for the development of a new housing policy, the Operación Sitio (Site Operation), through which the state expected to have 360,000 housing units built by 1970.<sup>26</sup> The Operación Sitio aimed to do so by providing the poorest families with urbanized plots (generally 9x18 meters) and title deeds. *Pobladores*, in turn, were supposed to take part in the production of social housing units by either forming housing cooperatives or autoconstructing their houses. Throughout the process of homebuilding, the state gave *pobladores* permanent technical and financial support,<sup>27</sup> which were complemented with training workshops in community skills oriented towards endowing the emerging *poblaciones* with a “community sense” (*sentido comunitario*).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> DESAL's perspective was, in this regard, very similar to some structural-functionalist approaches to urban marginality like that of Gino Germani's (1973), which analyzed Latin American underdevelopment by making a distinction between traditional and modern societies.

<sup>26</sup> “Record de construcciones.” *La Nación*, 02 November 1965, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> “La ‘Operación Sitio’ es una solución Chilena.” *La Nación*, 13 August 1966, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> “Viviendas que enseñan a vivir.” *La Nación*, 03 November 1965, p. 9.

Eduardo Frei's government was, however, far from fulfilling the expectations made at the beginning of his term. By 1970, the housing deficit actually reached 585,000 housing units, that is, around 100,000 units more than in 1960 (CIDU 1972). This fact contributed importantly to the radicalization of the *pobladores'* mobilizations and, consequently, to the intensification of land seizures. At the end of his presidency, the state reacted more violently to squatters' actions reaching to the point of killing ten *pobladores* who tried to seize an empty plot in the southern city of Puerto Montt on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 1969. The Pampa Irigoin Massacre, as known by public opinion, was probably the most cut-throat symptom of the disjunction between organized *pobladores'* growing interest in finding a place to live and Eduardo Frei's idea of offering them prompt housing solutions without questioning the foundations of the Chilean dependent capitalism; all of this, in a context in which the working classes were decisively committed to an agenda for social transformation that triggered the election of Salvador Allende as the President of Chile in 1970.

### **Second cycle of protests (1970–1973): Revolutionary *pobladores***

When the Unidad Popular came in power in 1970, *pobladores* movement—now totally engaged in Salvador Allende's "Chilean Road to Socialism"—acquired a clear class-based orientation. Unlike what occurred in the previous years, land seizures were no longer performed as a means to make the demands of poor families who did not own their home visible but, rather, as a way to both challenge the right to property and generate innovative experiences of popular power. In fact, the most characteristic elements of this cycle of protests will be the appearance of highly politicized *campamentos* and the radicalization of the political language utilized by *pobladores*, expressed in the utilization of *casa o muerte* ("house or death") as the battle flag of housing movement (De Ramón 2007). These phenomena coincide with the increasing influence of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria, MIR (Movement of Revolutionary Left) on the urban poor. This point turned out to be crucial for the progression of the housing movement during Allende's government since, until then, *pobladores* had overwhelmingly supported traditional parties like the Communist, the Socialist, and the Christian Democratic.

Allende's policy on illegal occupations differed drastically from that of Frei. His administration envisioned *tomas de terreno* as a reasonable and legitimate claim of the working classes in need of housing, which implied that the Unidad Popular barely repressed *pobladores* in the way the preceding governments did. Allende's permissiveness implied thus a dramatic explosion of land seizures. Although historians do not agree upon the actual number of land takeovers executed between 1970 and 1973 in Santiago, some estimates are indicative. For Edward Murphy (2015), the numbers of cases went from 23 in 1969 to 103 in 1970 and 350 in 1971.<sup>29</sup> Based on a careful archive research, historian Boris Cofré (2011) holds that *pobladores* conducted successfully at least 344 land seizures in that period producing a similar quantity of *campamentos*<sup>30</sup> in which more than 450,000 people—16,3% of the city's population—lived (Santa María 1973). This increment is graphically depicted in Map 1, which shows the 338 *campamentos* existing in Santiago in 1971. This map illuminates another aspect related to Allende's tolerance to *pobladores'* takeovers: the proliferation of a dozen of leftist squatter

<sup>29</sup> The realization of land occupations also exploded nationwide: 35 in 1969, 220 in 1970, and 560 in 1971 (Murphy 2015).

<sup>30</sup> Cofré (2011) points out that the number of *tomas* cannot be confused with the actual amount of *campamentos* since one squatter settlement might be the result of more than one land occupation. An example of this was the Campamento Nueva La Habana (see more below).

settlements in the north-eastern part of Santiago at the heart of Las Condes, the richest district of the city. Bourgeois families conceived of the appearance of the *campamentos*—suggestively named “Fidel Ernesto,” “Luciano Cruz,” Ramona Parra,” “Ho Chi Minh,” or “Ñancahuazú,” just to mention some—as a direct threat to their class privileges, which led even to episodes of violent physical encounters between *pobladores* and their richest neighbors. Whereas right-wing newspapers described these events as the result of an indulgent regime seeking to promote class struggle by allowing the poor to both “invade” Las Condes and violate the right to property<sup>31</sup> (Image 1), pro-government dailies depicted them as the reaction of fascists unwilling to lose their class prerogatives.<sup>32</sup> Regardless of the rich families’ opposition, Allende’s government carried out some pioneering social housing developments in Las Condes as a means to create a more integrated city (Chiara and Pulgar 2008).

As the working classes determinedly embraced the Unidad Popular’s political project, social sciences thought of *pobladores* as capable of constituting a truly transformative social movement. Sociologists and planners, in this regard, began to examine squatter settlements no longer to scrutinize the socio-cultural dimensions of the so-called marginal man, but rather to account for the formation of a revolutionary subject. The innovative experiences of self-government developed by some *campamentos* became thus a common topic of analysis, which often discussed to what extent processes of popular production of space might contribute to the appearance of new, transformative social relations (e.g. CIDU 1972; Fiori 1973; Santa María 1973; Pastrana and Threlfall 1974).

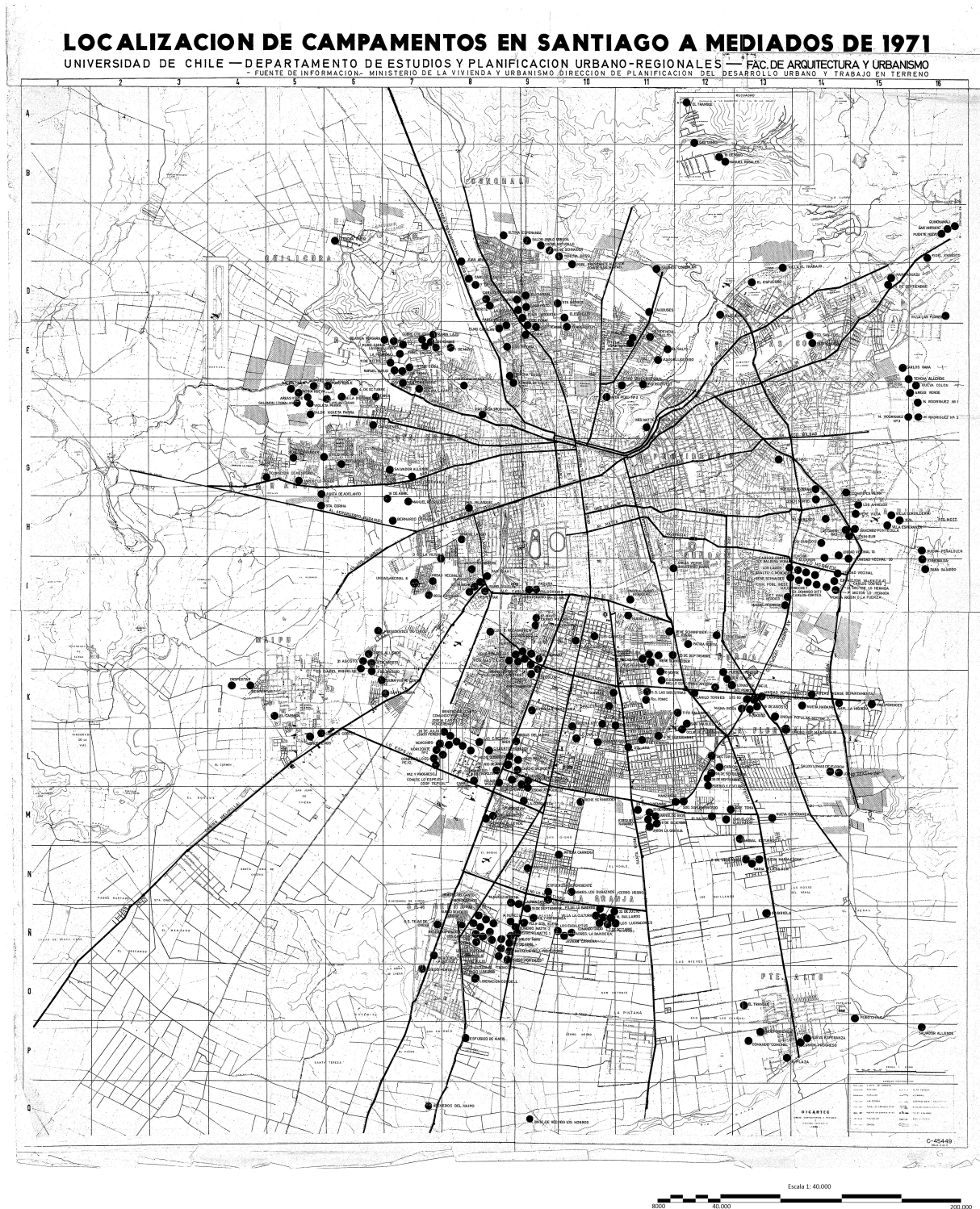
As for the emergence of highly organized *campamentos*, I will briefly illustrate the case of the Campamento Nueva La Habana, not only because it was “probably the most well-known *campamento* in Chile” (Pastrana and Threlfall 1974, 71), but also because this squatter settlement gave rise to the *población* in which I conducted my ethnographic research. The story of Nueva La Habana begins in November 1970 when one thousand and five hundred families, who were previously living in three land seizures (Magaly Honorato, Ranquil, and Elmo Catalán), arrived jointly in a wheat farm called Los Castaños in the district of La Florida. The Campamento Nueva La Habana, led by the Movement of Revolutionary Left (MIR), was significant in the history of the *pobladores* movement as it was one of the most consolidated expressions of *pobladores*’ growing political radicalization. Its high levels of internal organization were materialized in the creation of different “working fronts” (*frentes de trabajo*), which gave rise to a self-defense militia, self-managed schools for kids, popular courts, a preventive medicine facility, and a workers’ front through which *pobladores* autoconstructed what is now called Población Nuevo Amanecer.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> “Prefieren el Barrio Alto: El MIR Comenzó Invasión de Las Condes,” *La Prensa*, 12 May 1972, p. 16; “Vecinos Logran Desalojo de Predio Ocupado por Miristas,” *El Mercurio*, 02 June 1972, p. 24; “Vecinos de Las Condes Desalojaron a Pobladores,” *El Mercurio*, 15 August 1972, p. 1;

<sup>32</sup> “Atentado Fascista en el Barrio Alto,” *Puro Chile*, 15 December 1971, p. 12; “Cobarde Agresión de Nazis a Pobladores,” *La Nación*, 15 August 1972, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Nuevo Amanecer is the name that Pinochet’s dictatorship gave to Nueva La Habana. The assignment of new names to left-wing *campamentos* was one of the first measures taken by the military regime after the coup. I discuss the dictatorship’s politics of name changing in detail in Chapter III. With respect to the process of autoconstruction in Nueva La Habana/Nuevo Amanecer, see Chapter IV.





**Map 1: Localization of *Campamentos* in Santiago in 1971. Designed by the Departamento de Estudios y Planificación Urbana y Regional. Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo, Universidad de Chile.**



Image 1. “The invasion of Las Condes. Pobladores build up campamentos either legally with the government or illegally with *miristas* [MIR’s militants]” *Mundo*, 21 September 1972, p. 19.

As a way to create revolutionary subjectivities on the basis of making up a new everydayness, Nueva La Habana’s residents were supposed to behave in accordance with strict rules of conduct. Drinking, domestic violence, and other felonies against *pobladores* were thus prosecuted by a self-managed court that, based on a revolutionary ethics opposed to that of bourgeois institutions, sought to carry out *justicia popular* (popular justice). In view of this *campamento*’ spectacular organization, newspaper articles treated it either as a breeding ground for “extremists”<sup>34</sup> or as role model for other squatter settlements.<sup>35</sup> Magaly and Nona are two members of the Comités de Allegados Don Bosco—a housing assembly created in the early 2000s in the Población Nuevo Amanecer (see more below)—who arrived in Campamento Nueva La Habana during their early childhood. Like most, if not all, of the *pobladores* who dwelled in Nueva La Habana whom I interviewed, Magaly and Nona have nostalgic memories of their living in the *campamento*. Although, they say, life was much harder than now because of the precarious material conditions related to inhabiting as squatters, they miss the existence of a strong community capable of providing people with, at least, a safe place to live.

“When any man beat up his wife, everybody got him, beat him up, and expelled out of the *campamento*. The way of engaging with those matters was that everybody had to follow norms and rules... I think these [rules] are necessary because of a safety issue. Drinking was not allowed either, so everybody who wanted to drink had to go out of the *campamento*... that finally avoided that kids saw people drinking on the streets, which could have given them a distorted imagine, do you understand? (Magaly, November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013)

“[Nueva La Habana] was like ‘a separated country’ [*un país aparte*]. We had a shack that worked as a preventive care facility and some old buses adapted as

<sup>34</sup> “Extremistas de ‘Nueva La Habana’ no permiten policías.” *La Prensa*, 30 April 1972, p. 5. See also Robert Moss’ *Chile’s Marxist Experiment*. There, the author—a special correspondent for *The Economist* who was in Chile during Salvador Allende’s government—shows a map of Santiago in which Nueva La Habana is identified as one of the “key extremist encampments” (Moss 1973, 98).

<sup>35</sup> See, for example: “Nueva La Habana: una solución comunitaria.” *Ahora*, 04 May 1971, p. 30-32; “Nueva La Habana: Tradición de lucha, perspectiva de combate.” *El Rebelde*, 15 February 1972, p. 8.



classrooms. I actually went to school there... If anyone lost a spoon, the spoon appeared! If you fought with your partner and you hit her, everybody got into the fight and beat you up. So it was like a separate world... it was a really good experience. I'd love to come back to those times." (Nona, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014)

As years have gone by, Magaly and Nona have surely idealized their memories of the golden era of the Campamento Nueva La Habana, i.e., the period prior to the advent of a brutal military dictatorship that, between 1973 and 1990, repressed drastically this and many other squatter settlements. Nonetheless, their discourses shed light on some aspects of this *campamento* that drew powerfully the attention of many social scientists who looked at it as an emblematic case of *pobladores'* abilities to develop pioneering forms of popular power (e.g. Fiori 1973; Pastrana and Threlfall 1974). Cases like the Campamento Nueva La Habana or the Campamento 26 de Enero (Espinoza 1988, 302–328), as telling examples of the radicalization of housing mobilizations in this cycle of protest, not only questioned DESAL's theory of marginality but also helped elaborate theoretical frameworks in which *pobladores* were analyzed as political subjects in their own right. Accordingly, the new sociological approaches that came out in the early 1970s will examine specifically the role the urban poor in broader processes of social change. To do so, scholars rejected, first, the idea broadly spread by DESAL that poor neighborhoods were composed overwhelmingly of lumpenproletariat (Castells 1973; Giusti 1973).<sup>36</sup> By denying the so-called economic marginality of *pobladores*, these intellectuals tried to undermine the theoretical foundation DESAL's marginality and, as a result, its understanding of the marginal individuals as agents incapable of acting politically by themselves. Jorge Giusti affirmed, in relation to this, that the idea of "the marginal man" was, at least in Chile, a "myth:" "*Pobladores* are neither apathetic or pessimist, nor do they present features of internal disintegration as proposed by DESAL. Quite the contrary, they have the capacity to organize themselves for collective action" (Giusti 1973, 74). Therefore, for Giusti *pobladores'* expectations and wishes did not differ substantially from those of the rest of urban society and, even more important, they were neither, "as DESAL argued, prisoners of a servant-lord relationship" (Giusti 1973, 75), nor agents excluded from the political arena.<sup>37</sup>

The most consolidated criticism of DESAL's theory of marginality came however from the work developed by the Centro Interdisciplinario de Desarrollo Urbano, CIDU (Center Interdisciplinary for Urban Development) belonging to the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. CIDU scholars attempted primarily to understand the characteristics of a working-class social movement articulated through the demand for urban rights by conducting intensive researches on *campamentos*. These investigations examined, for instance, the type of social consciousness (*conciencia social*) developed by *pobladores* in their political struggle (Vanderschueren 1971); the rise of transformative forms of grassroots organization in *campamentos* (CIDU 1972); or the actual political significance of *pobladores* movement taking into account that these mobilizations resulted from a "secondary contradiction" of capitalism (Castells 1973, 9) linked to the housing crisis and the lack of public infrastructure. CIDU

<sup>36</sup> Early criticisms in this regard came, paradoxically, from Jorge Giusti (1973), a former member of DESAL who pointed out that the rates of unemployment among *pobladores* were not considerably higher than the rest of the economically active population in Santiago. In a similar fashion, Manuel Castells (1973) argued that Santiago's *campamentos*, although congregating a heterogeneous segment of the urban poor, were importantly made up of blue-collar laborers who, in working mostly in light industries and construction companies, had lower standards of living than other factions of the working class.

<sup>37</sup> There were other authors who, either in Chile or in other Latin American countries, criticized the theory of marginality in different ways (e.g. Perlman 1976; Sabatini 1981).

scholars' reflection on *pobladores* endeavor thus to explain housing protests vis-à-vis broader processes of social transformation. Such an enterprise must be acknowledged as *pobladores*, even receiving early the support of the Communist Party, were historically left aside as an object of theoretical analysis by the traditional left, which looked at blue-collar workers as the revolutionary subject par excellence.<sup>38</sup>

Manuel Castells's work on urban social movements was significant in this regard, especially if we take a look at how he changed his perspective on Chilean *pobladores* with respect to their capacity for developing a revolutionary social change. In the early 1970s, as a visiting scholar at CIDU, Castells argued that distinctive aspect of *pobladores* was less their belonging to a cultural or ideological universe constituted through their so-called marginal condition—as affirmed by DESAL—than their ability to take part in class struggle by putting forward urban-oriented claims (Castells 1973). Castells envisioned *pobladores*' mobilizations as a type of working-class social movement whose demands for collective consumption and public infrastructure might significantly contributed to Salvador Allende's socialist project. However, the Catalan sociologist will reformulate his view of *pobladores* movement in *The City and de Grassroots*. By 1983, the year in which this book came out, ten years had passed since Salvador Allende's government had been overthrown by a military coup, which had implied the almost total disappearance of housing movements. In this work, Castells affirmed that the Chilean experience had to be highlighted since it demonstrated “the potential and the limits of squatter's participation in a revolution” (Castells 1983, 179). By analyzing Latin American squatters' protests as an example of urban populism walking on the thin line between clientelism and the generation of an urban social movement, Castells concluded that Chilean *pobladores* were incapable of developing an autonomous political movement since they relied heavily on the political system to carry out their urban claims. Even more, their very existence and identity as collective actors, framed by their vulnerable status as urban dwellers, rested on the subordinated relationship they had with the state in their demands for rights to physical presence in the city. Hence, for Castells *pobladores*' protests were themselves part of a patronizing relationship since “only their reliance on the state's permissiveness entitles the squatters to the spatial basis of their daily existence” (Castells 1983, 211).

### **Third cycle of protests (1983–1990): *Pobladores* against Pinochet's dictatorship**

The arrival of Augusto Pinochet's military regime on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1973 entailed the total dismantling of Salvador Allende's Chilean road to socialism and a cruel repression of the social movements that backed it. Likewise, it implied the foundation of a totally new social order derived from the implementation of neoliberalism in Chile (Garretón 1983), which brought about the execution of several structural transformations aimed at creating a modern, export-oriented national economy (Harvey 2005). Three sets of reforms in policies linked to social housing, urban administration/planning, and poverty are crucial to comprehending the shifting scenario in which *pobladores* developed their right-to-housing mobilizations in the years to come.

First, concerning housing, the rise of a subsidy-based housing policy—the Programa de Subvención a la Vivienda of 1978—was predicated upon the idea that housing, rather than a social right, was a commodity that the poor could individually acquire on the market (Bruey

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<sup>38</sup> As Mario Garcés suggestively points out, there was a sort of inconsistency among Chilean communists stemming from, on the one hand, how active they were in practically and materially endorsing housing mobilizations and, on the other hand, how little they did to reflect theoretically on *pobladores* as a new type of political subject (Garcés 2002, 146–149).

2012). As a result, the role of the state was reduced to assign housing subsidies among those poor families whom had already demonstrated capacity for privately saving money whereas real-estate companies began to take on a leading part in the building of social housing projects (Hidalgo 2004a). Second, regarding urban administration/planning, Pinochet's Urban Development National Policy of 1979 struck down urban land regulations based on the idea that the market, rather than the state, would be the most effective agent to define land uses and urban limits. In addition, the dictatorship introduced a reform seeking to subdivide the seventeen existing *comunas* (municipalities) in Santiago into thirty four so as to create socially homogeneous districts (Sabatini 2000). These measures were accompanied by a slum eviction program called *erradicaciones* ("eradication"), which involved that between 1979 and 1985 30,000 families dwelling in *campamentos* located in high-rent neighborhoods were forced to move to the extreme periphery (Hidalgo 2004a). The direct effect of these changes was the emergence of large-scale subsidized housing projects in highly segregated, peripheral *comunas* (Hidalgo 2004a; Tapia 2011). Third, as for poverty-related policies, the dictatorship restructured the allocation of social welfare on the basis of a new paradigm which, while generating social programs exclusively oriented towards the lowest-income groups, constructed the poor as an individual beneficiary. To do so, Pinochet's regime designed a survey of socioeconomic classification—the Ficha CAS (Comités de Asistencia Social)<sup>39</sup>—which categorized working-class families as non-poor, poor, or indigent by measuring their income, level of schooling, and their household goods (Schild 2000).

The 1973 coup d'état marked the beginning of a systematic repression against *pobladores* movement, which was crudely materialized in the military intervention of *campamentos* and *poblaciones* as well as in the persecution and assassination of its most prominent leaders. Nona, the resident of the Campamento Nueva La Habana quoted above, describes her memories of the dictatorship in this way:

"You were sleeping and the military suddenly arrived at your house. They knocked on the door, came in, took off the mattress, and searched the attic [*entretecho*]. They messed your home up in two minutes... I also remember that after the coup the military dug a trench inside the *campamento* and stay there for many days carrying guns. If you wanted to go out of Nueva La Habana, you had to ask them for permission. That really shocked me" (Nona, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

The action of the dictatorship towards *pobladores* included also some attempts to dispute the hegemony of leftist ideals among neighborhood organizations. Such as explained by Alison Bruey (2012), Pinochet's government, at least in the first months in office, endeavored to show a genuine interest in solving the lack of affordable housing for the urban poor. To do so, "high-ranking officials made widely publicized visits, promising services and infrastructure," which led *poblaciones* to become "scenario for political theatre" (Bruey 2012, 531) such as observed in the previous years (see more in Chapter III). That strategy, however, was soon abandoned due to the inexistence of a coherent housing plan until the subsidy-based housing program was released in 1978.

In the first ten years of the military regime, land seizures almost totally disappeared. Although Bruey (2012) reports the occurrence of around twenty *tomas de terrenos* between 1978 and 1983, a substantial part of them were quickly repressed. The direct consequence of this was

<sup>39</sup> The Ficha CAS was replaced by the Ficha de Protección Social ("Social Protection Survey") in 2007 during Michelle Bachelet's government. In 2012, Sebastián Piñera's administration released a new version of it. See more below and in Chapter V.

that the housing crisis acquired new dimensions during the 1980s. Instead of being associated with the rise of illegal squatter settlements, in this period the shortage of housing for the poor entailed the considerable increase in the number *allegados*, that is, families in need of home living in overcrowded conditions in relatives' houses (Necochea 1987, see more in Chapter III). Nonetheless, two land occupations realized in September 1983 in the district of La Granja (currently La Pintana) turned actually into the Campamento Cardenal Raúl Silva Henríquez and the Campamento Monseñor Juan Francisco Fresno, which ended up congregating eight thousand families altogether. The occurrence of these *tomas*, certainly exceptional in terms of the amount of *pobladores* involved and their capacity to consolidate the takeovers into two *campamentos*, must however be understood as an effect of the progressive rearticulation of the popular sectors. Two years prior to the emergence of these land seizures, *pobladores* linked mostly to the Communist Party—at that time proscribed by the military regime—had already founded the Coordinadora Metropolitana de Pobladores (METRO), which became the largest housing federation during the 1980s.<sup>40</sup> METRO, in fact, promoted and led the takeovers in La Granja in 1983 as a way to question the dictatorship's just housing policies, which had been totally ineffective to solve the housing crisis. Sergio Wilson (Wilson 1988, 100) asserts that, between 1978 and 1982, the military government could provide the poor with 24,493 housing subsidies nationwide, which represented only 30% of the amount expected to be assigned. Claudina Núñez, a communist militant who presided over METRO in the 1980s, holds that, in that period, their political claims had to do less with requesting more state subsidies than with being allowed to do a particular socio-spatial practice that was crucial for the development of *pobladores* movement in the preceding decades: autoconstruction. To do so, METRO advocated the implementation of the Operación Sitio programs through which *pobladores* expected to receive urbanized lands and construction material to work themselves in the building of their homes.

“We [METRO] demanded Operación Sitio or any other alternative that allowed for autoconstruction... we were willing to autoconstruct our houses because we were capable of doing that. Our history had demonstrated that we could do it. But they [the military regime] said that it was illegal” (Claudina Núñez, July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2015).

Tolerating land seizures and permitting *pobladores* to autoconstruct their houses was not, however, part of the government's policies on housing. For that reason, both the Campamento Cardenal Raúl Silva Henríquez and the Campamento Monseñor Juan Francisco Fresno did not result in the building of autoconstructed neighborhood as their residents were “enrolled in eradication programmes and dispersed throughout the city” (Bruey 2012, 548). Nevertheless, these occupations helped public opinion know that that *pobladores* movement was back.

1983 was decisive for those who fought Pinochet's dictatorship. In that year, nationwide demonstrations against the military regime, which would be known as *Jornadas de Protesta Nacional* (“Days of National Protest”), exploded. On May 11<sup>th</sup> 1983, workers, students, *pobladores*, human rights organizations, and many other civil society associations supported the nationwide strike initially called by trade unions like the Comando Nacional de Trabajadores (CNT) and the Confederación de Trabajadores del Cobre (CTC). This will be followed by three

<sup>40</sup> At the same time, *pobladores* related to the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria gave rise to the Coordinadora de Organizaciones Poblacionales (COAPO). In 1984, METRO, COAPO, and Movimiento Poblacional Dignidad, related to the Christian Left, founded the Comando Unitario de Pobladores (CUP). For a detailed description of the *pobladores*' organizations that emerged during the dictatorship, see Sergio Wilson's work (1988).

other days of protests—June 14<sup>th</sup>, July 12<sup>th</sup>, and August 11<sup>th</sup>—which, given the large amount of supporters claiming the end of the dictatorship and the restoration of democracy, will surprise both the government and the organizers (Wilson 1988). In all these events, *pobladores* will regain their political significance on account of their strong commitment to the cause, which was materialized in the fact that *poblaciones* became the main setting for resistance to police repression (Schneider 1995; Iglesias 2011).

As predictable, *pobladores*' dedicated involvement in the protests against the dictatorial regime was understood by the conservative press as troubling and problematic. The specter of mass urban riots carried out by the so-called marginal groups was, one more time, at the heart of the debate. The right-wing newspaper *La Segunda*, for instance, depicted *pobladores*' participation in this way: "It is in *poblaciones* where the protests assume forms that threaten the non-violent means required by political leaders." The author goes on saying that, since the 1960s, there is a nightmare associated with the realization "of a great urban revolt starred in by *pobladores* who kill, loot, and burn everything down."<sup>41</sup>

In circumstances in which the focus of *pobladores*' movement seemed to shift from the claim for housing to the demand for democratization (Oxhorn 1995), social sciences analyzed the remobilization of the urban poor from two interwoven perspectives. On the one hand, scholars studied how the rise of new and most radical types of social exclusion resulting from Chile's neoliberal modernization triggered the appearance of novel community-based survival strategies among the poorest sectors. That phenomenon was expressed in the creation—most of the time supported by the Catholic Church—of around 1,300 grassroots organizations (Hardy 1987; Campero 1987) that gathered together more than 220,000 *pobladores* in the mid-1980s (Valdés 1987). On the other hand, sociological inquiries reflected critically on the extent to which these neighborhood association, whose networks worked to carry out the struggle against the military regime, contributed to the formation of a social movement.

If Castells's (1983) reflection affirmed the inexistence of the *movimiento de pobladores* in the early 1970s on account of their lack of autonomy, during the dictatorship scholars ruled out the possibility of thinking of *pobladores*' mobilizations as truly transformative as these relied exclusively on community-based orientations (Espinoza 1982; Tironi 1986; Touraine 1987; Dubet et al. 1989). On this line of reasoning, these authors tended to emphasize that *pobladores* were incapable of constituting themselves as collective actors since their associations were fundamentally predicated upon solidarity and affective, rather than political, ties, which made impossible their articulation with larger political agendas. Deeply influence by Alain Touraine's work, these group of researcher conceived of *pobladores*' actions as predominantly oriented toward the preservation of their identity as members of a community of excluded urban residents rather than toward the makeup of an alternative, counter-hegemonic project. For them, *pobladores*' participation in the protests for democracy was therefore that of an apathetic mass using violence to make inorganic, depoliticized identity claims, which might even result in chaotic and uncontrolled urban riots (see, for example, Tironi 1986).

### **3. The Reemergence of *Pobladores*' Mobilizations: *Allegados* committees and new right-to-housing claims**

The end of Pinochet's dictatorship in 1990, Julia Paley (2001) argues, was the direct result of negotiation strategies led by political elites which, by ruling out any attempt of radical change developed through broad-based social movements, accepted the conditions for transition

<sup>41</sup> "El problema del poblador," by Angel Flisfisch. *La Segunda*, 08 September 1983, p. 4.

established by Pinochet's constitution. This explains why Chile still has practically the same constitution created by Pinochet in 1980, why Augusto Pinochet kept serving as Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces until 1998 and why the Concertación's governments (1990–2000), rather than proposing reformist agendas, strived to preserve and deepen the neoliberal project implemented by the dictatorship. The consolidation of neoliberalism as a solid and stable mode of development required thus the demobilization of the social movements, a process that paradoxically "could be accomplished more effectively by political democracy" (Paley 2001, 105). This entailed, for instance, that center-left parties persuaded labor leaders to postpone their demands to avoid the destabilization of a still fragile post-dictatorial system (Winn 2004). In those circumstances, Philip Oxhorn's (1994) question "Where did all the protestors go?," along with being an ironically formulated query, reveals in itself what will be the main orientation of the new democratic governments: the understanding of the popular sectors as subjects unable to politically intervene in the public sphere. In Verónica Schild's (Schild 2000, 277) opinion, this is actually the period where a "market citizenship" arises, namely, a form of neoliberal citizenship that makes use of public policy programs to produce citizens "as empowered clients, who as individuals are viewed as capable of enhancing their lives through judicious, responsible choices as consumers of services and other goods."

With respect to housing struggles, post-dictatorial governments feared that the coming of a democratic political system resulted in the reemergence of what had been the main strategy used by *pobladores* to deal with housing affordability problems: land seizures (Hipsher 1996). Such an apprehension compelled them to both allocate housing subsidies among the poorest families on a large scale and build an unprecedented amount of social housing units on the basis of the dictatorship's market-based housing policies.<sup>42</sup> During the 1990s, when Chile had a population of more than thirteen million people, the state endeavored to construct at least 90,000 subsidized "housing solutions" (*soluciones habitacionales*) per year (Arriagada and Moreno 2006). This eventually helped reduce the housing shortage from 918,756 units in 1990 to 743,450 in 2000, which represents a decrease from 53% to 37% in the number of households who were living as *allegados* (Ministerio de Planificación 2001).

To do so, the state relied heavily on the spread of state-regulated housing assemblies (*comités de allegados*) through which the poor began increasingly to be enrolled in housing programs. This phenomenon, some authors hold (Hipsher 1996; Özler 2012), was crucial for the demobilization of *pobladores* since their political demands, framed by their desire to apply for subsidies to become homeowners, started to be channeled through formal mechanism of citizenship participation. On this point, Özler (2012) assures that, in being predicated ideologically upon neoliberal housing policies, *allegados* committees make difficult the articulation of broader urban movements as the poor families "must compete against one another individually or in groups for limited subsidies [...which] leads them to seek personal solutions to their housing problems" (Özler 2012, 68).

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<sup>42</sup> Between 1990 and 2000, the main subsidy-based housing programs implemented by the state were: (1) the Programa de Vivienda Básica ("Basic Housing Program," initially created by the dictatorship), which sought to fund the construction of housing projects for those who applied individually or collectively for subsidies. (2) The Programa de Viviendas Progresivas ("Progressive Housing Program"), which differed from the former in that *pobladores* required less saving to get a smaller structure equipped only with housing and kitchen. (3) The Programa Chile Barrio ("Chile Neighborhood Program"), which was a policy developed by Eduardo Frei's government (1994–2000) to address specifically the lack of housing of those living as squatters. For a complete description of the housing programs utilized by the Concertación's governments, see Arriagada and Moreno (2006) and Özler (2012).

Although it is hard to deny the fact that *comités de allegados* were utilized by the state to deal with housing mobilizations during the 1990s, in what follows I will show that these state-created housing assemblies have actually allowed for the reemergence of *pobladores* movements since the mid-2000s. By depicting how *pobladores* participating in these instances fight the segregationist character of current housing policies, I want to question some assumptions (e.g. Hipsher 1996; Özler 2012) that conceive of *allegados* committees as politically constrained in advance. To do so, I will briefly describe the state of affairs of the *pobladores* movement at present by describing both the means of protests and the political language utilized by housing activists affiliated with the Federación Nacional de Pobladores (FENAPO). Then, I will give an account of my fifteen-month ethnographic participation in the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco so as to both illustrate how state-regulated assemblies operate on a daily basis and portray sociologically those who take part in them in their search for homeownership.

### **Territorially situated housing struggles**

By 2014, official data indicated that the housing deficit reached nearly 459,347 units, which means that 19.4% Chilean were living as *allegados*. Likewise, around 65% of households within the first quintile—the poorest 20%—were homeowners (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social 2014a). The considerable building of housing solutions for the poor have, however, been paradoxical for *pobladores*. Since the 1980s, poor families seeking to become homeowners have done so under locational constraints (Hidalgo 2004a; Rodríguez and Sungranyes 2005; Tapia 2011).<sup>43</sup> This fact has led to a reconfiguration of the political language utilized by *pobladores* struggling for housing rights expressed in the incorporation of new territorial demands verbalized as the right to stay in their districts of origins. This is what Rodríguez and Sungranyes (2005) understand as the problem of *los con techo* (“those who have housing”), i.e., the dilemma of those who, to fulfill the dream of *la casa propia* (one’s own home), have been segregated by subsidy-based policies. In this regard, some scholars (Sabatini and Wormald 2004; Rodríguez and Sungranyes 2005) have already suggested that, especially since the 1990s, *pobladores*’ right-to-housing protests in Santiago have been increasingly articulated around the claim for the right to live in well-located and good-quality housing projects.

*Pobladores*’ anti-segregation demand was patently manifested in the rise of the last two organized *campamentos* in Santiago—Esperanza Andina in 1992 (Valenzuela 2014) and la Toma de Peñalolén in 1999 (Salcedo 2010)—, which resulted from their longing to obtain housing in their *comuna* of origin, i.e., the gentrifying district of Peñalolén. Since then, poor families have been more and more engaged in collective actions for housing and territorial rights through their participation in state-regulated *allegados* committees, which has led their protest to escalate nationwide (see Tables 1 and 2).<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> To face the negative outcome of the 1990s housing policies related to the increase in rates of urban segregation, Ricardo Lagos’s administration (2000–2006) passed a New Housing Policy (“Nueva Política Habitacional”). Among other aspects, this policy promoted the building of *viviendas dinámicas*—literally “dynamic housing”—which refers to housing units that are physically adapted for *pobladores* to make home additions. Likewise, Lagos’ new housing policy involved the rise of a Fondo Solidario de Vivienda (Solidary Housing Fund) based on the idea that the development of housing solutions requires not only the material construction of a house but also “a Social Action Plan [Plan de Acción Social] destined to surpass the condition of social marginality of poor families” (Arriagada and Moreno 2006, 18).

<sup>44</sup> Tables 1 and 2 are based on data provided by sociologist Nicolás Somma who led a project entitled “Diffusion of Collective Protests in Chile, 2000–2011” between 2012 and 2015. To quantify social mobilizations, his team of researchers built a dataset of 2,342 protest events that took place in Chile between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000, and August

**Table 1. Nationwide Protest of Pobladores, Persons in Need of Home, and Neighbors by year**

Year of Event	Freq.	%
2002	5	2.2
2001	6	2.6
2002	4	1.8
2003	0	0
2004	0	0
2005	1	0.4
2006	21	9.2
2007	16	7.0
2008	24	10.5
2009	16	7.0
2010	14	6.1
2011	47	20.6
2012	74	32.5
Total	228	100

**Table 2. Nationwide protest for housing-related issues by year**

Year of Event	Freq.	%
2002	1	1.0
2001	1	1.0
2002	0	0
2003	0	0
2004	0	0
2005	6	6.1
2006	28	28.3
2007	8	8.1
2008	5	5.1
2009	14	14.1
2010	9	9.1
2011	14	14.1
2012	13	13.1
Total	99	100

To address *pobladores'* emerging anti-segregation mobilizations, Michelle Bachelet's first government (2006–2010) put into practice a new location subsidy (*subsidio a la localización*), which allocates more public funds to those housing projects placed in well-equipped areas, i.e., near public facilities, private services, infrastructure, etc. In addition, Bachelet's housing policy introduced two figures mediating the relationship between the state and working class families—the EGIS (Entities of Social and Real Estate Management) and PSAT (Provider of Technical Assistance Service—to, supposedly, invigorate the building of social housing. To do so, both entities, which could be either for-profit or non-profit organizations,<sup>45</sup> were in charge of the whole process of home building, namely: to search for and choose the plot where future housing units will be located; to handle constructor companies and state institutions; to supervise the design and construction of housing units; etc.

