Brick by brick:
An ethnography of self-help housing, family practices and everyday life in a consolidated popular settlement of Mexico City.

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy in the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work. References to other people's work have been indicated throughout.

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Abstract

Brick by brick: An ethnography of self-help housing, family practices and everyday life in a consolidated popular settlement of Mexico City.

This thesis looks into the connections between built form, everyday life and family practices. It is an ethnographic study of the densification process and the development of multifamily plots in Santo Domingo, that seeks to add texture and complexity to the understanding of everyday life in the consolidated popular settlements of Mexico City more broadly. It is embedded in the research agenda that is concerned with the experience of urban living for the different groups that make up the contemporary city.

The following research is grounded in the argument that Santo Domingo – as most consolidated popular settlements in Mexico City – is playing a fundamental role in the provision of housing for the city's low-income population. This has led to an increased densification and to the development of complex multifamily plots. The thesis first analyses how Santo Domingo's multifamily plots have come about and interrogates the nature of the relationship between houses and the families that produce them. It then looks into the question of why families cluster together in a variety of multifamily plots. By focusing on the cultural production of socio-spatial processes, it provides an alternative to understanding family practices and residential arrangements as being either the result of conscious strategies designed by rational agents which aim at maximising their limited resources, or as the mechanic effect of structural conditions. The thesis moves on to examine how, in the present situation of rising densification, families use their increasingly limited space in a tactical way in order to get closer to their ideal socio-spatial arrangement. Finally, it analyses the social consequences of the ongoing process of building that characterises popular settlements like Santo Domingo. It explores how the building of houses is – beyond the struggle to attain adequate shelter – a struggle to build and consolidate families, attain social recognition, and construct a sense of belonging.

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Glossary and acronyms

Glossary
APÁTICO – Apathetic
APARTE – Independent
ARRIMADO/A – A person that lives in a house that is not his/her own without paying a
    formal contribution to the owner.
AYUDA – Help or support
CAMPESINO/A – Peasant
CASA CHICA – Refers to the practice of having a mistress
CLAUSURAR – To get a business or construction closed down
COLONIA POPULAR – Popular settlement
COLONO/A – Literally, resident of a *colonia* or neighbourhood. Used in a non-derogatory
    way to refer to the settler of a *colonia popular.*
COMPADRE OR COMADRE – Symbolic co-parent or close friend.
COMPADRAZGO – Fictive kinship
COMPAÑERO/A – Fellow activist. Denotes friendship.
COMUNERO/A – Peasant or descendant of a peasant family with rights to communal
    agricultural land
CORONA – Funeral wreath
CUBA – Drink made with rum and coke
CUERNO – Bribe
DESDOBLAMIENTO FAMILIAR – Family unfolding
EJIDO – Mexico's 20th century *ejido* is a form of agrarian collective land tenure whose
    origins date back to the Mexican Revolution and the subsequent Agrarian Reform.
EXCURSIÓN – Excursion or outing
FAENA – Collective work
FRITANGA – Barbecue
GAMBUSINO – Gold seeker
GRANADEROS – Special police forces
GRIETA – Deep crack in the volcanic rock
LUCHA – Struggle
LUGARCITO – Small place
MERCADO SOBRE RUEDAS – Street market
MESTIZO – Of mixed Spanish-indigenous ancestry
MICRO – Mini bus. A widespread means of public transportation in Mexico City
MURO DE BERLIN (EL) – The Berlin Wall
PALOMAR – Pigeon house
PAISANO Countrymen. Someone is your *paisano* when s/he shares your place of origin. For
    Mexican immigrants in the United States, it means coming from Mexico as a
    country, and for the Mexican rural immigrant to the city it means coming from the
    same region or state within the country.
PARADA – Station
PARCELA – Plot of agricultural land
PETATE – Straw bed roll
PIRUL – Pepper tree
POSADA – Traditional Christmas celebration that takes place between the 16th of December
    and the 24th. It commemorates Joseph and Mary's search for lodging before Jesus'
    birth.
PREDIAL – Land tax
REVUELTO – Scrambled
SACRIFICADO/A – One that sacrifices herself
TRASPASO – Sale of a plot of land or house. *Traspasos* are characterised by the sale of a
    plot of land that lacks a legalised tenure.
URBANIZACIÓN POPULAR – Popular urbanisation
VECINDAD – Housing typology that derives from the colonial mansion and is characterised
    by multifamily occupancy.

Acronyms

AGEB Area Geoestadística Básica – Basic Geo-Statistic Area

CONAMUP Coordinadora Nacional del Movimiento Urbano Popular –
        National Coordinating Committee for the Popular Urban Movement

DIF Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia –
        State System for the Full Development of the Family

FIDEURBE Fideicomiso de Interés Social para el Desarrollo Urbano de la Ciudad de
        México – Social Interest Trust for the Development of Mexico City

FOVISSSTE Fondo de la Vivienda del Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los
        Trabajadores del Estado – Housing Fund of the Institute of Security and Social
        Services for State Workers

HBE Home-Based Enterprises

INDECO Instituto Nacional para el Desarrollo de la Comunidad Rural y la Vivienda Popular
        – Institute for the Development of the Rural Community and Popular Housing

INFONAVIT Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores –
        Institute for the National Fund for Housing for Workers

INVI Instituto de Vivienda del Distrito Federal – Institute for Housing of the Federal District

ISI Import Substitution Industrialisation

MUP Movimiento Urbano Popular – Popular Urban Movement

PMV Programa de Mejoramiento de Vivienda – Housing Improvement Programme

PRD Partido de la Revolución Democrática – Party of the Democratic Revolution

PRI Partido Revolucionario Institucional – Institutional Revolutionary Party

UNAM Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México –
        National Autonomous University of Mexico

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

1. Building families and houses in Mexico City

> "I have this idea; I have wanted it for sometime already...to make a plaque of honour, a plaque which immortalises everyone, from the founders of the house, up until those who are living in it today. My idea is a kind of homage to the founders of this house, to the families that have inhabited it, and to all who have shared their lives with it, to those who have felt part of this family."
>
> *Tula*[1], resident of a popular neighbourhood of Mexico City

Much of the time I spent in the neighbourhood of Santo Domingo was walking. I walked the streets observing every little detail, trying to capture the essence of the neighbourhood, its houses and its people. As I carefully looked at all the different houses during one of these walks, something I had not paid attention to suddenly came into view. I noticed there is a common feature in most houses. Sometimes hanging on the wall and sometimes on the door, most houses are adorned by a blue plaque in which, in small white letters the following text can be read:

Photograph 1. House plaque, Santo Domingo.

Source: author

Although these are not plaques of honour with an emotive inscription, their purpose and effect is similar to the plaque referred to by the extract cited above. Through this plaque you can, not only locate the house, but also identify the family to whom the house belongs, the family that most probably erected this house and has dwelled in it for the past thirty years. Each and every house proudly displays the name of the family that built it; each and every family proudly displays the house it has built. Already from the first approach one gets a sense that, in Santo Domingo, houses and families are inextricably linked. To understand the family practices of Santo

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[1] The names of all respondents have been changed in order to protect their anonymity. This issue will be further discussed in chapter three.

Domingo one is compelled to investigate the houses they have built, and vice versa, to understand the neighbourhood's current housing forms and residential patterns one has to investigate the families that have continuously built them throughout the last thirty years.

This thesis is an ethnographic study of the consolidated popular settlement of Santo Domingo. It is an in-depth examination of its densification process and of the development of complex multifamily plots. At the heart of this investigation is the process whereby, for over three decades, families have built, improved and expanded their houses. Through the in-depth investigation of one neighbourhood, this research aims to shed light into the current densification process of Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements more broadly, adding texture and complexity to the understanding of everyday life in these settlements. In so doing it seeks to contribute to the urban research that is concerned with the experience of urban living for the different groups that make up the contemporary city.

The questions that have guided my investigation of the area are: What are the family practices, residential arrangements and housing forms of Santo Domingo? How have they come about? How are they played out in everyday life?

At a further level, the research is embedded in the broader research agenda which examines the relationship between people and their residential environments. A set of supplementary questions that guide this research would thus be: what is the nature of the relationship between housing and the families that produce it? What is, if any, the sociological significance of the process of building one's own house?

2. The consolidated popular settlements of Mexico City

Between 1940 and 1980 Mexico went through a period of rapid economic development and urbanisation, which had a strong impact on Mexico City. During this period, the country experienced an important reorganisation of its territory and economic activities stimulating a rapid and uneven urbanisation process. As a result of this uneven urbanisation process, Mexico City's[2] population grew considerably

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[2] I am here referring not only to the Federal District but to the whole Metropolitan Area of Mexico City. Its important to note that metropolisation proper began around the 1950's.

from approximately 1.6 million people in 1940 to almost 13 million in 1980 (Negrete Salas 2000: 248)[3]. Likewise, between 1940 and 1980 the urbanised area of Mexico City multiplied by approximately 8 times (Duhau 1998:131).

During the late 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century housing demand was met by the production of rental accommodation, with the typical housing form being the *vecindad*[4]. Thus, until the 1950's more than 75% of Mexico City's housing was rented (Coulomb 1985: 43). From the 1940's rental housing started to decline as a result of a number of different factors: the production of rental housing ceased to be profitable mainly due to frozen rents and to the fact that people could not afford the prices of the formal housing market; the increasing alternatives for investors further reinforced the decline of investment on the production of rental housing; in addition, rental housing had a very bad reputation for its poor sanitary conditions, overcrowding, etc. Moreover, the high level of renting that existed before 1940 was due to the control over peripheral land by a reduced number of landowners. After these lands were expropriated and turned into *ejido*[5] lands or state owned lands they became the major reserve for low-income housing development (Gilbert and Varley 1989).

The decline of rental housing, together with the fact that people could not afford prices of the formal real estate market, and the almost nonexistent provision of public housing, led to the rising housing demand being met through a process of

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[3] Natural growth was the main force driving this extraordinary population growth. This is true even for the decades of higher immigration; from 1950-1960 and 1960-1970 the rate of natural growth was of 3.2% and social growth 2.5% and 2.2% respectively (Negrete Salas 2000: 249). This does not mean however, that immigration was not a crucial factor for the population growth of Mexico City.

[4] During the first half of the 20th century the *vecindad* was the predominant form of affordable rental housing of the inner city. The *vecindad* is a housing typology that derives from the colonial mansion and is characterised by multifamily occupancy. *Vecindades* are usually made up of a series of small family houses surrounding a common patio. The bathrooms, the washing area, and the like, are often located in this common space.

[5] Mexico's 20th century *ejido* is a form of agrarian collective land tenure whose origins date back to the Mexican Revolution and the Agrarian Reform that resulted from it. The Agrarian Reform Act of 1915 and the Constitution of 1917 established that the state would retain ultimate control over privately held land, which could be expropriated and redistributed or endowed to groups of peasants or *campesinos*. The title to the land was retained by the government but the peasants had the right to farm the land, either in a collective manner or through the designation of individual plots or *parcelas*. *Ejidatarios* could inherit their rights to the land but could not sell or mortgage it (Schteingart 2001: 29-31). For this reason urban development in *ejido* land is, with only a few exceptions, an illegal process (Varley 1989: 126). In 1992, during the administration of Salinas de Gortari, controversial amendments were made to the 27th Article of the Mexican Constitution which deals with *ejido* land. After the constitutional reform *ejidatarios* were enabled to lease or sell their plots if the majority of the members of the *ejido* agreed to do so. In addition, no further land would be distributed in favour of peasants who could not otherwise access land.

urbanización popular (popular urbanisation) characterised by the production of self-help housing and *colonias populares* (popular settlements)[6] (Duhau and Schteingart 1997). Self-help housing is defined by the fact that people produce the houses they will inhabit without any recourse to institutional credits or loans. It is produced and at least partially built and designed by its owners over an undefined period of time. Popular settlements are developed through different processes of land acquisition and urbanisation in which a certain level of informality is prevalent. They are formed through the invasion of public or private land, or through the fraudulent development of private land. In Mexico City a particular form of semi-legal land development was possible through the urbanisation of *ejido* and communal land[7].

In Mexico City land invasion has been a secondary form of access to land as compared to fraudulent or irregular subdivision of private or *ejido* and communal lands. This is partly so because the state did not own large amounts of land (Duhau 1998: 94), and a result of government policies that aimed at controlling urban sprawl, which meant that the state responded strongly to land invasions[8]. The periods of 1952 to 1966 under governor Uruchurtu and 1976 to 1982 under Hank Gonzalez stand out for their systematic repression of land invasions, which stimulated the city's expansion towards the State of Mexico. In this context, the vast expanses of *ejido* and communal land became an important source of land and an alternative to land invasions. In the Federal District, between 1940 and 1976, 52.8% of the expansion of the city took place in private land, 26.5% in communal land, and 20.7% in *ejido* land (Schteingart 2001: 35). A number of scholars have argued that as from the 1980's the irregular subdivision of private land has been the most significant source of land (Duhau 1998; Cruz Rodríguez 2001).

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[6] Irregular settlement, uncontrolled settlement, and spontaneous settlement, are amongst the many terms used to describe the phenomenon of popular urbanisation. In this research the term *colonia popular* is used as it is broadly employed in academic research in Mexico and in vernacular language. Moreover, I use the term popular settlement for it refers to the prevalent working class composition of these settlements. Likewise, I chose the term self-help housing over terms such as informal housing production, autoconstruction, and autoproduction to reflect common usage in academic research worldwide.

[7] As *ejido* lands, communal lands also have their origin in the Agrarian Reform which resulted from the Mexican Revolution. They are the lands that were redistributed to groups of peasants who owned them during colonial times and that were striped from them before the Revolution. They share the same norms as *ejido* lands: the owners of these lands, the *comuneros,* could farm and inherit their rights to the land but could not sell nor mortgage them (Schteingart 2001: 32).

[8] It is important to note though, that a number of large-scale invasions, which were organised or tolerated by the state or the official party, did play an important role in the urbanisation of large portions of land in the Metropolitan Area of Mexico City. Santo Domingo is the most significant example of land invasion in the Federal District.

There have been three distinct phases as regards state policies and attitudes towards popular settlements and self-help housing processes. The first phase, from 1940 until the 1970's, was characterised by government control of land invasions together with the intensification of illegal land subdivision and self-help housing. In spite of the tight control over land invasions, the Mexican state not only tolerated but in fact fostered the development of popular settlements on private and public land. The lack of state investment on housing, minimal government intervention in the enforcement of sanctions against developers who did not provide appropriate services and land titles, and the scarce development of housing related policies have led academics to typify this time as a laissez-faire period (Ward 1989). After the 70's, within the framework of import substitution industrialisation, the state increased its role in the provision of housing and incorporated state aided self-help processes. Regularisation of irregularly urbanised settlements was also a major trend in this second period. The current phase, which began in the decade of the 1980's is characterised by less direct state control and mere support of public-private partnership programs to develop large housing developments. An important amount of today's housing stock is provided by commercial builders who are developing massive subdivisions of low quality affordable housing both in the Federal District and in the neighbouring State of Mexico.

Though often conflated, it is important to note that the term popular settlement should not be equated to that of slum. The term slum refers to the quality of the housing in question and could be used to describe diverse urban environments such as popular settlements, or inner city tenements both in cities of the developing and the developed world. A slum can be defined as "a settlement in an urban area in which more than half of the inhabitants live in inadequate housing and lack basic services" (UN-HABITAT 2006: 19). More precisely, individual households fit the definition of slum when one or more of the following conditions is lacking: durable housing, sufficient living area, access to improved water, access to sanitation, and secure tenure. According to this definition slum conditions are not restricted to popular settlements exclusively, though most popular settlements are in fact slums. In their initial phase popular settlements always emerge under slum conditions. They may develop through different processes of land acquisition but typically they are characterised by a certain insecurity of tenure. Popular settlements are also defined by an initial lack of basic services and adequate housing provision and they tend to

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slowly consolidate over time. In Mexico City most of the settlements that were created approximately thirty years ago have undergone a process of consolidation through which most housing deficiencies have been solved. However, one frequent deficiency that still prevails is that of secure land tenure. In spite of the regularisation programmes that have been put in place it is still common that residents lack documentary evidence of their property. The 2006 UN-HABITAT report argues that in Latin American cities more generally "neither the magnitude of slums nor the degree of severity is as daunting as in other regions. However, the proportion of slum households that suffer from at least one shelter deprivation is quite high: 66 percent" (UN-HABITAT 2006: 33).

Today, around 60% of the total population of Mexico City resides in a popular settlement[9]. However, from the 1980's self-help housing production has ceased to be a viable alternative (Connolly 1982; Coulomb 1991). New popular settlements continue to emerge but in more restricted numbers than in the period 1940-1980 and mostly in the outlying municipalities of the State of Mexico[10]. Land available for urbanisation is increasingly scarce, ill-located and high-priced. Access to affordable housing is further constrained by the insufficient provision of social housing for the urban poor. Public funding of social housing production has decreased in the last decades. In addition, most of the social housing programmes available are not accessible for the working class population and tend to be taken up by the middle classes (Fideicomiso de Estudios Estratégicos sobre la Ciudad de México 2000: 290). Moreover, government efforts to control urban sprawl are contributing to the current housing crisis. In 2000 the government of the Federal District introduced the Bando Dos, a policy that aims to re-densify the Federal District's four central boroughs and contain urban sprawl. Due to the lack of coordination between the Federal District and the State of Mexico the Bando Dos has resulted in a substantial rise of land prises in the former (Stolarski 2006). As a result, the only alternatives for the development of working-class housing are the popular urbanisation of the outlying metropolitan districts, and the densification of the consolidated popular settlements. In this

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[9] Although there are no official figures existing research suggests that, as a result of the rapid urbanisation that the city underwent throughout the second half of the twentieth century, around 60% of the population lives in areas that were urbanised through popular urbanisation (see Connolly 1982: 141; Duhau 1998: 166; Connolly 1999: 56; Cruz Rodríguez 2001: 87).
[10] Between 1995 and 2000 only 22% of the spatial growth of popular settlements in the Metropolitan Area of Mexico City took place in the Federal District. In contrast, 80% of the growth of middle and upper class residential neighbourhoods was in the Federal District (Fideicomiso de Estudios Estratégicos sobre la Ciudad de México 2000: 285).

context, the Institute for Housing of the Federal District (INVI) created the Housing Improvement Programme (PMV) in 1998 to address the acute housing situation of the city's popular settlements. The Federal District's main housing initiative has been to provide credits, mainly for the expansion and improvement of already existing housing. The main objective of the PMV is to address problems of overcrowding, lack of ventilation and lighting and the improvement of damaged or at-risk housing units by providing economic support and technical guidance to home owners. The PMV thus promotes the planned densification of these settlements along the lines of a compact city agenda.

So, the bulk of the demand for affordable housing is being accommodated in the distant newly developed popular neighbourhoods and, more importantly, through the densification of the existing consolidated settlements (Gilbert and Ward 1985; Gilbert and Varley 1991; Gilbert 1993; Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991; Varley 1993; Villavicencio 1993). The most recently formed settlements face a number of challenges including an accumulated number of low quality housing, lack of services, and housing with structural deficiencies and vulnerability to environmental disasters. Meanwhile, the older settlements that were created approximately thirty years ago are no longer in the periphery and have undergone an important process of consolidation. These settlements, located in the city's first ring (Ward 1990: 35), are now experiencing rapid densification. This densification is the product of the expansion of informal rental housing and the intensification of house sharing and family unfolding.

This research is an analysis of the spatially and socially complex multifamily plots that are resulting from densification, with a particular focus on the practice of house sharing and family unfolding. It is an attempt to enrich the existing knowledge on the subject and provide an in-depth understanding of *how* these multifamily plots have come about and *how* they are experienced in everyday life.

3. Case study of Santo Domingo

I chose Santo Domingo to be the case study of my research because it exemplifies the situation of a great number of Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements. Like most popular neighbourhoods that were created around thirty years ago Santo

Domingo was once a distant, peripheral settlement but today enjoys full integration in to the urban fabric due to its preferential location. As a result of the expansion of informal rental housing and the development of complex multifamily plots, the neighbourhood is going through a rapid densification process. In addition, I chose Santo Domingo because it was the consolidated popular settlement to which I could personally most strongly relate. Being located in the South of Mexico City, to the West of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), and very close to where both my grandmother and where my brother and sister lived, I had passed around and across the settlement on numerous occasions. I felt generally acquainted with the settlement's busy streets and its most salient physical qualities but I had always wondered what the neighbourhood was really like. Was Santo Domingo's widespread reputation amongst city dwellers as a dangerous neighbourhood ill-founded? What kind of people lived in those houses? How were these houses from the inside? How had they come about? Why was this part of the city so different to the areas I generally visited? The mystery enclosed in Santo Domingo represented for me the mystery of my beloved and at times hated city. Santo Domingo was my window to the vast areas of Mexico City of which I had little understanding.

Santo Domingo is located in Coyoacán, one of the 16 boroughs that make up Mexico City's Federal District. It is situated in an area of the borough known as the Pedregales, an area name referring to the volcanic, igneous rock that covered everything after the explosion of the volcano Xitle around 200-100 B.C. (Gutmann 2007: 34). Due to its inhospitable setting Santo Domingo remained scarcely populated until 1971 when it became the site of Latin America's largest land invasion. As part of the city's popular urbanisation process that was discussed before, thousands of people who had no access to affordable housing came to this desolate area of the city in search of a piece of land where they could build a house. The invasion of Santo Domingo is atypical in that the neighbourhood emerged from a massive land invasion, a form of land acquisition that was decidedly banned in the Federal District. But it is representative of the development of the city's popular settlements in that people produced their houses and urbanised the neighbourhood themselves. Having staked a piece of land as their own, the thousands of families that invaded Santo Domingo began building their homes with whatever materials they could get hold of. But constructing improvised shacks and shelters was only the beginning, as the neighbourhood's new dwellers embarked on the long process of

consolidation of their houses, urbanisation of the neighbourhood, and the painful process of legal regularisation. Getting together to open up roads which would allow construction materials to be brought into the neighbourhood was an initial priority. This was followed by a struggle to secure water, electricity and sewage. Little by little, throughout the years, the people of Santo Domingo erected their neighbourhood and houses on their own with only minor governmental support.

Thirty six years after the land invasion Santo Domingo is now a consolidated settlement. It is no longer located in the periphery but lies at the heart of the sprawling metropolis. The neighbourhood's houses, which were originally made of temporary materials, are now two and even three storied brick houses. The ground level of the main streets' houses is full of food shops, stationary stores, pharmacies, dentists, doctors, and even a few internet cafes. Bright coloured street markets fill the main streets on a regular basis adding up to the numerous people populating these main roads. The neighbourhood is under constant transformation; its houses are a mix of plain but colourful facades and grey parts where construction is underway. Although residents themselves feel the area has improved, they proudly continue to describe Santo Domingo as a working class neighbourhood.

4. Chapter outline

To show how the densification of Santo Domingo unfolds, in the interplay of families and houses is the purpose of the following chapters. Chapter two and three set out the intellectual terrain for the remaining chapters. Chapter two reviews the two main literatures in which the research is grounded. It first reviews the literature which looks into the role of extended family practices and family networks in contemporary Mexico and Latin America and then proceeds to discuss the literature on the consolidation and the densification of Mexico City's popular settlements. This chapter also sets the basis for the following chapters by briefly outlining the definitions of the main concepts. Chapter three provides an account of the methods employed in this research and of its methodological framework. Chapter four is an introduction to the neighbourhood of Santo Domingo. Based on the existing literature on the area and on the narratives I collected during fieldwork it describes the invasion process which brought the neighbourhood into existence in 1971 and the ensuing process of consolidation. From the neighbourhood's historical context, this chapter

Map 1. Location of Santo Domingo in the Metropolitan Area of Mexico City
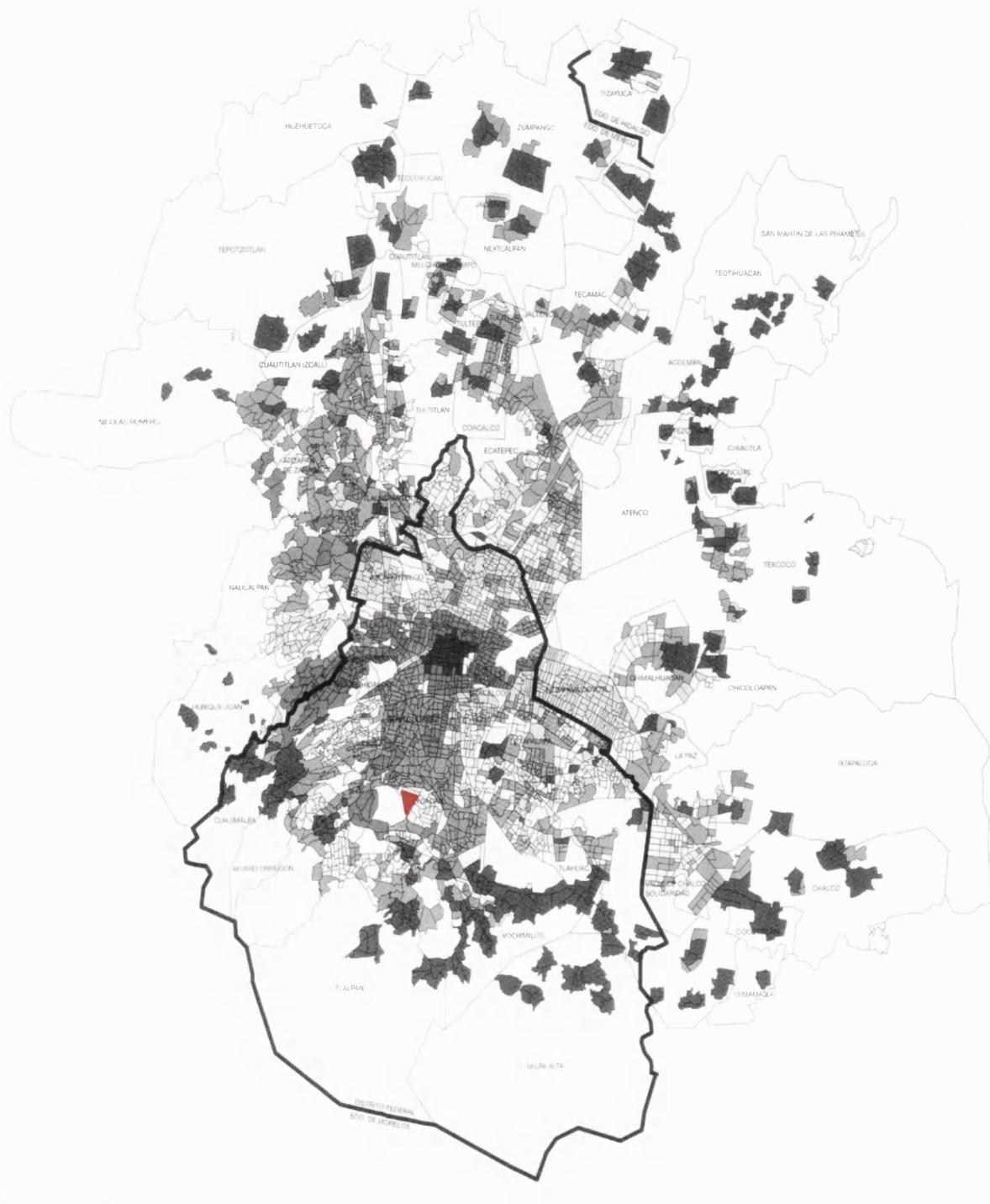
●   Santo Domingo

▬   State boundaries of the Federal District and the State of Mexico/
      Hidalgo

moves on to present Santo Domingo's current socio-spatial configuration as one that represents the majority of Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements. The intention of this chapter is to put forward, as a framework for the remaining chapters, the key elements of its current densification process. With the groundwork for the remaining chapters laid out, chapter five explores the nature of the relation between family practices and housing in Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements. It looks into the process whereby families have built, improved and expanded their houses throughout more than three decades. Beyond a more detailed historical account of the invasion and consolidation process of the neighbourhood, it deals with the sociological question of how the current situation of Mexico City's consolidated self-help settlements has come about. Chapter six addresses the question of why, in the consolidated popular settlements of Mexico City, families are clustering together in multifamily plots. By focusing on the cultural production of socio-spatial processes it attempts to go beyond both objectivist and subjectivist explanations. This chapter explores the cultural processes through which the neighbourhood's socio-spatial realities are both reproduced and transformed. Chapter seven is concerned with the intricacies of everyday life in the complex multifamily plots of Santo Domingo. It is the more ethnographic chapter in the traditional sense. By analysing the various tactics that the residents of this neighbourhood develop in order to achieve their ideal socio-spatial arrangement it illustrates how socio-spatial processes are produced in everyday life. Finally, grounded on a brick by brick exploration of the family-house process the last chapter argues that the building of houses in Santo Domingo is much more than the struggle to attain adequate shelter. It demonstrates how the essence of the family-house is not the housing form that is produced but the process of building itself. This last chapter is an examination of the social consequences of this ongoing building process.

CHAPTER TWO – AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO FAMILY PRACTICES AND SELF-HELP HOUSING

1. Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the academic literature in which the research is embedded. As an interdisciplinary project which looks at the relation between self-help housing and family practices in the consolidated popular settlement of Santo Domingo, this research builds upon two strands of literature which seldom overlap. The first of these literatures is preoccupied with the continuities and changes in family practices in Latin America and Mexico in particular. More precisely, this research is embedded in the literature that investigates the changing presence of extended family arrangements in Mexican cities. The chapter then moves on to review the second body of knowledge that deals with Mexico City's popular settlements. In concrete terms, this research builds on the literature that focuses on the consolidation of these settlements and their densification through informal rental housing and shared housing.

In addition to the aforementioned literature review, the chapter provides a brief outline of the main concepts upon which the remaining pages are grounded. It begins by distinguishing the concepts of house and home and by clarifying how the house will be conceptualised in the pages that follow. The chapter then looks into de Certau's concept of "tactics" as it applies to the relationship between people and their residential environments. From this the chapter moves on to define this investigation's approach to family and the adoption of the concept of "family practices" as opposed to structuralist and functionalist definitions of "the family". Lastly, the chapter discusses the use of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* for the understanding the family practices, and residential arrangements of contemporary Santo Domingo.

2. Family practices in Mexico and Latin America

My initial interest when starting this research was to explore the current development of Mexico City's consolidated settlements in relation to the families that have produced them. A preliminary question driving the investigation was whether

consolidated neighbourhoods like Santo Domingo continued to be populated by their original settlers and what had become of their children and grandchildren. I was interested in investigating the residential patterns and family practices in these settlements, and finding out whether people still lived in extended families or whether the widely held belief that this family practice had been progressively dying out as the neighbourhood became more urban was true. This section offers a review of the literature that deals with the continuities and changes in family practices in Latin America and Mexico in particular. It then focuses on the research that sheds light into changing occurrence and nature of extended family arrangements in Mexican cities.

2.1 Demographic and social trends

The rapid economic and social changes that Latin America has experienced throughout the 20th century have influenced family relations in various and complex ways. The prolific literature on the Latin American family converges in pointing out a number of general trends shaping family life in the region, which can be divided into two qualitatively different types of change: demographic and social change (Tuirán 2001). These different types of change are conceptualised in the literature as the first and second demographic transitions. Commonly adopted by Latin American scholars, this conceptualisation has its origins in writings which argued that since the 1960's most developed countries saw the emergence of new patterns of family life, which could be said to represent a second demographic transition (see van de Kaa 1987; Lesthaeghe 1995). There is generalised agreement amongst Latin American academics in that the first transition has taken place, and an ongoing debate as to whether it can be said that the region is undergoing a second transition. The second transition tends to be subject to debate as it implies that there has been a social and cultural transformation in values as well as mere demographic change.

> "Several wide-ranging economic, social and cultural changes would lie behind this second demographic transition, regarded as a major symptom of the end of religious and political control over people's personal lives. A key role would be played by growing individual autonomy and women's economic emancipation, which would demand better quality and less asymmetry in relations between genders, within a framework of growing individual aspirations as regards consumption and living standards" (García and Rojas 2001: 4).

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2.2 First demographic transition

The most notable demographic changes that have had a strong impact on the Latin American family and which define the first demographic transition are a significant decrease in mortality and fertility rates and an increase in life expectancy (Tuirán 2001; Arriagada 2002; 2004). The decrease in mortality rates has meant that both men and women live longer thus extending the time of potential family contact and making room for a greater number and more complex family arrangements and interactions. The average size of the Latin American family has decreased due delayed marriage, reduced number of children and wider time gaps between each birth (CEPAL 2002; Arriagada 2002; 2004). Fussell and Palloni (2004) illustrate that by the 1950's fertility rates had dropped in a limited number of countries, and that it was not until the 1970's and 1980's that this pattern started to spread throughout the entire region. For the case of Mexico, Tuirán (2001: 32) points out that the overall fertility rate decreased from 7 to 2.5 children per women on average in the last three decades.

As I had mentioned before, the second demographic transition refers to not only demographic change, but to demographic change that is a result of a turning point in society's values. This change in values can be broadly described as an erosion of the traditional patriarchal family model. The question of how eroded the traditional model is and to which extent the demographic changes taking place in Latin America are a response to a change in values is still a contested subject within academia. In response to this question the literature has paid special attention to a particular set of themes of which I will now review the most relevant ones.

2.3 Increased diversity of family forms

Throughout the literature there is a claim that a wider variety of family forms can be observed in Latin America (López Ramírez 2001). Mounting diversity results from both the persistence of traditional family arrangements and norms alongside the emergence of new arrangements. The persistence of extended households combined with the longer presence of family members as a result of higher life expectancy has led to the existence of more complex family forms. On the other hand, larger number of mono-parental households, female-headed households, complex households, and

couples without children are part of the emerging landscape of new family forms (Tuirán 2001; Arriagada 2002; 2004).

2.4 Separations and divorces

Another trend that is frequently discussed in the literature is the rise in the number of separations and divorces. The problems with providing reliable empirical evidence for this question mean that there is not sufficient research nor any definite answer as to whether divorce and separation rates are actually going up. The difficulty stems mostly from the fact that statistical data only accounts for formal divorces and has no record of separations in consensual marriages, which are a widespread phenomenon in Latin America. In spite of the above mentioned constraints a number of scholars argue that, as regards Mexico, although separations are increasing, this tendency is still relatively weak for it to hold the assertion that the country is undergoing a second demographic transition (Quilodrán 2000; García and Rojas 2001; Fussell and Palloni 2004). As a result of research in which she compared quality of life and marital experiences between middle-class women and women from poor backgrounds in various Mexican cities, de Oliveira (2000: 87) concludes that middle class women tend to break off unsatisfactory marriages more often than poor women. This is so because women from poorer backgrounds confront greater economic difficulties in separating. It is the prospect of becoming a vulnerable single-mother household that prevents these women from separating. Whether separations are rising at a significant level or not, it is important to note that separations do not necessarily lead to the formation of mono-parental families. It has been pointed out that as a result of separations and family reconstitution, complex families are a new and more common phenomenon in the region (CEPAL 2002; Arriagada 2002: 152; 2004: 84). Following this argument, separation and divorces come to reinforce the previously cited trend of the growing diversity of family forms.

2.5 Female-headed households

Empirical evidence from various Latin American countries suggests that there has been a notable ascent in the number of female-headed households. Demographic ageing, labour migration, non-marriage, separation and divorce are amongst the many causes for female-household headship (López and Izazola 1995; Chant 2002). The

literature argues that female-headed households are varied and that they are prone to forming extended and complex family arrangements (Varley 1996). Tuirán (2001: 44) illustrates this for the Mexican case by showing that, between 1976 and 1995, male-headed households are predominantly nuclear (between 72 and 76 per cent), whereas female-headed households are 42 to 50 per cent of a non-nuclear nature. The literature first claimed that in terms of their material conditions female-headed households were amongst the most disadvantaged (González de la Rocha 1994: 261; CEPAL 2002). Later research revealed that female-headed households are spread over all income strata and that they are actually more common in more affluent sectors (González de la Rocha 2006). A debate sprung in the literature around the common held belief that female-head households were particularly disadvantaged. Chant's (1988) research challenges what she calls the "feminisation of poverty" by stating that female-headed households show high levels of well-being because they count with a better distribution of work and income, and a significant reduction in violence and authoritarianism. Chant posits that quality of life should not be reduced to income levels, and that if we look to qualitative indicators, female-headed households present high levels of well-being. In support of this argument, Varley (2001) notes that intra-household resource allocation tends to be more balanced in female-headed households and that income generated by women tends to benefit more members of the household than men's. García and de Oliveira (2005) suggest that although women who are heads of households have more decision making power this should not be confused with greater equality within the family. In households headed by women, they explain, the number of decisions taken equally by all members is small. More recently Chant (2003: 29) has warned against the dangers of making female headship a "panacea for poverty" stating that "poverty is multi-casual and multi-faceted, and that, in some ways and in some cases, female household headship can be positive and empowering, is no justification for lack of assistance from state agencies and other institutional providers".

2.6 Women and extra-domestic work

Throughout the second half of the 20th century Mexico and Latin America in general witnessed a constant increase in female integration into the labour market. This was due to factors such as the expansion in employment areas usually directed towards women, higher education levels, and urbanisation processes (Rendón 1990).

However, during the last decades women's participation in extra-domestic work rose at even higher levels. For the region as a whole, the percentage of women in paid work rose from 39% in 1990 to 44.7% in 1998 (Abramo, Valenzuela and Pollack cited in Arriagada 2002: 157). In the case of Mexico, it has been argued that the sharp increase in female participation in the labour market was a result of the economic recession of the 1980's which led to a significant deterioration of the population's living standards (Benería 1991). In Mexico, women's employment rose from 16% in 1970, to 21% in 1971, 25% in 1982, and 32% in 1987 and 1991 (García and de Oliveira 1994: 226).

The rise in female labour force has had an important impact on the traditional model of the male head as sole economic breadwinner (Cerruti and Zenteno 1999). Despite women's important contributions to the family income, women's responsibility for domestic work remains generally unchallenged both in middle-class and working-class households (García and de Oliveira 1994: 241) . Likewise, most women still consider motherhood as their main source of identity (García and de Oliveira 1997). Although women continue to be mainly responsible for all reproductive tasks, men have augmented their participation in their role as fathers (Gutmann 2007). Men with higher levels of education and urban residence in childhood tend to participate more. Men's role as fathers varies significantly depending on the age of their children. Income and age of the fathers, however, are not as determinant factors of their participation in childcare (García and de Oliveira 2005). The overall lack of gender substitution in reproductive tasks in the context of higher female participation in the work force, has led to more pronounced inequalities in the gendered costs of household membership (Arriagada 1998). Moreover, women continue to have lower levels of education and training, inferior occupational status, lower wages and less job security (Benería and Roldán 1987). An area of controversy in the literature on women's employment is whether it has led to greater domestic violence. Based on a statistical model Villarreal (2007) concludes that employment actually reduced women's risk of being victims of violence.

2.7 How significant are extended family practices in Mexico and Latin America?

Academics throughout the region have investigated the impact that the exacerbated poverty levels of the last decades have had on family life (García and Rojas 2001;

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González de la Rocha 2001). This body of literature opened up the question of whether and how, in times of crisis, the family is drawn on as a resource by the urban poor. Although this body of literature is not primarily concerned with questioning the generalised notion that the family is losing centrality, it brought the issue back to the forefront.

The question of whether the centrality of the family in Latin America was being diluted was initially addressed by the literature concerned with evaluating the impact of urbanisation and industrialisation. This debate brought about two diverging bodies of literature: the modernisation approach and the pragmatic or family strategies approach. The modernisation view builds on William Goode's (1963) classic work *World revolution and family patterns*, which claimed that the family worldwide is converging towards a nuclear family model. Kahl's (1968) study on Mexico and Brazil is a good representative of this body of literature as regards Mexico and Latin America. This perspective has been heavily criticised for being Eurocentric and evolutionistic in nature and thus not capable of explaining and understanding the phenomena taking place in the developing world and in particular in Latin American countries. It is also criticised for overlooking the agency of the population of these countries portraying them as mere victims of the urbanisation process. Alternatively, the family strategies approach posits that the transformation of family practices and institutions are pragmatic or instrumental strategies responding to social and economic needs which aid the families to adapt to rapid social changes such as urbanisation and modernisation (Wilkening, Pinto, and Pastore 1968; Hackenberg, Murphy and Selby 1984; Lomnitz 1975; de Vos 1993; Al-Haj 1995). This perspective argues that familial ties are not breaking down under the impact of modernisation. On the contrary, family and social networks are seen as a crucial resource for adapting to rapid social change. Carlos and Sellers' (1972) research argues that familial ties and the institution of fictive kinship have not lost presence under the impact of modernisation. It is only within middle class families that the extended family is not as widespread. Contrary to what the modernisation approach would anticipate, de Vos' (1993) findings suggest that, in Latin America, the practice of the extended family is actually more typically found in the urban context than in rural contexts. The Mexican case is singular in that the extended family is equally found in both rural and urban environments; but de Vos presents no explanation for this.

In her classic work, "Networks and marginality: Life in a Mexican shantytown", Lomnitz (1975) asserts that the family constitutes one of the most important means through which rural migrant families adapt to their new urban reality and thus cope with marginality. Reciprocity networks amongst family and friends are the mechanisms that compensate the lack of social security and allow migrant families to adapt to the urban environment. Lomnitz states that:

> "The economic importance of these networks of reciprocity is such that all traditional institutional resources are drawn on in order to strengthen them. Kinship, neighbourhood, fictive kinship, and male friendship are examples of other institutions that are adapted to the urban situation and are integrated to an ideology of mutual help" (Ibid.: 27, my translation).

Lomnitz's research as been particularly important to the body of literature that looks at the centrality of the family in Latin America, and in Mexico in particular, for she not only analysed the role of family networks amongst the urban poor but also carried out research in a Mexican elite family. As a result of this research, Lomnitz concludes that although the rich do not resort to family networks as a survival strategy they do put a conscious effort in keeping their family networks well alive as a way to preserve their economic and social position. This results in an equation between the business of elite families (the economic unit), and the three generation family (the social unit). Consequently, Lomnitz suggests that in Mexico: "The economic system and the political system are shaped by the kinship system (Lomnitz and Perez-Lizaur 1987: 238).

Following Lomnitz's line of research, González de la Rocha (1994) developed the resources-of-poverty model based on fieldwork carried out in Guadalajara. The model's central argument is that: "given the inability of the state to provide adequate social welfare, individual survival depended on the economic and social support of social networks, primarily provided by family members" (Ibid.: 2). González de la Rocha argues that it is precisely because of poverty that individuals need to rely on others. Consequently, the family most importantly, but also other social networks are fundamental for their survival. In the context of poverty, therefore, the family has remained central. In her view, the persistent importance of the family is not a residue of a past societal stage, but a response to the society in which it is preserved.

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Changing family arrangements are the way in which poor families cope. Amongst the most important survival strategies adopted by the urban poor are the use of the household's flexibility to send more of its members onto the labour market and the expansion of the number of members that makes up the family unit. Adopting new family members and absorbing married children into the family is a collective way to cut down expenses, count with more members who can work, share household tasks, etc. The extended household thus proved to be the best means to face economic hardship, explaining the increase in its relative absolute occurrence.

The resources-of-poverty model has been criticised for portraying household unity, cooperation and consensus amongst a population that has common collective goals and interests (González de la Rocha 2001: 75). In response to this, González de la Rocha, Escobar and Martínez Castellanos argued that survival strategies and internal conflict should be seen as two sides of the same coin. Survival strategies make the family more vulnerable to conflict for they intensify the contradiction between enduring normative codes of behaviour and changing practices.

> "Conflict, violence, and domestic unrest have been intensified by a double and contradictory necessity: greater individual dependence on the work of other members of the domestic unit and, at the same time, the growing divorce between ideological precepts and the realities of a social division of labour forced by crisis" (González de la Rocha, Escobar and Martínez Castellanos 1990: 355, my translation).

More generally, strategy-based approaches have been the target of strong criticism (see for example Crow 1989; Wolf 1992). The work of Selby et al. (1990) illustrates the core of these critical observations by arguing that the concept of "survival strategies" is problematic because it implies that a rational choice is made amongst a minimal number of alternatives. "We consider it dangerous to build a rational actor that takes decisions in a situation characterised by the scarcity of alternatives" (Ibid.: 371, my translation). The concept of "survival strategies" is further criticised for it suggests that the family is actually surviving. Under the economic hardship many families are facing, they note, we could not assert that these families are surviving if by surviving we understand the capacity to reproduce in adequate conditions and with a minimum quality of life.

In spite of the criticism made to the concept of survival strategies, Selby et al. also found that the family is central for Mexico's urban poor. They state that: "It is hard to exaggerate the importance of the family for the Mexican popular classes" (Ibid.: 372). As a result of their research Selby et al., posit that extended family arrangements have greater economic possibilities. Amongst the urban poor, the families with a larger number of members, more children living in the house, more members as active members of the labour market, and a smaller dependency level, were the ones with the higher living standards.

The economic crisis of the 1980's, and the deterioration of economic conditions that has prevailed since, forced academics to re-asses the use of the resources-of-poverty model. In face of the continuous impoverishment of the urban poor it became paramount to tease out the limits of survival strategies. How far would the meagre resources of the urban poor stretch in the struggle to cope with the crisis? As a result of the economic restructuring that began in the 1980's the urban poor find themselves in a situation of extreme hardship which has meant that the resources-of-poverty model is no longer empirically or theoretically viable (González de la Rocha 2006). González de la Rocha (2001: 86) argues that two elements characterise the current economic situation of the urban poor which is qualitatively different from the past: labour exclusion and precarious employment. As Selby et al. (1990) had indicated before, the capacity of larger families to cope with economic hardship depends on their being able to launch their members into the labour market. Under conditions of persistent and intensified poverty, combined with exclusion from the labour market, all survival strategies are being eroded.

> "The current situation, characterised by new forms of exclusion and increasing precariousness, is unfavourable to the operation of traditional household mechanisms of work intensification. Instead of talking about the resources of poverty, as we have before, the present situation is better described by the opposite: the poverty of resources, the lack of employment opportunities in a context shaped by an exclusive economic model" (González de la Rocha 2001: 89).

In spite of the erosion of traditional survival strategies, families can still resort to integrating women into the labour market, and this mostly within the informal economy. Though very low, women's wages have become critical for household maintenance (González de la Rocha 1995; 2001; 2006). Families have also responded

to economic crisis by altering their consumption patterns (González de la Rocha 1995; 2002). Though this was true of all households, extended households were better able to protect their consumption patterns (González de la Rocha 1995: 20). One of the new responses to this intensified economic crisis is emigration to the United States, a reality which is reshaping families more and more each day (González de la Rocha 2001; 2002; 2006). With the increased migration of male heads of families, female-headed households and transnational parenthood are becoming more widespread. As a result of the 1982 economic crisis, extended families became more common. Households grew in size not only through the birth of new members but through the incorporation of daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, other relatives and non-relatives. While this family arrangement had existed in the past, after the crisis it became an increasingly common phenomenon (González de la Rocha 2002). Although the mounting difficulty to send more members to work is eroding extended families comparative advantage, and although the effectiveness of family and social networks has been severely damaged, this later literature provides no empirical evidence showing that family ties are diluting, in fact it suggests that the growth of extended households is likely to continue in the near future (Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha 2002: 204). This suggestion is supported by Chant's research which argues that: "household extension among low income groups in many urban areas seems to have become more marked during the last 10-15 years, especially in countries which have undergone recession and major economic restructuring such as Mexico" (Chant 1996: 18). Contrary to past dominant assumptions about household change, recent literature suggests that, in Mexican cities, household extension has become increasingly common.

3. The consolidated popular settlements of Mexico City

Aside from finding out whether the extended family is losing ground amongst Mexico City's urban poor this research was first born from an interest in the city's popular settlements. My particular interest resided on the current situation of the settlements which were created at least thirty years ago. How have they consolidated? Have the original settlers been expelled? What housing forms and residential patterns have emerged? I begin by reviewing the literature on Mexico City's popular settlements as it provides the broader context for this investigation. I then focus on

the research that looks into the consolidation of these settlements and their densification through informal rental housing and shared housing.

3.1 Popular urbanisation and self-help housing in Mexico City

The literature that deals with Mexico City's popular settlements is vast. Up until the 1990's popular urbanisation and self-help housing were favoured topics in urban research focused on Mexico City and on other cities of the South. However, in recent years interest in the subject has faded and other subject areas have gained particular salience. Research on popular urbanisation and self-help housing first developed around the issue of large scale migration into the city (see Cornelius 1975; Lomnitz 1975; Montaño 1976). This literature looked into the survival strategies and the political participation of the large groups of migrants that populated the city. By the 1980's the focus of research was reoriented towards issues of the illegality of land tenure, regularisation and consolidation processes, and the role of the State. This work introduced a more critical view into the phenomenon of popular urbanisation and self-help housing and put the State in question (see Connolly 1977; Eckstein 1977; Perló 1981; Connolly 1982; Makin 1984; Gilbert and Ward 1984; 1985; Ward 1989; Duhau 1998; Schteingart 2001). Other important lines of research that developed after the 1980's are those which deal with issues of land tenure, the different ways in which land is accessed and regularised, with special emphasis on *ejido* land (see Iracheta 1984a; 1984b; Varley 1985a; Varley 1985b) and that centred on gender and self-help housing (see Chant 1987; Massolo and Díaz 1991; Massolo 1991; Chant1992; González and Durán 1992). At the heart of the latter literature is the argument that housing is a determinant element as regards gender relations, for housing often acts to reinforce inequality and disadvantage. From the 1990's there has been significantly less research on the city's popular settlements and on self-help housing. Other topics such as urban governance, economic restructuring, globalisation, and environmental issues have gained centrality in Mexican urban research (Schteingart 2000). This means that, in spite of the significant role that the city's consolidated settlements are currently playing in the provision of housing for the urban poor, research on the topic is insufficient.

3.2 Self-help housing consolidation

For the purpose of this investigation, the main interest is to see what the existing literature provides for the development of a sociological understanding of the consolidation of Mexico City's popular settlements and of their current densification. In what follows I will review the most relevant literature on the consolidation of these settlements.

3.2.1 The necessary conditions for housing consolidation

Research on the consolidation of popular settlements has demonstrated that this process does not depend on land regularisation taking place. Varley's (1988) research has shown that what is determinant for consolidation is not land regularisation but a *perception* of security in land tenure. "[S]ecurity of land tenure is not a fixed and objective concept; it is affected by another series of considerations and not only by those related to legality or illegality of land tenure" (Ibid.: 89, my translation). The introduction of services in the neighbourhood is generally interpreted as a sign of a *de facto* recognition of the settlement by the government. Furthermore, improvements on infrastructure foster consolidation processes not only because they increase the inhabitant's perceived security but also because they encourage people to want to settle permanently in the area and they make the practical task of consolidating easier. Taxation, the expedition of commercial land use licenses by the government, regularisation processes taking place in nearby neighbourhoods, and time spent in the neighbourhood without being evicted also raise perceptions of security.

As a result of research in which Ward (1982) compared an incipient settlement, a consolidating and a consolidated settlement, he emphasises how consolidation is dependent on economic determinants such as the household's ability to create an investment surplus. More than regularisation, his research reveals, consolidation is dependent on the resident's economic situation. Ward (Ibid.: 201) argues that this is why, regardless of land regularisation, improvement is severely restricted for a significant proportion of residents. Following Ward's line of argument Bazant (1985) posits that the two factors that determine housing consolidation are family growth and the availability of economic resources. He argues that the interaction between a

family's increasing need for space – which is determined by their stage in the life cycle – and their expanding income results in a given linear and irreversible consolidation and expansion process of the house.

An important problematisation of the previous framework has been brought forward by the existing research on women and housing. This research has highlighted the gendered character of housing consolidation by showing that the quality of women's participation in the housing process is a critical determinant of dwelling standards. Women's participation is usually conditioned by the type of household to which they belong (Chant 1987). When women have a greater participation within their homes improvements are more likely to occur (Chant 1992). "Generally speaking, in households where women participate in decisions affecting housing priorities, as well as in the organisation and building of their homes, proportionally more time and income are allocated to housing than in households where women have only limited authority over household budgeting and expenditure" (Chant 1987: 33). It is generally within extended family arrangements that women have a more decisive role and therefore where consolidation is more likely to take place (Chant 1987; 1992).

3.2.2 Consolidation and neighbourhood stability

Urban theorists had generally anticipated that consolidation would result in rising the costs of living in the settlements and in the subsequent displacement of the original inhabitants through gentrification processes (see Legorreta 1994). Empirical evidence suggests, however, that only a minimal proportion of the original residents is forced to leave (Vega 1991). The relation between legalisation and displacement is based on the wrong assumption that there is a clear cut division between a settlement's irregular and legal status. Under this logic, it follows that when settlements are irregular residents do not have to pay services nor land tax and when they acquire legal status residents have to pay both (Varley 2000). Another equally important assumption that led to the idea of displacement is the belief that residents of popular settlements are eager to move out. Authors who believe that displacement is probable "suppose that if people do not move it is because they can not. Immobility is explained in terms of poor people being "prisoners" in their settlements" (Varley 2000: 276, my translation). This notion is a consequence of overlooking the special meaning attached to these houses by their owners and producers. Rather than selling

their houses and leaving their neighbourhoods, residents have developed imaginative ways to stay. Intensification or densification of the plots is one of the most common of these; renting out rooms to secure and extra income is now a widespread practice in the consolidated settlements of Mexico City (Ward 1989; Coulomb 1985; Gilbert 1993). Alternatively, Duhau (1998: 186) says that although it is true that consolidation implies an increase in the value of land, and the subsequent arrival of families of a higher income, this does not mean that a significant number of the original families is forced to move out. Families of a higher income, he explains, do not come to replace original inhabitants but occupy vacant plots and plots that were kept un-built by micro scale speculators.

3.2.3 Consolidation and the development of home-based-enterprises

Research on the consolidation of self-help settlements has also suggested that, as popular settlements consolidate houses tend to develop home-based-enterprises (HBE) (Tipple 2000). Kellett and Tipple found that "there is a symbiotic relationship between housing and home-based-enterprises, as dwellers are able to consolidate their dwellings through the income earned; many households would not have a dwelling without their home-based-enterprise and many enterprises would not exist without the use of a dwelling" (Kellett and Tipple 2000: 204). The adaptability of self-help housing means that with only minimal costs, adaptations can be made to incorporate income generating activities in the home. It has been argued that except for cases in which dwellings are already very small, home-based enterprises occupy little space within the home and have little negative impact on domestic space (Tipple 2004: 378). It has also been suggested that low-income households that have a home-based enterprise are able to secure a higher income than those which do not (Ibid.: 374). Aside from the provision of jobs for low-income populations home-based enterprises have a positive impact for the neighbourhood as a whole. In providing goods and services at an arms reach, neighbours are able to save time and resources that would otherwise be spent travelling. Cutting on transport costs is a great advantage because, whenever this expenditure has to be made, it represents a significant portion of the earnings of a low-income household (Ibid.: 373).

3.3 The densification of the consolidated settlements in the context of economic recession and lack of affordable housing options

It has been suggested that, in the context of the economic restructuring of the last decades and the persistent lack of affordable housing options, rental and shared housing in the consolidated popular settlements have become an important source of housing for the urban poor (Gilbert and Ward 1985; Gilbert and Varley 1991; Gilbert 1993; Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991; Varley 1993; Villavicencio 1993). As a result, the city's consolidated settlements are going through a process of densification. Since the mid 1980's informal rental housing has attracted the attention of researchers working on popular settlements and housing in Mexico City, and the global South more generally. Conversely, in spite of the recognition of the importance of shared housing, this issue has remained largely neglected[11]. In this section I will review the main findings of the literature on informal rental housing in Mexico and the scarce literature on shared housing.

3.3.1 Informal rental housing

Empirical evidence has suggested that a fundamental element of the consolidation process is the development of informal rental housing (Coulomb 1985; Ward 1989; Gilbert 1993). A complex combination of factors such as governmental policies oriented towards the control of urban sprawl, rise in land prices, a decline of household incomes, and the consequent un-feasibility of self-help processes, the insufficient provision of affordable housing, and the need for the creation of an extra income by the residents of consolidated settlements, have meant that much of the housing demand has been absorbed by the consolidated popular settlements through the development of informal rental housing. The rise of rental housing has brought

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[11] A city in which the issue of shared housing has attracted more attention is Santiago de Chile. The specificities of Santiago's housing market have accentuated the role of house sharing since the early 1970's. Under the military regimes of the 1970's and 1980's land invasions and the irregular sale of affordable land were strictly banned (Gilbert 1993; UN-HABITAT 2003). After 1973 the only way to gain access to land in the periphery was through official housing schemes which most low-income families could not afford (Gilbert 1993: 80). In addition, the cost of rental housing rose at a higher level than in other Latin American cities. Unlike most cities in the region, rental housing in Santiago is not a viable alternative for the urban poor (Ibid.: 95). Given the unfeasibility of home-ownership and rental accommodation for the urban poor, shared housing acquired a particular centrality in this city to the point that it has been semi-formalised through the creation of *allegados* committees (Beall 2001: 1017). As a result, the issue has been granted significantly greater recognition both by academic research and policy makers than in other cities in the region.

into question the taken for granted notion that one of the defining characteristics of popular urbanisation and self-help housing is home-ownership.

> "Peripheral self-help settlements are not analogous to home ownership; as they consolidate and integrate into the housing market of the "legal" city, a rental housing market that responds to the growing demand of rental housing is developed in these settlements" (Coulomb 1988: 150, my translation).

Due to its informal character, there is no precise number as to the percentage of rental housing in consolidated settlements. Empirical evidence suggests that rental housing represents a considerable percentage of the housing offer within these settlements[12]. However, the percentage of rental housing varies from settlement to settlement, as Coulomb indicates: "the relative importance of popular rental housing depends on both the settlements' age and its location in relation to the centres of employment" (Coulomb 1985: 46, my translation).

A central question guiding the literature on informal rental housing is whether tenant households are poorer than home-owner households. Early research on rental housing concluded that tenants were poorer than owners (Coulomb 1985; Gilbert and Ward 1985). More recent research sustains that although the overall income of tenant households is slightly lower than that of owner households there is no statistically significant difference. Moreover, because tenant families tend to be significantly smaller they have a higher per capita income than owner families (Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991; UN-HABITAT 2003). The difference between earlier research and the most recent findings can be explained by changes in economic circumstances and in the housing market. As land prices have risen and self-help solutions are becoming less viable, those who would have previously accessed home ownership through self-help housing are now being forced to rent. Moreover, those who would have previously rented and then moved to homeownership are finding it increasingly difficult to make this shift. As a result, those renting in the city's consolidated settlements tend to have higher incomes than inner city tenants and than home-owners in the outlying periphery. In line with this argument Gilbert (1987;

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[12] An example of this is Ward's research on a recently formed settlement, a consolidating and a consolidated settlement where he indicates that 47% of the households in the consolidated settlement were renting accommodation (Ward 1982). Based on a 1970 census data Connolly argues that in the older and more consolidated settlements as much as 60% of the housing stock is rented (Connolly 1982).

1993) notes that it would be wrong to assume that tenants are the poorer and most marginal group in the city. Employment structure and income levels tend to be very similar between tenants and owners. Landlords, owners and tenants in the consolidated settlements, he concludes are drawn from the same social class. In spite of this, Gilbert (1987: 63) argues that informal rental housing is a residual form of land tenure that accommodates those who cannot buy. Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada (1991: 118), on the other hand, posit that rental housing is not a residual form of land tenure, considered only by the poorest of the poor. Those with no other alternative tend to acquire a plot in the popular settlements of the outlying periphery. Quality of housing is lower in the outlying periphery than it is in the rental accommodation of the consolidated settlements (UN-HABITAT 2003).

A further question guiding the literature on informal rental housing is the relationship between tenure and migrant status. Research on the issue suggests that most tenants of the inner city are natives or have a long trajectory of residence in the city whilst owner heads of household in the popular settlements tend to be migrants (Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991; Gilbert 1993). Most tenants in the consolidated popular settlements are recently arrived migrants. The consolidated settlements are becoming an important source of affordable housing for this population. However, due to the limited offer of rental housing in the inner city, there is also an important percentage of native tenants in the consolidated settlements (Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991).

As regards the owners, the literature argues that they operate on a small-scale and tend to live on the premises (Gilbert 1987; 1993; UN-HABITAT 2003). Informal rental housing tends to be highly unstable given that landlords resort to renting according to need. Because most of the rental accommodation was not built for that end, its use varies considerably. Its use often fluctuates between being rented out to being used to accommodate family members (Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991; Gilbert and Varley 1991; UN-HABITAT 2003). In Mexico landlordism is often referred to as a "widow's business" due to the large amounts of women involved (Gilbert and Varley 1991; UN-HABITAT 2003).

3.3.2 Shared housing in the consolidated settlements

One of the consequences of the lack of research on the subject of shared housing is that there is no coherent definition of this social phenomenon. Sharing is broadly defined as the situation in which a person (or family) lives in a house or plot s/he does not own without paying any regular rent to the owner (Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991; UN-HABITAT 2003). Varley (1993) defines sharing as the situation in which two or more separate households – defined as a group of people eating from same pot - occupy the same plot of land. One of these households owns the plot and the other/s live/s there rent free as a result of kinship or friendship links with the owner. Varley's definition differentiates between extended families and house sharing. If instead of living as separate households all people in the plot live and eat from the same pot they would be an extended family and not house sharers. In contrast, the 2003 UN-HABITAT report says that sharers include both households sharing a property with the owner but not forming part of the owner's household and households living as part of an extended household.

A further characteristic of the existing literature is that it is based on questionnaire surveys applied in a limited number of settlements in Mexico City, Puebla, and Guadalajara[13]. Most of these surveys are embedded in a more extensive research on informal rental housing[14]. As a result they provide only a broad picture on the practice of house sharing. In what follows I will present the main findings of the research available to date.

3.3.2.1 Who are the sharers?

Research on the issue suggests that, in these cities, most sharers are the sons and daughters of owners, siblings or close relatives (Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991; Varley 1993; Villavicencio 1993). In addition, sharers have smaller households and tend to be younger than other household heads. Owners are older than tenants and tenants older than sharers.(Gilbert and Ward 1985; Gilbert 1993; UN-HABITAT

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[13] Varley's 1993 research is based on a survey of Mexico City, Puebla and Guadalajara, the others focus solely on Mexico City.

[14] It is important to note, as a further evidence of the scarcity of research on the subject, that the work of Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991, Gilbert 1993 (the part on Mexico City) and Villavicencio 1993 are based on the same survey. In fact, Villavicencio collaborated in the interpretation and writing up process of the brief section dedicated to the topic of shared housing in Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991.

2003). Villavicencio (1993) shows that although most sharers are younger, amongst sharers there are also families with older heads of household and children.

Sharers were mostly born in the city, only a few migrants become sharers (Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991; Gilbert 1993; Villavicencio 1993) This is because migrants tend to lack the social networks to access this kind of tenure. Kinship and friendship ties are determinant for accessing shared housing. Unlike the situation in Santiago de Chile, in Mexico City few sharers are friends of the owner. They are mostly related by kin (Gilbert 1993: 49). The few migrants who share do so with relatives other than their parents or friends and often as a temporary housing solution (Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991).

The household income of sharers tends to be only slightly lower than that of owners and tenants (Gilbert 1993; Villavicencio 1993). However, they have better per capita incomes than owners. They have less personal possession than both owners and tenants (Gilbert 1993). Most sharers have not previously owned a house. The few cases in which this happens is when sharers are old and decide to leave their property to move in with their children (Ibid.). For many sharers the house in which they now share is their first house (Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991). There are however many cases in which sharers have previously rented or shared elsewhere (Villavicencio 1993).

3.3.2.2 Is sharing a last resort?

Empirical research shows that sharers are generally happy to do so. It does not seem to be a tenure of last resort chosen by those who cannot rent or buy. (Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991; Gilbert 1993). Most sharers affirm that they prefer to share than to rent because of the economic benefits and the family support they can obtain (Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991). In addition, a preference for sharing rather then renting is explained by the fact that sharers live in better conditions than tenants. (Gilbert 1993). They have larger living spaces than tenants and greater access to consumer goods because they are able to use those of the owners (Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991). Villavicencio (1993) hints that preference for sharing might also respond to the existence of a disposition towards sharing in the part of the

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sharers. This, she argues, suggests that in addition to being an economic solution there is a cultural connotation to sharing.

3.3.2.3 Is sharing a temporary solution leading to home ownership?

There is no general agreement in the research available on whether sharing is a temporary solution leading to homeownership. Varley (1993: 21) argues that sharing enables people to save and to later become home-owners. Contrary to this Gilbert (1993: 49) reports that only few of the sharers he interviewed said sharing allowed them to save in order to become owners. Moreover, only 1 in 11 had actually looked for their own house. Following the same line of argument, Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada (1991: 124) posit that whilst sharers affirm that being able to save is one of the benefits of this arrangement this should not be taken to mean that saving will be channelled towards a change in land tenure.

Sharing is not simply a temporary housing solution leading to house ownership. Rather, it increasingly represents a normal mechanism to access housing, similar to renting or owning a place to live (Villavicencio 1993: 39). This is mostly due to the lack of affordable housing provision. Sharing becomes more common as affordable housing alternatives diminish (Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991;.Villavicencio 1993; UN-HABITAT 2003).

4. Laying out the conceptual groundwork

4.1 House and home

As the subject of this research is the process whereby families produce and physically build their houses, its central concept is the house and not the home. The concept of home is relevant to this research insofar as one of the social consequences of the process of building a house, but not the only one, is the cultural process of turning the house into a home. Therefore, although they are often conflated into one concept, in this research house and home will not be taken to represent the same thing (Blunt and Dowling 2006). Houses are often a place of residence but are not regarded by its inhabitants as a home. Home is thus not always the house where one lives. "Home may be ones' country, city or town, where one's family lives or comes from and /or

where one usually lives" (Mallett 2004: 79). Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that home is not always linked to a concrete house or even to a concrete physical space. "While homes might be located, it is not the location that is "home". Instead, homes can be understood as places that hold considerable social, psychological and emotive meaning for individuals and for groups" (Easthope 2004: 135). For some, home can be a purely imaginary place. In today's age, when people are increasingly mobile, feelings of home are often produced through various practices such as the cooking of food (Petridou 2001). However it is defined and produced, home is not fixed and stable but dynamic and ever-changing. This is because, as Blunt and Dowling (2006: 23) state "Home does not simply exist, but is made. Home is a process of creating and understanding forms of dwelling and belonging".

The fact that the house is not always a home does not mean that it is a mere background where social life unfolds. In this research the house will be conceptualised as a form of socially produced space or spatiality that is sociologically significant. This definition of the house follows the tradition of thought that was developed in the social sciences after the 1970's which defines space as being socially constructed and productive of social practices and relations (Lefebvre 1991; Massey and Allen 1984; Massey 1995; Soja 1985). Though this conceptualisation argues for the productive character of housing it differs from environmental deterministic notions which would claim that there is a direct causal relation between given spatial forms and social behaviour; that a given space (X) would always create a (Y) social result. Rather, it defines the house as a socially constructed space that is both the outcome and an active agent in the construction, reproduction, and change of social processes and relations (Giddens 1984; Bourdieu 1990a). My conceptualisation of the house also differs from a material culture approach to housing. The house is not defined as an object of consumption that is endowed with cultural meaning, but rather, in the context of popular urbanisation, housing is a *building process* through which cultural meaning is produced.

4.2 The transformative potential of everyday practices

I will draw on de Certeau's (1984) concept of "tactic" to account for the moments in which the spatial order of the house is transformed by its users even if only in

temporary ways. Feminist literature on the house has illustrated how the structures of patriarchy are naturalised in the spatial order of the house and the consequent role the house plays in their reproduction. This literature has also demonstrated that the spatial order of the house can be transgressed through everyday practice (see Bowlby, Gregory and McKie 1997; Munro and Madigan 1999). Based on this empirical evidence and following de Certeau, this research is grounded on the claim that, through everyday use, the ordinary subject has the capacity to transform the spatial order in which s/he dwells. It is through tactical everyday practices such as walking, dwelling, and cooking that these transformations come about. Tactical practice is defined by de Certeau as a calculated action which "must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power" (de Certeau 1984: 37). The transformative capacity of this tactical practice is therefore limited: "Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into "opportunities" (Ibid.: XiX).

Houses are "some of the most "symbolically structured" of spatial regimes" (Tonkiss 2005). Self-help housing is different to most formal housing in that, being produced and built by people themselves, the spatial order of the house is not a foreign territory imposed on its users. Self-help housing, however, is not built in a social vacuum. In de Certeau's terms, it is not the product of the strategic practice of its users. As argued before, all forms of housing are a product of social structures and relations and a medium for their reproduction. In building their houses the residents of popular settlements respond to dominant views of what a house and a family ought to be like. Though social structures have an important effect on the development of an auto-constructed house there is often a contradiction between what the spaces that make up the house were built for and their actual use. The residents of self-help housing transform the spatial order of their house sometimes through radical material alterations, but mostly through their everyday tactical practice.

4.3 Family practices

Another key theoretical concept that this research draws on is that of *family practices*. In adopting this definition I distance myself from structural-functionalist definitions of "the family." A wide range of empirical evidence has demonstrated that

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there is no one universal thing we can call "the family", but rather, definitions of "the family" are culture and time specific (Cheal 1991; Bernardes 1997; Wright and Jagger 1999). Definitions of "the family" which aim at identifying "normal" family structures exclude the existing variety of family forms, practices and understandings of family life, treating them as pathologies and thus as theoretically irrelevant. Contrary to this view, this research is grounded on an understanding of the family that focuses on what people do together rather than on identifying universal roles within families and the patterned interactions that take place between them. The emphasis is placed on what families "do" rather than on what form they take (Silva and Smart 1999:11).

Defining family in terms of the process of "doing" family does not mean that I will follow a functionalist approach which sees the family as an institution that fulfils universal functional prerequisites for the survival of human societies (Cheal 1991: 4). I will distance myself from functionalist definitions of "the family" in three ways: as one of its central thinkers, Parsons has argued that the nuclear family is the prevailing family form of the modern society for it is the one that best responds to the requirements of the industrial economy. There is little decisive empirical evidence to prove that the nuclear family has ever been the predominant family form. As Morgan (1975) states, although Parsons intended to put forward a general theory of society and the role of family in it, his analysis actually only applied to the modern American family and more specifically to the middle class American family. Second, functionalist accounts are problematic in their statement that prevailing family forms come about for they represent the most efficient fit for the society in which they are embedded. Sennett's (1970) research on middle class families of industrial Chicago puts this into question by providing evidence that the nuclear or intensive family, was actually less effective in adapting to the industrial society than extended families were. The intensive family was strong because it was used as a "weapon of defence" *against* the threatening new urban environment (Ibid.: 194). Furthermore, functionalist definitions are problematic in that they are based on an understanding of "the family" as essential and universal. Different family forms are seen to be but variations of the same subject called "the family". As Barret and McIntosh (1991: 90) note: "One major problem of the attempt to argue a functional relationship between a particular form of family and a particular mode of production is that we have to

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accept the family as it is constructed ideologically –as a self-evident unity- in order to do so". In addition, as feminist scholars have pointed out, functionalist views of "the family" tend to see it as a coherent and cohesive unit overlooking the fact that not all families function well and that they are also the scenario for violence and conflict. Feminists stress the importance of not only acknowledging the fact that there are differences between families but also within families (Gittins 1985: 2).

Focusing on what families do rather than on family structure does not imply the adoption of functionalist accounts of "the family." In this research family will be understood as: "a term used by lay actors to label those ties which they believe to involve enduring intimate relations" (Cheal 1991: 130). Family or kinship is "a way of identifying others as in some way special from the rest, people to whom the individual or collectivity feel responsible in certain ways. It is a method of demarcating obligations and responsibilities between individuals and groups" (Gittins 1985: 65). Family will be therefore defined as an active process rather than as a static thing. That is, family is about family making, about how social actors define what family is. In line with this conceptualisation of family, this research is grounded on Morgan's (1999) concept of *family practices*. Morgan suggests that we look at family as being: "less of a noun and more of an adjective or, possibly, a verb. "Family" represents a constructed quality of human interaction rather than a thing-like object of detached social investigation" (Ibid.: 16). He defines *family practices* as those relationships, activities and interactions that are seen as having to do with family matters. This means that, we are not to follow one universal theoretical definition of " the family" but consider as "family" all that is described as such by individual actors, social and cultural institutions, and the observer. The focus on *family practices*, or the act of doing family implies a focus on everyday life.

4.4 Habitus

Lastly, I will draw on Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to understand the family practices, and residential arrangements of present day Santo Domingo. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is useful for it goes beyond both the objectivism and subjectivism of action:

"the objectivism of action understood as a mechanical reaction "without an agent" and the subjectivism which portrays action as the deliberate pursuit of a conscious intention, the free project of a conscience positing its own ends and maximising its utility through rational computation" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 121).

Habitus provides an alternative to understanding family practices and residential arrangements as being either the result of conscious strategies designed by rational agents which aim at maximising their limited resources, or as the mechanic effect of structural conditions. Following these lines of argument it would be concluded that in Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements people live in multifamily plots because they cannot afford to live otherwise or that they cluster together as a conscious strategy to maximise their limited resources. Instead, the family practices and residential arrangements of Santo Domingo will be seen as being the product of *habitus*, a system of durable dispositions which generate and organise practice.

To say that family practices and residential arrangements are the product of *habitus* is not to say that they are the product of a person's or group's inherent 'culture' as 'culture of poverty' theories would suggest. The argument is not that people live in a particular way because they have an inborn or natural taste for the practices they perform. The *habitus* is "something *non natural*, [it is] a set of *acquired* characteristics which are the product of social conditions" (Bourdieu 2002: 29). Being the product of objective conditions of existence "the habitus is necessity internalized and converted into a disposition" (Bourdieu 2007: 170). It is a mechanism of adaptation that is not the product of the conscious and instrumental strategising of a rational agent.

People who occupy similar position in a given field, that is, people who live under similar conditions of existence will acquire a similar *habitus*. Consequently, those living under different conditions of existence will acquire a different *habitus* (Ibid.). Sharing similar conditions of existence, and in particular, similar positions in the field of housing, the residents of Santo Domingo share a similar *habitus*. This does not mean, however, that their practices are wholly determined and will therefore be the same. A given *habitus* can produce very different practices but within set limits. This is because the *habitus* "is a structured principle of invention, similar to a

generative grammar able to produce an infinite number of new sentences according to determinate patterns and within determinate limits" (Bourdieu 2002: 30). The limits of the practices that can be performed under a particular *habitus* are not random, they are set by "the historically and socially situated conditions of its production" (Bourdieu 1990a: 55). This means that the family practices and residential arrangements of Santo Domingo are not fully unpredictable nor a direct consequence of past or present conditions of existence.

Through the concept of *habitus* it is possible to account for how the family practices and residential arrangements of Santo Domingo have come about and also for their continuity and potential change. Being the product of a given set of conditions of existence, the *habitus* is transformed when these conditions of existence change. "Habitus change constantly in response to new experiences. Dispositions are subject to a kind of permanent revision, but one which is never radical, because it works on the basis of the premises established in the previous state" (Bourdieu 2000: 161). Generally speaking, socio economic conditions have remained constant for Mexico City's urban poor. This means that, overall, there is a correspondence between people's *habitus* and their conditions of existence. At one level this correspondence explains the widespread continuity of family practices and residential arrangements in the neighbourhood. At a second level, it explains neighbourhood stability and attachment to place. Because "people's dispositions are embodied, and thereby necessarily territorially located" (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005: 9), when *habitus* and conditions of existence match, people feel comfortable in the social and physical space they occupy. "People are comfortable when there is a correspondence between habitus and field, but otherwise people feel ill at ease and seek to move – socially and spatially – so their discomfort is relieved" (Ibid.).

Because in Santo Domingo the *habitus* operates under similar conditions of existence to those of which it is the product it creates the illusion of practice being the direct product of economic necessity (people cluster in multifamily plots because they cannot afford to live otherwise) or of rational action (people cluster together as a conscious strategy to pool resources and pay less rent). The existence of the *habitus* only becomes apparent when there is mismatch between the *habitus* and the conditions of existence. In Santo Domingo *habitus* is made evident amongst the more

affluent families and in situations in which, in spite of having the material resources to live in a different way, people choose to stay in the neighbourhood, and live in a multifamily plot.

The *habitus* is not only transformed as a result of changes in the objective conditions of existence, it can also be transformed as a result of education. Education can make a person's *habitus* at least partially explicit and conscious and therefore subject to being revised (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:133; Bourdieu 2002: 29). Education tends to accentuate the mismatch of *habitus* and field generating tensions and frustrations (Bourdieu 2000: 234). Thus, although in Santo Domingo conditions of existence have remained relatively constant access to education has meant that for some – often members of the second and third generations who have had significantly more access to formal education than the generation that first populated the neighbourhood – alternative family practices and residential arrangements have emerged as desirable, if not always possible.

5. Conclusion

Empirical research has shown that, in Mexico and Latin America, extended family practices are not dying out. Family forms are becoming increasingly diverse and, amongst this diversity, are more varied and complex extended family arrangements. In addition, research suggests that in Mexican cities extended family arrangements are becoming more widespread as a result of worsening economic conditions. According to the existing research families are clustering together in order to maximise their limited resources. The following chapters aim at expanding this body of literature by providing an up-to-date and in-depth account of the family practices of Mexico City's urban poor. This research seeks to not only enrich the existing knowledge on family practices in urban Mexico but also to develop new ways of thinking and theorising how these practices have come about, their continuity and transformations.

The literature on housing consolidation that has been reviewed in this chapter suggests that the original settlers of the consolidated popular settlements of Mexico City have not been expelled. In order to cope with the rising costs of staying in their

neighbourhoods residents have intensified the use of their plots and built additional rooms to rent in the informal housing market. The significant expansion of informal rental housing and the important role it plays in providing housing for the urban poor has meant that, in recent years, urban research dealing with the city's popular settlements has mainly focused on this issue. In contrast, little attention has been given to the process of densification resulting from families clustering together in multifamily plots. The scarce research that exists on the subject provides only a preliminary approach and general account of the phenomenon. This research intends to fill in this gap in the literature providing an up-to-date ethnographic study of the practice of family unfolding and house sharing. In addition, this research seeks to add a cultural layer to the understanding of the densification of Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements. Following the suggestion that there might be a cultural connotation to the practice of house sharing (Villavicencio 1993) my research will look into the question of why families cluster together.

CHAPTER THREE – AN ETHNOGRAPHIC WINDOW INTO MEXICO CITY'S CONSOLIDATED POPULAR SETTLEMENTS

1. Introduction

This chapter provides an account of the methods employed in this research and of its methodological framework. It begins with a definition of ethnography and an explanation of the thesis' methodological framework. It follows with a discussion on this research's approach to ethnography and culture and on the relation between theory and data. The chapter continues by presenting the methods employed, how access was negotiated and how data was collected. To conclude a note on translation and on the ethical issues that are intrinsic to the inquiry are included.

2. Ethnography: a methodological approach

This research is an ethnography of a consolidated popular settlement in Mexico City. Broadly speaking ethnography can be defined "in catholic fashion, as social research based on the close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space, in which the investigator embeds herself near (or within) the phenomenon so as to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do" (Wacquant 2003: 5). In what follows I will qualify this definition by clarifying this research's methodological framework.

I distance myself from a realist or positivist ethnographic approach that would assume the existence of an objective reality which can be accurately represented in the ethnographic text. Rather, I believe that the social world is constantly being interpreted, and at least partially constructed and reconstructed by people themselves (Brewer 2000: 34). Therefore, the social world cannot be fully understood without taking into account the landscape of intentions and meanings.

Because there is no one neutral and observable "reality", any ethnographic account will always be a partial view of the competing versions of reality. The ethnographer's version is thus not privileged and unproblematic but only one informed account among many possible other. The ethnographic process is not one of discovering knowledge but one of constructing it. "We invent concepts, models, and

schemes to make sense of experience and, further, we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience" (Schwandt 1998: 237).

Moreover, the ethnographer is part of the social reality that is being researched and is not a detached objective observer. The findings of the research are hence always value mediated (Guba and Lincoln 1998: 206). As a result, throughout the research I sought to adopt a critical attitude towards my own data, and be reflexive with regard to my own work. The implications of adopting the principle of reflexivity will be discussed further in this chapter.

As with all ethnographic research, much of my empirical data is made up of different kinds of narratives from my participants (semi structured interviews, life history interviews, informal conversations, etc). As a consequence of the ontological position taken in this research, these narratives are not taken as "true" reproductions of past events. Narratives are mediated by people's capacity to reflect on, and be selective about past events. The narrative material gathered throughout my fieldwork is therefore context specific; different narratives would have resulted if I had approached my participants in a different place and time of their lives.

> "The use of auto/biography raises many questions about "truth" and knowledge and about the way the subjective experience of events is continually mediated as memory... All events are "remembered" and therefore reconstructed over time, and as a result there will always be an element of fiction in the way that life stories are told and retold and are constantly reworked through the additional experiences of the narrator (see e.g. Riceour 1984; Bruner 1985). It is possible to say that all responses are "constructed". The audience and the motives of the narrator, such as the desire to please or obscure, are always factors in responses given" (Ali 2003: 29).

While it is important to bear in mind that narratives are constructed and are thus context specific, it does not mean that they are to be seen as an "unreliable" source of data . The objective of this research is not to uncover a supposed "objective reality" about self-help housing and family practices, but rather to understand this social phenomenon as it is interpreted, experienced and constructed by social actors. In being value mediated narratives actually offer an opportunity to learn more about the speakers' perspectives. The choice of what is said and what is not said, omissions

and silences and the tone and manner in which things are said is just as revealing as the events that are being narrated. In addition, narratives do not simply reflect social life but play an important role in its construction (Gill 2000: 172). The fact that narratives are not neutral means that we should both approach them with certain scepticism and see them as an opportunity to further understand how social processes come about.

3. An in-depth exploration of a social phenomenon

My choice to focus on the micro level of everyday life and unpack the development of the varied spatial and social forms that come about throughout the self-help housing process required an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon. Only a detailed inquiry would enable me to properly tackle the subject I set out to understand. Consequently, the research is an ethnographic study of one consolidated popular settlement of Mexico City. Ethnography – through its combination of interviews and conversations as a means to generate rich data about practices, and the actual observation and recording of these practices – represented the only way in which I could access social practices in a substantial way. Moreover, my interest lies in understanding *how* the socio-spatial reality of Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements is produced in everyday life. As Christian Lüders (2004: 225, my emphasis) states: "at the centre of ethnographic studies is the question – theoretically put – of *how* the particular realities are "produced" in practical terms; they therefore look at means employed in a given situation for the production of social phenomena from the perspective of participants." Ethnography's concern with thorough rather than representative data provided the framework which could enable the understanding, and not merely a representation of, the complex socio-spatial practices taking place in Santo Domingo. It was precisely this search for in-depth data and understanding of the phenomenon which led me to focus on one consolidated popular settlement of Mexico City and a limited number of families within it. As Stake (1998) posits, the decision to carry out a case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of object which suggests a particular epistemological stance. This being that in-depth knowledge of the case studied enables a complex understanding of a broader social phenomenon.

Therefore, my decision to develop an ethnographic study of a single neighbourhood does not mean that I embrace notions of "community", which presuppose the existence of shared values and culture within a spatially limited setting (Marcus 1998), and which see this supposed "community" as the object of ethnographic research. I am therefore not attempting to do an ethnography of "a people" or "community" but rather to investigate the densification process of Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements. My approach is thus what Marcus denominates a strategically situated ethnography.

> "The strategically situated ethnography attempts to understand something broadly
> about the system in ethnographic terms as much as it does its local subjects. It is
> only local circumstantially, thus situating itself in a context or field quite differently
> than does other single-sited ethnography" (Ibid.: 95).

This research is not an ethnography of a "people" nor of a marginal and/or exceptional phenomenon, it is concerned with an urban environment - popular settlements - that constitutes a significant portion of the world's cities, mostly in the global South. Moreover, this research deals with an increasingly relevant phenomenon taking place in most cities of the South, namely the densification of the consolidated popular settlements through informal rental housing and house sharing. As the 2003 UN-HABITAT report on rental housing illustrates, in most developing countries, the number of urban families living in rental or shared housing has and will continue to increase.

Beyond providing an in-depth understanding of Santo Domingo, this research aims to contribute to the urban research that is concerned with the experience of urban living for the different groups that make up the contemporary city. Given that the majority of the world's urban population lives in a city of the South[15], and a large portion of these in a consolidated popular settlement undergoing densification, it is crucial to include this urban environment in our understanding and theorising of the contemporary city.

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[15] "The total population of cities in the developing regions of the world already exceeds that of cities in all of the developed regions (by 1.3 billion people). If predictions prove accurate, by 2030, nearly 4 billion people - 8 per cent of the world's urban dwellers - will live in cities of the developing world" (UN-HABITAT 2006: 4).

As was mentioned in chapter one, around 60% of the population of Mexico City lives in an area that was produced through popular urbanisation. Because the rapid urbanisation that led to the development of popular settlements in the city took place in the last half of the twentieth century a large portion of the city's popular settlements is now at least twenty years old and has undergone a process of consolidation and densification. Santo Domingo was chosen as a case that broadly characterises the consolidated popular settlements of Mexico City. This research seeks to provide an ethnographic understanding of Mexico City's consolidated settlements through the in-depth investigation of a single case.

I disagree with the view that ethnographic research can only speak to the particular site from which it emerged and is thus unable to generate theory. I believe that by clarifying the specificities of the researched site comparisons can be drawn. Through these informed comparisons concepts and theories developed in a particular ethnography can prove useful for the understanding of other settings. Throughout this thesis I have strived to be as specific as possible about the particularities of my ethnographic study so as to enable later comparisons. However, because the elaboration of these comparisons falls outside of the scope of this research as Duneier (1999: 11) concludes about his ethnographic study of New York's Greenwich Village sidewalk life: "In the end, I must leave it to readers to test my observations against their own, and hope that the concepts I have developed to make sense of this neighbourhood will prove useful in other venues."

Unlike most ethnographies which attempt to provide a comprehensive picture of a "community" at a particular point in time, and which tend to refer to its history only as a form of contextualisation (Small 2004: 196), this is an ethnographic research which continuously looks into the past. It does so not with the aim of constructing a comprehensive historical account of Santo Domingo, but to understand its present densification process. Because all socio-spatial conditions are the outcome of social processes and relations, they are deeply embedded in complex historical processes. A thorough understanding of these conditions, therefore, requires an investigation of these processes and not merely a contextual glimpse into the past. It is important to note that just as I am not aiming to provide an all-inclusive snapshot of Santo Domingo – its religious festivals, political organisations, and the like – when looking at the past my aim is not to uncover the overall historical development of the

neighbourhood. Rather, the intention is to uncover how the current densification of Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements has come about and how it is produced and experienced in everyday life.

4. Working from the data

Although I chose Santo Domingo as a case study with the intention of learning about a particular urban phenomenon and not with the idea of developing a monographic study of "a people", the more specific research questions, themes and theoretical issues that are developed in this dissertation emerged as fieldwork and data analysis took place. My approach was to start with a definition of the particular empirical reality which I intended to study, collect ethnographic data, analyse it and build concepts and theory from it. In this approach the chosen empirical setting is the subject of the research, and the aim is to have theory emerge from the empirical data. Behind this approach is the notion that "generating set notions about the field study in the form of questions or assumptions could preclude certain lines of inquiry that might prove valuable later"(Anderson 2003: 237).

The approach of working from the data towards the construction of theory differs from ethnographic research that "begins with theory reconstruction as its pivotal agenda and seeks cases that cause trouble for received wisdom" (Duneier 1999: 342). In this alternative way of doing ethnographic research a chosen theory is "applied" to the reality observed with the aim of substantiating and refining it. The chosen theoretical background, rather than a particular site or social phenomenon, is the subject of the research (see Burawoy 1991).

The two broad interests that set in motion this research were: a broad interest in the residential patterns and family practices amongst Mexico City's urban poor and an interest in learning more about Mexico City's popular settlements. As I read through the relevant literature I became particularly interested in the current situation of the earlier settlements which were created in the second half of the twentieth century, during the city's rapid urbanisation process. I wanted to know how people in these settlements lived, what kinds of housing forms, residential patterns and family practices had emerged. As a result of my initial readings, conversations with experts, and the visits to possible consolidated popular settlements that I carried out on my

first fieldwork visit to Mexico City, I focused the subject of my research on the densification process that these settlements are undergoing and the development of complex multifamily plots. From this early point in my research I defined the research question that guides chapter 6. For this chapter I performed a series interviews that dealt specifically with this question. The themes of the remaining chapters emerged slowly throughout fieldwork and were crystallised only in the later data analysis and writing process. It was through the coding of the data and initial writing attempts that the themes and sociological questions guiding the remaining chapters were finally defined.

5. Accessing the field

From the beginning of my project I recognised that the issue of access was crucial for the kind of research I intended to do. The fact that I set out to do an ethnographic research within the domestic realm put the issue of access at the heart of the project. During one of my first visits to Santo Domingo, one of my informants insisted on me not going around knocking on people's doors in order to interview them. He related a story about a young man who had been filling in questionnaires for a governmental survey who got beaten up because a gang of drug dealers thought he was working for the police. Although this was of course an extreme situation I knew very well I could not just go into the neighbourhood and approach people at random. Even if I had only intended to ask people to answer a brief questionnaire I risked, not being physically assaulted as Alberto suggested, but certainly being rejected as a consequence of distrust. And given that my intention was to carry out in-depth interviews and participant observations within people's houses access represented a particular challenge. So how did I negotiate access?

The main objective of my first trip to Mexico City in July 2004 was to negotiate access to the field. At that initial stage, my main door into the field was Darío, an architect friend of my family who has worked for many years giving technical advice to popular organisations concerned with housing demands. Darío not only gave me very valuable information from his experience in Mexico City's popular settlements but also introduced me to Germán, a political activist who thirty years before had been a leader in Santo Domingo. One evening, Germán rang me to say he was planning to go to Santo Domingo the next morning and that he would have time to

show me around. I spent the whole morning with him in Santo Domingo. He first took me to a friend's house where we were offered food and had a nice and long chat with the female head of the house who was very open and willing to help me in my research. We then went to visit another friend who said that having been introduced by Germán, she was more than happy to help me. Although this was a very good start, I was worried about only working with people who had been part of Germán's housing organisation. It was important for me to also contact families who had not been part of an organisation and even families who had not been squatters but *comuneros* (peasant or descendant of peasant family with rights to communal land) who were the alleged owners of the land.

Although accessing these families was a bit harder, I was able to do so through personal contacts and through my own presence in the field. During a conversation with a friend I learned that the woman who worked as a cleaner at her mother's house had previously lived in Santo Domingo with her relatives. My friend gave me her contact number and through her I was able to contact a family that had not been part of a political organisation. After I had spent a longer time in the field I was also able to get in touch with people myself. For example, one morning, as I was taking a cab from a taxi stand that is only five minutes away from Santo Domingo, the driver asked me why I was going there. He said he had already seen me around the neighbourhood on repeated occasions. I explained to him what I was doing and he told me he lived in Santo Domingo. After I had met him several times he said he could introduce me to his mother-in-law who was a *comunera* and would be keen to tell me her side of the story. From the first time I met her there was a good rapport between us so I returned to her house on numerous occasions and was able to talk to other residents of the plot of land. Families were generally reticent to formally introduce me to people in my role of researcher. Nevertheless, they invited me to different occasions where they knew I would be able to meet more people and talk to them informally. There was one important exception to this. José, the male head of one family formally introduced me to his relatives who lived in two other plots of land on the same street as he did. This was very important for it gave me the opportunity to look at social and spatial networks beyond the limits of a singe plot of land.

6. Data collection

The fieldwork was completed between July 2004 and January 2006. In order to combine the process of reflecting over the data and the processes of data collection to guarantee a direct relation between elaborated theories and empirical data, the fieldwork was divided into different phases. I distanced myself from the field periodically, reflected over the collected data and came back to the field to perfect and develop the emerging research questions, themes, concepts, and theories. This means that effectively there were no distinct stages of formulation of research questions, data gathering, analysis and theorising. Rather, as Walsh (1998: 221) describes, the research process was one of "constant interaction between problem formulation, data collection, and data analysis. The analysis of data feeds into research design; data collection and theory come to be developed out of data analysis and all the subsequent data collection is guided strategically by the emergent theory."

Stepping back was also important for it enabled me to have a sense of what material I had and to determine when I had collected enough data. As time went by and I knew more and became more involved with the field, new themes and nuances became more visible making me feel there was much more to uncover thus giving me the sense that there was never going to be a point where I could stop. While in the field, I intermittently felt that I had already collected a vast amount of material which would be difficult to process but also felt that I had still too little to do justice to my topic.

6.1 Participant observation and interviewing

The decision of carrying out an ethnographic study meant that my fieldwork was based on multiple modes of data collection, which led me to engage with the field in different levels and to collect various types of information. The combination of these different types of data helped me achieve more depth by looking at the phenomenon from different angles. The main methods of data collection I used were observational and interview techniques. Interviewing and participant observation took place with the residents of 10 different plots of land (see Appendix for more information). Corresponding to the general situation in Santo Domingo most plots were either 100 or 200 square meters. The number of people making up the families that live in each plot varied from 5 to 23 In addition, many of the plots were inhabited by a number of

people that were not family members who were renting rooms. The families living in these plots are a variety of extended families that often include three generations. The definite number of families I worked with was not defined before fieldwork commenced. This was defined in the fieldwork process when I felt that I had collected enough data.

When doing ethnographic research, there is a moment in which it is hard to distinguish between interviews as such and more informal conversations that provide the same and at times even richer material. It is therefore difficult to quantify the amount of interviews that I performed. Formal interviews and conversations were blurred by the fact that I did not follow the traditional criteria for interviewing which dictates that the interviewing situation ought to be a one-way process in which the interviewer does not disclose information about him or herself nor gives opinions so as not to 'bias' the interview. The researcher limits him or herself to asks questions to a passive interviewee who only responds (Oakley 1995). In practice, even the more formal interviews I conducted took more the form of a conversation in which the interviewees often asked about myself and wanted to hear my views on the topic in question. Rather than obstructing the interview, as Oakley (Ibid.: 41) observes "in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of the interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship.

I did most of the more formal in-depth interviews during my first visits to the different families. Most of these dealt with the research question of why families cluster together that guides chapter six. Through these interviews I was able to uncover multiple and often conflicting and contradictory responses (Marvasti 2004: 21) to this question thus enabling a more complex understanding. Initially I tried to tape most of my interviews but I soon changed my approach. I realised I would get much better material by taking notes and moving toward more informal conversations. Participants felt much more comfortable without the recorder and spoke more freely. In addition, the absence of the recorder and the time frames the duration of the tapes provide, meant that conversations were more flexible, they diverted from my particular research interests to other topics and back, enabling not only a better rapport but also the possibility of being surprised by a relevant topic that

I hadn't anticipated (see Ellen 1984; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). In spite of the benefits of taking notes as opposed to tape recording, note taking represented particular challenges for I had to simultaneously listen, think about further probes and write (Lofland 1971: 89). What I did to make the task easier and to make sure I could adequately attend to the conversation was to make jotted notes of what I heard and observed and full notes only of particular sentences which I felt would be important to quote verbatim. At the end of the day (and sometimes the next morning) I wrote full field notes of all I could remember from the previous day. It is important to note that it was not a "mistake" to begin by doing more formal tape recorded interviews although I later felt informal conversations provided better material. Having this concrete reason to be in the homes of the participants was crucial for enabling the rest of my fieldwork.

As time passed my relationship with some of the families grew closer. This enabled me to visit them on a regular basis without having a scheduled interview. Although I visited all of the plots of land on repeated occasions I had a closer relationship with the families of three plots (see Plots 1,2 and 3 in Appendix). Plot 1 consisted of a total of 15 people and 5 family groups. Plot 2 consisted of 10 people and three family groups. In these two plots I interacted with all the family groups that lived there. In Plot 3 sustained interaction took place with two of the 6 family groups living in the plot of land. It is important to say that the main contact in all the cases was the female head of the plot. It was with these women with which more time was spent and more conversations held. Generally speaking, more time was spent with women and children, who were the ones that spent more time in the house. But beyond the fact that women were more often at home carrying out tasks in which I could join in, I spent more time talking to women for it was with them that a better rapport was established. This is because gender categories play an important role in determining the domains of discourse to which the ethnographer has access (Ellen 1984). I found that, similar to what Finch (1999) describes about her experience of interviewing women, in spite of our different class positions we could identify through our shared structural position as women. Like Finch, I was surprised at how easy it was to speak to women and at how eager they were to talk about personal topics. It was common that, whenever I spent a long time talking with one woman (sometimes in the context of a scheduled interview) as I got ready to leave the house she mentioned how she had enjoyed being able to talk about herself and having someone to listen.

I carried out the bulk of my participant observation during my visits to the plots of land. In the beginning of my fieldwork my visits were organised around formal interviews. This did not mean, however, that I arrived at their house, interviewed the person I had agreed to interview on that day, and then left. Before I began interviewing I often chatted with the people that were in the house at the moment and stayed with them for a long time after the interview had ended. As time went by I was able to visit without having an interview scheduled. During these long visits I had the opportunity of engaging in different activities such as helping women cook, do the shopping, and take care of the children. I also shared numerous meals with different members of the families and participated in leisure activities such as watching TV, or playing table games. I also helped some of the female heads of house install and remove their market stands and sell a variety of goods. As our relationship got closer I was invited to family events like birthday celebrations and *posadas* (traditional Christmas celebration). I also had the chance to be with some of the families in different events outside their house such as political rallies and in one occasion I ventured outside the neighbourhood with a participant to play BINGO. In addition, I recorded observations made from my walks around the neighbourhood as well as informal conversations with people.

6.2 Visual methods

As I prepared myself for fieldwork I considered using a number of visual methods of data collection. At a very early stage I thought of using Lynch's (1960) mapping method but soon discarded it as the data I could gather from this exercise proved to be of little use to the research questions that were beginning to emerge. I also considered using photography in a number of ways: as a visual recording method; to examine pre-existing visual representations, such as the family album; and to carry out photographic interviewing (Rose 2001) or photo-elicitation. Photo-elicitation "involves using photographs to invoke comments, memory and discussion" (Banks 2001: 87) often in the context of an interview or focus group. The photographs in question could have been taken by the researcher for the purpose of the investigation or in the past, they could have been taken by someone else (eg. be part of an archive or of a magazine), or could have been produced by the interviewee as requested by the researcher (Banks 2001; Ali 2004). In all these cases "the photograph loses its

claim of objectivity; indeed, the power of the photo is its ability to unlock the subjectivity of those who see the image differently that does the researcher" (Harper 2004: 236).

The way I envisioned the use of photo-elicitation in my research was to ask my participants to make a photographic diary of their daily activities during a working day and during a day off work. My idea was to later discuss the photographs with my participants. This, I believed would provide me with rich material on everyday life in Santo Domingo's multifamily plots and on the tactics families use to negotiate their limited space. A few months into my fieldwork, I decided to try this out with two participants with whom I had developed a close relationship. I gave them a disposable camera each and explained in detail what it was I wanted them to do. The result was very interesting but not at all what I had imagined. Neither of my two participants carried out a photographic diary, none of the pictures they took was of their daily activities. Instead, they went over great pains to organise a "special" occasion that would justify the use of the camera. One of them, for example, organised a picnic in the nearby park of Huayamilpas with as many members of the family as she could gather and took the photos there. From the conversation I had with them after I developed the films I realised the exercise I had devised stood in direct contradiction with their understanding of photography. Their use of domestic photography was limited to important family events such as family outings, birthdays, graduations and weddings. It was an instrument for the development of a collective narrative of family cohesion (see Bourdieu 1990b). When I repeated to them that I was interested in pictures of their everyday activities such as preparing breakfast, washing clothes, etc. they laughed and shook their heads in disbelief.

I am not arguing that asking participants to carry out a photographic diary is problematic in itself. As Pink (2001b) affirms, the practice of giving cameras (both photographic and video) to participants is increasingly common in social research. There are plenty of examples of very personal and technically demanding uses of visual material such as Holliday's (2000) research. Holliday asked her participants to create a video diary where they would demonstrate visually and reflect upon the ways in which they presented their identities in different settings. She gave her participants a period of one month to film and edit the material. What made the elaboration of these diaries possible, and in fact largely determined their content and production

was, as Pink (2001b) observes in a discussion of Holliday's work, the respondent's familiarity with the video diary due to their use in television since the late 1990's.

What I did in the end was to use photography as a visual recording method by taking pictures of the neighbourhood. This material, as all other visual material I collected, was used not only as a means of illustrating text or recording data but also as a medium through which new knowledge could be created (Banks 2001; Pink 2001a). My approach to all the visual material used in the research was to question their claim of objectivity. I did not treat the visual material I obtained as objective evidence because I believe that photographs, as other visual data, are not automatic reflections of the world (Winston 1998), they represent and construct reality (Orobitg Canal 2004) and they are polysemic, meaning that multiple meanings and interpretations are possible and valid (Harper 2003). In addition to taking photographs myself I also collected a series of photographs from the photo albums of a limited number of families. Because most of the families did not have photos or were uncomfortable with the idea of giving them to me, I was able to get hold of the photos of four families who lent them to me. Normally, I borrowed the photos they allowed me to take with me, scanned them and then returned them to their owners. As they gave me the photos, they provided interesting explanations for most, which I recorded in my notes. However, the photos that proved to be more revealing were the ones that were brought up by my participants in the course of one of our conversations. Another important source of photographic material was Díaz Enciso's book *Las mil y una historias del Pedregal de Santo Domingo*. The book is a collection of testimonies and photographs of the residents of Santo Domingo that offers an important source of firsthand data on the land invasion and urbanisation of the neighbourhood. The testimonies and the photos of this book were a central source of data for chapter four.

Another kind of visual data I collected during the first stages of my fieldwork was a series of plans I drew with my participants of the different stages of their plot of land. I drew on the process of producing these plans as a method of memory work. That is, as a way of facilitating my informant's recollection of the process of building their houses and the production of new memories (Ali 2004: 276). The material which resulted from this are a number of sketches of each plot at different points in time which are accompanied by notes on why the changes were done and what was

happening in the family at the time. In total I carried out a register of the physical development of 10 plots of land. This exercise was generally practiced with the female or male heads of the house for they were the ones who more clearly remembered the development of the house and were the main actors in its construction. This version was nourished by my conversations with other members of the family. It is important to note that these sketches - and therefore the resulting plans and sections included in this thesis - are not precisely measured surveys. It was not my interest – nor within my capacity – to elaborate such professional surveys, but to document the physical transformation of the houses and why and how they took place.

6.3 Background research on the neighbourhood

During my first visit to Mexico City I collected as much data as I could on the studied neighbourhood. This entailed in the first place getting together books, theses and documents written on the neighbourhood which gave me a good initial knowledge of the area and of the invasion process. It also involved the gathering of census data for this particular neighbourhood. Statistical data in Mexico at the disaggregated level of the neighbourhood is not easily accessible, but I was able to gather an important amount of information at the disaggregated level of the neighbourhood through the *SCINCE por colonias, Distrito Federal* data set elaborated by INEGI based on the 2000 general population census.

Another important source of information on the neighbourhood and on Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements more generally were the conversations I had during the initial phase of my research with people, like Darío Jiménez, who are closely involved with Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements either through academic research or professional work. Through these conversations I gathered information on the neighbourhood and on their understanding of the current situation of Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements. More than anything, this information guided me in the process of delimiting my research topic and questions. Lastly, I carried out a small survey with 24 applicants from the neighbourhood of Santo Domingo to the Housing Improvement Programme (PMV) of the Institute for

Housing of the Federal District (INVI)[16]. In my brief questionnaire I asked how many people lived in their plot of land and who they were; how many structures made up the plot of land and whether they had separate access, kitchen and bathroom. I also asked how they intended to use the credit granted by the INVI, and whether their plans involved the incorporation of more people into the plot of land and, if so, who they were. In the last part of the survey I asked their opinion on renting accommodation and on living in a multifamily plot. In addition, I photocopied 60 formal applications from Santo Domingo for credits in the category of house expansion. These applications provide socio-economic data on the family that is applying, who lives in the house, and how and why they intend to expand their houses. As my research developed and the themes and more focused research questions were defined I decided not to include the data gathered through my survey or the applications for credit directly in any chapter. Nonetheless, this data was important in that it validated the argument that the neighbourhood is densifying at a rapid pace, houses are expanding leading to the formation of complex multifamily plots inhabited by a variety of extended family arrangements. It corroborated that the plots of land in which I carried out fieldwork are not exceptional cases but representative of the development of housing, residential and family patterns in the neighbourhood.

7. On translation

The problem of translation has always been central to ethnographic research. Ethnography originated as the study of distant cultures based on extended fieldwork in a particular site. The researcher had to immerse him or herself into a completely different culture and carry out fieldwork in a foreign language. Researchers faced the challenge of acquiring sufficient language competence so as to be able to communicate in the field and write up without misrepresenting what they had heard. Traditional ethnography has been criticised for its understanding of culture as bound, discrete and fixed (see Rosaldo 1989; Marcus 1998; Couldry 2003) and for its colonialist focus on the "other". As a result of the latter ethnography has reoriented its focus bringing the ethnographer back home. Even when working in their own

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[16] The PMV was created in 1998 by the city government and a number of NGO's from the Habitat Coalition-Mexico to deal with the housing problems of Mexico City's popular settlements. The programme grants credits to low-income households of the Federal District and provides technical assistance. The PMV provides credits for: house expansion, improvement, new progressive housing and new finished housing.

society ethnographers continuously find themselves having to translate across class, gender, race and/or ethnicity. Today, as a consequence of globalisation, it is increasingly common to see ethnographers who carry out fieldwork in their countries of origin and write and disseminate their findings in the foreign country in which they are currently based. As Ang (2001) observes, a characteristic figure of our post-colonial globalised world is that of the 'migrant intellectual', who works in a different country to that in which s/he was born. My choice to embark on an ethnographic research in my home town and mother tongue to then write up for an Anglophone audience posed particular challenges. I constantly found myself dealing with the challenge of writing a PhD dissertation for an Anglophone audience based on fieldwork carried out in a different language and cultural setting.