Bachelet's reforms, however, did not change the market orientations of housing policies. A civil servant of the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism (MINVU), whom I will identify as Ignacio, told me that the implementation of location subsidies, in adding more money to the development of affordable housing, contributed to raising land prices. Likewise, the direct result of the appearance of EGIS was that many of these organizations operated actually as real-estate companies that, by fostering social housing neighborhoods in peripheral districts, sought to make profit out of housing subsidies. In his words:

31<sup>st</sup>, 2012. The sources of information they used ranged from mainstream newspapers and radios to websites of social movement organizations. This research was funded by the National Fund for Scientific and Technological Development, FONDECYT (project no. 11121147).

<sup>45</sup> EGIS and PSAT may include a wide variety of entities such as municipalities, foundations, cooperatives, consulting companies, constructions firms, etc.



“Last year we [MINVU professionals] did a small research to know where poor families applying for subsidies came from. In doing so, we found out that, in the last three years, 80% of these applications came from *comunas* like Til Til, Colina, El Monte, that is, from the extreme periphery. Interestingly, in districts like El Monte there is no such a demand for social housing, which means that EGIS were buying cheap land there and then were enrolling people from other Santiago’s *comunas* to develop social housing projects” (Ignacio, Ministry of Housing and Urbanism, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014).

The trend to carry out social housing projects in peripheral areas—even in districts outside Santiago Metropolitan Area like the just mentioned El Monte—have therefore persisted until now. The main reason of this is that, although every government modifies the decrees regulating the allocation of subsidies and the construction of social housing, none of them have substantially changed the neoliberal, market-oriented character of urban and housing policies. Some planners have argued, in this regard, that the scant building of housing solutions for the poor within the city margins is essentially explained by the lack of regulations in urban land markets, which have brought about a sustained increment in land prices (Trivelli 2011; M. J. Castillo and Forray 2014). In fact, some have demonstrated that the average land prices in Santiago have increased almost 1,000% between 1982 and 2012 (El Mercurio 2012). In specific terms, urban economist Pablo Trivelli states that “there is practically no supply of plots that cost less than 1.5 UF/square meters [around U\$52.4/square meters], in circumstances that social housing developments cannot pay more than 0.4 UF/square meters [around U\$14/square meters] for them”<sup>46</sup> (Trivelli 2011, 181–182).

This was the scenario that I found in my first ethnographic approach to contemporary housing mobilizations when, in May 2011, I carried out a two-month research about the Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha of Peñalolén (MPL, see more in Pérez Forthcoming). By then, the MPL was comprised of five *comités de allegados*, which gathered together around two hundred families fighting to obtain housing solutions in the gentrifying district of Peñalolén. Daniela, one of the founder members of the MPL, described the struggle of her organization in this way:

“The development of the MPL has to do directly with that situation [gentrification]; it has to do directly with how you walk around Lo Hermida or Peñalolén Alto [two working-class neighborhoods] and you hear people saying ‘I’m not participating in any [*allegados*] committee because there is no land available in Peñalolén... because at the municipality I was told that there was no land available to build social housing.’ So you start from that point telling them ‘Sr., there is actually land available in Peñalolén’... so this is how the MPL’s discourse about the defense of our *comuna* begins” (Daniela, June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011).

Through this pilot investigation, I found out that the demand to stay in *pobladores’* neighborhoods of origin was present in many other Santiago’s housing assemblies.<sup>47</sup> To deal with this and other housing-related issues, dozens of *comités de allegados* founded the Federación Nacional de Pobladores (FENAPO) in 2010, which became the most visible expression of *pobladores’* attempts to reorganize housing associations on a national level.

<sup>46</sup> UF (acronym for Unidad de Fomento) is a Chilean unit of account adjusted to inflation. It is currently the preferred measure for estimating the value of real estate, housing, and bank loans.

<sup>47</sup> According to data provided by the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism, by July 2015 there were 867 *comités de allegados* in Santiago Metropolitan Area in which 57,692 families were participating.

Nowadays, FENAPO brings together more than thirty housing assemblies, which amounts to four thousand families. In Santiago, it congregates poor families coming from a variety of districts—e.g. La Pintana, La Florida, Lo Barnechea, Peñalolén, Santiago Centro, San Joaquín, and San Bernardo—who, regardless of the residential context they live in, aspire to become homeowners in the *comunas* where they were born and raised. This longing has been politically conceptualized by FENAPO's *pobladores* as a specific right to the city that they call *demanda territorial* ("territorial demand"). When I met Lautaro, a MPL's member and one of the spokesperson of FENAPO, he accounted for *pobladores*' struggles in this way:

"The first dwellers [of Peñalolén] had to deal with trash, wild hills (...) and had to struggle to get electricity, transportation. *Pobladores* practically urbanized Lo Hermida neighborhood... [All of] this surplus value, this wealth [that Peñalolén has now] demonstrates that it's a myth that the poor impoverish a territory, because [rather] what they do is to generate value. And this is the capital in dispute that will finally be appropriated by real estate developers, banks, and the state" (Lautaro, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011).

Just like the Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha, all of the housing assemblies organized around FENAPO are currently demanding the right to stay in their *comunas* of origin. "We try to give priority to those housing developments that allow *allegados* to stay in their *comunas*. We don't want to send the poor to live far away from their districts; we don't want to make the same mistakes twice... but sometimes that is difficult because of the lack of resources," said a representative of the Regional Service of Housing (SERVIU) to a group of FENAPO *pobladores* at a meeting held in June 2014. Nonetheless, for the *pobladores* who contributed to this dissertation, their desire to continue to dwell in their districts is envisioned as an unquestionable, even taken-for-granted, right over the territories in which they have resided throughout their lives. In Chapter IV, I will show exhaustively how this claim is grounded on *pobladores*' understanding of themselves as city makers, an argument that also works to make a genealogical link between past and present housing movements. For now, I just want to briefly problematize what implies conceiving of FENAPO's territorial demand as a type of right to the city, which compels me to look at Henri Lefebvre's seminal work.

### **Territorial demand as a right to the city**

Henri Lefebvre's reflection on the right to the city stems from his interest in examining the city and the urban from a Marxist perspective. To do so, he adopted categories such as ideology or value to scrutinize a society structured by what he calls the urban problematic; that is, a society whose structuring force is no longer industrialization but urbanization (Lefebvre 2003). In Lefebvre's work, the right to the city must therefore be understood as part of his inquiries about the emergence of an urban society, one in which the urban comes to replace industrialization as the content and meaning of social relations.<sup>48</sup> In that endeavor, he points out that the urbanization of society does not refer purely to the geographic expansion of "the city"—which he defines the morphological base in which the urban takes place—or to the demographic changes that industrialized societies underwent in the mid-twentieth century. It, rather, alludes to the spread of new social relations framed by "the urban," which Lefebvre understands as a "productive force" (Lefebvre 2003, 15) given its capacity to constitute a novel politics of space articulated through the right to the city.

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<sup>48</sup> Henri Lefebvre defines the urban as "a mental and social form, that of simultaneity, of gathering, of convergence, of encounter (or rather, encounters)" (Lefebvre 1996, 131).

To delineate the defining aspects of the right to the city, Lefebvre (1996) draws on the concepts of use and exchange value through which he makes two hypotheses: (1) the city and urban reality—i.e., the material base and the urban life, respectively—have historically been related to use value. The city, he suggests, can be construed as use value, namely, as an *oeuvre* or work of art created and appropriated by its producers. (2) The generalization of commodities, he asserts, led to the breakdown of the city as an *oeuvre*. The advance of industrialization had one clear outcome: the city dominated by market relationships (exchange value) began to prevail over the city as a product (use value). Lefebvre's political demand has therefore to do with the capacity to fully realize the urban as a totality, i.e., as a mode of life and as a morphological, material base. What is at stake, Lefebvre proclaims, is the reestablishment of the city as an *oeuvre* able to be produced and appropriated by inhabitants. Lefebvre's right to the city involves thus the right to appropriation—the right to use, to live, and to represent the urban space—and the right to participation, i.e., to exert a control over the decision-making process in the social production of space (Lefebvre 1991).

As may be noted, Lefebvre's proposal is far from sharing the classical Marxist dogma concerning the primacy of labor as the first and foremost instance in which the working classes acquire political relevance. From his view, in an urbanized society social change results from a particular kind of social experience—*inhabitation*—, which makes up a number of everyday actions in which the urban problematic reveals itself in its whole complexity. Urban segregation, as the process through which deprived populations are expelled from the city center to the peripheries, is telling in this regard as it vividly shows the incapacity of the subordinated groups to exert a hegemonic power over the production of urban spaces. This is why Lefebvre's right to the city refers also to the right to urban centralities, not “to return to the heart of the traditional city” but rather to make possible the materialization of an urban life in which “the ‘urban,’ place of encounter, priority of use value ... finds its morphological base and its practico-material realization” (Lefebvre 1996, 158 emphasis in the original).

Although Lefebvre does not look at industrial workers as the revolutionary subject per excellence, he actually sees in working-class residents the main political force of social transformation; they, through everyday practices developed in their *inhabitation*, are the political power that can most effectively struggle against segregation. The struggle against spatial exclusion, he argues, relies on “the presence and action of the working class, the only one able to put an end to a segregation directed essentially against it. Only this class, as a class, can decisively contribute to the reconstruction of centrality destroyed by a strategy of segregation... This does not mean that the working class will make urban society all on its own, but that without it nothing is possible” (Lefebvre 1996, 154).

Over the last decades, social scientists and planners have become increasingly interested in studying right-to-the-city movements as a means to explicate the rise of particular forms of socio-political protests in response to emerging urban inequalities (to mention some: Mitchell 2003; Purcell 2002; 2003; Holston 2008; Marcuse 2009; Fawaz 2009; Harvey 2012; Blokland et al. 2015). In this context, the right to the city, as Purcell (2002) tellingly notes, has become a sort of catchphrase among activists and intellectuals who employ it, a fact that has hindered the possibilities for a critical evaluation of its contribution to a renew urban democracy. David Harvey makes a similar point when he argues that, in political terms, “the right to the city is an empty signifier” (2012, xv), meaning that its definition depends on those who get to fill it with a specific content, be they private developers, homeless, grassroots organizations, NGOs, etc.

It is, in fact, this openness in meaning what has permitted Santiago's *pobladores* to rearticulate their demands for urban rights in circumstances in which the huge investments in housing has not involved better living conditions for the poor but, rather, their marginalization in peripheral *poblaciones*. In this regard, the right-to-the city orientation contained in *pobladores'* territorial claim speaks not only about the formulation of a struggle against the segregationist nature of neoliberal urban policies, but also about how their right-to-housing protests have been reframed on a territorial basis. I therefore disagree with some authors like Sabatini and Wormald (2004) who envision the right-to-the-city protests realized by Santiago's urban poor in the 2000s as totally opposed to the right-to-housing mobilizations carried out by *pobladores* in the 1960s. These scholars point out that, unlike the historical *pobladores* movement, the former are organized around "more local, less ideological, and less class-based political actions" (Sabatini and Wormald 2004, 84) given that the poor who take part in them build their political identity upon territorial rather than class-based affiliations. Nonetheless, I will show quite different findings in this dissertation, especially when discussing how *pobladores* recreate their subjectivity as working-class political subjects (Chapter III) and how such a process produces a particular understanding of citizenship and rights (Chapter IV). Here I will just say that, from my standpoint, what is at stake is not distinguishing the spatial dimension of urban conflicts (e.g. claiming rights over neighborhoods or districts) from their class dimension (e.g. advocating the right to housing) but, rather, problematizing how their articulation gives rise to novel urban movements; that is to say, how contemporary housing protests frame territorially their rights-claiming by making up new political demands rooted in *pobladores'* longing to continue to reside where they have constructed their life projects. A first and necessary approach to the analysis of that phenomenon relates to the description of the means of social participation through which the urban poor perform their protests for new urban rights. I will finish this chapter by portraying concisely the *comité de allegados* I took part in for fifteen months. In doing so, I will be able to situate historically the contemporary *pobladores* movement as to both the socioeconomic characteristics of those who mobilize for social housing and their modalities of collective action.

### **An ethnographic account of a *comité de allegados***

I attempted to find Rafael among two or three hundred people. It was a Friday night of August 2013 when, for the first time, I attended a general assembly of the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco in the district of La Florida, particularly in the historical neighborhood of Nuevo Amanecer (formerly Nueva La Habana). Since March 2013, this *allegado* committee was occupying an empty plot located on the corner of Tobalaba Avenue and Departamental Avenue to demand the building of a social housing project in there. Although no more than three families were in fact living there as squatters, that place worked as the Don Bosco's headquarters during the seven months that this land seizure lasted. For that reason, on that Friday night I headed to this takeover to meet Rafael, the president of this housing committee and one of the three spokespersons of the FENAPO. Salvador, a friend of mine who had political connections with the FENAPO, had previously talked to him about my presence in the general assembly. On my way to the *pobladores'* gathering, I thought that being "recommended" by one of Rafael's comrades might function as a sort of political clearance for conducting my fieldwork. The fact of not being welcomed honestly worried me. Trying not to think so much about it, I arrived at the takeover around 8.00 pm and I started to wander around the crowd as way to go unnoticed. A couples of minutes later, I distinguished a brown, average height, and notoriously overweigh

man who was in his forties being asked by dozens of people about how to get into the housing assembly, how to apply for subsidies, the documents needed to do so, etc. There was Rafael.

“Hi Rafael, I’m Miguel,” I said to him. “I guess Salvador told you about me coming today to meet you because I’m doing a dissertation about...” Before saying anything else, he replied: “Sure, but let’s meet later. I have to start the *asamblea* now.” Some minutes afterwards, Rafael was leading the assembly in which he let people know the most important outcomes of the meeting the Don Bosco’s *directiva* (leadership) had had some days earlier with public authorities at the Regional Service of Housing, SERVIU. “As usual, they always find excuses not to offer a concrete solution to our demands. Most of the Don Bosco’s *pobladores* have already housing subsidies so we can’t be waiting forever. We’re not going to give up until we have our *casas* (houses) built in La Florida,” he stated. Since that first occasion, I could hear the same kind of complaint in most of the around eighty Don Bosco committee-related events I attended (e.g. general assemblies, meeting with state officers, leadership gatherings, etc.; Image 2).



Image 2. A Don Bosco’s general assembly, November 2013. Photo by the author.

Four days later, I eventually met with Rafael at his home. There, I let him know who I was, where I was coming from, what was my project about, and why I thought my participant observation in this *comité de allegados* would be crucial for my dissertation. In the following days, I did the same with the other members of the leadership—Irma (first director), María José (second director), Nona (secretary), and Claudia (treasurer)—, as well as with the people who, although not being acknowledged as social leaders, were actively involved in the organization. Doing that facilitated considerably my involvement in the committee’s activities. Since then, I was recognized as “the guy who studies in the Unites Sated and takes a lot of notes,” quoting Nona’s words.

The Comité de Allegados Don Bosco was formed as a legal entity (*personalidad jurídica*) by less than twenty families of the Población Nuevo Amanecer in 2002. Its name, which makes a clear reference to the Italian Catholic Priest John Bosco, stems from the fact that some *pobladores* used to get together at a community educational center on Punitaqui Avenue run by Salesian priests, who helped found the housing assembly. These *pobladores* lived mostly as *allegados* in what, back in the early 1970s, was the historical location of Campamento Nueva La Habana, a section of the neighborhood that now is popularly known as *campamento viejo* (old

*campamento*). This area is comprised of around four hundred residential properties in which the original dwellers of Nueva La Habana—or, rather, those who were not evicted nor prosecuted during the dictatorship—have progressively autoconstructed their houses over the last four decades (see more in Chapter IV). Irma, born and raised in the Campamento Nueva la Habana, told me that the size of these plots—which reach more than 150 square meters—has allowed *pobladores* to make home additions over time in accordance with new family requirements. When anyone wants to move in his/her parents' house with his/her partner, the incoming family is often supposed to autoconstruct its room in the back yard to raise its family. “But at some point you just get sick of living as *allegada* because you want something for your own and for your children... In my case, I wanted to be able to do whatever I wanted without being asked about what I did or didn't do. I needed more privacy,” Irma said to me when I asked her about how she decided to get into the *allegados* committee. That is why Irma and others who, like herself, were children and grandchildren of Nueva La Habana's founders organized to found this committee in the early 2000s.

Current members of Don Bosco consider, however, October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005 as the “real” foundation date. On that day, some determined *pobladores* decided to seize unfinished houses built in Nuevo Amanecer for “outsiders,” namely, former members of La Toma de Penalolén, the last large-scale land seizure in Santiago, which occurred in 1999.<sup>49</sup> Although Don Bosco's squatters were quickly evicted, the occupation sparked the restructuring of the group as its former leaders, incapable of giving housing solutions to their social basis, left their positions. “On October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005—says Rafael, who precisely took on the presidency in those circumstances—we passed from being a simple housing assembly to being a housing movement.”

As of July 2015, the Don Bosco committee had 672 participants formally enrolled in its members' register book (*libro de socios*; see more below), 464 of which have been granted state subsidies. The organization was divided into seven groups (*listas*) that differ in number of people and age of existence.<sup>50</sup> From the oldest (2007) to the newest (2014), the *listas* and their amount of applicants were: 1. Alto Tobalaba (84); 2. Florida Ahora (120); 3. Buin (44); 4. Juntos por Un Sueño (66); 5. Ilusión (83); 6. Suyai (67); 7. La Herradura<sup>51</sup> (207). These *listas*, in turn, were split into smaller *comunidades* (communities or affinity groups), made up of groups of tree to twenty persons who plan to live next to each other when the housing projects are built. The relationship between the members of this *allegados* committee was regulated by a general corpus of rules that every person, regardless of his/her individual involvement in any *lista* or *comunidad*, had to follow. These norms established, among other things, that every applicant for subsidies had to pay for a monthly committee fee—\$3,500 Chilean pesos (around US\$6)—within the first five days of each month. With the money collected, the organization covered all the expenses related to its internal functioning such as photocopies, legalization of documents,

<sup>49</sup> See a detailed account of this squatter settlement in Salcedo (2010).

<sup>50</sup> The creation of these *listas* is due to a 2007 state regulation establishing that *comités de allegados* cannot have more than one hundred sixty applicants for subsidies, a policy that seeks to avoid the building of overcrowded social housing projects like in 1990s. Nonetheless, the legal entity is the “Comité de Allegados Don Bosco,” meaning that all the members are formally enrolled in it. By August 2015, all groups, except the newest, had been granted state subsidies.

<sup>51</sup> During the time I was in fieldwork, this group was still in process of formation. This means that it was not a legal entity (*personalidad jurídica*) yet nor its members could apply for state subsidies. The people enrolled in the Don Bosco's members' book as part of La Herradura, although participating in the committee's activities, were not formally registered as prospective applicants in the Ministry of Housing's database.

transportation, cell phone plans, Internet connection plans, etc. In addition, it was used to give the leaders a kind of salary that usually amounted to US\$600 for each, which was understood by everybody as a mechanism of enforcement. When talking to prospective applicants, Rafael let them know that the income they received allowed “us to be totally dedicated to this and forces us to do our job right. If we don’t do it, you have the right to stop paying us.” That was actually what I observed when I got back to the committee in June 2015. A *lista* of more than eighty members had decided to cease to remunerate Rafael because, I was told, they were dissatisfied with the way he was leading the committee.

### **Women, precariousness, and waiting**

As a social program based on the differentiated allocation of social expenditure, the assignment of housing subsidies is restricted to those whom the state recognizes as *vulnerables* (vulnerable) through a household survey named the Ficha the Protección Social (Social Protection Survey). Therefore, before taking part in *allegados* committee, every prospective homeowner must be classified as such by *la Ficha*, as people commonly call it. Leaving the analysis of this state’s instrument of classification for Chapter V, now I want to define the sociological characteristics of those “vulnerable” individuals who are allowed to get into *comités de allegados*. What is the age and gender distribution of the people who decide to search collectively for a place to live? What kinds of occupations do they have? The members’ register book (*libro de socios*) of the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco provided me with remarkable information in this regard. The members’ register book contains the official list of those who has ever joined the committee. Anyone interested in enrolling in it must sign up in this book and put his/her personal information—i.e., name, age, marital status, occupation, national I.D. number, and signature—at the moment of his/her affiliation. Thus, the information specified in this *libro de socios* should be understood as an image depicting the particular situation of each individual when he/she got involved in the organization. When I reviewed it in August 2015, it had a total of 880 people registered<sup>52</sup> who were overwhelmingly women (86.6%; see Table 3), mostly unmarried (62.3%; see Table 4), and less than 35 years old when decided to enter into the *comité de allegados* (59.4%; see Table 5).

The significant presence of women is not a particular attribute of this housing assembly. As many other scholars have extensively accounted for, women have been historically predominant in housing and neighborhood-related grassroots organizations in Chile (Valdés and Weinstein 1993; Paley 2001; Salazar and Pinto 2002; Murphy 2015). In being a housing assembly composed for the most part of women, the occupations of its members are therefore gender-based. Table 6 illustrates that Don Bosco’s participants are mainly unskilled laborers who work in elementary occupations and in services and sales jobs. However, the vast majority of them (47.5%) identify themselves as *dueñas de casa*, which can be translated both as “housewives” or, more literally, as “master of the house.” Although this kind of activity is followed by a job traditionally associated with men—unskilled construction workers, which represent 7.3%—, the third most common employment—domestic and cleaning works (6.9%)—is usually done by women.

The fact that almost half of the Don Bosco’s applicants define themselves as *dueñas de casa* implies that these women have no technical or educational credentials enabling them to be competitive on the formal labor market. Being *dueñas de casa*, nonetheless, does not prevent

<sup>52</sup> This number represents the total amount of people who have ever been part of the Don Bosco Allegados Committee, not those who are actually participating. See more below.



them from earning income. Most of the women I met, even recognizing themselves as such, worked often as informal self-employed to deal with their families' economic instability. In a brilliant ethnographic account of neoliberal Chile, Clara Han indicates that for the urban poor that financial precariousness takes the form of "unpredictable cash flow, irregular work patterns and tasks, and erratic shift-work schedules" (Han 2012, 122). As a means to manage such instability, Don Bosco's women, for instance, used to sell French fries, pizzas, empanadas, and sopaipillas—a kind of fried dough made of squash—during the committee's events or worked as informal street vendors (*coleros*) on Saturdays' free market on Departamental Avenue.

**Table 3. Gender Distribution of the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco's members**

	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Women</b>	762	86.6
<b>Men</b>	118	13.4
<b>Total</b>	880	100

**Table 4. Marital Status Distribution of the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco's members**

	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Single</b>	548	62.3
<b>Married</b>	303	34.4
<b>Widow/widower</b>	9	1.0
<b>Divorced</b>	20	2.3
<b>Total</b>	880	100

**Table 5. Age of entry to the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco**

	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>18–25</b>	210	23.9
<b>26–35</b>	312	35.5
<b>36–45</b>	258	29.3
<b>46–55</b>	75	8.5
<b>56–Above</b>	25	2.8
<b>Total</b>	880	100

In an everyday existence structured by labor instability and economic precariousness, *allegados*' desire to become homeowners is conceptualized as the most important struggle to get ahead in life. This requires reorganizing family budget, being ready to spend many hours a week on attending meetings and assemblies, and accepting that the participation in the housing committee may longer than expected. But not everybody is willing to do so. By 2015, 208 of the



880 people registered in the members' book—that is, 23.6%—had left the organization. The most common reasons to leave were: (1) not having enough money to either pay for the committee fees or save the necessary amount to apply for subsidies; (2) being actually expelled out of the organization due to their “lack of commitment” (I will elaborate thoroughly on this issue in Chapter IV); and (3) losing interest in continuing to participate in it, which results from the frustration that causes not having *la casa propia* (one's own home) after being involved in it for years.

As for the last point, the Table 7 shows that almost 65% of *pobladores* register in the members' book joined the committee between 2007 and 2008, the years in which the oldest *listas* (Alto Tobalaba and Florida Ahora) were created. This suggests that a considerable amount of families have been taking part in the organization for at least seven years, a participation that has allowed them to get housing subsidies from the Fondo Solidario de Elección de Vivienda regulated by the Housing Decree No. 49.<sup>53</sup> For *pobladores*, the acquisition of subsidies certainly represents an advance in the pursuit of one's own home. However, Rafael habitually tells Don Bosco's *allegados* that having a subsidy “is like having a voucher to be used on the market. Nothing else.” On one occasion, he tried to explain to a *poblador* the delay in the building of social housing by saying that “what happens now is that, although people do have subsidies, real estate companies don't want to construct housing for the poor.”

Rafael was actually right. By June 2015, official data of the Ministry Housing and Urbanism (MINVU) indicated that, between 2011 and 2014, the state had assigned 188,769 subsidies nationwide as part of its housing programs for the poorest families. However, almost 100,000 of them had not been used to build housing projects,<sup>54</sup> which is basically explained by the neoliberal nature upon which the system of distribution of social housing is based: the amount of money provided by these subsidies—700 UF per family, i.e., US\$ 26,000 approximately—is simply insufficient to fund housing developments in a context where land prices are increasing (Trivelli 2011; M. J. Castillo and Forray 2014). Quoting Javier Romero, the Undersecretary of Housing and Urbanism in 2014, this means that real estate market is currently incapable of “taking charge (*hacerse cargo*) of the construction process” of social housing.<sup>55</sup>

This experience of waiting for several years to become homeowners even having been granted state subsidies, along with being profoundly upsetting for *pobladores*, is crucial for understanding the relationship they establish with the representatives of the state. “We are sick of waiting!” (*estamos cansados de esperar*), *pobladores* usually said to MINVU's professionals or municipal agents at meetings that, supposedly, were aimed at accelerating the construction of the housing projects assigned to them.<sup>56</sup> Such a complaint, however, seemed to be uttered more vehemently every time that a politician—like the Socialist senator Carlos Montes—showed up at Don Bosco's assemblies as his/her physical presence was envisioned as that of a person who breaks his promises. Although many people confessed to me that they had backed and even voted for this or other politicians, *pobladores'* political allegiance was not enough to prevent

<sup>53</sup> This decree, which operated between 2012 and 2015, replaced the Housing Decree No. 174. In 2015, it was substituted by the Housing Decree No.105.

<sup>54</sup> “Subsidios de vivienda: de 732 mil entregados en cinco años, cerca de la mitad se pierden.” *El Mercurio*, 27 June 2015, p. C13.

<sup>55</sup> “Cerca de cuatro mil subsidios sin proyectos podrían caducar durante este 2014.” *La Tercera*, 8 September 2014, p. 14.

<sup>56</sup> At the time of writing this chapter, Don Bosco's 464 families who have subsidies were supposed to split in three housing projects that the Regional Service of Housing was developing in La Florida: 1) Alto Tobalaba (180 housing units); 2) Altos de la Cordillera (180 housing units); and 3) Portal La Florida (460 housing units).

them from speaking up and letting *el político* (the politician) know that “we don’t want more promises.”

Waiting is therefore a social practice that structures the modes of collective action I examine in this dissertation. In asserting so, I seek to rethink Javier Auyero’s (2012) premises, which looks at the experience of waiting as a set of purely governing, disciplinary techniques through which the urban poor are subjected to the power of the state. Auyero’s work is extremely useful to ethnographically problematize two main elements: a) what occurs when social programs mediate the relationship between the state and the poor; and b) how such a power relation creates subordinate subjects who learn how to be patients (of the state) while waiting for welfare benefits. Nonetheless, I do not envision such an experience of waiting as intrinsically opposed to political mobilization. At least in the case I investigate here, being waiting seems to be, in effect, one of the constitutive elements framing *pobladores*’ right-to-housing mobilizations since it is the result of a fact understood by the *allegados* as the source of legitimacy for their demands: the incapacity of the state to keep the promises it has made them beforehand.

In that sense, what is at stake is to delve into how this waiting stemming from broken promises allows for the reconfiguration of *pobladores* movement. I hold that such an aspect can be examined through an ethnographic analysis of three phenomena: a) the emergence of new modalities of subject formation through which the urban poor rearticulate the agency contained in the category *poblador*; b) the rise of a particular political imagination on rights and citizenship among *pobladores*, which enable them to claim rights over the territories where they have built their life projects while reflecting on and questioning social inequality in neoliberal Chile; and c) the appearance of dignity-based narratives allowing social housing activists reimagine the political horizon of *pobladores* movement. I will scrutinize these phenomena in depth in the following three chapters.

**Table 6. Occupations of Comité de Allegados Don Bosco's members\***

Major group	Sub-major groups	Freq.	%
<b>1. Technicians and Associate Professionals</b>	Health Associate Professionals (e.g. paramedics, nursing technicians, etc.)	10	1.1
<b>2. Clerical Support Workers</b>	General and Keyboard Clerks (e.g. secretaries, keyboard operators, etc.)	55	6.3
	Client Services Clerk (e.g. telephone switchboard operators, receptionists, etc.)	5	0.6
<b>3. Services and Sales workers</b>	Personal Services Workers (e.g. cooks, bartenders, hairdressers, child care workers, etc.)	47	5.3
	Sales Workers (e.g. market salesperson, shop salesperson, cashier, etc.)	49	5.6
	Protective Services Workers (e.g. guards)	9	1.0
<b>4. Craft and Related Trade Workers</b>	Building and Related Trades Workers (e.g. carpenters, Handicraft and Printing Workers (e.g. shoemakers and Metal, Machinery, and Related Trades Workers (e.g. vehicle repairer)	15 4 5	1.7 0.5 0.6
<b>5. Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers</b>	Stationary Plant and Machine Operators (textile machine operators, metal processing and finishing plant operators, Drivers and Mobile Plant Operators (car drivers and truck drivers)	22 10	2.5 1.1
<b>6. Elementary Occupations</b>	Cleaners and Helpers (domestic workers, cleaners, etc.)	61	6.9
	Laborers in Mining, Construction, Manufacturing, and Transport ( <i>obreros de la construcción</i> [unskilled construction workers])	64	7.3
	Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Laborers (e.g. Food Preparation Assistants	7 16	0.8 1.8
	Street and Related Sales and Services Workers (e.g. street	32	3.6
<b>7. Others employment status</b>	<i>Dueñas de casa</i> (housewives)	418	47.5
	Students	21	2.4
	Unemployed	5	0.6
	People with disability	1	0.1
<b>8. Without info/unclassified</b>		24	2.7
<b>Total</b>		880	100

\*Occupational groups derived from the International Standard Classification of Occupations,

**Table 7. Year of Entry to the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco**

	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>2007</b>	210	23.9
<b>2008</b>	357	40.6
<b>2009</b>	90	10.2
<b>2010</b>	0	0.0
<b>2011</b>	4	0.5
<b>2012</b>	38	4.3
<b>2013-2014</b>	181	20.6
<b>Total</b>	880	100

## Chapter III. Making the city, making subjects: *Pobladores* as political agents

“[*Pobladores*] are those who struggle for their right to housing, for their right to feel better, to have a better community. It’s the people who need to get ahead [*salir adelante*] ... I think that a *poblador* is a person who struggles for his/her rights” (Juan, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

“I’m going to tell you an anecdote in relation to the word *pobladores*. When the new housing decree [no. 49] was about to be published, my boss asked me to spread the news about it to the press, public opinion, etc. So I wrote a speech in which I started saying ‘Dear *pobladores*...’ or something like that. But my boss, after reading it, said: ‘who wrote this? Why do you use the word *pobladores*? That’s a communist word; that’s a leftist word... remove it from the speech!’” (Civil Servant of the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014).

### 1. *Pobladores* as political subjects

As observed in many other metropolises in the so-called Global South, right-to-housing struggles are determinant in the politicization of the urban poor (Mangin 1967; Holston 1991; 2008; Holston and Appadurai 1996; J. Castillo 2001; Fawaz 2009; Das 2011; Caldeira 2015b). In Chapter II, I explained that the Chilean urban poor gained significant political recognition by conducting massive land occupations in the 1960s and early 1970s, which triggered what some have called *movimiento de pobladores* (Castells 1973; 1983; Pastrana and Threlfall 1974; Espinoza 1982; 1988; Garcés 2002; Cortés 2014; Murphy 2015). It was in that context when the category *poblador*—although it has been used since the nineteenth century to refer to impoverished residents (Salazar and Pinto 2002)—acquired a political connotation as it began to allude to a segment of the working classes mobilized around urban struggles.

Since 1990, once democracy was restored after Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship (1973–1990), the Chilean state has tried to avoid the reappearance of urban movements by preemptively building subsidized housing projects. By 2000, large-scale land occupations almost totally disappeared, calling into question the very existence of *pobladores* as agentival subjects. For some, current prospective homeowners’ participation in state-regulated housing assemblies (*comités de allegados*; see in Chapter II) is not only a means to apply for state subsidies, but also a mechanism used by democratic governments to incorporate the urban poor into the state bureaucracy and, accordingly, pacify them (e.g. Hipsher 1996; Özler 2012; Murphy 2015). Other contemporary authors, even recognizing the genealogy of the term *poblador*, talk about present *pobladores* as if there were no agency in that signifier; that is, as though that term were only an socio-identify category referring to any kind of working-class inhabitant (Paley 2001; Han 2012).

Some important questions arise: what leads some people to think of the term *pobladores* as a “communist word” or as referring to a “person who struggle for his/her rights”? Why, as I showed in Chapter II, do the urban poor draw on this signifier when addressing their political demands to the state? Furthermore, why is it important for them to be recognized as *pobladores* by the state? Why do they identify themselves as *pobladores* rather than as “citizens,” “proletarians,” or simply “poor people” to make political claims? My answer to these questions

would be: because the word *poblador* is not, as suggested by some authors, only an identity category. I hold that this term operates also as a political category of subject-formation that has a performative power, which means that its linguistic reinvocation produces subjects whose agentival capacities can be rearticulated in different historical circumstances; even, I will discuss in this chapter, in a period in which their old constitutive practices—large-scale practices of city making—are no longer part of their repertory of action.

This view entails looking at *pobladores* as the result of a process of subject formation: being a *poblador* is an agentival condition acquired through the development of social and political performances. Following Saba Mahmood's work, by agency I mean a "capacity for action that specific relations of *subordination* create and enable" (Mahmood 2012, 18, emphasis in the original); a capacity that does not suppose necessarily the configuration of a progressive project but, rather, a process of political and ethical formation whose meanings and senses cannot be fixed in advance. I will explore these meanings and senses by discussing how the urban poor, in constituting themselves as *pobladores*, are able to both make sense ethically of their condition of disadvantage working-class inhabitants and recognize themselves as subjects of rights.

The chapter accounts thus for the formation of an agency that, although originally developed through standardized performances of city building, is currently rearticulated by contemporary housing activists participating in subsidy-based housing programs. To do so, I first will examine the idea of "subject" through both performative theory and poststructuralist approaches, which allow me to think of the process of subject formation as associated with both the generative of language and the constituting character of ritualized social practices. Then, I will take a look at cultural, media, political, and scientific discourses that, since the 1950s, began to speak of the urban poor and their increasing politicization that resulted from the rise of mass housing movements. Here my attention will be focused particularly on two main aspects: first, the ways in which these discourses construed *pobladores'* performances of city making; and second, how the doing of these social practices contributed to the formation of *pobladores* as a political subjectivity. Finally, I will show ethnographic material to discuss how current *pobladores* reshape the agency embedded in the term *poblador* by both reclaiming the legacy of past urban mobilizations and making up an effort-based narrative through which they signify their experiences as working-class dwellers. My ethnographic findings illuminate a crucial issue, namely, the extent to which new generations of housing activists, who no longer organize their protests as squatters or autoconstructors, reformulate the agency contained in the category *poblador* by detaching it from their founding practices.

### **Performative theory: the power of ritualized acts**

Performative theory is an epistemological perspective of social, philosophical, and linguistic analysis for which language, particularly its discursive elaborations, plays a formative role. In *How to do things with words*, John Austin (1962) points out that statements are performative when, instead of reporting or stating some phenomena, their uttering is the doing of an action. In contrast to the constative statements and their true/false criterion, the performative utterances function under the principle of happiness/unhappiness. The definition of their felicity or infelicity is not a matter of empirical correspondence but rather of execution of rules, procedures, and circumstances. For any performative utterance to be realized—and, therefore, to have perlocutionary effects—it must satisfy a certain number of social conventions. This is why the performative speech assumes the character of a "ritual or ceremonial" (Austin 1962, 19), which

means that its force is materialized mainly through repetition. Thus, the intention of the speaker, although it does not vanish completely, seems to play a secondary role given that the performative would rely exclusively on the existence of events conventionally settled.

Later elaborations on the performative character of words concentrated their reflections precisely on the performative power of rituals. Jacques Derrida (1977) Pierre Bourdieu (1991) are two authors who engage with these debates addressing different approaches to repetition. For the former, citationality— i.e., the capacity of being quoted—is the foremost performative feature of every linguistic sign. Such a citational nature derives from his understanding of writing as difference, which amounts to saying that every single repetition of a mark is at the same time its transformation. This is what Derrida calls “iterability” (1977, 180), which entails a force of rupture deriving from the power held by the linguistic sign to break its context of production, i.e., the sum of presences organizing the moment of its inscription. In this regard, Derrida’s performativity is predicated upon the ritual nature characterizing not the events in which linguistic forms take place but the very linguistic sign.

Pierre Bourdieu, in turn, pays much more attention to the socio-cultural backdrop in which performative statements are uttered. If Derrida practically rules out the influence of the social context of the production of linguistic marks as their source of power, Bourdieu sees in it the necessary condition for speech acts to exert a performative effect. For him, the force of the performative results from what he calls “the performative magic of ritual” (Bourdieu 1991, 115), namely, the institutional conditions that must be satisfied for a ritual discourse—for instance, that of a priest at a mass—to be received and accepted as a such. However, any speech understood as legitimate does not act by itself in a performative way. By introducing the notion of “delegated power,” Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1991, 106) argues that the power of words is directly linked to the person who pronounces them and the institutional frame in which he/she does so.

In spite of the differences in Austin’s, Derrida’s, and Bourdieu’s accounts, all of them assert that the performative force stem from ritualized practices. Either as “conventional acts” (Austin), “iterability” (Derrida), or “the performative magic of rituals” (Bourdieu), these three authors conceive of repetition as the fundamental aspect of the performative. In asserting the role of rituals, these tinkers’ reflections also raise, explicitly or implicitly, the question of the speaking subject and his/her capacity to be the source of power from which speech acts exerts a performative effect.

### **Subject formation: knowledge, power, and ethics**

What is the role of the speaking subject in the performative? Is he/she able to provide words with power? If so, can we talk about a sort of political agency so long as individuals can have a control over what they are saying, and, then, consciously articulate a speech as a form of progressive discourse? If not, is the speaking subject only the effect of a process in which individuals enter into linguistic exchanges? To address these questions, now I will center my attention on the debates about the subject, his/her processes of formation, and his/her capacity to have agentival performances. In particular, I will discuss Foucault’s inquiry since it provides us with a suggestive analysis in which the subject is understood not as a coherent, enclosed entity that is capable of deliberately and calculatingly opposing dominant structures of power, but as the site and effect of a multiplicity of practices (of power, of knowing, etc.).

Michel Foucault reflects on the process of subject formation through two modes of analysis: first, as the consequence of multiple technical procedures acting over human beings; and, second, as a procedure that gives rise to specific ethical attitudes of human beings toward

themselves (Rabinow and Rose 2003). In this manner, both the technical and ethical dimension must be understood as two parts of one larger project: the analysis of the processes through which individuals turn into subjects. Foucault's intellectual interest resulted in different modes of inquiry, which can be divided in three periods: a) archeology; b) genealogy; and c) ethics.

In the archeological period, Foucault examines the subject by analyzing the historical development of human sciences and how he/she arises in relation to determinate fields of knowable objects. For him the construction of objects of knowledge<sup>1</sup> is a way of objectivizing the subject as well, since emerging forms of inquiry—recognized themselves as sciences—undertook analysis in which the human being was the object of study. The process of knowing is, thereby, at the same time a process in which subjects constitute themselves under fixed and determinate conditions. Foucault's archeology is a form of analysis interested in defining the historical conditions of realization of discursive practices (see more in Foucault 2010). The archeologist, he says, does not strive to unveil or interpret what is hidden in discourses, but establishes how particular rules of discursive formation defines the domain of the speakable at any given time.

Later on, Foucault developed a genealogical approach in which the notion of power, and the relations it supposes, becomes a key element for explaining the process of subject formation. Here the body is understood not only as the result of practices of knowing, but also of discipline, regulation, and control. As an enterprise interested in examining how power operates over the body, the relations it entails, and its constituting character, Foucault thinks of power less an appropriable and exchangeable object unidirectionally exerted—for instance, from the state—than a “strategy” whose effects of domination are related to particular techniques, tactics, and functionings (Foucault 1995, 26). Power consists of a multiplicity of relations of force (Foucault 1990), which are immanent in the different spheres in which they act (e.g., economic processes, knowledge relations, sexual relations, and so on). Thus, relations of power do not come from external apparatuses (e.g., the state) but are the immediate effects of a variety of relations structured by divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums (Foucault 1990, 94). Since power is the internal condition of these differentiations, it does not merely have a repressive function but also a productive role. Hence, power relations go beyond the dualistic ruler-ruled model insofar as there are multiple effects emerging from them. Resistance, one of these effects, is therefore internal to the relations of power: “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault 1990, 95).

Finally, in what may be called the ethical period, Foucault's reflection on the subject leaves aside the analysis of discourse and knowledge to concentrate on the relationship of the self to itself and to others. In this new framework, power is treated in terms of governmentality, a concept that defines a form of power constituted by institutions, procedures, tactics, and calculations that “has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security” (Foucault 2003, 244). Nevertheless, governmentality not only refers to the government of others. This concept also

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<sup>1</sup> The English-language word “knowledge” has two meanings in French. On the one hand, it refers to *savoir*, which, for Foucault, is “the process through which the subject finds himself modified by what he knows. . . . It is what permits the modification of the subject and the construction of the object” (Foucault and Trombadori 1991, 69–70). On the other, knowledge also means *connaissance*, that is, the process “which permits the multiplication of knowable objects, the development of their intelligibility, the understanding of their rationality, while the subject doing the investigation always remains the same” (Foucault and Trombadori 1991, 70). In this regard, when talking about subject formation, I am particularly referring to the first sense of knowledge (*savoir*).



implies the relationship of the self to the self as it covers “the whole range of practices that constitute, define, organize, and instrumentalize the strategies that individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with others” (Foucault 2003, 41). In that sense, those who try to govern others are ethically free individuals capable of using certain instruments to do so. In the ethical period, he is no longer interested in how the discourses of truth speak about the subject (e.g., the delinquent, the patient, etc.), but rather in how they let the subject speak about himself. In the lectures included in *The Hermeneutic of the Subject*, Foucault (2005) discusses the historical forms in which the relations between subject and truth have taken shape in Western societies through the idea of “care of the self.” As the specific mode in which individual freedom has been ethically understood in the West, the care of the self is an attitude toward the self, others, and the world that supposes a “number of actions exercised on the self by the self, actions by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself” (Foucault 2005, 11).

### **Subject, interpellation, and agency**

Although the notion of discourse turns out to be central in Foucault’s reflections on the subject, language is only one the “the heterogeneous and localized intellectual and practical techniques, [that is,] the ‘instruments’ through which constitutes themselves” (Rabinow and Rose 2003, xxi). I will follow Judith Butler’s work (1997) to both analyze the subject formation on the basis of the creative character of language and reflect on a sort of agency related the capacity of the subject to reframe the terms of his/her subjectivation by developing performative practices.

Butler’s starting point is to conceive of Austin’s speech acts as an act of what Louis Althusser calls “interpellation,” which leads her to raise a fundamental question regarding the relation between subject and speech: the extent to which the subject constituted through the address of the other becomes a subject capable of addressing others. This aspect, I will show later, becomes crucial to understanding *pobladores’* process of subject formation. Interpellation, in Althusser’s (2001) view, is the process through which individuals acquire the status of subject as they are ideologically recognized within society. He affirms that “there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects” (Althusser 2001, 115), meaning that ideology only operates as such insofar as it acts upon subjects. Thus, he argues, we reach the status of concrete, individual, distinguishable, and irreplaceable subjects by means of the constant realization of rituals of ideological recognition.

In attempting to understand interpellation through a performative framework, Butler seeks to rethink of Austin’s and Althusser’s theories by problematizing the role of the speaking subject—and his/her relation to language—in these rituals of ideological recognition. The central problem for Butler is to be found in the fact that, while in Austin’s model the subject who speaks precedes the speech in question, in Althusser’s view the interpellating speech act that brings the subject into linguistic existence appears to be prior to the subject in question. To disentangle this theoretical disjunction, Butler borrows the idea that language has an uncontrollable nature from Shoshana Felman (2002), which undermines the primacy of the sovereign subject in the production of speech acts. According to Felman, speech act is not able to exert any kind of control over its intended intentionality because the relation between language and the body is incongruous but indissoluble. In addition, she argues that there is not a radical separation between the body and the speech act since the former is constituted through the latter. Hence, there is not a transcendental subject capable of interpellating or, in other words, a subject whose existence is prior to language.

Felman's assumption allows Butler to hold that language is not merely an instrument of expression but also the condition of possibility for the emergence of the speaking subject since he/she is formed by the language that he/she speaks: "this means that the subject has its own 'existence' implicated in language that precedes and exceeds the subject, a language whose historicity includes a past and future that exceeds that of the subject who speaks" (Butler 1997, 28 emphasis in the original). Butler, then, conceives of interpellation as a process of subject formation inasmuch as subjects take part in social rituals as a way to enter the normativity of language; a linguistic domain based on "foreclosure" as the scenario in which the subject arises is always tied to the circumscribed production of the realm of the speakable.

Although for both Butler and Althusser interpellation supposes a subordination of the interpellated subject with respect to the interpellating agent (person or institution), for the North American philosopher the speaking subject who interpellates has no control over that ritual as he/she cannot estimate the perlocutionary effects of his speech. In so doing, Butler gets rid of the sovereign subject as the source of power that explains the efficacy of interpellation, which leads her to pay attention to the conventional, and therefore citational, character of such a process. It is precisely in the execution of these conventions that Butler sees the possibility of a sort of linguistic agency different from that of relying on the sovereign subject. For her, the subordination involved in any process of interpellation—for instance, by being called *poblador*—can be subverted on the basis of the defining condition of speech acts: their citational nature. If the subject, she says, is produced in speech through a set of linguistic foreclosures that determine the domain of the speakable, and these foreclosures must be repeated to re-consolidate its power and efficacy, then the subject, when speaking, would be reinvoking the foreclosure on which it depends. However, following Derrida, Butler holds that "this reinvocation is neither mechanical nor deliberate" (Butler 1997, 140) since the linguistic mark modifies its previous form in the very act of repeating. Repetition, she goes on, entails always a form of alterity and the very discursive reinvocation works as the condition of possibility for agency: if injurious speech-acts need to be cited to have a perlocutionary effect, their repetition then opens up the possibility of a linguistic insubordination, as their intended meanings can be recontextualized and resignified for subversive goals. In that sense, interpellation is not only a subordinating act but also the condition for the agentive power of the "post-sovereign subject" (Butler 1997, 139) whose discursive operations, although constrained in advance, are open to a further and unexpected delimitation. The very process of subject formation is, consequently, which makes Butler construe agency as the unanticipated, open-ended reformulation of the performative utterance, which may be resignified for different, even radical, purposes.

### **Accounting for *pobladores*' performative force**

In this chapter I argue that the term *poblador* operates as a political category whose performative force enables the urban poor to constitute themselves as subjects capable of demanding rights from the state. I will delve into such a subject-formation process by accounting for two main issues: (1) First, I will examine the historical development of this performative force in the mid-twentieth century. Specifically, I first look at interwoven set of media, cultural, and scientific discourses that, since the 1950s, began increasingly to speak of the urban poor as *pobladores* endowed with agentive capacities. In addition, I will analyze ritualized practices of city making—particularly large-scale land seizures and autoconstruction—through which *pobladores* not only redefined the terms in which they were socially interpellated, but also gained considerable social and political significance. (2) As a second point of inquiry, I will scrutinize

how contemporary housing protesters, by reinvoking the performative power of the category *poblador*, constitute themselves as agentival subjects in circumstances in which the doing of these ritualized acts are no longer present. Here I will show ethnographically how new generations of *pobladores* rearticulate the agency anchored in that term by: a) looking retrospectively at past urban movements so as to bring the performative force of *pobladores* into the present; and b) formulating an effort-based discourse as a means to signify their experiences as working-class dwellers in ethical terms.

## 2. Social Discourses on the Urban Poor: Stories of *callamperos*

As explained in Chapter II, in the first half of the twentieth century both the implementation of projects of urban renewal in central areas and Santiago's demographic changes contributed significantly to the housing crisis of the 1940s and, accordingly, to the development of *pobladores* movement. The massive occurrence of *lanzamientos* (evictions) of the poor from the city center not only redefined Santiago's geography of residential segregation but also gave rise to a phenomenon that, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, would be determinant in formation of *pobladores*: the rise of illegal land seizures in the peripheries.

Incapable of affording a place to live in Santiago downtown, the urban poor began increasingly to dwell as squatters in *poblaciones callampas* (shantytowns) mostly in state-owned, vacant peripheral areas (e.g., riverbanks, channels, and ditches) that tended to be close to industrial neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> Who were those residents who, since the late 1940s, began to, using de Ramón's (1990) word, "informally" settle in empty plots on the city margins? What were the narratives through which social and cultural discourses produced them as an object of public inquiry in a period in which *las callampas* were deemed the most expressive icon of urban marginality?

### Progressive imaginaries and views of the Catholic Church

The growing number squatter settlements drew powerfully the attention of public opinion in the early 1950s. Both *lanzamientos* and the rise of *callampas* appeared to reveal the unequal nature of Chilean modernization insofar as such a large amount of "modest citizens"<sup>3</sup> were condemned to live humbly in shantytowns. It is in this context in which the *callampas* and their residents, *los callamperos* (squatters), became an object of media and cultural discourses in strongly symbolizing the unexpected outcomes of an import-substitution industrialization that, as explained in Chapter II, could hardly absorb all the migrant population as labor force. In that sense, the first accounts of these new forms of urban inhabitation were structured by a denunciatory language, which could be seen both in leftist newspapers (*El Siglo*, *Democracia*, or *Vistazo*) and in the Catholic Church's official journal (*Mensaje*). Although both the political left and the Catholic Church conceived of *callampas* as an undignified type of residency that needed to be changed by governmental policies, the ethical understanding of them differed: while for the former shantytowns were a vivid expression of the self-organizing capacities of the urban poor,<sup>4</sup> for the latter they demoralized, degraded, and corrupted working-class dwellers.<sup>5</sup> I will illustrate

<sup>2</sup> As I showed in the previous chapter, there were 75,000 *callamperos* in Santiago by 1952 (6.25% of its population), a number that increased dramatically in twenty years, specifically, to almost five hundred thousand (16.3% of Santiago's inhabitants). See more in Santa María (1973) and De Ramón (1990).

<sup>3</sup> "Hogar de Cristo en Ayuda de Damnificados." *El Mercurio*, 31 October 1957, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> "Solución al problema de vivienda." *El Siglo*, 02 February 1954, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> "Ante un Hecho Illegal." *Mensaje*, December 1957, p. 461.

these perspectives through two different cultural productions, *La Novela de las Poblaciones Callampas* (“The Novel of *Poblaciones Callampas*,” published in 1953) and a documentary entitled *Las Callampas* (1958).

In the beginning of 1953, the progressive journal *Vistazo* began to publish a tale entitled *La Novela de las Poblaciones Callampas* (“The Novel of *Poblaciones Callampas*”), which was divided into twelve short pieces that come out every Tuesday. Based on true events, the novel tells sequentially the experiences of poor inhabitants who, once evicted from their inner-city slum tenement (*conventillos*) in 1946, start dwelling in different *callampas* until they take over a vacant area giving rise to the Toma Zañartu in 1947. Later on, the protagonists are moved to an urbanized area in which the Población Nueva La Legua would eventually be founded.

In the first episode of *La Novela de las Poblaciones Callampas*, tellingly called *El Lanzamiento*<sup>6</sup> (“The Eviction”), *poblaciones callampas* are described as “that chapter of misery and heroism, of embarrassment and struggle, of pain and effort that arose in Chilean social life.” Likewise, the author of the opening note, whose identity is not revealed, argues that the story is the “most real, most human, and most dramatic novel of these days in Chile.” The message for the reader was clear: although *callampas* were the scenario for never-seen-before forms of misery and social exclusion, they might contribute to the rise of new kinds of solidarity-based social relations and even to the formation of political agencies. In fact, most of the chapters follow more or less the same argumentative structure: the squatters face up a variety of threatening events—e.g., an eviction,<sup>7</sup> a winter flood,<sup>8</sup> the spread of alcoholism among *callamperos*,<sup>9</sup> or a one member’s betrayal to the group<sup>10</sup>—that they are able to overcome successfully through strong solidarity ties, upright moral values, and a wise political consciousness.

For the “Novel of *Poblaciones Callampas*,” the appearance of squatter settlements was thus the condition of possibilities for the formation of grassroots organizations and, ultimately, class consciousness. *Callamperos*, although receiving permanent support from politicians and civil society, were capable of defeating their material conditions of existence by themselves through a political struggle. This narration is, thus, that of subjects growingly politicized who, by primarily making up a strong community, could not only autoconstruct their homes but also conquest a future envisioned as promising, encouraging, and full of expectations.

This optimist account of the *poblaciones callampas* was, however, quite absent in the narratives developed by the Catholic Church in the 1950s, which tended to emphasize the dehumanizing character of squatter settlements. In this period, the role Jesuits was crucial, which is demonstrated in that two major institutions emerged under the wing of this congregation: The Hogar de Cristo (“Christ’s Home”), a charity organization established in 1944 that provided *callamperos* with emergency housing; and *Revista Mensaje*, a magazine founded in 1951 that took on a leading role denouncing Chile’s social inequality in the mid-twentieth century. It is actually in *Mensaje* where the Jesuit Priest Carlos Hurtado Echeverría argued that shantytowns, in being the most paradigmatic expression of marginality, led to the “moral and civic disturbance” (*desquiciamiento moral y cívico*) of the urban poor.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> “El Lanzamiento.” *Vistazo*, 17 February 1953, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> “La Resistencia.” *Vistazo*, 10 March 1953, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> “La Inundación.” *Vistazo*, 03 March 1953, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> “Nuevas Amenazas” *Vistazo*, 07 April 1953, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> “La Traición.” *Vistazo*, 14 April 1953, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> “Ante un Hecho Ilegal.” *Mensaje*, December 1957, p. 461.

The Catholic Church's view on squatter settlements is patently present in *Las Callampas*, a 1958 documentary directed by Jesuit Priest Rafael Sánchez that narrates the events that gave rise to the well-known Población La Victoria, the first working-class neighborhood that resulted from a large-scale land seizure (see Chapter II). This film must be understood as an attempt to comprehend the experiences, motivations, and feelings of socio-economically and culturally diminished dwellers who ultimately were unable to integrate themselves into the modernizing process. When portraying the living conditions of *callamperos*, the film is thus framed by a language of despair, misery, and desolation. It is not trivial to remind that, in the same decade, Oscar Lewis was conducting a long-term fieldwork in México City, which later will give rise to his theory of culture of poverty. Lewis' work sought precisely to account for the generation of a system of values, beliefs, and behaviors which, although functioning as "defense mechanisms that make the poor's life tolerable" (Lewis 1961, xxv) needed to be reformed for the sake of modernization. In the case of *Las Callampas* (Sánchez 1958), the residents of Zanjón de la Aguada squatter settlements are depicted as hopeless *callamperos* who, after a fire consumed their shacks, saw themselves forced to occupy vacant plots to build their permanent homes.

It is in those fateful circumstances when, the documentary tells us, the Catholic Church appears and helps out *callamperos*: "In those tough moments, when failure and grief could break down this effort [the building of a new *población*], someone came dressed like a *callampero*. The Priest [Alejandro] del Corro [the chief of Hogar de Cristo] showed up confident and enthusiastic. Here he built his tent and got mobilized from that instant on." Later, the film's narrator continues to describe, through telling statements, the process of moral transformation experienced by the former squatters. The *callampero*, "that man who seemed overwhelmed in a disorganized and unsanitary *población callampa*, leaps passionately to build his new home... with the support of those [e.g. the Jesuits priest] who ask him for nothing but his own self-improvement." The urban poor, unlike the story told by the "Novel of *Poblaciones Callampas*," are thus imagined as incapable of overcoming their condition of informal residents by themselves. It is just through the moral and technical guidance of the priest that former squatters acquire capacities to make their new neighborhood. It is, in other words, through the Catholic Church's intervention that *callamperos* become city-makers, which is thought of as the process of endowing them with an agency understood as external to them.

### Unsanitary housing, subhuman residents

The "unsanitary" nature of *poblaciones callampas*, such as accounted for by Rafael Sánchez in *Las Callampas*, was a widespread topic of debate in the 1950s. The ubiquity of sanitary approaches to *poblaciones callampas* is manifested in the fact that they can be found in different sources like *pobladores'* propaganda, national newspapers (progressive and conservative), and the above-mentioned Catholic journal *Mensaje*. In all of them, the lack of hygiene of shantytowns, which resulted from the total absence of urbanization, was interpreted as a dehumanizing way of living. According to Agrupación Provincial de Pobladores de Santiago ("Provincial Association of Santiago's *Pobladores*"), for instance, there were thousands of "citizens" who by 1952 lived in "subhuman conditions" on the city margins on account of the state's failure to stop land speculation in the city center.<sup>12</sup>

The eviction of *callampas* and the emergence of new neighborhoods in areas with minimum standards of urbanization were therefore seen as a necessary step for creating more human and civilized forms of inhabitation. Miguel Lawner, a progressive architect who later will

<sup>12</sup> "La 'Solución' del Régimen al Problema de Vivienda." *El Poblador*, 31 May 1952, p. 3.

be the director of the Urban Improvement Corporation (Corporación de Mejoramiento Urbano, CORMU) during Salvador Allende's Government (1970–1973), assured that the building of Población La Victoria in 1957 would enable *pobladores* to autoconstruct their homes in “human and hygienic conditions.”<sup>13</sup> The massive displacement of other *callamperos* from Zanjón de la Aguada, which led to the rise of Población San Gregorio in 1959, was described by the conservative newspaper *El Mercurio* through a similar narrative: “Thirty families, out of four thousand, were taken from the Zanjón de la Aguada *población ‘callampa’* to the San Gregorio ranch on army trucks. There, the interested party [*los propios interesados*] will build permanent and hygienic homes [*viviendas definitivas e higiénicas*].”<sup>14</sup>

Mary Douglas (1966) holds that any idea of dirtiness reveals symbolic systems of classification in which the elements of our social world are put into a hierarchical order. She points out that the presence of dirt always involves the existence of a systemic ordering through which elements deemed inappropriate are rejected. In that sense, the appearance of cleanliness-based discourses speaking of *callampas* must be examined as part of broader urban imaginaries framed by the idea that modern cities could provide industrialization not only with infrastructure and services but also with a more skilled—i.e., educated—labor force. Industrializing agendas in Latin America construed the city fundamentally as both an economic and a cultural space in which modern life could be successfully realized (Gorelik 2004). In congregating a large amount of poor families dwelling in “pathetic living conditions,”<sup>15</sup> uncultured, dirty, and, therefore, dehumanizing *callampas* were thought of as a threat to such a premise insofar as *callamperos* were unable to participate in modernization processes as *human beings*.

Although these sanitary approaches were also present in *pobladores'* discourses, they understood early the risks involved in reproducing the derogatory language commonly utilized by the mainstream media in the early 1950s. In *El Poblador*, the Agrupación Provincial de Pobladores de Santiago's official organ of propaganda, housing activists frequently said that working class families lived “like animals” in *callampas*.<sup>16</sup> However, they did so less to account for their socioeconomic backwardness than to put forward a sort of human rights-based discourse that started out with recognition of *pobladores* as subjects who had been dehumanized by the state's policies. This housing organization complained about those who, by calling them “socially and culturally misfits” (*inadaptados social y culturalmente*), denied them the right to live in decent houses; a right, they asserted, marginalized poor residents were entitled to not only because the “Political Constitution” gave it to them but also because they are “human beings.”<sup>17</sup> In this regard, for *pobladores* the very spread of social discourses treating them as dirty, infected individuals opposed to those “sanitary citizens” (Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2003)—narratives that reached even to the point of questioning their human character—was a means of disfranchising them. The negation of their human condition was thus conceived of as the denial of the rights as *humans*.

<sup>13</sup> “Terrenos Conquistados Defenderán Pobladores. Cuentan con Amplia Solidaridad.” *El Siglo*, 01 November 1957, p.1

<sup>14</sup> “En el Zanjón de la Aguada.” *El Mercurio*, 07 May 1959, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> “Ayuda a Gente de Poblaciones del Zanjón de la Aguada.” *El Mercurio*, 01 November 1957, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> “Nuestro periódico.” *El Poblador*, 01 May 1952, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> “La ‘Solución’ del Régimen al Problema de Vivienda.” *El Poblador*, 31 May 1952, p. 3.

### 3. Ritualized performances of city-making: Land Seizures and Autoconstruction

The occurrence of *tomas de terreno* (land seizures) since the late 1940s, graphically shown in the cultural production I talked about in the preceding section, will have unexpected political outcomes in the following years. The organized and massive character of the events that gave rise to the Población *Zañartu* (1947) and the Población La Victoria (1957), both of which received the support of the Communist Party since their very beginning, will be replicated in the 1960s as illegal occupations became a common strategy for claiming the right to housing. It is actually through the propagation of *tomas de terrenos*—and the processes of autoconstruction that, in some cases, resulted from them—that the urban poor began to be recognized by the state as individuals with agentive capacities. It is, in other words, through the spread of practices of production of space that working-class dwellers constituted themselves as political subjectivities, phenomenon that came along with the development of new discourses speaking of the urban poor. Since the early 1960s, *pobladores* living in squatter settlements were less and less referred to as unsanitary *callamperos* but rather as political agents in their own right. That identification, I will show, relied importantly on a process of interpellation through which the state started to acknowledge poor individuals as *pobladores* city makers, which by no means suggests that *pobladores'* subjectivity stems exclusively from the action of the state. Following Butler, I argue that the terms of this ritual of ideological recognition, rather than being constrained by the state's interest, were always-already open to a further and unexpected resignification, which was fundamentally materialized through the massive proliferation of highly politicized squatter settlements in the early 1970s.

#### Autoconstruction: Interpellating the urban poor as *pobladores*

In his work on housing movements in São Paulo, James Holston (Holston 1991, 451) suggests that the notion of autoconstruction refers to a variety of activities concerning land occupations and tenure situations that share two main attributes: on the one hand, that of a particular social production of space in which “the need to build a house represents the builder's relation to a set of conditions that we might call peripheral urbanization;” and, on the other hand, “that of home building as the figure or measure of an imagined future quite different from those conditions.” The experience of autoconstruction, Holston proposes, engenders political actions about residency and aesthetic judgments about houses through which working classes develop new kinds of social agencies. Teresa Caldeira (Caldeira 2015a, 4), drawing primarily on her analysis of the Brazilian case, defines autoconstruction as a “mode of producing the urban in which residents build by themselves their spaces.” Such a process, she holds, enables the urban poor to “make themselves into citizens and political agents, become fluent in rights talks, and claim the cities as their own” (Caldeira 2015a, 2).

In Chile, autoconstruction process and the resulting formation of political agencies were observable as early as in the late 1940s. However, they were different from those of depicted by Holston (1991; 2008) and Caldeira (Caldeira 2000; 2015a; 2015b). In that the state, unlike the Brazilian case, was significantly involved by both attempting to regulate the distribution of land and providing the poor with building materials through housing policies based on autoconstruction. This modality of state-led autoconstruction, I will show below, would give rise even to housing policies in which *pobladores* were expected to work themselves in the making of their residential spaces. By the late 1940s, when large-scale land seizures were not a concern for the state yet, autoconstruction was already present in both the political language of *pobladores* and the political parties that supported them. In simple terms, the demand for

autoconstruction implied the request for both technical advice and loans to acquire building supplies from the state with which *pobladores* sought to construct their houses and neighborhoods on their own. In 1947, the residents of the already mentioned Población Zañartu, for example, asked the state for the expropriation of the plot they had seized as well as construction materials.<sup>18</sup> A similar request was made in the following years by many other poor families who looked at autoconstruction as the most effective way to gain possession of the land they were occupying to, then, legitimate their residential property.<sup>19</sup>

Nonetheless, squatters were not the only ones who asked for autoconstruction. Since the late 1940s, *pobladores* living in state-planned neighborhood with deficient housing solutions or incomplete urbanization started increasingly to hold such a claim. That was the case of Población Nueva La Legua whose inhabitants who lived in overcrowded conditions (*agregados* or *allegados*) demanded autoconstruction to avoid receiving emergency housing made of asbestos cement sheets (*pizarreño*) since, in *pobladores'* view, they were toxic for health.<sup>20</sup> Some years later, the residents of other renowned *poblaciones* like San Gregorio<sup>21</sup> and José María Caro<sup>22</sup> — both founded in 1959 and two of the largest neighborhoods that resulted from the Housing Plan (Plan Habitacional) of President Jorge Alessandri (1958–1964)—will also carry out autoconstruction processes on a large scale.

As mentioned in Chapter II, the growing experiences in autoconstruction will be crucial for the implementation of Operación Sitio (“Site Operation”), one of the most significant housing policies of the 1960s proposed by Eduardo Frei’s Christian Democratic administration (1966–1970). Operación Sitio was based on the allocation of title deeds and, ideally, urbanized plots in which *pobladores* would autoconstruct their houses under the supervision of state agencies. In circumstances in which the urban poor engaged massively in performances of city making promoted by a populist regime, the state began to see *pobladores* as individuals with high organizational skills. Families involved in practices of production of space stopped, thus, being referred to as *callamperos* insofar as they were progressively integrated into state policies. Autoconstruction, in its state-led modality, represented therefore the spirit of progress and self-improvement of the poor. That view is powerfully expressed in an opinion note that appeared in *La Nación*, the state-owned newspaper that in practice operated as the government’s official organ of propaganda. The text, entitled “Autoconstruction in Chile” starts indicating that “the people” (*el pueblo*) might get used to receiving aids and assistance from paternalistic politicians. Nonetheless, at heart, they “prefer to participate, with their own effort, in the solution of their problems.”<sup>23</sup> Then, the note says that both the formation of housing cooperatives and autoconstruction “are the ideal form” through which “the State and the People [*el Pueblo*] associate with each other.” It was precisely the establishment of such an association that, at a first instance, allowed the urban poor to be acknowledged by the state—and, ultimately, by society—as subjects capable of intervening politically in the public sphere. I will illustrate the terms of this *pobladores*-state relationship through two events.

<sup>18</sup> “Expropiación de la Población Zañartu Piden sus Habitantes.” *El Siglo*, 28 January 1947, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, “Pobladores de Lo Encalada Rechazan el Alza Eléctrica: Exigen Estabilidad de Los Pobladores en los Sitios que Ocupan.” *El Siglo*, 25 November 1952, p. 4; “Pobladores de Ñuñoa Piden Entrega de Materiales para Construir Viviendas.” *El Siglo*, 17 February 1953, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> “Agregados de Nueva La Legua Tienen Hoy Una Gran Asamblea.” *El Siglo*, 19 January 1953, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> “Se Ha Logrado Instalar 76 Familias en San Gregorio.” *El Mercurio*, 09 May 1959, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> “300 Familias construyeron su Propia Población de Emergencia.” *La Nación*, 11 June 1965, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> “La Autoconstrucción en Chile.” *La Nación*, 16 October 1966, p. 11.



The first one has President Eduardo Frei as the main protagonist. When inaugurating the Población Irene Frei in Conchalí—a northern, working-class district of Santiago—in 1965, the head of the state said to *pobladores*: “you made these houses by yourself so don’t thank me for having them.” In addition, Frei made another statement, one as provocative as unrealizable: “I assure you that *poblaciones callampas* will be totally gone by the end of my government.”<sup>24</sup> The making of such a promise, although it was far from being fulfilled, is symbolically powerful since the speech act was directly addressed to lower-income inhabitants in a *población*. There was no mediation between the president and the urban poor; or, in other words, between the state and those who just a couple of years ago were deemed to be living “like animals.” The President’s speech, accordingly, can be understood as a form of interpellation by means of which the state acknowledges individuals as subjects. In this case, such a ritual of ideological recognition—following Althusser’s words—has to do with the identification of the urban poor as a particular kind of subject: as *pobladores* city-makers. This interpellation, of course, was aimed at obtaining *pobladores*’ support and mobilizing them towards Frei’s government own partisan objectives. However, it is significant in a performative sense as it reveals a very particular moment in Chilean political history in which the urban poor, conceived of as *pobladores*, were imagined as subjects capable of being promised by the state given their agentival condition.

The character of the state’s interpellation is tellingly expressed in another 1965 event, which has Christian Democratic Deputy Sergio Fernández as the central figure. After holding a meeting with hundreds of *pobladores* and other prominent Christian Democratic politicians like Patricio Aylwin—who later on will be the first president elected democratically after Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship —Fernández said to the press: “*pobladores* are currently the most active element of the working classes in Chile.”<sup>25</sup> Fernández’s declaration is not surprising if we consider that the party he represented had the urban poor as its main political basis (Garcés 2002). Nonetheless, it is suggestive that he identified *pobladores* as *the* “most active” popular group because such a recognition accounts for the consolidation of new forms of working-class agencies developed through urban struggles.

Both Frei and Fernández’s statements demonstrate that *pobladores* of the mid-1960s, now envisioned as city-makers, had become relevant political subjects through autoconstruction and specific practices of production of space. It is in this context when the performative dimension of the category *poblador* began to prevail over the constative one. This “performative shift,” adapting Yurchak’s terminology (2005, 24), was materialized in the fact that the very utilization of that term not only described a segment of the working classes but also allowed for the formation of new political subjectivities. In being referred to as *pobladores*, the urban poor developed never-seen-before political capacities through their involvement in large-scale processes of city making. However, the emergence of this political subjectivity would not be totally realized just through a state-led autoconstruction. The state interpellation of the urban poor as *pobladores* city makers will have unexpected performative effects related to the formation of a subjectivity whose political claims exceeded those anticipated by Eduardo Frei’s populist government. The formation of *pobladores* as political subjects will be fully achieved once they take decisively part in the implementation of radical agendas for social change that ended up with the election of Socialist Salvador Allende as the President of Chile (1970–1973). To do so, *pobladores* made use of a strategy that they had utilized before, i.e., massive illegal

<sup>24</sup> “‘Les aseguro que al termino de mi Gobierno habrán desaparecido las poblaciones callampas en el país’. Dijo el Jefe de Estado a los Pobladores.” *La Nación*, 18 June 1965, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> “Coordinación de Labor de Pobladores Estudia Congreso del Tercer Distrito.” *La Nación*, 17 October 1965, p. 15

occupations, which, in a context of growing social polarization, acquired a renewed political meaning.

### **The rise of *campamentos***

As I largely explicated in the previous chapter, between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s, *pobladores* carried out large-scale land seizures not only to demand urban land but also to develop innovative political tactics aimed at creating popular power. Pastrana and Threlfall (1974), in this regard, suggest that the *tomas de terreno* of this period emerged not only as a strategy of survival as observed earlier but also a means to put forward a transformative political agenda. The spread of highly politicized land occupations was accompanied by a change in the language to account for them. Since then, the term *campamento* (“encampment”) became increasingly used to designate squatter settlements, which somehow coincides with the progressive withdrawal of the word *callampas*. If the latter concept stood for the most severe expression of urban marginality, the former one symbolized *pobladores*’ political radicalization and their involvement in broader processes of social transformation.

As shown in Chapter II, the takeover of La Victoria on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1957 was crucial for the further development of *pobladores*’ movement since it was the first large-scale land seizure that resulted in the autoconstruction of a *población*. Certainly, La Victoria was not the first massive illegal occupation in Santiago nor was the demand for autoconstruction unfamiliar for the urban poor when it occurred. However, La Victoria played a key role in the consolidation of the urban poor as relevant and socially recognized political actors. To do so, the dwellers of this neighborhood disputed common-sense views of shantytowns by asserting that La Victoria was not a *población callampa* and that its residents, on account of their organizational skills, deserved dignity and respect. In an editorial note of “La Voz de la Victoria,” the official organ of propaganda of this *campamento*, *pobladores* said:

“Our *campamento* is an erupting volcano. The wish and enthusiasm of all of those who live in Chile’s most combative *población* is huge. We want to demonstrate to the public opinion of the American continent that we are not a *población ‘callampa’* and that we neither tolerate nor will tolerate such a humiliating term. We deserve respect from every citizen with no exception because we have been an example of overcoming that we wish other working-class *poblaciones* could imitate”<sup>26</sup>

The Campamento La Victoria opened up a realm of action for *pobladores*, who conceived of squatter settlement as a strategy for the development of transformative agendas. Although historians do not agree upon the number of *campamentos* that arose in Santiago between 1964 and 1973—the period in which *pobladores*’ mobilizations were more politically significant—some scholars have estimated it in more than four hundred (Cofré 2011, see more in Chapter II). What were the distinctive elements of these squatter settlements? What kind of performances did *pobladores* do when setting up a *campamento*? Generally, massive land occupations occurred overnight and followed a sort of ritualized events. Having searched for empty plots (public or private) in advance, organized housing assemblies—which might gather together more than one thousand families—usually got swiftly in them by breaking down the fences to then set up their provisional tents and *mediaguas* (shacks). The squatters, who often arrived on trucks, carts or wagons, carried not only their belongings but also Chilean flags that, like in an act of colonization, were immediately put on the territory in which they hoped to build

<sup>26</sup> “Nuestra Posición.” *La Voz de la Victoria*, 01 May 1969, p. 1.

their neighborhood: “A forest of Chilean flags emerged in the dense fog that covered yesterday’s dawn in the capital city... We witnessed the rise of a four hundred people *población* in fifteen minutes”,<sup>27</sup> said *El Siglo* to describe the founding act of a squatter settlement in 1967, which later gave rise to the Población Herminda de la Victoria.

In addition to physically seizing a vacant plot, *pobladores* performed another crucial act: they gave the new *campamento* a name. The names assigned to the developing squatter settlement were commonly based on the date of the occupation;<sup>28</sup> political slogans;<sup>29</sup> a living politician, generally leftist, who supported *pobladores*’ demands;<sup>30</sup> a Marxist prominent figure (artists, intellectuals, etc.);<sup>31</sup> the remembrance of historical events related to popular mobilizations;<sup>32</sup> or simply the imagination of the squatters who, through the name, sought to display their spirit of struggle.<sup>33</sup> What came next was equally unsurprising: police repression seeking to evict the squatters, popular resistance to those evictions, and the arrival, sometimes right after the takeover, of mostly leftist politicians who helped *pobladores* negotiate with state authorities their stay in the occupied land. Once *pobladores* were allowed to do that, the building of the *campamento* began, a process in which it was common to see university students, catholic priests, and a diversity of volunteers from other civil society organizations collaborating.

In his album *La Población* (1972),<sup>34</sup> Chilean folk singer Víctor Jara depicted brilliantly the set of practices and imaginaries surrounding the appearance of *campamentos* such as the rigorous organization of the *pobladores*; their sense of opportunity when seizing a plot; the risks that, as a result, they faced; and, still more important, their view of a future conceived of as promising that would come along with the building of the *población*. This last point is well formulated in the ending song of the album entitled *La Marcha de Los Pobladores* (“The March of Pobladores”):

“*Poblador, comrade poblador, we’ll keep on moving forward until the end  
Poblador, comrade poblador, for the kids, the fatherland, and the home,  
Poblador, comrade poblador, now history is for you. By having a house, a shelter,  
and bread, we’ll march all together to the future.*”<sup>35</sup>

The formation of *campamentos* were thus predicated upon the execution of a series of standardized practices that, in addition to the state’s interpellation discussed above, helped configure *pobladores* subjectivities. Some thinkers of the performative (Butler 1997; Hollywood 2002; Yurchak 2005) have argued that the process of subject formation derives not only from

<sup>27</sup> “Defendieron con Sus Pechos el suelo conquistado.” *El Siglo*, 17 March 1967, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., 26 de Enero (“26 of January”); 22 de Julio (“22 of July”).

<sup>29</sup> E.g., Venceremos (“We will overcome”); Batalla de la Producción (“Struggle for Production”); Unidad Popular (“Popular Unity”); Trabajadores al Poder (“Workers, Take the Power Over”).

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Salvador Allende; Carlos Cortés; Tito Palestro; José Tohá; Carlos Altamirano.

<sup>31</sup> E.g., Carlos Marx; Lenin; Fidel Castro; Che Guevara; Angela Davis; Fidel-Ernesto; Camilo Torres; Ho Chi Minh; Pablo Neruda; Violeta Parra.

<sup>32</sup> E.g., Primero de Mayo (“First of May”); Vietnam Heroico (“Heroic Vietnam”); Asalto al Cuartel Moncada (“Attack on Moncada Barracks”); Nueva La Habana (“New La Habana”).

<sup>33</sup> E.g., El Esfuerzo (“Effort”); Los Luchadores (“The Fighters”); Paz y Progreso (“Peace and Progress”); Fe y Esperanza (“Faith and Hope”).

<sup>34</sup> This work was inspired by the Campamento Herminda de la Victoria—located in district of Barrancas, currently Cerro Navia—, which was tragically well known for the decease of Herminda, a baby girl who died from police bullets in the events that came after the land seizure.