Throughout my research I constantly saw the need to provide detailed contextual information to a foreign audience who would most probably be unacquainted with the specificities of the culture and site in question. The benefits of doing fieldwork in a foreign place, it is believed, is that it provides a useful distance to what would otherwise be taken for granted. Though this is a disputable argument, I did find that distinguishing all the background knowledge that needed unpacking was something I could hardly do by myself. Exposing my work to various readers at seminars, conferences and to my supervisors helped me make out the various concepts or issues that required further explanation.

A further challenge was that of translating concepts developed in Spanish and fieldwork quotes into English. Whenever I use a concept that emerged from Spanish speaking academic research or from vernacular use I first introduce the concept in Spanish, in italics, followed by an English translation in brackets. Thereafter I stick to the Spanish concept in italics. One exception to this is the concept of *colonia popular* (popular settlement). While it was important to illustrate the vernacular and academic Spanish version of the term, given that the English term refers to the same urban environment, I decided to keep the English version to make the text more readable. As regards the translation of quotes from fieldwork, my approach was to translate them as literally as possible while striving to make them readable. What I did not do was to translate turns of phrase or vernacular language into their "equivalent" English version, as I believe the inner meanings and logics embedded in language are distinctive to race, class, and cultural positions. As Borchgrevink (2003:

111) put it "translation involves interpretation and explanation of cultural context". Whenever I found a word or turn of phrase which has a particular meaning and couldn't be translated without losing its specificity I left the word or phrase in Spanish, in italics, and provided the closest English translation. A more fine grained understanding was sought by providing additional context in the form of extensive quotes or repeated usage of the word or phrase.

Beyond the challenge of translating fieldwork quotes and providing sufficient contextual information to a foreign audience, is the epistemological and methodological question of writing in between different academic traditions. Of her experience of carrying out fieldwork in Brazil, her home country, and writing up in English for an American institution Caldeira (2000: 5) describes that she realised that more than her words, her thinking was shaped in a certain language. A language that did not remain unchanged by the experience of living and working in a different language and academic tradition. Taking this into consideration Caldeira (Ibid.: 6) concludes:

> "My languages, my writing, my thinking, my critiques all have acquired a peculiar identity. I came to realize that as my English has an accent, so does my anthropology; it persists no matter from what perspective I look at it or in which language I write it."

8. Ethical issues

Unlike the positivist paradigm, for which ethical issues are important but external to the research process, in this research I have embraced ethical concerns as being intrinsic to the inquiry. This is a direct consequence of adopting the epistemological stance which sees the relationship between the researcher and the object of investigation as a transactional and subjectivist process. It implies the need to recognise the power relations between researcher and participants. Because ethnographic research entails that fieldwork is conducted over a prolonged period of time personal relations characterised by a certain degree of intimacy are developed adding a layer of complexity to the negotiation of power in the research process. In this regard Ali (2006: 475) observes that:

"Levels of intimacy and trust mean that researchers who go on to 'write up' data wield huge power over others and over the data. It is commonly noted that one way for feminists to combat potential power inequalities is to take a reflexive approach in research".

Throughout my fieldwork I drew on the feminist principle of reflexivity in an attempt to make explicit the existing power relations affecting the research process as well as to reduce any possible harm or unethical behaviour vis-à-vis the participants (Maynard 1994: 16; Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002: 118-119). Power relations, however, will always be present to a certain degree. As Glucksmann (1994: 150) points out, it is impossible to overcome the inequalities of knowledge between researcher and researched.

"However much the researcher aims to avoid treating the people she is researching as "objects", and however "good" the rapport appears to be, there can be no getting away from the fact that those being researched are the "subjects" of the research." (Ibid.: 156)

In spite of my attempts to minimise power relations, after months of interaction with my participants when a relationship of trust and friendship had already developed, there was always a tacit understanding of the different socio-economic backgrounds from which we came which placed me in an authoritative position. Power is not easily equalised within the research process for, as Skeggs (2001: 434) notes, researchers enter the field with all their economic and cultural baggage, with embodied traces of positioning and history of which they cannot easily disinvest. The ethnographer will invariably be identified with a particular class, political party, religion, ethnic background, etc. (Ellen 1984). This is neatly illustrated by one of my fieldwork experiences: I shared a meal one afternoon with a family on a special occasion in which a large proportion of the adult residents of the plot was there. One of the men, who had migrated to the United States years before, recounted his experience and concluded that he could never get accustomed to the lifestyle abroad. They all started talking about the things they thought they would miss if they left the country and I contributed with my own experiences of being Mexican and living in the UK. As I was talking, one of the men, who lived in a self-contained flat in the plot, and with whom I had had little interaction pointed out "But you are Spanish, right?" I was very surprised by this for I did not consider myself to be whiter than

most of the people present at the table and I definitely do not have a Spanish accent. I asked him why he though that, whether he thought I spoke differently and he replied that he just thought I looked Spanish. Afterwards I realised he was not trying to tell me he actually thought I was Spanish, as from being from Spain, he was simply alluding to my different class position in what he thought would be an indirect and therefore polite way. He was alluding to the fact that my experience of living in the UK as a PhD student was not comparable to their experiences as migrant in the United States. Given the correlation between race and class that exists in Mexico, the two elements are often blurred in everyday discourse. Therefore, what he was pointing out was not that he thought that I was a foreigner, but that I was not like them for I come from a middle-class background.

When talking about the power relations affecting the research project one has to acknowledge that power in research circulates in complex ways and that participants also exercise it. Participants have a certain level of agency; they are able to negotiate power relations throughout the research process even if in a limited way (Ali 2006: 480). Throughout the research process my participants had the control over what to say and what to withhold and could even block my presence in the settlement altogether. Moreover, although it was never openly expressed, my participants and I were aware of the fact that I depended on them in order to successfully complete my research.

The use of participant observation and in-depth interviewing further stressed the importance of ethical considerations. These kinds of methods, which involve close personal interactions, bring about delicate situations as regards confidentiality and the handling of sensitive information. The first strategy I used to deal with this was to count with the informed consent from all my participants explaining them as carefully as possible what the research was about and what their participation in it implied. However, it is important to acknowledge that as the relation of trust developed a complex situation emerged in which my participants often appeared as to be indifferent or to have forgotten that the initial reason I had met them was because of my research (see Ellen 1984). I experienced a similar situation to that described by Whyte (1973: 300) in which, although people expected an explanation for my presence in the field, they were not interested in detailed information on my research

project. Once they were able to make out that I (not my research project) was 'all right' they stopped questioning my presence.

As time went by and my relationships with some of my participants grew closer our conversations took a more personal tone. An important challenge was in finding a way to deal with being confided on issues such as domestic violence, serious illness, and conflicts amongst family members. Although I can say that I enjoyed the process of doing fieldwork immensely there were difficult moments in which I felt overburdened with this kind of information and the feeling that I could do nothing to help. Aside from the emotional strain these conversations represented they brought to the fore the issue of confidentiality. The reason I was the recipient of all this intimate information was because of my outsider or marginal (Lofland 1971: 97) status. Some of my participants felt they could turn to me to talk about their troubles because I was seen as a disinterested party who would not judge or intrude and would simply listen. So this is what I decided to do, listen whenever I was required to do so, and keep these conversations confidential. The fact that I was never explicitly told which information I could disclose and which one I could not – owing partly to the fact that they weren't always aware of my role as researcher – added a level of complexity to the issue of confidentiality. I did my best to discern, from the tone of the conversations, and what I knew about the different families, which information I could use and which one I should withhold.

I explicitly asked all of my participants whether they wanted to remain anonymous or not. To my surprise most of the female heads of household were very assertive in their desire to be named. As for the remaining members of the families with which I worked they were generally just as assertive about their desire not to be named. Whilst this was very revealing as to the empowerment of the female head of the house that took place throughout the housing process and their increased familiarity with the public sphere, it presented me with a difficult situation as regards anonymity. The fact that my research focuses on families rather than individuals means that it would have been impossible to disclose the identity of some whilst guarding that of others. My final decision was thus to keep all of the participants anonymous so as to respond to the call for anonymity of some. To achieve this I changed the names of all the participants and withheld information that would have

made the person identifiable. What I did not do was to create composite characters, combine events, or change biographical information.

A strategy which allowed me to better respond to potential delicate situations, and empower my participants during the research process was enabling them to decide how our relationship developed and what kind of information I could have access to. An example of how I did this was by always arranging a date which they agreed to for our next meeting. Because the social life of the inhabitants of Santo Domingo tends to happen within its limits, the practice of setting a date is not a common one. The common practice is to simply come by the person's house that you want to visit, and if they are busy, you come around later. This meant that many times when I showed up they had either forgotten I was coming but were happy to have me there, or were out doing something for they had forgotten the date so I had to wait. Arranging the date was thus not so much a practical practice as an opportunity for them to control the frequency and character of our meetings. My general strategy has been to adopt the principle of reciprocity which, as Skeggs (1994: 81) notes, is not based on offering an economic return for participation in the research, but on acknowledging the personal relation that develops throughout the research process and committing to it.

9. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that ethnography is the most suitable method for the investigation of the densification process of Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements. Only an in-depth investigation could enable the understanding of how the current family practices, residential arrangements and housing forms of present day Santo Domingo have come about and how they are played out in everyday life. My choice to carry out an ethnographic study, however, does not imply that I embrace notions of "community", which presuppose the existence of shared values and culture within a spatially limited setting. Though grounded on Santo Domingo, this research is not a study of "a people" but an in-depth investigation of a social phenomenon, namely the densification process of the city's consolidated popular settlements. This research seeks to provide an ethnographic understanding of the densification process taking place in Mexico City's consolidated settlements through the in-depth investigation of a single case. Santo Domingo was chosen as a case that

broadly typifies the consolidated popular settlements of Mexico City. Santo Domingo is unique in many ways, so being as specific as possible about its particularities will allow for later comparisons with other sites. In this spirit, and as a framework for the remaining chapters, the next chapter provides a detailed introduction to the neighbourhood of Santo Domingo, from the invasion process which brought the neighbourhood into being to its present densification process.

CHAPTER FOUR – SANTO DOMINGO: FROM INVASION TO DENSIFICATION

1. Introduction

This chapter is an introduction to the neighbourhood of Santo Domingo that is based on existing documentary and statistical material and on the narratives I collected throughout fieldwork. Its aim is to introduce its current densification process and the formation of its multifamily plots. The chapter first looks at the formation of the settlement and at its early consolidation. It also reviews past family patterns and the prevalence of original settlers in the neighbourhood. The second part of the chapter examines the neighbourhood's current situation as a consolidated settlement with high levels of neighbourhood stability. It argues that Santo Domingo is undergoing a process of intensive densification which has led to the formation of multifamily plots and the emergence of increasingly complex extended family arrangements.

2. Land invasion and consolidation of the neighbourhood

> "...nos venimos a la aventura que a mi se me hizo muy bonita porque vi gente de todos lados con sus petates y sus cobijas. Se me figuró que estábamos en la época de los gambusinos, en busca de oro. Nuestro oro era nuestro pedacito de tierra". Lucía Reyes (cited in Díaz Enciso 2002: 17).

> "...we came as if on an adventure which I found very nice because I saw people from all over with their *petates* (straw bed rolls) and their blankets. It seemed to me like we were in the times of the *gambusinos* (gold seekers), in search of gold. Our gold was our piece of land". Lucía Reyes (Ibid.).

2.1 The land invasion

On the first days of September 1971 between four to five thousand families came to Santo Domingo fighting for a piece of land where they could build their home in what is said to be Latin America's largest single land invasion. Sheltered by the night, thousands of men, women and children crept into the area and claimed a stake over a portion of land.

It has been suggested that the invasion was indirectly promoted by President Luis Echeverría Álvarez who declared, on 1 September 1971, that his government would

respect every Mexican's right to housing and would work towards the legalisation of irregular tenancy on public lands. Shortly after the land invasion the government responded by cordoning off the area with the aim of preventing further people from coming in. Notwithstanding, a significant number of people were able to access the cordoned area by paying a bribe to the *granaderos* (special police forces).

> "what they did was to surround us… a policeman asked me for a hundred and fifty pesos to be able to invade…they gave us IDs to go in and out, they didn't want more to come…they surrounded us, others couldn't come in…" Anonymous testimony (cited in Safa 1992: 55, my translation).

Photograph 2. Special police forces patrolling the area.
Source: Díaz Enciso 2002: 43.
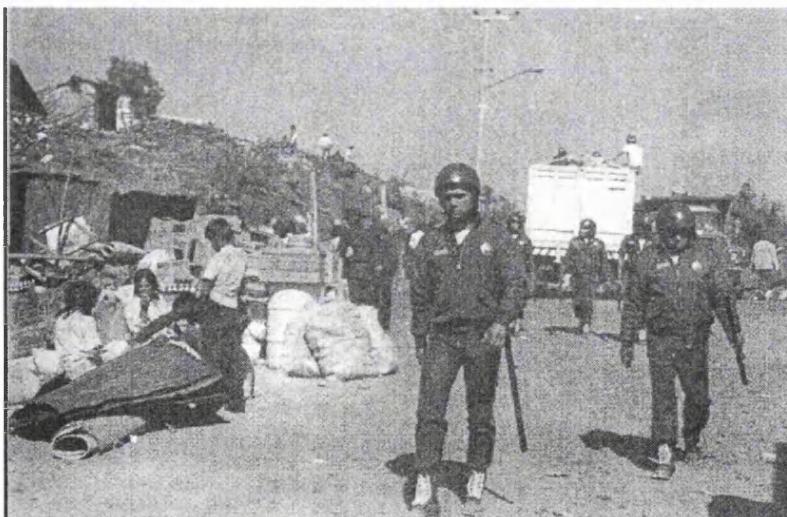
Who the legitimate owners of the area were at that time is a debatable subject. Nonetheless, it is generally agreed that the area belonged to the *comuneros* of the neighbouring town of Los Reyes. Because the area was completely inhospitable it was only scarcely populated before the land invasion. Santo Domingo had previously been targeted as a potential site for the development of a high-end residential neighbourhood such as the Pedregal de San Angel. This project did not materialise before the land invasion took place due to the high costs required to urbanise this type of land (Aguado and Portal 1992: 105) For many years, the *comuneros* of Los

Reyes mainly used this vast area to gather raw material for the production of *coronas* (funeral wreaths) and adornments for religious festivals. After the land invasion took place the *comuneros* claimed ownership of the place leading to many violent confrontations with the squatters, and driving both to keep a zealous watch over their piece of land day and night.

Santo Domingo is located in an area known as Los Pedregales, a vast area of 800 hectares which was covered by volcanic rock after the explosion of the Xitle. The landscape created by the volcano's explosion was of a staggering hostile beauty. The fast rivers of lava petrified creating the most formidable collection of mounds, deep cracks, smooth, jagged and rugged surfaces. In between the barren rocks a variety of animals and plants emerged. There were snakes, tarantulas, scorpions, toads, butterflies, fireflies, and hummingbirds. A variety of herbs and wild flowers also covered the rocks. At certain seasons the black rocks would glimmer in a touch of white or faint blue. From time to time, the *pirul* (pepper tree), with its ever green leaves and hanging branches would rise as far as 15 meters providing a bit of shade and a sign of relentless life.

It was inside its caves and over its softest surfaces that the thousands of people who arrived in September 1971 (and the few that were already there) built their first ramshackle homes. For weeks they claimed a stake of a piece of land but were constantly under threat of eviction by the police or by the *comuneros* who defended a land the latter considered had been stolen. Approximately six weeks after the invasion, the emerging leaders began to subdivide the area into plots of land and to distribute them amongst the people. Ropes and quicklime were placed over the black rocks in order to set the limits of and assign numbers to the different plots of land. During that initial phase, plots varied significantly in size and their location followed no general plan. It was little by little that streets were definitely drawn, and plots of 90 to 200 square metres per family assigned.

2.2 Between formality and informality

The growing numbers of low-income people that populated the city put a significant pressure in the government that could not be ignored. They represented votes that could be mobilised by the ruling party but also an important stock of potential social

discontent. The government's strategy was thus to contain discontent and to create patron-client relations with the poor by responding to particular demands in a picemeal fashion rather than tackling the housing issue as a whole. As a result, the irregularity of land tenure was not solved and governmental action in the provision of services and infrastructure remained minimal.

Mediation between government and *colonos* (resident of a *colonia* or neighbourhood) was in the hands of the emerging leaders and of a number of institutions created by the government to deal with the popular settlements. At first, the majority of the leaders who were active in Santo Domingo were linked to the political party in power, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Initially, these leaders were supported by the *colonos* due to the generally acknowledged need to organise, to shared feelings of vulnerability, but also due to their counting with a certain recognition that stemmed from their active presence in the surrounding neighbourhoods. While these first leaders helped the *colonos* to organise and worked as mediators with the government, they often abused their power. They frequently asked the residents to pay them a bribe and threatened that they would lose their house if support faltered. As time went by these leaders gradually lost power, independent leaders from the neighbourhood emerged, and student leaders from the UNAM gained presence. By the mid 1980's a number of the existing leaders decided to join the National Coordinating Committee for the Popular Urban Movement (CONAMUP). Since then, the leaders of Santo Domingo have been more often linked to left wing political parties such as the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) (Contreras Burgos 1996).

The first governmental institution to be involved in Santo Domingo was the National Institute for the Development of the Rural Community and Popular Housing (INDECO). As a first step towards regularisation and ordering of the territory INDECO made an attempt to apply a census in the area. The residents of Santo Domingo saw INDECO as a threat and refused to participate in the survey. In addition, INDECO promoted to redraw the neighbourhood and assign a 60 square meter plot per family. This initiative was also strongly opposed by the people who, through the mediation of their leaders, demanded 100 or 200 square meters. In the context of the government's new policy of regularising popular settlements INDECO carried out the first expropriation of the neighbourhood of Santo Domingo with the

aim of later selling the plots of land to the *colonos* and thus solving the irregularity of land tenure. However, the expropriation was challenged by a number of appeals from alleged owners of the land who had not been compensated. This situation undermined the legitimacy of the expropriation and jeopardised the regularisation process. In this context, it was not until 1982 that President López Portillo issued the first land titles to a number of residents of Santo Domingo (Mancilla 2000).

In 1973 President Luis Echeverría created the Social Interest Trust for the Development of Mexico City (FIDEURBE) to replace the failed INDECO. The new FIDEURBE was responsible for the situation in Santo Domingo and other similar settlements. FIDEURBE carried out a census of the neighbourhood and took part in redrawing the streets, plots, and relocating those families whose houses ended up on a street. A year after its creation a significant incident took place after FIDEURBE built a series of "model homes" in the northern limit of the locality. The government's idea was to redraw the neighbourhood, and build houses like the ones on display for which the residents would have to pay in instalments. FIDEURBE's intention to re-house the *colonos* of Santo Domingo was strongly rejected. For many, FIDEURBE's plan meant a significant reduction in their plot size and for most the acquisition of a high debt for a house which they saw as unfit for their needs.

> "They were crazy. They wanted to put us in a little house with no space. Most of us were construction workers, we could and knew how to build a house, but according to what we wanted…and also, what a good business it would have been…how many houses of 90 square meters could have been built? We did not want *palomares* (pigeon houses). So much struggle for this…" Anonymous testimony (cited in Safa 1992: 56, my translation).

The ambiguity of the situation as regards land ownership persisted after the first land expropriation. Increasing pressure to regularise as well as the appearance of further alleged owners of portions of the land who claimed compensation led the government to issue a second expropriation in October 1994. Because a portion of the settlement was not included in this expropriation and irregularities persisted, a third expropriation was carried out in 1997 (Mancilla 2000). The residents of Santo Domingo thus lived under continuous legal uncertainty, and were forced to pay for each new land title that was issued.

2.3 Faenas and introduction of urban services

Counting on minor governmental support the *colonos* were compelled to organise and carry out the bulk of the urbanisation of the area by themselves. To this end each family had to participate in *faenas* (collective work) with a particular amount of hours and spend Saturday and Sunday providing their manual work force. In addition, each family had to make regular monetary contributions to fund the urbanisation costs. The leaders often abused their power as mediators with the authorities and demanded the neighbours to pay extra contributions which they kept for themselves.

> "We began to do *faenas* on Saturdays and Sundays, men, women and children to begin opening the streets we have today. To even them out, we asked for donations amongst the neighbours to be able to buy trucks full of gravel that cost 100 and 150 pesos, and we cooperated to buy dynamite that was used to break the rocks, we had to cooperate with 200 pesos per plot of land, every eight days." Cándido Valenzo Muníz (cited in Díaz Enciso 2002: 74, my translation).

> "When we invaded there was no water, light, there were no streets; between all of us we opened streets, we bought the bucket of water for five pesos, we had a small house made out of twigs and five corrugated metal sheets. We cooperated, doing work with each other to open the streets properly. We worked doing *fainas* [sic], carrying rocks to help ourselves. To arrange our houses properly, we did *fainas* [sic], during almost a year. I cooperated for the pole with one thousand pesos, I cooperated in front of my house with eight trucks of earth, we opened the pit and I cooperated with 250 pesos for the asbestos tube". Ángela Castillo (Ibid.: 69, my translation).

Opening roads along which water, goods, and construction materials could be brought into the neighbourhood was an initial priority. During the *faenas* women, men and children worked together to even out the terrain and cover the deep cracks on the volcanic rock. Each street required an incredible amount of physical labour and monetary investment, most of which was carried by the *colonos* themselves. To illustrate the effort involved in the urbanisation of the neighbourhood Arroyo Irigoyen (1981) provides an estimate of the monetary costs and invested labour that were required by a single street. Each street required approximately 100 trucks of earth, with a cost of 40 pesos each. A 3 kilometre long and 12 meter wide road

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entailed 800 *faenas* of 120 people each. This road only, represented 16,000 hours of unpaid work (Ibid.: 16 & 18).

Photograph 3. Working together to open up roads.
Source: Díaz Enciso 2002: 134.

Photograph 4. Collecting water at an authorised water stop.
Source: Díaz Enciso 2002: 200.

Photograph 5. Queuing for water.
Source: Díaz Enciso 2002: 190.

Access to water has been a central concern for the *colonos*, and its scarcity a continuous source of conflict. In the early days after the invasion, the only source of water were the surrounding neighbourhoods. People would have to walk long distances to reach a public tap in a nearby settlement and carry the buckets back home. This arduous task was often carried out by women and children. A second source of water came shortly after when the government of the Federal District, through the Delegación, sent free tanker lorries to the neighbourhood. In order to obtain this service all the families living in a street had to get together and sign a formal petition. Signing the petition, however, was no guarantee for the supply. Water was only delivered if tanker lorries were available and if the streets were in an adequate condition for the lorries to drive through. In addition, tanker lorries would only be delivered to authorised *paradas* (stations). Extra lorries were sometimes sent to areas that lacked an authorised *parada* after the neighbours paid a bribe. A number of families were assigned to each authorised *parada* where a container of 200 litre capacity was allocated to every family. The large containers were often only half filled by the tanker lorries and neighbours had to pay a bribe to the lorry driver if they wanted their container to be completely filled. There were also 10 stationary water tanks around the neighbourhood from which each family was allowed two daily buckets. The insufficiency of this service brought constant heated conflicts amongst

neighbours. Families had to keep watch over their containers for it was not uncommon that their water got stolen by a neighbour during the night (Arroyo Irigoyen 1981: 27). After many years of protest with the authorities, tap water was introduced into Santo Domingo. Though the government provided technical expertise, the neighbours carried the bulk of the costs and through *faenas* provided the labour for the introduction of this service themselves.

"Then we opened the pits to put in the official pipe and everything based on cooperation from us, for the galvanised steel pipes we had to cooperate with 460 pesos, because it included a meal for the engineers and employees from the Departamento de Aguas y Saneamiento (Water and Sanitation Department)." Heriberto Luna H (cited in Díaz Enciso 2002: 201, my translation).

Photograph 6. Opening up the pits for the water pipes.
Source: Díaz Enciso 2002: 201.

At first, candles and kerosene lamps were used for illumination and cooking. Later on, the neighbours succeeded in bringing electricity to Santo Domingo by hooking into the formal network of the nearby neighbourhoods of Ajusco and Coplico. As a resident of Santo Domingo describes: "To bring in the light, we used poles and laid

cable from the Ajusco neighbourhood." Anonymous (Ibid.:188, my translation). Electricity was officially supplied to Santo Domingo in 1976 (Gilbert 1993). Houses were then provided with electricity meters and charged for the service.

Photograph 7. "El diablito" Makeshift electricity posts.
Source: Díaz Enciso 2002: 188.
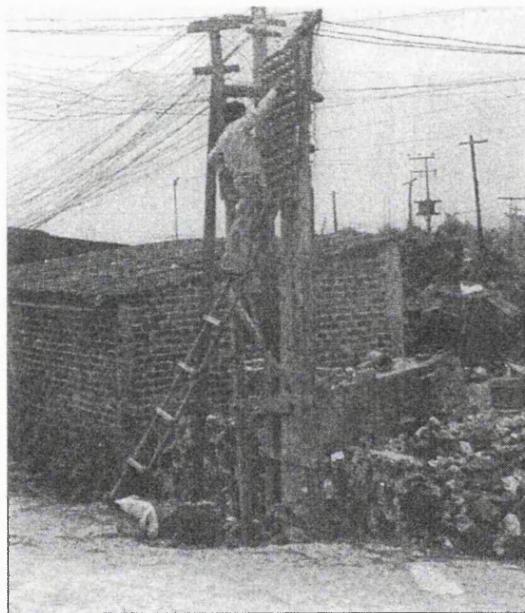
It was not until 1992 that sewage was brought into the neighbourhood. Up until that time the residents of Santo Domingo had depended on the *grietas* (deep cracks) of the volcanic rock. Families had to take good care of their *grietas* and make sure no solid waste was thrown into them to avoid their being blocked. Waste disposal was generally burnt and sometimes thrown into the *grietas*. (Arroyo Irigoyen 1981: 26). Eventually the service of refuse collection was provided but in an intermittent and insufficient manner (Lima Barrios 1992; Gutmann 2007).

> "One never knows whether the garbage truck will come today or in a week, so at the sound of the garbage bell one must be ready to leap into the street dragging whatever has accumulated since the last trash pickup." (Gutmann 2007: 38).

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Photograph 8. Light posts.
Source: Díaz Enciso 2002: 63.

2.4 Housing consolidation

Parallel to the urbanisation of the neighbourhood, families worked to improve the condition of their houses. Initially all houses were made out of a variety of temporary materials such as plastic, cloth, wood, corrugated cardboard, and corrugated metal. A number of the original houses were also partially built with fragments of the volcanic rock removed to open up roads. The majority of these house were single-room dwellings with dirt floors which barely protected the families from the inclemency of the environment.

Based on research carried out in 1974, Ward (1982) describes that by this year, most families had begun to make important improvements to their houses despite their insecure land tenure. 47% of the sample already had walls made of brick and 48% had laid foundations made of cement so as to provide the house with a more stable structure that would enable it to expand. The roofs, however, were still predominantly made out of temporary material, only 10% had already laid a concrete roof. Three years after the invasion, almost half of the sample continued to live in a

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single-room dwelling, and only one-fifth had more than two rooms. In 1974 there was no rental housing, and the density of persons per hectare was 211 (Ibid.: 182 and 179).

2.5 Neighbourhood stability

In spite of the special police forces cordoning off the area, during the weeks following the land invasion smaller numbers of people continued to arrive. As plots were drawn and distributed amongst the *colonos* the population of the area temporarily stabilised. According to a study carried out by the State System for the Full Development of the Family (DIF) 80% of the early settlers were squatters and 20% *comuneros* (Lima Barrios 1992). During the years that followed the land invasion this proportion changed due to the influx of more families into the neighbourhood. Most of the new residents accessed land in the neighbourhood by filling up all the available empty plots of land in an intensive densification process (Duhau 1998). In addition, land was made available for newcomers by the subdivision of the original plots without the expulsion of the original *colonos*. Seeing they could make profit a number of families sold half of their plot and kept the other. Other newcomers occupied plots that were retained by "micro speculators". Throughout Mexico City the formation of popular settlements was often accompanied by the presence of a group of individuals whose aim was to acquire several lots of land with the view of selling them later (Ward 1982; Duhau 1998). Only a limited number of newcomers accessed land in the neighbourhood through a *traspaso* (sale) of the land. *Traspasos* were carried out only by the poorest amongst the squatters who seized the opportunity of selling the totality of their plot of land for a much higher price than what they had invested in order to claim ownership over it [17]. There is no precise data as to the percentage of people who sold their plots and left at this early stage, but it can be estimated that it was around 20%. Ward's research reveals that by 1974 very few people reported that their lots had been previously occupied but 18% knew of neighbours who had moved (Ward 1982: 187). Based on fieldwork carried out between 1982-1985 Safa (1992: 46) presents the results of a survey applied on a group of sixth grade elementary school children: 16% of the children did not know when their parents arrived in the neighbourhood, 62% said

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[17] Arroyo Irigoyen (1981) describes that plots were sold at prices as high as 30,00 pesos, a significant amount of money if we take into account that the investment that those who arrived after the massive land invasion made to access the area was an approximate 500 pesos bribe to the *granaderos*.

they arrived between 1971-1973; 10% between 1973-1975; 9% between 1976-1978; and 3% between 1981 and 1984. From this data it can be inferred that though new people continued to arrive they did so in limited numbers and only seldom replacing the original population. Ten years after the land invasion the neighbourhood was still mainly made up by the early settlers.

2.6 Family patterns

Santo Domingo was populated by families coming from various places in the country such as the states of Guerrero, Oaxaca and Michoacán. *Paisanos* (countrymen) tended to cluster together creating distinct areas within the neighbourhood with high percentages of people originating from the same state. One of the most distinct of these clusters, located in one of the borders of the neighbourhood close to today's underground station, is where the migrants from Oaxaca settled. This is one of the poorest areas of the neighbourhood, and one of the less consolidated. Another recognisable area is that of the *comuneros*. This area is characterised by the existence of the largest plots in Santo Domingo (generally 250 square meters), wider streets, and high levels of consolidation. Many of the people that migrated from the countryside to Santo Domingo were of an ethnic minority. Although the identity of the residents of Santo Domingo is strongly tied to their place of origin - as is demonstrated in the way they cluster together – *mestizos* (of mixed Spanish – indigenous ancestry) actively seek to distinguish themselves from those of indigenous background. As the cluster of those who came from Oaxaca illustrates, in Mexico there is a direct relation between race and class. People from indigenous backgrounds are amongst the most marginalised and those of Spanish decent tend to be amongst the most privileged. Throughout the country race and class prejudice is blurred in complex ways in everyday practice.

A high percentage of the early *colonos* had already been living in Mexico City, many of them at a close distance from Santo Domingo[18]. Most of the squatters were young couples who had been previously renting or living with other family members such as

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[18] Lima Barrios (1992) argues that 90% had been living close to the area before the invasion of 1971. Based on data provided by the Asociación de Estudios Urbanos, Arroyo Irigoyen (1981: 38) argues that between 25 and 30% had been living for more than 10 years in Mexico City, between 40 and 50% for less than 5 years, and 20% had been living in the city for 5 to 10 years. Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada (1991) found that 2/3 of the house owners in Santo Domingo came from neighbouring settlements within the borough of Coyoacán.

parents or in-laws. As a result, Santo Domingo was predominantly populated by recently formed nuclear families. As the neighbourhood consolidated this situation changed and various extended family arrangements grew to be the norm. Based on fieldwork carried out in the mid 70's, Arroyo Irigoyen (1981: 57) argues that, already then, extended families were prevalent in Santo Domingo. A few years after the land invasion it was common to see not only parents living together with their children but also sharing the house or plot with other members of the family - such as brothers, grandparents, cousins, etc.- and even with friends or *paisanos*.

Safa's (1992: 60 -1) research provides further empirical evidence of the increasing presence of extended family arrangements throughout the neighbourhood in the years 1982- 1985. According to the survey Safa carried out with 238 elementary school pupils of Santo Domingo, 52% lived in an extended family arrangement. This data suggests that only a decade after their arrival in Santo Domingo, a significant portion of the recently formed nuclear families that invaded the area had already formed an extended family arrangement. Moreover, by this time the existing constellations were varied and complex. 74% of the extended families were made up by a nuclear family and three or more members of the extended family, 16% by a nuclear family and a member of the extended family, and 10% by the nuclear family and one or two grandparents. Most of these extended families were formed either as a result of the marriage of a member of the second generation who remained in the house or because those already living in the city provided accommodation to relatives who migrated later. Although most families saw the incorporation of second generation families and relatives as a temporary arrangement, 52% of them had been living in this way for a long time.

3. Santo Domingo today

3.1 A vibrant neighbourhood of busy streets

Today, Santo Domingo has a population of 85,698 inhabitants[19]. It is no longer in the periphery but in the heart of the metropolis, located in the city's first ring of

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[19] This figure is based on the 2000 census data. Census data tends to under represent the population of popular settlements: families often do not indicate that they have tenants or "temporary" inhabitants. In addition, several years have passed since the last census and given the settlement's intensive densification it can be expected that its population has risen. It should therefore be expected that the actual population exceeds this number significantly.

expansion from the city core (Ward 1990: 35)[20]. The popular settlements of this first ring, created approximately thirty years ago, are now consolidated neighbourhoods fully integrated into the urban fabric. The more recent popular settlements are located further out in the periphery, most of them in the neighbouring State of Mexico. Also in the State of Mexico are the massive subdivisions of low-quality affordable housing that commercial developers have been building throughout the country in the last years.

Santo Domingo is a vibrant neighbourhood of busy streets. Las Rosas[21] was the first paved street and is now the main commercial road along which a number of bus routes drive across the neighbourhood. It runs from west to east and is located close to the northern border of the neighbourhood. The ground level of Las Rosas, like other similar commercial streets, is full of food shops, stationary stores, pharmacies, dentists, doctors, and even a few internet cafes. The neighbourhood's commercial streets are a colourful collection of irregular signs, and brightly painted houses. Throughout the day, these streets are populated by people running errands, waiting to catch a minibus, or sharing a bite around one of the many food stands. In addition to the commercial establishments located on the ground floor of the main streets, bright coloured street markets fill a number of streets on a weekly basis adding to the numerous people populating the main roads. On the days of *mercado sobre ruedas* (street market), the street turns into a river of pink canopies, endless bargaining, and desperately slow traffic.

As one moves away from the main roads, streets become more narrow, quiet, and less colourful. Unlike the sea of varied shops and services of the main roads, these streets have only one or two corner shops selling basic supplies. People walk along these streets coming or going to their errands, children play dodging the few cars that drive by, and neighbours sit or meet at the doorstep taking a break or returning from the busy day. Away from the main roads houses tend to be less consolidated, meaning that the bare gray facades that once dominated the landscape are more common.

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[20] The first ring also includes: Alvaro Obregón, Azcapotzalco, Gustavo Madero, Iztacalco, Iztapalapa, Cuajimalpa, Naucalpan, and Netzahualcóyotl. The second ring includes: Magdalena Contreras, Tlalpan, Xochimilco, Tlahuac, Tlalnepantla, Chimalhuacan, Ecatepec, Atizapan, Coacalco, Huixquilucan, La Paz, Tultitlan, Atenco, and Cuautitlan Izcalli. The third ring includes: Milpa Alta, Cuautitlan de Romero Rubio, Chalco, Chiautla, Chicolapan, Ixtapaluca, Nicolas Romero, Tecamac, and Texcoco (Ward 1990: 35).

[21] Now called Escuinapa, but seldom referred to by this name by long-term residents.

Photograph 9. *Mercado sobre ruedas* in Las Rosas Street.

Source: author.

Photograph 10. Fruit stand.

Source: author.

The streets are Santo Domingo's main public spaces. The evident lack of green and open spaces in the neighbourhood lead the young and old to gather and play on the street. Alternatively, the residents of Santo Domingo go to the nearby Huayamilpas Park, which is located to the west of Santo Domingo, in the area of the Pedregales by other popular settlements such as Ajusco, Huayamilpas, and Ruiz Cortínes. It is a large park of 20 hectares which preserves the original landscape of the Pedregales and is mainly used by the residents of Coyoacán's popular settlements. Another alternative for those located close to the Eje 10 Sur, along the northernmost border of the neighbourhood, is to use its wide boulevard which has some green space and a playground. On special occasions, some venture as far as the main square of the old colonial town of Coyoacán, to go for a walk and maybe buy an ice cream. In spite of their obvious absence, it is not a priority for Santo Domingo residents to fight for more green space, as the mounting pressure on housing remains the most important issue. Lima Barrios reports that in the survey she carried out in the neighbourhood nobody demanded the provision of green spaces. In this regard one of her interviewees argued that "What we need here is space for more houses where people can live, why would we want the little available space to be wasted on parks?" (Lima Barrios 1992: 26, my translation).

Although a large portion of Santo Domingo consists of a grid like fabric it has some irregular sections. Along its western border the grid is disrupted giving way to smaller blocks, narrower streets, and cul-de-sacs. Similarly, the area surrounding the subway station along the eastern border of the neighbourhood consists of irregular

blocks, dark alleyways and a large number of cul-de-sacs. These irregular areas are also largely the ones with the smallest plots of land, the houses with lowest levels of consolidation, and the poorest households. The various alleyways and cul-de-sacs are also the least populated streets and the most dangerous in the neighbourhood. In some cases, as in the area surrounding the station, which is predominantly inhabited by families originally from Oaxaca, there is correlation between town of origin, deprivation levels, housing quality and urban fabric.

Illustration 1. Santo Domingo: urban fabric
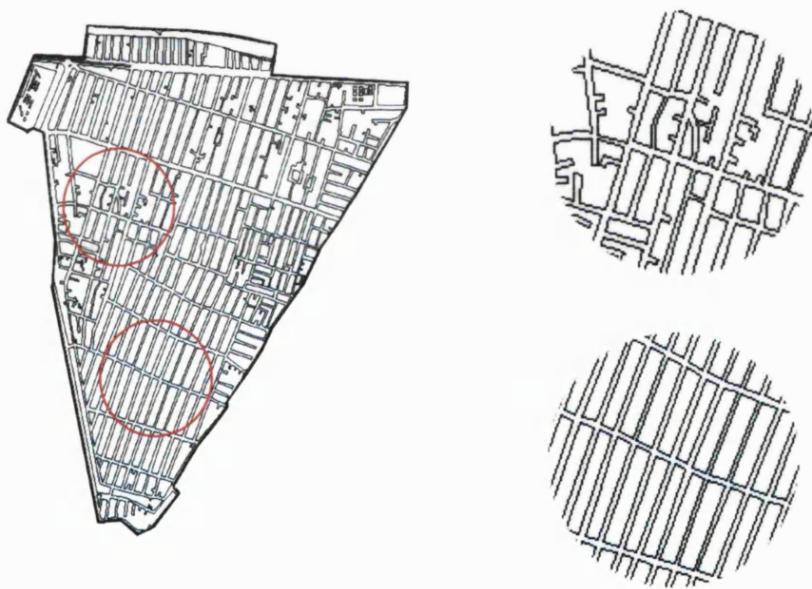
3.2 A consolidated settlement

Like most of the popular settlements of the first ring that were created around thirty years ago, Santo Domingo is now a highly consolidated settlement. Most of Santo Domingo's once precarious shacks are now two and even three storied brick houses. The neighbourhood is made up of a heterogeneous landscape of freshly painted houses that are adorned with flowers and metalwork, and dull grey houses of exposed bare bricks. In spite of the evident differences, there is a high level of consolidation throughout the neighbourhood. The 2000 Census data clearly illustrates

how most of the shacks made out of temporary materials that first populated Santo Domingo are now solid houses. By the year 2000, 99% of all houses in the settlement had walls made out of concrete, bricks, or rock. Similarly, 86% counted with concrete, brick, or terrace ceilings. In addition, the formerly widespread earth floors, which created unhygienic living conditions, have now almost disappeared with 98.5% of all houses having concrete, tiled, or wooden floors. Aside from the improvement of the construction materials, most houses have expanded significantly. Whilst in the early days most houses were made up of one multipurpose room where the families slept, ate, worked, and made love; in the year 2000, 69.1% of all houses[22] consisted of 2 to 5 rooms (not including kitchen), and 54.4% houses had 2 to 4 sleeping rooms.

Photograph 12. Santo Domingo's heterogeneous landscape.

Source: author.

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[22] The census definition of a house is: "Space used for living - that is sleeping, food preparation, eating and protection from the environment – that is normally defined by walls and roofs of any material and by an independent entrance" (my translation). Independent entrance is that where access to the house is not across the interior of another house.

Consolidation is also manifest in the widespread provision of urban services throughout the neighbourhood. It is now hard to picture the time when the residents of Santo Domingo cooked their meals in a small bonfire, and lit their houses with candles or kerosene lamps. In the year 2000, 98.5% of all houses had gas to cook, and 99.4% had electricity. Though 16% of the houses still depended on the cracks on the volcanic rock to dispose of their waste, 82.1% or all houses were linked to the sewage system. The high level of consolidation is best illustrated by the fact that, in 2000, 80.6% of all houses had their own sanitary service. Where consolidation has been weakest is in the provision of water. While in the nearby upper and middle class neighbourhoods of Coyoacán many families use copious amounts of water for their gardens, in Santo Domingo water is often scarce, 61% of all houses have tap water in the house, whilst 37.6% only count with a single tap in the plot of land.

3.3 Who are the residents of Santo Domingo?

The original population of Santo Domingo has remained notably stable. *Traspasos* have continued to occur but they have been reduced and sporadic. Consequently, there has been no extensive process of expulsion of the neighbourhood's original population. In 1988, 62.35% of the neighbourhood's house owners said they had acquired their plot through land invasion, 10.8% said they had inherited it and 4.75% had been assigned the plot by the government. In contrast, only 15.75% said they had bough their plot to its previous owner, and 1.3% had bought it from a *comunero* (Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991: 83). Most of the neighbourhood's house owners continue to be the early *colonos* and/or their families. Throughout my fieldwork, the residents of Santo Domingo with which I spoke affirmed that the neighbourhood continued to be largely occupied by "original" settlers. Until this day there is a significant differentiation between the "original" settlers (those who participated in the land invasion, the distribution of the plots, and the early efforts to urbanise the area) and newcomers. There is a sentiment amongst "original" settlers that those who arrived later are not aware of the efforts that urbanising the area entailed, are not as committed to the neighbourhood, and therefore have less rights to it (see Lima Barrios 1992: 22).

Its is important to note that, although the majority of the original *colonos* have remained in the neighbourhood, Santo Domingo has incorporated large numbers of

new residents through the expansion of informal rental housing and house sharing. Existing empirical research on Santo Domingo suggests that the proportion of renter and sharer households has been on the rise. Already in the second half of the 1970's 81% of the neighbourhood's total households were owners, 18% were sharers and 4% were tenants (Gilbert and Ward 1985: 24).By the 1980's, 60% of all households were owners, 28% were sharing or living in an extended family arrangement, and 12% were tenants (Gilbert 1993: 40-41 and 50). A similar picture is provided by Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada (1991: 175) who found that, in 1988, 59.5% of the households were owners, 27.6% were sharers and 12% tenants. In addition, by 1988, 92.2% of all plots were inhabited by the owners and by tenants and/or sharers (Ibid.: 176). Given the persistent lack of affordable housing options and the continuous impoverishment of the urban poor consolidated settlements like Santo Domingo are absorbing an increasing number of tenants and sharers. Therefore, it can be expected that the percentage of sharers and tenants is now higher than that reported by Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada (Ibid.) for 1988. From this we can conclude that the neighbourhood is currently made up by the early *colonos*, and a rising proportion of tenants and sharers.

In spite of the continuous influx of new people Santo Domingo has a relatively stable population. Gilbert (1993) observed that, in the popular settlements of Mexico City, neither owners nor non-owners move frequently. For as long as they are able to owners remain in their plots of land; tenants and sharers are also relatively stable. 38% of those sharing in Santo Domingo in the 1980's had lived more than 10 years in their current house. For them, house sharing was more than a temporary housing solution (Ibid.: 50). The last census data provides more recent evidence of this relative neighbourhood stability showing that 81.7% of the population of more than 5 years lived in Santo Domingo in 1995.

3.4 A working-class settlement

The conditions of the neighbourhood's first settlers improved significantly once they migrated into the city and became homeowners. Between 1940 and 1980, during the time of Import Substitution Industrialisation (ISI), the Mexican economy grew. It was in this economic context that a large proportion of the urban poor became homeowners through self-help processes. Though they suffered the consequences of

living in ill-serviced settlements and their survival continued to be very difficult, they experienced relative gains (Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha 2002). However, the economic crisis of the early 1980's and the ensuing restructuring and liberalisation has had a strong negative impact on the early *colonos* of Santo Domingo. More broadly, the situation of the city's urban poor has gradually deteriorated since the early 1980's. Gutmann (2007: 259) goes as far as to suggest that "the bitter reality is that, except for the fact that they own their homes, [as a result of the financial crisis of 1995, in Santo Domingo,] most families are economically and politically far worse off than they were in the late 1970's". Today, the families of the *colonos* lack viable alternatives for becoming homeowners and face increasing difficulties in inserting themselves in the labour market.

At present, the neighbourhood is made up by the early *colonos* and by new residents of the same socio economic strata that have been incorporated through house sharing and informal rental housing. Only a small portion of the population is somewhat more affluent. Consequently, although Santo Domingo is no longer amongst the most deprived areas of the city, it continues to be an essentially working class settlement (see map 2).

Literacy and educational levels throughout Mexico City are relatively high when compared with other areas of the country but they are also significantly imbalanced. In Santo Domingo 95% of the population of more than 15 years of age can read and write and the average number of years of study of the population over 15 is 8.46. This places Santo Domingo close to the top margin of the average of 8.9 years of schooling in the metropolitan area. However, although literacy and education levels have risen only 12.3% of the population in Santo Domingo of 18 years and over count with higher education. This figure is better understood if contrasted to the 44.3% of the adjacent middle-upper class neighbourhood of Pedregal de San Francisco and the 52% in Romero de Terreros.

A similar situation can be seen as regards income levels. Santo Domingo is still essentially a working-class neighbourhood but it does not lie amongst the city's most deprived neighbourhoods. According to the 2000 census data, in Santo Domingo 39.9% of the occupied population earns between one and up to two minimum wages,

Map 2. Metropolitan Area of Mexico City: Socio-spatial distribution per Basic Geo-Statistic Area or AGEB

Source: Rubalcava and Schteingart 2000: 293.

Santo Domingo

Upper

Upper-middle

Middle

Lower-middle

Lower

Very low

Not specified
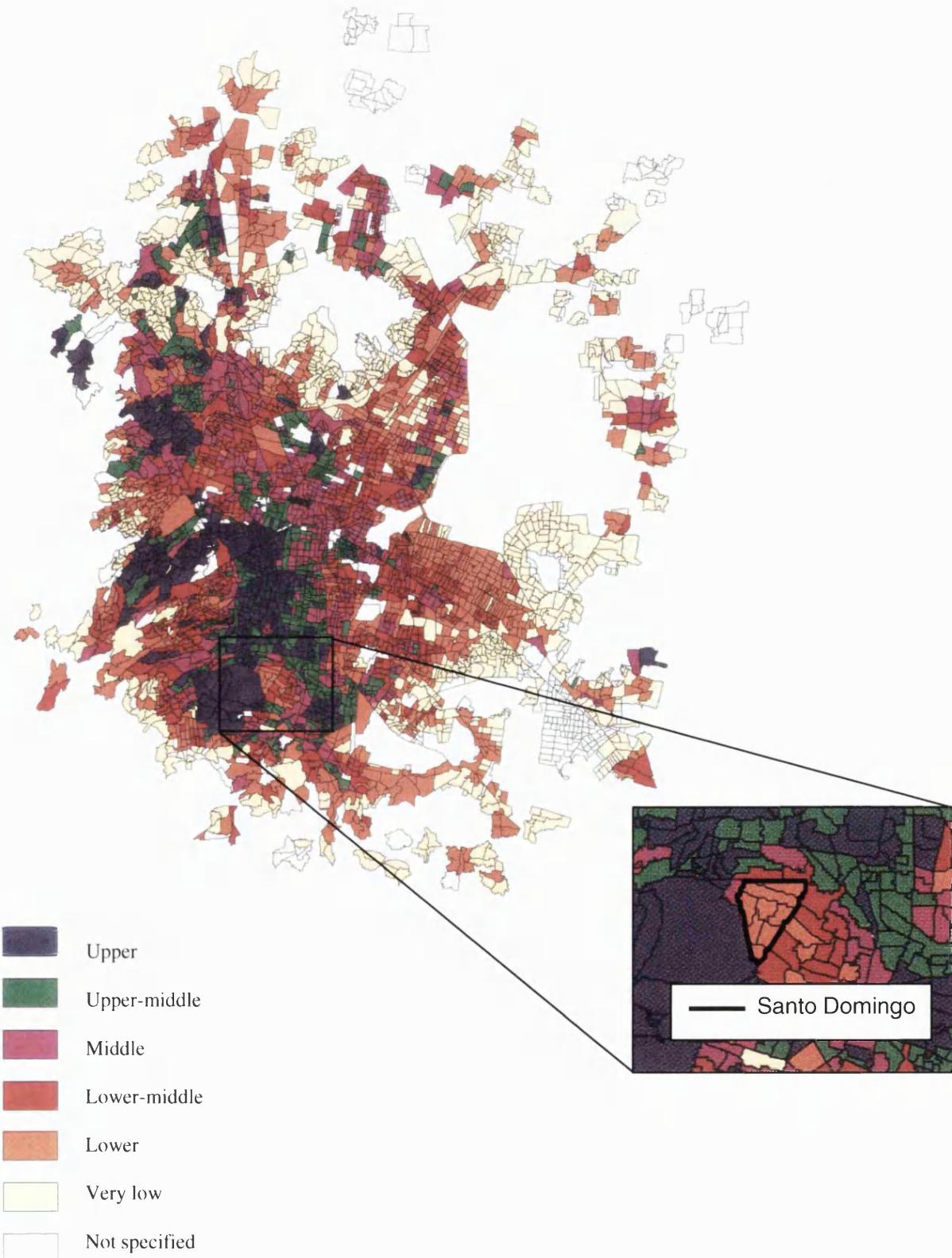
and 32.9% earns between 2 and up to 5 minimum wages. Merely an 8.3% of the employed population of Santo Domingo earns more than 5 minimum wages, compared to 34% in Pedregal de San Francisco and 39% in Romero de Terreros (see map 3). On average, a family group of two income earners struggles to make ends meet with only 5 minimum wages. The minimum wage in Mexico City is 50.57 pesos per day – 2.28 GBP. On average, with 50.57 pesos one can buy either 80 grams of meat, 1.2 kilos of chicken, or 6 litres of milk[23]. Five minimum wages are thus barely sufficient to cover the basic needs of a family. It is important to note that income distribution continues to be highly gendered, as is clearly illustrated by the fact that of the 8.3% that earn more than 5 minimum wages 73.8% are men. The majority of Santo Domingo's employed population works in the tertiary sector (71.7%) pursuing occupations such as that of taxi or minibus driver, handyman, maid, janitor, construction worker, and retailer[24]. There is no available data as to the percentage of the neighbourhood's population employed in the informal sector but it can be expected to be significantly high. Throughout the city the informal economy is extensive. At least 41.8% of the employed population of the Federal District is part of the informal economy (Fideicomiso de Estudios Estratégicos sobre la Ciudad de México 2000).

When looking into the consumer goods that are available in the neighbourhood we see again that Santo Domingo continues to be a popular urban neighbourhood but not amongst the most disadvantaged. An indicator of its relatively advantaged position amongst the urban poor is that 60% of all houses have a washing machine and 81% have a fridge. This figure is counterbalanced by the fact that only 57.3% of all houses have telephone. More over, in contrast to middle-class neighbourhoods only 27% of all houses have a car and 12% have a computer. This stands at a sharp contrast with the adjacent middle-upper class neighbourhoods of Pedregal de San Francisco and Romero de Terreros in which 56% of all houses have a computer, 77.6% of the houses in Pedregal de San Francisco have a car and 84% in Romero de Terreros.

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[23] Based on 2007 data provided by the Comisión Nacional de Salarios Mínimos (National Commission for Minimum Wages) and the Procuraduría Federal del Consumidor (Federal Judiciary for the Consumer).
[24] A survey carried out by Safa (1992: 46) in the early 1980's with students of a school in Santo Domingo revealed that of the parents that had arrived in the neighbourhood between 1971-1973 17% were manual workers, 28% construction workers, 14% retailers, 3% employees at a commercial establishment, 17% government employees, 7% office employees, 3% janitors and 3% professionals.