<sup>35</sup> “Poblador, compañero poblador, seguiremos avanzando hasta el final. Poblador, compañero poblador, por los hijos, por la patria y el hogar. Poblador, compañero poblador, ahora la historia es para ti. Con techo, abrigo y pan, marchemos juntos al porvenir.”

his/her involvement in instances of ideological recognition like interpellation, but also from the corporeal encounters of the bodies that take part in rituals. In view of the formative character of ritualized social practices, the very autoconstruction of *campamentos* can be thought of as essential for *pobladores* to constitute themselves as agentival subjects. The formation of those settlements is, therefore, not only associated with the development of novel political strategies in a period of intense popular mobilization but also with the consolidation of political agencies that, as Victor Jara narrated, put the urban poor in a new status to deal with their own future, the state, and history.

### Fearing *campamentos*

The growing political importance of *pobladores* between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s—materialized in the spread of highly ideological and organized *campamentos* especially during Salvador Allende’s administration—gave rise to novel narratives on squatter settlements. If for progressive views like that of Victor Jara they arose from the action of conscious working-class dwellers whose right to housing had been systematically denied by bourgeois governments,<sup>36</sup> for conservative groups *campamentos* operated even like “concentration camps” where *pobladores* were being indoctrinated by “extreme left-wing elements.”<sup>37</sup> In the conservative press, this emerging form of urban protest was thus conceptualized from a fear-based discourse in which *pobladores* were imagined as hopeless people whose despair, which was “clouding their view of what is correct and legal,”<sup>38</sup> might lead to the implementation of Marxist political projects.

This fear of *campamentos* felt by right-wing groups was both material and symbolic. The former was fundamentally associated with the threat of the right of private property that the increase of squatter settlements entailed. Such a view led to the appearance of several editorials in newspapers like *El Ilustrado* and *El Mercurio* discussing the political risks involved in allowing squatters to stay in the occupied plots since *campamentos*, some newspapers said, might even be the scenario for the development of some forms of “urban guerrilla.”<sup>39</sup> State repression was understood as a necessary and unavoidable step for avoiding the spread of *campamentos*; yet, it had to be directed towards their “intellectual authors”—namely, leftist parties—rather than their “material executors” since *pobladores*, such as the landowner whose right to property had been violated, were merely victims of extremists.<sup>40</sup>

The conservative fear of squatter settlements had also a symbolic dimension related to the criticism of two founding practices through which, as I showed above, *pobladores* gave rise to *campamentos*: the putting of Chilean flags on the seized land and the naming of the new neighborhood. Editorial opinions in reactionary newspapers argued that those performances accounted for both the abuse of Chile’s national emblems and the incorporation of foreign figures that did not stand for our national values. In this regard, both actions were understood as a menace to national unity, such as expressed in these two editorials:

“Why do we venerate our national flag? Because it symbolizes the unity of our nation... These days we have seen how the Communist Party has distributed hundreds of Chilean flags among *pobladores* who were instigated to invade a

<sup>36</sup> See also: “Defendieron con Sus Pechos el Suelo Conquistado.” *El Siglo*, 17 March 1967, p. 7; “Las tomas de terreno.” *El Siglo*, 15 February 1969, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance: “¿Campos de Concentración en Santiago?” *El Mercurio*, 31 May 1967, p. 3; “El caso de la 26 de Enero.” *El Ilustrado*, 30 April 1970, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> “Ilegal Ocupación de Terrenos.” *El Ilustrado*, 05 May 1969, p. 3.

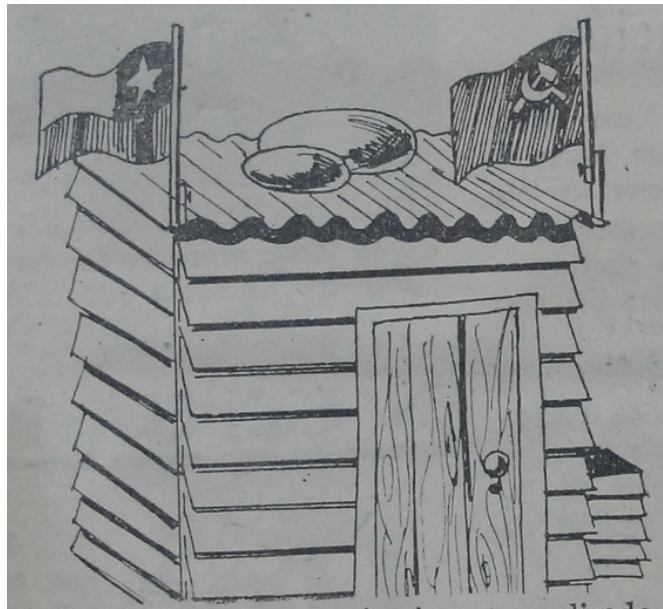
<sup>39</sup> “Ocupación Ilegal de Predios.” *El Ilustrado*, 24 February 1969, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> “Ocupaciones Ilegales de Sitios.” *El Mercurio*, 03 May 1969, p. 3.

private plot in the district of La Granja... It is time to take measures aimed at preventing demagoguery and divisive politicians from continuing to use a respectable emblem that belongs to and symbolizes our entire nationality.”<sup>41</sup>

“We are going through a period of ‘Che Guevara,’ ‘Mao Tse-tung,’ ‘Fidel Castro,’ ‘Camilo Torres,’ [i.e., names of *campamentos*], which expresses an anti-Chilean deviationism that ignores our own values... [Some radical groups] encourage squatters to seize an empty plot, which starts by putting a Chilean flag as a sign of respectability to their arbitrariness. There, the Chilean flag surely waves with less proud and historicity [*historicidad*] than at the Morro de Arica or La Concepción<sup>42</sup> to, later, gets lost among red flags.”<sup>43</sup>

The note just quoted was accompanied by a drawing of a shack with two flags—a Chilean and a Soviet one (Image 1)—as a graphic representation of what, according to conservative newspapers, was happening in Santiago’s working-class neighborhoods: the increasing penetration of external, Marxist agendas aimed at, first, promoting class struggles and, then, subverting Chile’s constitutional order. In that sense, for reactionary discourses *pobladores*’ performances, even just being an “instrument” for the left, were becoming growingly dangerous. Why? Because they were resulting in the emergence of new forms of social life in *campamentos* through which the urban poor would be able question both the political-juridical and ideological principles of the bourgeois society by fighting the right to property and the unity of the nation.



**Image 1: The “misuse” of the Chilean flag and the arrival of “Marxist ideals” in *campamentos***

The strong symbolism of the two performances just mentioned—the naming *campamentos* and the “misuse” of the Chilean flag—became even more evident when the dictator Augusto Pinochet came to power in 1973. In this regard, the military regime (1973–1990) not only repressed physically *pobladores*, but also changed the names of *campamentos*

<sup>41</sup> “Abuso Del Pabellón Patrio.” *El Mercurio*, 13 May 1967, p. 3

<sup>42</sup> These are names of two battles in the War of the Pacific (1879–1883) in which Chile fought against a Perú and Bolivia.

<sup>43</sup> “Las Ocupaciones y las Fricciones” by Juan de la Cuesta. *Tribuna*, 19 July 1971, p. 4

right after Pinochet took office. Nine days after the coup of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1973, War Admiral Jorge Paredes said in Concepción—the second largest city of the country—that the replacement of *campamentos*' names was to “restore the patriotic values of our nation [...since] there are foreign-looking denominations related to names of individuals who have contributed nothing to our fatherland.”<sup>44</sup> Besides, the dictatorship stopped calling squatter settlements “*campamentos*” given the political content of that word and began to call them *poblaciones*, a term that seemed to be less loaded ideologically.<sup>45</sup> The names used to re-baptize *campamentos* were based mostly on Chile's historical personages, names of battles, or made-up phrases that represented “truly patriotic” ideals or, at least, were less harmful to national unity. Just to mention some, in Santiago the Campamento Lenin was named “Población Yungay” to commemorate an 1836 battle in which Chile confronted the Perú-Bolivia Confederation; the Campamento Unidad Popular was denominated “Población Los Copihues,” in honor to the national flower of Chile; the Campamento Angela Davis was called “Población Héroes de la Concepción” to memorialize the decease of seventy seven young soldiers who died in the War of the Pacific in 1882; and the Campamento Ho Chi Minh, “one of the most controversial Santiago's *campamentos* in the past regime,”<sup>46</sup> was re-baptized simply as Villa San Luis de Las Condes.

For the dictatorship, thus, the erasure of Salvador Allende's legacy had not only to do with the physical decimation of its supporters, but also with the destruction of the symbolism the “Chilean Road to Socialism” was based upon. This led Pinochet's military regime to regard *pobladores*, at least in public, less as transformative subjectivities than as defenseless poor residents who—drawing on General Óscar Bonilla's word—had been deceived and politically exploited by previous “demagogic” governments.<sup>47</sup> As a consequence, the actions of the regime towards the urban poor involved not only a systematic violence against the latter but also their consideration as political agents incapable of deliberating on their own behalf.

#### 4. *Pobladores as allegados*

As largely explained in the previous chapter, during the 1980s the housing crisis—which in the early 1980s reached more than 800,000 units (Chateau and Pozo 1987)—assumed new characteristics on account of three main phenomena: a) the drastic repression of land occupations; b) the implementation of a new, subsidy-based housing policy; c) the execution of large-scale eradications of squatter-settlements (*erradicaciones*) through which *campamentos* located in central areas were evicted to peripheries. As *pobladores* were incapable of accessing urban land through *tomas de terrenos*, the housing shortage of this period was framed fundamentally by the spread of *allegados*. In simple terms, *allegados* are those working-class families in need of home who live in overcrowded conditions in relatives' houses, a situation that affected more than 152,000 families by the mid-1980s (Chateau and Pozo 1987).

Although *allegados* were already the object of public discourses in the mid-twentieth century,<sup>48</sup> it is just in the 1980s when this form of inhabitation drew the attention of scholars because it was only then when *allegados* “reached a never-seen-before magnitude” (Chateau and Pozo 1987, 37). In this context, Andrés Necochea (1987) defined *allegados* as young poor

<sup>44</sup> “Cambian Denominación y Nombres a las ‘Tomas’ y ‘Campamentos’.” *El Mercurio*, 20 September 1973, p. 17.

<sup>45</sup> “Cambiaron Nombres a Campamentos.” *El Mercurio*, 27 September 1973, p. 23.

<sup>46</sup> “El Sectarismo fue Reemplazado por Trabajo.” *La Tercera*, 18 December 1972, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> “‘Los pobladores tienen que dejar de mirarse con odio’.” *La Tercera*, 22 October 1973, p. 22.

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance: “Que el Gobierno Compre los Terrenos de la Caja de Carabineros Ubicados en La Legua.” *El Siglo*, 27 January 1953, p. 4; “Allegados.” *El Siglo*, 02 August 1965, p. 2.

families residing in any of the following four conditions: a) as an economically dependent household sharing a house with another family; b) as an economically independent household living in another family's home; c) as a household that, being granted a portion of land, dwells in the backyard of a residential property; and d) as a family renting a room or a small housing unit within a residential property.

The analysis of *allegados* turns out to be crucial to understanding contemporary housing struggles, which, as depicted in Chapter II, are essentially carried out through state-regulated *comités de allegados* whereby the urban poor apply for state subsidies. I will discuss extensively how the urban poor signify their condition as *allegados* in Chapter V. For now, I hold that it is precisely the reconfiguration of *pobladores* as *allegados* that characterizes the mode of subjectivation of the urban poor since the 1980s what has led social scientists to conceive of the term *poblador* exclusively as a socio-identity category (e.g. Chateau and Pozo 1987; Paley 2001; Sabatini and Wormald 2004; Han 2012). The almost total disappearance of the practices through which urban poor constituted themselves as political subjects in the preceding decades has resulted thus in a sustained lack of interests in examining the type of agency imbedded in the signifier in question. Since then, intellectuals began progressively to talk about *pobladores* as any sort of disadvantaged dwellers rather than as political agents, especially when discussing the increasing incapacity of the urban poor perform practices of city making on a large scale. *Pobladores*, accordingly, started to be thought of less as producers of space than as marginalized inhabitants.

An early example of this approach can be found in the book *Espacio y Poder: Los Pobladores* ("Space and Power: The *Pobladores*"), a compilation of articles edited by Hernán Pozo (1987). In preface of this work, Pozo (Pozo 1987, 10) said that prior to the dictatorship *pobladores* were not "one-dimensional" men as they were defined by their work, their place of residence, their social relations, their expectations, and their ideas of progress. However, he argued, the military regime not only blocked *pobladores'* hopes, wishes, and projects, but also relegated them to a condition of poor residents: "in this new scenario, the *poblador* turns into a man who inhabits a specific place" (Pozo 1987, 10). The removal of the productive character of *pobladores'* practices is also present in the first part of this book, written by Jorge Chateau and the just mentioned Hernán Pozo. In their attempt to identify sociologically the main features of *pobladores*, these authors offered an operational definition that, as stated by them, was built upon the common-sense understanding of that term. Chateau and Pozo (1987, 23), in this regard, conceptualized *pobladores* as all the poor residents who lived, either as homeowner or *allegados*, in any of the following places: a) squatter settlements or *campamentos*; b) *poblaciones* resulting from Eduardo Frei's "Site Operation" (see Chapter II); and c) state-led housing projects oriented toward solving the housing problematic linked to the appearance of *callampas*, *campamentos* or other forms of informal residency. Although later in the text these authors affirmed that, as shown in the large amount of community organizations existing in Santiago by then, *pobladores* did have capacities for collective action, it is striking that *pobladores'* political capacities did not take on any significant role in their conceptualization. Hence, for Chateau and Pozo the category *poblador* referred essentially to precarious inhabitants without even elaborating on to what extent the political dimension anchored in it allows for the emergence of agentival subjects.

Such a perspective appears to be dominant in most of the academic works that came out afterwards. Although there are some scholars who have, in different ways, recognized the political dimension contained in the category *poblador*, such recognition derives from the fact that they conducted retrospective studies of the housing movement of the 1960s and early 1970s

(Espinoza 1988; Garcés 2002; Cortés 2014; Murphy 2015). Nonetheless, most of the social scientists analyzing contemporary processes have systematically overlooked the problem of how *pobladores* rearticulate their agency in a context in which massive land occupations are no longer present. That theoretical disregard can be seen, for instance, in the works examining the depoliticization of the urban poor after the restoration of democracy (Paley 2001); the rise of right-to-the-city mobilizations (Sabatini and Wormald 2004); the subjective effects of becoming homeowners related to the loss of old community ties (Márquez 2004) and the emergence of middle-class values among them (Salcedo 2010), or the ways in which the urban poor make sense and embody past state violence and present social arrangements of care in neoliberal Chile (Han 2012). When problematizing ethnographically the notion of *poblador*, authors go back to the past to find traces of a subject who acquired a political character through land seizures, autoconstruction and, more generally, large-scale housing movements (see, for instance, Han 2012, 15; Murphy 2015). However, they say little about how such a political subjectivity is reformulated once massive right to housing mobilization vanished. By assuming that being a *poblador* is simply a matter of residing in a *población*, contemporaneous social scientists look at *pobladores* as a static social category resulting from the act of inhabiting rather than as a to-be-formed agency. For these scholars, *pobladores* inhabit in the city rather than make it.

This approach has brought about not only the, so to speak, depoliticization of the term *poblador* but also the spread of a taken-for-granted understanding of it among social scientists, who barely account for the mechanisms through which current *pobladores* develop their political agencies as *allegados* demanding urban rights. The question of how the urban poor form themselves as political subjects turns out to be relevant if we consider that, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, they built a rights-based language precisely by recognizing themselves as *pobladores* city-makers. In the meantime, I will discuss how this process of subject formation occurs among new generations of *pobladores*.

### 5. New *pobladores*, new subjects

Housing mobilizations in Chile, as accounted for in detail in Chapter II, have reemerged since the mid-2000s. Working-class families, through their enrollment in state-regulated *allegados* committees, have developed new right-to-the-city demands, which have enable them to reformulate the content and orientation of housing movement. I want to finish this chapter by demonstrating that such a remobilization is importantly grounded in the self-identification of housing activists as *pobladores*. In that sense, I seek to explore the practical and discursive mechanisms allowing them to claim to be *pobladores* when making political claims. I aim to discuss, accordingly, the modalities of formation of what the National Federation of Pobladores calls “a new subject:”

“What do we seek? We seek to obtain a decent house [*vivienda digna*] by struggling and getting organized. We also seek to construct a *new subject* [*un nuevo sujeto*] who, through solidarity and dialogue, makes up a community capable of struggling for the right to the city and the building of a new neighborhood” (National Federation of Pobladores, FENAPO, public statement. April/May 2011, emphasis added).

How to understand the constitution of a working class agency—one that, as I have shown earlier in this chapter, public and academic discourses have referred to as *pobladores*—when its historical modes of subjectivation are absent? What are the main attributes of this agency now that it is no longer developed by autoconstructors but by *allegados* enrolled in state programs?



Based on my ethnographic analysis of housing assemblies, I suggest that we are observing a sort of linguistic rearticulation of the category *poblador* since the very same concept used to describe old squatters' housing protests is now utilized by the urban poor to reinterpret their role as *allegados* advocating housing rights in a neoliberal city. I hold that the urban poor, by recognizing themselves as *pobladores*, not only make sense of their everyday experiences as a socially excluded population in ethical terms but also conceive of themselves as political subjects capable of addressing a language of rights to the state. Leaving for the next chapter the examination of the political outcomes of such rearticulation process—which, I anticipate, is associated with a redefinition of social understandings of rights and citizenship—I will here focus on the discursive formulations through which contemporary *allegados* think of themselves as *pobladores*. These narratives are built upon two main elements: (1) the consideration of *pobladores* as a trans-historical form of subjectivity, which compels contemporary urban protesters to look at the past as both a source of symbolic power and a container of foundational events. In doing so, they are able to reclaim the legacy of old *pobladores* movements while connecting present individual biographies to a history collectively made by past autoconstructors; (2) the development of an effort-based discourse through which *allegados* signify their condition of disadvantage working-class inhabitants from a moral framework, which allows them to establish ethical boundaries between worthy and unworthy poor.

### **Looking to the past (I): The symbolic power *tomas***

One of the mechanisms through which new generations of *allegados* construct themselves as *pobladores* alludes to the observation of the past as a container of events revealing not only the social and political significance of the urban poor, but also marks disclosing the historical continuity of the agency anchored in the term *poblador*. Land takeovers are one of these events I will pay attention to in this section. The importance of past *tomas de terrenos* lies in the fact that they involve a set of performances that, in being practically or discursively brought into the present, enable contemporaneous *pobladores* to conceive of themselves as part of a historically grounded agency developed by the urban poor over the past six decades.

In a book published in 2011, the Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha, MP, holds that contemporary housing protests are a fraction of a trans-historical struggle for *la vida digna* (“dignified life;” see Chapter V), which has a number of historically situated expressions like the squatters' movement of the mid-twentieth century or the popular demonstrations against Pinochet's government (Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha 2011). The political struggle of contemporary *pobladores*, who consider themselves as heirs of a social movement that began several decades ago, would rest ultimately on their ability to rearticulate their agentival capacities in new historical circumstances. I could notice this sense of belonging in two situations: a) when contemporary *allegados*, by saying that *tomas* [takeovers] are *the* historical strategy used by *pobladores*, referred to these actions as the most consolidated manifestation of *pobladores'* transformative character; b) when they actually perform some small-scale occupations as a means to make some claims to the state.

The *allegados* I met in fieldwork understood the act of seizing—such as done in the 1960s and early 1970s—as the most telling occurrence illustrating the increasing social importance of *pobladores*. This was clearly shown when they talked about the past through sentences like “my parents participated in the *toma* and founded this *población*.” Nonetheless, the takeovers that present *pobladores* actually do are restricted to the small-scale seizure of state buildings, public spaces, riverbanks, or even empty plots through which they seek primarily to

make their demands more visible (Image 2 and 3). In these incidents, similar to those of the past, *pobladores* often carry Chilean flags and sing the national anthem, but they hardly think of these seizures as a way to, for instance, demand autoconstruction. In that sense, while massive illegal occupations are present less as an actual form of political action than as a linguistic resource to refer back to a heroic past, current small-scales takeovers are carried out fundamentally to make their claims public.

It is, however, the realization of these performances what allows new generations of housing activists to establish a symbolic link between past and present *pobladores*. In thinking of *tomas*—regardless of their scale—as one of the defining political strategies of *pobladores*, contemporary *allegados* construe themselves as performers of the “same” kind of practices that their parents and grandparents did several decades ago. The magnitude the occupation, the number of *pobladores* involved in it, the historical circumstances in which it is realized, or even the environment of the place occupied may certainly vary; but the doer of such an action is, current *pobladores* think, fundamentally the same.



Images 2 and 3. Takeover of Río Mapocho's riverbank in downtown Santiago during the Chilean winter in 2014. *Campamento Mapocho*, as FENAPO called this occupation, lasted seventy-four days, from June 11<sup>th</sup> to August 23<sup>rd</sup>. Photos taken by the author in June, 2014.

Sometimes, the widespread presence of romanticized discourses around past land seizures, as if they stand for the golden era of *pobladores*, appears to bring about a disjunction between the imagined capacities to do an occupation and the actual possibilities to carry it out

effectively. I could see this on November 30<sup>th</sup> 2013, when I attended an assembly of the Santiago branch of FENAPO, which congregated around twenty delegates representing more than ten *allegados* committees. One of the topics of discussion was what to do for the government to answer the demands of each group, which I could categorize in three kinds of claims: a) the creation of a public bank of urban land as a means to facilitate the building of social housing projects in well-located areas; b) the allocation of subsidies for those families who had not receive them yet; and c) the prompt construction of those housing projects already approved by the state. During the debate, Luis, a delegate of the Movimiento Pueblo Sin Techo of Peñalolén who was in his fifties, argued passionately that the only way to be heard was to massively take over a vacant plot; all of this while making references to how *pobladores* gained access to urban land on their own in the 1960s. The assembly rejected Luis' proposal after one of the spokesperson of FENAPO said: "*tomas* are a means to an end, not an end in themselves," which was simply understood as a "we don't have the capacity to lead any *toma* like in the past." Some months later, when Luis and I were having a more personal conversation, he would insist on this idea. He said to me: "you know buddy? I'm sick of coming to meetings every week and marching to the Ministry of Housing once in a while. That is not working at all. Do you know what I would do? I would gather together all the FENAPO *comités de allegados* and go to take over the Sauzal [an empty plot located in Peñalolén]. If we do that the government would surely pay attention to us."

There were, nonetheless, other examples in which takeovers were successfully done. When I began to take part in the Don Bosco *allegados* committee in July 2013, this housing committee was occupying a state-owned vacant plot located on the corner of Departamental Ave. and Tobalaba Ave. in the district of La Florida. Through the takeover, these *pobladores* were fundamentally demanding more subsidies to purchase the plot—which had increased significantly its value—and a social housing project built (see more in Chapter IV). This *toma* was maintained on a daily basis by only two families who were living as squatters, who admitted to me that they were frustrated with the little support they received from most of the seven hundred families that this housing assembly brings together. Despite this fact, the takeover lasted nine months—from March to December—once the government, besides promising *pobladores* to give them extra subsidies to pay for the land, hired a private construction company to did the soil treatment required for the building of the social housing project. This affair is just one example of the many occasions in which this committee took part in occupations aiming not only to make their demands public but also to tie symbolically their present political involvement to a past construed as glorious. It is precisely this past what new generation of housing activists, who understand their political struggle as deeply attached to previous urban movements, reclaim as a way to think of themselves as *pobladores*.

Both Luis' proposal and Don Bosco's actions reveal, thus, the symbolic character of *tomas* among present *pobladores*. The incidents just described unveil that *tomas*, either discursively uttered or practically realized, are not only imagined as possible set of actions when it comes to formulating strategies for protests and mobilizations, but also as a means to bring the past into the present. I will be clear on this point: although large-scale land occupations are no longer a fundamental practice in the repertory of actions of the urban poor, the act of take over something—an empty plot, a public building, a freeway, a riverbank, etc.—does have a symbolic power among *pobladores* as, in so doing, they would be making use of what is conceptualized as the most developed expression of *pobladores*' performative character.

### Looking to the past (II): Autoconstruction as foundational events

Another way to look to the past is through the configuration of social imaginaries of autoconstruction, which is seen as the set of practices of popular production of space through which *pobladores*, as historian Mario Garcés (2011) suggests, “practically re-found the city of Santiago by building the most important popular neighborhoods that we currently know.” The reference to autoconstruction is therefore associated with the understanding of *pobladores* as a productive agency capable of engaging in processes of city making. The rise of this autoconstruction-based imaginary turns out to be noteworthy if we consider that current housing activists, who have formed their subjectivities as *allegados*, have not taken part in collective processes of homebuilding. In that sense, this modality of referring back to the past differs from the one linked to takeovers because, as I demonstrated above, the symbolic power of the latter relies on the realization of, at least, small-scale *tomas*. In the case I will discuss in this section, the looking to the past is essentially based on family and neighborhood memories through which present *allegados* reflect on past *pobladores* as city makers who were able to transform both the city and their lives.

I met Fresia through Rafael, her partner and one of the members of the Don Bosco’s leadership. Fresia lived most of her life as an *allegada* in the Población Nuevo Amanecer, formerly Campamento Nueva La Habana (see Chapter IV). Her residential condition, however, changed in 2009 when the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco inaugurated its first housing project, the Villa Padre Rodrigo Carranza. Located in the eastern area of the Población Nuevo Amanecer, this neighborhood is composed predominantly of children and grandchildren of those who founded the Campamento Nueva La Habana who have similar personal histories: first, as residents of a *campamento*; second, as members of an *allegados* committee; and third, as homeowners of a subsidized housing unit. In January 2014, I went to Fresia’s own home. I had been there many times before as I used to meet with Rafael there. However, on that occasion I wanted to meet exclusively with her to dig into her longing to stay in her *población*, which had ultimately encouraged her and others to create a housing committee. I first asked her about her memories of living in the *campamento*. Besides mentioning the harshness of having no electricity or running water in her childhood, she, noticeably touched, said:

“He [my dad] came to look for rubble, sand, bricks to this place [an empty plot surrounding her new house]...when the *campamento* was formed, everybody began to build their houses... My dad built it [the house] by getting materials from where we live now. He made our house all by himself [*Él hizo la casa solito*]” (Fresia, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

Others shared similar experiences with me. Juan Rivas—a construction worker who lives as an *allegado* with his partner at his mom’s house—proudly told me that his father worked in the autoconstruction of the neighborhood when the Población Nuevo Amanecer was being built under the supervision of Salvador Allende’s government (see Chapter IV). Juan felt lucky not only for being part of a family who could move out of the *campamento* when the permanent houses were distributed, but also for living specifically in one that his dad built. “My daddy made our house. We never thought we would get that house,” he said when I queried him about the making of the *población*. Ana, Juan’s partner, confirmed me his assertion while adding that the houses that resulted from this state-led autoconstruction were even more solid than the housing units provided currently by the government. To make this point, she asserted that

“earthquakes have not done any damage to them,” a natural phenomenon that most of Chileans would use as an indicator letting them know the quality of any construction.

In these *pobladores*’ view, autoconstruction, although primarily experienced as a family event through memories of relatives working materially in the construction of a house, is always attached to a larger, collective phenomenon: the making of a *población*. At the very outset of that process, quoting Fresia, “everybody began to build their houses,” which forces us to think of autoconstruction processes less as an individual fabrication of a house than as a social production of space materialized in the building of a neighborhood. Autoconstruction, even though not being personally practiced, functions as a sort of foundational act through which the urban poor connect their personal biographies to historically grounded neighborhood memories. In being evoked through family narratives, such a performance works thus as set of imaginary, even mythical, events enabling present *pobladores* to bring individual experiences into a collective history. This makes it possible to understand the *pobladores*’ political capacities as a trans-historical agency linked to the processes of city making; an agency that can be reclaimed even by those who have not autoconstructed the city.

### **Effort-based narratives: *Pobres-pobres* versus *pobres-pobladores***

A second mechanism utilized by *allegados* to think of themselves as *pobladores* refers to the creation of effort-based narratives through which they differentiate who is—and, accordingly, who is not—to be considered a *poblador*. If the previous formulations were based mainly on a retrospective gaze at the old housing mobilizations, this discursive elaboration is predicated fundamentally upon the moral appraisal of present events, which permits *allegados* to both identify themselves as *pobladores* and make sense of their living condition as socially excluded inhabitants. In that sense, I will now illuminate the discursive mechanisms through which current housing activists, by configuring ethical judgments about the urban poor, generate particular understandings of what it means to be a *poblador*. Following Foucault’s (2005) reflection on the “care of the self,” this time I will concentrate less on external discourses of truth speaking about *pobladores* than on the array of discourses through which they speak about themselves as a means to construct ethically the self.

When I informally asked Don Bosco’s people “who are *pobladores*?” during the first stage of my fieldwork, one of the answers I got more commonly was: “*pobladores* are all of us” (*los pobladores somos todos nosotros*). Initially, I construed such a rough definition as describing a form of universalizing, territorially-based membership that would include everybody who lives in a *población*. Being a *poblador*, I thought, was thus like being a Chilean: a member of a community framed by neighborhood/national borders. In the following months, I changed drastically my mind. After working in this *allegados* committee for four or five months, I realized that this “all of us” was restricted to the people who, being or not involved in housing struggles, were socially recognized as hardworking individuals. This became clear to me in December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013. On that day Rafael, Fresia’s partner, introduced me to another member of the Don Bosco *allegados* committee at a barbecue we had at his place. Around 4.00 p.m., after having eaten enough, the three of us went to walk around the empty plot that this housing assembly had taken over in March. The occupation had ended just three weeks ago, in early December, right before a private construction company came in to treat the soil prior to the building. By taking me there, Rafael and his friend wanted to show me how the process of soil treatment was going. When wandering around the area, Rafael’s friend, who at that time was working as a laborer in the construction site, complained all the time about his employers: “This

company sucks. It's getting really warm these days and they don't provide us with sunscreen. They don't even give us the right materials to do our job. Engineers have no idea about what they're doing," he said. In seeing his friend's mood, Rafael laughed and told me: "This buddy is a real *poblador* [*este socio es un poblador-poblador*]. He doesn't philosophize about anything [*no filosofa nada*], he just tries to make a living day to day here in the *población*."

After hearing Rafael's comment, I reformulated my initial premise on my way back home. *Poblador*, I said to myself, seems to be less an essence, so to speak, given by birth than a condition developed through practices valued by the community, be it a housing assembly or a *población*. "I started to call myself *pobladora* after entering into the committee," a Don Bosco's member told me once, which reinforced the idea I was coming up with: the material condition for *pobladores* to emerge is poverty, but not all the working-class dwellers are *pobladores*; the urban poor *become*, rather than *are* per se, *pobladores*.

With this significant distinction in my mind, I came back to ask *allegados* about how they conceptualize the notion of *poblador* and, furthermore, if my thoughts made any sense to them. I will transcribe some fragments of a conversation concerning this topic that I had with Ana on January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014:

"For me, *pobladores* are those who struggle for what they want... I'm a poor, but I'm struggling for having something better to get out of poverty.

*So who would be the poorest?*

The poorest? They are people who don't want to work and want to be poor... Extreme poverty [*pobreza-pobreza*] is laziness. The poorest [*los pobres-pobres*] are lazy people"

*So, you are saying that not all the poor...*

[She interrupts me] No, no... There are very poor people [*gente pobre-pobre*] that want to be poor... In the 'old *campamento*' there are people who could have their houses beautifully arranged, but they have them like when we got there.

*So wouldn't they be pobladores?*

Well, maybe... But there are *pobladores* who are struggling to have a house, to have something better. For example, in the [Don Bosco] committee there are *pobladores* because they want to have something better for themselves and for their children. We're not going to get rich, but we'll have something more 'worthy' [*vamos a tener algo más digno*].

I put this quotation because it powerfully reveals that for the *allegados* the "condition" of *poblador* is gained mainly through effort. Ana, in spite of considering herself poor, made a suggestive distinction between the "poorest" and *pobladores*. To do so, she utilized a modality of speaking frequently used by Chileans, which consists in repeating two times the same word to make a statement more emphatic. Hence, by saying that there are *gente pobre-pobre*—which literally translated would be "poor-poor people"—she wanted to affirm the existence of extremely poor people. However, when we place her opinion in relation to her discourses on *pobladores*, she aimed to argue that that these kind of individuals are not only materially disadvantage, but also morally mediocre because they do not struggle to "get out of poverty." Ana asserted that she is a poor woman who, nonetheless, is struggling to have something better. She was, thus, a *pobladora* as well: she is a *pobre-pobladora* ("poor-*pobladora*"). As the reader surely noted, Rafael employed the same idiomatic resource when describing his friend as a *poblador-poblador*—which I roughly translated as "real *poblador*"—to value the way he struggled in his everyday life to improve his living conditions.

Both Ana's and Rafael's assertions unveil a conceptualization of *pobladores* that lies in the recognition of "effort" as their main attribute. The creation of such effort-based understanding enables *allegados* to identify two classes of urban poor: the *pobres-pobres* ("very poor people") and the *pobres-pobladores* ("poor-pobladores"). While the former would be composed of those dependent, "lazy" lower-income residents who—as many people told me—"want everything for free," the latter would be those hardworking dwellers who sacrifice themselves to get out of poverty. By considering themselves *pobres-pobladores* who struggle to have a better life for their families, *allegados* thus conceive of themselves as subjects who have gained a moral dignity. In that sense, when talking about the "all of us" mentioned above, these *allegados* are particularly referring to those who have also acquired such a moral dignity but, at the same time, are being excluded by a society construed as extremely unequal. When I asked Juan Meneses, another Don Bosco's member, about his understanding of the term *poblador*, he tellingly said:

"[They are] my neighbors, the people who live around me in the *población*, the people who share, the people who use Transantiago [Santiago's public transportation system], the people who have to wait [...] at the hospital. I'm talking about that kind of *poblador*, who has to wake up early in the morning, even being sick, to avoid waiting in line at the public hospital [*consultorio*]. I think that it's humiliating [*indigno*]... That's the people I'm talking about, the people who have to sweat blood to 'make ends meet' [*llegar a fin de mes*]" (February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

The differentiation between a *pobre-pobre* and a *pobre-poblador* must be examined less as an empirical distinction than as a discursive formulation through which *allegados* signify their experiences as urban poor in ethical terms. That is to say, the set of moral values and attitudes attached to the category of *poblador* are not, to put in simple terms, to be applied as a "checklist" to determine who is and who is not a *poblador*. Rather, they function as a matrix of practices socially recognized as dignifying by means of which *allegados* assert themselves as poor inhabitants who have acquired a moral status that enables them to become *pobladores*. *Pobres-pobres* ("very poor people") might even not exist as defined by my interlocutors. However, their representation as subjects opposed to *pobres-pobladores* ("poor-pobladores") allows the latter to think of themselves as deserving dignity. If we ask any *allegados* whether he/she considers him/herself part of *pobladores*, I am sure that most of them, if not all of them, will answer in the affirmative. Likewise, I am sure that, when asked to define what it means to be a *poblador*, they will convey an effort-related narrative so as to represent themselves as dignified, deserving, honest, and respectable residents. This form of conceiving of *pobladores* has important political outcomes. By affirming their identity as subjects endowed with dignity, *allegados* construe themselves as capable of making political claims to the state. This fosters what I call "politics of effort:" an understanding of citizenship and rights predicated on narratives on personal and collective effort through which *pobladores* think of themselves as citizen city-makers. I will discuss largely these political outcomes in the next chapter.



## Chapter IV. Politics of effort: Urban formulations of citizenship and rights

Current housing policies in Chile are grounded on a series of urban reforms that, inspired by neoliberal principles, were carried out in the late 1970s by Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship (1973–1990). Such policies brought about a radical change in the way Chilean *pobladores* both access and conceive of social housing. As shown earlier in this dissertation, in the mid-twentieth century the urban poor envisioned social housing as the consequence of collective practices of city making, which gave rise to large-scale autoconstructed neighborhoods. Nonetheless, since the late 1970s state policies conceptualize housing as a commodity that *pobladores* can get through both state subsidies and private savings. Functioning as a voucher-based system, these policies provide thus housing subsidies to individuals who, understood as rational economic actors, buy homes built by private developers.

The democratic governments that followed Pinochet's regime feared that the advent of a less repressive political context would result in the reemergence of housing protests and, consequently, mass land seizures (Hipsler 1996). Such an apprehension compelled them to allocate housing subsidies among lower-income families on a large scale and build an unprecedented amount of social housing units on the basis of the dictatorship's market-based policies. As I discussed in Chapter II, during the 1990s—when Chile had a population of more than thirteen million people—the state endeavored to construct at least 90,000 subsidized “housing solutions” (*soluciones habitacionales*) per year (Arriagada and Moreno 2006). This eventually helped reduce the housing shortage from 918,756 units in 1990 to 743,450 in 2000, which represents a decrease from 53% to 37% in the number of households in need of housing (Ministerio de Planificación 2001). The reduction of the housing deficit persisted in the following decades reaching 459,347 units in 2013 (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social 2014a). This means that currently 19.4% Chilean still live as *allegados*, a term used in Chilean public policy to refer to those families in need of home who live in another person's house, generally in that of a relative, in overcrowded conditions.

The significant building of housing solutions for working-class families have, however, turned out to be paradoxical for them. Since the early 1980s, poor families seeking to become homeowners have done so under locational constraints. Due to historic land prices (M. J. Castillo and Forray 2014; see also El Mercurio 2012), *pobladores* only utilize the state subsidy for homeownership in highly segregated peripheral areas lacking infrastructure and services (Ducci 1997; Rodríguez and Sungranyes 2005; Tapia 2011). Urban economists Pablo Trivelli (2011), in this regard, holds that “there is practically no supply of plots that cost less than 1.5 UF/square meters<sup>1</sup> [around U\$52.4/square meters], in circumstances that social housing developments cannot pay more than 0.4 UF/square meters [around U\$14/square meters] for them” (Trivelli 2011, 181–182). This is what Rodríguez and Sungranyes (2005) understand as the dilemma of “those who have housing” (*los con techo*), i.e., the quandary of those who, to fulfill the dream of one's own home, have been forced to move out of their neighborhoods to dwell in subsidized housing projects. This paradox is at the core of the reemergence of housing movements in the past 15 years; a process of remobilization that, I will discuss in this chapter, is closely related to

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<sup>1</sup> UF (acronym for Unidad de Fomento) is a Chilean unit of account adjusted to inflation. It is currently the preferred measure for estimating the value of real estate, housing, and bank loans.



both the appearance of new urban demands and the transformation of the terms in which the urban poor conceive of citizenship and rights.

### 1. New understandings of the right to housing

The political and institutional arrangement of a city that tends to expel poor families to its margins has reconfigured the content of *pobladores*' protests. The language that contemporary urban activists gathered together in *comités de allegado* use to make political claims is not only framed by the traditional right to housing but also by new demands, one of which the National Federation of Pobladores (FENAPO) calls *demanda territorial* ("territorial demand"). As I explained in Chapter II, this demand is grounded fundamentally in the longing of *allegados* for obtaining housing solutions in the *comunas* (districts) where they were born and raised. This desire, however, seems currently difficult to accomplish in view of the generalized increase in land prices in Santiago Metropolitan Area (Trivelli 2011; El Mercurio 2012; M. J. Castillo and Forray 2014).