Map 3. Percentage of the employed population that earns more than 5 minimum wages
(percentage ranges rounded up)
Source: INEGI. 2003. *SINCE por colonias: Distrito Federal.*

— Santo Domingo

■ 29 - 34	■ 20 - 25	■ 12 - 16	▢ 3 - 7
■ 25 - 29	■ 16 - 20	■ 7 - 12	
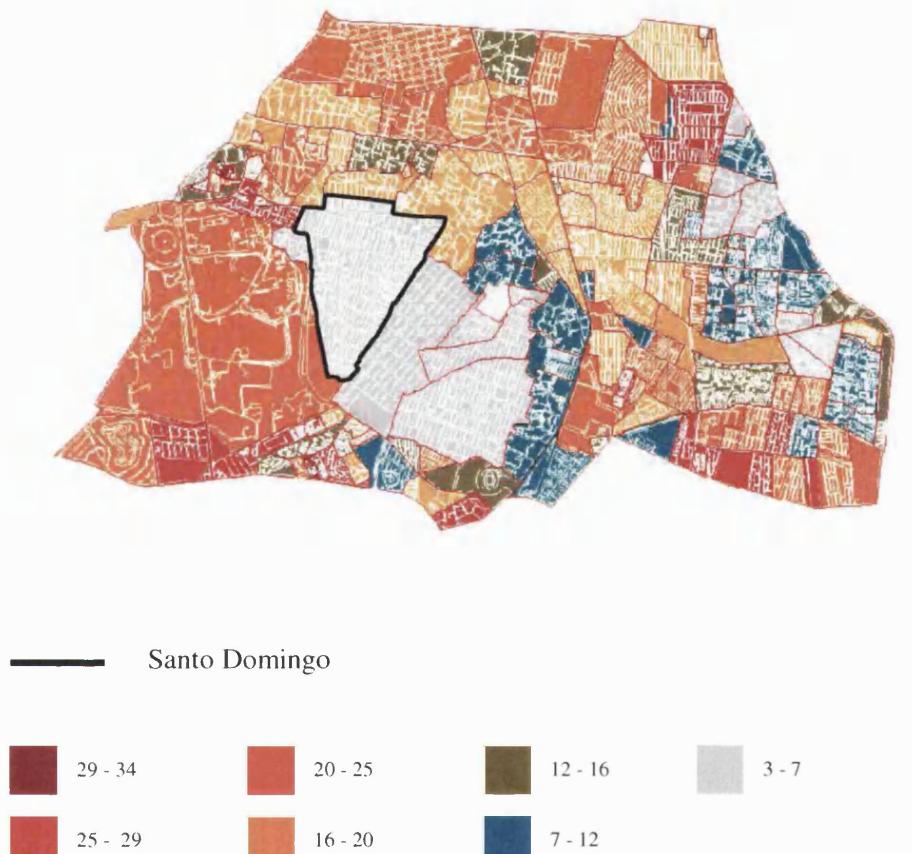
3.5 Gentrifying pressures[25]

Santo Domingo is located in Coyoacán, one of the most privileged boroughs of the
city. Coyoacán is the home of the National Autonomous University of Mexico
(UNAM), and has one of the city's densest concentration of cultural amenities and
green spaces. It is also a highly polarised locality constituted by a few middle class

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[25] I use the concept of gentrification in its loosest definition: the movement of the middle classes into
working-class neighbourhoods, which often entails the displacement of the lower income population.
Although in its origins the concept was used to describe the movement of a particular fraction of the
middle classes into the city centres of large Western cities (see Smith and Williams 1986), recent
developments in the literature have pointed out new forms of gentrification thus opening up the
concept. "Whether gentrification is urban, suburban, or rural, new-build or the renovation of existing
stock, it refers, as its *gentri*-suffixes attest, to nothing more or less than *the class dimensions of
neighbourhood change* – in short, not simply changes in the housing stock, but changes in housing
class." (Slater, Curran and Lees 2004: 1144).

housing projects, upper-middle class residential neighbourhoods and by a series of popular settlements located in the area of the Pedregales. Santo Domingo thus borders with the UNAM on the west, popular settlements to the south and east, and upper and upper-middle class residential neighbourhoods to the north. The residents of Santo Domingo are highly aware of their neighbouring middle and middle-upper class neighbourhoods. A recurring theme when talking about the neighbourhood is what they call *El muro de Berlin* (the "Berlin Wall"). Past the Eje 10 Sur, on the northernmost edge of the neighbourhood, all of the streets leading towards the well-off neighbourhoods are closed off by a sudden wall that interrupts the intuitive sense of connection and flow. On the side of Santo Domingo most of these closed streets are adorned by a small shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe. Beyond the wall large single family houses with cable antennas and elaborate finishings look down into the popular settlement. In spite of the wall, interactions between the neighbourhoods are common as the well-off households are often serviced by the residents of Santo Domingo. Many women from Santo Domingo work as maids, and many men serve the affluent households as handymen.

Santo Domingo's central location is enhanced by its transport infrastructure. The introduction of the Universidad and Coplico underground stops and the Eje 10 Sur, a major road, in the early 1980's radically transformed the neighbourhood. The Universidad and Coplico stations are located along the subway line that traverses the city from north to south and connects with most of the other lines. Proximity to this line of the underground network implies high levels of accessibility to far away areas

Photograph 13. "The Berlin Wall".
Source: author.

of the city via public transport. As part of the orthogonal network of rapid-highways that was imposed upon the urban fabric by Mayor Hank Gonzalez, the Eje 10 connected Santo Domingo to the rest of the city by linking it to its primary road network. However, in doing so it cut through the neighbourhood leaving one whole block squeezed between the new road and the wall that divides Santo Domingo and the adjacent upper-middle class neighbourhood. As a result of these infrastructure projects Santo Domingo has become highly accessible and thus increasingly attractive for real estate developers and the middle classes.

In the past decades, Santo Domingo's central location, high accessibility, and consolidation have raised the value of the land significantly and have made it an important target for real estate developers. There have been several rumours throughout the past years about large scale projects for the area. One that is often referred to by the residents of Santo Domingo is an alleged plan by a Japanese real estate development firm to buy the area of the Pedregales and build high rise apartment buildings.

> "From what people tell, they say that they wanted to remove it [the neighbourhood], isn't that right? Maybe you heard that people say that they wanted to remove it…disappear it, but that's hard! Ain't it?! Its already pretty big, *y luego dejarnos así de fácil* (and then to easily let that happen), I don't think so, we had to go and defend it no matter what…I mean here… we already suffered so much and then let it go? Leave our *lugarcito* (small place), no, no." Carmelo Juarez (cited in Mancilla 2000: 326, my translation).

Until today, most of the residents of Santo Domingo have been able to resist these large scale redevelopment projects and most of them have managed to stay in the area in spite of the rising costs and the perceived pressure from developers. One important way in which they have done this is through the construction of informal rental housing. Many families have expanded their houses building extra rooms and even independent flats to rent out and thus secure an extra income. It must be said that a process of gentrification has not taken place yet, however, the pressure on the neighbourhood as potential source of middle class housing is growing. Since the 1990's a number of middle class condominiums have sprung up at the edges of the neighbourhood making the tightening grip over the neighbourhood more apparent.

Map 4. Santo Domingo – Key sites

————	Neighbourhood boundary
————	"Berlin Wall"
————	Main commercial road
▮	Huayamilpas park
▮	National Autonomous University of Mexico
●	Underground stations

3.6 From densification to overcrowding

In its interior, Santo Domingo is going through a process of rapid densification. Within each plot of land the initial one-bedroom shacks have expanded into one or more structures of up to three stories high. Most plots of land have developed into complex multifamily plots where several family groups live in one shared house or in various semi-independent and fully-independent houses. At present, the neighbourhood is thus mostly made up by a variety of extended family arrangements.

Photograph 14. Middle class gated community at the edges of Santo Domingo.
Source: author.
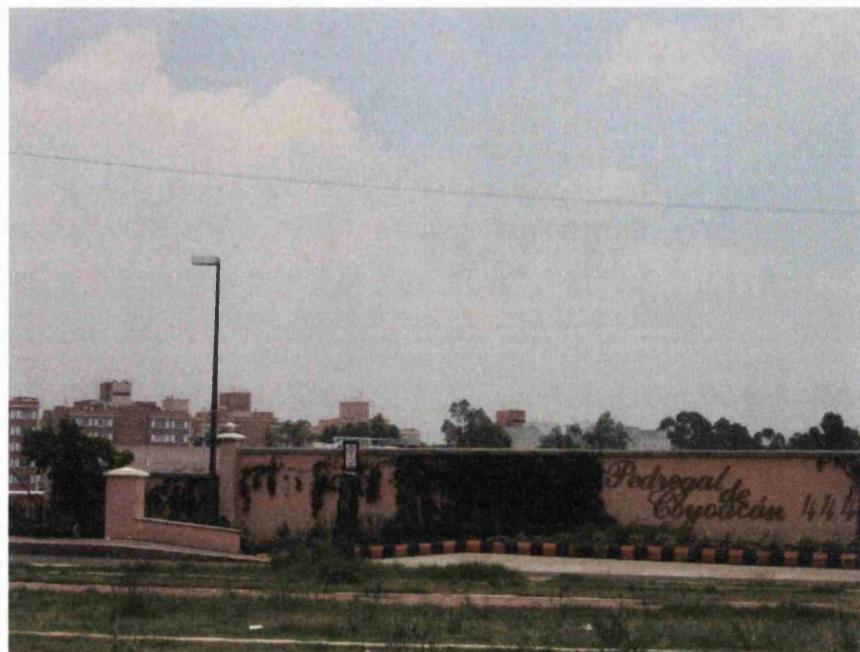
Density has also risen as a result of the expansion of informal rental housing. As mentioned above, rental housing has been an important resource for the families of Santo Domingo to generate an extra income to help them face the persistent economic crisis and the rising costs of staying in the neighbourhood.

Photograph 15. Middle class apartment buildings around the eastern fringes of Santo Domingo. Source: author.

The consolidated settlements of Mexico City are currently playing a fundamental role in providing affordable housing for the urban poor. Due to the shortage of social housing provided by the state and the increasing difficulties of accessing housing through self-help processes, the consolidated settlements that were created approximately thirty years ago represent an important housing alternative for the urban poor (Gilbert and Ward 1985; Gilbert and Varley 1991; Gilbert 1993; Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991; Varley 1993; Villavicencio 1993). These settlements have absorbed the housing needs of the children, relatives, and even friends of the original *colonos* through family unfolding and house sharing processes. In addition, informal rental housing in the consolidated settlements of the city has served to take up part of the demand for cheap housing from recent migrants to the city and the urban poor more generally.

Mexico City has a high average density of 92 people per hectare with high density areas distributed throughout the city both in advantaged and disadvantaged areas (see map 5). However, in disadvantaged areas densities tend to be higher and often translate into conditions of overcrowding. High densities are particularly evident in the city's first ring, i.e. where the consolidated popular settlements that were created approximately thirty years ago are located (see map 6). As these settlements have consolidated they have tended to densify and then develop a significant problem of overcrowding. Accordingly, Santo Domingo is now amongst the more densely populated neighbourhoods and is facing increasing overcrowding as many other consolidated settlements in the city. Santo Domingo has a significantly high density of 328.34 people per hectare, well above the Mexico City average. Moreover, according to the 2000 census data the neighbourhood already suffers from a significant problem of overcrowding with an average of 1.53 people per room. This figure is particularly high when compared to the adjacent middle-upper class neighbourhoods of Pedregal de San Francisco and Romero de Terreros which have an average of 0.72 and 0.68 people per room respectively (see map 7). As a result of the current levels of overcrowding and as the houses have expanded both horizontally and vertically using all the available space, ventilation and illumination is often severely inadequate causing important social and health problems.

Map 5. Residential density in the Metropolitan Area of Mexico City (pers./ha)

Source: Urban Age, Mexico City Maps
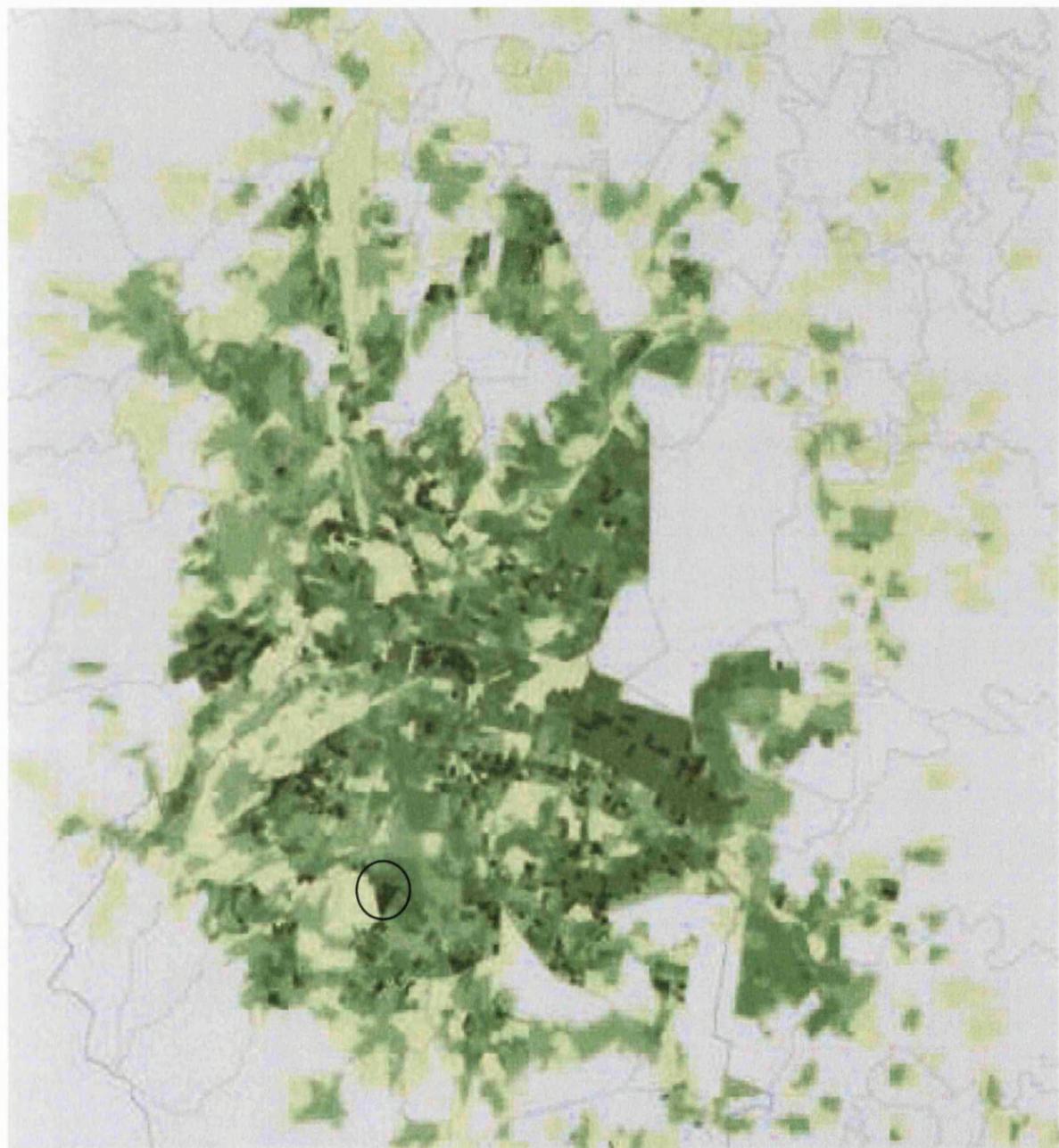
○ Santo Domingo

- 39 or fewer
- 40 to 119
- 120 to 199
- 200 to 299
- 300 or more

4. Conclusion

Santo Domingo is unlike most popular settlements of Mexico City in that it was created through a massive land invasion. But aside from this atypical process of land acquisition it is like most popular settlements in its urbanisation, consolidation, and densification process. Santo Domingo was inhabited by a low-income population that did not have access to affordable formal housing, most of whom were migrants to the city. Although most of the neighbourhood's early settlers were recently formed nuclear families, only a decade after the land invasion extended family arrangements became the norm. In spite of the rising costs of staying in the area, most of the neighbourhood's original settlers have stayed on. There has been no extensive process of expulsion of the neighbourhood's original population. This does not mean that Santo Domingo's population has remained unchanged; large numbers of new residents have been incorporated through the expansion of informal rental housing and house sharing. In fact, existing empirical research on Santo Domingo suggests that the proportion of renter and sharer households has been on the rise. At present, the neighbourhood is still essentially working class but its central location, high accessibility, and consolidation have rendered it attractive for real estate developers and for the middle classes. Santo Domingo thus finds itself under a mounting gentrifying pressure. Until this day, it has not actually gentrified but has become, like most consolidated settlements, an important resource of affordable housing. The situation of Santo Domingo illustrates how Mexico City's urban poor are increasingly coping with the lack of access to affordable housing by clustering together in multifamily plots and through informal rental housing. Today, Santo Domingo is a densely populated neighbourhood that is facing a growing problem of overcrowding.

Map 6. Metropolitan Area of Mexico City: Dominant settlement types per AGEB.

Source: Suárez Pareyón 2000: 392.

Incorporated towns
Low density popular settlement
Medium density popular settlement
High density popular settlement
Inner city popular settlement
Historic centre
Housing complex
Middle-class residential neighbourhood
Upper-class residential neighbourhood

Delimitation of boroughs and municipalities
State limits of the Federal District and the State of Mexico/Hidalgo
Limits of the AGEBs

Map 7. Coyoacán: Average people per room (rounded up)
Source: INEGI. 2003. *SINCE por colonias: Distrito Federal.*

Santo Domingo

1.7 - 2	1.2 - 1.4	0.6 - 0.9	0.0 - 0.3
1.4 - 1.7	0.9 - 1.2	0.3 - 0.6	
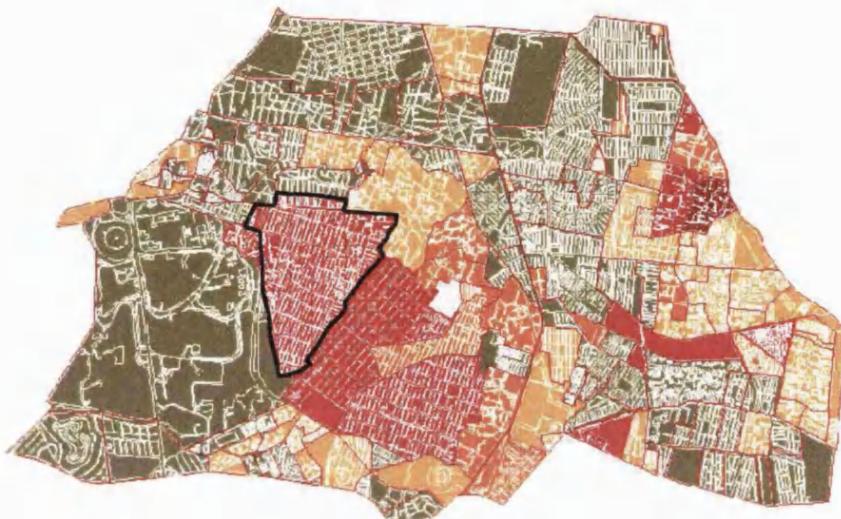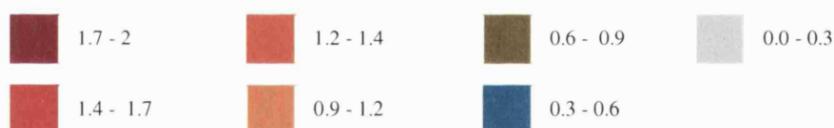
CHAPTER FIVE - THE FAMILY-HOUSE PROCESS IN SANTO DOMINGO

1. Introduction

This chapter examines the relation between family and housing in the context of Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements. It draws on the ethnographic data gathered in Santo Domingo to demonstrate the inextricable relation between family and housing which I conceptualise as the *family-house process*. In this chapter I illustrate how family and house emerge from the same building process and cannot be understood dissociated from one another.

This chapter offers a detailed analysis of the family-house process demonstrating the parallel development of family and house. Although there is no universal pattern, which all self-produced houses follow (there is not even a conception of how the house will look like when finished in each individual case), I argue that it is possible to put forward a general framework that describes the family-house process and illustrates the relationship between house and family. A detailed description of the main phases in the family-house process – finding access to a piece of land, building and consolidating the house, densification of the plot of land – is thus put forward.

The family-house process that has been briefly outlined informs my argument that many definitions of house and family are too closed and fixed to do justice to what in fact is a more fluid process. Because family is constantly redefined by family members and practiced in a variety of ways, and because the house is constantly transformed and its internal and external boundaries continuously demarcated, alternative ways of conceptualising both house and family are discussed.

2. Building families and houses

2.1 The self-help housing process as intrinsic element to a family's life history

Self-help housing's most salient feature is the fact that it is produced and at least partially built and designed by its owners over an undefined period of time. Because houses are consolidated very slowly throughout the years, housing remains as a fundamental concern for the families that produce it. Moreover, the centrality of the house is constantly actualised by the fact that it is always being decorated, improved,

and expanded. The houses, as the families that produce them, are in a constant process of becoming, they are never a finished object. Throughout time the families' common and most important project is the consolidation of their house. As Varley (2000: 280) states: "the whole project of building a house is a thread that runs through the family's life". The development of a family's house is parallel to the development of the family itself. The house is thus perceived and lived as the embodiment of the transformations that take place within the family. It is not viewed as an architectural object, but rather as an integral part of the family process.

All through my fieldwork, the stories of how each family built their house did not have a precise beginning and have not yet reached an ending. Rather, the result was a narration of how the family has resolved their housing needs and aspirations throughout time. Each moment of economic prosperity was translated into a new addition or improvement to the house, and vice versa, each period of hardship translated into a new spatial arrangement within the house. Evidently, economic conditions are partially determinant but they are not sufficient to understand changes in the house. Equally important are the comings and goings of members of the family, births, marriages, deaths, fights and reconciliations, which are all part of the history of the house. Thus, the house is neither seen, nor lived, as the mere satisfaction of the need of shelter, or as the neutral scenario or background against which life takes place. The story of the house is an intrinsic part of the family process; it is an essential piece in the discursive reconstruction of the families' lives. Through the narratives of the history of a house one learns the history of the family.

This is very well illustrated by one of my fieldwork experiences. One afternoon Carmen and I sat in the living room of her three storied house, which now houses fifteen members of her family. I asked her to tell me the story of their house since her family arrived in Mexico City. She began describing the initial shack in which she lived with her mother and siblings, followed by narrating how she moved into another shack when she married, and then how this shack evolved into the three storied brick house of today. Throughout her narration she wove in and out of long descriptions of what the family was doing at the time, their problems and their happiness, and more direct references to the house as a physical structure. At one moment, when Carmen was trying to explain the attachment she felt to the house, and what it had meant to turn it into what it is now, she ran out of the room to look for

something. She came back with two pictures (see photograph 16). In one of the photos you could see two very poor children holding each other and smiling. In the second picture you could see a boy sitting on top of a wooden horse in front of their three storied house which was covered by scaffolding. Pointing at the first picture she said: "You see, look how poor my children were?" – and pointing at the second picture – "and now look, this is my grandson!"

Photograph 16. "You see how poor my children were?...And now look, this is my grandson!"
Source: Family photo albums

The house is a powerful point of reference for the biographies of its inhabitants; it is around this central reference point that the family members construct their life stories. Thus, the house becomes the centre of gravity from where, not only social relations and activities emanate, but also symbolic resources upon which families draw to make sense and attach meaning to their past, present and future life projects.

2.2 The family-house process

I have argued that, in popular settlements like Santo Domingo, families and houses emerge from the same building process. For this reason, houses are not seen nor lived as distinct artefacts to be consumed, they are intrinsic to the family process. As illustrated above, the residents of these settlements often find it difficult to discern between the family and the house as they are two aspects of the same building

process. In the popular settlements of Mexico City, people are simultaneously building families and houses. In what follows, this continuous process of building families and houses will be conceptualised as the *family-house process*. Although there is no universal pattern, which all families and houses follow, I will offer a general framework to illustrate the family-house process of consolidated settlements like Santo Domingo.

2.2.1 Finding access to a piece of land

The first step in the family-house process is the decision to embark on the project of building a family-house and the acquirement of a plot of land. The literature on women and popular settlements in Mexico consistently argues that women play a central role in motivating the acquisition of a plot of land (Varley 1995: 172). My own fieldwork in Santo Domingo supports this claim. As women evoked the time in which they commenced the arduous process of building their family-house, they often emphasised that it was them who initiated the process.

> "Because in reality, *les daba igual* (it was all the same) to them [men] whether we had a house or not. They were conformist, they didn't go to demonstrations, they didn't go to the rallies, we had to go and have clean clothes for them, have...hmm... send the kids to school and participate (politically). So, here it was women's participation, mainly...because...because they are very conformist, they wanted to always...well, they weren't interested in whether we had two rooms, or if one room is crumbling down or if it leaks. We saw that here...even, *compañero* (fellow activist) Pascual, one of the *compañeros* who participated most, said that this was the... the organisation of the... of the widows...because many of the men were drunkards, wife beaters...hmmm....drunkards, wife beaters, and also, they went out with other women and weren't interested on whether we achieved a house or if we remained in a standstill, in one room...in one of those rooms that were full of rats, of animals...it was all the same to them, you could count them with the hand, those who were interested in that the house was made." (Carmen)

Women also remembered that their husbands were often against the whole enterprise and that they were forced to begin the process without their support. When Edith learnt about the possibility of securing a plot of land she tried to convince her husband to take part in the land invasion. Confronted with a strong opposition from

his part she decided to take the risk and claim a stake over a plot of land taking her young children with her. Edith bought as many beans, rice, chilli, onions and tortillas as she could and settled in Santo Domingo in a makeshift home made out of corrugated cardboard and plastic. She recalls that her husband was infuriated and expected that she would return after a couple of days. Contrary to his prediction, Edith stood firm and a month later her husband had no option but to follow in her steps. She remembers that the day her husband returned she only had a couple of tomatoes left.

Varley (1995: 172) notes that women's role as instigators is due to the fact that "one of the greatest achievements to which they aspire in fulfilling their maternal obligations is to build "something to leave for their children" – the most common response obtained by anyone asking why people are prepared to tolerate the inhospitable environment of a recently-established irregular settlement in urban Mexico". Women are also particularly interested in improving their housing conditions because they are the ones who spend the most time at home and are therefore the most affected by its quality (González Cruz and Duran Uribe 1992). Furthermore, as it is often the case that recently formed couples are patrilocal, women are particularly interested in moving out of the in-law's and into their own house. Another explanation for men's overt resistance to initiating the family-house process is that, as Carmen clearly puts it:

> "I feel that men didn't want that we improved our housing because they didn't want us to organise, *querían que estuviéramos con una pata encima* (they wanted us to be under their foot)." (Carmen)

In addition, "women play a crucial role in underpinning the social relations on which much of the mutually supportive activity of self-help housing construction rests" (Ibid.: 192). Women are generally the ones who maintain the relations and information networks amongst relatives and friends. This is important because social networks and especially family networks are the most common way in which families access the information about opportunities to acquire a plot of land. Because of the informality of the development of popular settlements, possible land invasions and the availability of land for sale are mostly propagated by word of mouth. Like

Edith explains, the general pattern is that one member of the family finds out about land being sold or invaded and lets the rest of the family know.

> "We started to bring in nephews and nieces, grandchildren, sons and daughters, and that is how the neighbourhood was populated. The same happened in the other neighbourhoods, Ruiz Cortínes, Díaz Ordaz, and others." (Edith)

As these settlements are often inhabited by a high percentage of immigrant population from rural areas, it is common that after finding out about the possible ways of having access to a plot of land the pioneer immigrant family or family members summon the rest of the family to join them in the city. Popular settlements are thus made up of a complex network of interconnected people. The distribution and acquisition of land consequently does not follow the mechanisms of the market, with money being it's established medium, but is organised around complex social networks of trust and mutuality. People are connected either by family ties, friendship, or by being *paisanos*. Many of my informants described how, having learnt that a person came from the same area as they did; they helped them acquire the land and secure it. In her narration of how her family secured a piece of land in Santo Domingo, Aurora remembered how they got into the area, which was then circled by the police who were there to prevent further people from coming in. A *paisano* she knew had told her that a land invasion was taking place in Santo Domingo and that one of the policemen guarding the area was a *paisano* too. Aurora immediately looked for this *paisano*, whom she had not met before, and told him she came from the same town as he did. They quickly started talking about their home town and the shared memories they had; later on the policeman let Aurora and her family get through and get hold of a piece of land. As a result of these processes, in settlements like Santo Domingo, people coming from the same region tend to be located close to one another and are recognised as being part of a group.

It is important to stop at this point and clarify what I mean by people being related by family ties. I strongly argue that being related by family ties can not be reduced to being related by blood or marriage. The way family is defined and actually acted out is a much more flexible and complex process. A common Mexican practice which exemplifies this is the notion of fictive kinship or *compadrazgo*. The most common form of *compadrazgo* is when the parents of a new born child choose a person to be

the child's godfather or godmother, thereby becoming the parents' *compadre* or *comadre*. However, as Lomnitz (1975) illustrates in her research, it is typical for people of popular neighbourhoods to expand the number and variety of *compadres* they have. There are therefore not only *compadres* of baptism but also of confirmation, graduation from school, marriage, etc. The common aspect in all of them is that *compadrazgo* defines a relation between people, which entails certain rights and obligations. It gives a semi-official status to a close social relation thus strengthening the bonds of solidarity and trust. *Compadrazgo* is a recognised common practice in Mexico and therefore to an extent institutionalised. However, family can also be defined in more informal and flexible ways. One of my informants, Manuela, explained that she considered some of her neighbours as family because of the long time they had spent together, because of the hard times they shared, and because of the support they got from one another. Although not related to her by blood, in practice, these people were not only said to be part of the family but they actually acted as active family members themselves. This does not mean that all close friends are to be seen as family. People clearly differentiate between close friends and those individuals who have, due to their everyday acts, become active members of the family.

We can see that, already from this initial stage in the family-house process, before each individual house begins to expand and densify we already witness a complex residential and familial phenomenon throughout the neighbourhood. This is accentuated by the fact that, in most popular settlements, social life tends to happen within its limits. Bazán and Estrada (1992) found that it is typical for people to marry among themselves in these settlements. Popular settlements are therefore made up of a complex network of people interconnected in many ways. The significant thing here is that there is a parallel between the neighbourhoods' social networks and its spatial configuration.

2.2.2 A family builds a house

After acquiring the land, families secure their plot of land. They summon as many of its members as it is necessary in order to occupy the plot and look after it day and night. They turn to various family members in order to negotiate between the need to constantly guard the land and the need to go to work, care for the children, gather

building materials, etc. Marcela described to me how, in the case of her family, it was her husband's cousins who took care of the plot of land before they built a habitable room and moved into it.

> "His cousins were the ones who looked after the land here, he [her husband] left work and came to see them, he brought them soft drinks, sandwiches, or something for them to eat...he was over there [in their old house where they lived with her parents] because he was working. After a while I told him *lets see if its time now* and he told me *you have to go over there so they see that someone is living there, because they want to invade it*...and so, he asked for money where he worked, and started building a room." (Marcela)

Similarly, Edith explained that in her case it was her father-in-law whom they mostly relied on. He not only helped out Edith and her husband but also Edith's sister-in-law who had also participated in the invasion. Years before the invasion in Santo Domingo, Edith's parents-in-law had themselves invaded in a nearby neighbourhood. It was them who had spread the word amongst the family that an invasion was taking place in Santo Domingo.

> "My husband drew the plan and my father-in-law did the rubblework. My father-in-law knew nothing about masonry, but life teaches you. My father-in-law stayed here to look after the land, in the little room, [a temporary shack made of corrugated metal] or sometimes next door with my sister-in-law." (Edith)

As the land on which land invasion takes place is usually unsuited for urbanisation, much work has to be done in preparing the site (evening out the land, taking out rocks and plants etc.) before building a habitable room of whichever kind. This initial construction plays an important symbolic role. Although it is sometimes so precarious that it only helps the members of the family that are looking over the land to cover themselves from the rain – meaning that the family does not yet effectively "move" to live there – it has a significant symbolic function as it states that the plot of land belongs to a given family.

After the land has been secured and prepared for building, an initial construction made of temporary material is built, in which the family moves in. This structure is generally one multipurpose room where the family sleeps, cooks, works and plays.

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As the family's economic situation improves and the permanence in the plot seems more secure, the family starts to replace some of the provisional materials with more durable ones. The transformation usually begins with the walls, changing them from corrugated cardboard or metal into cement blocks. This first improvement tends to happen relatively soon after the land is taken. After the walls, the roof is usually changed from corrugated cardboard to asbestos, and at a later stage to cement (Bazant 1985).

Photograph 17. Multipurpose room made out of brick walls and corrugated metal roof
Source: Family photo albums.

Family networks are especially important in this early stage. Mostly as a result of their economic situation, families turn to members of their extended family network to build the house. Instead of hiring labour, they mobilise as many members as possible for this task. Edith remembers how even before they had actually began the construction work, her parents-in-law were already collaborating in the process of gathering the temporary material to build their first room.

> "my parents-in-law had already gathered corrugated cardboard, if they saw corrugated cardboard in the street they would pick it up, they had their pile…afterwards, the family got together to build the room. All of my brothers and sisters-in-law and their children, they all came." (Edith)

Photograph 18. Women taking active part in construction work

Source: Díaz Enciso 2002: (left) 30 (right) 180.

The narrations of my informants all coincided that the main construction was carried out during the weekends, when the men were free from work. However, unlike what many men claim (Chant 1987), this does not mean men built the house entirely on their own. During the week, women carried out the less skilled but nevertheless arduous construction work: they looked after the plot of land, gathered construction materials, and prepared the site for construction. On the weekend, they cooked and contributed with things such as bringing water or carrying the materials. As José described, these were days of hard work, but they were also "lively family gatherings".

> "It wears you out, its tough, the effort one makes but, sometimes we like to be in the middle of it. You know what? There is food, there are snacks, there is beer, a soft drink that one would like to drink, a *cuba* (rum with coke), or two, or three…" (José)

A similar image was portrayed by Edith's family as we sat together one Sunday morning around Edith's market stand. Every Sunday, Edith placed a market stand in front of her house in which she sold clothes, and accessories for women. It was common for one or more of her relatives to drop by unannounced, have something to eat and chat around the market stand. That Sunday morning Edith's sister and her husband arrived. The two women started recalling the times when they were building

the house. They laughed and talked about how Edith's sister would come *de excursión* (on an excursion or outing) every Sunday accompanied by her husband and children. They would help evening out the land, taking out rocks, and then building the house. They both chatted about how, after a hard day of work, they would make a *fritanga* (barbecue) and have a big feast until around seven o'clock at night. In their memories, these days of work were also memorable family outings.

These experiences suggest that, although the apparent motivation for turning to family members as a source of labour seems to be a necessity to cut costs, the socialisation and conviviality that came with it also played a significant role. Saving money was indeed a determinant factor, but the choice was also accompanied by the compensation of a family gathering. Why hire someone if we can do it ourselves? Why hire someone if while getting the work done we can have fun?

Photograph 19. "Everyone participated"
Source: Díaz Enciso 2002: 252.

The majority of my informants emphasised the participation of all members of the family in this initial phase of construction. Even children, they described, helped carrying whatever they could and learnt from a young age the craft of a mason. Ana María recalls how her own children worked hard to build their own home and that of

the neighbours. "Oh, yes, they did, the children worked a lot, yes. Children grew up working" she says. Remembering the days when the house was being built, Marcela also recounts how they all participated in the construction:

"It was as they say, if you may excuse me, we had cement mix even inside our panties. And there we were, my daughters and I, they were really little, and we helped to bring in the gravel and throw in the cement. And that little courtyard there, that's from the time of the invasion, I remember how my husband threw the cement mix, we hauled it and emptied it out and he extended it. And then my son threw in the shovel, and worked on it and ended up with cement even in his underpants, [she laughs] and then he said *come on, dad, get out of the way when we even out!* And right after that he would even out the cement and covered all of our feet [laughs]. My poor son, he also helped, and then he said, *ay mom, how we suffered here, didn't we? - yes son, but now you have a place to live in,* I tell him, *we suffered but now you have a place to live in.*" (Marcela)

After the initial multipurpose room the first thing families tend to build is a second room, with the aim of separating the children's sleeping space from that of their parents. The next additions are usually another room, a living room and a bathroom. The original multipurpose room generally develops into a dining room and kitchen once there are enough rooms for sleeping. Ana María explains that for her family, after having separate rooms for the children and parents to sleep, a living room was the next thing to have, and last in the list, a kitchen.

"A room, a small living room, and that's all…the kitchen didn't worry us so much. We didn't give it that much importance because, here we cooked like this, even in the small courtyard… well, we made our bonfire here and that's how we cooked…like, it wasn't like much of a problem." (Ana María)

The first years after the acquisition of the land are dedicated to expanding the house enough for the founding family to have separate spaces for cooking, communal spaces, and sleeping areas. This seldom means that each child has his or her own room, it is generally sought that at least boys and girls have separate spaces and, sometimes, that older children have a separate room. Parallel to this process of expansion, in which the one-room house is transformed into a two or three-room house, there is a process of consolidation. Through this process the materials and the

infrastructure of the existing rooms are constantly improved. Both expansion and consolidation are relatively independent of land regularisation and start taking place long before legal regularisation processes begin (see Varley 1988). What is important is the perception of security by the owners. This perception, however, does not necessarily coincide with actual land regularisation. It is rather the introduction of services and taxes and the provision of commercial land use licenses that are a more determinant factor for the perception of security.

There is a direct correlation between the level of house consolidation and the amount of labour force that is hired. Whereas in the initial phase the common pattern is that none of the work force is hired and the family does all the work themselves, as the house is consolidated a higher percentage of the work done on the house is paid for (Bazant 1985). However, this does not mean that there is less and less involvement of family members in the housing process. Families often choose to hire family members in economic need or neighbours to do the work. As my informants explained, they prefer to pay this money to a member of the family rather than to a stranger. We see once again how the housing process is not based on market relations but on networks of trust. Whenever I visited the Martínez family on a Saturday or Sunday morning I would find Alberto working with his brother in the room he was building for his daughter. He explained to me that he had carried out the finishings of the house himself, and that now that they were building an extension to the house they had decided to hire his brother. His brother was in poorer economic conditions as he was, so he preferred to hire him than anybody else. In addition, Alberto said that with his brother the work was more relaxed. At around noon Dolores would call Alberto and his brother into the house and serve them a hearty meal. If her children or grandchildren were around they would share the table with Alberto and his brother, who, after a small chat, would go back to their work. Weekend family gatherings that evolve around the building of the house continue to take place in the later stages of the housing process, although they are different to those of the initial phase.

Narrating the story of her own house Aurora explains how the later parts of the house were built mainly by her children.

"And then I did the upstairs floor. The upstairs floor was made by my son that now lives upstairs. And it was because he wasn't going to be left behind, he felt he was going to be left behind because he said the house was mine. *But it is not mine, its yours, you made it*, and so he got his bit and he lives upstairs. And so yeah, we built upstairs, with many sacrifices because you know that poor people never have that much. They [her children] always helped me to save. Because, my son, the one that now lives in the United States sent me money. *Mama, help Lecho [the son that lives upstairs], help him because he was the one who got us out of this. Help him.* And so we did it all together, all together we did this. Don't think that only them [her children], or me, all together." (Aurora)

Later on in the conversation she adds,

"And so I did it all little by little, the only floor that was made fast was the top one, because they [her children] all worked already." (Aurora)

The role the second generation plays also illustrates how the families' involvement with the housing process does not decrease with time. Rather, what we see is how there is a parallel development of both house and family and, accordingly, a changing interaction between them. As children grow older and begin to work, their income becomes central for the house's consolidation. It is the availability of this extra income that actually makes this consolidation possible. A great part of the second generation's salary goes into the expansion and improvement of the house. The house is now, more then ever, a joint family project.

The parallel development of family and house is further evidenced in the relation between consolidation levels and gendered family practices. Chant's (1987) research has demonstrated that the quality of women's participation in the housing process is a critical determinant of dwelling standards. When women have a more decisive role within the family there tends to be more consolidation. She claims that women's participation is usually conditioned by the type of household to which they belong, and that it is within extended families that women tend to have a more decisive role. There are three main factors, which influence the pattern of life in extended families, giving women greater freedom and decision making capacities: there are at least two earners, housework can be shared, and where the additional members are women, wives have a greater opportunity of taking a paid employment outside the house. Jan

Bazant's (1985) research contradicts this hypothesis. He emphasises the interdependency between the construction process and housing improvement with the families' socio-economic development. I would argue that although economic capacity is definitely a necessary element, it is not sufficient for housing improvement to take place. Chants' research proves the importance of studying the impact of the more "qualitative" aspects of home construction.

Talking about the development of her house Carmen simultaneously narrated the comings and goings of her family and concluded "all of this has been the process of building the house, education for the children, and well, that the husband respects us, right?...that is, even that we learnt, that...we can't remain silent, we can't allow that anyone steps over us because...hmmm...we have our rights." Although both men and women drew attention to the direct participation of all members of the family in the initial construction and early consolidation, the family-house process is highly gendered. The housing process is inextricably linked to the continuity and redefinition of gender roles within the families.

Besides having a central role in the actual construction of the house, women carry out the bulk of the administrative and negotiation work with the authorities (see also Moser 1992). A fundamental part of the housing process, which is mainly done by women, is to organise demonstrations and attend meetings with the local authorities to attain the regularisation of the land and the introduction of urban services in the neighbourhood. It is generally acknowledged amongst the residents of Santo Domingo that women are the central agents in the family-house process. When talking about the effort of building their houses and consolidating the neighbourhood women often talk in the first person feminine plural *nosotras*, rather than the usual mixed-gendered plural *nosotros*. To provide evidence of the central participation of women Carmen showed me, amongst other images, a photograph of a meeting with the local authorities and remarked "if you notice, only women were there."

In addition to the feelings of solidarity and the cheerful family gatherings, when evoking the family-house process women often talk about how *la lucha* (the struggle) for a house had been made particularly difficult due to the regular conflicts they had with men. This is such a central and broadly recognised issue that during the early stages of my fieldwork, before I had established a close relationship with the Robles

family, Carmen once noted that *la lucha* had been very difficult because in the beginning Marcelo beat her and did not grant her permission to attend the meetings with the *colonos*. As she spoke, Marcelo stood right beside us and instead of arguing against what his wife had just said he laughed and added "we were big machos!", and Carmen joined him and in a jest exclaimed "and now I am the one that beats him!" Carmen's situation is not exceptional, throughout my fieldwork women related how they had to participate secretively or confront their husbands' rage.

In spite of the extra work and the conflicts that active participation in the housing process entails for women "[t]he positive side of these experiences of tiring negotiations is that women acquire knowledge on the institutional workings, and develop practices of communication and negotiation with the public powers as social subjects-actors of a social housing project and not as objects of an official housing policy" (Massolo 1991: 310). Being the ones more often engaged in the day-to-day political organisation and activism of the irregular settlements, "they become more knowledgeable than men about public political affairs in general" (Elizabeth Jelin cited in Gutmann 2002: 180). In this process women become more articulate, self-confident and develop a network of support which provides them with a sense of

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relative empowerment. Like most of the women I met in Santo Domingo, Ana María is strikingly articulate and self-confident especially when compared to her husband Poncho. Don Poncho, a shy thin man of around sixty, always greeted the many people that came to his house with a warm smile and hurried to his room or busied himself in the garden choosing not to participate in the various community meetings and festivities taking place. The contrast between Don Poncho and Ana María was made particularly stark the first time I heard Ana María give a public speech. Ana María greeted me in her usual friendly and markedly formal manner and remarked that she was a bit nervous about the speech. Ana María is a short and extremely slim woman that gives the impression of having aged early due to constant hard work. Her clothing is simple and she retains a certain provincial look, her eyes are intense and alert and her smile broad and toothless. As she began talking, Ana María glowed and appeared to grow, she spoke with incredible self-assurance and projected her voice loud and clear. Parallel to the process of building and consolidating her family-house, Ana María attained significant confidence and recognition.

However, for the women of Santo Domingo the ultimate evidence of their empowerment is the house itself. Edith describes feeling a "sense of power" and how well women felt having realised that "we can do it" . She felt that her husband never believed that they could obtain a plot of land and build a house and therefore opposed the whole enterprise. "Well, like every macho, they believe that without them its not possible, but we have proved to them that it is, thanks to us we have a future for our children."

Although women's relative empowerment has meant that issues such as domestic violence are constantly addressed, the patriarchal system as a whole is generally left unchallenged. The literature on women and housing in Mexico suggests that "their participation is not so much a challenge to established gender roles as an extension of their roles as "mother-wives-housewives… (in fact) the participants are likely to be ambivalent about any overtly feminist elements to the movement, and may go as far as to declare themselves, roundly, "*not* feminists" (Varley 1995: 172). This claim is clearly illustrated by a speech made by Doña Jovita, one of the most prominent female activists, during an open air celebration of International Women's Day in Santo Domingo.

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"Years ago, we came from many places to populate the Pedregales. The women from Ajusco, Santo Domingo and los Pedregales have achieved these neighbourhoods... full of courage we went to all the offices...we struggled so that we could have schools, markets, for a better life. Women took the mallet and the pick to begin the streets...it's a nice memory, and ... shouldn't let the struggle die...today is the international women's day, of which women? Of the *sacrificada* (one that scarifies herself), to bring up her children..." (Speech delivered by Doña Jovita. Street rally "De los Pedregales a los Caracoles" to collect school utensils for Chiapas and to celebrate International Women's Day, 6th of March 2005)

2.2.3 Densification of the plot of land

The third phase of the family-house process is the densification of the plot of land. This phase characterises the present moment of Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements. In the context of a persistent lack of affordable housing provision and the continued impoverishment of the urban poor, settlements like Santo Domingo are absorbing a large number of people through family unfolding, house sharing and the expansion of informal rental housing[26]. Though family unfolding and house sharing can be observed in the earlier phases of the family-house process, they are intensified and acquire more permanence in this latter stage (Villavicencio 1993).

2.2.3.1 Family unfolding

Desdoblamiento familiar (family unfolding) refers to the process whereby a member of the family-house forms an additional *family group* within the house by incorporating new people. A *family group* is defined by the existence of a closer social relation, greater mutual obligations, and rights between a reduced number of the members of the whole family, who live within one house. Amongst many possible arrangements, the most common way in which a family group is formed is around the direct responsibility for a child. For example: a couple and their children, or a single mother or father and his/her children, form a family group. A family group can also be formed between siblings, who live with family members other than their parents.

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[26] It is important to note that the literature on self-help housing does not differentiate between what I define as house sharing and family unfolding and refers to both processes as house sharing. In spite of the confusion this might cause, I believe it is necessary to make this distinction in order to better understand these practices.

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The most common way in which family unfolding takes place is when members of the second generation begin to marry and bring their husbands or wives to live in the house, thereby forming their family group there. An increasingly frequent phenomenon is that of single mothers who decide to stay with their child in their parental home. Family unfolding can also happen if a member of the family brings a person into the house with whom he/she has a special bond and greater mutual obligations – such as a brother or sister – that is not his or her partner or child. If the initial family included not only what is generally understood as a nuclear family, but also other family member(s)[27], family unfolding also takes place if they form an additional family group within the house.

Family unfolding resulting from the marriage of a member of the second generation is a common practice in Mexico and has been widely documented in rural areas (Varley 1993). Traditionally, this practice had been mainly patrilocal, but this is starting to change. In Santo Domingo it is now quite common to see wives bringing their husbands into their parental homes (see also Gutmann 2007: 166). Ana María described how in her generation, due to *machismo*, it was thought that men had to provide a housing solution for their wives, and thus it was more common that the new couple stayed at the husband's parental house. Now, she said, it was not seen under a negative light if the new family lived in the wives' parental home.

> "The family starts to grow, there are new couples, one begins to build, yes. Although here, in the Pedregales, well, the sons-in-law come. I have noticed that, that the sons-in-law come to live with their mother's-in-law, yes. Amongst our neighbours, the sons-in-law are here…yes, actually, the man goes to live at the house of his future wife." (Ana María)

The case of her own family is an example of that; her daughter Rosa brought her husband to live in her house. As Ana María explains, matrilocality is becoming a more frequent practice due to economic convenience, because women have a higher tendency to want to remain by their mothers, and as a way to circumvent disputes between mother and daughter-in-law.

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[27] Here I want to make note again that by family member I am not solely referring to blood related individuals, but also to non blood related people who are defined as being members of the family.

With the unfolding of the family comes the expansion of the house. This results in a variety of housing typologies, and with them a variety of family practices. As the family unfolds the house expands vertically and/or horizontally to accommodate the members of the new family group. It is at this stage where the houses transform into two or three storied houses and go from being made up by one single structure to maybe two or more within the same plot of land.

There are six main variables defining the spatial arrangements and family practices that come with family unfolding. I have divided these variables into social and spatial variables. The social variables define the type of practices existing between the family groups.

Spatial variables
- vertical or horizontal expansion
- shared facilities or self contained flats
- shared or independent access

Social variables
- shared spending and pooling of resources between family groups or separate spending
- shared or separate meals
- shared or separate domestic work such as child care, getting rid of rubbish etc

These spatial and social variables mix in all possible ways to create a wide variety of housing forms and family arrangements. It is important to note that, because many plots of land expand to include more than one structure and a number of family groups, one same plot can have an overlap of different social and spatial arrangements.

I will describe the case of the plot of land of the Martinez family, to better illustrate this. Alberto and Dolores were a recently married couple at the time of the land invasion, they had been renting a room at a relative's house close to Santo Domingo. Therefore, the possibility of becoming home owners drove the young couple to settle in the neighbourhood in spite of the difficult conditions the area posed. During the first year only Dolores, Alberto, and their small children lived in the plot of land. But

a significant number of members of their extended family network have come and gone throughout the 30 years the family has lived here.

Illustration 2. The Martínez family
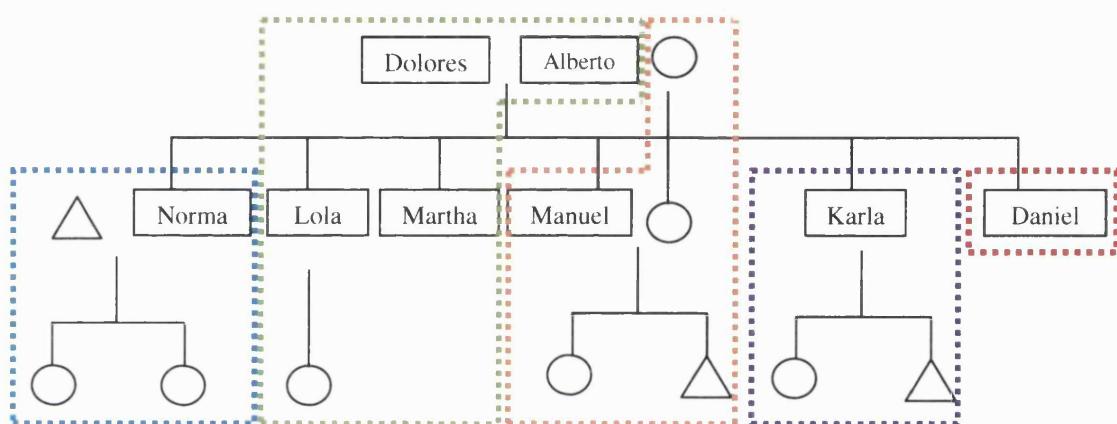
.... Live in ground floor of first structure

.... Live in first floor of first structure

.... Live in second floor of first structure

.... Live in second floor of first structure

.... Live in second structure

.... Currently rented out

Illustration 3. Family unfolding and house expansion: The Martínez family-house

| Basement | Ground Floor | First Floor | Second Floor |
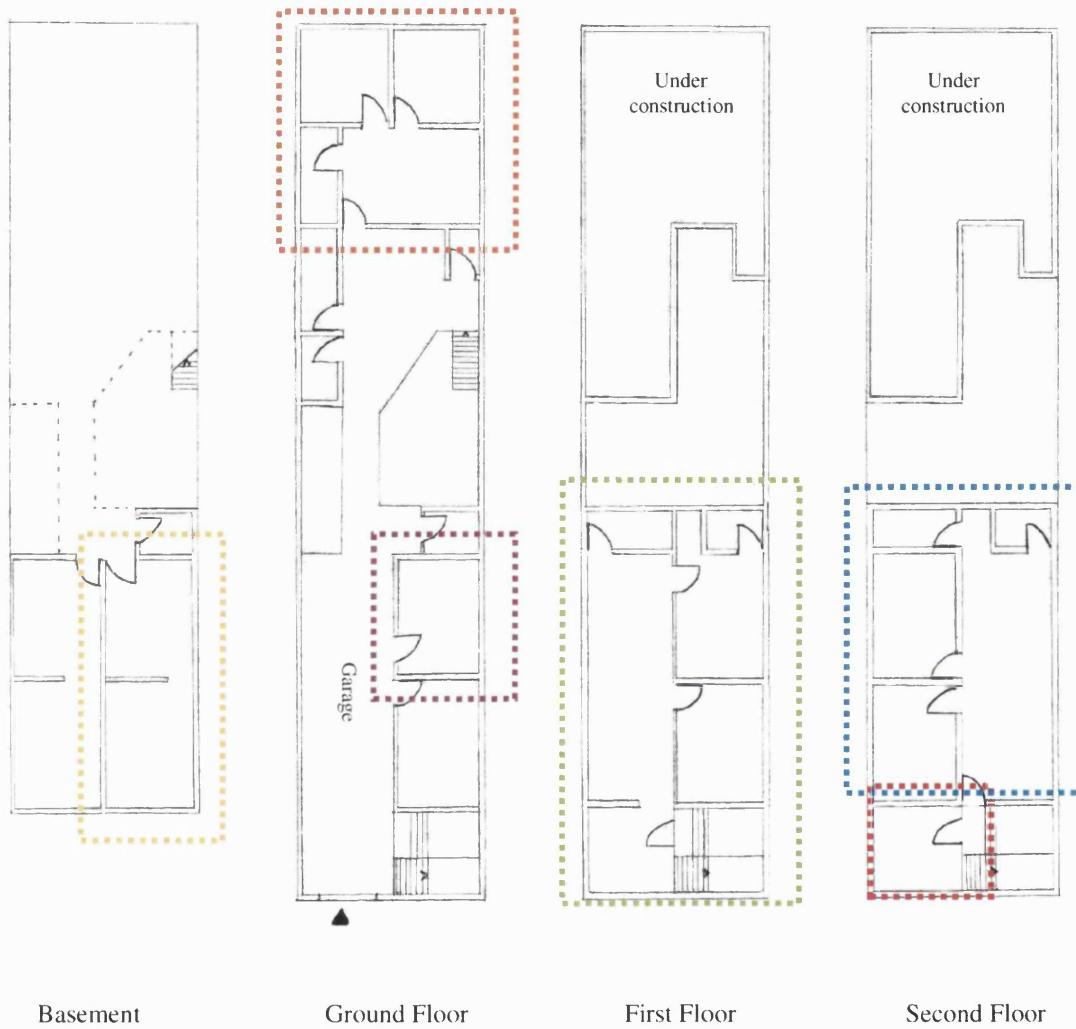
Today, the house is made up of two distinct structures, one at the front of the plot with access to the street, and the other one at the back. The front structure is made up of four different levels, each with separate access. The first is below street level, and it was the second structure the family built. Today, this basement is divided into two small self-contained apartments, one of which is currently rented out. There is very little contact between the family renting this flat and the rest of the people living in the piece of land.

The second level, which is at street level, is made up of only two rooms. One of these rooms has been inhabited by the couple's daughter Karla – a single mother – and her two children for the past few years. The other room has been left vacant after a period

in which it was occupied by Dolores' cousin. Karla and her children spend a significant amount of time at Alberto's and Dolores' flat. They shower and eat there, and when Karla is at work Dolores takes care of her children. Dolores often complains that Karla does not give her a monetary contribution even though she is an active member of her household.

The third floor is now the central home where Alberto and Dolores live. They share this flat with their younger, single daughter Martha and with their daughter Lola, who is also a single mother and has one child. Martha, Lola and her daughter sleep in the room which leads to the only bathroom in the flat. Alberto and Dolores sleep in the contiguous bedroom. Whenever she can, Martha contributes to the household spending and Lola contributes with a fixed percentage of her salary. Although Lola's daughter is already 11 years old, she is also looked after by Dolores or another family member, when Lola is away for work. At present, Lola often works double shifts in order to save up money to finish building a separate flat at the back of the plot for her and her daughter.

The fourth floor is divided in two: one part is inhabited by Daniel, the founder's couple single son. The other part is where Norma, her husband and two children now live, after a short period in which they rented a flat outside the neighbourhood. Daniel eats and showers at his parents flat, and very seldom contributes to the household spending. Norma and her family are more independent from the core family. They normally eat and bathe in their own house and have separate expenses. However, because they don't have a proper shower, they often go downstairs to clean themselves. Although Norma and her husband make a conscious effort to be independent of the central household, their children spend a lot of time downstairs. It was not uncommon to see the children eating downstairs, playing with their cousins, asking for help with their homework, or asking to have their hair fixed before going to school.

The second structure is an L shaped construction at the back of the plot made up by three levels, each with separate access. Its first floor is inhabited by Manuel, his wife, and two children, and his mother-in-law. Part of this same level has recently been vacated by Alberto's brother, who lived in the plot of land for more than four years. Manuel has a self contained flat, and his family eats and showers there, he has totally

separate expenses from his parents. Manuel's children are taken care of by his mother-in-law, which makes the connection with the central household weaker. Manuel's mother-in-law only visits the rest of the people living in the plot of land on very special occasions, and she is not considered as part of the family by all. The second and third levels of this structure are currently under construction and will be used to make a different spatial arrangement, with the hope of giving an independent flat to each family group.

2.2.3.2 House sharing

House sharing is the process whereby one or more family members or friends – such as relatives facing economic problems – come to live in the family-house on grounds other than their forming a family group with a member of the house and without paying a formally defined contribution such as rent money. In Mexico, sharers are commonly referred to as *arrimados*. This term comes from the verb *arrimarse,* which means to come close or to lean on.

When talking about all the different people that have lived in the house, Aurora not only talks about her children and their partners. She also talks about several relatives who have lived in the house without paying formal rent. In the earlier stages, when the house had still only the ground floor and not the three floors it has today, Aurora remembers the many people that resided in her house. She particularly remembers a time in which they came from Michoacán, her home town, to get medical attention in Mexico City.

> "The whole of my husband's family are in great need, also because of diseases, they would come here to get cured, and they stayed here for months and months. I had *arrimados* that came to work and here I gave them... eh.. a house." (Aurora)

She tells me that she currently has someone living in her house: "and even right now, I have this one...this one is my niece who is working here in the city." Her niece Jimena came from Guadalajara to find a job and establish herself in the capital. Her move into Aurora's house is therefore less temporary; unless she marries and is able to get a house of her own, Jimena's plans are to continue living with Aurora. Jimena

does not contribute to the household in any predefined way; as all other members of the household she buys food, and takes part with whatever she can.

House sharing significantly raises the level of complexity of the spatial patterns and family practices in the house, for we are no longer seeing the house merely as an outward expression of the three generation family ideal, as Larissa Lomnitz (1975) argued, but also as a resource for the whole extended family network and friends who are often considered as part of it[28]. This makes the borders defining the family and the house more and more blurry. The practice of house sharing clearly demonstrates the empirical and conceptual flaws of any approach that equates the family and the house with a nuclear family model. But not only are the external boundaries of what constitutes the family and what constitutes the house blurred out; the same can be said about the differentiation of family groups within the house.

2.2.3.3 Families rent out a part of their house

An additional element in the densification of the plot of land is the development of informal rental housing. It is the process whereby the family-house is expanded with the explicit purpose of renting out rooms to secure an additional income, or when existing rooms that have been temporarily left vacant are rented out.

The case of Edith's plot of land is a good example of the complexities added to the family-house process through the expansion of informal rental housing. Edith arrived in Santo Domingo with her husband and first born son, 27 years ago. She found out about the availability of a plot of land through one of her sisters-in-law. The house is now a two storied house with four bedrooms, a dining room, a living room, one kitchen, and one bathroom. For many years Edith and her husband shared the main room, their older son Javier slept in another room, and the three daughters shared the last room. The fourth bedroom was built when Javier decided to marry so he could accommodate his new family in the house. After a couple of years Javier was offered housing through his job; he and his family moved out leaving the fourth and largest room vacant. The three daughters then rearranged and each got a room of her own. Soon after Lilia, the eldest daughter, married and moved with her husband into the

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[28] In her 1975 research, carried out in a recently formed self-help settlement in Mexico City, Lomnitz (1975) argues that residential patterns in these settlements are: 1) one of the outward expressions of the three generation family ideal and, 2) an important survival strategy.

fourth room. The relationship between Lilia's husband and the rest was not easy so Lilia decided to leave and look for a place to rent. She wanted to live close to her mother, so she looked for a room to rent amongst her neighbours and found one on the same street, two houses away from her mother's house. Lilia and her family live in only one room and share a bathroom with the landlords. Consequently, she goes to her mother's house to cook, wash her clothes, watch TV, and drop off her two daughters with Edith while she goes to work. With Lilia leaving the house, the largest room was left vacant again. As Edith had recently divorced, she thought it could be good to rent the room out and secure an extra income, but her daughters opposed the idea for they would have to share bathroom and kitchen with any tenant.

One day, as Edith was working in her market stall, a woman came and asked whether she had rooms for rent. Edith decided to give it a try and showed the woman the empty room. She warned her that they would have to share the bathroom and that they would not be allowed to use the shower so as to avoid problems over the costs of gas. The next day the woman, her husband and a small son moved in. "We were fine, we didn't have any problems. They were offered to look after a house and they left. They get paid to look after a house because the owners of the house left to work in the United States" said Edith. Two years later, a neighbour came by to ask Edith whether she would be willing to rent out a room. The neighbour's sister-in-law had recently arrived in Mexico City and was looking for a place to live. Although Edith was not so sure she wanted to rent again, she agreed to do so only to help her neighbour. This second renting experience did not go so well. The agreement had been that only her neighbour's sister-in-law, her husband and two kids would come to rent. However, Edith was shocked to find out that they had brought more relatives with them from their home town, which meant that there were eight people crammed into the room. The tenants explained that their relatives were there only for a few days, but after a month Edith asked them to leave. She decided never to rent this room again but aspires to build one or two self contained flats for rent in order to get some extra money or, as she puts it to "help herself".

As we have seen in the case of Edith's plot of land, rental housing is very unstable, for its availability is directly related to the family-house process. The transformation of the family's residential *needs* is a determinant factor as to the distribution of this rental housing. Only a portion of the rooms for rent were built for this purpose. It is

often the case that a room is rented after it has been left empty by a member of the house, who was first thought would reside there. The most common scenario is when one of the members of the second generation who formed a separate family group within the parental house (as was the case with Javier and Lilia) leaves this house after having found an alternative accommodation. It is also common that a room that was being rented is reclaimed by the family because another family member is in need of a place to live or simply wants to come back. As Edith's experience shows, the creation and distribution of informal rental housing does not follow the mechanisms of the formal market. Owner-tenant relations result from the availability of a room being propagated by word of mouth, usually amongst people who are related in one way or another. Coulomb's (1985) research has proved that there are strong social ties between owners and tenants, with around 20% being related and 40% having some sort of social relation (*compadres, paisanos*, work colleagues, acquainted to a friend or family member, etc). Thus, various social and family relations determine the distribution and prices of rental housing. The construction of rooms for rent, house sharing, and family unfolding often results in the formation of real family *vecindades*.

Having gone through each of the stages in the family-house process we now see how the complex relationship between house and family makes a closed and fixed definition of house and family impossible. The building process from which family and house emerge does not have an end. Family and house are thus frequently redefined. As I have attempted to depict in the last section, family is continually redefined by family members and practiced in various different ways. Likewise, the house is constantly transformed and its internal and external boundaries re-demarcated[29]. Thus, looking carefully at the construction and transformations of the family-house process is a useful tool to rethink the concept of house and family. Parting from the argument made until now, in the next section of this chapter I will develop the idea that housing and family ought to be thought of in a different way.

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[29] Although in this chapter I have mostly concentrated on the house as defined by one plot of land, it is important to note that this boundary is also very blurry. The level of complexity rises significantly if we take into account the fact that spatial and family relations are spread out across the neighbourhood and overrun the limits of a piece of land. As I have described before, most families within self-help neighbourhoods are closely interconnected with each other, this not only calls for an even more complex and flexible definition of family but for a more complex and dynamic definition of the house as well. Although I acknowledge this is a fundamental part of my argument, for the purposes of this chapter, I restrict my analysis mostly to the spatial and social relations that take place within the various plots of land.

3. Rethinking family and house

Housing, as most spatial phenomena, has generally been regarded as the mere background or setting against which social life takes place. The inextricable relation between self-help housing and family processes that I have unpacked in the previous section illustrates the inseparability of the spatial and the social. Self-help housing cannot be understood as distinct from the family who produces it. The family-house process of the consolidated settlements of Mexico City provides a clear example of an instance in which spatial form and social practices emerge from the same building process.

Once it is built, the built form of housing contributes to the continuity of the family practices within which it emerged. The flexibility offered by self-help housing is an important enabling element for the practice of the extended family[30] to be reproduced and enhanced. The fact that people are able to reshape and expand their houses is a crucial element in a family's decision to unfold or to share the house with more members of the family or more family groups. Likewise, given spatial arrangements such as proximity, shared facilities and leisure spaces, enable the continuity of communal social practices.

Looking at self-help housing in its relation to family compels us to define the house in a more flexible way. As I have argued throughout this chapter, the complex family-house process exposes the mistake of resorting to a static and fixed definition of the house. The house's internal and external boundaries are in practice extremely variable. The multiple ways in which self-help housing can unfold and expand mean that within the same physical structure, which started out as being one house, a number of different houses can emerge, whose borders cannot be strictly defined. Aside from this internal porosity the houses external boundaries are also notably flexible. Where the inside ends and the outside begins, where the private ends and where the public begins, this is not so easily discernible.

The family-house process also offers an opportunity to question fixed understandings such as the definitions of family or household as a group of people of living under

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[30] When referring to the extended family I am not alluding to a given family structure, but rather to an actual family *practice*, which is defined by the act of demarcating, and performing family in an amplified manner that includes non blood related individuals, and various family groups.

one roof. I regard this definition as inappropriate for it implies a very narrow understanding of both house and family. It requires a closed or bounded definition of both concepts which does not map into their complex manifestation in reality. The insights emerging from this chapter have shown that the flexibility of self-help housing has enabled the development of a wide typology of residential arrangements where the equation "one family equals the people living under one roof" does not apply. As we have seen, within the same plot of land there can be several physical structures simultaneously defined by their inhabitants as a number of separate houses and as one same house. Likewise, the people that live in this space are simultaneously defined as being different family groupings and as one single family. What is important to note here, is that these residential clusters are active family networks, which due to their shared everyday practices and their self-definition as a "family" represent a unified notion and practice of family. We therefore see that family and house do not always directly converge into a single physical or familial structure. In practice, the definitions and boundaries assigned to the house and family are far more permeable and complex.

A detailed look into the family-house process in Santo Domingo also warns us against too narrow definitions of "the family". Definitions which equal "the family" to a given family structure ignore: 1) that family structures vary significantly between cultures and between different periods in time; 2) the existing diversity of family forms within a particular society and within a historical moment. Practices such as that of the "*casa chica*"[31], the inclusion of children from previous marriages into a new family, various extended family arrangements, and the adoption (legal or not) of a non-related member of the family, are examples of family practices taking place in Santo Domingo which demonstrate that family cannot be equated with a given family form. Likewise, these practices challenge the essentialist view of "the family" as a biologically or naturally given entity. In the case of step-families or that of adopted family members, a previously non existent family relation is constructed with someone who is not related by blood. These practices put in evidence that what constitutes family is not naturally given but negotiated and constructed day to day. What these examples show is that, in practice, family is not static or universal.

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[31] "*La casa chica* is usually thought of as the arrangement, whereby a Mexican man keeps a woman other than his wife in a residence separate from his main (*casa grande*) household" (Gutmann 2007: 138). Gutmann states that in Santo Domingo the term is often used to describe second marriages. Second and later marriages are defined as *casa chica,* even if the relationship with the first wife has long been over, when the man has not divorced this first wife (Gutmann 2007: 140).

Rather, as Wright and Jagger (1999: 3) state: "Families and family relations are, like the term itself, flexible, fluid, and contingent".

The family-house process also indicates the need to question normative definitions of "the family" which present the nuclear family as the normal family type. The empirical evidence gathered in Santo Domingo attests that the most recurrent family practices are much more varied and complex than the nuclear family model could suggest. Furthermore, even in the cases where mother, father and children lived by themselves in a self-contained house, their own definition of family would repeatedly differ from the nuclear family model. When talking about their families they would often jump from their nuclear family to the people they live with or to their extended family network.

Given the limitations of the definitions presented above, and based on the empirical evidence gathered by looking closely at the family-house process in Santo Domingo, it becomes evident that the emphasis should be placed not on defining "the family" but on understanding what family is about. Rather than being a thing which can be defined, family is a way in which people relate to one another, which is constructed in their everyday acts. It is by *doing* family life that the very diverse family forms are socially constructed. As Morgan (1999: 29) says: "For social actors, the importance of family life lies in the actual practices, practices which inevitably overlap with other areas of life and other practices, rather than any supposed unit or structure". He elaborates that, in order to avoid the reification of the family into the kind of rigid definitions discussed above, much can be learnt about family life by looking at its relation to other areas of life. "My approach was to see "family" as being rather like a primary colour, interesting in itself in a somewhat limited way, but achieving its real significance in combination, undergoing repeated variation, with other colours" (Ibid.: 16). Following this approach, a more in-depth understanding of the complexities of Santo Domingo's family life was achieved by looking at how family interacts with housing. Moreover, Morgan's concept of *family practices* is useful because it can encompass complex family forms that surpass structural-functional definitions, as well as family groups that are defined beyond the sharing of a single physical structure or house. Of special importance is that this definition can account for the complex family-house processes characteristic of self-help housing. The vertical and horizontal expansion that is typical of self-help housing that comes with

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family unfolding, rental housing, and house sharing has given rise to very complex residential clusters involving an increasing number of people. Through their daily interactions, these groups of people act and see themselves as family, thus giving rise to ever more complex family practices.

The vast literature on self-help housing has suggested that there is a direct relation between transformations in houses and transformations in families, equating the housing process to the life cycle. It is more accurate to relate self-help housing to Morgan's (1996) concept of the *life course* as opposed to that of *life cycle*. Although I have argued that there is a relation between transformations in houses and transformations in families, these transformations are not cyclical or linear in nature, as the concept of life cycle implies. They change from case to case and are also tied to broader historical changes. For example, the expansion of rental housing and house sharing is not a natural stage in a family's life cycle, but responds to the current economic and urban context that makes it more difficult to acquire a house. Furthermore, this equation between the development of self-help housing and the life cycle implies a one-way influence in that the shape the houses take is a result of the changes in the families and not vice versa. Yet, all the observations during my fieldwork suggest that self-help housing and family practices are mutually constitutive. The house is also a determinant factor as to the course the lives of the family will take. Therefore, what we have is a direct, two-way, relationship between self-help housing and the families' life course.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated how in the context of Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements families and houses emerge from the same building process, namely the *family-house process*. For this reason, houses are not seen nor lived as distinct artefacts to be consumed by the families that produce them but are intrinsic to the family process. As the house consolidates and expands, the newborn family also consolidates and expands into a multiplicity of extended family arrangements. The family-house process follows three distinct phases: the acquisition of a piece of land, building and consolidating the family and house, and the densification of the family-house. The last phase corresponds to the processes that are currently shaping consolidated settlements in Mexico City.

A careful analysis of the family-house process reveals its highly gendered nature. Throughout the family-house process women play a central role as instigators, as providers of labour for the actual construction process, and as the main actors in the political work necessary for the regularisation and consolidation of the neighbourhood. Women are often confronted by the violent opposition of their husbands and see their unpaid workload significantly augmented. At the same time, they are notably empowered in relation to government authorities and inside their homes without directly challenging established gender roles. As Varley (1995: 179) rightly affirms "no single image of women as victims, heroines or villains can adequately represent the complex and contradictory reality of women's roles in the production of low-income housing."

Lastly, in this chapter I suggest that the family-house process demonstrates the shortcomings of closed and fixed definitions of house and family. In practice, the definitions and boundaries assigned to house and family are decidedly permeable and complex. I therefore argue that house and family are best understood on the basis of how they are practiced in everyday life.

The following chapter will provide a more detailed examination of the last phase of the family-house process that was introduced in this chapter. It will look into the current densification processes of the consolidated popular settlements with the aim of understanding how they have come about. More precisely, it will engage with the question of why it is that people cluster together in multifamily plots through family unfolding and house sharing.

CHAPTER SIX – "TOGETHER BUT NOT SCRAMBLED": CONTINUITY AND REINFORCEMENT OF EXTENDED FAMILY PRACTICES

1. Introduction

As one walks through a consolidated settlement of Mexico City like Netzahualcóyotl or Santo Domingo, one would never imagine that these apparently low density neighbourhoods of two or three storied family houses are amongst the most densely populated of the city. The typology of the family house is generally associated with low density suburban-like developments. Its is true that as one walks along the street, the simple facades trick us into believing that what lies beyond them is a house where a family lives. Sounds logical. The clever anthropologist would scrutinise the façade to find out the truth, s/he would walk towards the doors with the aim of counting the amount of doorbells and thus decipher the mystery. After doing so, s/he will find that most of the houses have no bells, or maybe just a single one, and will happily walk away believing that beyond the door there is only a family and its house. However, s/he would be surprised to find out that as one crosses the threshold one discovers that what looked like a simple family house is a complex maze of families and houses, in plural.

From the outside, Beatriz' house looks like a smallish three storied house. On the ground level, from left to right one sees two small windows and a rather narrow metal door. The first and second floors also have small windows and seem to be part of the same house; the bedrooms, one would guess. Walking through the door one stands not in the inside of a house, as was expected, but on a dark narrow passageway. To the left there is a door to a house and a small window that looks into a kitchen. At the end of the corridor one stands in the middle of the plot, between two distinct structures. On the façades of both structures one distinguishes various little doors. Linking these doors to the ground and among themselves is an intricate web of metal staircases. There are so many of them that the space between the two structures is completely covered, letting only streams of light flicker through.

Beyond its simple façades Santo Domingo is actually made up of complex multifamily plots. One afternoon, drinking coffee and eating cookies in her living room, Claudia described to me how, one block away from her house, in the blue

house at the corner of the street, the house has expanded in such a way that almost 60 people live in its small, badly lit rooms. Though this is an example of extreme overcrowding in the neighbourhood, one can assert with no doubt that in the consolidated settlement of Santo Domingo families are clustering together. But why?

This chapter deals with the question of why – in the consolidated settlements of Mexico City – families are clustering together in various extended family arrangements resulting from house sharing and family unfolding. It attempts to go beyond both structuralist and subjectivist explanations that claim that people live in this way because they lack the economic resources to live otherwise, or because this living arrangement is part of a survival strategy that allows them to pool resources thus improving their objective conditions. It seeks to provide an alternative to "dichotomized characterization[s] of urban people in poverty either as heroes of resistance or as passive and hopeless" (Beall 2001: 1020). In what follows I argue that extended family arrangements are being reproduced and enhanced due to the development of a *habitus* that predisposes the families of Santo Domingo towards communal family life.

2. Structural conditions constraining residential patterns in Santo Domingo

"Es el sueño de todos, tener una casa, pero si no entra en tu bolsillo, no puedo soñar".

"It is everybody's dream, to have a house, but if it doesn't fit in your pocket [if you can't afford it] I can't dream".

The more straightforward explanation as to why people decide to live in a communal way is that they lack the economic resources to live otherwise. Under this logic, one would argue that people cluster together because they can not afford to live elsewhere due to a persistent economic hardship and lack of affordable housing options.

Though self-help housing was responsible for the production of more than half of the city's housing stock until the 1980's, as from this decade it ceased to be a viable housing solution for the urban poor (Connolly 1982; Coulomb 1991). To begin with, the continuous impoverishment of the urban poor that has taken place since the

1980's has depleted their already meagre economic power to face the overall costs of construction and the rising prices of building materials. In addition, the growing scarcity of land available for urbanisation has significantly raised the cost of self-help housing. Its costs are further elevated by the remoteness of the land that is on offer, which is ill-located in relation to work centres, entails elevated transport costs, as well as social and economic displacement (Coulomb 1991: 259). In spite of the decreasing viability of self-help housing the provision of affordable housing within the formal market continues to be insufficient.

The difficulties of acquiring both affordable formal and informal housing have been accompanied by the continuous impoverishment of the urban poor that commenced with the 1982 debts crisis. As a result of this crisis, between 1982 and 1986, the urban poor were faced with rising prices in consumer goods, growing unemployment and stagnation of the formal economy, shrinking wages and decreasing public expenditure and subsidies (Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha 2002). Between 1982 and 1986 the Mexican peso was devaluated to one eight of its previous value (González de la Rocha 2006). From 1986, the government's response to the crisis was to restructure the economy along neoliberal lines. The consequence of these neoliberal policies has been a rise in poverty and inequality, lower wages and precarious work conditions. As a result, between 1980 and 1987 the informal economy grew by 80% throughout the country (Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha 2002: 192). Inflation reached its peak in 1987 at 159% (González de la Rocha 2006). Crisis hit the country again in 1995 bringing about a drastic devaluation of the peso. Though macroeconomic indicators have recovered since, research suggests that, on average, the Mexican population was poorer in the year 2000 than in 1993 (Ibid.). If the worker's real earnings were half what they had been before the 1982 debt crisis, after the 1995 crisis they decreased even further (Gutmann 2002).

In this context, the bulk of the demand for affordable housing is being accommodated in the newly developed popular neighbourhoods at the city's periphery and, more importantly, through the densification of the existing consolidated settlements (Gilbert and Ward 1985; Gilbert and Varley 1991; Gilbert 1993; Coulomb and Sánchez Mejorada 1991; Varley 1993; Villavicencio 1993). The densification of the consolidated settlements is happening both through the expansion of informal rental housing and through the intensification of house sharing and

family unfolding. Coulomb (1989) argues that since the city cannot grow outwards anymore it will either do so upwards or inwards; the reality of the consolidated settlements of Mexico City suggests that it will do so inwards, through densification and often overcrowding.

Because structural conditions frame the landscape of what is materially possible it would be naïve and dangerous to undermine their relevance. Nevertheless, in this chapter I will posit that in order to fully understand the persistence and expansion of house sharing and family unfolding, it is necessary to go beyond structural explanations. This is not to say that structural conditions do not matter. My research in Santo Domingo shows that structural conditions play the role of constraining or enabling the choices people make regarding where and how to live, but that they do not determine them in a linear cause-effect way.

During one of my visits to the Robles family-house, Carmen showed me the extension that her oldest son had recently completed to the family-house. Carmen explained that when her son married he did have the option of getting a mortgage for a flat. This was a tempting opportunity for, at that precise moment, the Robles family had enough savings to pay the deposit and secure the flat. Carmen laughed and told me that this, however, did not happen. Her daughter-in-law was eager to have a proper wedding celebration and the young couple did not have enough money for both. In seeing that the flat was rather far from Santo Domingo, they decided to let this opportunity to buy a house pass and instead chose to have the wedding celebration they had imagined, and build themselves a flat as an extension to the Robles family-house. Having the economic resources and access to social housing did not automatically translate into the acquisition of the flat. The decision whether to buy the flat or not was dependent on a combination of elements that can not be reduced to having the necessary economic resources to buy it or not. Although having economic resources is a necessary condition for securing a house, it does not inevitably lead to that. Following this line of argument, I suggest that, also vice-versa, the availability of limited material resources does not lead to a given residential and familial arrangement. In other words, to have only limited economic resources in a time when self-help housing is less viable and formal housing is not affordable, does not automatically lead to family unfolding and house sharing. The parallel expansion of informal rental housing, family unfolding and house sharing in

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the city's consolidated settlements, and the development of new popular settlements in the far out periphery, is an illustration of the diversity of possible outcomes under the same structural circumstances.

3. The comforts of family life

3.1 What housing does for people

An alternative explanation is the one offered by the subjectivist approach of the survival strategies literature. This approach assumes that in response to their structural conditions people make a rational decision as to where and how they will live that maximises their economic interests.

González de la Rocha (1994) has shown that clustering together in multifamily plots has been a strategy that Mexican poor urban households have developed not only to respond to the insufficient provision of affordable housing but to the more general structural conditions of persistent economic hardship. Adopting new family members and absorbing married children into the family is a collective way to cut down expenses, count with more members who can work, share household tasks, etc. The extended household thus proved to be the best means to face economic hardship, explaining the increase in their relative absolute presence.

Supporting this line of argument, the empirical evidence I gathered in Santo Domingo suggests that people cluster together not only because they have very restricted and at times no options as to where to go, but also because they obtain certain benefits from this residential arrangement. Before considering leaving the shared family plot and renting or buying an affordable plot of land in the periphery, families evaluate the benefits they get from staying in Santo Domingo. Although they sometimes live in overcrowded conditions and dream about more privacy and independency by having their own house, they value the benefit they get from sharing a plot in Santo Domingo as being high enough to justify staying on.

When evaluating their own housing conditions, families not only focus on maximising direct economic benefits such as saving rent and pooling resources, they also give great value to the indirect economic benefits derived from the house, its

location, and their familial arrangement. Turner's (1976: 96-97) main argument that "It is what housing *does* for people that matters more than what it *is*, or how it *looks*" helps us to understand the complexity of the instrumental aspect of why people cluster together. Turner found that self-help housing reduced the mismatch between people's actual needs and housing provided by the state. "User-controlled housing (when it is also materially economic) is far superior as a vehicle of personal, family and social growth or development than housing which is merely supplied" (Turner 1972: 159). In his highly controversial 1976 research Turner argues, based on an in-depth study of 25 low-income households in Mexico City, that housing is not only a set of spatial and material qualities, a good house also has to provide economic and social benefits that are at times more important. Turner uses two case studies to illustrate this idea: "the supportive shack" and "the oppressive house". He explains that the shack, even though poor in material terms, responds better to the needs and resources of its dwellers, providing good access to work and housing at almost no cost. On the other hand, social housing built by the state fails to take into account the dweller's needs in terms of access to jobs and social networks, and also by providing housing at a high price for their resources leaving little remaining money for other needs. Although the material characteristics of the house are better, it creates a socially and economically worse situation for the inhabitants.

Turner has been rightly criticised for romanticising self-help housing by addressing it in a depoliticised fashion. In focusing on the benefits of self-help housing his work largely undermines the vulnerabilities attached to self-help housing processes. Consequently, before turning to "what housing does for people" as a way to understand the instrumental logic that drives people to cluster together in Santo Domingo I will bring these vulnerabilities to the fore. A major source of vulnerability stems from popular settlements' dependence on their position in the political game. Whether a settlement is authorised or unauthorised is contingent on the unpredictable ebb and flow of the political circumstances. Rather than depending on the objective fulfilment of particular requisites over which the residents have some control, regularisation is dependant on the political will, or lack of it, of those with power over the legal status of the settlements. Because of this, non-regularised settlements are periodically regularised, often immediately before or after elections. During electoral campaigns political contenders promise to authorise more settlements if voted into office, thus using settlement regularisation as a means to secure voter

banks. Land regularisation in popular settlements is highly unstable, and official papers attesting to the legal authorisation of the land are of little value as settlements are often unauthorised by newly elected governments who can discard previous authorisation processes and entitlements.

A further element adding to the vulnerability of popular settlements is the widespread and deeply rooted practice of clientelism. Based on extensive research carried out in Mexico City, Ward (1989) demonstrates how, in the context of popular urbanisation, a clientelistic land policy has been used by successive governments to achieve political mediation and control. "The state has sought to use the issue of land as a means of extending its influence over the poor and of maintaining their quiescence" (Ibid.: 151). The precarious conditions of popular settlements meant that its inhabitants needed to constantly negotiate with the government for the provision of services, and for an effective land regularisation process. The state used this situation to skilfully co-opt any urban movement and to build patron-client relations that would guarantee the political support of the urban poor in exchange of a solution to their demands.

Moreover, Burgess (1982) pointed out that although it is important to recognise the use value of housing in these settlements, it is crucial to bring to the fore the fact that this housing solution is a result of deep structural poverty, and that this structural poverty is not challenged but actually reproduced by self-help housing. The inherent uncertainties of the legal system, the contradictory role of institutionalised political forces as both repressors and instigators of land invasion movements, the infiltration of squatter organisations by the authorities with the specific purpose to diffuse revolt, and the manipulation of squatter groups for vote-catching purposes (Ibid.: 75) means that the urban poor remain trapped in a cycle of structural poverty.

Following the same line of argument, Connolly's (1982) research has highlighted that housing production in popular settlements represents an affordable housing solution due to the many hours of unpaid labour its inhabitants invest. Furthermore, she states that the relatively low costs are possible mainly due to: "a reduction in the use-value of the house produced, that is, in the reduction of the living conditions of the population" (Ibid.: 160). Thus, housing production in popular settlements is, in the long term, an altogether economically more attractive solution for the State than for

its inhabitants, in the sense that governments relieve themselves from the responsibility of housing provision and instead of investing and planning they leave it to the poor to improvise and adapt to the precarious housing conditions they face.

In spite of the limitations that were highlighted before, Turner's approach of looking at "what housing does for people" enables us to unpack the instrumental dimension of why families are clustering together in the consolidated settlements of Mexico City. This qualitative approach that evaluates housing beyond the bare provision of shelter uncovers the benefits that the residents of Santo Domingo obtain from remaining in the settlement. In what follows, I will review the concrete economic benefits that the residents of Santo Domingo bring to mind when faced with the possibility of deciding whether to stay in their multifamily plots.

3.1.1 Location and the importance of mobility

Andrea owns a small flat in the south-eastern borough of Iztapalapa. Although she claims her greatest wish is to live only with her three sons in order to avoid the constant problems she faces by living in her parental home in Santo Domingo, she decided to rent out her remote flat, and stay in Santo Domingo.

> "We want to leave [from her parents house into the flat she already owns but rents out] but it ends up being complicated, Pedro is at the CCH [a high school close to Santo Domingo], we would have to come all the way from there at 5 in the morning, at what time do you wake up?" (Andrea)

Andrea emphasises the fact that in Santo Domingo she and her sons can take a bus to wherever they want to go. She can walk to the subway and be at her job in no time. In order to support her three sons, Andrea works two shifts every day; if it weren't for the mobility the neighbourhood offers her, she would not be able to travel from one job to the other and come home in time to see her sons before they go to bed.

Andrea, as well as everyone else with whom I spoke, argued that although their dream is to have their own house, they would not move far from Santo Domingo. Once a peripheral and ill-serviced neighbourhood, Santo Domingo is now at the heart of Mexico City. All of those who built their houses in the neighbourhood remember the importance of counting with good transport links. Having experienced more than

three decades since the emergence of the neighbourhood, they have seen how this once inaccessible land is now the target of real estate developers due to its primary location. Santo Domingo's central location and its high accessibility by road and public transport provide its residents with easy access to jobs, school, everyday consumer products, and services.

3.1.2 Basic services and amenities

People's accounts of the first years in Santo Domingo are plagued with memories of the lack of basic services. They remember how they had to carry water, use the cracks on the volcanic rocks as sewage, and travel long distances to buy their food. Manuela relates how they had to go all the way to Taxqueña for water :

> "which donkey? We played the ... with your pardon, but we were the donkeys, because we used one stick, we put it across like this, and here a bucket, and here another, and we brought them back full of water... and like that, we carried it from over there and like that ...early because people stood in line, very long the queue..."(Manuela)

Marcela also remembers the difficult times:

> "Around here there wasn't even a market, eh? One had to go very far to buy the things to eat...later on, here at the Santo Domingo Church, people started to sell ...provisions...tomatoes and so on, so one went closer. But I had to go down with my daughters to the school and I brought it all from there and if I forgot something...well tough, we had to eat things like that because over here there weren't even stores, right? (Marcela)

The residents of Santo Domingo evaluate their housing options based on their lived experience of lacking urban services and having to implement them themselves. Buying a plot of land in the periphery, they know, would imply going through all that again. Francisco came as a young child to Santo Domingo, and although he strongly argues that independence is his goal, he tells me you cannot have it "at all costs".

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Francisco - I think that the issue of services is crucial, if we had had water [somewhere else], maybe no sewage, we would have looked for another option [of where to live]. But water, yes, it is not an option, or services... In my view, in those conditions, we would be fulfilling the minimum to be able to be out of here. I am going to tell you that my wife would not move away from here. To another similar flat, maybe...

Iliana - Would you leave if you found a plot of land that had all urban services?

Francisco - hmm...as regards services, I think we would have to acquire them or introduce them. And as long as they are not there, we can't live there. But, if we have them, I think, we have to go...that's it. Because let me tell you, now that we are here [in his in-law's plot of land] my wife says *if we are going to move from here it has to be for a better place*. I don't think quite like that, what I do believe, is that we have to leave...and not necessarily for a better place, to a place that would allow us to, hmm... start solving all the deficiencies we have, because if we leave for a place that does not allow us to solve those deficiencies, then really, we wouldn't have another option than to stay here...

Based on an ethnographic study of Villa Victoria, a low-income Puerto Rican neighbourhood in Boston, Small (2004) challenges the generalised notion that high poverty is always accompanied by resource deprivation[32]. Villa Victoria, he claims, is in fact a high-poverty and high-resource neighbourhood. The fact that people have all the necessary services and can satisfy their needs with very little mobility contributes to their social world being confined within the limits of the neighbourhood. As a result, within-class social capital is strengthened and between-class social capita decreases. From this he concludes that, "a high resource neighbourhood, therefore, makes quite convenient what turns out to be social isolation" (Ibid.:133). Similar to Villa Victoria, – though in stark contrast with recently established popular neighbourhoods – the consolidated settlements of Mexico City like Santo Domingo, are low-income neighbourhoods that are high on resources (an important exception being that of cultural amenities and open public space). As in Villa Victoria, the fact that the residents of Santo Domingo can access a variety of resources within the neighbourhood has enhanced local networks *and* neighbourhood stability. The availability of resources that the neighbourhood offers

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[32] Small (2004: 126) defines resources as "any business, government agency, nonprofit organisation, or public space that serves a resident's need".

is a central element in the resident's positive evaluation of their staying in the neighbourhood. Following Small's line of argument we could conclude that, in Santo Domingo, the high availability of resources renders family clustering as convenient, thus strengthening neighbourhood stability often at the cost of overcrowding.

3.1.3 Child care

Another determinant factor explaining why people stay in Santo Domingo is the mutual help they obtain from the family members with whom they share the plot of land. For some residents of Santo Domingo the pooling of resources that their residential arrangement enables is a necessary condition for survival and well-being. In this instance sharing is a necessity and not a choice. As a way to explain to me that the sons and daughters with whom he shares his plot of land would not be able to live elsewhere, Marcelo tells me:

> "Its true, look at Ramón, he gives 500 pesos here. Do you think he could have a house, light, clothing? He has his wife and three kids. Suppose he gave 1,000 a week. I can assure you that with 1,000 a week he wouldn't make it, he wouldn't make it, he would have to pay rent, light, water, clothing, and all, and here only food, sort of, and clothing for them [his kids]." (Marcelo)

Beyond the pooling of resources, family unfolding and house sharing enabled other highly valued social benefits, that drive people to stay in Santo Domingo even when alternatives are at hand in theory. The social benefit of which all my informants spoke was that of child care. In this regard, living in a multifamily plot of land could be more than a mere survival strategy. At one level, this residential arrangement facilitates access to child care in the context of limited economic resources. In addition, it can become a means to secure certain life-style preferences, which are seen as more important than the ideal of counting with one's own house.

Beatriz remembers one occasion, when her children were still young, in which she was offered the possibility to apply for social housing through her job and get her own flat. Although Beatriz affirms that living only with her husband and children has always been her ideal, the couple did not apply for the flat automatically but discussed the scenario at length. She remembers that one of the most salient things that led them to stay in her husband's family-house was the concern of care for their

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children. Soon after giving birth Beatriz returned to work full-time and left her children to be looked after by her mother-in-law. The couple never considered the option looking for a nursery. As a result, they knew that if they moved to an independent flat, they would have to travel to Santo Domingo everyday to leave the children with their grandmother. Thinking back on their decision to stay Beatriz says:

> "For convenience, we didn't do it [move out]. The fact of not having to wake up the children so early, that was one of the things that probably stopped us." (Beatriz)

The absorption of child care within the family is not only a result of a very limited and expensive provision of child care facilities. It is also the result of a widely shared preference, built upon a negative opinion of nurseries not always based on first hand experience. Because of this, the issue of child care is not only determinant for those couples where the woman is in full time employment. The pooling of economic and social resources that results from house sharing and family unfolding enables the families that share the plot of land to afford the economic costs of having one or more women staying in the house to take care of everyone's children.

Malena tells me that: "This thing of being stuck at home only with the children, sort of gets you in a bad mood". She says she would like to go to work but does not do so because she wants to take care of her own children. Before giving birth Malena worked at a children's home. She remembers that during that time she witnessed how the children were ill-treated and decided she would never send her own children to be taken care of by someone she did not know. Malena says she would happily leave her children with her mother and go to work, but her mother insists on her taking care of her children. This was corroborated by Malena's mother Carmen, who told me that she had persisted on the idea that Malena and her daughter-in-law, Angélica, stayed at home to take care of their children. Carmen explained to me that she regretted that she had had to work all her life and had thus not been able to look after her children. Having had that experience she now wishes that her grandchildren grow up with their mothers even if that implies the loss of a number of potential incomes. Living together in a multifamily plot is the only way in which Angélica and Malena can afford to stay at home and take care of the children. It is important to note that the position of these three women is not equal. For single mothers like Malena, living in a multifamily plot is more a matter of a survival than a means to access a preferred

child rearing practice. Single mothers are particularly vulnerable and need the support of other family members to either be able to go to work or to be able to raise their children themselves. Likewise, it is not always women's preferred child rearing practice that is being secured but that of their husbands. In Santo Domingo it is still common that a women is not allowed to work and is forced by her husband to stay and take care of the children.

It would be mistaken to assume that the residents of Santo Domingo only use these networks of reciprocity because of cultural inertia, as if the weight of tradition inhibited them to seek out other ways. Rather, the residents are fully aware of their existence and of their dependency on the physical proximity that comes with house sharing and family unfolding. It is precisely this awareness that often leads them to stay in their multifamily plot in Santo Domingo even when having an alternative place to go, which would help them achieve their stated ideal of acquiring an independent home, but would deprive them from the possibility to solve child care according to their economic possibilities and rearing preferences.

The examples of location, urban services, and child care have served as an illustration of how families cluster together not only because they have no other choice, but because they obtain certain benefits from this arrangement. Turner's insight of looking at beyond what housing *is*, into what housing *does* for people uncovers this second dimension. Though Turner helps us go further in understanding neighbourhood stability, by looking at what housing *does* for people, his approach falls short for it does not understand what housing *means* for people in a more personal sense. As Varley (2000: 279) argues, although Turner attempts to go beyond the dichotomy of "use value" and "exchange value" in understanding housing, he still sees its value as tied to its function as a material support for the resident's everyday life. In the next section I will engage with the question of what the houses and the neighbourhood mean for the residents of Santo Domingo. By answering this question, I posit, one can further understand why families cluster together in the consolidated settlements of Mexico City. A crucial element in the understanding of neighbourhood stability and the continuity of the practice of the extended family in the consolidated settlements of Mexico City, is the strong attachment that most of the residents have to their houses and to the neighbourhood.

3.2 What housing means for people

3.2.1 Emotional attachment to house and neighbourhood

If rational choice were the principal driver of people's choices and preferences, it would have been correct to predict that the founders of the neighbourhood would leave when confronted with rising land prices and living costs as a consequence of consolidation. But people stayed. Similarly, engaging in what could be evaluated as irrational behaviour from a strictly economic point of view, I saw how even in times of economic hardship families decided to invest their meagre resources in "keeping the house pretty" and painted it at least once a year. Listening carefully to the individual stories of a number of families in Santo Domingo uncovered this complex private dimension, which reveals the role of emotions and attachment in human action.

"Where would we go? We don't have anywhere to go. There is no other place than here...from here we will be taken only to the graveyard" (Ángela)

"...that I be taken away from here? *Con las patas por delante!* (only with my feet first i.e. dead), That's the only way!"(Edith)

A strong feeling of rootedness, especially amongst the founders of the neighbourhood, is well illustrated in these quotes. When asked whether they could picture themselves living elsewhere in the future, whether they would leave or sell their houses, my informants responded with surprise. Why would they leave or sell their houses? Part of this incredulity stems from the belief that they have nowhere else to go, that they lack other choices. But another, more decisive element, is a proud decision to remain there. This figure of speech: "I am only leaving when I am dead" expresses their feeling that they are not willing to leave, and that, whilst they are alive, they will do all they can to avoid it. This proud decision to stay is not so much the result of a careful rational evaluation of the material costs and benefits of leaving or staying in their area. Such a strong response originates in a profound emotional attachment to their houses and neighbourhood.

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3.2.2 The house as intrinsic to a family's life history

It has been previously demonstrated that, in the context of self-help housing production, families and houses emerge together from the same building process. It is through the process of building the house that the families themselves are constituted and vice versa. Because of this, families tend to make little distinction in their narratives between their house and their families, thus making it increasingly complicated to discern one from the other. On the one hand, the families would not exist as they are now without these houses, so they are seen as one and the same thing. Secondly, the houses are seen to contain the families' life histories. The parallel development of house and family explains why these houses tend to have a very special value for the families that inhabit them and produced them.

"I mean, here, in this house, I have left the best years of my life, my youth, the childhood of my children, all of our lives. So, its invaluable" (Carmen)

In a similar vein, Ana María says:

"We left all of our strength here, all of our lives, our sad moments, and our happy moments. Because we also had a lot of happiness, like.. hmm how we helped each other with the neighbours and family, of hmm, solidarity". (Ana María)

The two above quotes reveal how my informants themselves understand and explain their attachment to the house as having to do with the house as a repository of the families' times past. The house contains the biographies of all family members, and is thus deeply valued. The most salient evidence of the strong emotional value attached to the houses and of the merging together of family and house came through a conversation I had one day with Carmen. Carmen was explaining to me how she wished her children would preserve the house after her death and would keep living there together and taking good care of it. She thought this was feasible for her sons and daughters really loved the house. They love it so much, she said, that:

"Ramón has even said that he would like, look, hmm, it sounds a bit terrifying, but that is his idea, what he thinks is that here, where the living room is, to make something like a niche and that, well, each one of us could be cremated and we could all rest [stay] right here" (Carmen)

3.2.3 Pride of building, sacrifice and suffering

An important source of attachment to the house, and to the neighbourhood, is having produced it themselves. When listening to the stories of the times of hardest work in the construction of the house and the urbanisation of the neighbourhood, I was struck by the frequent use of the verb "to suffer". My informants used this word to describe the precarious conditions in which they lived, and to describe the effort they put into the building and urbanisation process. "Suffering" is the word that is chosen to illustrate their thorough involvement in the process of building the family-house. It is because they built it with their own physical and economic effort that the house is valuable. It is their own creation and not a detached material object of consumption.

A conversation I had with Aurora in which we talked about whether she or other members of her family had ever considered selling the family-house serves as a good illustration of the relationship between suffering and attachment.

> "Our plot of land... I think that we have given it a value in the sense that we haven't tried to...to sell. We value it because we suffered. I feel that because we suffered, more than anything else. Because I feel that those who don't suffer, they don't give a damn." (Aurora)

As this extract of my conversation with Aurora shows, it is through involvement and self-sacrifice that a profound attachment is created. Those who did not "suffer", those who have had a less hands-on relation to the acquisition of a house, have no attachment to it. Those with no attachment can act following a rational choice logic. Moreover, those who did not "suffer" value the house only as regards its exchange value, and thus after calculating the economically most profitable scenario, are willing to sell the house and move to a new place.

> "Like, for example, they [those who didn't suffer] give a damn and say: *Well, if I could do what I did here somewhere else, I sell, I leave, I get the hell out of here.* And maybe they do it too! For example, if they buy here in twenty thousand pesos, and in a while, in two years, or three, they give it away in two hundred thousand pesos, they get their things together and leave, they buy another plot for twenty thousand and that's it." (Aurora)

Aurora later suggests that the families that do not sell are not acting irrationally but rather measuring costs and benefits on a different scale. A different rationale, based on attachment, would exclude economic benefit from the pros and cons. It is therefore not because of ignorance or irrationality that neighbourhood stability exists, but because of a conscious decision to prioritise, as long as its is possible, symbolic rather than material benefits.

> "So, how much would they get? Right? Maybe because of that, but I haven't even thought about that, I haven't even thought about money. For example, in how much do you value it [her plot]? For example, like...going low, in how much do you value my plot?... I say, in my part, I value it in two million, for example. And say that there is someone that gives them to me. But, no way!" (Aurora)

As my conversation with Aurora illustrates, not only is there a sense that any decision not to sell is in fact justified and informed by strategic choices; but popular settlers also deploy negative sanctions against neighbours, who decide to sell.

> "The one who does not value it is my husband, he says, before he used to say, *I am going to sell.* What? Look, I don't give a damn, because it even makes me laugh, I know he won't sell... he didn't value it [the house] since we got in here. He got drunk and he brought me buyers, because he was going to sell it to them, he said. And I told the buyers, I would go at them, like that...I was very harsh, yes, I said: *Why?...What happened? Why are you coming here?* I asked them. *Ah, well we come to see the plot*...it was a plot then. They said: *This man says he sells it*...Because you know that a man with a vice, doesn't value, doesn't even value himself. He doesn't know how to value, he doesn't know how to value himself." (Aurora)

From this last extract of my conversation with Aurora a connection between valuing one's house and self-worth is revealed. Aurora extrapolates how the fact that her husband does not value the house and even attempted to sell it is a result of the fact that he does not even value himself. This connection between the house and self-worth reinforces the argument made so far that, for the residents of the popular settlements, house and family are indistinguishable from one another.

As noted earlier, the notion of "suffering" is not only used in reference to the effort made in building the house, but also to describe the poor conditions in which families

lived in the neighbourhood's early days and to make a clear distinction to how they live today. The notion of suffering, thus also alludes to the pride of having achieved significantly improved material conditions through individual and collective efforts. As one of my informants explained: *"Y yo les digo si he sufrido pero me he movido" (I tell them, yes, I did suffer but I moved on)*. The word "moved" here points both to the pride of being an active agent that responds to existing structural constraints, as well as to the pride of climbing up the social ladder. The house is thus not only intrinsic to the family's life history in general, but is specially valued for it is essentially linked to their social ascent.

The notion of "suffering" contains much of what lies behind people's attachment to their house. The value of each house, and of its inhabitants, resides precisely in this notion of suffering. The residents that took part in the effort of building the family-house, and in the suffering that this entailed, are positively sanctioned and admired by their peers. They are also the ones that have a right to the house. Aurora explains how all of her children deserve a part of the house because they all suffered during the times in which they had no water and they all had to carry buckets of water back home: "at night you saw us as a procession to go carry water". Therefore, when her daughters and sons asked if they could build an extension in her plot of land she *nunca les quitó la intención* (never tried to talk them out of it). Aurora says that the house "was an asset for everyone. I never thought of telling them not to build here. I don't think the house is mine. The house belongs to my children, because they deprived themselves from many things to achieve this". Marcela also explains how a family dispute around the family plot was resolved by establishing that the relatives that had suffered for it, that had stood through the hard times and had developed it from a unusable piece of land to a desirable plot and house had the ultimate right to the plot.

> "Then one day a nephew came to try and... to try and take the plot away from me. [He said] that I should give him [a part] because his grandmother had given it to his mum. *Come on, tell me where is the bit that she gave her?* I said...And he said: *No, its just that I don't have where to live.* Then he went with my brother, the one who doesn't have a foot, and my brother said: *No son, I can't intervene here because it is your aunt's. Besides, your uncles suffered a lot there... they have been there since the invasion. How am I going to tell them to give you the plot if they are the ones that suffered? Besides, my mother gave them the plot. That's why your aunt went to*

receive it because your grandmother gave it to them...when did you worry to go get
it? or to help?...No, well...well you should have seen what the patio was like...just
rocks...and how the dust was in here from so much breaking the rocks. It was a man
that we paid to break rocks, when he came back from work. Because one didn't even
have a patio...my children fell all the time and walked around all
bruised...because...there wasn't...anything." (Marcela)

Based on the empirical data gathered in Santo Domingo, I have here argued that, although structural conditions do constrain the choices people have as to where they can live, there is no simple cause-effect relation between these conditions and the residential patterns and family practices in the neighbourhood. To follow this would be to see people as prisoners of structural conditions, mechanically responding to them devoid of any agency. Residents of a popular settlement are aware of the benefits they obtain from clustering together in multifamily plots and from staying in the neighbourhood. What is more, they take these benefits into consideration whenever they are presented with alternative housing options. Although people make choices, whenever they can, these choices are not solely driven by the desire to maximise their economic resources, that is, they are not only driven by an economic rationality. Other factors such as attachment to place and life style preferences determine the choices people make.

4. Juntos pero no revueltos

4.1 Residential arrangements and family practices shaped by habitus

"Siempre he estado viviendo desde que tengo uso de razón con mi mamá, mi suegra, etc., nunca he vivido sin familiares, yo creo que ha de sentirse como pez fuera del agua".

"Since I can remember, I have always been living with my mom, my mother-in-law, etcetera, I have never lived without relatives, I believe it must feel like a fish outside the water."

Until here I have suggested that family clustering in Santo Domingo can be understood as a survival strategy and as a result of emotional attachment. In this section I will argue that a further level of understanding can be achieved by surpassing both structuralist and subjectivist explanations. The argument is that the residents of Santo Domingo have developed not only an attachment to their houses

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and to their neighbourhood but also a kind of taste for communal family life. This is not as simple as to say that the families in Santo Domingo cluster together because they like to; but rather, that as a result of the constraints of the objective conditions, which make it increasingly difficult to obtain a new house for each family member, the residents have acquired a disposition for communal family life. That is, they have acquired a particular *habitus* that predisposes them to cluster together in multifamily plots. It is as a result of this *habitus* that the residents of Santo Domingo "choose" to cluster together and stay in the neighbourhood. Because the *habitus* and the conditions of existence, of which it is the product, have remained relatively constant, the "choices" people make as predisposed by their *habitus* appear to be the result of a reasoned and conscious purpose (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

To say that the dispositions of the *habitus* are the product of structural constraints, does not imply a direct cause-effect relation between social structure and action patterns, and it does not mean that people cluster together because they have no other choice. It is rather that practices are regulated by the *habitus* based on past experiences of regular objective conditions. Through the *habitus*, "(t)he most improbable practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable." (Bourdieu 1990a: 54). The following extract demonstrates how social actors rationalise their course of action by considering various options within the realm of the perceived universe of the possible, thus gradually acquiring a taste for their lifestyle and making a virtue out of necessity.