For FENAPO's activists, the large-scale distribution of subsidized housing has paradoxically become a means of socially excluding the urban poor. To become homeowners, poor families are forced to move to low-priced areas, that is to say, to the extreme periphery where private constructions companies, in charge of the process of homebuilding, are able to make more profit out of state subsidies and working-class families' savings. The territorial demand held by *pobladores*, thus, has essentially to do with the advocacy for the "right to stay" in their neighborhoods of origins regardless of their lack of economic resources to acquire urban land via market mechanisms, which entails a radical criticism of segregationist policies based ideologically on neoliberal principles. This chapter analyzes these emerging territorially situated struggles by demonstrating that contemporary *pobladores*' claims reveal not only a reframing of the right to housing but also a broader reformulation of their imaginaries of citizenship. This reconceptualization is directly related to the effort-based narratives through which, as I argued in Chapter III, members of housing organizations signify their social experiences as working-class residents. If in that section I accounted primarily for the moral narratives allowing *allegados* to imagine themselves as *pobladores* deserving dignity, in this chapter I will focus on how, by making use of effort-related discursive formulations, they think of themselves as *pobladores* deserving rights. In that sense, I will discuss to what extent *pobladores*' territorial demand allows us to reflect on the rise of new forms of urban citizenship through which the urban poor, by conceiving of themselves as hardworking and committed city-makers, make up new criteria for rights-distribution and political membership.

*Pobladores*' self-understanding as subjects entitled to rights rests on what I call "politics of effort," a concept referring to narratives on personal and collective effort through which they legitimize their political membership and, as a result, their capacity to claim rights. I hold that this politics of effort can be understood as an incipient form of what some authors have called "urban citizenship" (Holston and Appadurai 1996; Holston 2008; Blokland et al. 2015; Cohen and Margalit 2015). According to these scholars, urban citizenship regards the city, rather than the national-state, as the foremost political community and residency, rather than nationality, as the main criterion of political membership. This notion has a theoretical utility to analyze the impact of urban movements on the redefinition of the ways social agents interpret the system of rights distribution that results from the national model of citizenship. This dissertation differs thus from other works that discuss urban citizenship through the examination of legal and constitutional reforms; an approach that has given rise to studies looking at, for instance, the

exercise of citizenship rights when national borders have been transformed (Lebuhn 2013) or the granting of autonomous power to local self-government oriented toward the creation of a citizenship “emancipated from the imperatives of national sovereignty and homogeneity” (Bauböck 2003, 157). Following Holston (2008, 33), I consider that citizenship regimes develop as “assemblages of entrenched and insurgent forms,” which are often in “tense” and unsettled relations. This chapter, accordingly, scrutinizes to what extent housing struggles have triggered the irruption of novel understandings of rights and citizenship enabling the urban poor to rethink the terms of the relationship they establish with a neoliberal state.

Current debates on rights and citizenship in the so-called Global South metropolises are composed overwhelmingly of inquiries examining the subversive effects of those who have directly engaged in autoconstruction processes (Holston 1991; 2008; Fawaz 2009; Das 2011; Caldeira 2015b). The vast literature on this matter contrast, however, with the little attention that has been paid to housing protests framed by poor residents’ participation in subsidy-based housing programs.<sup>2</sup> In Chapter II, I explained that those who have accounted for that phenomenon in Chile (Hipsher 1996; Özler 2012; Murphy 2015) argue, nonetheless, that there is practically no room for developing political agencies when the poor make use of these programs to claim housing rights. For them, participating in state-regulated housing assemblies, envisioned as a conclusive expression of political demobilization, is therefore opposed to the generation of a transformative, insurgent urban movement. I will question these assumptions by examining how contemporary *pobladores* enrolled in state-regulated committees are able to recreate their political agencies when struggling for the right to the city *within* a state housing program. To do so, I will delve into *pobladores*’ conceptualizations of citizenship and rights when housing protests seem to be constrained by neoliberal housing policies, wherein housing is presented by the state as a commodity to be obtained on the market, rather than a right to democratically distributed. My reflection on contemporary housing mobilizations in Chile is therefore aimed at scrutinizing to what extent an advanced neoliberal society in which “the market became the primary mode of governance” (Han 2012, 7) sets up the conditions not only for the emergence FENAPO’s territorial demand, but also for the structuring of a kind of (urban) citizenship; one in which *pobladores* articulate their demand for rights to the city by both considering themselves as citizens city-makers and envisioning the city as a space for political intervention.

This chapter draws primarily, although not exclusively, on the findings I collected during my ethnographic involvement in the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco. As shown earlier in this dissertation, this housing assembly was founded in 2002 in the Población Nuevo Amanecer—formerly known as Nueva La Habana—by *pobladores* seeking to resist a housing affordability problem caused by the increase in land prices in the district of La Florida. In this chapter, I will show how Don Bosco’s members, in a context of gentrification, frame their territorial demand by recognizing themselves as heirs of the urban rights acquired by their parents and grandparents through the autoconstruction of their neighborhood.

In addition to the data gathered through my participation in this La Florida committee, this chapter makes use of some interviews I conducted among *pobladores* of Techo Ahora (“Roof Now”), a housing assembly originated in 2010 in the southern Santiago district of La Pintana. Like Don Bosco, Techo Ahora is affiliated with the National Federation of *Pobladores* and is also struggling for obtaining housing solutions in the area where its members live. However, the urban setting in which these housing assemblies emerged differs importantly. La Pintana, in contrast to La Florida, is a municipality composed predominantly of working-class

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<sup>2</sup> Levenson’s (2014) work on housing delivery in Post-Apartheid South Africa is an exception to this trend.

families—more than 70% (Cornejo 2012)—that has not undergone gentrification. Until the 1980s, La Pintana was a semi-rural area, a fact that drastically changed due to the significant arrival of subsidized housing projects derived from the dictatorship's slum clearance policies (*erradicaciones*).<sup>3</sup> This background turns out to be relevant for it illuminates a significant analytical aspect: most of *allegados* taking part in Techo Ahora were born and raised in neighborhoods that, rather than being autoconstructed by previous generations of *pobladores*, emerged along with the building of subsidized housing projects. However, similar to what I observed in La Florida, La Pintana's *pobladores* are also advocating the right to stay in their district. In this regard, the inclusion of Techo Ahora will work as a counter-case to enlighten how *pobladores* formulate this right when neither they nor their parents were the actual autoconstructors of the neighborhood over which they are claiming territorial rights.

This chapter starts with a brief account of the process of increase in land prices in La Florida, which helps situate Don Bosco's struggle in a historical context. Then I will present ethnographic data to shed light on an important theoretical problem often analyzed among political anthropology and urban studies scholars: the extent to which the demand for rights to the city is legitimized through the subjective recognition of the urban poor as city-makers (Holston 1991; 2008; Fawaz 2009; Das 2011; Murphy 2015). Then, I will briefly present the case of La Pintana Techo Ahora *allegados* committee to discuss how such subjective recognition is articulated in circumstances in which autoconstruction processes are absent, which allows me to elaborate on new forms of conceptualizing the idea of city making. Finally, I will reflect on the politics of effort to account for how *pobladores'* demands for urban rights, verbalized through the "right to stay," may be understood as an emerging form of (urban) citizenship.

## 2. Resisting housing affordability in La Florida

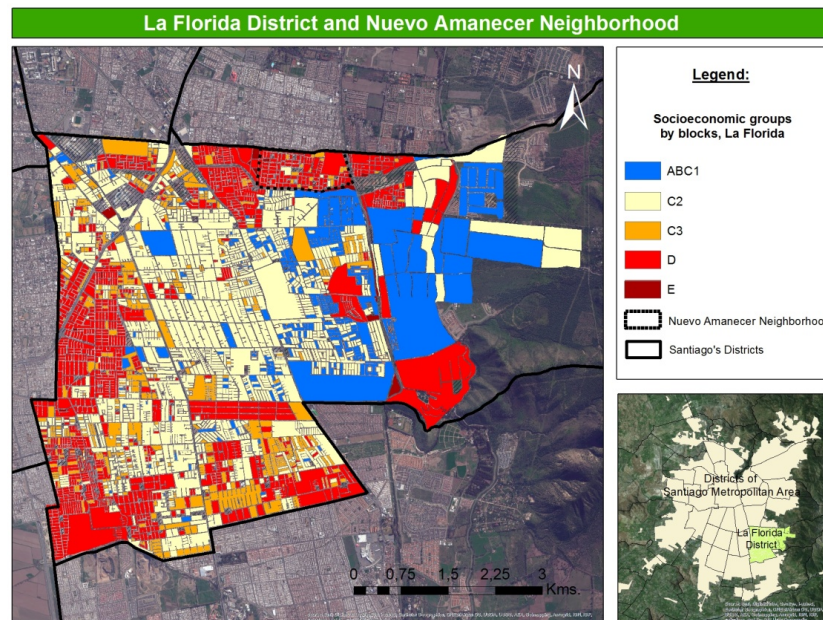
La Florida is a *comuna* (district) located in the southeast of Santiago that, according to a projection of the National Institute of Statistics in 2013, has a population of around 397,000 people (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social 2014b). This district has undergone important socio-spatial transformations over the past five decades, which makes it a significant case study. In the 1960s and early 1970s, when La Florida was still part of Santiago's semi-rural periphery, *pobladores* carried out large-scale land takeovers which originated several autoconstructed neighborhoods such as Nuevo Amanecer, the site in which I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork (Map 1). Later, the implementation of neoliberal housing policies led to the building of 23,906 subsidized housing units between 1983 and 1999 (Tapia 2011), most of which were located in the western part of this *comuna*. Almost at the same time, real estate agents, taking advantage of the low price of urban land of an until then peripheral municipality, began to develop residential and commercial private investments. As a consequence, during the 1990s La Florida's inhabitants witnessed the inauguration of two shopping malls—Plaza Vespucio Shopping Mall in 1990 and Florida Center in 1997—and the opening of a subway station—Bellavista de La Florida—in 1997. In addition, they observed the arrival of middle- and upper-class population who started to live in eastern area of this *comuna*, mainly in gated communities built in gorgeous landscapes at the foothill of the Andes mountains (Hidalgo 2004b; Ruiz-Tagle 2016).

Since then, La Florida—like other Santiago districts such as Peñalolén, Huechuraba or Quilicura—has drawn the attention of scholars who have looked it as an exemplary case

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed analysis of the number of subsidized housing units built during the 1980s in Santiago's peripheries, see Ricardo Tapia's work (2011).

exposing, in Sabatini and Salcedo's (2007) words, the colonization of the poor periphery by the rich. In being an area in which lower- and upper-income groups live close to each other, these studies have thus discussed to what degree such a coexistence may bring about new forms of social integration or, on the contrary, processes of gentrification and displacement (see, for instance, Hidalgo 2004b; Sabatini and Salcedo 2007; Sabatini et al. 2010; Ruiz-Tagle and López 2014; Ruiz-Tagle 2016). As a patent demonstration of this colonization, in the early 2000s around 11% of La Florida's residents were characterized as "ABC1"—a concept used in Chilean public policy to refer to the richest 7%—on the basis of the data provided by the 2002 census (Asociación Chilena de Empresas de Investigación de Mercado 2008; see also Map 1). Currently there is no official data in this regard given the invalidation of the 2012 census.<sup>4</sup> However, some estimates indicate that the number of rich families residing in La Florida has continued to escalate, such as asserted by some planners who have recently argued that this district has consolidated its position as *comuna* that upper-class households perceive as attractive to live in (La Tercera 2015). This fact is graphically depicted in Map 2, which shows the dispersion of ABC1 households in Santiago between 2002 and 2013. There, La Florida appears as the Santiago district that, along with the *comunas* in which the rich have traditionally resided,<sup>5</sup> congregated more bourgeois families.



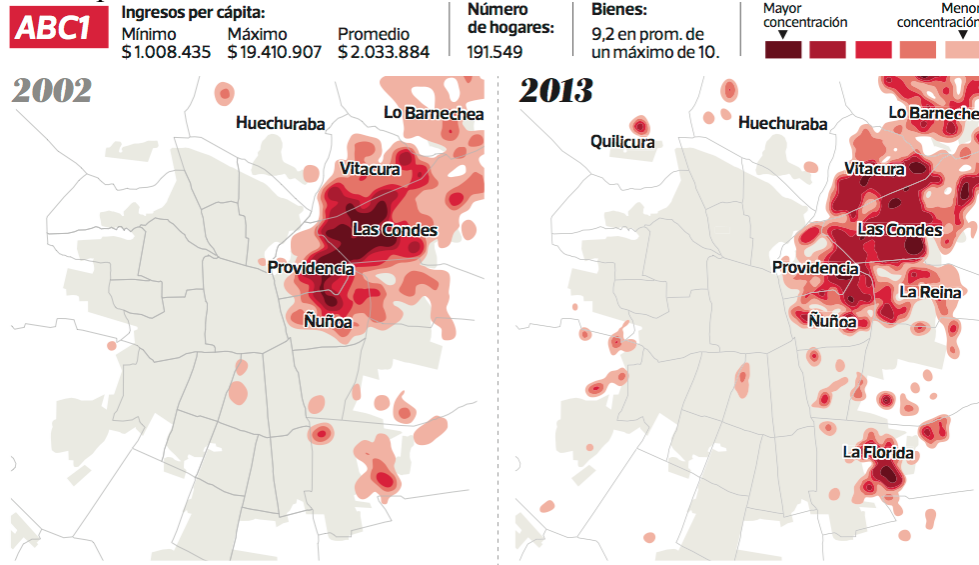
**Map 1. Socioeconomic groups by blocks in La Florida by 2002. ABC1 represents the richest socioeconomic groups; C2 y C3 middle strata; D lower-middle group, and E stands for the poor.**

The socio-spatial changes just described have been accompanied by a sustained increase in land prices. Data provided by urban economist Pablo Trivelli (El Mercurio 2012, B8–B9) shows that, between 1991 and 2011, the average value of land in La Florida rose from 0.68 UF/square meters to 9.33UF/square meters (23.8 US\$/square meters and 326.5 US\$/square meters respectively; Table 3). These numbers represent an increment of almost 1,400%, which,

<sup>4</sup> The 2012 census was annulled because of serious methodological errors. Among other issues, it failed to survey over 9% of the population (New York Times 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Las Condes, Lo Barnechea, Providencia, Vitacura, Ñuñoa and La Reina.

according to Trivelli, is seven times higher than the increase observed in Santiago Metropolitan Area in the same period.



Map 2. Changes in the Spatial Distribution of ABC1 Families in Santiago, 2002 and 2013. Source: La Tercera (2015, 38).

As affirmed above, subsidized housing projects for lower-income families are generally developed in areas whose prices do not exceed 0.4 UF/square meters (Trivelli 2011). Thus, the notorious increment in land values in La Florida over the past twenty-five years has given rise to a housing affordability problem for the 13,3% of the residents who, according to the National Survey of Socioeconomic Characterization of 2013, are poor. In fact, official data offered by La Florida City Hall indicates that, as of July 2015, 34,983 people—i.e., almost 9% of its population—are living as *allegados*. It is precisely this phenomenon what has triggered the reemergence of *pobladores* protests for what some authors, when discussing community-based strategies to resist displacement processes, have called the “right to stay put” (Hartman 2002; Newman and Wyly 2006). I will account for these struggles through the examination of the Don Bosco housing assembly.

**Table 3. Increase in land prices in La Florida**

Year	UF/m <sup>2</sup>
1991	0.62
2001	5.43
2006	6.21
2011	9.33

Source: El Mercurio (2012)

### “Because we were born and raised here, here we’re going to stay”

The Comité de Don Bosco was born in the early 2000s when less than twenty families of Nuevo Amanecer neighborhood organized to claim the right to stay put in La Florida. The desire of Don Bosco’s *allegados* to continue to reside in La Florida has a biographical explanation: most of

them are children and grandchildren of the squatters who, in the early 1970s, autoconstructed the Población Nuevo Amanecer. Nona, one of the leaders of this organization, explained the struggle carried out by the Don Bosco in this way:

“We noticed that our families, who had been displaced [*erradicadas*] to other districts, wanted to come back to La Florida. I tell you this from my own experience. My sister received social housing in 1984 in [the southern district of] Puente Alto... It was a two-floor, thirty-six square meters housing that had a tiny patio, but they couldn’t go out of the house because the neighborhood was really dangerous. The dictatorship put people who didn’t know each other to live all together. So what happened? Those who were tougher [*más choros*] prevailed; it was like the law of the jungle [*la ley del más fuerte*]. If I’m told ‘you’re going to have a house elsewhere’ I wouldn’t take it... We are struggling to stay here where everybody knows each other... elsewhere there is no the ‘sense of community’ [*sentido de comunidad*] that we have here in the Don Bosco because those who formed this assembly are all children of those who made this neighborhood.” (Nona, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014).

The “sense of community” that Nona talks about is rooted in the history of Nuevo Amanecer, whose emergence is directly associated with the old *pobladores* movement. As I explained earlier in this dissertation, the emergence of this neighborhood is rooted in the *pobladores* movement of the 1970s. On November 1<sup>st</sup> of that year, one thousand and five hundred poor families coming from three land seizures—Magaly Honorato, Elmo Catalán, and Ranquil—founded the Campamento Nueva La Habana under the leadership of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR). The spectacular organizational skills of Nueva La Habana’s residents, materialized in the creation of a self-defense militia (*frente de vigilancia*), self-managed schools for kids, popular courts, and a preventive medicine facility, made the *campamento* an object of academic inquiries (e.g. Fiori 1973; Pastrana and Threlfall 1974; Castells 1983) and media debates (see more in Chapter II). One of the most innovative experiences developed in Nueva La Habana was the creation of a *frente de trabajadores* (“workers’ front”), which gathered together unemployed *pobladores* who, eventually, autoconstructed the neighborhood (Image 1). In the early 1970s, Nueva La Habana’s residents made an agreement with the Secretary of Housing of Salvador Allende’s government to allow squatters who took part in this workers’ front to work themselves in the urbanization of what would be the Población Nueva Habana. Thus, whereas the state provided construction materials, hundreds of Nueva La Habana’s dwellers participated themselves in the building of the solid houses in which all of squatters would supposedly end up living.

This project, however, could not be accomplished because of the military coup of 1973. Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship—along with assassinating some leaders of this *campamento* and changing its name to Nuevo Amanecer (“New Dawn”)—established an unfair system of housing distribution: those families who did not have a required amount of savings could not reside in the houses that *pobladores* had built. Consequently, whereas some of them began to inhabit in the *casas nuevas* (“new houses”) in 1975, many others continued to dwell as squatters in what people currently call *campamento viejo* (“old squatter settlement”). During the 1980s and 1990s, several subsidized social housing projects were built in Nuevo Amanecer, which has contributed to maintaining the working-class composition of this area.

Currently the “old squatter settlement,” which is composed of almost four hundred residential properties, is completely urbanized and the former squatters have since acquired title



deeds. However, many of their children and grandchildren are still residing as *allegados* given lack of housing solutions in La Florida. At present, more than seven hundred families are enrolled in this *allegados* committee. All of them are seeking to become homeowners in their district of origin as a way to preserve what Nona calls “a sense of community.” The slogan that they use in public protests is telling in this regard: “Because we were born and raised here, here we’re going to stay” (Image 2).

Don Bosco’s families are currently fighting for some empty plots within the neighborhood that, although included in the original plan of Nueva La Habana squatter settlement, were expropriated by the state during the dictatorship. The Don Bosco committee has one subsidized social housing project built in one of these plots—Villa Padre Rodrigo Carranza, inaugurated in 2009—in which 160 families formerly enrolled in the organization currently live. Nonetheless, there still hundreds of families wishing to stay in a territory that, back in the 1970s, their parents imagined as the place in which their individual and collective projects could be fully realized.



**Image 1. Autoconstruction in Campamento Nueva La Habana. Photo taken by Ted Polumbaum. Source: Polumbaum and Polumbaum (1992, 30).**



**Image 2. Don Bosco *Allegados* Committee protesting in front of the Secretary of Housing. Photo taken by the author, October, 2013.**

### Territorial rights as a legacy

For many of the members of the Don Bosco committee, their claim for the right to stay put in La Florida had a particular background: the arrival of the rich in that *comuna*. For these *pobladores*, such a phenomenon, materialized in a growing interests of real estate companies in building housing developments for upper-class families, was central to understanding the housing affordability problem of La Florida. I will quote one of the opinions I obtained in this regard:

“Here there are a lot of buildings for the rich but there is no social housing. You know, ‘money talks’ [*tú cachai, con la plata baila el mono*]... [the rich] think that we, the poor, ruin the landscape or that are going to rob... they think that they are the owners of the district [*se creen dueños de la comuna*]... the rich are invading this district. Private construction companies buy land to build houses that cost more than 80 millions of pesos [around U\$115,000]. So who is losing? We, the poor, are losing... why don’t I have the right to stay if I’ve lived all my life here? the rich weren’t even born here!” (Graciela, February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

“Why don’t have the right to stay if I’ve lived all my life here?”, Graciela told me as a means to question what she considered to be an expression of a class-based system of social injustice manifested in the “invasion” of the rich. Graciela’s territorial formulation of rights is actually a constitutive element of the political language developed by the housing assembly she takes part in. Don Bosco’s *pobladores* articulated such a claim by demanding the building of social housing units in some empty plots located inside the neighborhood, which they envisioned as belonging to those who are the direct descendants of the squatters who urbanized this area four decades ago. In such an endeavor, these new generations of housing activists made up a narrative by recognizing themselves as endowed with rights to the city acquired by their parents and grandparents through the autoconstruction processes.

The right-to-stay discourse is vividly expressed in one statement that I heard from Fresia. She was born in Nueva La Habana in 1974, lived most of her life as *allegada* in the “old *campamento*,” and now is a homeowner in Villa Padre Rodrigo Carranza, the first social housing project developed by the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco (Image 3). Back in the early 1970s, her parents and grandparents participated actively in the making of the Campamento Nueva La Habana, a fact that she looked at as a basis for her rights claiming. When I asked her to tell me her thoughts about Don Bosco’s struggle, she responded:

“I like it...we were born here so we have to stay here (...) One has to get a house where one was born, for our parents, because they struggled [for us]... My mom tells me that people installed street lights poles by themselves to have a better place to live. Back then people had neither running water nor electricity... my also grandfather worked in the self-defense militia...” (January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

Fresia concluded her narration by saying: “We have to stay here because Nueva La Habana is ours. This is what I think.” Her sense of belonging to Nueva La Habana/Nuevo Amanecer, which is widespread among Don Bosco’s *allegados*, discloses something that can be conceptually understood from Lefebvre’s (1996) right to the city:<sup>6</sup> the idea that urban dwellers, as producers of space, are able to propose a political agenda through which the city and its resources are reappropriated by its creators. Another ethnographic example will help me illustrate how Don Bosco’s *pobladores* articulate their right to the city.

<sup>6</sup> For a broader discussion on the right to the city, see Chapter II.



In March 2013, few months before I began to do my fieldwork, the Secretary of Housing told Don Bosco' *pobladores* that the construction of a subsidized housing project in one of the vacant plots in Nuevo Amanecer was not economically viable. *Pobladores* understood such a decision as a hoax since some years ago the Regional Service of Housing (SERVIU), through a letter of commitment, had promised them funds to develop the project regardless of the growing land prices. To reverse this unfortunate decision, *pobladores* took over the empty plot located on the northeast part of Nuevo Amanecer, right on the corner of Departamental Avenue and Tobalaba Avenue. The land seizure lasted almost seven months and, after the first days of the occupation, was sustained by three families who lived as squatters.



**Image 3. Villa Rodrigo Carranza, the first housing project developed by the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco in 2009. Photo taken by the author, June 2014.**

When I began to work with the Don Bosco *allegados* committee in August 2013, I immediately noticed that the occupation was primarily aimed to symbolically reclaim that space. There, *pobladores* told me that the main goal of the occupation was to put pressure on national authorities by letting Chilean public opinion know that the Sebastian Piñera's government "did not care about the poor." The takeover had in fact a high impact on public opinion and Don Bosco's leaders appeared several times on radio and T.V. demonstrating their frustration by the government decision. After some months of intense negotiations, the Secretary of Housing agreed to add more subsidies to this housing project, which meant that one hundred eighty Don Bosco's families could eventually have a house in that area.

The land seizure ended in December 2013 when a construction company began to excavate the plot to, in the future, do the process of soil treatment required for the building of the social housing units. When that happened, two families who did not want to live as *allegados* again, saw themselves forced to search for a place to install their shacks. "I don't want live at my mom's place again because she's really complicated," one of them assured me. In that search, on December 10<sup>th</sup> I accompanied them to talk to the priest of the neighborhood to ask for a room in a vacant space placed behind the chapel. However, he did not accept them. "I'm not authorized to have people residing illegally in the property managed by the church," he said. One of the women in need of home, Magaly, made an interesting statement when arguing with the priest: "You can't do this to us because you [the church] arrived [at the neighborhood] after *pobladores*. The community gave you the chance to have a space here. It was not the other way around."

Both Fresia and Magaly's assertions result from the subjective acknowledgment of *pobladores* as subjects who, by carrying out practices of city making, have not only played a crucial role in Santiago's urbanization but also acquired a political character allowing them to claim rights. For both of them, *pobladores'* performances have contributed to the improvement of the poor's living conditions by either materially making the neighborhood or demanding housing solutions within a district "invaded" by the rich. *Pobladores* advocate thus the right to exert a full control over the fate of a part of the city that, in light of their socio-spatial performances, is deemed their own. To do so, they legitimize their demand for rights to the city by thinking of themselves as city-makers or city-producers, a particular understanding of rights that James Holston (2008, 260) calls "contributor rights." *Pobladores'* advocacy for urban rights, in being detached from the actual making of homes and neighborhoods, is however analytically important since academic works tend to relate the emergence of new social imaginaries of rights to the material action of homebuilding (Holston 1991; 2008; Fawaz 2009; Das 2011; Caldeira 2015a; Caldeira 2015b).

Contemporary housing movements in Chile, in that sense, compel us to rethink the way this kind of legitimizing narrative comes into being. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that autoconstruction, even not being personally practiced, is seen as a foundational act allowing the urban the poor of the present to imagine themselves as *pobladores* endowed with agentival capacities. To this, I will now add that this process of city making functions also as source of legitimacy to claim rights since it enables current *pobladores* envision themselves as individuals belonging to a larger community whose historicity is framed by the making of a *población*. Autoconstruction works thus as a discursive instrument not only to bring into the present *pobladores'* transformative powers but also to allow for the constitution of the urban poor as legitimate rights bearers. As a result, a "contributor-rights" narrative—using Holston's terminology—emerges on the basis of the biographical link existing between past and present *pobladores'* struggles which, although being carried out in different temporalities, have the same residential spaces as the setting for their occurrence. This is what permits Don Bosco's *pobladores* to think of themselves as the heirs of the territorial rights acquired by their ancestors since 1970. This leads us to a critical conclusion: the political subjectivities stemming from autoconstruction processes that provide the poor with rights to the city can emerge even when large-scale performances of city making are absent.

### 3. Reconceptualizing the city making

After six months of taking part in the Don Bosco *allegados* committee, I decided to examine another housing assembly to look into how the right-to-stay discourse was articulated by *pobladores* who, in contrast to Don Bosco's, were not born in an autoconstructed *población*. The main goal of my new research stage was very straightforward: I wanted to explore how *pobladores* justified territorial claims over spaces that neither their parents nor grandparents helped build. I searched thus for a counter-case that allowed me to scrutinize where the "territorial demand" comes from when, unlike what I had observed in La Florida, there is no a biographical link between the actual makers of the neighborhood and the *pobladores* advocating rights over it. In February 2014, I contacted the Agrupación Techo Ahora, a grassroots organization affiliated with FENAPO that was formed in 2010 in La Pintana. Through my involvement in FENAPO's activities, I had met some of its members before, which made it easy to arrange interviews with them.

La Pintana is a southern peripheral district with a population of 202,000 residents (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social 2014c), most of which are working class. In specific terms,

55,1% of them are lower-middle class whereas 20,7% are poor (Cornejo 2012). The social composition of this *comuna* is mainly explained by the large-scale evictions of squatter settlements implemented during Pinochet's dictatorship, which resulted in building of subsidized housing projects in the extreme periphery.<sup>7</sup> According to Tapia (2011), in the 1980s La Pintana received more than 15,000 social housing units—mostly in the form of apartment blocks—, which must be understood as an expression of the new patterns of urban segregation derived from the neoliberal housing policies. These patterns, this authors argues, refer to the growing trend to locate social housing projects in southern areas of city, specifically in *comunas* like the already mentioned La Pintana, Puente Alto, San Bernardo, El Bosque, and La Granja (Map 3). Currently, more than 98% of the housing units in La Pintana are publicly-funded (Cornejo 2012), which makes it one of the most homogeneous districts in socioeconomic terms. With respect to the housing shortage, official data provided by the Municipality of Las Pintana reveals that, by 2015, 15,342 households were living as *allegados*, which represents 30% of the families residing in this district.

### **Techo Ahora *allegados* committee**

Techo Ahora is a housing assembly created in 2010 in La Pintana, specifically in Población San Ricardo. According to Lorena, the president of this organization, the housing affordability problem in La Pintana is the result of a political decision. Local authorities, in her words, “don't want more poor people living here” as a way to stop the socio-economic homogeneity that characterizes this district:

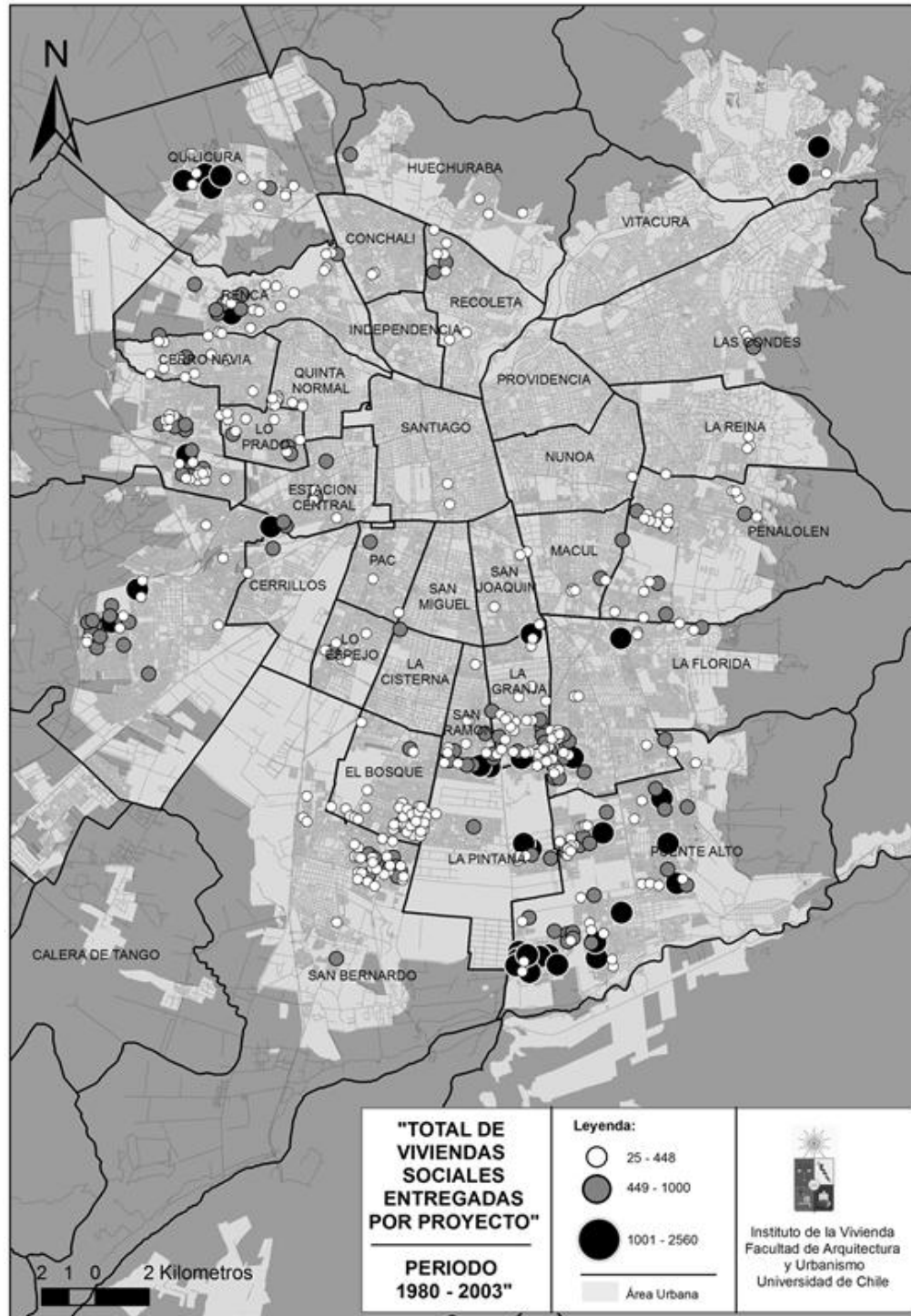
“They [local public servants] have said to us that La Pintana is one of the most marginalized districts because it has too many poor families. There is actually available land, but they [the municipality] want to develop middle-class-oriented housing projects” (July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

Techo Ahora is small if we compare it to Don Bosco since it has forty-two families enrolled, most of which live as *allegados* in the Población San Ricardo. The rest dwell in other La Pintana neighborhoods like Santo Tomás and San Rafael. San Ricardo, Santo Tomás, and El Castillo, just to mention some, are subsidized housing neighborhoods built in the 1980s. Because of the peripheral and highly segregated condition of the areas in which these *poblaciones* are situated, they (and their residents) have long been subject to widespread stigmatizing discourses. In a case study of the Población El Castillo, anthropologist Catalina Cornejo (2012) sees this territorial stigma as a form of symbolic violence in which everyday sufferings, in being misrepresented by stigmatizing social imaginaries, become invisible for the rest of society. She also argues that the stigmatizing discourses are often internalized by La Pintana's residents, a phenomenon that, she suggestively states, is far from being mechanical or passive as *pobladores* re-signify the terms through the territorial stigmatization occurs.

I could observe such a re-appropriation among La Pintana's *pobladores* who, even “internalizing” stigmatizing narratives on this district, are demanding the right to stay in this *comuna*. Miriam, who has lived all her life in La Pintana and is currently participating in Techo Ahora, admitted that, when applying for jobs, she usually avoids making explicit that her house is located in La Pintana. “When I'm asked about where I live, I sometimes answer La Florida or La Granja,” she, notoriously embarrassed, confessed. However, she wishes to keep residing in La

<sup>7</sup> In the mid-1980s, Miguel Budnik, a journalists working for the progressive journal *Hoy*, conducted a number of reports describing the subjective experiences of *pobladores* who, after being eradicated, were moved in semi-rural, peripheral areas by the dictatorship. These reports gave rise to the book *Los Marginados* (Budnik 1986).

Pintana, a *comuna* that she and the rest of Techo Ahora's members are deeply attached to. "I'm used to living in La Pintana and I like it. Some people say that La Pintana is a bad neighborhood... well, there are actually bad people, but there are also good and hardworking people," she proudly affirmed, maybe as a way to vindicate herself from what she had previously said. How to account for this sense of belonging to severely stigmatized *poblaciones* which, in contrast the case of La Florida I presented above, were not autoconstructed?



Map 3. Social housing units built by housing project, 1980-2003. Source: Tapia (Tapia 2011, 127).

For *pobladores* who were born and/or raised in subsidized housing projects in La Pintana, family memories are not framed by events related to collective practices of city making but, rather, by the fact of being eradicated from central areas to the periphery. Such a phenomenon implied that poor families, after applying individually for state subsidies, were assigned a housing unit without being able to decide either its location or the people they wanted to have as neighbors. Becoming homeowners on the city margins entailed therefore a series of traumatic occurrences in which *pobladores* had to both re-accommodate their life projects and remake their social networks. “My neighbors came from different Santiago’s districts like Pudahuel, Peñalolén, Puente Alto, and Lo Espejo,” told me Nicolás, a Techo Ahora’s activist who is in his early thirties. He also assured me that it was in the 1980s when prospective homeowners began increasingly to say “*me salió casa en...*” (“I received a house in...”) to refer to the promising, although uncertain event of becoming homeowner in a strange land. That phrase is indicative as it reveals two main ideological principles of the neoliberal housing policies: a) the understanding of social housing as a commodity whose acquisition relies on the capacity of each family to both save money and apply for state subsidies privately; that is to say, on the urban poor’s aptitude for behaving as rational economic agents; and b) the idea of housing as a consumption good to be “received” by passive individuals through the market rather than—following Lefebvre (1996)—as an *oeuvre* collectively “made” by active city-makers.

These emerging peripheral *poblaciones* like those of La Pintana were composed of families who, not knowing each other at the time of their arrival, had thus to deal with an unfriendly environment that most of the time lacked social services and appropriate public infrastructure. Nicolás, raised in the Población Santo Tomás, depicted such a process with an ironic, although telling anecdote:

“When we got here [in the late 1980s], there was a playground. It was really beautiful! Some military dictatorship’s authorities came to inaugurate it, but one week later they packed all the equipment up and took them away. I promise you! Then that place became a wasteland (*peladero*) and remained like that for fifteen years” (February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

Mauricio, a founding member of Techo Ahora, went through similar life experiences when he moved in Población San Ricardo in 1983. He was born in the well-known Población La Victoria (see Chapter II and III) in the late 1960s and his grandparents participated keenly in the autoconstruction of that neighborhood. However, Mauricio’s parents, tired of living as *allegados*, decided to acquire a subsidized housing in the early 1980s, which led them to leave what had been their *población* for more than two decades. La Pintana, Mauricio pointed out, is “practically a garbage dump (*botadero*) for the poor. In the 1980s and 1990s—he went on—the state sent poor people to live here in the periphery. My family is part of those who got here in that period.” Like Nicolás’, Mauricio’s memories of the process of coming in his new *población* is full of descriptions accounting for the unfinished, incomplete, and deficient quality of the area in which his family sought to reorganize its lifestyle and reconstruct its biographical project. He, similar to Nicolás’ portrait, depicts his new neighborhood as a “wasteland” (*peladero*):

“Logically when we arrive at San Ricardo there was no grass, no pavement, and no trees. There was nothing. This was a damn wasteland. Gabriela Avenue had only one lane... there was even a chicken coop nearby!” (February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

### City making without autoconstruction

It is precisely this lack of services and infrastructure what has made eradicated *pobladores* generate a sense of attachment to spaces initially seen as “wastelands.” Given that at the time of their arrival “there was nothing,” new residents had to make everything. This making goes certainly beyond the material building of a *población* as performed in autoconstruction processes. In the subsidized housing neighborhoods, instead, this making refers mainly to the set of community practices through which *pobladores* seek to improve the condition of habitability of their residential and community spaces, which allows them to produce a meaningful connection to their district. As the state marginalized *pobladores* by providing them with segregated and low-quality housing solutions, they have had to make them livable by building up a strong community capable of struggling for common issues. This requires the constitution of an emotional bonding with a territory, which, once developed, works as an argument to claim urban rights such as the right to stay in La Pintana or the right to live in a *barrio digno* (“dignified neighborhood”).<sup>8</sup> Nicolás gave me an insightful statement in this regard:

“Although we did not autoconstruct our houses, we do produce them on a daily basis [*nosotros las producimos a diario*]. We make sense [*le damos sentido*] of everything that surrounds our homes. That’s why we have a sense of belonging as rooted as that of those people who built their homes... We, like them, ‘constructed’ [our homes] while living there” (February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

The very history of Techo Ahora *allegados* committee can be understood as a political outcome of the development of a symbolic attachment to a subsidized housing neighborhood. Its founders were mostly neighbors in San Ricardo who, before forming this housing assembly, had helped set up a cultural center, the Galpón Cultural (“Cultural Warehouse”). This was venue in which a variety of youth organizations—from soccer supporters to rock and hip-hop musicians—gathered together around gigs, workshops, film festival, etc. Mauricio told me that they were not interested in participating in the cultural center run by the municipality for it functioned under the logic of a patronizing politics in which local politicians allowed *pobladores* to take part in those instances as long as they supported them electorally. “For that reason—he recalled—in 2006 we decided to create a self-managed cultural center to develop social activities by ourselves.”