> "I think that, as I tell you, it was a bit because of the kids and a bit because of my husband (they have always been very united, amongst his brothers) that we ended up living here. Both things, because of money and because of choice. When I started to work he was earning the minimum wage. He had nothing. From that point we started buying [building] material little by little. The choice, *el gusto* (the taste for it) was what weighed more. Because many people leave without having the resources. I believe sometimes people don't have the necessary resources to leave, and they leave. Economic resources are going to make you get a move on, no? In my case, it was because of our [her's and her husband's] choice. If I had pressured maybe we would have left. I don't regret it, because my children were well looked after, no, I don't regret it. There comes a moment in which you get used to your place, your

neighbourhood, knowing the people... I like being here more. For example, now I go to my parents house and I immediately want to come back to my house. I would not leave the neighbourhood, because of attachment to the family environment" (Beatriz)

This quote is a very good illustration of how the residential arrangements and family practices of the families of Santo Domingo result from the interplay between immediate necessity (structural constraints) and their acquired disposition towards communal family life (*habitus*). In this interplay, as Beatriz states, *habitus* is what tips the balance in their decision to stay. When there is a continued correspondence between *habitus* and conditions of existence, as is the case of Santo Domingo, previously made "choices" are validated and make the disposition or *habitus* stronger.

Beatriz put her thoughts together and concluded with the statement reproduced here only after we had been talking for some time about where she had lived in the different moments of her life and about why she and her husband had stayed in her husband's family house. Beatriz – as most of the residents of Santo Domingo for whom *habitus* and present conditions of existence continue to match, and who have not been exposed to substantial transformative education – is not aware of her disposition towards communal family life and therefore does not have the elements to talk about it. Her residential and familial choices seem "natural" and remain therefore largely unquestioned. They are seen like the most logical path to follow, which means that other possible alternatives are often not considered or even recognised.

During my fieldwork it happened more than once that my informants commented that they had never really thought about the questions I posed them. For example, one afternoon I was drinking coffee with Ana María and her daughter Claudia, and Ana María commented that she had never stopped to think about the way people lived in Santo Domingo and about how family unfolding and house sharing were more and more common. She began a recount of the families she knew in the neighbourhood and stated how they all lived in a multifamily plot, some with more people than others. After commenting on a few cases, where she knows that many people live clustered in the same house, Ana María concluded: "It is already a problem of overcrowding, isn't it? We are more and more each time and there is nowhere else to

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go". Ana María told me that she never spoke with her family and neighbours about families clustering together or about overcrowding. She said people thought it was natural that their children stayed in their homes after forming their own families. "The only thing we comment is: *We should have taken another plot of land*". Ana María tells me that, often, when she is with her *comadre* (symbolic co-parent or close friend) who lives in an already overcrowded house they regret not having taken another plot of land. It is precisely because they are largely unconscious of their own *habitus* that it acquires the strength of a long lasting disposition towards action. It is because most people seldom stop to question and reflect upon it that the predisposed range of possibilities are naturalised and taken as the common-sense course of action.

4.2 Juntos pero no revueltos

As I stated before, my informants seldom recognised many other possible living alternatives and tended to naturalise their act of staying in their multifamily plots. When questioned about what they thought would be the most desirable living arrangement for themselves and for their children – given no material limitations – most members of the first and second generation automatically responded that the best was for each family group to have its own independent house. Silvia laughs an remembers the old saying that goes: *"los parientes como el sol, entre mas lejos mejor"* ("relatives, like the sun, the further the better"). As the conversation progressed and specific alternatives were discussed, I understood what they meant when they said that all family groups should have an independent house.

Although they affirmed that living independently was the ideal, this was not to be achieved at all costs. Between the alternative of living together in a multifamily plot and going away to rent (or having their children go to rent), they undoubtedly preferred to live together. Renting was seen by most as the least acceptable alternative. It was not uncommon to hear them say that *rentar es ir a sufrir* (to rent is to go to suffer). Renting is perceived as a bad option for oneself, but it is regarded as unacceptable for ones children.

> "If my children had to rent, I would prefer that they come here. It is preferable that s/he stays than that s/he goes around renting somewhere else. One gives one's opinion, *if you want you can stay, but if you want to rent, then leave, I give you my*

blessing. So, yeah, I would like it if my children stayed although I tell you that there are many conflicts…But if one had to rent, no! better that they stay here, to share, that is why I have those two here, because I don't want them to go rent, to go suffer". (Aurora)

Their opinions about renting are based on personal experience, on the experiences of people they knew, or through their experience as landlords. For this reason, the rental housing they know is informal rental housing in consolidated settlements where the housing conditions are very poor and rents relatively high. Being homeowners themselves, and often landlords of one or two rented rooms, they consider renting as a descent on the social ladder. Renting, they emphasised, is like throwing money away, and is particularly inappropriate to their usually unstable incomes which impede them from having a fixed monetary commitment.

"Renting, hmm, its like people say, no? that its throwing money away. I mean, in a way they are giving you a service, but you don't see an ending to it. And that was something that did worry us, whether we would have [money]. Otherwise, where do we go? And the *where do we go?* meant that we had to put together a rent plus the deposit plus I don't know what else and it was going to be very hard. Even if we ended up without eating, *pero teniamos que juntar* (we had to get the money)…" (Rosa)

For women, the most negative aspect of renting was related to childrearing. In rental housing, they argued, there was not enough space for their children to play, and most importantly, they would lack the liberty to educate them as they considered best.

"I wanted at least a small plot of land so that nobody could tell me how to live and how to raise my children" (Edith)

Even when compared to living with many other family members in a multifamily plot, many stated that renting implied less privacy, where a lack of privacy was a synonym of lack of liberty.

"When renting you don't have privacy. That is, you can't go out in your underwear, for example, or play your music loud. Because, in a way, you are already bothering others…" (Rosa)

When presented before the alternative of living (themselves or their children) in an owned house located outside the neighbourhood, in the remote peripheral areas where land or affordable housing is mostly available, the majority again stated that they would rather live together in Santo Domingo. Furthermore, although both men and women stated that they considered it best for their children to leave and be independent, they all hurried to add that their children would nevertheless always count with a space in the family home if they ever needed it.

> "Simply, if their economic conditions are very bad, or just bad, I would have no excuse for telling them not to come and live with us. Even if they were married, if they had a family, I think I would open the doors to them...Maybe even, without them requesting it...maybe on seeing [their situation] myself, I would have the possibility to tell them to stay with us." (Francisco)

After revising a number of different options I presented before them, my respondents concluded that the most preferable scenario was to live *juntos pero no revueltos* (together but not scrambled). For most, the ideal scenario was to own a large plot of land where each family group could have its individual house. A desirable alternative was for all family groups to live in independent houses on the same street or at least within the same neighbourhood. The ideal is to be in close proximity to one another, to feel accompanied and count with support, but to be *aparte* or independent from one another[33]. When evaluating their current living arrangements they would differentiate between those family groups that lived within the plot of land in an independent area with separate kitchen and access, and others who shared the same house. The condition of those living in independent houses within the same plot was considered as ideal and relatively problem-free. The dissatisfaction with living together in the same plot stemmed not from the fact of residing together in itself, but in not counting with individual houses, enough space, and privacy. In other words, living in close proximity is not seen as the problem, the problem is to live *revueltos* (scrambled); when not scrambled, living in each others company is actually evaluated as a positive asset.

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[33] Varley (1993: 24) also observed in popular settlements in Guadalajara, Puebla and Mexico City that, whenever married children remained in their parental family plots, the aspiration was to provide separate accommodation and facilities for the younger household. Similarly, Walker (2000: 351) found that, in a popular settlement of Mexico City, priority was given to dividing the available space for use by different households living on the same plot.

4.3 The second generation: Incorporating heterogeneity and making room for change

I have here argued that family clustering in Santo Domingo can be understood as the outcome of the development of a disposition for communal family life, as a result of a particular *habitus*. I would now like to emphasise that this does not mean that everyone in the neighbourhood thinks and acts the same way. Firstly, the *habitus* is something non natural, it is a set of *acquired* dispositions towards action. A given *habitus* is therefore not inherent to a particular social class nor to a particular ethnic, racial, or social grouping. Consequently, the disposition towards communal family life is not intrinsic to the residents of a popular settlement nor to their ethnic background or social class and it could change throughout time.

Furthermore, in the development of a shared *habitus* there is room for considerable heterogeneity and change. Understanding the *habitus* as a set of dispositions towards action, which allows for a certain element of individual choice (Bourdieu 1990a; 2002), is crucial for explaining the degree of variation in the family members' views and behaviour. The danger of not recognising the heterogeneity within a group that shares a given *habitus* is to reinforce stereotypical views of the urban poor. A further problem would be to think of the *habitus* as fixed and immutable, therefore being unable to account for social change.

I will now present the cases of three second-generation residents of Santo Domingo as a way to illustrate both the existing heterogeneity of practices within a shared *habitus* and its gradual transformation. At present, all three individuals live in the neighbourhood in their parental (or their spouses') family plot. Although they were all socialised into the same *habitus* they are not equally oriented by it. Their *habitus* has been transformed in varying degrees depending on whether their individual trajectories have created a mismatch between *habitus* and their present conditions of existence and on their varying exposure to education and training.

Ursula

Ursula is a confident and energetic woman; her worn face, the wrinkles around her eyes reveal how though lively and joyful she has gone through a lot. She is the 4th daughter of a total of 6 children and grew up in Copilco, a nearby neighbourhood to

Santo Domingo, in the plot of land of her maternal grandmother. Ursula's family rented a room in this family plot where her aunt and cousins also lived. Her childhood was rather difficult for there were many children in her family and very scarce resources. Ursula's father expected that his mother would eventually divide the plot of land between him and his sister, so that he would get his share. However, after Ursula's aunt died leaving three children behind, her grandmother decided that the plot of land would be inherited only by the orphans. Knowing that their family group had no secure house for the future, Ursula's family looked for an opportunity to acquire a plot of land and develop their own house. As a result, Ursula's brother, José, decided to join the invasion of Santo Domingo. Before the family house in Santo Domingo was ready for her to move in, Ursula married and moved into her husband's family house. This did not mean however that she was distanced from her family for her husband's paternal plot was located on the same street as her family's house in Santo Domingo. In addition, on the other side of the street, between her husband's house and her mother's house, is the house of her paternal grandmother and her aunts. The bond is further strengthened with Ursula's sister marrying her husband's brother and coming to live in the family's plot of land.

Ursula's daily routine is divided amongst the three family plots and the many people who live in them. She is a good conversationalist and enjoys people's company. Ursula never considered living independent from her family. She explains that when she married it never occurred to her that they would live on their own. The question was whether they would live in her husband's family plot or in her family's plot. Family cohesion, she explains, is one of her highest values.

For the last four years, Ursula's husband has been living in the United States and sending back money so the couple can continue building their flat. Very recently Ursula was diagnosed with diabetes, and had to quit her job. Being alone with her single son, Ursula feels protected and happy living in the family-house. She says she feels stronger now than when she was younger and that she would not be so scared of living alone, but still believes living with family is a better option.

Claudia was born and raised in Santo Domingo. From an early age she was forced to be independent. While her mother and father worked and busied themselves with the development of the neighbourhood, Claudia and her siblings ate the food that their mother had left them, and walked to school by themselves and back. In their free time Claudia and her siblings collaborated with building the house. During adolescence she was very active within the neighbourhood and developed a strong sense of attachment to it. It was in those days of activism that she met her future husband, an older middle class man who, though not from Santo Domingo, was an important political leader there. Before getting married her idea had always been that she would live independently with her husband, but always imagined that she would live in or close to Santo Domingo. However, when they got married, they moved to her husband's house, who lived with his mother, and an uncle with his family at a considerable distance from Santo Domingo. At that time, they did not consider the option of renting a flat.

With her husband, Claudia lived in Iztapalapa, a long way from Santo Domingo. Claudia remembers that she missed her family and friends from the neighbourhood and wished to come back. In practice, she came back to her parental house in Santo Domingo on a daily basis for it was on the way to her job. She woke up very early and showered at her parent's house arguing that she never accustomed to her new house. During this time Claudia was offered a credit for a flat by the Institute for the National Fund for Housing for Workers (INFONAVIT)[34]; she wanted to move there with her husband but he told her that they had no need. Now she regrets it.

When she got pregnant, Claudia convinced her husband to move to Santo Domingo to her mother's house. Her mother, she explains, could help her take care of the baby and had offered her a piece of the plot where they could build an independent flat. A couple of years after her second son was born Claudia divorced her husband. She stayed with her children in her parental home and continued to build her flat.

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[34] INFONAVIT is a government organisation that provides credits for people working in a private company. Those employed in the public sector have access to credits by the Housing Fund of the Institute of Security and Social Services for State Workers (FOVISSSTE). For more on the role of the State in the provision of housing see: Perló 1981; Schteingart 2001.

Today Claudia has a plot of land in Michoacán but does not intend to live there. She says that as soon as she finishes paying the credit with which she built her current flat in Santo Domingo, she will try and get another credit for a social housing flat. Her plan is not to move into this flat herself but rather wants it in order to have something of her own that she can leave to her children. Although she still thinks that living independently is the ideal, Claudia admits she is too comfortable at her parental house and does not want to leave. She is very attached to her mother whom she incessantly supports and accompanies in her political and communal activities. In addition, her work as a nurse has fostered in her a deep sense of duty towards the neighbourhood. Every single day she receives a phone call from a different neighbour who needs an injection, a blood pressure test, or the like.

Francisco

Francisco is an independent and determined 42 year-old man, who is married to Rosa and has two children. He was born in a developing popular settlement of Mexico City close to Santo Domingo. His childhood and growth were tightly knit to the development of the neighbourhood. His father died when he was only six years old but managed to build a couple of rooms where the family lived and slowly expanded. One by one his siblings married and received a part of the plot where they have built their house.

Francisco has always been restless. The portion of land assigned to him in his parental family plot still awaits him, empty, for his dream has always been to be independent and get a house for himself. In his youth Francisco had a first chance to follow this dream when he was offered a plot of land in a nearby developing neighbourhood. This time on his own, he moved into the neighbourhood which still lacked all urban services and began the arduous task of building his house. However, he soon found himself in economic problems, and was forced to sell. Fighting against the perspective of returning to his parental home he spent some years in rental housing, an experience which he claims was positive and contributed to his personal development. Even after he married he persisted with his ideal of being independent and continued to rent a flat. However, he explains himself, the situation became more and more difficult so he and his wife ended up building a flat at his parents-in-law.

As a result of his life experience, Francisco's life evolves around the issue of housing. He studied architecture. His student years went by during the 60's, at the height of the urban popular movement, which articulated housing and urban services as its central demands. He thus became involved with the Frente Popular Francisco Villa, an autonomous popular organisation which fights for access to housing and tenants rights. From the moment when he finished his studies, until the present day, Francisco worked for the Frente Popular Francisco Villa providing technical advice. Here he learnt that housing is a basic human right and that all should have the opportunity to have their own house.

Francisco emphasises his belief in that everyone should have his/her own house and be independent. This is also what he wishes for himself and for his children. He is highly critical of families having to cluster together in a plot of land. He believes most families do so because they have no other option, and that those who chose it do so as a result of lack of education. He is not proud of living in a flat in the plot of land of his parents-in-law. Although he has invested many years of his life in building this flat he insists in it being only a temporary accommodation. He says that although he lives in the same plot of land as his parents-in-law, his sister and brother-in-law, he makes a conscious effort to be independent from them. He makes clear that he is grateful to his parents-in-law for letting him be there and that he has no conflicts with them. Nevertheless, he believes each family group ought to have its own house and develop independently. Although he has no concrete plan as to when and where he will move out, and continues to make improvements to his current house, he maintains his assertion that living independently is the ideal. But it is not independence at all costs; Francisco admits that he would not leave his current accommodation unless it offers better or at least similar conditions to the ones he has now.

4.4 The third generation: continuity and transformations of habitus

The third generation illustrates both how the *habitus* is maintained and thus contributes to the continuity of given practices, and how it can be slowly transformed. Because they were born in to a *habitus* which predisposes them towards communal family life, the children of the third generation perceive this practice as natural and "sensible". Their acquisition of the *habitus* is similar to the acquisition of

one's mother tongue. "The child learns at the same time to speak the language (which is only ever presented in action, in his own or other people's speech) and to think *in* (rather than with) the language" (Bourdieu 1990a: 67). This is opposed to the way in which one learns a foreign language, in which the language is perceived as "an arbitrary game, explicitly constituted as such in the form of grammar, rules and exercises, expressly taught by institutions expressly designed for that purpose" (Ibid.). This naturalisation of the *habitus,* is the result of being born into it and is neatly illustrated by one of my fieldwork experiences: Ana María and I conversed about the lack of affordable housing options and how she was worried for her grandchildren, meanwhile one of her grandsons ran around us and overheard our conversation. Turning around to look at him, Ana María sighed and asked "ay, my son, where are you going to live?" Her eight year old grandson smiled and replied "I am going to build myself a room in the roof!" Just as he had seen his parent's biographies and observed the expansion of the house, family unfolding was for him the natural option.

As with their parents and grandparents, I asked some members of the third generation to tell me what they thought was the ideal residential arrangement for an extended family. In line with what their parents and grandparents had told me, the members of the third generation shared a negative view of rental housing and had a positive opinion of living in a multifamily plot. For most of them, living in this way meant that they were always accompanied even when their parents were at work, and that they had more children and people to play with.

> "If we rented, we shouldn't be rude to people. It depends, because if you have a house in which to live…the fact of renting, it's not, I have a bad temper and I change moods easily. I would rather not have to rent, you avoid many problems. There are people, that you rent from them, and the third day they are already mad because you make too much noise or you go to bed too late, that is why I don't like to rent". (Mariana)

> "Well yeah, I like to live here because you have people to hang out with. If it were us [her mother, her sister and her]…I feel it wouldn't be the same. In here, we go out from there to come in here, to the living room, to the kitchen…Well, boring, if we were by ourselves it would be boring. In here, I tell you, we hang out, or we sit to talk with my grandmother, and things like that… The good thing about living here is

that you hang out more, that you have with whom to talk. If we were by ourselves, well, I do talk with my mom, but not much because she goes to work and comes back until the night. In here you can go out and my aunt is there [she lives in the house next door]. Living by ourselves I wouldn't be able to go out to, say, go see the next door neighbour. In here, because my aunts are here, we go to, say, visit my cousin…and well, the music, I am a music fan, and I don't like to listen to it quietly if we were to rent." (Mariana)

In spite of the fact that they liked their current living arrangement, many of them manifested that they would not like to live with more people. Although they enjoyed living with members of their extended family they recognised the implications of there being more people in the same plot. Their knowledge of these implications originated from turning to cases they knew around the neighbourhood, where there is overcrowding and bad housing conditions – such as lack of lighting and ventilation – and to the changes they themselves had experienced in the past when the number of family members in their own plot increased.

"[When I have a family] I would go to Michoacán, because I wouldn't like to have so much family here. Sometimes my aunt and my uncle come to visit and they sleep over, and they bring their kids. I feel its too much when there are many people, or when my uncles have get-togethers in my house. Not now, now I feel its normal. But I don't imagine that we build another floor for me because the house would be too big and the sun would not enter to the patio anymore… like Enrique's house, its all closed and almost no light gets in, they have to be with the light on. If my uncles Iván and Pamela were to build here, uy, I wouldn't like to live here anymore! Like I said before, we would be too many. There would be some [people] around here, others upstairs, others there, it would feel very crammed" (Canek)

Like their parents and grandparents, the children made a distinction between living in the same plot but in independent houses or spaces and actually sharing the same house. Marisol currently shares a room with her mother and her aunt inside her grandparent's flat. In the next few months her grandfather will finish building a small apartment for her and her mother at the back of the family plot. Marisol asserts that she is looking forward to moving to her new flat "to be more alone, to have my room, but not to get all stuck up". She thinks having an independent space within the family plot is the best option; she prefers this than living independently with her mother outside the family plot. She explains:

"For example, before, my mother wanted to buy another house and I did think that I would miss it here. I do like living here, in another place I would be more lonely, here, if I need something from the stationary store, or something, and I don't have money, my grandmother lends it to me. Otherwise, how would I do it? My mom comes back only at night. Now its different, back there [in the flat that is being built for her and her mother within the family plot] we would live in the same house but in different rooms". (Marisol)

Although they affirmed that they enjoyed living in the family plot, when asked about where they thought they would live in the future most of the youngsters shared the feeling that they would not be able to stay in their grandparent's plot of land. On the one hand, they felt there was not enough space for them to stay, and they also expressed an understanding that the plot had been secured by their grandparents so that their children would have a place to live and a patrimony to inherit.

"When I marry I would look for a room for myself, because there are a lot of people here. Besides, my grandfather built this house for his children. Ok, also for us, but it would be too much…there would be too many people in the same place". (Marisol)

Some were even aware of the tensions that would emerge over the inheritance once their grandparents passed away. I asked Mariana if she would like to stay in her grandmother's plot of land when she grows up and she replied:

"No, because, that's when the problems begin. When my grandparents die they start with things like, *they left the house to me*…some will want to rent and others to build, and others to come here. That's where the problems start, because that's what they say first, *stay here* and then no. *I told you, you should go rent*". (Mariana)

When I ask Sofía where she will live when she is older she replied without hesitation: "Here, in my house. My brother will leave, and my sister will leave, I would expand. I have to stay because I am the youngest. I should live here with my parents because what if they [her siblings] leave and forget about them?" She adds that even if she marries she would bring her husband with her. Meanwhile her mother Beatriz is washing the dishes inside the kitchen; she holds the view that it would be best if her children managed to become independent. Therefore, she is surprised to hear what her daughter told me, and popping her head out of the kitchen into the dinning room

she corrects her daughter: "of course not, I am going to kick him out!" Smiling Sofía replies:

"and who is going to take care of you? Ok, I won't take care of you, I will just give you 50 pesos", she laughs, turns her head to me and explains: "I wouldn't like to live with my parents-in-law. I would rather get a house for myself, but I would live with my parents. If my husband doesn't want to live with my parents I would prefer to buy a house even if its far away. But between living here with my husband or somewhere else, better here. Because, what if I don't find a house close by? What if one day something happens to my parents and nobody finds me and I don't find out? What if it takes a lot of effort to come and see them? What if I leave and I don't have friends? And here I know everybody!" (Sofía)

A similar situation is repeated with David and his mother Andrea. David's biggest concern is not to be far away from his mother; he even considers the option of renting as a means to stay close. He affirms that even if he found a plot of land not too far from Santo Domingo he would still like to bring his mother with him. "Because I think she has formed my life and I don't want to leave her alone. She says that when we grow up we are going to swap her for our girlfriends and I want her to see that that is not true" he explains and continues, "But if I don't have money to buy my house, then yeah, I would rent something so as to not end up on the street." At this point Andrea interrupts him and adds: "and so as to not stay in your mother's house!" David looks at her, smiles and replies: "although I will bring you with me anyway, I have already told you."

Like their parents, they feel that *tener algo propio* (having something of their own) is the ideal. The dream for themselves and for their imagined children is to own a house. But being far away from their families and friends is a sacrifice they would not like to make. Speculating about the future some seem more ready for a change than others. As for their parents, having a large plot of land where they could all build their own separate houses, living *juntos pero no revueltos*, would be the best compromise, if not the ideal solution. However, as Marisol concludes, it is hard to know how they and their children will live: "its going to be different times, when I turn 30, it will already be different."

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5. Conclusion

In the consolidated settlements of Mexico City families are clustering together in multifamily plots. A first level of analysis would lead us to argue that people decide to live in this communal way because they lack the economic resources to live otherwise. Although structural conditions play the important role of constraining or enabling the choices people make regarding where and how to live, they do not determine them in a cause-effect way. Families cluster together not only because they have no other choice, but because they obtain certain benefits from this arrangement. People choose to stay in Santo Domingo and to cluster together in multifamily plots as a way to maximise their limited resources and in response to strong feelings of attachment to their houses and to the neighbourhood. This choice, however, is not the result of an independent and conscious rational action, but a choice made within the confines of a particular *habitus*. In the consolidated popular settlements extended family arrangements are being reproduced and enhanced due to the development of a *habitus* that predisposes the families towards communal family life. In addition to the material constraints that severely constrain the possibilities of obtaining a new house, the residents of Santo Domingo have developed something stronger than a mere attachment to their houses and neighbourhood; they have acquired a disposition towards communal family life. The argument here is not that families in Santo Domingo cluster together because they like to; but rather, that as a result of the constraints of the present conditions of existence, which make it increasingly difficult for each individual to obtain a new house, people develop a disposition for a communal family life around their existing dwellings. It is therefore as an outcome of the objective conditions of existence in which there is a limited access to affordable housing, that the residents of Santo Domingo have developed – but not as a conscious strategy – a taste for communal family life that predisposes them to cluster in multifamily plots. Thus, the ideal scenario for most residents of Santo Domingo is to live *juntos pero no revueltos*; to live in close proximity to one another, to feel accompanied and count with support, but to be *aparte* or spatially independent from one another. Building upon this argument, the following chapter looks into the concrete family practices and uses of space through which families living in multifamily plots aim to achieve this ideal of *juntos pero no revueltos*. Even when the ideal of having an independent flat for each family group is not attained, families deploy a variety of tactics to be as close as possible to that ideal.

CHAPTER SEVEN –THE SPATIAL POLITICS OF FAMILY LIFE: NEGOTIATING SOCIO-SPATIAL BOUNDARIES IN EVERYDAY LIFE

1. Introduction

This chapter looks at the intricacies of everyday life in the complex multifamily plots of the consolidated popular settlement of Santo Domingo. It builds upon the argument made before where I stated that the residents of the settlement have developed a kind of taste for communal life in which living *juntos pero no revueltos* is the ideal for most. In what follows, I explore some of the tactics (de Certeau 1984) that the dwellers of the family-house employ to get closer to their ideal.

The *juntos pero no revueltos* ideal is pursued through the constant negotiation, in everyday life, of socio-spatial boundaries. To illustrate this argument, the chapter will look at a number of practices inside and outside the family-house. Inside the family-house, the practices analysed are the organisation of expenses, the division of domestic work, the practice of shared mothering, the organisation of eating, everyday sociability, and the designation of communal and private spaces. Outside the family-house the following pages look at the home as workplace, at the neighbourhood as extension of the family house, and at the porous boundary defining the inside and outside of the family-house.

Although the analysis and arguments presented here are drawn from the bulk of my ethnographic data, for presentational purposes, I focus on two of the plots of land in which I carried out fieldwork. This is done to enable a fine grained analysis of the boundary-setting tactics that take place in Santo Domingo's multifamily plots, and to facilitate a clearer illustration of the arguments.

2. Negotiating socio-spatial boundaries: inside the family-house

2.1 The Robles family-house

The Robles family lives in a three storied house built on a 10 x 6 meters plot of land. At present, there are fifteen people living in the plot of land, including: Carmen and Marcelo, the founders of the plot of land; Carmen's older son from a previous

marriage, Toño, his wife and two children; Carmen and Marcelo's son Ramón, his wife Angélica, and three children; Pepe, a single son of the founders of the house; and Malena their youngest daughter who is now a single mother of two sons. The ground floor of the family-house is made up of a small living room and dining room, a small bathroom, a kitchen and outdoors patio, a storage area and Carmen's and Marcelo's bedroom. The first floor, which is accessed through a staircase from the ground floor, has one toilet and four rooms. The two back rooms are occupied by Ramón and his family, one by the couple and the other one for the two children. One of the front rooms is Pepe's room and the other is where Malena and her two sons live. The second floor is a self-contained flat which is accessed through an external metal staircase. This flat is the latest expansion carried out on the house and is inhabited by Toño, his wife and two children. The floor of this apartment is somewhat tilted because when the family decided to make this new addition they had to even out the previous gabled roof of the house's first floor.

Illustration 4. The Robles family

·········· Live in ground floor

·········· Live in first floor

·········· Live in second floor in a self-contained flat
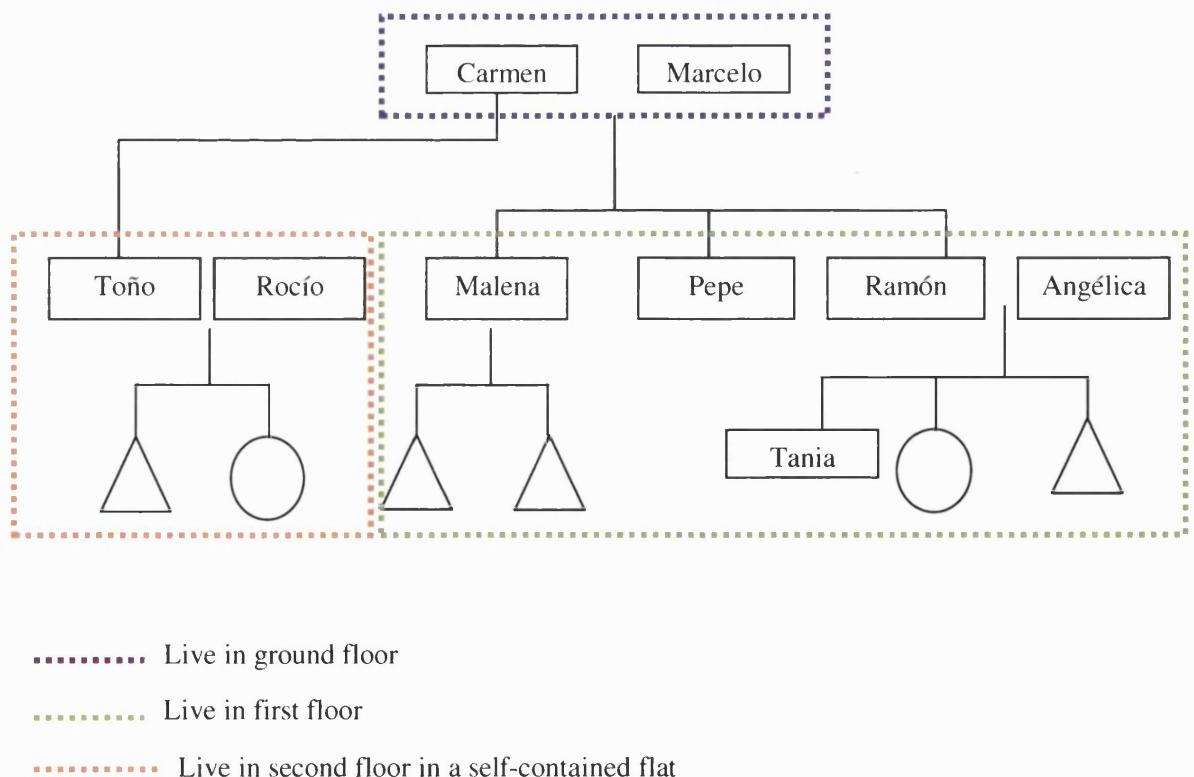
Illustration 5. The Robles family-house

Second floor   First floor   Ground floor

.... Carmen and Marecelo

.... Ramon and Angelica's family group

.... Malena's family group

.... Pepe

.... Tono's family group
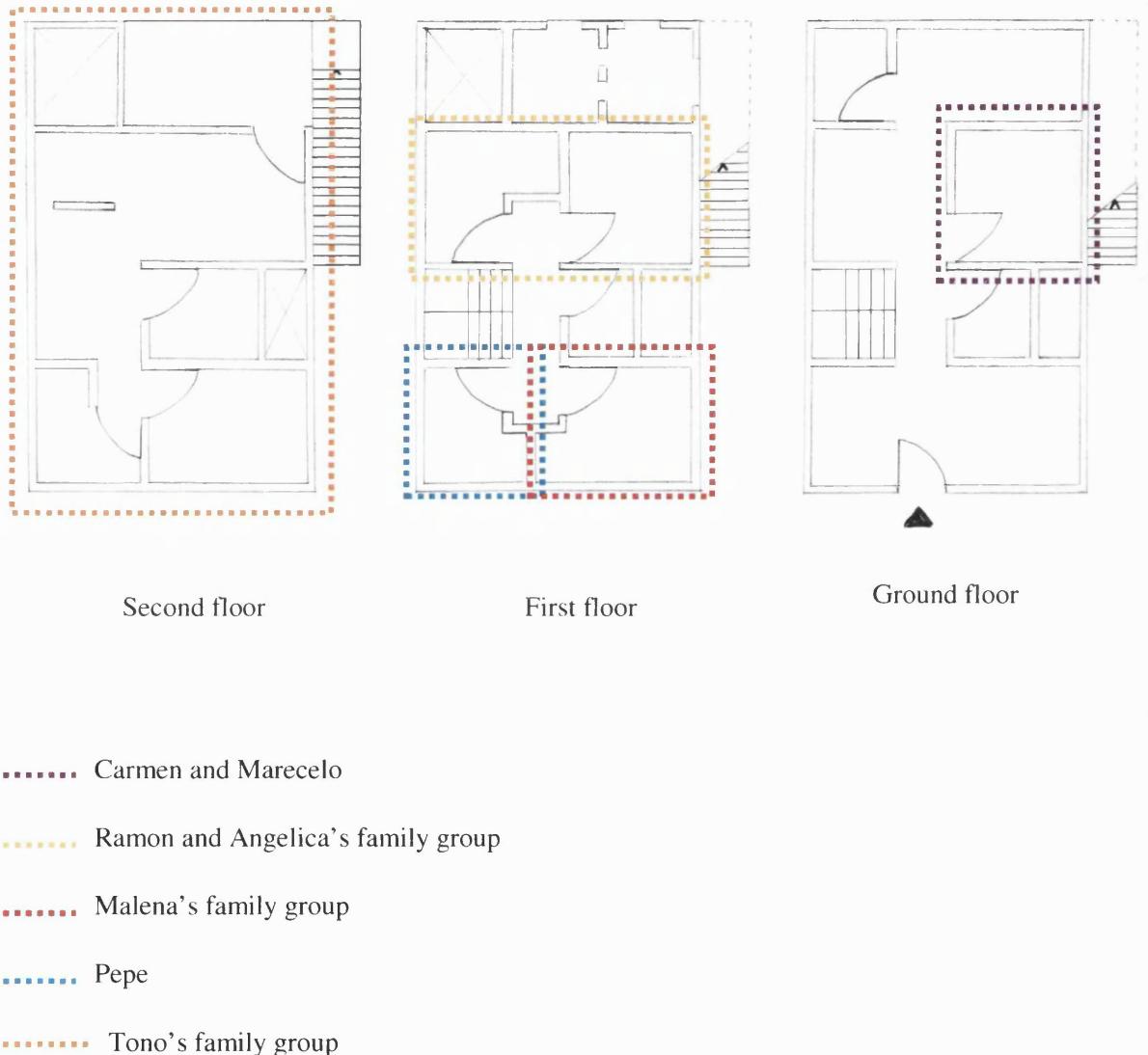
2.2 Sharing and differentiation of expenses as a boundary-setting tactic

"In here [those living on the ground and first floors] here everyone, each one gives what they can. Many don't give, we had agreed that we would give an X amount and they never did, my wife even chose to have two electricity meters, actually three. Toño pays his, Ramón and Pepe pay the middle [floor], because Malena doesn't, and downstairs we pay [Carmen and him]. The gas and the rest, my wife is the one that makes ends meet. Ramón gives 500 pesos a week, Pepe 250 or 300[35] and

[35] On average, with 500 pesos – 22.69 GBP – one can buy 3 kilos of meat, 1 kilo of toast bread, 3 kilos of beans, 3 kilos of rice, 6 litres of milk, and 6 kilos of tomatoes. 300 pesos – 13.61 BGP – would buy 3 kilos of meat, 1 kilo of toast bread, 3 kilos of beans, and 3 kilos of rice and 250 pesos – 11.34 GBP – would buy 3 kilos of meat and one kilo of toast bread. Based on 2007 data provided by the Procuraduría Federal del Consumidor (Federal Judiciary for the Consumer).

Malena doesn't give anything, quite the opposite, she gets money from my wife even for her transport. My wife cooks for everybody". (Marcelo, male head of household)

"Toño and his family live very *aparte*" said Angélica. Although living in the same family plot and, in fact, in the same physical structure, Toño represents the ideal residential situation of being together with the family, but not scrambled. The most obvious way in which this boundary is set is through the physical characteristic of Toño' house. As can be seen on the plan, Toño' family live in an independent, self-contained flat. The second floor flat counts with a fully equipped kitchen, bathroom, living room, dining room and two small bedrooms. Furthermore, with the incorporation of a very steep and rather precarious external metal staircase, which raises from the northeast façade of the house, an independent access to the second floor flat was established, and with this a fundamental boundary.

In addition to the aforementioned fixed physical boundaries, everyday activities are crucial in the establishment of boundaries and the continuous redefinition of the existing physical ones. The division of expenses across the members of the plot of land is a crucial boundary-setting tactic. Toño and his family further safeguard their position as being *aparte* by having completely separate expenses. They have a separate electricity reader, gas supply, telephone, and everyday expenses such as food and clothing. Through this they reinforce their definition as a separate house and separate family group from the rest of the plot of land.

Those who live in the ground and first floor of the house have not reached the aspired ideal of being sufficiently *aparte* but are, in practice, not a fixed single house and family unit. The division of expenses is one of the tactics through which family groups are demarcated within the family-house. Group demarcation (which is achieved through the establishment of both physical and social boundaries) frames the group and thus establishes that "a world is located inside of it which is subject only to its own laws, not drawn into the determinations and changes of the surrounding world" (Simmel 2000a: 141). The organisation of expenses is one of the ways in which group demarcation takes place and family groups are delineated. In the case of the Robles family the demarcation as regards expenses is as follows: Ramón and his family form a distinct family group; Pepe, the single son forms a separate unit; and Carmen and Marcelo another.

Although none of the groups pay rent, the agreement is that each group should give Carmen a fixed amount of money for the payment of gas, food and electricity consumed in the ground and second floors. Because the different family groups failed to provide this fixed amount of money on a monthly basis, Carmen decided to differentiate expenses further and introduced a separate electricity meter for the ground and first floors. Setting a telephone line is very costly, which means that Carmen was not able to reinforce boundaries through the use and payment of the telephone. There is thus a telephone in the living room that only receives phone calls and another telephone from which calls can be made inside Carmen's room. Carmen generally keeps her room locked with a key and whoever wants to make a phone call has to ask for her permission. The telephone bill is paid by Carmen from the money she collects from the various family groups.

The case of Malena, a single mother with two children, calls for special attention for it illustrates the fluidity in the demarcation of socio-spatial boundaries inside the family-house. Although Malena and her children are grouped together into a family group, they are absorbed either by her parents Carmen and Marcelo or by her brother Pepe when it comes to parenting or expenses. Malena does not work, so her expenses are carried over by Pepe or by her parents. As will be seen in the following sections, when a single mother goes to work she and her offspring become a distinct family group both in emotional and economic terms. However, a new dependence with the female head of the house in terms of parenting and division of domestic work is formed making the total distinction of the group incomplete. Although single mothers greatly benefit from the support they can get by adhering to other family groups, they do this at the expense of not being able to establish more solid boundaries for their family group. In the quest towards the ideal model of *juntos pero no revueltos* the single mothers are the most disadvantaged[36].

The case of single mothers also highlights how living in a multifamily plot, constantly negotiating boundaries does not go without conflict. Conflict results from the ambiguity of boundaries, from the fact that they are both resistant and porous. Their ambiguity means that they are under constant negotiation and thus not sites of

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[36] Based on a questionnaire survey carried out in six popular settlements in Mexico City, Puebla and Guadalajara, Varley (1993) concludes that, when living together in a multifamily ploy, single parents tend to be integrated into their parent's family group. She explains that it seems like it would be regarded as inappropriate if single parents form a separate family group.

indifference but of tense exchange (Sennett 2004). In the case of the Robles family there is a fiery dispute between Marcelo and Carmen as to whether Malena and her children should form a distinct family group or not, and if so, how. Marcelo insists that Malena should go to work and pay her own expenses. Carmen says Malena should stay at home with her children and contribute with domestic work. She complains that Marcelo does not understand the implications that sending Malena to work has for her.

The organisation of expenses within the family-house is significantly gendered. As I have explained before, it is the female head of the house, who manages the contributions of the different family groups and is responsible for making ends meet as regards the payment of bills, food consumption and house maintenance. Carmen often complained that it was she who carried the economic burden of the house. One day, as I was helping her cook dinner she showed me the tiles around the sink and said that her sons had done the job. "But of course, I am the one who has to buy the paint, the tiles, and then they do it. I do miracles, don't I? so that it's enough for everything" she told me with a smile. As this quote suggests, on a first level the gender unbalance rests on the administration of the house. Carmen often complains that her husband Marcelo never knows what is needed in the house, he is not aware of the debts, bills and maintenance work that has to be done. Marcelo himself explained to me that the first bulk of money he makes from driving his taxi each day goes to paying the petrol, the second goes to pay the fixed contribution to his wife, and the rest he keeps for himself. Except for the daily allowance she receives, Carmen has no knowledge nor control over how much Marcelo earns and how he spends his money (see also Benería and Roldán 1987). It is not only as regards the management of expenses that the female head of the house is overburdened, as Carmen explains in the following quote, the female head of the house often finds the need to engage in paid work in order to make ends meet.

> Carmen – Our husbands are so irresponsible that they don't even know how we are going to pay the council tax, how we are going to pay the water, how we pay...they, if you ask them for more money, they say *I don't have more to give*...and...and women, we can't conform with the little they give us because we wouldn't manage to pay the water, live a little bit better...yeah?

Iliana. – Of course.

Carmen – I mean, we do want to give a better life to our children, and to our grandchildren who are already here, no?

Iliana – hmm…

Carmen – We work…we still work. This neighbourhood is of working women, yeah? Eh…they work in cleaning, as house maids, they sell quesadillas. I, for example, I sell second hand clothes…we can't just stand still, because then, we would never have enough to pay the costs we have now. Like, hmm, a telephone line, we would have never had it. Now we have it, but we don't have it as a luxury, but as a necessity, right?

2.3 The division of domestic work as boundary-setting tactic

When I arrived at her house Carmen was busy hanging a large pile of bed clothes she had just finished washing. Her son Pepe was on the roof of the neighbour's house working as a mason on the expansion of a room, and when he saw me coming he shouted to his mother that I had just arrived. Carmen ran to the border of the second floor patio, the entrance to Toño's house. She leaned forward, wiped her forehead and in between deep breaths shouted at me "come in, come in!" I waved back to her and went inside the house to join Angélica who was cooking for the children. The children are on vacation, she tells me, so there is more work in the house than normal. While Angélica and I chatted and cooked, Malena was busy sweeping the floors. Her mop was broken so she had to stop constantly to fix the stick back into place. She collected large piles of rubbish and dragged them to the patio by the kitchen on the ground floor. At one point she noticed my surprise at the amounts of rubbish she was gathering; she paused to take a breath, leaned on the mop and told me " I clean all this rubbish now, and you will see how in two hours it's all dirty again. I sweep the floors everyday but there are so many kids in this house that it's always dirty!"

Angélica explained to me that "we do our chores each, so we don't get into a fight". She remembers that they decided to split the household chores in this way when Malena's boyfriend came to live in the house "because there was a little problem,

right?" They have split domestic work in such a way that Angélica cleans her two rooms, washes the clothes of her family, washes everyone's dishes, cleans the kitchen, the first floor bathroom and the stairs; Malena sweeps and dusts the ground floor, cleans the bathroom on the ground floor, sweeps the entrance to the house, and cleans her and Carmen's room; Carmen cooks for everyone and washes the clothes for Malena, her children and Marcelo.

All the women of the house have specifically assigned household chores for which they are responsible. However, their contribution to domestic work is not done as individuals; they do the share of the domestic work on behalf of their family group. We see again how the single mother's position is not clearly defined in this division of labour. During the time in which her boyfriend came to live in the house the chores were renegotiated and she was considered as the axis of a family group; after her boyfriend left, Malena and her children sometimes form a distinct family group but often merge with another. As regards domestic work, she is grouped together with her parents. While Angélica cleans her private spaces and her share of the common ones, Malena divides the private chores with her mother thus belonging to the same family group. During the year I carried out my fieldwork I witnessed a period in which the Robles family went through a severe crisis. As a strategy to cope with this unforeseen crisis they sent as many members of the family to the labour market as they could with the aim of expanding their income (see also González de la Rocha 1994). During this time Malena and Angélica went off to work. Although Carmen was very proud of Malena when she received 500 pesos from her as a contribution to the general expenses, she continually complained that since Malena started to work her own domestic workload was doubled. At that time she had to take care of Malena's children all day long, feed them and even wash all of Malena's clothes. This, argued Carmen, also has an impact on her own income for she has less free time go out and sell clothes. Again, we see how the single mother holds a highly conflictive and dependant position. In Mexico, and in Latin America more broadly, the number of female-headed households and mono-parental households is increasing (see Tuirán 2001; Arriagada 2002; 2004). Female-headed households, specially when also a mono-parental household, have a tendency to integrate into extended families (Varley 1996). As a result, they are a frequent feature of the multifamily plots of the consolidated popular settlements adding a further layer of complexity on the everyday life constitution of the family-house.

The tactics deployed in group demarcation are clearly gendered. Men play a central role in the demarcation of groups according to the payment of expenses, whilst women do it around domestic work. In the case of domestic work, it is largely unquestioned that women are the ones responsible for carrying it out. Gendered divisions of labour are still regarded as relevant and are constantly reinforced. When men participate it is often with chores thought of as being masculine such as "fixing anything that is broken", house repairs or painting the house. Increasingly, men of the younger generations perform activities such as washing dishes, sweeping floors, and going shopping on a regular basis (see also Gutmann 2007: 151). But this growing participation of the younger male generations is often explained as being the result of economic need and their action referred to as *ayuda* (help or support) rather than responsibility. Similarly, women's participation in the household economy through remunerated work is referred to as *ayuda* to what is seen as a masculine role (Ibid.: 157).

When I interviewed Marcelo he manifested his discontent at the overburden his wife Carmen has to deal with. But his complaint was directed towards the women in the house. If Carmen was overburdened, he thought, it was because the division of work amongst the women was not fair or was not being followed.

> "They had agreed to do that [split the domestic work]. I said that it was unfair that my wife did everything and Laura, as the eldest daughter, [who does not live in the plot of land] wanted to come and put them in order. They agreed that for example Malena you do that...the thing is that nobody does it, I think three days and the project failed". (Marcelo)

In spite of the important empowerment that women achieved through their central role in the family-house construction process, Carmen sustained a subordinate attitude towards her husband and did not question the division of expenses and domestic work along gender roles. I witnessed many times how, when Marcelo entered the house, she interrupted whatever she was doing and asked to be excused saying "would you let me take care of my husband?" For Malena, a member of the second generation, the situation is different. Although she does question the given gender roles, she sees them as fixed and naturally defined: "I did demand it, but men are men and they say, *now, now you want to go to work*." Because women's relative

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empowerment derives from their participation in the housing process, their association to the domestic sphere is reinforced, thus ultimately reproducing the status quo.

When it comes to domestic work Toño and his family again hold the position of being *juntos pero no revueltos*. Toño's wife Rocío cleans all of her flat and does not participate in any of the chores of the ground and first floors. She reinforces the establishment of this boundary by not only doing her own laundry but also by owning her own washing machine. More than Toño, it is Rocío who works hard in maintaining the boundary oiled, functioning, and as solid as possible. She allows Carmen to hang the bed clothes in her patio but nothing else and tried to limit the mutual help with her mother-in-law. Carmen complained to me that Rocío was *muy especial* (difficult) so she stopped cooking for her and now tries to help from a distance. Although Carmen agrees that being *aparte* is the ideal, she constantly tries to blur the boundary between Toño's family group and the rest of the family. Attaining the position of being *aparte* is so important that Rocío is willing to renounce to the reduced workload that comes with extended family arrangements (see also Chant 1984).

2.4 Shared Mothering

An essential feature of Santo Domingo's multifamily plots is the practice of collective parenting. The flexibility of the family-house that results from its porous and variable socio-spatial boundaries enables a more fluid exercise and understanding of this practice. Amongst Mexico City's urban poor, collective parenting is important for it allows for the maximisation of the number of female members of the family plot that can engage in paid work and makes up for the lack of social security in general, and access to maternity leave and nurseries in particular. In addition, it is often also the means through which families sustain their preference of keeping child care within the family bounds.

In Santo Domingo parenting continues to be a highly gendered practice. Though it is important to acknowledge that fathers represent a diverse group and some are more active than others, generally speaking, it is still women who are essentially responsible for parenting obligations. "When men are "available" they may and often

do care for children, but women generally have less flexibility than men with regard to child care over all" (Gutmann 2007: 75). Moreover, there is a gendered division of labour as regards parenting in which men's responsibility is generally defined around the provision of economic support for the family and women's is centred around the various day-to-day tasks. When men participate they often do so in the more pleasurable aspects such as playing and providing affection and only rarely in the everyday tasks. Because it is mostly women who take part in the practice of collective parenting, I argue that it is more accurate to define this feature of the family-house as *shared mothering*.

In this section I will briefly leave the Robles family and turn to the Ortiz family as it provides a clear illustration of shared mothering in the family-house. The 200 square meter family plot is built to its maximum horizontal capacity housing a total of 24 people. As is the case with most houses in Santo Domingo, the Ortiz family-house expanded in an unplanned and organic way. In spite of this, the construction that exists today resembles a *vecindad* and is made up of five self-contained flats, and a sixth partially equipped one. The five self-contained flats belong to distinct family groups made up by five of Lupe's children, their partners and their offspring. Lupe, the founder of the plot of land no longer lives, but her descendants have remained in the family-house. The sixth structure is inhabited by Rolando, a single son that sometimes makes up a distinct family unit and sometimes adheres to Vicente's family group. Although the five flats are self-contained and count with independent access, boundaries are not fixed within the family-house but negotiated on a daily basis. Aside from the intricate web of metal staircases connecting each flat to the ground and to each other, shared parenting is a strong tie connecting the apparently independent flats and family groups, thereby blurring the boundaries.

On the various occasions in which I visited Beatriz she reminded me that she had worked outside the house all her life and emphasised that in the last four years that she has been at home she has had difficulties adapting to her new reality. Beatriz did not tire of explaining that she found house work to be extremely demanding and remembered paid work outside the house to be less stressful. At home, she explained, she has to wake up early and have breakfast ready for everybody, she has to attend to her children and to those of her sister-in-law Tere, go shopping, fix dinner, etcetera. "You never finish!" she exclaims. Beatriz recounts how, when her children were little

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Illustration 6. The Ortiz family-house

Manuel and Glady's family group	Ursula's family group	Tere's family group
Internal courtyard		
Hector's family group / Passageway	Beatriz's family group	Rolando
Street		
Ground Floor	First Floor	Second Floor
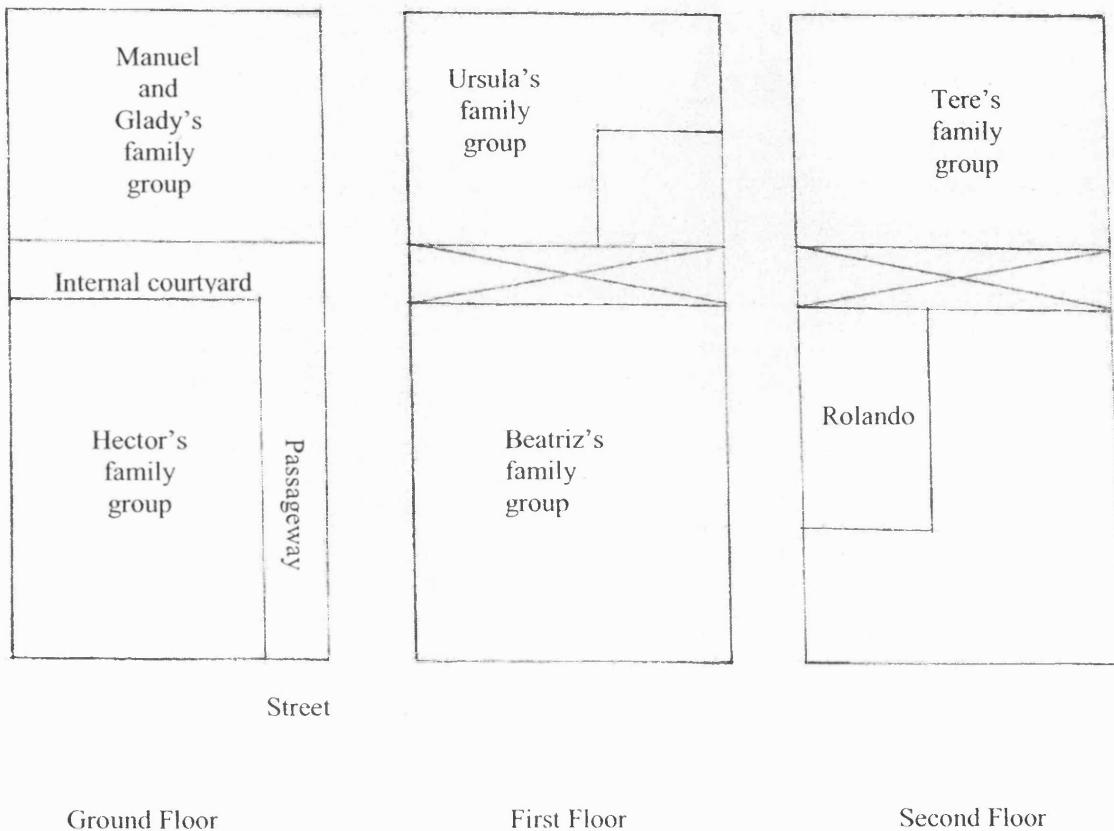
she went off to work and left them in the family-house with her mother-in-law Lupe who was still alive. "I never struggled with my children. I left them with my mother-in-law since they were very little. When I stopped working they were grown up…I only had to struggle three hours a day, when I came back from work until I put them to bed". For this reason, says Beatriz, she has little patience with children and she admires those women who dedicate themselves to the care of children which she considers to be a very though job.

Now that she is not working outside the home, Beatriz helps her sister-in-law Tere with the care of her children. However, she does not do this job alone. Ursula, another sister-in-law who lives in the plot of land and who is no longer working due to worsening diabetes shares this duty. When I met the Ortiz family Tere had a three year old son, Oscar, and a one year old daughter called Elisabeth, which she left with Beatriz and Ursula. Months after I had formally concluded fieldwork I visited the

Illustration 7. The Ortiz family

Ursula

Beatriz

Tere

Elizabeth

Oscar

.... Live in the United States

.... Ursula and Beatriz's family groups

.... Tere's children
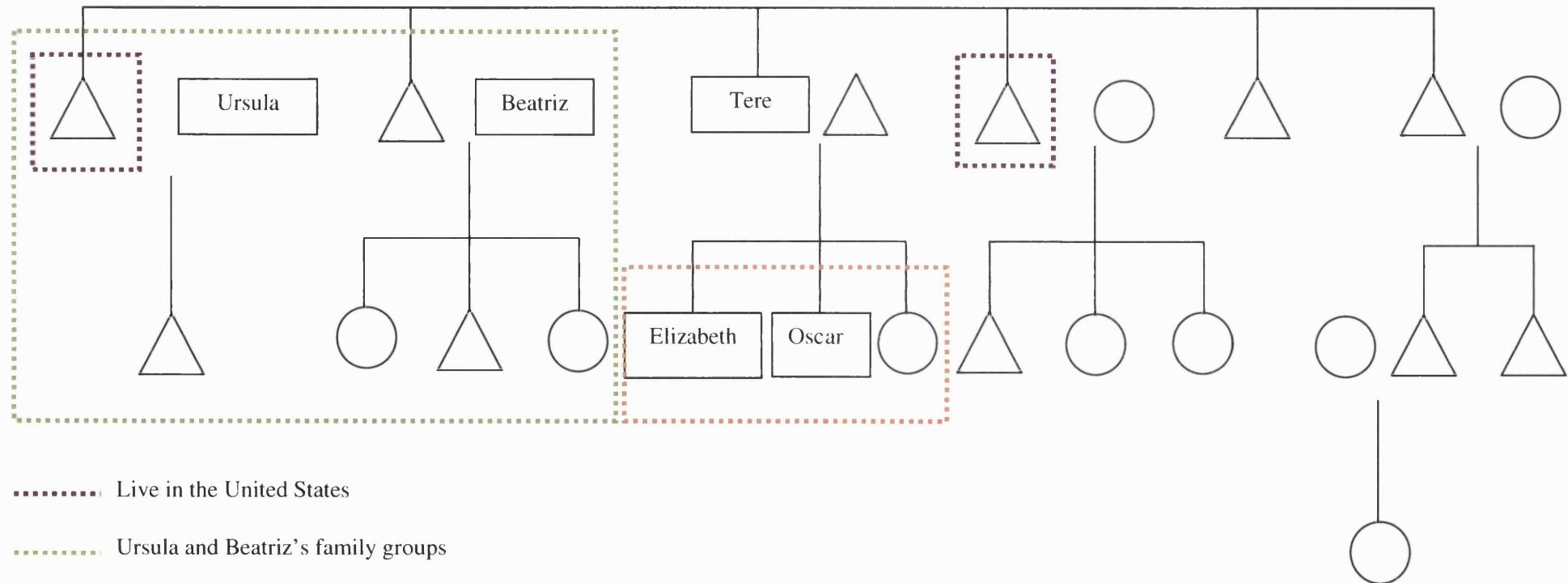
Ortiz family during a trip to Mexico City and the first thing that Ursula and Beatriz told me was that "there was a new child in the house". Immediately after I arrived in the house Ursula ran into a room, picked up the little baby girl and handed her to me proudly. For a few seconds I was confused, I did not know who to congratulate for the child. Only after I asked did they explain that the baby girl was Tere's youngest baby, that she had now returned to work and they were now also taking care of her. Tere and her husband work at the Comercial Mexicana, the supermarket that is located in the nearby upper middle class neighbourhood. They rest only one day a week which is fixed from week to week. This means that they cannot count with a common and fixed rest day and that it rarely coincides with a weekend. Tere did not have any paid maternity leave so now that the baby girl was one month and a half old she had decided to go back to work and leave her with Ursula and Beatriz, as she had done with the other two. I asked Beatriz and Ursula if Tere had been sad to leave her little baby, they looked at each other, giggled and said "to be honest, no".

At one point during my visit, Ursula complained and said that taking care of the kids was often heavy work, she then raised her eyebrows and hurried to add: "we also had our children taken care of." It is a common practice in the consolidated popular settlements of Mexico City to share parenting responsibilities among the female members of the plot of land. Although the flats in the Ortiz's plot are self-contained and each family group aspires to be *aparte* they share parenting responsibilities as if they were the same family group. While the organisation of expenses serves as a boundary setting tactic, mothering is a practice that blurs them out. Ursula and Beatriz' assertion that "there was a new child in the house" defines the house (and also the family) not in terms of each distinct family group, but sets the boundaries in the most generous way around the walls of the entire plot of land. When it comes to mothering, they are more scrambled than *aparte*. The example of shared mothering in the Ortiz plot of land reveals how the physical characteristics, the design of the spaces conforming the multi-family plot, do not determine the practices that take place in them directly. The fact that in this plot of land all family groups count with a self-contained flat with separate access does not imply that in practice these boundaries will be fixed. Although they facilitate the definition of each family group as being *aparte*, they do not automatically cause it. This is because spatial and social boundaries are not a pre-social fact but are generated through social interaction.

Corresponding to the arguments that were made earlier, shared mothering in the family-house is particularly revealing as regards the need to understand family in relation to how it is practiced. Shared mothering contradicts structural definitions of the family and is a clear illustration of how family relations are constructed as such through everyday practice. Not only is the more general relationship of being family constructed in practice, but also particular bonds, such as that of "grandfather" or "grandmother." As soon as he started to speak, Tere's son called Beatriz "grandmother" even though the structural bond is that of nephew and aunt. Beatriz not only never attempted to correct the boy but actually feels very proud of being, in practice, the boy's grandmother. The construction of this closer family tie justifies not only that the boy is taken care of by Beatriz when his parents are working, but also that he sometimes chooses to be "with his grandparents" even at times when his parents are present at home.

Although Beatriz and the boy recognise each other as having a grandmother-grandson relation, this definition of their relationship is not fixed. As Morgan (1999: 18) notes: "notions of "family" are rarely static but are constantly subjected to processes of negotiation and re-definition.". Beatriz' own children do not refer to Tere's offspring as their mother's grandchildren but actually refer to them as their mother's children (without therefore calling them brother or sister). Beatriz often provoked her husband and children by saying that one of these days she will go to the United States "to try it out," to see what it was like there. Beatriz' children laughed and said that she would not be able to leave, and that if she left she would be back immediately for she would miss "her children" too much. I also often heard Beatriz' children shouting to their mother things like "your son fell" or "your little girl is crying."

The practice of shared mothering has a direct impact on the physical qualities of the family-house and on the distinction between communal and private spaces, showing again how there is no direct relation between the design of space and the activities that take place within it. Ursula and Beatriz constantly go in and out of Tere's house to fetch things for the kids. Also, both Ursula and Beatriz have a baby bed, a small table for the children to eat, and toys inside their bedrooms. Because in practice Ursula and Beatriz share the care of the three kids the two women go in and out of each other's houses and even of each other's rooms without asking for permission.

Beatriz and Ursula confided to me that raising children collectively was not easy, and so there were many tensions with Tere. Tensions arise from Tere's need to re-establish boundaries from time to time emphasising the fact that she is the mother of the children and has the final word as to how they should be educated. Beatriz and Ursula described Tere as being very "special" and giving them strict directions as to what to do with the children. Reluctant to accept this boundary setting, Beatriz and Ursula not only tend to dismiss Tere's indications, they insisted in saying that *they* disliked and disagreed with the way Tere treated the children; Tere in turn responds by reaffirming boundaries further. Ursula told me that she feels Tere is too strict with the children and treats them harshly. She explained to me that she is very demanding with Oscar, who is only in Kindergarten and expects him to do his homework as an older boy would. Ursula affirmed that she is softer and more supportive with the child and that, as a result, he did a better job with his homework with her. Ursula told me she was very upset with Tere for she had accused Ursula of doing the homework for the boy and had forbid her to do the homework with him and he is now only allowed to do it until Tere comes back from work. Ursula says she now suffers listening to Tere shouting at the boy and the boy crying in despair. "The problem, says Ursula, is that Tere does not know her own son".

2.5 Establishing boundaries through the everyday practice of eating

An essential tactic for maximising space and avoiding being scrambled together is a practical layering of activities inside the house. I will now return to the Robles family and analyse the practice of eating to illustrate how this layering occurs. Of all the different household chores, cooking is the most gendered of all (Gutmann 2007: 152). It is therefore generally the female head of the house that does the cooking for the entire family-house, and when this is not possible she is substituted by another female member of the family. As I explained in the section on domestic work, during the week Carmen cooks for all of those living in the ground and first floor. Only on counted occasions, when Carmen goes out, Angélica cooks whatever Carmen instructed her to. Carmen buys the food, plans the menu, and cooks in very large pots enough for everybody to eat. On a normal day, she wakes up very early and fixes breakfast. Normally Carmen serves breakfast to Ramón, Pepe, and Marcelo who leave the house at the same time to go to work. Later in the morning Angélica comes

down and gives breakfast to her children and then Malena (who usually is the last to wake up) comes down and serves her children breakfast if Carmen has not done so.

Lunch and dinner are the most irregular meals. Marcelo always comes back home to eat lunch but Toño, Ramón and Pepe do so depending on the job they have and on where it is located. There is no agreed time for everyone to sit at the table either for lunch or for dinner. Carmen has the food ready and as the men come back for lunch or return from work ready to have dinner, she warms up the food and serves them as they come along. Whenever they cluster to eat, they do so along family groups. That is, sometimes Angélica waits for Ramón to arrive to have dinner, and Carmen generally eats with Marcelo. Malena and Pepe eat by themselves or attach themselves to another family group, generally their parents. But even amongst the members of a family group things are not fixed. It often happens that Angélica feeds her children and than waits to eat with Ramón. Sometimes she eats with her children and only serves Ramón food. It is also common that Tania, their older daughter, does not eat with them. She eats whenever she is hungry and often eats upstairs with Toño, where she often hangs out. Angélica only makes sure that she has eaten but does not mind when or with whom.

If during the week there is a tendency for everyone to eat whenever they come back to the house, and thus not to eat together, on Sunday this is intensified. Carmen goes to visit Laura and Alma - her two daughters who live independently - and does not cook that day. There is no common pot that day so each family group solves what they will eat independently. Malena and Pepe often get together to buy something, but this is also not a rule.

It is only on a small number of occasions such as Christmas that all the members of the family-house eat together in a performed ritual. During these rituals, rather than demarcating boundaries between family groups to achieve a sense of the *juntos pero no revueltos*, eating together becomes a strategy to perform and reinforce family unity. In spite of the sporadic nature of these rituals their importance endows the dining room with a particular relevance inside the house. This relevance is enhanced by the fact that "its existence seems to respond more to an "external norm", to a dominant pattern of what is considered to be basic in a house" (Lima Barrios 1992:

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56, my translation). Having a proper dining room with a large table to seat the entire family is thus seen as a symbol of both family unity and status.

Not only is there no fixed time at which they all eat together, there is also no fixed obligation to eat at the house. I was present on many occasions in which one of Carmen's children came back from work, said hello and went up to their rooms without saying whether they have already eaten or if they would like to eat. Carmen cooks enough food for everyone knowing that one of them could say that s/he is not hungry or that s/he has already eaten. If this happens and there is food left over, she uses it for the next day.

A further level of flexibility is added by the fact that not everyone eats in the dining room, except for Marcelo and Carmen. We see once more how, although enabling or constraining, the design of the house does not determine the location and character of the activities in it. Angélica often warms up food for herself and for her children and eats upstairs in one of her rooms. She feeds her younger child first and sits him around a small children's table by her bed. After he has eaten, she eats sitting on a chair or on her bed. Angélica says she prefers to eat upstairs for her younger child eats better. She says that Malena's children are too violent and often get into fights with her son, so she prefers to have him eat and play in the room. Pepe and Malena also sometimes eat upstairs, in their rooms, but Malena's children tend to eat downstairs. There is a small table besides one of the living room sofas which they often take out, place in front of the TV and have the children eat there. Furniture is often used to overcome the constraints set by the design of the house, as in this case turning bedrooms, or living rooms into dining rooms.

Once, again Toño and his family are *aparte* when it comes to cooking, eating, and clearing up. Toño's wife cooks for her husband and children on a daily basis and they all eat upstairs. If Toño wants to eat downstairs with his mother, he does have to let his wife know and make sure she has not cooked yet. The strict boundary between Toño's family and the rest, however, is generally broken by children. As I said before, it often happens that Tania, Ramón's daughter eats upstairs or that Toño's son eats with Carmen if he has been playing outside with the rest of the kids.

The practice of eating clearly illustrates how living together in a multifamily plot does not mean living as one single family. The complex layering that can bee observed in the family's eating patterns – eating at different times, in different places – does not simply result from the different and busy schedules that the members of the house have. It is also a tactic they deploy for the demarcation of boundaries of family groups and a tactic to create several houses within the house. This is particularly evident in Angélica's tendency to eat upstairs within her family group's space. This layering is also a tactic the family uses to maximise their limited space and avoid the feeling of being crammed together. As Angélica told me: "Sometimes when we all come down to eat together, well it's very nice. But there are so many kids that we get claustrophobic. We are many and the space is very small."

2.6 Everyday interaction

Daily interaction in the house is layered in a similar way as eating. Even though there are fifteen people living in the house it seldom happens that they are all – or even a large portion of them – together. The different schedules each member has often mean that they see each other briefly or not at all on a normal day. For example, Marcelo described to me that: "with Malena it's very seldom [that he sees her] because she gets up very late and when I come back she is already sleeping". The layering of everyday interactions in the family-house partly results from structurally defined schedules such as those of formal work and school. But, to the extent that it is possible, the different members of the family-house shape their own schedules to negotiate distance and proximity and come closer to the *juntos pero no revueltos* ideal.

Women are generally the ones who interact more, but even they do not see each other constantly. This can be a result of the different household chores they have, but also due to a conscious strategy to avoid conflict. Angélica explains to me that: "I have my own space, my room. I finish my housework and I lock myself in". She does this because she does not get along with Malena that well; she says that because they are the same age and are very different they tend to collide a lot "once, we even got into a physical fight".

As regards daily interaction, the case of those living *aparte* is interesting. Opposite to what has been said about expenses, food, and domestic work, informal daily interaction is used by those living *aparte* as a means to maintain a bond with other family groups in the plot. Although Toño – or the rest of his family group – seldom eats in the ground floor or spends time in the living room, he comes by at least once a day to say hallo to his mother. It is often the case that he lets his mother know when he is leaving and when he has returned. It is important to note that the bond between the family group living *aparte* and the rest is not maintained by all. In-laws tend to be solely involved in boundary demarcating and not in establishing a bond. As with Simmel's doors, boundaries can be opened and traversed thus enabling that which has been demarcated as distinct to be included again. This is because separating and connecting are two sides of the same act (Simmel 2000b: 172) .

2.7 Negotiating communal and private spaces

The most obvious tactic for setting boundaries, which I have not discussed yet, is the demarcation of communal and private spaces inside the house. What constitutes a communal or a private space is not the same throughout the plot of land. The family groups that succeed in establishing themselves as *aparte* demarcate their whole self-contained flats as private spaces for the rest of the inhabitants of the plot of land. Inside the self-contained flat, private and communal spaces will then be demarcated for those living in the flat. The definition of the self-contained flats of the families who are *aparte* as private, comes with a definition of the rest of the plot of land as a private, separate house. Being a physically independent flat – counting with a separate access and with full facilities – is a necessary condition for the designation of an area of the plot of land as a flat *aparte* and private.

In the Robles family the family group centred around Toño is the only one that lives in a space that holds the status of private to the rest of the inhabitants of the plot of land. As there is no need to walk through Toño's house to access the rest of the house or to make use of a shared facility; going to his house is a result of a conscious decision and a will to "visit". Knocking at the door is expected before entering.

Although firm and effective, this boundary is also relatively porous. It is in front of Carmen, who is considered as the "owner" and founder of the plot of land, that

boundaries are most porous. Although on a daily basis she accepts this boundary and acts accordingly, on given occasions she is allowed to redefine it. A clear example of such an occasion was the day Carmen showed me the last extension – Toño's flat – that had been done to the family-house. She showed me up the stairs and knocked the door before coming in. As soon as she heard the voice of Rocío, her daughter-in-law, she announced we were coming and we went in. Once inside the house Carmen briefly introduced me to Rocío and then hurried to give me a tour around the entire flat without asking Rocío for permission. During the time we were there Rocío retreated to the kitchen from where she looked at us nervously and waited until we left.

The potential flexibility of this boundary was enabled by an addition done to the house. A few years ago a metal staircase going from the ground floor patio to the kitchen on the second floor (from inside to inside) was added. Although there is no explicit rule as to the use of these stairs, in practice it is only used by the children, by Rocío and by Carmen. The stair thus enables these particular members of the family to move from one house to the other unnoticed, and thus without compromising the validity of the boundary between the two flats.

Inside the rest of the family-house a complex definition of communal and private spaces is negotiated on a daily basis. As a general framework for the Robles family, the kitchen, living room and dining room, ground floor bathroom, and the storage area besides the stairs are considered to be communal areas for those living on the ground and first floors. Carmen and Marcelo's bedroom, as well as the other bedrooms on the first floor, are all private spaces. It is in the communal spaces that the members of the family meet. They often gather around the TV or sit around waiting for someone else to show up. Although there is a TV in each bedroom of the house, as Carmen explained "they like to come down here, to be here downstairs". If one of them wants to talk to someone in particular, s/he would knock at his/her door and they would then go to the living room or dining room to talk, they would very seldom enter each other's rooms. The living room and the dining room are also the areas where all of those who do not live in the family-house are received, while the remaining spaces are not accessible to them.

It is important to note that although, generally speaking, the dining room and the living room are communal spaces, they are not equally accessible to all. As Lima Barrios (1992: 57, my translation) observed, "right to the use of some spaces within the house is "earned" through an acquired status, not everybody can make use of particular spaces or objects". This is clearly illustrated by the fact that although Angélica has lived in the house for over a decade she tends to spend most of her time inside her room and when she is in the living room she never lies down or adopts an informal posture. Although her relation to her mother-in-law Carmen is very good, and she insists that she is comfortable and happy in the house, she feels she does not have the same right to the communal spaces as the other members of the family.

The definition and safeguarding of private spaces in the family-house is fundamental, it allows those who have not reached the ideal condition of being *aparte* to "be all together but each with its own space", as Carmen put it. The doors of the different rooms are always closed and often (as they themselves told me) locked with key. Whether doors are locked or not, the dwellers of the family-house always knock at the door if they want to speak to someone who is not in one of the communal areas. Locking the door with keys is not perceived by others as lack of trust but rather as a reinforcement of the privacy of the space which they all want. Furthermore, locking the bedroom doors is a way of treating them as outside doors and thus of giving the bedrooms the status of a different house all together.

All members of the family-house share a pride about the existence and effectiveness of their private spaces. I often heard them assert that they "respect each other's space" and proudly state that they seldom visit each other's rooms. Marcelo once told me: "I am not the kind of person that you would see up there [in other people's rooms]. Up there, in Angélica's room, its been I don't know how many months that I haven't been, I don't like being a drag. I tell you, we have always been together here." Granting someone else's private space the status of a truly private space and respecting it will in turn confer his/her own space the same status. With this logic in mind they make a conscious effort to constantly actualise the definition of the rooms as private and to safeguard them. Of the different boundaries that exist in the family-house the one defining private space is the least porous of all.

Although it is accepted that the bedrooms constitute the private inside the house, there are contradictions as to whether they are seen (and used) merely as bedrooms or

as actual separate houses within the family-house. Giving the bedrooms the status of a house brings them closer to the ideal of *juntos pero no revueltos*. The way in which the members of the family-house refer to the bedrooms depends on the kind of boundary that wants to be established, or the status that wants to be granted.

As was already suggested before, there is an unspoken rule which allows the female head of the house – in her quality of founder and owner of the plot of land – and children to traverse the established boundaries thereby making them porous. Whilst adults are expected to knock at doors and respect the distinction of communal and private spaces, children navigate the plot of land making no distinctions. Therefore, through the children's comings and goings between the different spaces, the boundary between family groups and houses becomes significantly permeable.

In addition to being able to traverse the different boundaries, the female head of the house has the role of mediating the tensions that arise from the everyday negotiating of boundaries. In this case, it is not so much an unspoken rule but a role the female head of the household is fully conscious of. Carmen commented to me that she holds a key position in the house and that she mediates between the different members of the house in order to avoid disputes. She even voiced her concern of what would happen if she were to die for she believes "the house would not be able to hold itself together".

3. Negotiating socio-spatial boundaries: outside the family-house

I have argued that families develop a variety of tactics to build socio-spatial boundaries within the house, thus demarcating family groups as distinct from the rest living in the house, and spaces as private and distinct from the rest of the built area in the plot of land. I will now argue that similar to the boundaries within the family-house, the boundary dividing the plot of land from the surrounding social and spatial world is also significantly permeable. Thus, where the family-house ends and the neighbourhood begins, as well as where the limits to the family are set, both concepts are defined day to day.

3.1 Public/private: The home as workplace

"If there is one lesson for planners in the massive literature on slums and squatter community life, it is the finding that housing in these areas is not for home life alone. A house is a production space, market place, entertainment centre, financial institution, and also a retreat. A low-income community is the same, only more so. Both the home and the community derive their vitality from this multiplicity of uses." Laquian cited in Kellett and Tipple 2000: 204.

Photograph 21. "I used to put a little table there, with ceramic things that I brought with me, and I sold them there"
Source: Family photo albums

Carmen wanted to show me some photos from her wedding with Marcelo, but as her photos were all inside a plastic bag following no specific order, we ended up looking and talking through many more. The photos elicited memories from different times of her life, following no chronological order. The photo above was one of the images that caught her attention. The picture shows Carmen standing by a small round table in what is now the dining room of her house. The cupboard on the left side of the image is the same one they have today, but the rest has changed. At present, the dining room has a large rectangular table that seats six people leaving little room to move around it, and the pictures on the wall are different. "I used to put a little table there, with ceramic things that I brought with me, and I sold them there" she explained. Throughout the years Carmen has done many things to earn a little bit of money. For many years she gathered a small income washing and ironing clothes for the upper-middle class residents of the adjacent neighbourhood located across the

main road. She walked around the area knocking on people's doors offering her services and thus managed to secure a handful of clients. Her routine consisted in walking to her client's homes, collecting their clothes with the regularity they chose, walking back to her house, where she then worked, and returning the clothes to her clients clean, ironed and neatly folded. Today Carmen sells second hand clothes both outside and inside her house. On most weekdays Carmen sets a little clothes stand by the main road that borders the neighbourhood. There is a small private University on the other side of the road which brings many students in around lunch time. After finishing her household chores Carmen runs to catch the crowd as they are leaving University to go home and eat. Some days she manages to sell four or five pieces, and others, having sat under the midday burning sun, she comes back home empty handed. On most afternoons Carmen's brother Omar substitutes her sister and places a small stand with nuts where she had her clothes stand. Omar owns and runs a small shop in the ground floor of his house. He sells daily household staples such as eggs, milk, bread, pasta, and canned products. His store is open everyday and is the place where all his neighbours do their basic shopping. As a strategy to reach out beyond his neighbours (but also in order to get out of his house) Omar takes out his small stand with nuts onto the main street hoping to catch some passers by. Carmen's neighbours know she sells clothes so they often come to her house to see what she has got whenever her stand is not out. In those occasions, she drags the two large bags of clothes, which are stored in the small storage area beside the stairs on the ground floor, to the living room. In no time the sofas are all covered with T-shirts, skirts, sweaters, and everything one can imagine. For that particular moment in time, her living room is transformed into a clothes stand, her house thus becoming a workplace.

The creation of home-based enterprises is a common feature of low-income settlements in cities of the developing world (Tipple 2004). Consolidated popular settlements are full of small shops selling daily household staples, small eateries, stationary stores, internet cafes, mechanics, hairdressers, bakeries, etc. All these different home-based enterprises mainly serve people from the neighbourhood (Ibid.: 373). Informal rental housing is another form of home-based enterprise that has expanded at a large pace in the consolidated self-help neighbourhoods in last two decades (Coulomb 1988; Tipple 2004). In the more established of these enterprises, the general pattern is that the ground floor of the house – which was generally

initially used as dormitory and then used as dining and living room area as the house expanded – is "cleared" from domestic activities and set up as a distinct space devoted to work. The house is also used as a workplace in more informal ways: a room that is usually used as a living room or dining room temporarily becomes a clothes stand, the washing area becomes the laundry of the upper-middle class residents of the adjacent neighbourhood, a room or bathroom temporarily becomes a hairdressers, etc. Both in the more formal home-based enterprises and in the cases where a portion of the house is temporarily transformed into a working space, the house becomes a mixed use structure, where the distinction between work and domestic functions is blurred.

Photograph 22. Home-based enterprises in Santo Domingo: internet café and corner shop. Source: author.
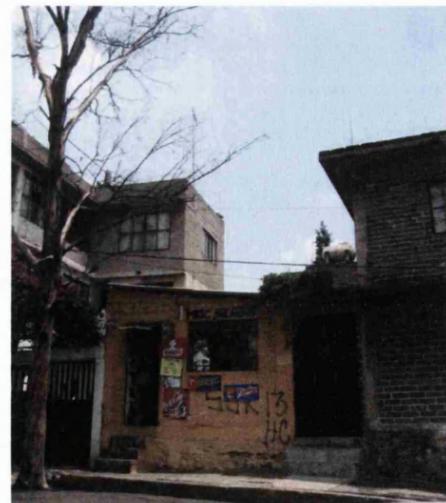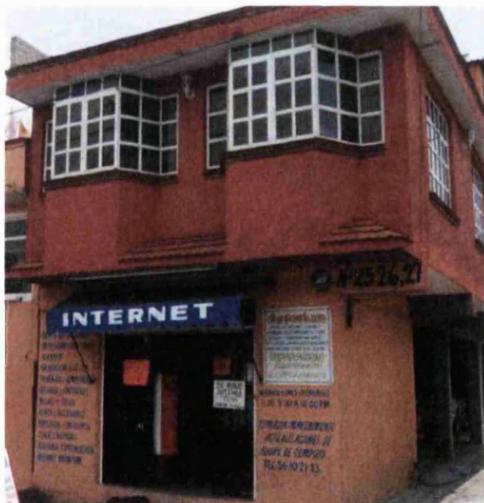
What I would like to emphasise here is that home-based enterprises imply a negotiation of private and public spaces, domestic and work spaces, outside and inside the family-house. The space of the house and the furniture are used in flexible and creative ways in order to create temporal distinctions between dichotomies. While the more informal home-based enterprises clearly illustrate the existing constant negotiation, and boundary setting, the more established home-based enterprises illustrate the permeable character of those boundaries. Even in the cases where a distinct physically separated space – the ground floor – has been assigned for the home-based enterprise, the distinction between public and private, domestic

Photograph 23. Home-based enterprises in Santo Domingo: general supplies and copy shop. Source: author.

and work space is not so clear cut. Boundaries are porous and leakages occur: children are helped by their parents with their homework while they attend to their small business, family visits are done inside the working area, merchandise is ordered to providers from the living room while watching TV, the returns of the day are calculated at the dining room accompanied by a glass of soda, etc, etc.

3.2 Inside/Outside: The neighbourhood as extension of the house

The door to the Robles's house is always unlocked, with children constantly running in and out of the house. In the after school hours and on weekends children spend a significant amount of time playing on the street outside the house. They run around with the other children from the plot of land but also with other kids from neighbouring houses. Of the many hours they spend playing (and often fighting) outside the house, not all of them are under supervision of an adult. Aside from playing and having fun, older children are responsible for looking after the younger ones. In an informal but effective manner adults keep an eye on the children and on whether another adult or older child is present.

Though mostly populated by children, adults are also often found outside the house. Behind the Robles's house there is a small metal bench where it is common to find Carmen chatting merrily with a *comadre* or with her brother Omar. Marcelo spends

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many hours when he is not at work chatting and fixing his taxi with the help of a neighbour. Malena regularly meets with one of the neighbours, who is a close friend, outside the house. On her birthday I remember Malena going out with her friend, spreading out a blanket by one of the houses' exterior walls and sitting down to chat and play cards. The streets are often blocked with children and young men playing football. Parked cars along the street serve as seats for many men getting together for a conversation. It is also common to see a man or a women seated on a stool in front of their house enjoying the sun and watching people pass by.

The street makes up for the existing limited space within the house by providing extra space so that the residents of the densely populated plots of land are not scrambled. Outside the house, the lack of green and open spaces, leisure facilities and playgrounds mean that activities are pushed out of the house directly onto the street. In practice, the street becomes an extension of the house, the most public of its communal spaces. The boundary dividing the plot of land from the street, although more solid than the boundaries inside the house is nevertheless porous. Looking inside the plot of land I have argued that the family-house is at the same time one and many houses. In its relationship to the street the limits of the plot of land become significantly blurry, making the distinction between outside and inside, of public and private not so easily discernable. Thus the neighbourhood, as Pierre Mayol describes it, becomes an area of public space which becomes *particularised space* through everyday practice.

> "The neighbourhood is the middle term in an existential dialectic (on a personal level) and a social one (on the level of a group of users), between inside and outside. And it is in the tension between these two terms, an inside and an outside, which little by little becomes the continuation of an inside, that the appropriation of space takes place. As a result, the neighbourhood can be called an outgrowth of the abode; for the dweller it amounts to the sum of all trajectories inaugurated from the dwelling place. It is less an urban surface, transparent for everyone or statistically measurable, than the possibility offered everyone to inscribe in the city a multitude of trajectories whose hard core permanently remains the private sphere" (de Certeau, Giard and Pierre Mayol 1998: 11).

3.3 Where does each house / family end and another one begin?

In her classic research on Cerrada del Cóndor, which was then a recently formed popular settlement in Mexico City, Larissa Lomnitz argued that:

> "Although housing is apparently grouped at random, in fact, its distribution responds to social structures, especially kinship structures" (Lomnitz 1975: 39, my translation).

Lomnitz described Cerrada del Cóndor as a tightly knit community, in which social networks were the most important resource for survival. Social networks were so central that they permeated all aspects of social life and were imprinted in the settlement's spatial distribution. As in Cerrada del Cóndor the distribution of housing in Santo Domingo is closely tied to kinship structures. As it has been previously shown, it is through informal channels of communication centred around the extended family, friends, and *paisanos* that the urban poor find out about land that will be invaded or that is being sold. Popular settlements are thus originally populated by relatives, friends and *paisanos*, who clustered together as plots of land were being sold or distributed by the leaders in invasion processes.

Ursula grew up in Copilco el Bajo, an adjacent neighbourhood to Santo Domingo. Her parents rented a room in the plot of land of her maternal grandmother, where her grandparents lived, and an aunt rented another space for her family. When Ursula was still young, her aunt died leaving her three cousins orphans. This event altered the grandmother's decision to inherit the plot of land to the families of her two children and decided to leave it all to the orphans. Seeing that they would have no land to inherit, Ursula's family considered the option of participating in a land invasion or buying a plot in the periphery and begin the process of building their own house. Having heard that a land invasion was to take place in Santo Domingo, Ursula's brother José decided to participate and secured a plot of land for his family (A) and another one for his maternal grandparents (B) (see Illustration 8). Before the whole family moved into Santo Domingo Ursula married Juan Carlos. Juan Carlos's family had also participated in the invasion of Santo Domingo and had begun building their house on the same street as Ursula's family (C). Ursula and Juan Carlos moved in with the rest of Juan Carlos's family to share one of the two rooms

that had already been built. With Ursula's and Juan Carlos's marriage, and the intense interaction amongst neighbours in the initial phase of development of the settlement, the two families became acquainted with one anther. Thus Gladys, Ursula's sister, became closer and closer to one of Juan Carlos's brothers. After a short period of courtship Gladys married Juan Carlos's brother, Andrés, and joined her sister Ursula in her husband's plot of land. With the years, the plot of land has expanded significantly and the different family groups now live in distinct self-contained apartments.

Meanwhile, José and the rest of Ursula's family continued building on their plot of land. With the years José fell in love with Griselda, a younger girl who lived with her family 50 meters away on the same street (D). Shortly after getting together Griselda and José got married and pondered upon where to live. Griselda's parents offered the young couple to build a space for themselves within their plot of land. The couple thus built a small house in which they lived for a number of years. Then, one of Griselda's uncles, who owned a house in another popular settlement of Mexico City, decided to move to the United States and asked José and Griselda whether they would be willing to look after his house. With the aim of helping the uncle but also of gaining more independence Griselda and José accepted the offer and moved out of their house in Santo Domingo. The ground floor was soon rented out and the first floor was occupied by José and Griselda's older son who, at a young age got a girl pregnant and was forced to marry. Soon after she was widowed, José's mother, Silvia insisted that José and his wife should move back into her plot of land and build a new house. José accepted the offer and, once more, began to build a house. Back in Santo Domingo José rented the ground floor of a house located in Escuinapa, Santo Domingo's main commercial street, and set up his business there. With the establishment of Escuinapa as the main commercial street and seeing that his business went well, the owners of the house raised the rent. José then moved to another space, less that 100 meters away, on the same street. Driven by higher rents José has moved his business a number of times but managed to remain on the same street at a close distance to his house (E).

On the same street where Ursula, José, and Gladys live is the house of their parental grandmother and their aunts (F). Following the common practice of marrying someone from the neighbourhood, their aunt Rosario married the neighbour that lived

in the house behind her house (G). Since his family's plot of land was already fully built, they made an extension in Rosario's plot of land. A couple of blocks away from this family cluster, is the house of Robert, another of the Ornelas brothers (H).

Illustration 8. Where does each house end and another one begin? Where does each family end and another one begin?

Plot A
Plot B
Plot C
Plot D
Plot E
Plot F
Plot G
Plot H
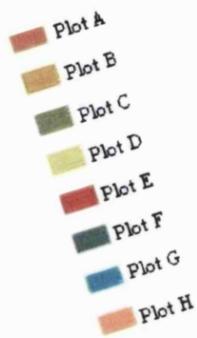
Facilitated by spatial proximity, the interaction amongst the residents of all these plots of land is very intense. Often on a daily basis, they go from one house to the other, crossing the main door to the plot of land without knocking and coming unannounced. "Oh, you are busy, I will come back later" is the reaction when the person visited is not available. Ursula visits her mother on a daily basis; she generally walks up to her house for lunch, but if she has no time she pops around later for a chat. Knowing that Silvia is on her own, Rosario and her sister Lupita also come to see her regularly and often have breakfast with her. As a result of her diabetes Silvia prefers to avoid too much sun and physical strain so she asks her sisters-in-law to do the everyday shopping at the nearby street market for her. In the afternoon Silvia comes by to pick up her groceries and sits down for a coffee. Aside from playing on the street, the children of the different plots of land constantly move from one plot of land to the other looking for food, company and someone to play. They come into the various houses unannounced and leave with an informal "bye, see you later". In addition to visiting family and neighbours, José's children also often walk by his business in their way back or to school to say hallo or to get something they need.

Not only are the plots of land extended out into the street, but through the intense daily interaction amongst the residents of the various plots, the boundaries defining each plot as a distinct separate house become blurry. If the questions that arise when looking into one plot of land are: is it one house or many houses? Is it one family or many family groups? The questions that arise when looking at the interaction and daily practices amongst some of the plots of land are: where does each house end and another one begin? Where does each family end and another one begin? Some relations are closer than others and some spaces are more private than others. Depending on who asks and from where, the answers to these questions will be different, but all equally valid.

4. Conclusion

In the consolidated popular settlements of Mexico City, family members have developed a variety of tactics to introduce or transform socio-spatial boundaries with the aim of getting closer to the *juntos pero no revueltos* ideal. I have here argued that the organisation of expenses, the division of domestic work, the practice of shared mothering, the organisation of eating, everyday sociability, and the designation of

communal and private spaces are all boundary setting tactics oriented towards the achievement of their residential ideal. They enable those living in a shared plot of land to define themselves as one unified family and/or to subdivide into various family groups. These tactics also allow the residents of the family-house to mould their residential spaces defining them as a single house and/or subdividing it into distinct, separate houses.

The multifamily plots characteristic of consolidated popular settlements are not simply houses where extended families live. What a detailed analysis of the practices that take place inside the family-house revealed is that in this living together there are varied and ever changing spatial and social arrangements. Although living together means that a practice of the extended family takes place, how it is acted out is a product of constant negotiation, it is a fluid and complex process. Within the family-house social relations are constantly being framed through the setting of physical and social boundaries (Simmel 2000a: 141).

The everyday practices analysed in this chapter are clearly gendered. In spite of the empowerment that women have achieved through their central participation in the housing process gender roles remain largely unchallenged. This is because, through the housing process, women's association to the domestic sphere is reinforced, thus ultimately reproducing the status quo. Although men of the younger generations perform significantly more household chores than their parents and grandparents did, and though they are generally more present fathers, generally speaking, the definition of men as bread winners and women as mothers and housewives is sustained.

The boundary setting tactics employed by the members of the family-house suggest a critique of the environmental determinist approach to the built environment. Such an approach is based upon the premise that there is a direct causal relation between the design of space and people's behaviour in it. Under this logic it would follow that looking at a houses' plan, one could "read" the practices and social relations taking place in them. The analysis presented in this chapter suggests otherwise. As Simmel argued: "The boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially" (Ibid.: 143). What I have tried to show in this chapter is that, in practice, through their ability to constantly set boundaries

(physical or not), people constantly shape and reshape their residential environments and thus frame and re-frame their social relations.

In addition, the chapter points towards a critique of what Ingold calls "the building perspective" and lays the ground for the arguments made in the following chapter. The building perspective is an understanding of the built environment based on the premise that "worlds are made before they are lived in" (Ingold 2000: 179). The essence of this approach is the separation of the built environment from the act of dwelling; putting the built environment first and then the practices that take place in it. By contrast, the organic quality of self-help housing clearly illustrates how the family, the physical environment of the house, and the family practices performed in it, emerge from the same building-dwelling process. Moreover, it exemplifies how this process has no clear end in that the house, as the family, is never a finished object. The house emerges together with the practice of dwelling and is constantly reconstituted by it. The boundary setting tactics analysed in this chapter show how both house and family are perpetually under construction. "Building, then, is a process that is continually going on, for as long as people dwell in an environment" (Ibid.: 189). This is because the space of the house is inseparable from the activities that take place in it; dwelling and building are indivisible. Following this line of argument, the following chapter will look at the social consequences of building the family-house.

CHAPTER EIGHT – BRICK BY BRICK: THE SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF BUILDING

> "…alterations were not always done for functional purposes. They were done to keep up with the times or because notions about living changed, because one could not identify with what one took over because it belonged to a different generation. The occupant would rarely have been interested in aesthetic values, and anyway such considerations would change as much as the houses. But the house was an important means of illustrating his position in life. It was his social expression, his way of establishing his ego. For this, it was necessary that the occupant should possess his dwelling in the fullest sense of the word. If changes were made it was not in order to preserve the building, but because one could not afford to pull down and start afresh". (Habraken 1999: 19)

1. Introduction

If one walks along Santo Domingo today, more than three decades after the land invasion, one sees that the neighbourhood is still under constant transformation. Although with less intensity than in the early years, building is continuously taking place. The neighbourhood's houses are thus a mix of recently painted colourful façades and non-plastered walls of bare grey blocks. It is not uncommon to see building materials piled up outside a house when construction is underway, or to find that they are stored somewhere inside the plot of land mounting up and waiting for construction to commence. The resulting urban landscape is made up of houses that have left numerous steel reinforcing rods for a second floor or a new room exposed into the open air. Resembling an artificial forest, thousands of steel rods rise towards the sun, and while they slowly rust they express the shared aspiration of continued building.

Photograph 24. "A forest of aspirations".
Source: author.

This chapter argues that the family-house process is more than the struggle to attain adequate shelter and respond to a family's changing spatial needs in the context of limited economic resources. What constitutes the essence of the family-house is not the housing form that is produced but the process of building itself. The chapter therefore proposes to see the house not only as an expression of its occupants needs, possibilities and values, but to see the *process of building* a house as being of social significance. Based on a brick by brick analysis of the development of Santo Domingo's houses the chapter demonstrates that the family-house process is the process of building and consolidating families. It then unpacks the idea that the family-house process is also the building of social acceptance and recognition. To conclude, the chapter shows how behind the material and symbolic rationale for house construction, the impulse to build itself is what lies at the heart. From this incessant impulse to build a strong sense of belonging is created which explains the attachment that the residents of Santo Domingo have towards their neighbourhood and their houses more specifically.

2. The struggle to secure adequate shelter

Before being able to secure a piece of land in Santo Domingo, the Hernández family had long struggled to access housing by participating in a number of failed land invasions. Once in Santo Domingo, the first structure that the family erected was a multipurpose room made out of corrugated metal, and a small latrine built out of plastic bags. With the birth of their third son in 1974, Ana María and Poncho decided to build an extra corrugated cardboard room directly contiguous to their previous shack so as to have a separate room for the children. By the beginning of the 1980's the Hernández family began to buy bricks, sand, and other necessary materials to commence building of the first permanent structure. Ana María remembers that they prioritised the building of two bedrooms because their children, and especially the two girls, were growing and needed more privacy.

> "Yes, the first room was a bedroom ...for my girls, the first room was their room. Meanwhile we continued living in the little corrugated metal room. Yes [we built this room] because they already, because of their homework classmates from their high-school came; to do their homework, or for some get-together. That is, things started to change, so, that's how we thought of, of the privacy of our children, of our daughters, no? in this case, their privacy and ours as well." (Ana María)

As the case of the Hernández family shows, at a first level of analysis self-help housing can be understood as a family's attempt to access shelter. It can also be said that self-help housing tends to expand because, as families grow, their need for space and privacy increases. House expansion, however, does not simply take place whenever there is need for space, it depends on the family's economic possibilities. According to Bazant (1985), the need for more space is a direct consequence of the gradual growth that families go through and is therefore seen to be determined by the family's stage in the life cycle. The implication of this argument that all families go through easily discernible stages common to them all, and that these stages demand certain spatial characteristics. Bazant's explanatory model also suggests that all families undergo a gradual process of economic improvement. He argues that the interaction between a family's rising need for space resulting from gradual family growth, and their expanding income results in a given linear and irreversible consolidation and expansion process of the house. Thereby, each stage in the housing process corresponds to a stage in the family's economic development and in their life cycle.

Although family growth and economic conditions are determinant elements of house consolidation and expansion, my own research suggests that houses do not undergo a simple and irreversible linear expansion. To illustrate this point I will briefly turn to the Molina family-house. The Molina family first built a small multipurpose room out of corrugated metal and dirt floor, a kitchen and a bathroom made out of the same materials. As the family-house consolidated and expanded the initial layout of the plot did not remain unchanged. In 1974 the original kitchen was moved to a new location because it had attracted a colony of rats which they could not get rid of. To avoid the problem of rats an extra investment was made in order to equip the new kitchen with cement floor. Two years later, the original bathroom was moved to the opposite corner of the plot with the intention of freeing up space to begin construction of permanent rooms in that end of the plot . A new bathroom was built on top of another crack in the volcanic rock and made of the same material as the previous one. This second bathroom was dismantled in less than a year for it was only used while the construction of the new permanent rooms took place. During this time the second temporary kitchen was also removed to make place for construction. The first years of the Molina family-house presented here illustrate that house expansion does not follow a linear development. The houses do not undergo a simple

and irreversible expansion where additions are affixed to an original structure to satisfy an incremental need for space. The family-house process often entails the dismantling of structures, the erection of new ones, and the abandonment of others that respond to a complex array of motivations that are not limited to providing more space for a growing family.

Illustration 9. The Molina family-house: initial layout
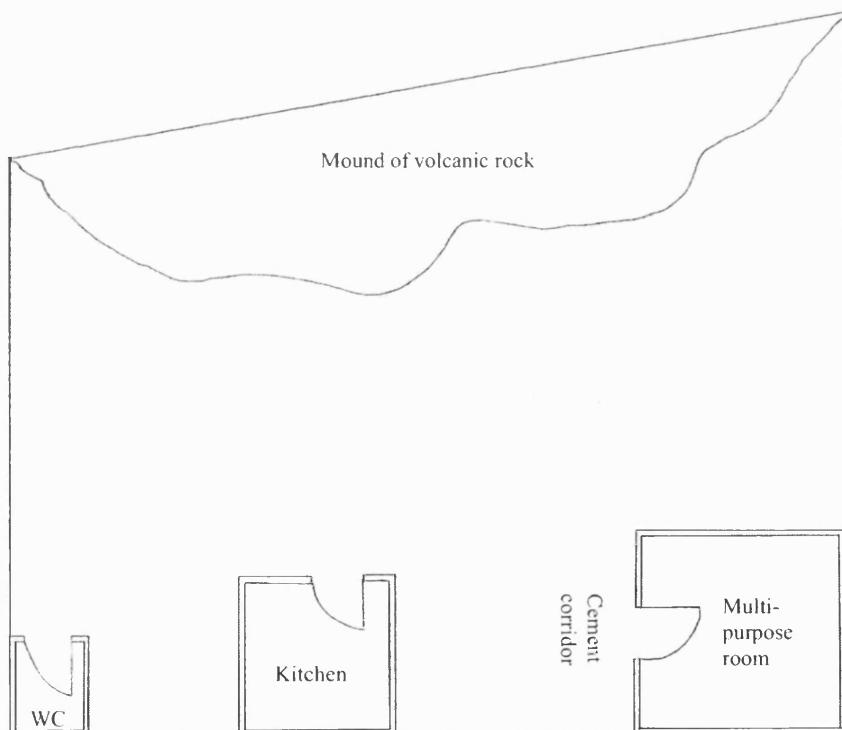
Illustration 10. The Molina family-house: 1974
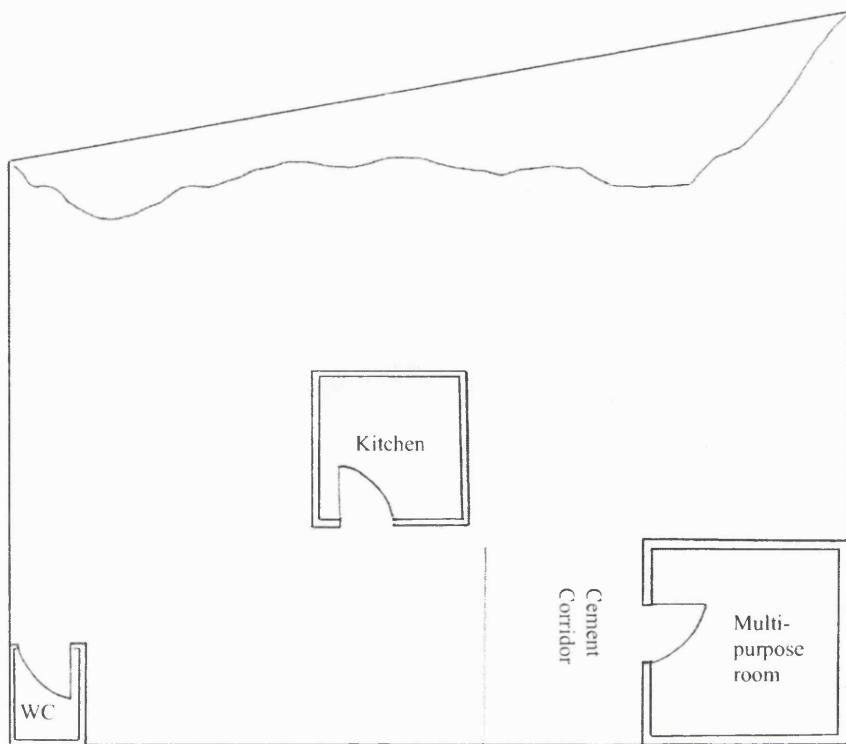
Illustration 11. The Molina family-house: 1976
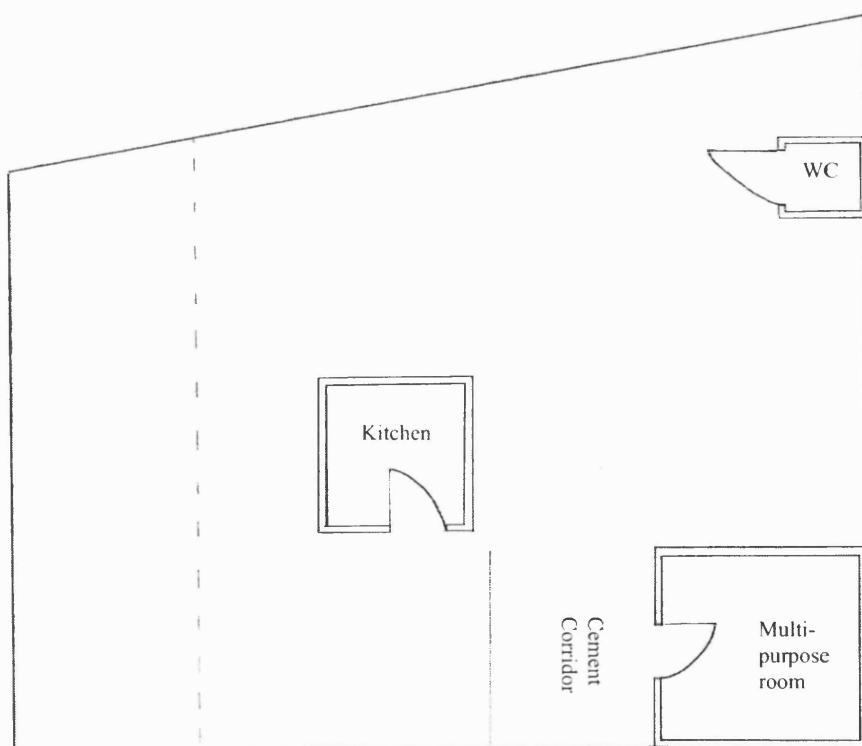
Illustration 12. The Molina family-house: first permanent structure

WC

Parent's room

Kitchen/ Children's room

Cement Corridor

Children's room
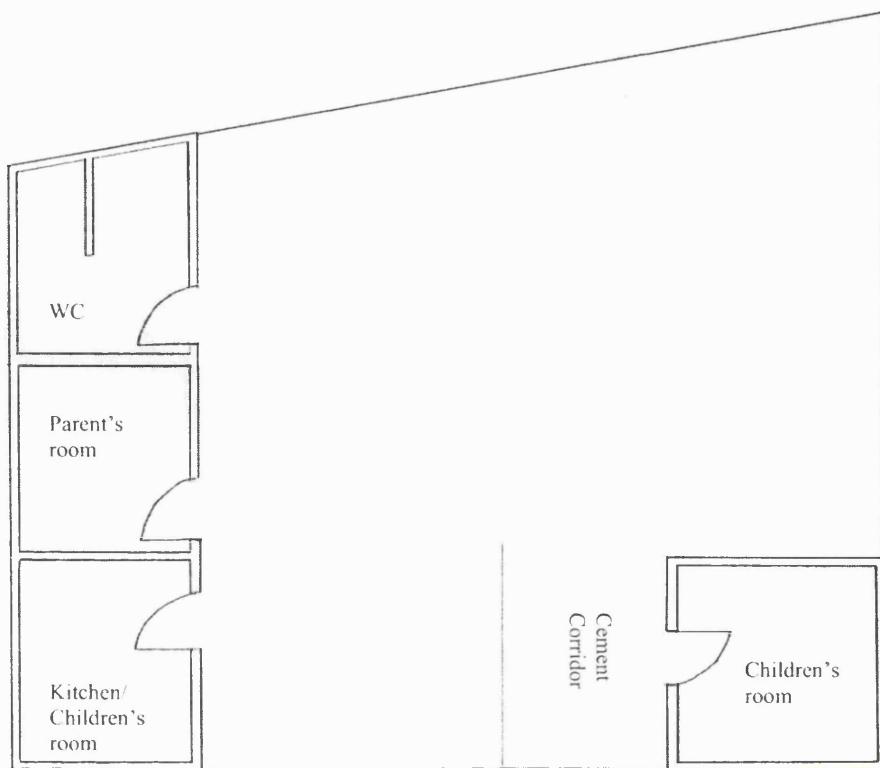
By the 1990's the Molina family-house had already expanded considerably. Alfredo, the youngest son, had not been given a section of the plot to build on. Instead, he was allowed to occupy a flat which had been originally built and left vacant by his brother César. After seven years of living in this flat Alfredo left the family-house as a result of an argument with his mother in which she asked him to pay the *predial* (land tax). Claiming that he had not had the opportunity to build and fearing that he would not inherit a part of the plot of land, Alfredo refused to pay the *predial* and left the house. Years later, Alfredo admitted to his mother that he had experienced a hard time living away from the family-house and asked if he and his family could come back. During his absence the flat Alfredo had lived on was passed on to his brother Moisés. In order to accommodate his returning son, Aurora decided to convert the empty space underneath the garage into an extra flat for Arturo and his family. Three years later, Alfredo was offered a credit for a small house in Iztapaluca and decided to leave again. The rooms that were built underneath the garage were left empty for some time, then rented, and later on occupied by Alfredo's sister Itzel. Following her marriage Itzel moved with her partner into the flat that had been built by Arturo in

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the Molina family-house; this flat had been left vacant when Arturo migrated to the United States. A few years later Itzel left the Molina family-house to live with her parents-in-law because of continuous problems between her mother and her partner. Only a year later, Itzel and her partner separated and Itzel decided to ask her mother, Aurora, if she and her two daughters could return to live in the family-house. Aurora immediately asked the tenants who rented the rooms that had been built beneath the garage to vacate and offered the space to Itzel.