In such an endeavor, they took over an abandoned plot within San Ricardo that, like other unoccupied areas in Santiago’s peripheries, had become a small illegal landfill because of municipal negligence. Using that renewed space as the organization’s headquarters, the Galpón Cultural started to work as a meeting point for activists, social leaders, and “common neighbors” (*vecinos comunes*). These, in addition to enjoying cultural events, began also to deliberate upon and demand what Castells (1983, xviii) calls “collective consumption,” namely, “goods and services directly or indirectly provided by the state.” In these circumstances, in 2009 Galpón Cultural’s members engaged with a series of popular assemblies (*cabildos*) through which different grassroots organizations sought to discuss the main problems affecting La Pintana’s *pobladores* such as the lack of public spaces, the need for adequate cultural resources, among others. In these gatherings, one of the topics that came out more often was the lack of affordable housing for *allegados*. Mauricio and Lorena, both of which took part in these *cabildos*, agreed that this housing shortage was seen as an opportunity for creating Techo Ahora. Lorena, indeed, told me that it was after carrying out these assemblies when they made the decision to form an *allegados* committee:

<sup>8</sup> I will analyze the utilization of the signifier “dignity” in *pobladores*’ political language thoroughly in Chapter V.

“Back then we said: ‘although we have no idea about housing policies, we have to channel this demand.’ We did so because there were many people who were not receiving any support from the municipality in terms of how to apply subsidies, how to deal with SERVIU [Regional Service of Housing], etc.” (July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

Techo Ahora’s members’ political involvement raises a crucial question: how to analyze these *pobladores*’ socio-spatial performances in terms of city making? I hold that this case illustrates what Lefebvre (1991) defines as the social production of space, i.e., as the process in which residents impugn hegemonic conceptualizations of space through the development of subversive spatial practices. By performing them, they not only create new senses and meanings to envision and signify space but also space itself becomes as an object over which they can claim rights to the city. According to Mauricio, for a long time the municipality did not take care of a San Ricardo’s soccer field, which eventually became an illegal landfill. However, Mauricio and his neighbors worked jointly to turn it into a productive space by conducting cultural events for the community within it. In that sense, their practices were not only related to setting up materially a deserted land for neighborhood activities but also to bringing new social dynamics into it; dynamics that were the condition of possibility for *pobladores* to deliberate upon public affairs. In other words, these residents were those who—borrowing Lefebvre’s (1996) terminology—added *use value*<sup>9</sup> to an area that had been left behind by the local administration.

Once I was at Mauricio’s house, he, pointing to the soccer field, told me that Techo Ahora is currently claiming to have a housing project built in there. His demand was predicated precisely on the fact that, he argued, this *allegados* committee had contributed to the revitalization (*recuperación*) of this piece of land by taking part in community-based actions. In a very lefebvrian formulation, he was essentially advocating rights over a space that is understood as an *oeuvre* belonging to those who produced them. This indicates that the act of making space, when it comes to linking it to the demand for rights to the city, entails not only the building of, quoting Lefebvre, the *city* but also the construction of the *urban*: that is to say, what is made is not only a “practico-material and architectural fact” (Lefebvre 1996, 103) but also a “a mental and social form, that of simultaneity, of gathering, of convergence, of encounter (or rather, encounters)” (Lefebvre 1996, 131). In that sense, although Techo Ahora’s members cannot recognize themselves as descendants their neighborhood’s autoconstructors, they conceive of the act of subversively creating a space where new social relations arise as the source of legitimacy for their demand for territorial rights.

In Nicolás’ view, for instance, the mere fact of inhabiting—in being the necessary condition for space to acquire a use value appropriated as an exchange value by capitalist urbanization—enables *pobladores* to articulate a right to the city discourse. He thus understands Techo Ahora’s struggle as that of working-class producers of space endeavoring to take back what they have made. He elaborated on that idea in the following way:

“We give use value [to things], but they [capitalists] give economic value to them. It wouldn’t make any sense to have schools, hospitals, etc. in this district if there are no people who use them. None of them would have any [economic] value if we don’t give them use value” (February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

The case just discussed permits us to expand our understanding of the relationship between city-making processes and the emergence of a rights-based language among contemporary *pobladores*. If in autoconstructed *poblaciones* the making of what Lefebvre calls the *city* and the *urban*, in being framed by large-scale housing movements, occurs at the same

<sup>9</sup> See more in Chapter II.



time, in subsidized housing neighborhoods the making of latter prevails over the former given the absence of massive autoconstruction processes. Hence, when associating city making performances with the formulation of urban rights, we must consider both the materiality of space and the social relations that symbolically produce it as two different, yet interwoven dimensions whose modalities of assemblage may vary historically.

#### 4. Rights, citizenship, and politics of effort

Thus far I have shown how two different types of city making have given rise to dissimilar formulations of what the National Federation of *Pobladores* conceptualizes as “territorial demand.” I first discussed the case of Don Bosco’s *pobladores* for whom autoconstruction functions as an argument to claim rights insofar as it connects contemporary urban activists’ personal biographies to a historically grounded and geographically situated collective memory. This enables the Comité de Allegados don Bosco envision its struggle for the right to stay in La Florida as that of those who are legitimate heirs of territorial rights acquired by the autoconstructors of the past. Then I examined Techo Ahora’s *allegados* committee as a counter-case permitting me to interrogate how this territorial demand is developed by *pobladores* who, instead of living in autoconstructed neighborhoods, reside in subsidized housing *poblaciones*. For these activists, as explained above, the idea of city making entails no longer the construction of homes but strong communities committed to the betterment of neighborhoods that, they assert, have been systematically left behind by the state. For these *pobladores*, their community-oriented social actions add use value to residential spaces, which allows them to construe their neighborhood as belonging to those who socially and symbolically, rather than materially, produce them on a daily basis. This sense of attachment developed by communities seeking to improve their living conditions is at the core of the political narratives through which Techo Ahora’s *allegados* advocate the right to stay. As producers of space, their right-to-the-city struggle is essentially related to appropriating what Lefebvre (1996) terms the *urban*.

In this last section I will demonstrate that these two cases shed light on some theoretical elements enabling us to discuss the concept of urban citizenship. I have already showed how contemporary *pobladores*, by conceiving of themselves as city-makers or city-producers from a framework in which the making does not rely on autoconstruction, have articulated a right-to-stay narrative to fight exclusionary housing policies. In what follows I will problematize to what extent such a subjective recognition permits them to rethink both their membership in the political community and the rights they are endowed with. To do so, I will first give a brief conceptual discussion about urban citizenship to, then, return to the Don Bosco *allegados* committee so as to depict ethnographically how this concept reveals itself in the political practices of this housing assembly’s members. There, I will elaborate on what I call politics of effort to account for the close relationship existing between, on the one hand, *pobladores*’ self-understanding as political agents—an aspect that I examined in detail in Chapter III—and, on the other hand, the utilization of the signifier “effort” as a notion framing their rights claiming.

#### Urban citizenship

According to Holston and Appadurai (1996, 188), the urban expansion of the late twentieth century has led the city to become the “strategic arena” for reconstructing the notion of citizenship and, furthermore, expanding it upon a new social basis. They point out that, since urbanization came along with the persistence of social inequalities, urban growth has contributed to the emergence of mass mobilizations struggling for social inclusion by claiming rights to the



city. Holston (2008), in this regard, depicts ethnographically how housing movements in São Paulo's peripheries have reconfigured social understandings of citizenship in creating an alternative public sphere of civic participation that he calls "insurgent citizenship." As a kind of urban citizenship, Holston argues, this insurgent citizenship is a form of political membership—and, therefore, a system of distribution of rights—that presents three main characteristics: a) it deems the city, rather than the nation, as the foremost political community; b) the political membership is thus defined by residency rather than nationality; c) the rights to be distributed are understood as rights to the city.

Holston's approach can be complemented with Veena Das' (2011) analysis of citizenship, which derives from her study of squatters of Noida, India. Das is particularly interested in elucidating the manner the notion of rights is evoked among the urban poor who, based on the idea that the state has promised them certain rights, articulate their political protest. Das suggests that citizenship is a "claim rather than a status" (2011, 320) for claims to citizenship are not determined by formal legal procedures but, rather, by the act of demanding rights through which squatters seek to justify the provision of legal protection regardless of their informal residential condition. Das' arguments enable us to question some theoretical efforts proposing normative, even utopian, models of urban citizenship that do not allow for an empirical observation of the mechanisms by means of which urban dwellers' claims for rights generate novel conceptualizations of citizenship (e.g. Beauregard and Bounds 2000). Das' account, as well as Holston's and Appadurai's, turn out to be helpful to relate the rise of types of urban citizenship to the formation of social agencies through which the urban poor construe themselves as subjects of rights.

In the preceding chapter I argued that the term *poblador* is a political category that, in view of its performative character, allows for the formation of political subjectivities in different historical circumstances. I therefore conducted a genealogical analysis of this category paying special attention to how its agentive dimension, initially constituted through large-scale performances of city making, is currently rearticulated by new generations of housing activists. I also pointed out that contemporary *pobladores* recreate the agency anchored in the term *poblador* by both reclaiming the legacy of past housing movements and generating an effort-based discourse through which they make sense of their condition of poor inhabitants. Now I will argue that such a process of rearticulation has crucial political outcomes. *Pobladores'* self-recognition as hardworking and deserving city-makers not only means that they see themselves as subjects who, regardless of their social status, merit dignity and equal treatment. It also entails that the urban poor, by linking their political subjectivity to a sort of trans-historical agency embedded in the category *poblador*, envision themselves as subjects deserving rights; rights that, as explained in the preceding sections, are understood as directly bound up with *pobladores'* performances of city making.

### Politics of effort

Don Bosco's leaders say often to their social basis *sólo los que luchan, ganan* ("only those who struggle, win") to make clear that housing, as any other right, is something to be acquired through an active sociopolitical involvement. Many times I heard that those who do not struggle hand in hand with other *pobladores* are not *pobladores-pobladores* ("real *pobladores*" see Chapter III) or that they "do not deserve a house." Working-class individuals' view of themselves as subjects of rights is thus closely linked to a sense of commitment to their families, their housing assemblies, and their neighborhoods.

*Pobladores'* advocacy for rights rest fundamentally on what I term "politics of effort," that is, on the construction of a broad narrative on personal and collective effort through which they create ethical and political judgments about the urban poor and, as a result, reformulate social perceptions of citizenship and rights. This politics of effort allows *pobladores* not only to consider themselves legitimate subjects of rights but also to establish discursive and practical mechanisms to differentiate those who are worthy of rights and those who are not. This kind of urban politics relies on two interwoven understandings of effort. (1) On the one hand, it is envisaged in a political manner, which can be conceptualized as disposition to "struggle" (*luchar*). This political meaning of effort, in being associated with the act of rights claiming, helps *pobladores* produce discursive definitions establishing the social and political conditions needed for individuals to *exert* their rights. (2) On the other hand, effort is construed in an ethical fashion, which is well expressed in the idea of "sacrifice" (*sacrificio*). By thinking of effort from this ethical framework, *pobladores* manage internal conflicts within their housing committees on the basis of a moral definition of who "deserves" rights.

### **Effort as struggle**

To talk about the political dimension of effort, I will draw on a very tense, although revealing event I experienced in fieldwork. On a Saturday of March 2014, Don Bosco's leadership had scheduled a meeting at 8:00 pm with around sixty *allegados* who had gotten involved in the organization just three months ago. The new members were all relatives or friend of older ones, a fact deliberately arranged so as to, quoting Rafael, "keep the sense of community of this *allegados* committee and avoid the arrival of unwanted people like drug dealers or rapists." As usual during that summer, *pobladores* had agreed to get together at Villa Rodrigo Carranza's five-a-side soccer field (*multicancha*) rather than at the community center. The latter, a venue specially designed for gatherings like this, was too small to congregate everyone who was expected to attend.

When I got to the assembly, Rafael, notoriously angry and exasperated, was discussing with eight young guys who, I guessed, were in their early twenties. They were playing soccer when Rafael asked them to leave to start the assembly. Before this incident, I had seen them hanging out in public spaces while consuming drugs and drinking beer. They were intimidating not only to me but also to many neighbors who secretly complained about their public behavior. The people I got to know in Villa Rodrigo Carranza regarded them as troublemakers. Either way, the quarrel began when some of the new members, assuming that the meeting would start at the set time, entered the playing court, which provoked a violent reaction on the part of the players. In seeing that, Rafael, taking on his position as a social leader, vigorously confronted them, which made him the target of the bullies' threat. If Nona and Irma—two members of Don Bosco's leadership—had not had the courage to intervene in such a dispute, it certainly would have ended up in a fight since Rafael did not hesitate to defy the crew by himself. Finally, the young players found themselves obliged to abandon the soccer field and Rafael could start the meeting around 8:20 pm, but not without apologizing for his reaction: "I'm really sorry for my behavior—he said to Don Bosco's new applicants—but if I don't get arrogant (*"si no me pongo arrogante"*) with these guys, I'll have a drug dealer living next to my children tomorrow."

After Nona and Irma's pacifying intervention, I approached them to talk about the confrontation. To account for the incident, Nona said: "these guys are in their right to use the field because they are neighbors. If they were from elsewhere it would be different. But they are neighbors and, ultimately, the field is to play, so next time we should have our meeting at the

community center.” That opinion was strongly criticized by Irma who, with the passion that characterizes her, stated: “these *huevones* (morons) don’t do anything for the soccer field. It is in really bad conditions. You can see how it is. It doesn’t have lights to play at night and the goals are terrible. I have invited them to meetings to get it fixed but they don’t show up, so they don’t have any right to use it.”

Irma’s understanding of rights, i.e., as a prerogative acquired through a subjective involvement in public affairs, is widespread among Don Bosco’s *pobladores*. In fact, their self-perception as subjects of rights is predicated essentially upon the fact that they conceive of themselves as socially excluded dwellers who have to “struggle” on a daily basis to make a living. The signifier struggle is thus fundamental to capturing the full range of political practices realized by them, which include both the explicit claim for rights in the political arena and general demands for better living conditions for the poor. In that sense, along with advocating the right to housing, urban activists’ political discourses are also organized around critical judgments about Chile’s levels of social inequality, which engenders a particular view of the poor as a dispossessed population whose rights have been denied by a neoliberal society.

In the beginning of 2014, Fresia was really concern about her nineteen-year old son whom had to decide his academic future. He had graduated from high school in December 2013 and wanted to pursue undergraduate studies. He was notoriously excited with the idea of becoming a college student so he habitually asked me about grant opportunities and university programs that might fit in with his interests. However, Fresia, who worked as a self-employed dressmaker with her mother, felt frustrated with the fact that she simply did not have money to pay for his son’s education; a disappointment that is broadly linked to her incapacity to access social rights which, in Chile, have been systematically privatized over the past thirty years. In her opinion: “if my son doesn’t study this year, he will have to pay again for the PSU.<sup>10</sup> You see? That is already a struggle. If you don’t struggle you got nothing... I don’t know. This country never considers the poor [but] always the rich. For example, my son... even having a lot of interest in studying, he can’t because we don’t have money... that happens even in health care too: if you don’t have money, you simply die.”

In her view, similar to those of others, *pobladores*’ existence as poor residents oblige them to be predisposed to struggle to “make ends meet” (*parar la olla*). Such a predisposition is based on a social class-based understanding of effort: the poor, in being incapable of acquiring commodities freely on the market given their material conditionings, have necessarily to exert themselves more than the rich to get them. To feed their families and have a minimum standard of living, the poor must work extra hours, have two or three (precarious) jobs, and be willing to get loans and credits with predatory interest rates from retail companies.<sup>11</sup> For *pobladores*, all of that involves an everyday struggle inasmuch as that is the only way to subvert the system of inequality that structures Chilean society. That is why *pobladores*, when giving opinions on effort and inequality, frequently bring up comments on those who “do not struggle” like them to earn a living. Opinions on the rich work thus to objectify those people who have no disposition to carry out a political struggle as their economic power allow them to easily satisfy their material needs. In *pobladores*’ opinion, bourgeois individuals do not “necessitate” to struggle for rights since they have economic resources to take care of their welfare. In Ana’s opinion,

<sup>10</sup> Spanish acronym for University Selection Test. PSU is a national exam taken by students just graduated from high school who want to pursue college programs.

<sup>11</sup> For a captivating ethnographic account of the indebted existence of Chile’s urban poor, see Clara Han’s work (2012).

“Why would they [the rich] struggle? They won’t do that because they have money from inheritances they are giving [to their relatives]; if your dad gives you an inheritance, you’ll do the same with your son... [On the contrary], *pobladores*, for me, are those who struggle for what they want to have” (January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

Both Fresia’s and Ana’s statement refer back to what I discussed in Chapter III, namely, the idea that the category *poblador*, rather than being a predefined working-class identity, alludes to a political agency than can be rearticulated on the basis of socially valued everyday practices. Fresia and Ana, like most of the people I interviewed, understand *pobladores* as working-class individuals who are strongly committed to their families, which requires a subjective involvement in collective struggles like that of housing committees. For them, the very act of mobilizing for rights is the precondition for *pobladores*’ legitimate existence as political agents capable of addressing a rights-based language to the state. This understanding of citizenship rights takes us to a critical issue: although *pobladores* do emphasize the universal character of social rights, they stress that these rights should not be provided for free by the state. The demand for free education that became popular after the 2011 student movement is, in this regard, highly questioned by them. “Why would the rich have a free education if they’ve got money to pay for it?” I heard many times when discussing this matter with *pobladores*. This premise is also valid for housing: if each family taking part in an *allegados* committee, along with applying for state subsidies, has to save money to become homeowner, why would anyone get a house for free? This idea was suggestively articulated by Irma who, with respect to the right to housing, says:

“Maybe housing is a right for everyone because everyone should have a place to live... [but] you have to struggle for it because you can’t have everything given as a gift” (February 4<sup>th</sup> 2014).

### **Effort as personal sacrifice**

The signifier effort is also conceptualized as a “sacrifice,” a connotation that derives from *pobladores*’ understanding of their everyday practices as framed by a society that allocates differentiated opportunities among its members. In this case, the concept of effort comprises an ethical dimension that results in moral condemnations of those *pobladores* who have not sacrificed themselves enough to, broadly speaking, “get ahead” (*salir adelante*) in life. The idea of sacrifice is thus understood as a defining aspect of *pobladores*’ subjectivity: they must “sweat blood” (*sacarse la cresta*) to survive. In this context, those individuals who do not sacrifice themselves like other *pobladores* are subject to moral criticism reaching even to the point of denying their condition of rights-bearers. *Pobladores*’ maxim would therefore be “rights for those who sacrifice themselves,” an imperative that has allowed Don Bosco’s members to manage conflicts associated with how to distribute rights fairly among them. I will flesh out this point through two ethnographic experiences.

The first one has as a backdrop the empty plot located on the corner of Departamental Avenue and Tobalaba Avenue over which Don Bosco’s families are claiming territorial rights. As shown above, this *allegados* committee took it over in March 2013 as a way to demand the construction of social housing units in an area that, they argue, belongs to the residents of Población Nuevo Amanecer. Nonetheless, Don Bosco’s families were not the only ones living illegally in that vacant plot. Around fifteen years prior to this occupation, a woman, who is a former member of this housing assembly, began to dwell as a squatter in a wooden shack whose main entrance faced Tobalaba Avenue. Don Bosco’s *allegados* told me that she had been

expelled out of the organization because her performance in her duties—especially concerning attendances to assemblies and payment of fees—was deplorable. According to *pobladores*, if it were not for her lack of commitment, now she would be living as a homeowner in Villa Padre Rodrigo Carranza, the first Don Bosco’ housing project built. Nevertheless, this woman decided to overcome her situation of *allegada* by becoming a squatter without the support of any housing assembly. Don Bosco’s members never saw her presence as a problem. She lived off the vegetables and other products she sold as a self-employed grocer, a job that she carried out precisely at her shack. But everything changed in November 2013, when the Regional Service of Housing (SERVIU) let the Don Bosco committee know that the process of soil treatment—a necessary step for the construction of the social housing units—would start in the next month. The squatter, advocating rights of possession, sought to legalize her residential condition between 2005 and 2007, but she did not succeed. In the following years, she attempted to acquire title deeds again but her request was equally rejected.

By November 2013, the situation was critical for Don Bosco’s *pobladores*. They were afraid that the physical presence of this squatter delayed the process of soil treatment. “How could such a task be done if she denies leaving?” they constantly asked SERVIU’s public servants the dozens of times we met to address this issue. The construction company came in the plot in early December but the squatter was still living there. As she could not formalize her de facto settlement, she changed strategy and began to call for a new demand: she now wanted to receive a housing unit in the project that the Don Bosco *allegados* committee was developing for that empty plot. “She is a shameless person; she wants a house for free!” *pobladores* often uttered to complain about the women’s attitudes. To make their argument stronger, they even criticized the fact that she was running a small grocery store without paying for taxes. At a meeting in the Secretary of Housing, a leader of Don Bosco, when talking to a professional of that public office, said: “She is making profit out of her illegality because she doesn’t pay taxes. She’s economically exploiting that space for her own interest. This is preventing one hundred eighty families from becoming homeowners.”

To compel the unlawful resident to abandon that piece of land, SERVIU even offered her a social housing apartment in another district, but she rejected it arguing that she desired to stay in La Florida. At the time of writing this chapter, she continued to dwell as a squatter regardless of a court order commanding her eviction. However, her expulsion seems to be just a matter of time. Before going through the second example, I just want to mention that this incident turns out to be interesting as it discloses *pobladores*’ understanding of rights as entitlements acquired through personal sacrifice. “Why should this woman have rights over Población Nuevo Amanecer’s empty plots if—a *pobladores* argued—she is not sacrificing herself for housing like us?” For Don Bosco’s *allegados*, the squatter is not morally questioned because of her legal condition but, rather, because of her lack of commitment to her former housing assembly; that is to say, to the group and, ultimately, to the community. That is why she was called “shameless” (*sinvergüenza*) or “free-rider” (*aprovechadora*), two terms expressing that the object of ethical criticisms is less her form of inhabitation than her attitude of claiming rights without “sweating blood.” “Why should she—*pobladores* would say—have the same rights as people who, to become homeowners, spend time taking part in housing committees where they have to pay for monthly fees during six or seven years, waste time on tedious assemblies, and save money as required by housing policies?”

*Pobladores*’ perspectives on how rights should be distributed challenge thus the very ideological grounds of modern, liberal formulations of citizenship for which rights are allocated

on the basis of individuals' formal membership in a political community. For *pobladores*, this political membership makes no sense when who claims rights does not behave in accordance with what they understand as a selfless commitment to the family and the neighborhood. As a result, the moral disapproval of those who do not act appropriately becomes the main criterion of rights distribution insofar it helps housing activists delimitate those who "deserve" (*merecen*) rights and those who do not. The second ethnographic illustration is telling on this point since it depicts how Don Bosco's *allegados* have internally managed the problem of rights allocation.

Every housing assembly faces a serious difficulty when it comes to deciding in what house/apartment their prospective homeowners will eventually reside. This turns out to be a sort of paradox that can be expressed in the following question: which families have the right to choose first where they want to live if all of them, in being members of the same organization, are supposed to have equal rights? To solve this problem, the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco generated an evaluation system through which the leadership can measure "objectively" the performance of each *poblador* enrolled in the assembly in the terms of the effort that he/she makes in the struggle for housing. The assessment scale uses two criteria to evaluate people's behavior: commitment and participation, the former related to being up-to-date with monthly payments and the latter to being keenly engaged in the committee's activities. It functions more or less like this: if one acts properly—e.g. paying for the committee fees on time—he/she will receive one point, which is written down in a notebook utilized exclusively for that purpose. On the contrary, if one person does not behave in accordance with the committee's internal rules—e.g. missing assemblies, marches, public demonstrations, etc.—he/she will not be given any mark. This system is pretty straightforward: the better one acts, the more points one gets.

Does this evaluation mechanism conceive of each *poblador*, following Macpherson's (Macpherson 1962, 3) work on liberalism, as "a moral whole, nor as part of a larger social whole, but as an owner of himself"? Not at all. As I explained in Chapter II, the Don Bosco committee is split into smaller affinity groups—called *comunidades*—made up of groups of three to twenty persons who plan to live next to each other when the housing projects are built. To allow these *comunidades* to preserve the community-based relationships that their members have previously developed, this grassroots organization established that the decision of where each individual will eventually reside—either on what street/alley or in what apartment building—would be collectively made. This leads to a critical point: although the assessment system operates on the basis of a scrutiny of each person's behavior, the right to select where to live is not left to the individual him/herself but, rather, the affinity group. Accordingly, the defining criteria for determining who will "gain" this right is not each *poblador*' score but the sum of the scores of those belonging to a *comunidad*, which means that the affinity group with the highest score will be able to choose first. This has an important consequence in the way *pobladores* interact with each other: everyone, in being member of a *comunidad*, is supposed to act properly so as not to lower the points of the group she/he takes part in.

This mechanism of rights distribution has given rise to internal tensions between the "best" and the "worst" affinity groups. These conflicts take generally the form of public condemnations of specific individuals who are considered to be "lazy," "selfish," or "opportunistic." These moral appraisals are common in general assemblies, especially when the more energetic activists seek to legitimize themselves as subjects whose opinions are more valid than those of others who are not actively engaged in the organization. In that sense, the most committed *pobladores* see themselves as deserving more rights (to housing, to speak in public, to be heard, etc.) than others.

That perspective on rights led even to the expulsion of some *pobladores* given their “lack of commitment to the struggle for housing.” Many of them—making use of a prerogative established in the Community Organizations Law<sup>12</sup>—showed up at Don Bosco’s general assemblies to vindicate themselves and avoided being expelled. Since the final decision is on the part of the general assembly, I observed that *pobladores* seeking exoneration tried often to convince the audience that they had good reasons not to come to the meetings or to be behind in their payments. I saw such a rite of exculpation twenty or more times and only rarely did the assembly allowed the expelled people to continue to participate in the organization. For instance, on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013 a young woman who had been notified of her expulsion came in to ask for forgiveness. She had been absent for more than six months because she had been out of town. Considering that such an absence would surely have a negative effect on the final score of her affinity group, even some members of her *comunidad* wanted her out of the committee. One of them, after hearing her arguments, said: “If you can’t come you have to at least let us know. Who knows that you really were out of town and not hidden at home?” He went on: “All of us have problems to come. We all work, study, and have children, but we come anyway.” The verbal dispute escalated and, after realizing that she had no options to be reintegrated, the young girl shouted: “you’re denying me the right to housing” (*me están negando el derecho al techo*). By August 2015, more than forty members had actually been expelled, all of whom had been granted state subsidies. This implies that they are no longer able to become homeowners unless enrolling in another *allegados* organization and applying, again, for subsidies. Such an outcome, yet tragic for those who were disfranchised, is however conceived of by Don Bosco’s *pobladores* as an expected result of a morally unacceptable lack of personal sacrifice of those who simply “don’t deserve rights.”

### 5. *Pobladores* as urban citizens

Chile’s Political Constitution of 1980, in its Chapter III (“Constitutional Rights and Duties”), does not recognize housing as a right. Instead, it proclaims the right to reside without restraint everywhere in the country as an expression of the rights to individual liberty. Until now I have shown that *pobladores*’ mobilizations have challenged such a conceptualization by conceiving of housing, as well as the very fact of staying in their districts, as rights that must be guaranteed by the state. To do so, they have developed emerging right-to-the-city mobilizations through which housing struggles has been reframed on a territorial basis in a context in which market-based policies distribute housing subsidies among the poor on a large scale. *Pobladores*’ political imagination seems, at the same time, to question modern formulations of citizenship while expressing an incipient urban-based formulation of citizenship. For them, rights are not prerogatives “passively enjoyable”—an aspect that Walzer (Walzer 1989, 216) sees as characteristic of regimes of citizenship like the liberal one—since the actual demand for rights appears to be the condition for their exercise. As a result, *pobladores* look at themselves as legitimate rights-bearers not because of their formal membership in a national political community but because of their active participation in urban politics, which has allowed them to “gain” rights to the city. It is this “substantive” dimension of citizenship (Holston and Appadurai 1996, 190), as opposed to the formal one, which helps them establish criteria for allocating rights: their capacity for rights is reserved for those who *luchan* (struggle). The right-to-stay narrative developed by new generations of *pobladores* turns out to be significant in this regard as it is grounded in the recognition of generative capacity of the urban poor expressed, for instance,

<sup>12</sup> Ley 19,418 de Juntas de Vecinos y Organizaciones Comunitarias.

in the material autoconstruction of houses and neighborhoods as well as in the symbolic production of space.

Nationality, to be clear on this point, is not totally absent in *pobladores'* discourse. National emblems such as the national anthem or the Chilean flag, as I have depicted in this dissertation, have long been distinctive symbols utilized by the urban poor when performing protests and public demonstrations. However, it is striking to observe that *pobladores*, when it comes to distributing rights among the members of housing committees, think of the acquisition of rights as essentially a matter of effort, struggle, and sacrifice. In other words: in *pobladores'* political discourses every Chilean, just for being citizens of that country, has the right to housing. Nonetheless, such as I have discussed here, that prerogative appears to be reserved just for those who “deserve” it. The presence of immigrants with permanent residency in Chile is revealing in this regard. When I asked people “Why do you think you have rights?” many of them answered, “Because I’m Chilean.” Then, I replied: “Fair enough, but what happens with Peruvian families who take part in the committee? Would not they have rights due to their nationality?” Here is one of the people’s answers:

“To apply for subsidies, they [Peruvians] had also to do a lot of paperwork... a lot of paperwork, so they also have rights because they also have sacrificed themselves and have families [like us]. It doesn’t really matter if you are Chilean or Peruvian” (Graciela, February 10<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Does *pobladores'* politics of effort mean that they have passively internalized a neoliberal ethic based upon ideologies of self-governing, self-sufficiency and individual sovereignty? Not necessarily. Two elements will help me elaborate on this point. First, I have discussed that *pobladores'* conceptualization of effort derives from the execution of community-based social practices. It is precisely such a modality of social action what permits them to collectively struggle for the right to stay put, which is a demand that the state cannot meet without profoundly changing the neoliberal character of subsidy-based policies. Second, when alluding to the housing affordability in La Florida, *pobladores* articulate a class-based understanding of social conflict: if there is no housing for the poor is, paraphrasing a *pobladora*, because the rich are “invading the district.” Thus, the category “effort” must be examined as a signifier whose utilization in the urban poor’s political language, rather than expressing the formation of neoliberal subjectivities, accounts for how concepts can be reappropriated by social movements and, accordingly, acquire transformative meanings and senses. This is what Judith Butler, when asserting that speech acts are open to subversive resignification, suggestively calls the “*expropriability* of the dominant... discourse” (Butler 1997, 157, emphasis in the original).

This latter point does not entail that contemporary housing mobilizations are by definition oriented towards the establishment of a revolutionary agenda. It would be easy to hold such a statement without falling into pure political shortsightedness and voluntarism. Nevertheless, *pobladores'* struggles contribute significantly to the development of transformative political projects in Chile by putting forward urban claims, which reveal that the neoliberal regime has been incapable of promoting substantial levels of social and urban justice. It is actually in such an undertaking that their mobilizations have given rise to an urban formulation of citizenship, which turns out to be critical for the redefinition of urban politics in two senses: on the one hand, it is based on the consideration of urban spaces as instances to be politically claimed by the poor; and, on the other, it is grounded on *pobladores'* subjective recognition as citizens-city makers who, due to their socio-spatial performances, are endowed with rights to the city. Urban citizenship, therefore, permits the urban poor to question the way rights are allocated in a context



of neoliberal urbanization in which the commodification of social rights has resulted in the increasing segregation of the urban poor. The political outcomes of this emerging political imagination remains to be seen. However, a first and necessary step to analyzing the transformative capacity of housing mobilizations has to do with problematizing how contemporary *allegados* draw on the idea of “dignity” to reformulate the political horizon of *pobladores* movement. I will delve into it thoroughly in the next chapter.

## Chapter V. Towards a Dignified Life: Ordinary experiences, new political horizons

“We came up with the concept of ‘dignified life’ [*la vida digna*] in the first meetings we had as FENAPO in 2010. I think that it has to do with the dignity of Chilean people [*la dignidad del pueblo chileno*] to resist what the neoliberal system has done against them in terms of segregation, displacement, abuse, etc.... So when we talk about the right to a dignified life we talk about taking control of our lives, generating solutions to our problems by ourselves... a dignified life is the kind of life that we are building up through associativism [*asociativismo*], mutual aid [*ayuda mutua*], cooperativism [*cooperativismo*], and organization. For example, we have been able to increase the size of social housing. Pinochet started giving us twenty-four square meters housing units. Then, the Concertación followed that model and gave us, at best, thirty-six squatter meters housing units. Today, on the basis of self-management [*autogestión*], we have been able to demand that the state increase the size of social housing, improve the quality of housing units, and design them according to our needs. We don’t have to forget that after the implementation of the subsidy-based model a part of the city was built with no dignity [*se construyó una parte de la ciudad sin nada de dignidad*]” (Rafael, Don Bosco *allegados* committee, July 5<sup>th</sup> 2015).

### 1. *Pobladores’ claims for la vida digna*

“She has no dignity!” That was what Irma, evidently annoyed, said at the La Florida City Hall on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013 after noticing that a *vecina* (neighbor) of her showed up at that place. She expressed that when we—namely, the Don Bosco’s leadership and I—were about to enter a meeting with two communist politicians: David Peralta, a La Florida *concejal* (councilman) and Camila Vallejo, the former student leader who had just been elected Deputy for La Florida. More than technical, this gathering was purely political. As usual, the leaders of this housing assembly had made use of their connections to arrange a meeting with local and national authorities aimed at generating a network of support and, accordingly, backing politically the housing projects they were struggling for.

The meeting was supposed to start at noon but neither the councilman nor the deputy arrived on time. While waiting for them, the *pobladores* improvised a coordination assembly in which they agreed that, as representatives of more than six hundred families wishing to become homeowners in La Florida, they had to defend the same claim when speaking to the authorities. This idea of adopting a common position stemmed from the fact that some members of the leadership had profound political and personal differences. Leaving these discrepancies aside, Rafael summed up agreements that resulted from the spontaneous gathering by saying: “So we all agree that all of Don Bosco’s *allegados* who already received subsidies must obtain a house in one of the three housing projects that the Regional Service of Housing (SERVIU) is developing in La Florida, right?”

Once *pobladores* agreed upon what to say to the politicians, we all began to chat about trivial things for fifteen or twenty minutes. It was already 12:35 p.m. and some people—including me—were getting exasperated about not having started a meeting that had been scheduled for noon. “Come on guys, show up! I have to be home soon to cook for my kids and am already starving” Irma yelled to the air trying, as she always did, to make fun of an

uncomfortable situation. It was in these circumstances when, after seeing a neighbor of her who was coming into the City Hall, she said: “No way! Here she is again to see the mayor [the right-wing Rodolfo Carter] to ask for some aid.” Then, she stared directly at me and, as a way to reaffirm her statement, went on: “You know Miguel? That woman comes all the time to the municipality to beg for a box of good (*mercadería*), Christmas gifts, and so on... She is so fucking lazy; she doesn’t even work! You’ve seen that for us it’s really hard to get an appointment with the mayor, haven’t you? But for her it’s just a matter of coming in and begging for help.” To conclude her complaints, Irma stated: “She has no dignity!” (*Es indigna!*).

### **Dignity, politics, and ethics**

The signifier *dignidad* (dignity) has long been a constitutive element of *pobladores’* political language, particularly when it comes to, on the one hand, envisioning themselves as subjects deserving equal treatment and social recognition and, on the other, imagining in a normative sense the life they aspire to and struggle for. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, *pobladores’* demands for dignity have however changed over time: nowadays, the claims for dignified housing and life with dignity result less from the understanding of the poor’s living conditions as ‘subhuman’ and ‘unsanitary’—a kind of narrative observed often in the mid-twentieth century (see Chapter III)—than from the critical assessment of neoliberal housing policies that have commodified the right to housing.

In the last years, anthropologists have become increasingly interested in discussing the notion of dignity by particularly reflecting on what some scholars have referred to as “ordinary ethics,” namely, a set of ethical practices that, rather than being grounded on a transcendental morality, are articulated around actions of everyday social life (e.g. Lambek 2010a; Das 2012; Zigon 2014). For the case of Chilean *pobladores*, authors like Clara Han (2012) and Edward Murphy (2015) have already addressed the significance of the idea of dignity in their everydayness, especially in a context in which the state allocates social expenditures by categorizing working-class families according to their level of income. These policies have given rise to social programs oriented exclusively towards those families who have been characterized as economically “vulnerable” by the Ficha de Protección Social (Survey of Social Protection; see more below). Clara Han’s work ethnographically accounts for how these programs draw on a moral consideration of dignity as a condition opposed to poverty, meaning that they are ideologically grounded on the idea that the poor could only achieve dignity by getting out of poverty. However, she argues, *pobladores’* conceptualization of dignity, rather than being restricted to moralizing imaginaries orchestrated by state programs, comprises a set of solidarity-based ideas and practices through which they respond to critical moments such as losing their jobs or being unable to handle economic crisis. In her words, “this ‘living with dignity’ is neither formalized nor publicly pronounced; it is neither isolatable nor pinned down as a moral code. Rather, its outlines emerge through sustained engagement with everyday life in the *población*.” In a similar line of reasoning, Edward Murphy (2015, 244), when talking about those *pobladores* who are already homeowners, conceives of the pursuit of a dignified life as fundamentally “a private affair” that does not give rise to “public, constitutional claims.” He goes on and points out that for *pobladores* “the promise of a life in dignity has been far more elusive... They have gained a right to housing. Yet they have not generally realized the more expansive promises of dignity embedded in their struggles.” In Murphy’s view, similar to Han’s, *pobladores’* aspirations to make up a life in dignity relates, thus, to a number of everyday, domestic

relationships by means of which they seek to overcome the conditions of economic insecurity, labor precariousness, and social exclusion they endure on a daily basis.

To expand Han's and Murphy's important contributions to the ethnographic knowledge of the Chilean urban poor, in this chapter I will show that *pobladores'* pursuit of dignity, besides taking the form of social practices developed in the private sphere, results also in political claims made in public. Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that the ideas of effort (*esfuerzo*), sacrifice (*sacrificio*), and struggle (*lucha*) are crucial to accounting for the rearticulation of *pobladores* as political agents. In Chapter III, I examined how the urban poor, by imagining themselves as subjects who have acquired agentival capacities through their involvement in urban struggles, are able to think of themselves as *pobladores* endowed with a moral dignity. In Chapter IV, in turn, I argued that such a process of subject formation allows for the emergence of political subjectivities through which *pobladores*, by recognizing themselves as city makers or producers of space, are capable of addressing a language of rights to the state. There I revealed that this renewed capacity for demanding urban rights is closely associated with the rise of emerging forms of urban citizenship through which *pobladores* impugn the segregationist nature of neoliberal urban policies. In this chapter, I will look at the use of the signifier dignity among housing activists—verbalized in the advocacy for the right to “dignified housing” (*vivienda digna*; Image 1) and a “dignified life” (*vida digna*) and—as a way to problematize how such claims makes possible the reconfiguration of the strategic demands of *pobladores'* protests. In other words, I will delve ethnographically into the reformulation of dignity-based discourses among contemporary *pobladores* as a means to explore what it means to have *la vida digna* (dignified life) as, utilizing the Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha's words (Guzmán et al. 2009, 4), the “political horizon” of the current housing movement.

I started this chapter by showing how Rafael, a member of the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco and the spokesperson of the National Federation of Pobladores, defined the idea of “dignified life” as new demand of the contemporary *pobladores* movement. Then, I depicted an ethnographic situation in which Irma criticized a *vecina* of her for going to the municipality of La Florida “to beg,” an incident that the former understood as a clear manifestation of the lack of “dignity” of the latter. The reason to present these findings at the very beginning of this chapter is that they bring to light the different senses that the category dignity acquires in *pobladores'* discourses and practices. In the opening citation, on the one hand, dignity unfolds as a political claim through which *pobladores* frame their current mobilizations for housing. On the other hand, in Irma's criticism dignity assumes the character of a subjective moral grammar allowing her to assess other people's behavior from an ethical framework. Irma's assertion reminds us of what Michael Lambek (2010b), in his analysis of the relationship between ethics, speech, and action, understands as the (ethical) criteria for practical judgment: ethics, he says “entails judgment (evaluations) with respect to situations, actions, and cumulatively, actors, persons, and character... Judgment—he goes on—is both of others, thus social and conventional, and for oneself, thus linked to freedom and self-fashioning, but also to responsibility, care, guilt, forgiveness, and insight, and to recognizing the limits of what one can know or do or understand” (Lambek 2010b, 42–43).

In this chapter, I assert that the political and moral understandings of dignity frequently intersect in the performances of those *pobladores* advocating urban rights. This means that the demand for dignified housing and a dignified life encompasses not only rights-claiming processes but also, following Foucault's (2005) care of the self, the construction of a set of ethical attitudes through which the urban poor reflect on themselves, others, and the world;

ethical attitudes, Veena Das suggests, that arise not from individuals' orientations to transcendental values—such as asserted in the Kantian tradition—but, rather, from their “cultivation of sensibilities *within* the everyday” (Das 2012, 132 emphasis in the original). As I said above, anthropologist Clara Han (2012, 69) holds that *pobladores*' imaginaries and practices rooted in what she calls a “living with dignity” are far from constituting a “moral code.” In Chapter IV, I have however demonstrated that working-class residents participating in housing committees generate specific mechanisms of evaluation through which they, to allocate rights among themselves fairly, assess each individual's performances on the basis of moral criteria such as “commitment” and “sacrifice.” *Pobladores* themselves, thus, make use of strict moral codes when it comes to envisioning themselves as bearers of rights. I do not think, nonetheless, that my findings necessarily contradict Han's but, rather, complement them. First, because my analysis aims to disentangle how poor residents just like those described by her transform their subjectivities once involved in urban struggles, i.e., once their everyday life is reorganized on account of their enrollment in a housing assembly. This process, I have discussed earlier, requires the production of ethical discourses allowing poor residents to conceive of themselves as subjects with a moral dignity capable of demanding rights from the state. Second, because I seek to illuminate to what extent Han's living with dignity takes the shape of political claims whereby the urban poor, along with questioning the way in which the state categorizes them as subjects of social welfare, redefine the normative referents of housing movements. This latter point will be the focus of this chapter. Both Han's and my own work must therefore be understood as two enterprises that, by looking at different spheres of social life, attempt to reflect ethnographically on how *pobladores*' search for a dignified life results in specific modalities of, using Das' (2012) terminology, “ordinary” actions and speeches through which they become moral subjects.



**Image 1. “Struggle for Dignified Housing.” Mural painted by the Comité de Allegados don Bosco in 2013.  
Photo by the author.**

To explore the discursive centrality of the signifier dignity in housing struggles, in the next two sections I will discuss how everyday experiences, which *allegados* understand as degrading and humiliating, make possible the emergence of *la vida digna* as new political horizon of *pobladores* movement. In particular, I will scrutinize two aspects that *pobladores* perceive as expressions of a social system that humiliates the poor: 1) the lack of affordable

housing solutions in their districts of origin, which forces them to reside as *allegados*; and 2) the ways in which the Ficha de Protección Social—the instrument of socioeconomic classification used by the state to allocate social welfare—objectifies them as subjects of social welfare benefits. To elaborate on these topics, I will put my focus mostly, although not exclusively, on women’s experiences not only because they are the majority of those engaged in housing struggles (see Chapter II) but also because their desire to obtain *la casa propia* (one’s own home) entails gender-specific processes that result in particular conceptions of what it means to have dignified housing. Finally, in the last section, I will examine the political utilization of the term dignity by delving into how people in need of housing draw on it to reformulate the strategic demands of *pobladores* movement. In this regard, I will argue that the inclusion of *la vida digna* (“dignified life”) as a fundamental component of the right to housing and the right to the city helps *pobladores* endow their political actions with specific ethical orientations. Likewise, I will reflect on how contemporary *pobladores*’ ideas of dignity make up a rights-based language in which poverty is not seen as opposed to a dignified life.

## 2. Being an *allegada*

Clara Han’s ethnographic work (2012) discloses one of the most paradigmatic phenomena of neoliberal Chile: the ubiquitous presence of modern household appliances in poor families’ homes. Since the 1990s, the never-seen-before availability of credits among lower-income groups, she argues, has enabled the poor to access consumption goods that some decades ago could have been regarded as expensive, sophisticated, and luxurious. This trend, although initiated around twenty years ago, still persists. That explains why it was easy for me to see *pobladores* manipulating smartphones to communicate with their relatives and friends, using laptops to work or study, or spending an evening at home while watching satellite television on a plasma TV. All of this, however, does not entail that poverty in Chile has vanished but, rather, that its characteristics have substantially changed.

The 2013 Survey of Socioeconomic Characterization (CASEN) shows that, on the basis of people’s income, 14.4% of Chileans were poor in 2013. Compared to the 29.1% of persons living in poverty in 2006, this certainly represented a significant reduction in poverty levels (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social 2014d).<sup>1</sup> It is, nonetheless, necessary to mention that the 2013 CASEN implemented some important methodological improvements seeking precisely to capture the complex nature of poverty, an enterprise that resulted in the creation of new indicators aimed at measuring poverty from a multidimensional perspective. In practice, this meant that variables other than income—i.e. housing, work, education, social security, and health care—were included to assess the actual amount of people living in poverty. The results obtained through this new methodology were not surprising: instead of 14.4%, poverty levels reached 20.4% in 2013.

Poverty, in neoliberal Chile, has therefore a diversity of faces, which become visible less in the shortage of consumption goods than in people’s structural inability to have stable jobs, to live in suitable housing, or to receive appropriate health care. The poor, in this regard, make

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<sup>1</sup> These statistics derive from a new methodology of poverty measurement (by income) that started to be applied in 2006. Although CASEN survey has been used since the late 1980s, the numbers obtained prior to 2006 are therefore not comparable to those I provide here. If we consider the data offered by previous versions of CASEN—based on the old method of calculation—the amount of people living in poverty falls from 38.6% in 1990 to 7.8% in 2013. Nonetheless, there is widespread consensus that such a methodology tended to underestimate the real levels of poverty, which has led state professionals to develop more reliable instruments. For a detailed methodological description of CASEN, see <http://observatorio.ministeriodesarrollosocial.gob.cl/>

sense of their condition of poverty through the occurrence of everyday situations which, undergone either in the private or in the public spheres, are structured by a class-based system of social inequality. In this section I will scrutinize one of these experiences that *pobladores* understand as expressions of a society that humiliates working-class citizens: the living as *allegados*. Here I will discuss how *pobladores* signify their existence as individuals dwelling in overcrowded relatives' houses and how such a kind of inhabitation informs their views and thoughts of a future life as homeowners.

### Ana's participation in a housing committee

I met Ana in August, 2013 when I began to conduct my ethnographic research in the Don Bosco *allegados* committee. I often saw her doing administrative work like taking attendance, collecting fees, taking notes of the agreements made in meetings and assemblies, etc. I also saw her answering people's questions about future meetings, procedures for applying for subsidies, payment dates, etc. Such an uninterested involvement made me think that she was not a "common" *poblador* seeking to become homeowner but a member of the *directiva* (leadership); one that, having been raised in the historical Campamento Nueva La Habana, had long been part of housing struggles. But I was wrong. "I'm not part of the leadership," she told me when I talked with her for the first time. "That's why I neither lead the assembly nor speak in public," she added. During the fifteen months I spent in fieldwork, I actually never saw her addressing a speech to the assembly like other more experienced *pobladores* whose communicative skills reminded me of those of professional politicians. Ana's shyness, however, contrasted with her tireless commitment to daily committee's activities. Rather than a charismatic leader, she was a bureaucrat working in the shadows in charge of the everyday functioning of the organization. This led people—including me—to deem her a *dirigenta social* (social leader) despite the fact that she was not formally part of the leadership.

Ana arrived in the Campamento Nueva La Habana in 1970 when she was six-year old. Although she was actively involved in the protests against Pinochet's regime in the 1980s, she joined in housing mobilizations just in 2009. "I had never participated in anything like this until I got into the *comité*. Before that, I just was at home ... Well, I did participate in the campaign for the plebiscite [against Pinochet in 1988], but then I got away [*me alejé*]," she told me when I asked her about her past experiences in grassroots organizations. Ana was a *pobladora* who, like the vast majority of the women in this housing assembly, identified herself as *dueña de casa* ("housewife" or, literally translated, "master of the house;" see more Chapter II). Accordingly, she conceived of her role as an active collaborator in a housing association as a new facet of her life.

Ana's engagement seemed even more interesting to me after I noticed that most—if not all—of the women I talked with affirmed that their resolution to enroll in a *comité de allegados* was preceded by their husbands' or boyfriends' firm refusal. Ana narrated that Juan, her common-law partner, initially did not want her to attend the committee's assemblies because of his jealousy. I heard similar stories from other women who told me how hard was for their partners to accept that, regardless of their distrust, they would begin to take part in a *comité de allegados*. "My husband thought that I could start dating someone else here in the committee," one of these *pobladoras* said to me in December 2013. "But what happens now? I have seen him around a couple of times," I replied. "Now he's fine with me coming to the *comité* because once, in the middle of an argument, I said: 'so you don't want me to participate? Alright, so give me a place of my own.'" As her husband, an unskilled construction laborer, was unable to afford a

house, “he ended up accepting that some days a week I’m not going to be waiting for him when he gets home from work,” this woman uttered forcefully.

After two unsuccessful attempts, I finally came over Ana’s home in late January, 2014. I wanted to talk with her at her place after realizing that conducting an interview at the committee’s events was almost impossible. Her tasks there kept her busy most of the time, which would have affected the course of our conversation. I was particularly interested in delving more deeply into how a woman having little organizing background in urban struggles decided, at some point of her life, to stop “being at home,” alter her family dynamics, join in a housing assembly, and assume a leading role. Thus, when I visited her one of my first questions was simply: “What encouraged you to participate in the *comité*?” Her answer was not as revealing as the context and the way in which she articulated it. “My house [*mi vivienda*] ... I’m in the *comité* because I want my own house,” she responded while lowering her eyes. Right after, Ana quietly said “it’s really difficult to live as an *allegada* in other person’s house,” while looking through the window as if she wanted to avoid being heard by someone else.

### Asking for permission

Ana and Juan lived together in Juan’s mother’s place since 1990. Their biographies are composed of similar family experiences, which certainly helped their lives cross in the late 1980s. They both arrived in the Campamento Nueva La Habana in the early 1970s and, in the mid-1970s, moved in the housing project developed during Salvador Allende’s government (see more in Chapter IV). In the late 1980s, prior to the plebiscite of 1988, Ana and Juan worked in the campaign for the “NO” through which Chileans sought to defeat democratically Pinochet’s dictatorship. This was actually the context in which they met and began a relationship. “I had seen Juan before in the *población* but we became friends just then,” said Ana. However, after democracy was restored in 1990, Ana and Juan ceased to participate in any political activity and withdrew to the private domain, which might be seen as an expression of what Julia Paley (2001) describes as the demobilization of Chilean society.

Following their desire to have a life together as a family, they decided thus to move into Juan’s mother’s residence, a house that was built by Juan’s father in the early 1970s as part of the autoconstruction processes led by Salvador Allende’s administration. This, like most of the houses in this neighborhood, is semi-detached, brick-made, and one-floor and is divided into three major sections (living/dining room, kitchen, and bedrooms). The size of residential property on which it is placed has more than 150 square meters—around 1,614 square feet—, a fact that explains Ana’s and Juan’s current condition as *allegados*. Initially, in 1990, they lived within Ana’s mother-in-law house but problems arose shortly, which compelled them to construct by themselves a small wooden dwelling in the backyard. In Ana’s words:

“In the beginning, living together with my mother-in-law was a disaster... It was hard to live with her within the same house. Two women cannot live together because they both want to be *dueñas de casa* [“masters of the house”], they both want to order [*quieren mandar las dos*] ... I couldn’t stand having my mother-in-law on me saying ‘make the eggs for my son in this way’ or ‘do it this way.’ We didn’t get along at all and even hit each other... so we decided to make this [their house] here on the back” (January 28<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Ana is part of the 19.4% of Chilean families that, according to the National Survey of Social Characterization, CASEN live as *allegados* in relatives’ homes (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social 2014a). These are composed of 3.7% families living as “external *allegados*” and 15.4% as



“internal *allegados*.” In CASEN’s terminology, the condition of *allegado* can assume two forms: a) external *allegamiento*, which refers to the situation in which two or more economically independent households live either in one house (*allegamiento en vivienda*) or, such as in Ana’s case, in one residential property in two different houses (*allegamiento en sitio*); and b) internal *allegamiento*, that is, a state in which two or more family groups (*núcleos familiares*) live together in one housing unit while sharing family budget. In Ana’s experience, the availability of space in her mother-in-law home allowed not only for the building of a separate dwelling in the backyard, but also for the rearrangement of family relations, which solved in part a milieu of increasing domestic violence. However, after Juan and Ana built their new house, the tension between Juan’s mother—the homeowner—and the couple of *allegados* persisted. Now, the problems were linked to the fact that latter felt the need to make explicit that they, despite their residential situation, were economically independent and self-sufficient. For Ana, in particular, the fact of being a woman in her fifties forced her to legitimize her claiming for housing rights and dignity by arguing that her condition of *allegamiento* did not entail a lack of personal autonomy. On this point, it was telling to notice how she made constant references to past and present events to situate herself as a subject who was not exploiting her partner’s mother. “We’d made all of this by ourselves,” Ana stated while showing me a concrete pillar—maybe the more stable structure in the building—that provided a secure support for a wooden roof. Likewise, she, notoriously upset, assured me that her mother-in-law often offered them economic aid because her “little son was living in her house” but they had agreed to pay for electricity since “we also use it.” Her permanent attempts to demonstrate economic independence and self-governing capacities were thus a form of saying that residing in other persons’ property as *allegados* did not constitute in itself a living with no dignity. In Ana’s opinion, what was ethically questionable was, rather, the manner in which other *allegados* made use of the lack of housing as an excuse to take advantage of their parents. To make this point, she mentioned the case of her brother:

“There are people who don’t want to get anything on their own... my brother lives with my dad in a house in the backyard. He can join in the committee, but doesn’t want to. He won’t leave my dad’s home because he would have to pay for everything... If you live with your dad and he pays for everything [whereas] you earn your salary and spend it on other stuff, what are you doing? You’re taking advantage of your dad, you understand? (*Estai aprovechándote del viejo, cachai?*). My brother could have obtained subsidy, but he doesn’t want to leave my dad’s house” (January 28<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Although *allegados* like Ana are most of the times able to endow themselves with a sense of entitlement through the recognition of their contribution to family budget, they are confronted with a phenomenon in which their individual capacity for action is much more limited: the impossibility of organizing an everyday life in accordance with their own norms and criteria for privacy. One of the first responses that came up when I asked people about the negative aspects of residing together with another family was actually the absence of privacy as well as the incapacity to autonomously establish basic rules of coexistence. Daily issues like sharing one bathroom with six, seven, or even more people or having to schedule laundry days when there is only one washing machine for two or three families are certainly uncomfortable, unpleasant, and wearying. But it seems much more frustrating to have no voice in the decision-making process of how domestic life is organized. That is why Ana and other Don Bosco’s women described their living as *allegadas* by saying “it’s complicated” (*es complicado*), “it’s terrible,” (*es terrible*), or “I wouldn’t wish this on anybody” (*no se lo deseo a nadie*); some statements that were often

articulated through depictions of everyday life events revealing their incapability of behaving freely in the private domain. To exemplify the problems associated with living in a relative's home, Angélica, another member of the Don Bosco's housing assembly, told me how difficult was for her former partner to visit her at her mother's house after they got divorced. Angélica affirmed that she still had good relations with him, but her mother did not allow him to get in the house because "it was *her* house." She said:

"I wouldn't wish this [living as an *allegado*] on anybody... because the homeowners—be it your mom, your aunt, whoever—is always emphasizing that the house is theirs, all the time. For instance, my mom had some problems with my son's father so I got divorced. But my mom doesn't let him in because it's her house [*es su casa*]. If, say, a wall socket breaks and, instead of paying for a new one, I want him to come over to repair it, I have to beg my mom, ask her for permission.... it's complicated because you can't make any decision. You can't." (November 26<sup>th</sup> 2013).

When I was about to finish my interview with Ana, she said something similar to what Angélica stated. "You are the first person who has ever visited my house. None of the committee's members has ever come over. Even Nona [a very good friend of hers] has not been here," she told me. At first, I did not believe her so I merely replied "Really? Why no one has been here before?" expecting her to elaborate more on this matter. Her response was very straightforward:

"I never invite people to my house simply because they have to pass through the kitchen [of the main house] and my mother-in-law, who is very conservative, would begin to ask me 'Who is this? What does he come? What is he going to do?' ... So it's hard because you have to give explanations all the time, like 'he's a friend who wants to talk with me' ... When you leave she surely will come and ask me about you."

Some days later, when I was arriving at a Don Bosco's general assembly, Nona saw me and jokingly said: "So you were at Ana's house! I can't believe it." Then, while pointing to Ana who was joining the conversation, Nona went on: "This stingy, old woman (*esta vieja cagada*) has never invited me over! Do you feel embarrassed about your house? Don't worry! All of us are *allegados*" said to Ana, who briefly answered "you know Nona... I'm not ashamed of my house; it's just that my mother-in-law is such a nasty person."

The examples that the *allegados* offered to illustrate their lack of entitlement to the place they dwell in result from the consideration of the subordinating character of *pedir permiso* (asking for permission) or *dar explicaciones* (giving explanations). Accordingly, they envision their modality of living as structured by relations of subjection compromising their individual agency. In the *allegados*' imagination, the idea of becoming homeowners arises thus as the only possible way to subvert a private domain in which there is not only little privacy, but also limited capacities to act in a sovereign manner. Here is when the notion of *vivienda digna* (dignified housing) arises. Once I asked Irma, the *pobladora* whom I quoted in the opening field note, "what do you understand by dignified housing?" to which she responded: "For me a dignified housing is one in which I can live comfortably, having *my* space, *my* living/dining room, *my* kitchen, *my* bathroom, rooms for my children, a backyard." A dignified housing would be therefore one that, along with being located where *pobladores* have developed their life trajectories (see Chapter IV), allows for the making of a home according to each family's criteria of coexistence; that is, a place in which *allegados*' understanding of what constitutes the private

and the intimate finds a material and a social base—i.e., a house and specific family relations—for their realization.

### 3. Predicaments of poverty and vulnerability

*Pobladores'* conceptualization of dignity is not only grounded on an evaluation of their residential circumstances. Their ideas of dignity are also informed by subjective assessments of what they understand as exclusionary practices of a class-based society that discriminates them given their condition of poor individuals in need of housing. *Pobladores'* thoughts on dignity, in this case, surface as critical appraisals of the ways in which, roughly speaking, society and the state treat the poor. I will problematize this point by looking at two elements: a) how *pobladores* conceive of and question discriminatory social discourses on the urban poor; and b) how they make sense of the technologies of socio-economic characterization through which the state classifies them as a vulnerable population. These two aspects will help me illuminate a central phenomenon: the extent to which *pobladores'* subjective class identification results from an ongoing tension associated with how their imaginaries about what it means to be poor in neoliberal Chile collide with the ideological principles upon which state programs oriented toward overcoming poverty are based. Here some questions arise: How do *pobladores* envision and signify this collision between different, so to speak, concepts of poverty in their everyday life? To what extent does it give rise to specific modalities of political action? Why does the state recognition of lower-income groups as a vulnerable population, which is a necessary step for the poor to take part in social programs, turn out to be problematic for *pobladores* struggling for housing and dignity? Furthermore, how does such a tension make possible the appearance of political demands for dignity?

#### Critical acting

Irma used to criticize the, in her words, “discrimination” (*discriminación*) that the poor face in the Chilean society. To do so, she rarely put herself in the position of a victim of the system, meaning that she hardly ever uttered her complaints in a pitiful way. On the contrary, Irma’s social criticism revealed itself when she, hoping to amuse other *pobladores*, made fun of her condition of poverty by unexpectedly playing the part of an upper-class woman having a condescending attitude towards the poor. Either at the committee’s activities, in meetings at the Regional Service of Housing, or in more personal conversations, she often acted as if she were a bourgeois lady with little empathy for *pobladores* who happened to be on scene. These improvised stand-ups were based thus on Irma’s overidentification with a rich person who, when dealing with *pobladores*, “spontaneously” verbalized common-sense opinions on the poor; statements that, if articulated by a middle- or upper-class individual, could have certainly been regarded as inappropriate, harmful, or injurious.

One of these performances took place in the context of a protest in Santiago downtown. In June 2014, the Don Bosco’s members, together with other *allegados* of the National Federation of Pobladores (FENAPO), decided to occupy the riverbank of the Río Mapocho under the Pío Nono Bridge, right in front the School of Law of the Universidad de Chile. To carry out this occupation, *pobladores* set up an encampment on the riverbank, which lasted more than seventy days. The goal of such an action was to make visible the shortage of housing solution for the poor by “bringing the reality of peripheral *poblaciones* into the city center,” said Rafael, the spokesperson of FENAPO. It was in those circumstances when Irma began to perform her character. Once we stayed overnight at this riverbank seizure, she, looking around the

encampment, said: “For God’s sake, look at how the poor guys are protesttesting! (*¡Por Dios, mira cómo protestan los pobres!*) They want a house for free... such a vulgar people! (*Quieren casa gratis... ¡qué ordinarios!*).” Then, directing her gaze toward a friend, she carried on with her acting: “I’m a professor of the School of Law at the Universidad de Chile and am here accompanying the poor. What are you doing here, ma’am? Are you also protesting?” she said as pretending to show a false interest in the other person’s opinion.

Although Irma’s “routines” made generally reference to *pobladores*’ housing problematic, not in few cases she addressed other concerns that turned out to be troubling for her and her family. The lack of economic resources to pay for her children’s education was, for example, one of these disturbing issues. On another occasion, while waiting to enter a meeting at the Ministry of Housing, she was telling other Don Bosco’s *pobladores* that her nineteen-year old daughter, who had just graduated from high school, wished to pursue undergraduate studies at a private technical institution (*instituto profesional*). This meant that Irma’s family needed around US\$ 3,300 per year to cover tuitions and fees, an amount that neither she nor her common-law partner actually had or could save. To narrate the complex economic situation, she asked her friends: “Do you have any idea about how my daughter can apply for the scholarships offered by the state?” To this, she ironically added: “I’m just curious about it. You know that two-million pesos [around US\$ 3,300] means nothing to me because I have money in excess (*a mí me sobra la plata*).”

Having these and other ethnographic anecdotes in mind, in July 2015 I visited Irma to dig into how she made sense of her situation of *pobladora* in terms of dignity. In particular, I sought to explore how she problematized the question of dignity by reflecting on her belonging to a group that, along with experiencing economic precariousness on a daily basis, is referred to as—using Irma’s words— “vulgar people” by others. I will transcribe part of the conversation we had:

“Do you think that society, broadly speaking, treats *pobladores* in a dignified way?

Not at all; it [society] excludes you from everything. Besides, people think that all of us who come from a *población* are criminals or thieves [*choros*]. This society marginalizes you [*te margina la sociedad*].

When have you felt such discrimination?

Sometimes, when we have meetings at the SERVIU [Regional Service of Housing], I feel that the people who work there discriminate you because they assume that, as we go to these meetings, we don’t have education or something like that... I think that if they kiss you in the face [to greet] it is because they feel the obligation to do so, but they don’t really like it... I think that we all have the same right, regardless of our education... for them we are all dirty and stinky... my clothes may be very old, but I have to demonstrate that they are clean, that I smell good [*que ando olorosa*], that at least I take a shower before going to the meeting” (July 8<sup>th</sup> 2015).

As discussed earlier in this dissertation, *pobladores* have long made use of cleanliness-based narratives to think of the urban poor as marginalized subjects who, in spite of their social status, are endowed with dignity. This echoes what Martínez y Palacios (1996), in their cultural analysis of the urban poor, calls “culture of decency” (*cultura de la decencia*). These authors understand this concept as a system of dispositions through which the poor are capable of overcoming the humiliating effects of poverty by embracing strict moral codes based on honesty,

honor, temperance, and transcendence. In a similar way, in this work I have problematized how *pobladores*' self-identification as *dignos* (dignified people) is closely related to their subjective recognition as non-dirty individuals who, irrespective of their residential situation, deserve respect and equal treatment. In Chapter III, for instance, I showed that such an approach was tellingly manifested when, in the mid-twentieth century, *pobladores* conceived of the lack of hygiene of *poblaciones callampas* as a degrading way of living that denied their right to live in "human" conditions. In doing so, they were able to formulate a language of rights as dignity-bearers, which ultimately contribute to the emergence of *pobladores* movement.

Currently *pobladores*' "sanitary" narratives are, however, not reduced to critical appraisals of the structural forces preventing them from obtaining dignified housing. As disclosed in Irma's discourse and performances, *pobladores*' expectations—such as her interest in finding economic support to fund her daughter's undergraduate studies—conflict with what they understand as social imaginaries that categorize them as an unclean, uneducated, and undesirable population. From *pobladores*' perspectives, this system of social categorization works thus as a mechanism of symbolic domination that reinforces social hierarchies by assuming that poverty is by definition opposed to wellbeing. Under this dominant framework, *pobladores* could find welfare, social respect, and dignity not only, as accurately stated by Clara Han (2012), by getting out of poverty but also by leaving their subjectivity as *pobladores* behind. This becomes even more problematic when Chile's neoliberal state draws on this ideology to allocate social expenditures. Why? Because the desire to *salir adelante* ("get ahead") turns out to be paradoxical for the urban poor: the better they do in life, the more "abandoned" by the state they feel.

### Technologies of objectivation

In the early morning of December 13<sup>th</sup> 2011, Santiago's inhabitants woke up seeing hundreds of FENAPO's activists blocking the city's main streets. At dawn, coordinated *pobladores* set up barricades on freeways and on the intersection of major avenues in different districts of the city causing severe traffic congestion. This action, which was replicated in other cities throughout the country, was covered by most of the nationwide newspapers, radio stations, and TV channels. One month later, on January 11<sup>th</sup> 2012, the same incident occurred again: hundreds of concerted *pobladores* blocked Santiago's most important streets around 7:00 a.m. when most of santiaguinos were going to their workplaces. In both cases, these *pobladores*' demonstrations aimed to condemn the new system of socioeconomic classification of Sebastián Piñera's government (2010–2014) through which thousands of families, in not being recognized as "vulnerable" by the state anymore, would no longer be able to apply for housing subsidies. Therefore, FENAPO's *pobladores* pointed directly to the Ficha de Protección Social (Survey of Social Protection) or, as popularly known, *la ficha*.

In simple terms, the Ficha de Protección Social is an instrument of socioeconomic characterization by means of which the state selects families as beneficiaries of social programs. In Latin America, this paradigm of welfare distribution has been known as *políticas de focalización*, which has resulted in the formulation of public policies that, in contrast to the principle of universality, are oriented exclusively towards the most vulnerable social segments (Candia 1998). For the Chilean case, if anyone desires to receive public benefits from the state through social programs—e.g. housing subsidies, retirement pensions, school subsidies, etc.—, he/she and his/her family must be first classified as vulnerable by the Ficha. To do so, prospective applicants go to the city hall of the *comuna* (municipality) they live in, talk with a

civil servant (generally a social worker), and request that a state representative survey them at their homes. After being evaluated, they are assigned a point score, which lets them know what quintile<sup>2</sup> they are in and, accordingly, what social programs they are eligible for.<sup>3</sup> This point score is adjusted every month and applicants can request that it be updated if the situation of their family changes due to, for instance, the birth or passing of a member.

The Ficha de Protección Social was developed by Michelle Bachelet's first government (2006–2010) and came to replace the Ficha CAS II—a new version of the Ficha CAS created in the late 1970s—which was a means-testing tool that categorized families by measuring their household goods, type of housing, level of schooling, and access to basic services, among other variables.<sup>4</sup> The Ficha de Protección Social, in this regard, presented some methodological improvements in including other elements of analysis such as the capacity of individuals for generating income, a measurement that is supposedly adjusted according to each household's particular needs (Larrañaga et al. 2014). By drawing on this new methodology of social classification, the state aspired to capture the changing situation of vulnerable families. The Ficha de Protección Social, unlike the previous CAS and CAS II, assumed thus that the condition of poverty is a dynamic phenomenon, meaning that a family that was initially categorized as non-poor could perfectly be reclassified as vulnerable later on.

This new mechanism of social stratification was an integral part of Bachelet's "System of Social Protection" ("Sistema de Protección Social"), which was aimed to allocate social expenditure among those characterized as "vulnerable." The concept of vulnerability, Larrañaga et al. (2014) argue, encompasses both the poor and those lower-middle class families who, although not being properly poor, have not been able to consolidate their economic situation being therefore permanently exposed to falling into poverty. In that sense, Bachelet's administration sought to distribute social welfare not by dismantling the ideological principles of *focalización* but, rather, by redefining the criteria for determining who were going to be considered beneficiaries.<sup>5</sup>

Sebastián Piñera's presidency (2010–2014) attempted to carry out significant changes in the Ficha de Protección Social to, among other goals, unveil the number of what Joaquín Lavín—the Minister of Social Development between 2011 and 2013—publicly called *falsos pobres* ("false poor people").<sup>6</sup> According to Lavín, *falsos pobres* are all of those families who consistently cheat the survey of this instrument of social classification to gain access to social

<sup>2</sup> The score scale of the Ficha de Protección Social is divided into quintiles of vulnerability starting with 2,072 points, which is the point score representing the most vulnerable condition. In specific terms, these quintiles are: Quintile I: between 2,072 and 8,500 points; Quintile II: between 8,501 and 11,734; Quintile III: between 11,735 and 13,484; Quintile IV: between 13,485 and 14,557; and Quintile V: from 14,558. By late 2015, an overwhelming majority of families using the Ficha de Protección Social belonged to the Quintile I (54.1%). See more at: <http://www.fichaproteccionsocial.gob.cl/biblioteca/estadisticas/>

<sup>3</sup> As for housing programs, the Fondo Solidario de Elección de Vivienda (Solidarity Housing Fund) regulated by the Housing Decree No. 49 of 2011—the norm under which the Don Bosco applied for subsidies—is oriented primarily towards *pobladores* belonging to Quintile I. However, housing projects can include at most 30% of families up to Quintile III when families apply collectively through *comités de allegados*.

<sup>4</sup> For a further description of Ficha CAS and Ficha CAS II, see Schild (2000), Han (2012, 57–58), and Larrañaga, et al. (2014).

<sup>5</sup> By 2013, 67% of Chileans—that is, more than 11 millions of people—had been surveyed by the Ficha de Protección Social (Larrañaga et al. 2014).

<sup>6</sup> "Lavín denuncia 4 mil casos que mintieron en Ficha de Protección social." *El Mercurio*, 21 September 2011: <http://www.emol.com/noticias/nacional/2011/09/21/504346/falsos-pobres-lavin-denuncia-4-mil-casos-de-adulteracion-de-la-ficha-de-proteccion-social.html>

programs. Nonetheless, for FENAPO Piñera's initiative was designed to exacerbate the *focalización* of social expenditure by making it more difficult to enroll in housing programs. This federation denounced that since 2010 the Ministry of Social Development made use of unclear, if not shady, criteria for "raising the points" (*subir los puntos*) in the Ficha de Protección Social of poor families. In doing so, the FENAPO affirmed, the state wanted to avoid recognizing these families as vulnerable to prevent them from being eligible for housing programs. In *pobladores'* opinion, the government's increasing strictness in terms of the points needed to apply for housing subsidies was thus another expression of, quoting a FENAPO's spokespersons, its "anti-poor policy" (*política antipobres*). The National Federation of Pobladores took therefore an active role in the protest against the Ficha de Protección Social, which was materialized in the execution of nationwide demonstrations such as the ones I described above. In one of these mobilizations—which ultimately led to Sebastián Piñera's government to postpone the implementation of the new version of the Ficha de Protección Social<sup>7</sup>—FENAPO released a suggestive public statement:

"Today, Tuesday, December 13<sup>th</sup> 2011... we have taken over the streets throughout the country to express our rejection to the Ficha de Protección Social and communicate the following issues: 1. We reject the Ficha de Protección Social as a valid mechanism of measurement [of poverty] as it is designed to falsify reality [*falsear la realidad*] and hide poverty by classifying thousands of families living in precarious conditions... as non-poor; 2. We blame the Ministry of Social Development, led by Joaquín Lavín, for raising the points in the last months without any justification and for wanting to end poverty by decree by introducing changes in the Ficha de Protección Social. These changes will bring about a widespread increase in the points which will prevent thousands of families from making use of more than sixty social programs that utilize the Ficha de Protección Social to assign resources. By using the excuse that the poor cheat, the government wants to get into our private information, an aspect that we strongly reject since it constitutes not only a menace to our privacy but also an act of discrimination towards *pobladores* as, in this country, nobody surveys the rich nor gets into their houses to measure them [*nadie se mete en sus casas para medirlos*]. 3. In this scenario, the National Federation of Pobladores... demands: that the application of the new Ficha de Protección social be stopped; that the points of families do not go up..." (National Federation of Pobladores, public statement, December 13<sup>th</sup> 2011).

FENAPO's statement must be understood not only as a questioning of how the state manipulates the production of scientific knowledge of poverty but also as a profound criticism of the, in a foucauldian sense, objectifying character of the Ficha de Protección. As I explained in Chapter III, Foucault's (2010) archeological approach conceives of the subject in relation to determinate fields of knowable objects, meaning that the subject formation is linked to the construction of objects of knowledge. In this case, *pobladores* fundamentally criticized the class orientation involved in this process of objectivation/subjectivation: it is only working-class residents who, to become subjects of social assistance, are measured, evaluated, and classified as objects of scientific knowledge. Rafael told me that, to confront such discrimination, the

<sup>7</sup> The changes initially proposed by this administration were never put into practice. In January 2016, however, Michelle Bachelet's second government (2014–2018) replaced the Ficha de Protección Social with a new instrument of socioeconomic stratification called Registro Nacional de Hogares (Household National Registry).

National Federation of Pobladores had a clear demand: “the state—he said—must survey every Chilean regardless of his/her social class. That’s the only way we can have a realistic picture of the levels of poverty in Chile.” Although hardly realizable, that request is however symbolically significant as it challenges the rationale of social programs based on the paradigm of *focalización*: the naturalized idea that the poor are the only ones to be subjected to a moralizing scrutiny of how they live, what they do, or what household appliances they possess.<sup>8</sup> Such a moralizing appraisal is central to understanding *pobladores*’ types of socialization when participating in state-regulated housing assemblies.

### “Now everybody can get a car”

For the vast majority of Don Bosco’s members whom I met in fieldwork, the Ficha de Protección Social works as a black box that defines people’s level of vulnerability at discretion. According to them, there is nothing “objective” in the way point scores are calculated. This idea is grounded essentially on empirical knowledge. All of them affirmed that they had witnessed how relatives, friends or neighbors, despite having similar living standards, were assigned totally different point scores. Such a claim was intimately bound up with sense of uncertainty: no matter how poor you are you will never really know how many points you will be given. This lack of certitude resulted in that many *pobladores* search for strategies—such as cheating the survey of the Ficha de Protección Social—to lower their points. This phenomenon, although not being publicly and openly recognized, was not necessarily a taboo among Don Bosco’s *pobladores*, which made it easy for me to delve into it when interviewing them.

Carla’s frankness, in this regard, struck me. She was a single woman in her early thirties who had a four-year old son when I met her in 2014. She was born and raised in the Población San Luis de Macul, a neighborhood that, although belonging administratively to the municipality of Peñalolén, is across the street from the Población Nuevo Amanecer. This geographic proximity enabled her to get to know the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco and joined in it in 2013. Carla was one of the few people I met who studied at a higher education institution, something that her parents—a domestic worker and a sewer laborer (*alcantarillero*)—were undeniably proud of. In 2015, she was working as a preschool teacher (*educadora de párvulos*) but her salary did not allow her to either afford a house by herself or rent a place outside her neighborhood of origin. Carla, who had lived her whole life in the same *población*, had however to struggle to be recognized as eligible to participate in a *comité de allegados*.

“I’m a preschool teacher... but I’m a single mother who earns four hundred *lucas* [around U\$615]. Maybe I could apply for middle-class-oriented housing subsidies but I know that none of the banks will give me a mortgage loan. So it [participating in the committee] is the only way to have a house of my own... It was really difficult for me to get into the *comité* because, at first, I was assigned 9,500 points<sup>9</sup> just for having a college degree... That’s why many people cheat the Ficha. You *have* to cheat. In my case I went [to the city hall] to talk with the social worker and had to annoy her to get my points lowered. I told her ‘do you want me to not wash my face or not take a shower during a week? Do you want

<sup>8</sup> Clara Han tellingly argues that these programs can be thought of as a form of Foucault’s governmentality. For families to become “an instrument in the government of the population” (2012, 66), she states, these kinds of programs operate through “systems of verification and disciplinary technologies designed to generate the self-regulating citizen-subject independent of the state” (Han 2012, 68).

<sup>9</sup> See the score scale of the Ficha de Protección Social in footnote 2 in this chapter.



me to come over with my hair dirty? Do you want me to lie to you and tell you that I'm unemployed, that I haven't studied?' ...Then they [the city hall's representatives] lowered my points because of my complaints. I made an appointment with the mayor of that time, [Claudio] Orrego, and explained to him my situation. I told him 'I won't leave until you give me a solution'...The next day the social worker came over my home and told me that I had 2,500 points." (July 16<sup>th</sup> 2015).

The acknowledgment that "many people cheat the Ficha" because "you *have to*" does not however avoid the widespread presence of moralistic assessments of people who, in Carla's words, "take shamelessly advantage" (*se aprovechan descaradamente*) of welfare programs. These appraisals generally assume the form of public criticisms of "those" who, even having the capacity to provide for themselves, would be abusing the distribution of housing subsidies. I never saw, nevertheless, that "those" individuals were openly addressed by their names. Many times I observed Don Bosco's social leaders making comments on this issue while leading general assemblies. On one occasion, for example, one of them said "we all know that there are *some people* who could pay rent on their own, but they prefer to receive subsidized housing to spend their money on other stuff." However, the speaker avoided giving any specific name. What is this kind public criticism telling us? Is it suggesting that the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco is composed of, paraphrasing the rightist politician Joaquín Lavín, "false poor people"? The data I provided in Chapter II seems to deny this idea. Based on the type of labor they perform, most of them can be classified either as "Other employment status" or "Elementary occupations," which means that they are in fact at the bottom of the occupation structure (see more in Chapter II, Table 6). A crucial question arises here: if Don Bosco's *pobladores* are poor, why would they cheat then? They cheat simply because of the anxiety produced by the sense of uncertainty I talked above. This state of distress results from the consideration that the technologies of socioeconomic stratification are not only discriminatory and objectivizing but also incapable of accounting for the meanings and experiences of poverty in neoliberal Chile. For Irma, for instance, having a daughter in college—a status that, according to the criteria used by the Ficha de Protección Social, would allow her to bring more money to home than as a high-school student—turned out to be deeply troubling as it could be considered an indicator of her "non-vulnerable" condition. In that sense, she—just as Carla—thought of any improvement in her living standards as a risk inasmuch as it might entail her exclusion of the state's welfare programs. Irma described this paradox by saying that "the government wants you to be poor... otherwise I can't understand why my points will go up if my daughter goes to college."

*Pobladores'* participation in housing programs is thus framed by a central disjunction: their desire to "move up" (*surgir*) in life conflicts with what the state and, ultimately, a class-based society expect them to be as subjects living in poverty. This dilemma brings about the emergence of social practices that may be seen as contradictory such as, on the one hand, questioning in moral terms those who "shamelessly" abuse public benefits and, on the other, searching for strategies to have their points lowered. The presence of these apparently opposed facts in *pobladores'* social life must be thus understood as two sides of the same phenomenon: the need of the poor to legitimize themselves as deserving subjects when their material conditions of existence do not correspond to social imaginaries on poverty. I will examine this point through an ethnographic example.

On July 26<sup>th</sup> 2014, around 6:10 p.m., I was chatting with four *pobladores* at the entrance of the Villa Rodrigo Carranza's headquarters (*sede social*) while waiting for a Don Bosco

housing committee's meeting to start. The gathering was supposed to begin at 6:30 p.m. so it was no more than twenty people around. We were talking about trivial matters, nothing related to housing struggles or anything that I could consider as directly linked to my research goals. But everything changed when an applicant showed up around 6:15 p.m. He, a good friend of one of the guys I was talking with, arrived in a car and parked it right in front of where we were hanging out. When he got out of the vehicle, his friend yelled at him "*buena poh, vulnerable!*" ("What's up, vulnerable man!"), which, of course, made everybody laugh. Unquestionably, the latter said that to the former without the intention of offending. And the addressee took it as what it was, as a harmless welcoming joke. The guy who was just showing up did not join us in the conversation, but his arrival generated an illuminating discussion about the meanings of poverty in neoliberal Chile articulated around a central topic: to what extent the poor are able to own a car. For one *poblador* it was absolutely inconceivable that a member of an *allegados* committee had a car. He emphatically said:

"If you can pay for a car, then you can also pay for rent, right? So nobody who owns a car should be part of the *comité*. Furthermore, if the SERVIU [the Regional Service of Housing] finds out that many of the Don Bosco's applicants have vehicles, they could be in real trouble because we're all supposed to be vulnerable.... Have you ever seen a vulnerable guy with a car?"

Nevertheless, the three other people who were engaged in this spontaneous focus group strongly disagreed. From their perspective, being vulnerable and possessing material goods—including a car—were not in contradiction. Thus, it was perfectly understandable that an *allegado* arrived the meeting driving. One of the individuals supporting this point of view said:

"In this country the poor are told that they can't get ahead [*al pobre se le dice que no puede surgir*], that they can't have a car. Let's be honest—he went on—, there are five social classes: extreme poverty [*pobreza extrema*], the poor [*los pobres*], the workers [*los trabajadores*], the middle class [*la clase media*], and the upper class [*la clase alta*]. A poor guy or a worker can have a car if they are capable of saving money and getting a credit. Now everybody can get a car."

This debate, which lasted around ten minutes, ended when all the interlocutors agreed upon one point: common-sense ideas of poverty are full of caricatures in which the poor are depicted as individuals who, using one the discussant's words, are "dirty, barefoot, and with muddy feet" [*sucios, sin zapatos y con los pies en el barro*].

The ethnographic illustrations I have provided here disclose a key aspect: the act of "interpellation"—drawing on Althusser's (2001) terminology<sup>10</sup>—through which they are acknowledged as "vulnerable" by the state's technologies of socioeconomic classification is built upon ideas, registers, and meanings of poverty that *pobladores* cannot decipher. The nature of this ideological recognition of the poor as subjects of state policies gives rise to a disturbing conundrum: *pobladores'* everyday life cannot be understood or read through the lens of social programs aimed supposedly at generating the conditions for overcoming poverty. The ongoing fear of "failing" to meet the criteria for vulnerability leads the urban poor to accommodate their expectations to those of the state. This, however, turns out to be problematic as it involves the execution of certain practices that, in their view, are morally reproachable. As a consequence, they conceive of such an interpellation not only as based upon banal misrepresentations of their actual living conditions, but also as a threat to their political identity as dignity-bearers, that is to say, as a menace to their subjectivity as *pobladores*. Why? Because, to "be vulnerable," they are

<sup>10</sup> See more in Chapter III

forced to represent themselves as “dirty,” dependent, and non-agentival subjects seeking to become homeowners less through a political struggle for rights than through a subordinating relationship with the state.

#### 4. The right to a dignified life

As I discussed in the introduction of this chapter, *pobladores*’ understanding of dignity is not restricted to moral evaluations of their condition of poverty. For the urban poor struggling for housing, dignity takes also the form of a political signifier through which they articulate specific urban claims towards the state such as the demand for dignified housing and a dignified life. The category *dignity* has thus enabled *pobladores* to reformulate the strategic demands of their mobilizations, an aspect that reveals itself when grassroots organizations affiliated with FENAPO affirms that *la vida digna* is the political horizon of the current *pobladores* movement (Guzmán et al. 2009; Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha 2011; Angelcos and Pérez Forthcoming). Taking that aspect into consideration, I will finish this chapter by examining both what a dignified life would look like in *pobladores*’ narratives and what are the defining aspects of a dignity-based political horizon.

#### Drawing a future life

In a refreshing article on the anti-war drugs political movement, Jarret Zigon relates the concept of dignity to the idea of dwelling by arguing that political demands for dignity stem from the “moral breakdown” experienced by those who have been forced to live in an everydayness which is “more akin to being trapped in a world” (Zigon 2014, 756–757). In that sense, claims for dignity—an “ethical imperative,” Zigon affirms—can be examined as narratives seeking to subvert particular social conditionings that offer people “limited possibilities for being-in-the-world” (Zigon 2014, 754). In the case I am discussing here, *pobladores*’ “moral breakdown” derives from a twofold situation, both of which hinder their capacity to carry out their biographical projects: on the one hand, the difficulty to obtain housing solutions in their districts of origin given the exclusionary character of neoliberal housing policies,<sup>11</sup> and, on the other, the fact of being forced to live as *allegados*, an aspect that I talked about earlier in this chapter. These structural conditionings have led *pobladores* to develop a right-to-city language that, as I extensively described in Chapter II, has given rise to the demand for novel territorial rights. It is in those circumstances in which the right to have a dignified life has emerged as a new strategic demand of *pobladores* movement. The Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha, one of the most active and committed organizations of FENAPO, understands *la vida digna* as a long-term goal framing contemporary urban struggles:

“Housing is only the beginning of a long and ongoing struggle, the struggle for Dignified Life [*Vida Digna*]. That is a choice of freedom that we do not request, but rather struggle for on a daily basis. It represents a wide path including different dimensions of living and populating [*poblar*] a territory, such as housing, health-care, education, work, and our identity...[A life with dignity] is not an external ideal, but an horizon built upon people’s dreams, wishes, and desires to have a good life” (Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha 2011, 31).

A crucial question still remains: what kind of life *pobladores* think of when claiming the right to have a dignified life? With that question in mind, I conducted several interviews between

<sup>11</sup> Several urban planners have analyzed this phenomenon. To mention some: Rodríguez and Sungranyes (2005), Tapia (2011), Trivelli (2011), and Castillo and Forray (2014). See more in Chapter II and IV.

2014 and 2015. Generally, the *pobladores* I talked with articulated their responses through words related to ideas of security, social justice, safety, comfort, and well-being, all of which were in clear association with what the Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha conceives of as “people’s dreams, wishes, and desires to have a good life.” A dignified life, in broader sense, operated thus as a general referent to designate what Avishai Margalit (1996, 1) calls a “decent society,” that is, a society “whose institutions do not humiliate people.” One of the answers I obtained through interviews was, nonetheless, particularly revealing:

*What do you understand by a ‘dignified life’?*

A dignified life is a life that we live as we want to, the life that one draws by oneself [*la vida que uno mismo dibuja*]... [no matter] if we want square, round, or small houses, if we build them as semi-detached or detached houses, [or] if we decide to have a park in the middle [of the neighborhood] or on a corner... we all build up a dignified life by ourselves by exercising the rights that should be guaranteed by the state” (Lorena, Techo Ahora *Allegados* Committee, July 4<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Lorena was a member of Techo Ahora (“Roof Now”), an *allegados* assembly formed in La Pintana, one of the poorest districts in Santiago. As I showed in detail in Chapter IV, Techo Ahora’s members took on FENAPO’s territorial demand and fought for their right to stay in La Pintana, specifically in the Población San Ricardo. Lorena’s conceptualization of *vida digna*, which certainly echoes that of the Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha, was thus framed by her longing to construct her future life in La Pintana together with other *pobladores* with whom she was struggling for urban rights. To arrive at such a definition, she identified two interrelated dimensions which, in different ways, speak about the conditions needed to attain a dignified life.

The first one refers to the physical environment that she and her neighbors sought to develop as members of a grassroots organizations. A dignified life would be thus one in which the material aspect of urban space—houses, squares, public spaces, etc.—accommodates to *pobladores’* expectations and wishes. This element takes us back to what I talked about earlier in this chapter when discussing how *allegados’* everyday experiences led them to think of “dignified housing” as the condition of possibility for making their own home. Both the demand for dignified housing and dignified life are, in that sense, orchestrated primarily by specific material claims that neoliberal housing policies would not be able to meet. Issues like the location of housing projects, the lack of accessibility to public services, or the quality of both housing units and their surrounding public spaces are thus understood as physical manifestations of an unequal society that segregates the poor. Undeniably, this aspect reminds us of the quote by Rafael with which I opened this chapter. He, to specify how FENAPO carried out the right-to-a-dignified-life struggle, said: “Pinochet started giving us twenty-four square meters housing units. Then, the Concertación followed that model and gave us, at most, thirty-six squatter meters housing units. Today... we have been able to demand the state to increase the size of social housing, to improve the quality of housing units, and to design them according to our needs.” A *vida digna* would therefore start only when *pobladores* are able to subvert those material conditionings by collectively participating in social mobilizations for urban rights.

This last point allows us to analyze the second element through which *pobladores* make sense of the concept in question. When speaking about *la vida digna*, Lorena, Rafael and the Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha looked at *pobladores* as agentival subjects able not only to demand dignity as a right but also to achieve it by intervening politically in the social production of space. To do so, they referred directly to community-based, everyday social practices as the

source of *pobladores'* transformative power: if they have been capable of, following Rafael's words, demanding that the state build better quality housing for the poor, it is only because they have mobilized on the basis of "associativism, mutual aid, cooperativism... and self-management." For *pobladores*, a dignified life alludes therefore not only to a kind of life in which materials determinants of dwelling are satisfied, but also to one in which the community itself takes charge of its fate "on a daily basis," such as stated by the Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha. This, in part, explains why *pobladores* apply collectively for subsidies—even being able to do it individually—or why *allegados* committees, when it comes to distributing rights among their members, generate evaluation systems in which each *poblador* is assessed not as an individual but as part of a larger collectivity.<sup>12</sup> What is at stake for them is thus both the (material) construction of dignified city spaces and the makeup of an empowered community through which the urban poor can, using Lorena's metaphor, "draw" their life projects by themselves.

### Dignity-based political horizons

The recognition of the physical-material and the community-related dimensions as constitutive elements of a dignified life turns out to be key to problematizing what it means to have such a claim as the political horizon of the contemporary *pobladores* movement. At first sight, the term "*vida digna*" appears to be an umbrella concept through which the urban poor are able to claim a number of social rights such as, citing the Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha, housing, work, education, and health care. It is precisely that attribute what allows housing activists to hold that their "struggle is larger than a house" (Image 2), which means that they imagine their political mobilizations as widely oriented towards the improvement of their living conditions as poor residents. Housing, in such a mobilizing process, represents thus the first and necessary step for achieving a *vida digna*, but it is not the only one. The notion of dignity emerges therefore as a right to be demanded only when it is put in relation to other social rights. Based on Iris M. Young's understanding of rights as relationships between social practices rather than as passive statements, Don Mitchell (2003) conceives of rights as an ideal that permits us to measure the behavior of the state, capital, and other powerful actors. Rights, he points out, offer an institutionalized framework through which social claims can be both organized and attained inasmuch as they give us a set of instructions on how power operates. The right to a dignified life functions precisely as a political instrument through *pobladores* can critically judge the performance of the state in terms of its (in)capacity to provide them with a minimal standard of living. In doing so, *pobladores* can formulate a broader criticism of Chilean neoliberalism—and the system of social inequality it entails—whose urban manifestations refers to the structuring of a city that marginalizes them.

The political value of the notion of dignity, however, goes beyond its discursive utilization as an explicit right to be demanded by the poor. This idea functions also as a signifier permitting *pobladores* to produce critical evaluations through which they read politically their experiences of social exclusion. In his theory of recognition, Philosopher Axel Honneth (Honneth 1992, 189) holds that the notions of integrity and disrespect have "implicit reference to a subject's claim to be granted recognition by others." The experience of disrespect, accordingly, is related to injuries that can even "cause the identity of the entire person to collapse." He identifies three forms of disrespect—physical mistreatment, denial of rights, and degradation of the social value of individuals or groups—which are subjectively internalized as a dispossession

<sup>12</sup> See more in Chapter IV, Section 4. "Rights, citizenship, and politics of effort."

of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem.<sup>13</sup> The sentiment of misrecognition and social degradation can however turn into forms of political resistance through which individuals and larger collectivities can react to these forms of disrespect. Honneth notes that “there must be a semantic bridge between the impersonal aspirations of a social movement and their participants’ private experiences of injury” (Honneth 1995, 163). The signifier dignity, such as verbalized by *pobladores*, is precisely this “semantic bridge” that enables them to deal collectively with experiences of injustice such as the fear to be expelled out of their neighborhoods, the lack of affordable housing for the poor, or the very fact of being interpellated as “vulnerable” by discriminatory technologies of socioeconomic characterization. As a semantic bridge, the notion of dignity allows thus for the articulation of a political language in which the subjectivity of the urban poor establishes a relationship to the self on the basis of “positive modes self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem” (Honneth 1992, 196).



**Image 2. “Don Bosco Allegados Committee. Our Struggle is Larger than a House... Dignified Neighborhood and Life.” Photo by the author, June 2014.**

Understanding dignity as a right and as a semantic bridge—two aspects enabling housing activists to think of “dignified life” as the new political horizon of *pobladores* movement—invites us to reflect on two elements. First, *pobladores*’ wishes and desires to “move up” (*surgir*) or “get ahead” (*salir adelante*)—two concepts through which, as discussed in this dissertation, they signify their participation in housing assemblies—turn out to be profoundly political inasmuch as they are framed by the right to a dignified life. In organizing their everyday social practices under this political horizon, the urban poor not only constitute themselves as political subjects capable of addressing a rights-based language to the state, but also avoid the, paraphrasing Honneth, “collapse” of their identity as *pobladores*. Once they affirm themselves as *pobladores*, they are able to think of themselves as endowed with a dignity that is not external to them; a dignity that, accordingly, can be claimed positively as a right when macro-structural forces jeopardize that condition. If they demand the right to a dignified life it is, in that sense, not

<sup>13</sup> For each form of disrespect, Honneth develops three different forms of mutual recognition which are: love, rights, and solidarity. These, he argues, “set down the formal requirements for conditions of interaction within which human beings can feel assured of their ‘dignity’ or integrity” (Honneth 1992, 195).

because they lack or have lost dignity but, rather, because they perceive that Chile's neoliberalism is often threatening their subjectivity as always-already dignified *pobladores*.

Second, the political utilization of the signifier dignity compels us to criticize the hypotheses made by several sociologists in the 1980s. As I argued in Chapter II, in that decade academics debates on *pobladores'* mobilizations were to a great extent related to the analysis of the capacity of the urban poor to, first, constitute themselves as collective actors and, second, generate counter-hegemonic political projects. The stand of some scholars (Espinoza 1982; Tironi 1986; Touraine 1987; Dubet et al. 1989) was clear on this point: since community-based organizations were predicated predominately upon solidarity and affective rather than political ties, *pobladores*—they affirmed—were unable to connect their demands to larger political agendas. These scholars assumed thus that the set of social practices emerging from neighborhood associations were exclusively oriented to the preservation of the identity of *pobladores* as marginalized urban residents rather than to the development of a transformative movement. Nonetheless, contemporary housing mobilizations seem to question, if not deny, such affirmations. *Pobladores'* advocacy for the right to a dignified life depends precisely on the formation of strong community and solidarity ties which are, as I have demonstrated in this work, are not only affective or emotional but also deeply political and transformative. *Pobladores'* “limited possibilities for being-in-the-world” (Zigon 2014, 754), which ultimately motivates them to react politically against segregationist housing policies, allude directly to the breakdown of community-based social relations; relations that they seek to maintain and strengthen by participating collectively in *allegados* committees through which they expect to become homeowners in their neighborhoods of origins. In that sense, their political mobilization for urban rights is consubstantial with their wishes to preserve a community of members, one that is understood as the condition of possibility for a *vida digna*.

## Chapter VI. Conclusions: Reframing the *pobladores* movement

The first time I returned to the Comité de Allegados Don Bosco after conducting the main field research for this dissertation could not have been framed by more meaningful circumstances. In June 2015, upon arriving in Chile, I called some of the *pobladores* I know to inform them that I would be in Santiago for two months and that wanted to continue to participate in the organization during that period of time. Rafael told me: “come over Altos de la Cordillera housing project, close to the corner of Mirador Azul Street and Froilán Roa Street. The Regional Service of Housing scheduled an inspection for us to see the *obra gruesa* (structural work) of it and make sure that everything is going well. It’d be great if you check out by yourself how it looks!... let’s meet there at 3.00 pm.”

Altos de la Cordillera (Image 1 and 2) was one of the three subsidized housing developments for which Don Bosco’s *pobladores* struggled for more than ten years. It consisted of 180 apartments distributed in fourteen five-floor blocks in which more than one hundred families of this housing assembly would become homeowners in 2016. The private construction company in charge of the building of Altos de la Cordillera had shown this project to the prospective homeowners in March 2014, at the meeting held at La Florida City Hall. Then, the *pobladores* saw some Power Points slides with the housing plan and heard an architect tell them what they already knew: that the locational attributes of this social housing project—which is surrounded by public hospitals, two shopping malls, supermarkets, and a Metro Station—“made it unique,” in words of the architect. Fifteen months had passed since that occasion when these *pobladores* were able to see, now in person, what in a near future would be their new neighborhood.

The inspection I was invited to attend was therefore a milestone for Don Bosco’s *allegados*. And I could notice that right after I arrived there. Although it was a weekday, many of them took the afternoon off from work not to miss out the opportunity to have a first-hand idea of the project. While wondering around the two apartments units open to the public, the *pobladores* exhibited a genuine happiness about what they were observing. A man who was there with his son told him “get ready to have your own room!” A woman jokingly said to a friend: “I won’t ever let my mother-in-law in!” Others simply took tons of pictures of the housing units with their cellphones. It was in that context when I ran into Juan. He, a construction worker who became my friend in the first stage of fieldwork, was measuring a wall with his tape measure when I entered one of these apartments. “Hey! What’s up, Miguel? Long time no see you!” he warmly said. Then, he, showing me his tool, added: “I just want to make sure that I’m going to receive what I was promised: a 58 square meters [624,3 square feet] apartment.” After quickly telling him about the goals of my trip to Chile, I asked him: “Can we walk around together? I’m just arriving and want hear your comments on the project” During our stroll, Juan gave his views of the quality of the roof, the windows, and the doors. He also examined carefully the electrical system of the housing units. “So what do think?” I asked him when we returned to what would be the living room. “This looks great” (*está impecable*), he stated. Then, while knocking on a wall, he added: “This is *hormigón* (concrete). If we throw a party here none of my neighbors will hear anything.” “I see you’re very happy,” I said, to which he, taking a deep breath first, replied: “I’m really happy. This housing project is going to be perfect for us. We are not going to leave La Florida and everything is nearby. But you know what is even better? That we got this struggling. Nobody gave us anything for free.”





Image 1 and 2. Altos de la Cordillera Housing Project, La Florida. Photos taken by the author, June 2015.

### Urban agencies

In this dissertation I have shown that the literature on *pobladores* has to a great extent examined them as political agencies in contexts in which the urban poor were able to take part politically in the public sphere. That explains why in the early 1970s and the mid-1980s poor residents captured the attention of social scientists seeking to account for how urban protests could result in radical social movements. That also elucidates why since 1990, once democracy was restored, they were no longer analyzed as agentival subjects but, rather, as a vulnerable population falling into larger processes of demobilization. For those works, *pobladores'* agency seems thus to rely on their capacity to exert an effect on macro-political structures. This amounts to saying that their very existence as political subjectivities would be subordinated to their power to intervene in the political system as collective actors through the execution of transformative political performances like mass land occupation and the autoconstruction of revolutionary *poblaciones*. To challenge these approaches, in this work I have demonstrated that new generations of poor

residents, who are no longer autoconstructors nor take over empty lands on a large-scale, have been able to reformulate their political agencies as *pobladores* through their participation in market-based housing programs.

Agency, Saba Mahmood (2012, 34) reminds us, “must be explored within the grammar of concepts in which it resides.” Such a proposal is not only an invitation to detach the idea of agency from the goals of progressive politics but also to account ethnographically for the terms, meanings, and senses in which it develops inside historically situated processes of political mobilization. Drawing on that framework, I have argued that type of working-class agency anchored in the signifier *poblador* is closely related to both material and symbolic performances of city making through which the urban poor constitute themselves as subjects of rights. Such a word is a political category of subject formation endowed with a performative character, which makes possible the rearticulation of the agentival condition of the urban poor in different historical circumstances. To both reformulate their political powers and form themselves as subjects capable of making political claims to the state, new generations of housing activists base their modalities of actions on a self-identification as *pobladores*. In doing so, they not only establish a symbolic link to the *movimiento de pobladores* of the 1960s and early 1970s but also produce a set of ethical narratives through which they make sense of their residential condition as *allegados*.

Current poor families longing for homeownership no longer work themselves in the building of their neighborhoods nor the social movement they have engendered back a socialist government like that of Salvador Allende. They neither autoconstruct highly politicized *campamentos* nor openly challenge the right to property by massively occupying empty plots in the richest neighborhoods. “House or death” is no longer their battle flag and politicians do not recognize them as the most active element of the working classes anymore. They, rather, enroll in state-regulated *comités de allegados*, participate in housing programs, apply for housing subsidies, and generate ethical discourses through which they legitimize themselves as worthy of rights, dignity, and social recognition. They look forward to becoming homeowners to make a home according their own criteria for privacy. In such an endeavor, they see themselves as of hardworking, honest, and tireless underprivileged individuals who sacrifice themselves for their families and neighborhoods, which results in the production of moralizing appraisals allowing them to differentiate those who “deserve” housing rights from those who do not.

Even so, poor residents in need of housing are still able to recreate their political agencies as *pobladores* and, furthermore, carry out political performances that turn out to be profoundly transformative. They are taking part in an emerging process of remobilization through which they impugn the system of social inequality structuring the Chilean society. They are mobilizing against exclusionary subsidy-based policies and questioning politically the instruments of socioeconomic classification through which the state interpellates them as vulnerable. They make political claims to the state by articulating effort-based discourses that results less from the internalization of ideologies of self-governing and entrepreneurialism than from their collective engagement in grassroots organization. They have ultimately been able to propose new strategic orientations for the *pobladores* movement on the basis of their claims for the right to live with dignity in their neighborhoods in which they have built their biographical projects.

### **Subjects of rights**

The constitution of *pobladores* as agentival subjects in a context of neoliberal urbanization has a significant political outcome associated with the emergence of particular understandings of

themselves as individuals endowed with rights to the city which, in turn, allows for the development of urban formulations of citizenship. By conceiving of themselves as city makers—even when they are not the actual builders of their residential spaces—, contemporary *pobladores* reclaim the legacy of past housing mobilizations while articulating new political claims. What the National Federation of Pobladores calls “territorial demand”—or the right to stay put in *allegados*’ districts of origin—is indicative in this regard. As I argued, this right has powerfully surfaced in autoconstructed neighborhoods in which new generation of *pobladores*, in spite of the generalized increase in land prices, expect to become homeowners by claiming to be the heirs of the urban rights acquired by those who autoconstructed these spaces. *Pobladores*’ view of themselves as subjects of rights is, nonetheless, not only predicated upon their self-recognition as descendants of those who participated in the housing struggles of the mid-twentieth century. To form themselves as legitimate rights bearers, they also draw on imaginaries of themselves as morally upright poor residents strongly committed to their families, their neighborhoods, and the housing assembly they take part in. These effort-based narratives, I showed in Chapter IV, are significantly materialized in the generation of evaluation systems through which *comités de allegados* seek to distribute rights “fairly” among prospective homeowners by assessing their behavior not as individuals, but as members of a larger collectivity. The ways in which *pobladores* become agents able to address a language of rights to the state disclose an important finding: their conceptualization of citizenship is fundamentally “urban” (Holston and Appadurai 1996; Holston 2008) since their rights-claiming capacities are understood as the result of the everyday contribution they make to urban life as producers of space rather than as a prerogative acquired through their formal membership in the national community. This not only implies considering the city rather as the main political community towards which *pobladores* direct their political practices, but also conceiving of these practices as the very source of legitimacy for claiming rights. If the urban poor think of themselves as entitled to rights to the city is precisely because they “struggle” (*luchan*) for them on a daily basis. This perspective reminds us of what Walzer (1989, 216) defines as “republican” mode of citizenship: for *pobladores* citizenship is less understood as a status endowing them with rights than “as an office, a responsibility, a burden proudly assumed,” which rests upon their active engagement in public affairs.

*Pobladores*’ political imagination reveals a number of tensions and dilemmas of the regime of citizenship in Chile. First of all, it forces us to reflect on the ideological principle through which Chile’s neoliberal state allocates social programs among working-class families. For *pobladores*, these programs are maybe the most visible expression of how a class-based society, rather than distributing welfare as universal social rights, select “the poorest among the poor”—using a social leader’s words—to determine who are eligible for these rights. In terms of housing, the *poblador* just quoted also argued that “I do think that housing is a right, not a benefit as the state wants us to believe.” The consideration of housing as a right is thus at the heart of *pobladores*’ criticisms of the mechanisms through which the Chilean state organizes the distribution of social rights among lower-income families. For them, welfare programs based on the idea of *focalización* are illustrative of a social system that denies not only universal rights to its citizens but also, in considering them “beneficiaries” of welfare, their very capacity to claim rights; that is, their very existence as *pobladores*.

This latter point takes us to the second scope of analysis related to the examination of the nature of social rights in a neoliberal regime, a subject matter that became popular among public intellectuals and social scientists after the student movement of 2011 (for instance, Mayol 2012;

Atria et al. 2013; PNUD 2015). In *pobladores*' opinion, housing, education, and health care—just to mention some—are universal social rights that have been systematically commodified. For them, the capacity of individuals to exert these rests primarily upon the possession of economic capital, a phenomenon that has given rise to a specific political demand: that social rights should be guaranteed by the state as a means to secure a truly democratic and universal access to them. In Chapter IV, however, I demonstrated that *pobladores*' advocacy for social rights is not based on the consideration that they should *necessarily* be provided for free or that all individuals, just for being a member of the nation-state, have the same right to have these rights. In fact, for most of my interlocutors the act of thinking of housing as a right seems to be opposed to demanding that the state give them “as a gift,” drawing on the words of a *pobladora*. Consistent with their politics of inhabitance, *pobladores* look at the acquisition of rights as the result of their subjective involvement in urban struggles or, using their language, as the consequence of the “effort” (*esfuerzo*) they make on a daily basis to subvert their current conditions of exclusion. As citizen city-makers, they see everyday life as the condition of possibility for transforming both their own existence and the structuring of urban spaces on the basis of their purse of the right to the city. Thus, they powerfully reject the idea that social rights are inherently free for everyone—even for those who “do not struggle” or those who possess enough money to provide for themselves—, not only because it is considered “unfair” but also because it would involve withdrawing the political praxis from their subjectivity as rights bearers. “The rich—a member of the Don Bosco *allegados* committee told me—do have rights like everybody else. But they don’t need them because they have money to pay for what they want. We, instead, have to struggle for what we want... so I don’t think it’s fair that the rich don’t pay for education or for a house.”

### **Rights to the city, rights to dignity**

*Pobladores*' mobilization for housing, since their first manifestations in the first decades of the twentieth century, have been crucial for the expansion of citizenship rights among the urban poor. Housing movements have worked as one of the preferred instances through which for working-class residents—either as room renters, squatters, or *allegados*—have been capable of developing new political subjectivities while demanding the right to physical presence in a city understood as their own. What in the mid-twentieth century began to be known as *movimiento de pobladores* has, in that sense, operated through the identification of the city as a space for political intervention; a recognition that, using Lefebvre's (1996) terminology, is based on inhabitants' view of it as an *oeuvre* able to be appropriated by those who produce it.

It is precisely the pursuit of strategies for appropriation what is at the heart of the urban poor's mobilization for their right to the city. Their quest for urban rights has resulted in historically inscribed repertoires of collective action (Tarrow 2011; see Chapter II) through which they have reframed the character and orientation of the *pobladores* movement. Sidney Tarrow (2011, 6) argues that “contentious politics occurs when ordinary people—often in alliance with more influential citizens and with changes in public mood—join forces in confrontation with elites, authorities, and opponents.” For him, the forms of collective action utilized by these “ordinary people” are dynamic and open to innovations, which suggests that particular modalities of protests can either be reformulated, change their meaning over time, or be eventually left behind. At present, housing movements no longer react to forcible evictions carried out by the repressive state apparatuses but, rather, seek to resist market forces that silently oblige them to move out of their neighborhoods. Likewise, mass land takeovers are no

longer the first and foremost tactic deployed by poor inhabitants wishing to become homeowners. To the contrary, the execution of land seizures is now limited to small-scale occupations through which *allegados* claim the symbolic possession of urban spaces while bringing the agentival power of the old *movimiento de pobladores* into the present. Nonetheless, it is striking to note that, to demand their right to the city, current *pobladores* draw predominantly on state-regulated mechanisms of citizen participation like; the same ones that post-dictatorial governments used to demobilize the popular sectors in the 1990s (Oxhorn 1994; Paley 2001).

These and other phenomena discussed in this dissertation not only show the capacity of *pobladores* to adapt their struggles to shifting political contexts. They also demonstrate that organizations like *comités de allegados* do not necessarily function, such as suggested by some authors (Hipsher 1996; Özler 2012; Murphy 2015), as instruments for demobilizing the poor. I am not claiming that the instances of civic participation controlled by the state have not been used for subordinating purposes but simply that they are not constrained in advance as to the kind of politics that those who make use of them are able to develop. The very history of *pobladores* movement is telling in this regard. In Chapter II, I accounted for how populist governments like that of Eduardo Frei Montalva tried to pacify the urban poor by enrolling them in the state-led grassroots associations. Nonetheless, the attempts of the state to channel *pobladores'* demands gave rise to new forms of politicization enabling them to develop social movements that, in the early 1970s, acquired even a revolutionary character. In that sense, I hold that the participation of the urban poor in state-regulated housing assemblies, rather than being construed as a manifest expression of their pacification, must be ethnographically interrogated. It is only by doing so that we can fully understand the character of the *pobladores* movement of the present, its relations with the past, the political language articulating its claims, and its new strategic demands.

In this work I have examined these mobilizations by inquiring how market-based housing policies—and the social housing programs they entail—have contributed to the reemergence of urban movements. My ethnographic approach to these protests aimed thus to illuminate how poor families exposed to being displaced from their neighborhoods have reframed the right to housing on a territorial basis. This has given rise to the formulation of novel right-to-the-city claims verbalized in what the National Federation of Pobladores calls “territorial demand,” namely, the right to stay put in *allegados'* districts of origin. As a new stage in urban social movements, housing activists are now fighting a neoliberal state whose policies segregate and exclude the poor in peripheral areas; objectify them as a “vulnerable” population through discriminatory technologies of socioeconomic classification; deprive them of social rights by understanding housing as a commodity to be obtained on the market; and, furthermore, deny *pobladores'* subjectivity as right-bearers by considering them “beneficiaries” of state welfare.

In circumstances in which Chile's neoliberal state has done little to stop the increasing privatization of social rights that started in the mid-1970s, the signifier “dignity” has assumed a renewed discursive centrality among poor residents. By claiming the right to have a *vida digna* (dignified life), *pobladores* imagine a future in which their wishes, longings, and expectations as both working-class families and member of larger collectivities find a material base for their realization. They, in that sense, struggle not only to be capable of making a new home as proprietors of a subsidized housing but also to preserve the sense of community developed in their *población* through their inhabitance as *vecinos* (neighbors). It is in this latter aspect where *pobladores'* claims for dignity reveal its profound political character. Although neoliberal

policies have helped reduce the housing deficit, the large-scale construction of subsidized projects has entailed the displacement of hundreds of thousands of lower-income families from their neighborhoods. *Pobladores'* yearnings to live with dignity in their districts of origin cannot thus be fulfilled without radically problematizing the type of urban development that has organized the city spaces in the last four decades. This explains why their demands for dignity has arisen as the new political horizon of housing movements. As a “semantic bridge” (Honneth 1995, 163), the category dignity makes possible the articulation of political demands built upon quotidian experiences, which are envisioned as humiliating and degrading. The claim for the right to a dignified life can thus be understood as the result of a politicization of—following Das’ (2012) conceptualization—the “ordinary,” which means that this right emerges not from the embrace of transcendental ideals or values but, rather, from *pobladores'* questioning of how their everydayness is structured.

In recent years, a number of scholars interested in examining the *malestar social* (“social malaise”) of Chileans—a phenomenon that seems to be at the heart of the new cycle of mobilizations that began with the 2011 student protests—have also brought up the significance of the idea of dignity for large segments of the country’s population (e.g. Mayol 2012; PNUD 2012; PNUD 2015). The 2012 Human Development Report published by the United Nations Development Programme (PNUD 2012) points out that the core of the social discontent is to be found in the generalized perception that Chilean society does not respect its citizens’ dignity and rights. Such a perception is, nonetheless, unequally distributed since it is lower-income individuals who feel themselves less capable of succeeding when dealing with those forms of injustice. According to this report, this demonstrates that social relations are structured by a “lack of recognition...lived through in the micro-quotidian” (PNUD 2012, 210) affecting specially the working classes.

It could not be difficult to hold that the demand for rights to dignity springs precisely when this sense of malaise is understood as a political problem, that is, when those who are more exposed to social injustice think of it as something to be changed through social mobilizations. This might explicate why the signifier “dignity” seems to be growingly used by grassroots organizations other than *comités de allegados*—e.g. labor unions, feminist organizations, and student associations—, which conceive of their particular protests as largely oriented to the attainment of dignified standards of living. More researches are certainly needed in this regard. In the meantime, we can approach such an emerging phenomenon by exploring to what degree the urban poor’s struggles for dignity enables them to go from particular, sectorial demands—for dignified housing, for dignified work, etc.—to more general claims for social transformation. The key issue is thus to examine to what extent *la vida digna* can become a renewed political horizon of social movements other than housing mobilizations. Henri Lefebvre, when delving into the right to the city, argued that the working classes’ claims are generalizable to the rest of society as they represent “the general interests of civilization and the particular interests of all social groups of ‘inhabitants,’ for whom integration and participation become obsessional without making their obsession effective” (Lefebvre 1996, 179, emphasis in the original). It is significant to note how insightful he was in foreseeing that, in a context of sharp urbanization, urban social movements like the one I scrutinized in this dissertation would be growingly organized through demands not restricted to, and even different from, the ones that characterize labor-based protests. Is the right to live with dignity advocated by *pobladores* struggling for the right to the city one of these generalizable claims that Lefebvre talked about? Maybe the incipient remobilization processes that Chilean society is undergoing will give us the answer.

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