Illustration 13. Basement of the Molina family-house

··········	Built and inhabited by Alfredo, currently inhabited by Itzel
··········	Currently inhabited by Aurora and her husband
··········	Currently inhabited by Jimena
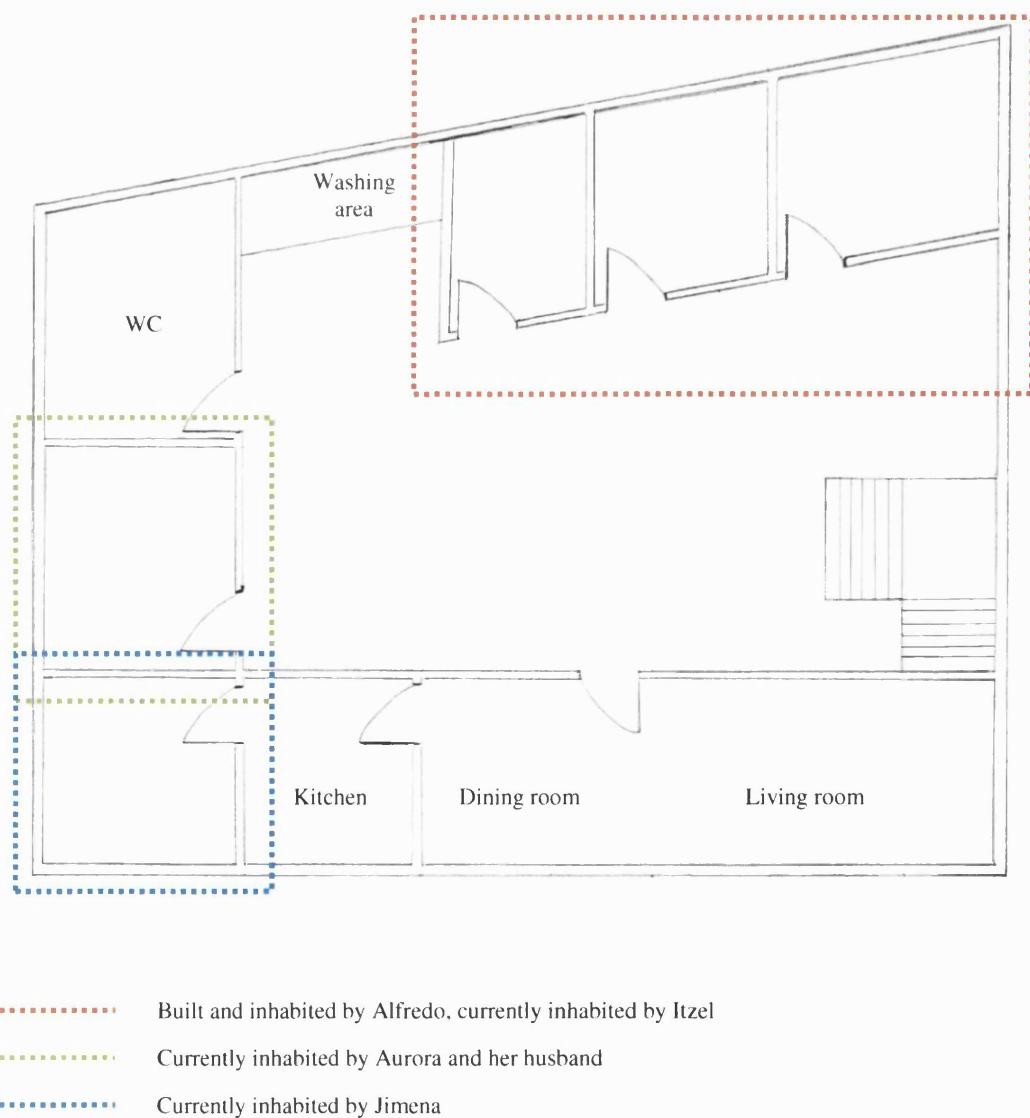
Illustration 14. Ground floor of the Molina family-house
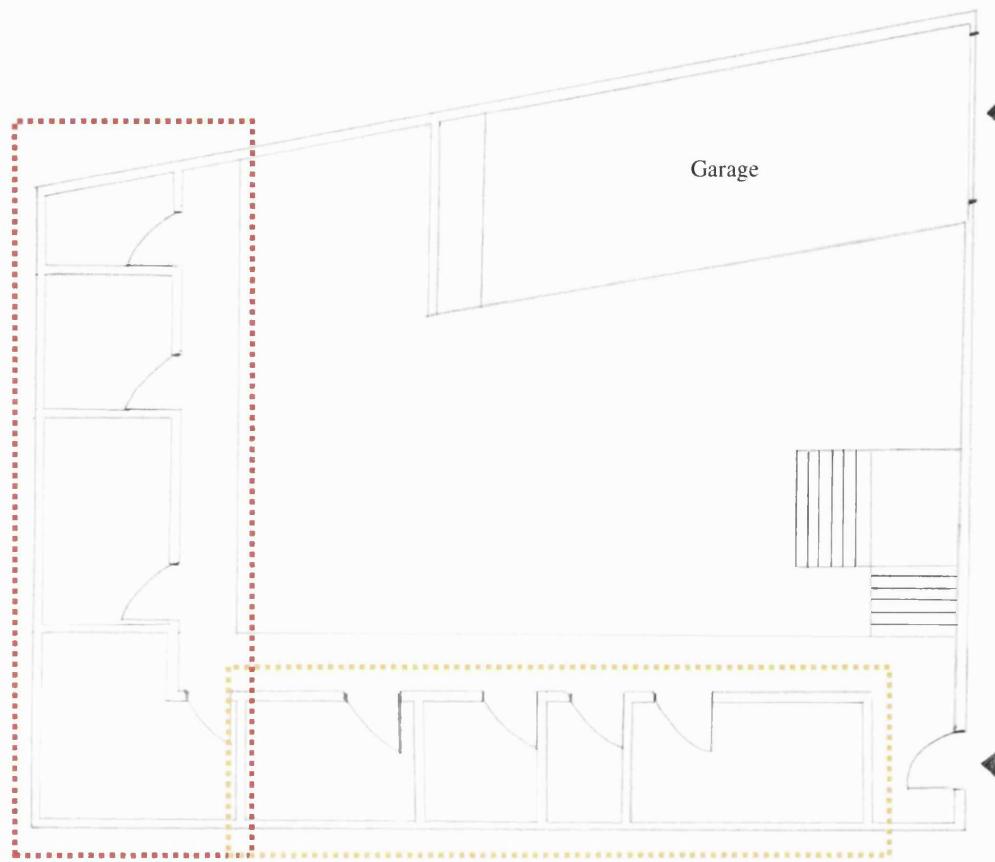
.... Built and inhabited by César, then by Alfredo and currently by Moisés

.... Built and inhabited by Arturo, then by Itzel and currently by César

The previous extract from the Molina family-house sheds further light onto the non-linearity of the family-house process. It suggests that families do not go through established uni-linear life cycles which are translated into particular spatial requirements. The standard script of: a nuclear family that has children, expands the house to provide rooms for the children, the children marry and the house expands further to provide a house for each newly formed family, seldom applies. As a result, the uses of the different spaces that make up the family-house change all the time. The reality involves complex situations like that of an extra room being built for a recently married son who then moves out leaving the room vacant, which is then occupied by another member of the family; years later the son who first built the room comes back and occupies another part of the plot which was built by another sibling, and so the process continues.

It should also be noted that families do not naturally go through a process of gradual economic improvement. As argued in chapter 4, the residents of Santo Domingo experienced an important upward mobility in the decade of the 1970's which manifests itself in the building of their houses. However, most families have not continued to experience economic improvement since. From the decade of the 1980's families have suffered a prolonged economic crisis which was intensified after the 1995 crisis. Families capacity to allocate resources for the improvement and expansion of their homes has therefore not increased constantly. They live in a fluctuating cash economy in which occasionally there is a little money to spend but there are other times in which there is barely enough to get by.

3. Building a family

Although securing adequate shelter and responding to changing spatial needs and aspirations in the context of limited economic resources is inherent to self-help housing, in this chapter I will argue that the family-house process is not merely about the production of housing. In its continuous becoming, the family-house is not an object to be consumed, it is a building process. What constitutes the essence of the family-house process is not the material form that results from the constant building, but the process of building itself.

It has been previously stated that, in the context of self-housing production, the house and the family are not separable, that the family sees and experiences its house as an extension of the family process. Through its unfinished quality the house overcomes its architectural dimensions and is an active part of the process of becoming of the family. Beyond the production of housing, the family-house process is about the building and consolidation of a family. From the moment they acquired their plot of land, the Ortiz family had the aspiration to stay together, to expand the family-house so as to provide a house for each one of Lupe's children and their families. As a widow Lupe had always been a very strong figure and had expressed her wish to have as many of her children live with her after they married. Vicente remembers: "We were all going to live here, that much we knew. We had always been together, my mother had always been at the head and if someone wanted to move away from the ordinary practice *nos jalaba las oreja*s (we got our ears pulled)". The Ortiz family is a clear illustration of how consolidating a family is an important element of house

building. For them, building and expanding the family-house is, above all, a project to consolidate the family.

3.1 Building family achievement

Given the indivisibility between family and house, the building process functions as a record of the family's achievements. Beyond the material objective of satisfying an increased need for space, and the aim to extend the house so as to avoid the fragmentation of the family, the aspiration is to build a house that will confer recognition to the family as a whole and to each family group separately. It is because of this that the differences between the houses of the various family groups within the family plot have a strong impact as to the family's self-esteem and the respect and position they obtain in relation to the other family groups in the plot of land and in the neighbourhood.

Many years after the family settled in Santo Domingo, when Lupe had already died, Juan Carlos and Ursula conditioned the first floor of the plot's back structure to be their own independent flat. Due to a lack of economic resources they soon found themselves unable to carry out a number of much desired improvements such as laying mosaic floors and plastering the walls. Later on, as the ground and second floor flats were expanded Juan Carlos and Ursula were tempted to use the floor, wall and ceiling that these new structures provided to expand their own flat. In 2002 Juan Carlos migrated to the United States with the aim of saving money to complete these expansions and improvements. Juan Carlos has not been able to send enough money for these plans to be accomplished, and although his family is eager for him to come back and he himself wishes to be with them, his return is postponed year by year with the hope that this time he will save enough money for the house. For Ursula, her unfinished flat is a source of deep grief and shame, it is an evidence of the crisis (both economic and that resulting from physical distance) which the family group is going through. The extensions, materials and finishings used or lacking in each house are thus seen to communicate a family's failure or success.

When Vicente and Beatriz married in 1983 they began to build a flat for their family group on the first floor of the plot's front structure, above the space that later became Héctor's flat. To provide access to Vicente's first floor flat, Héctor's kitchen was

dismantled and a concrete staircase was built in its place. After years of negotiation, Héctor and Vicente agreed to dismantle the cement staircase and build an external metal staircase instead so that Héctor could build a proper kitchen. Vicente took advantage of the new structure that Héctor's kitchen provided and expanded his own flat up to the border of the kitchen. With this he was able to add an extra room and a few meters to his living room area. Héctor often complains that it is unfair that his flat is smaller than that of Vicente's for he had to leave room for a two and a half meter wide passageway that opens out onto the street. The difference between the flats that each sibling erected is a continuous source of tension. At present, Vicente's flat is not only the largest but also the one with better finishing and ornaments within the plot of land. This places his family group in a preferential position vis-à-vis the rest of the residents of the plot, it provides them with a higher status but also with special authority in the everyday interactions and negotiations.

The Ortiz family shares the joint project of expanding and upgrading the plot of land to consolidate and obtain recognition for the family as a whole. In addition, within the plot of land each family group strives to improve their portion, to consolidate their family group and obtain recognition from the other members of the plot. Ursula and Juan Carlos' case is a clear illustration of how the housing process is not simply about acquiring appropriate shelter but also about consolidating a family group, improving socio-economically, and building a record of their achievement. Moreover, as the case of Vicente suggests, not only are a family's position and achievements inscribed on its walls, but the actual building of the house is simultaneously the building of achievement, recognition and status within and beyond the plot of land. In other words, its not simply that status and achievement can be "read" from a family's house, but that the process of building the house itself is the process of building this recognition.

3.2 Building a robust family-house

Before he started working as janitor at the UNAM, Alberto worked as construction foreman. Thanks to the skills he acquired then, in Santo Domingo he not only built his own house but played an important role helping his neighbours with his technical expertise. He openly conveys his pride of having taught his neighbours the craft of building which led some to actually work as masons. Already after a significant part

Illustration 15. Façade of the back structure of the Ortiz family-house
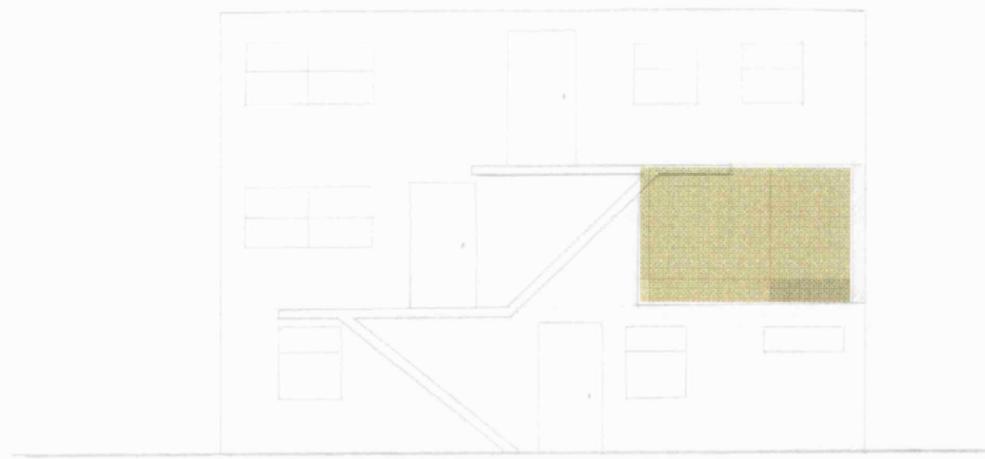
Area of planned expansion to Ursula and Juan Carlos's flat

Illustration 16. Plan of Ursula and Juan Carlos's flat
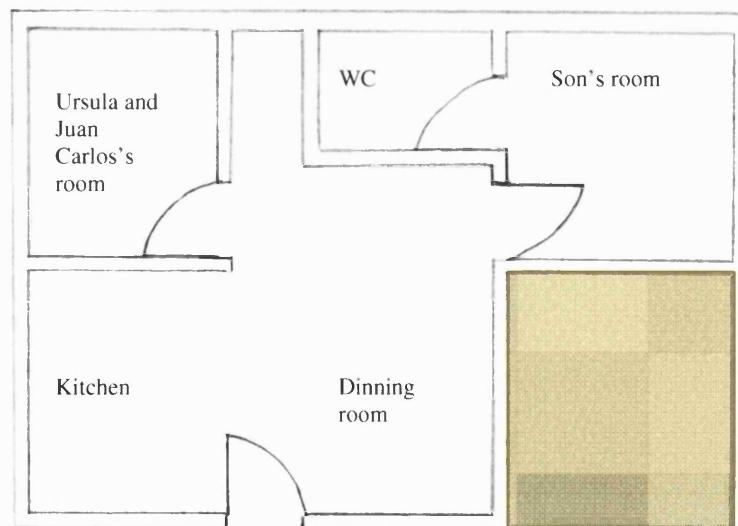
Area of planned expansion to Ursula and Juan Carlos's flat

Illustration 17. Before: Héctor's ground floor flat with internal cement staircase
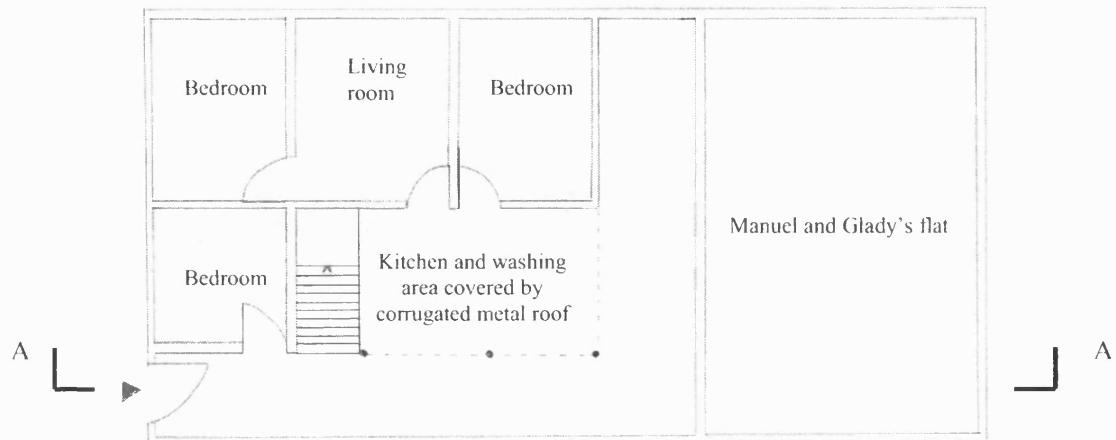
Illustration 18. Before: Vicente and Beatriz's first floor flat with internal cement staircase
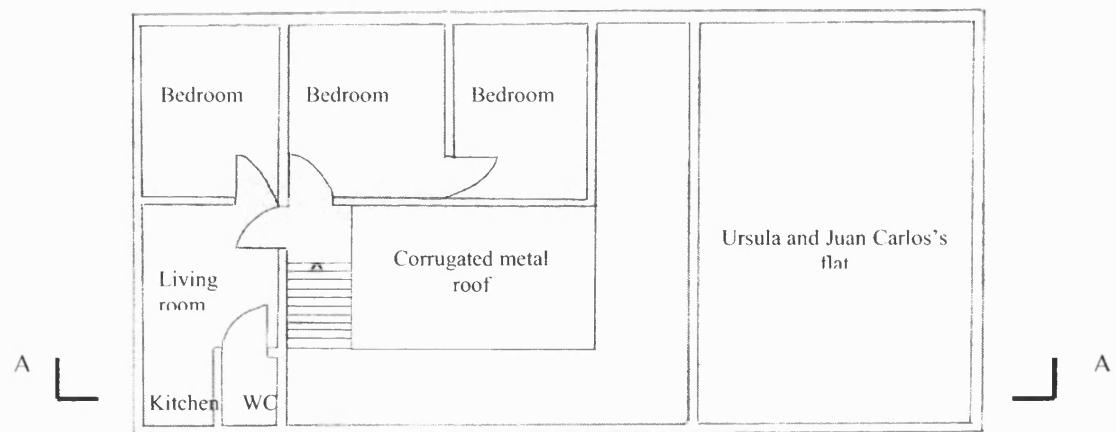

Illustration 19. Before: Section A – A'
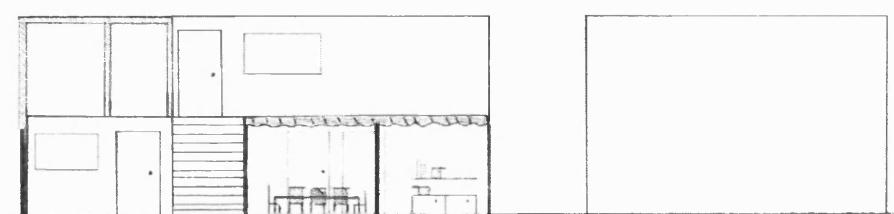
Illustration 20. After: Héctor's ground floor flat with external staircase and house expansion
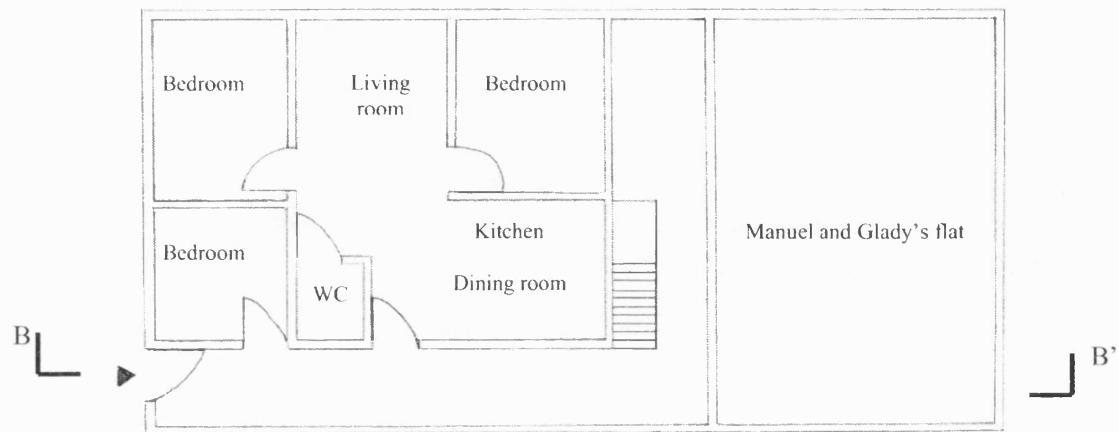
Illustration 21. After: Vicente and Beatriz's first floor flat with external staircase and house expansion
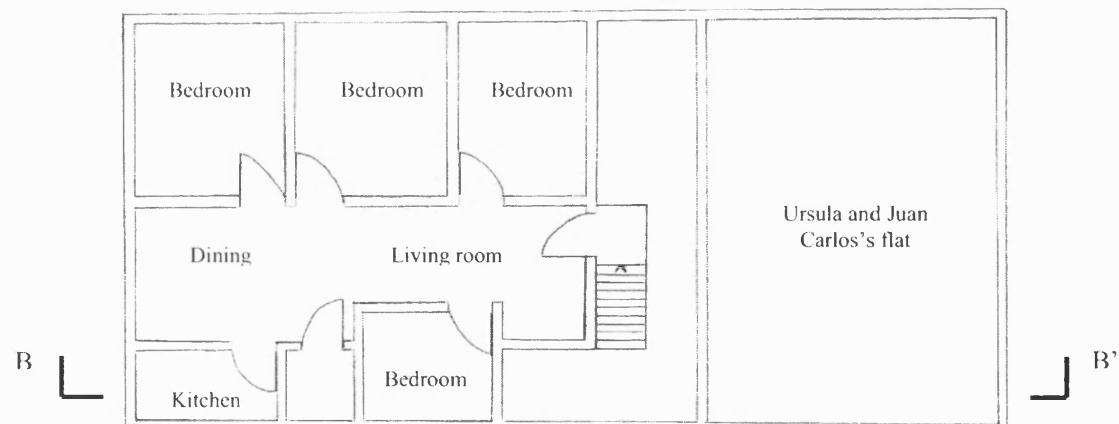

Illustration 22. After: Section B – B'
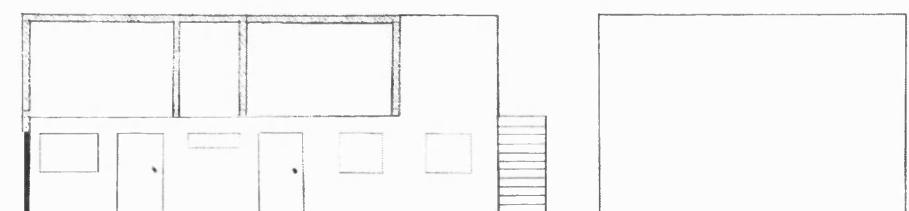
of the house was established Alberto enrolled in an architecture course. Although he does not intend to work as a foreman or architect, he is interested in perfecting the craft of building, a practice that he plans to continue and that he is proud of. He is especially proud that his skills have enabled him to build a well built and solid house. "If I am going to do it, I am going to do it well" he explains. Alberto emphasises that although his house might not be pretty it is definitely well built. By well built he means that his house can continue to expand because the foundations are solid. Beyond aesthetic values regarding the house, a stronger imperative is to build a "good" house that will enable further building to be carried out[37]. In the process of building a solid house, families not only strive to build good quality housing, they strive to build the foundations for a solid family that will be able to expand and prosper. Defining what constitutes a "good" house in this way lies in direct opposition with the general practice of professional architects who seek to build a finished house which can respond to the long term needs of its users, just as it is. In this context, if residents find the need to transform the house beyond the level of interior design, the house is evaluated as an architectural failure. Conversely, in Santo Domingo, a good family-house is expected to change continuously, not doing so would bring and/or reflect the stagnation of the house and of the family.

I met José early in the morning one day in which he was free from work. We first strolled along Santo Domingo's busy main street and then walked towards his house. José guided me to the plot of land where his house is sited and showed me to the rooftop of his house so that, from that vantage point, we could see other houses around the block. He first pointed to a neighbour's plot which lies behind his own plot and where the houses still have temporary roofs made of corrugated metal. "Some people have not wanted to improve", was his assertion. He asked me to turn around and showed me the plot of land directly in front of his house. The plot was made up of a number of small temporary shacks. José explained to me that the male head of the family, who was a contemporary of his in the invasion process, did not want his children to improve their houses and build them in permanent materials in order to avoid conflicts around inheritance and property ownership. According to José, it was not solely because of lack of economic resources that some people had not consolidated their houses. He then turned towards a plot at the end of his street

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[37] Walker (2000) also observed that, in a popular settlement of the south-east of Mexico City, a major preoccupation was to produce a house that was solid and durable.

where there is a four storied building. He said that although it looks like a building of apartments for rent, it actually belongs to a family whose members had been clever enough to organise themselves to build an independent flat for each son in this vertical way, one on top of the other. Not only had they done this, he added, they had left the ground floor empty to function as a large parking space where they keep a number of *micros* (mini buses), from which they make a living.

The extract reveals how a non-consolidated house is interpreted by others living in a consolidated settlement as a lack of economic status and as a failure to attain upward mobility. Being produced by people themselves mostly without recourse to credits[38] the house is a clear indication of the family's economic development. But more importantly, the two stories José related to me, are about family cohesion. Following José's narrative, those families who had done better in the process of building their families, had also done better in building physically and socially robust houses. The four storied structure José pointed me towards is not only consolidated in terms of its physical structure, it also provides the extended family with the desired spatial arrangement of the *juntos pero no revueltos* ideal that allows all family groups to be clustered together, while at the same time being independent. And as a bonus, this four storied apartment building containing a ground floor parking space also provides the house with a direct material resource. In stark contrast to this, José explains that the family in which its members are disunited, opposing in spite of being physically together, and thus envious of each other, could not build a solid physical foundation for their common future. Just as the various houses making up the family plot are built out of temporary material, the bonds uniting the extended family are fragile. We see once again how family and house are not finished entities but are rather in constant process of becoming. And they become through a common process of building, or making. It is therefore interpreted that those families who better mastered the craft of building their house were also those families who better mastered the craft of building their families. With this, I am not claiming that there is in fact a causal relation between "good" families and "good" houses. The first reason for this being that there is no such thing as an objectively "good" family or house. What I am arguing is that, because houses and families emerge from the same building process, they are *interpreted and lived* as being two aspects of the same thing. The house is

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[38] Credits have only recently been introduced in the Federal District by the INVI Housing Improvement Programme.

thus seen by the residents of Santo Domingo to embody the family-house process, and therefore reveal just as much about the family as about the house itself. Seen under this light, the house not only evidences a family's economic achievement but also their success or failure at building a family itself.

3.3 Building the juntos pero no revueltos ideal

As I have argued before, in Santo Domingo the family ideal is to live *juntos pero no revueltos*. The building of the family-house is therefore in great part the building of this socio-spatial arrangement. The case of the Hernández family-house shows how the building of this ideal shapes the family-house often in contradiction to the family' actual everyday practices. When Claudia married she moved out of the Hernández family-house to live with her husband in a small room that was given to them at the house of her parents-in-law. She never grew accustomed to the new place and after a short three months decided to return to her family-house and requested permission to build there. Consequently, the Hernández family decided to continue building on the first floor of the existing permanent structure and turn this space into an independent flat for Claudia and her family group. As a result of the decision to transform the first floor into an independent flat, the cement staircase that used to connect the ground floor kitchen and dinning room area with the first floor was removed and an external metal staircase put in its place. Today, Claudia and her mother Ana María both agree in that there was no point in removing the staircase because, in practice, Claudia and her sons are routinely on the ground floor with Ana María and Poncho and function as the same family group. Especially now that Claudia is divorced, she and her sons eat and spend much of their time in the ground floor flat. Though going against their everyday practices, removing the external staircase is justified as it allows the Hernández family to present itself as being made up of distinct family groups all living in independent self-contained flats. *Juntos pero no revueltos* is here evidenced as an ideal linked with family achievement and not always compatible with actual everyday practices.

In a similar way, the case of the Ornelas Rubio family-house suggests that the building of the *juntos pero no revueltos* ideal determines the form of the family-house often ignoring aesthetic or technical concerns regarding issues such as lighting and ventilation. The Ornelas Rubio plot of land consists of three different structures.

Illustration 23. Before: Ground Floor of Hernández family-house with internal staircase

WC

Living room

Dining room

Kitchen
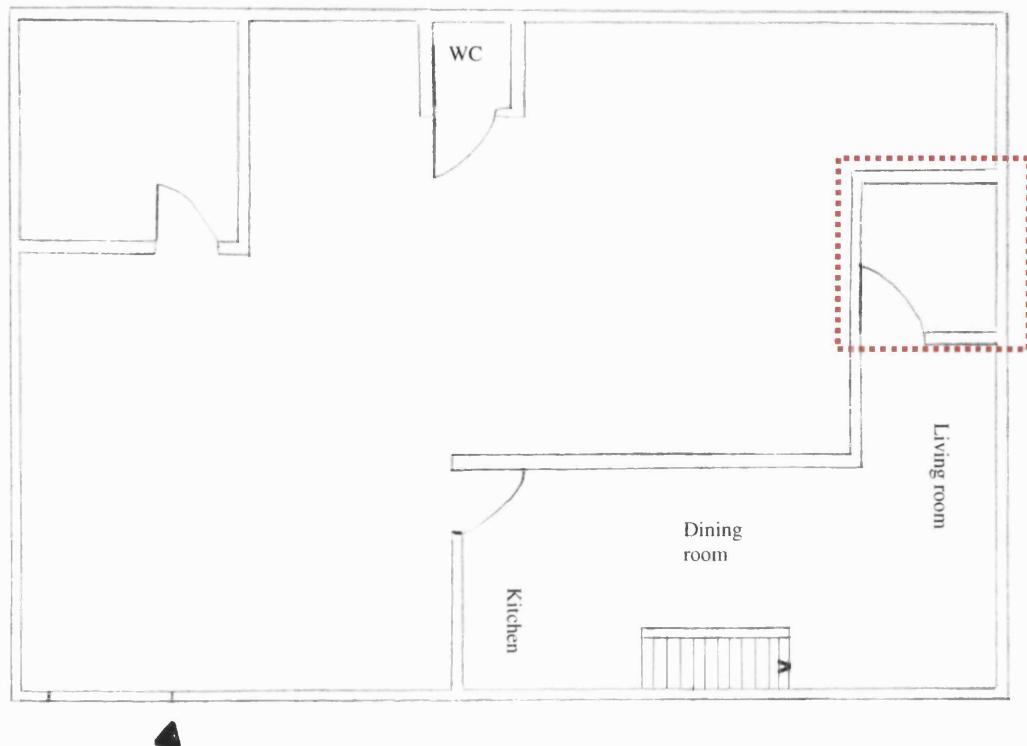
··········· Claudia's room – before she married and left the family-house

Illustration 24. Before: First Floor of Hernández family-house with internal staircase

Ana María and Poncho

Ana María and Poncho's son
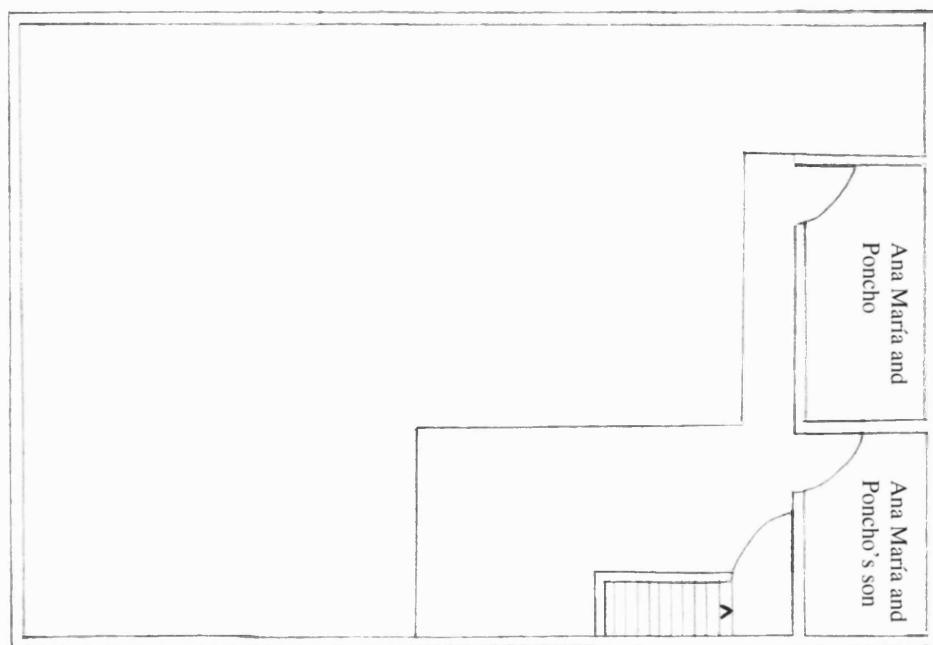
Illustration 25. After: Ground Floor of Hernández family-house with external staircase

WC

Ana María
and
Poncho's
son

Living room

Dining room

Kitchen

WC
(unfinished)
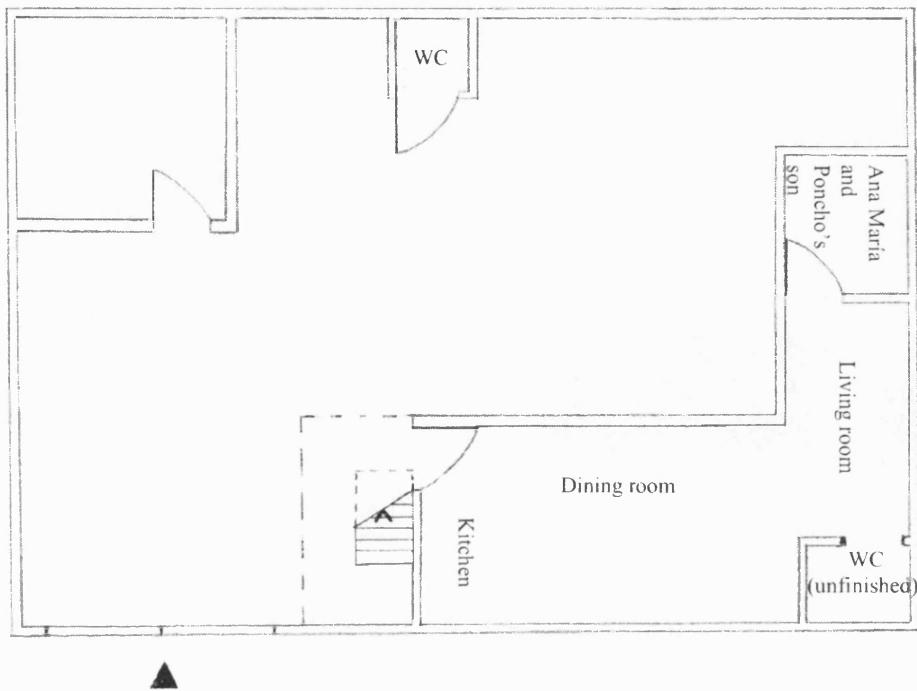
Illustration 26. After: First Floor of Hernández family-house with external staircase

Claudia's
room

Children's
room

Children's
room

Kitchen
(unfinished)

Dining room
and
Living room

WC
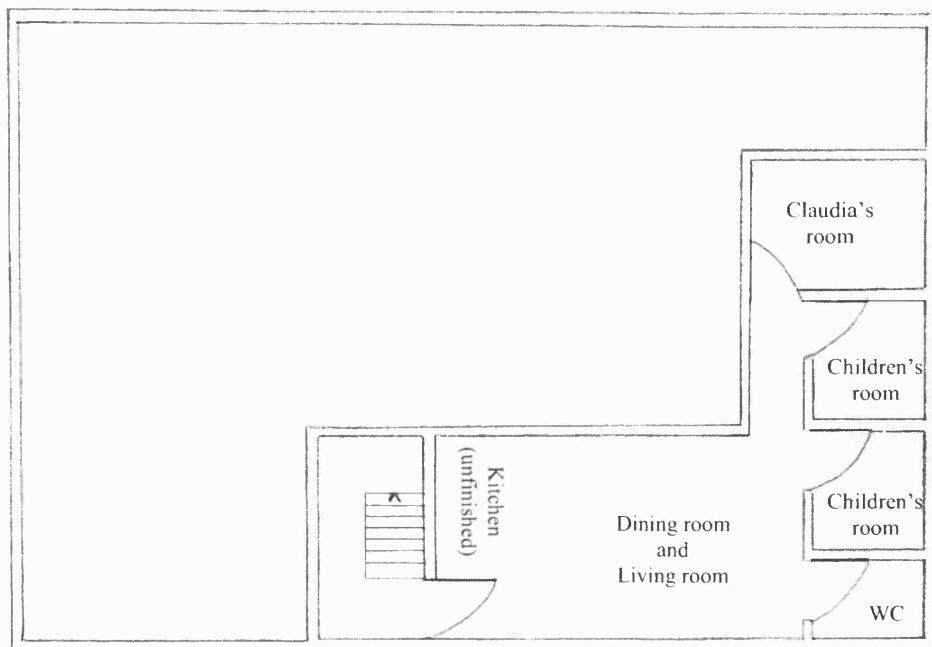
Mari lives with her single son on the ground floor of structure (A), on a flat that lacks an internal corridor. This means that to go from her bedroom to the kitchen Mari has to walk through her son's bedroom. To use the toilet Mari's son has to walk through her room. In addition, the staircase that leads to the first floor, where Mari's son Jerónimo lives with his wife, is located in Mari's bedroom. As a result of this spatial arrangement – that resulted from the organic addition of rooms without a long term plan – the members of the two flats have to see each other on a daily basis and are forced to constantly cross each other's personal spaces. Throughout the past years, Mari and her son Jerónimo have been saving money to expand the first floor flat and renovate the whole structure so that the ground and first floors become fully independent.

For many years, the plot's second structure (B) consisted only of a ground floor. This area was inhabited by the female-head of the plot, Julia, her son Omar and her daughter Karina. With the aim of getting closer to the ideal of *juntos pero no revueltos* in which each family group has an independent self-contained flat, Julia built this ground floor as two separate structures divided by an open air corridor so that Karina and Omar could eventually have separate spaces. With the years, the family gathered enough money to expand this structure and build a first floor. Karina now lives on one side of the ground floor and the other is inhabited by her son and his family. Omar and Julia live in the first floor which is currently accessed through a steep and insecure metal staircase. As Julia is now very old, a priority is to improve the quality of the staircase. To avoid the situation that Mari and her family live Omar wants to replace the existing staircase for a concrete one. As a way to fund this construction, Omar decided to apply for a credit to the INVI's Housing Improvement Programme. The INVI architects have warned him that building the stairway where he suggests would take away light from the downstairs flat and from his own leaving them with almost no natural light. They recommend that he should build an internal concrete staircase from one of the ground floor flats. In spite of these warnings Omar insist in building the external concrete staircase; in the search of the *juntos pero no revueltos* ideal he consciously privileges independence from light.

Illustration 27. The three structures of the Ornelas Rubio family-house
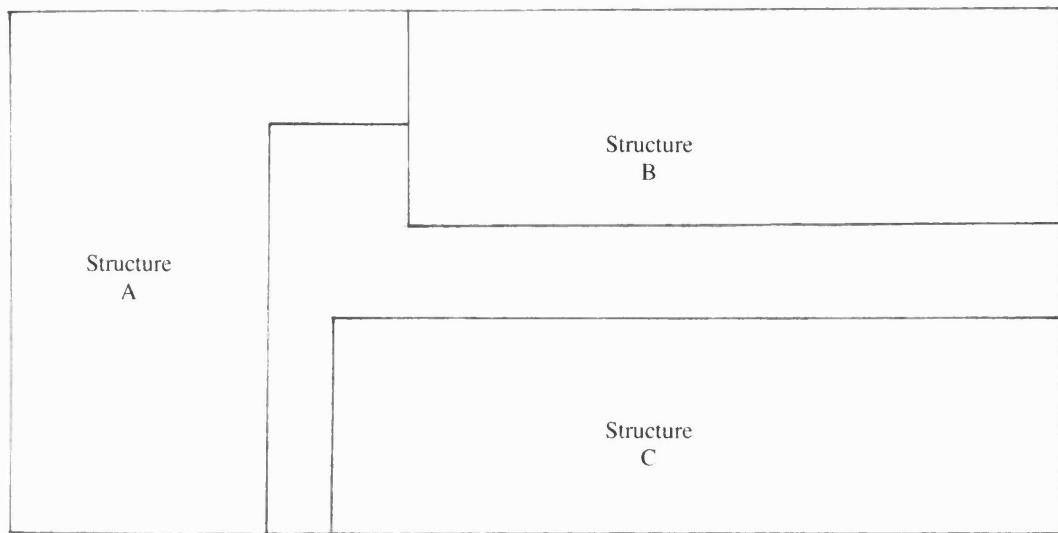

Illustration 28. Ground Floor of the Ornelas Rubio family-house
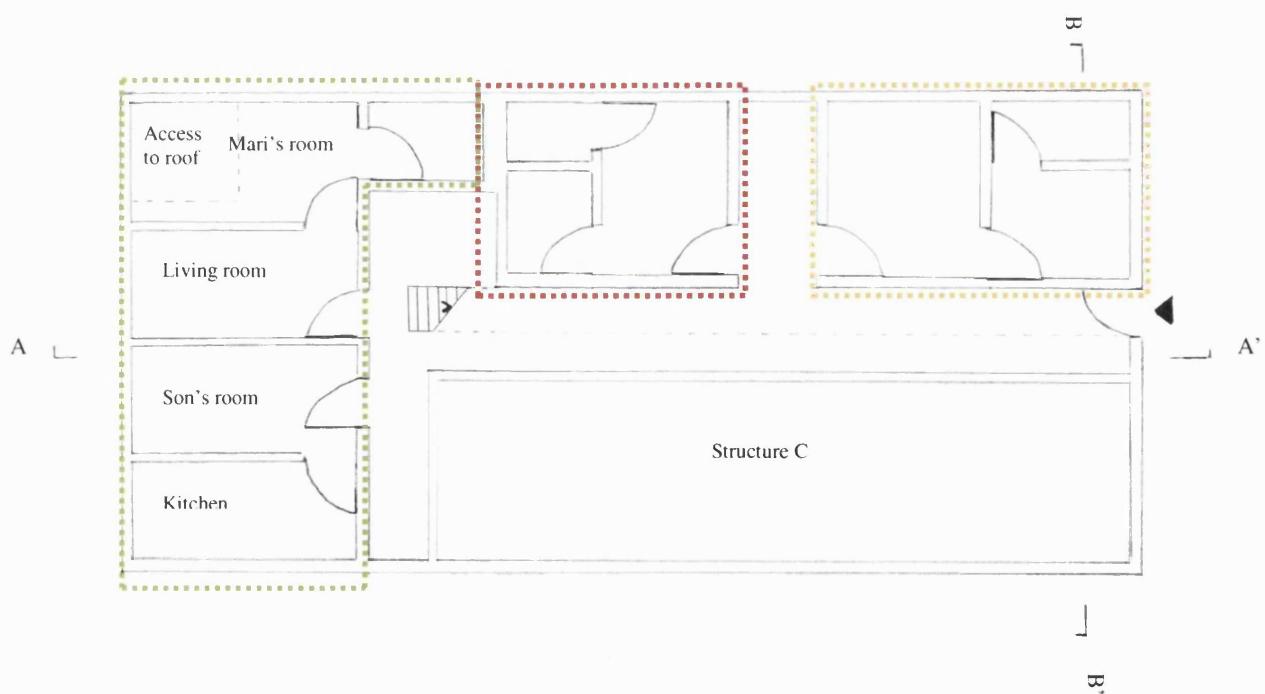
Illustration 29. First Floor of the Ornelas Rubio family-house

Access
from GF

Structure
C

A

A'

B

B'
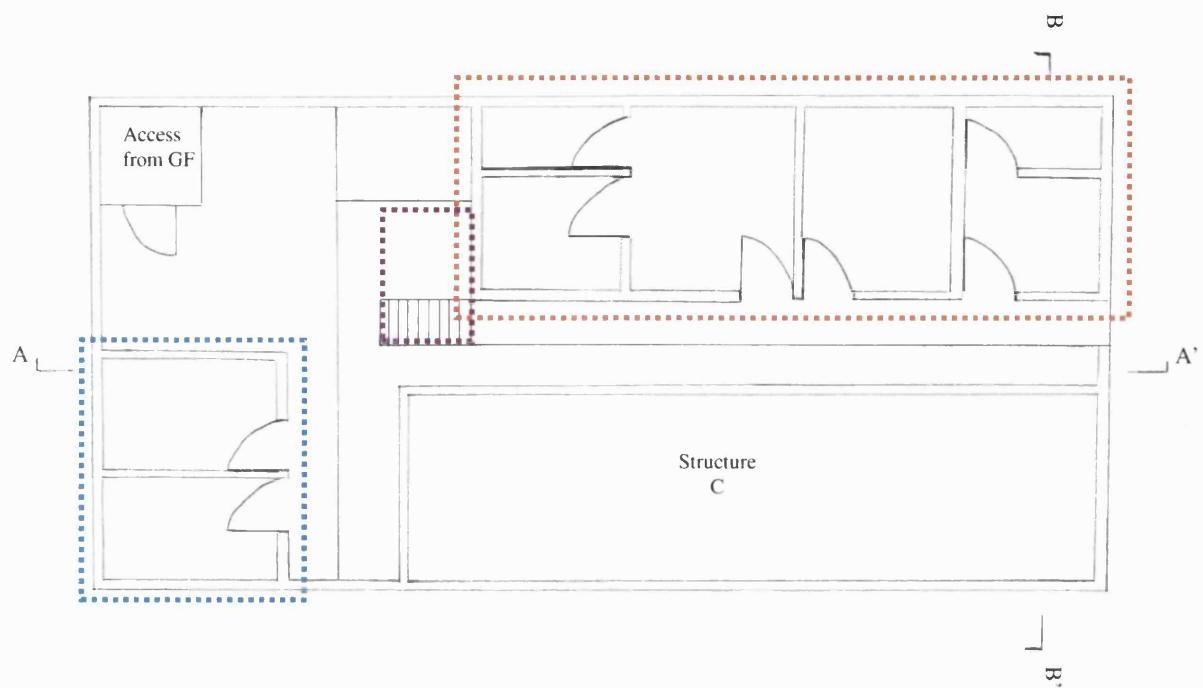
•••••••••••• Julia and Omar's

•••••••••••• Jerónimo's flat

•••••••••••• Area where Omar plans to build concrete staircase

Illustration 30. The Ornelas Rubio family-house: Section A – A'
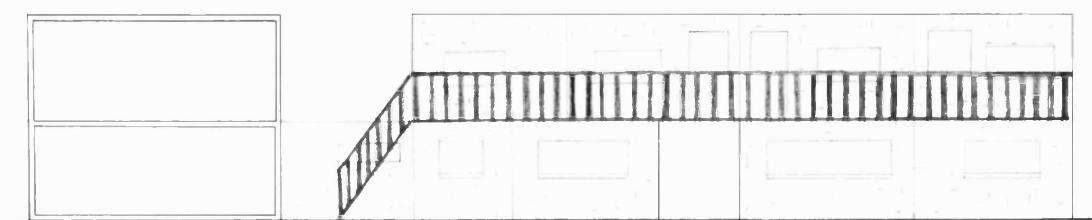
Illustration 31. The Ornelas Rubio family-house: Section B – B'
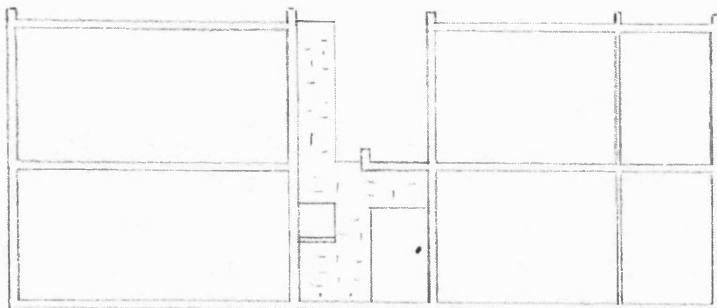
4. Building social acceptance and respect

Seen from the outside the Hernández family-house is a magnificent three storied house. Not only is the façade freshly painted in a bright pistachio colour, it is also carefully adorned. In front of every window there is a rectangular ceramic flower pot secured by an elaborate iron work. On the many occasions I visited the house, these pots always contained beautiful fresh flowers. In addition, above each window and above the main door a delicate red tiled roof adds to the decoration. Altogether, the façade speaks of a well maintained and loved for house, but also of economic status. Once across the main door one gets a different impression. The house and the garden are clean and well kept, but the house does not seem as consolidated. Inside the living room some of the walls are not fully plastered and there is a bathroom under construction in which there are bricks and other building materials. The first floor flat, which belongs to Ana María's older daughter, Claudia, is also evidently under construction. Claudia and her sons continue to eat and cook in her parents home downstairs for her kitchen is as yet unfinished. Ana María's family chose to invest their limited economic resources on adorning and constantly maintaining the façade as opposed to spending on or saving for the interior of the house. Ana María's house is by no means an exception; a similar pattern can be observed amongst many other houses in Santo Domingo.

At a first level of analysis one can argue that the façade is the material representation of the family's social and economic status, it is a statement about the family's

economic stability and also of their success in building a "good" family-house. In the context of a self-help housing in which people construct their houses and their future life opportunities mainly by themselves, a consolidated house represents an achieved upward mobility, and thus reflects certain socio-economic status. On the other hand, the fact that the family has privileged the allocation of resources in the upkeep of the façade suggests that the house is in fact more than the mere reflection of achieved economic status, but is actually a means through which this status is achieved. That is, rather then "reading" an existing economic status from the house, what the adorned façade reveals is the family's ongoing efforts of building status through their house. The building of the family-house is thus also the building of the family's socio-economic status.

The building of socio-economic status through the family-house is not only achieved through the conscious use of the house as public façade (Holston 1991). Beyond the aesthetic and formal qualities of the house, the action of building is itself a producer of status. In Santo Domingo my informants incessantly emphasised their wish to "leave something for their children" or "to have a piece of land of their own". Owning a piece of land and better still, a house that stands on it, is an important economic investment for the future. But more than the economic benefit that could derive from owning a house the desire is to gain access to the portion of the population that are home-owners. For this reason, building is thus often prompted not simply by the need to satisfy an immediate need for space, but by a desire to belong to the recognised group of home-owners and builders. It is often the case that once a member of the second generation sets off to build, the rest feel compelled to follow suit. Aurora remembers that the first floor of her family-house and the ensuing expansions were triggered by the fact that his eldest son asked for permission to build. In seeing this the remaining sons also demanded to build saying "y que, yo no voy a hacer?" (what's the deal, am I not going to build?).

The act of building becomes a source of status also as a result of the political constellation in which popular settlements are embedded. Alberto explains that neither he nor the rest of the family had a concrete plan as to how the house was going to look like in the future.

"No, I didn't have a clue, because what I wanted was to move on, like that, build a room quickly because they came here very often...they started to come, the famous construction inspectors we had. When they came it was because I had already done it...they didn't find me. And between Saturday and Sunday I built. I am telling you, it was fast, do it fast, otherwise, on Monday it was already *clausurado* (closed down)... Many neighbours around here had that, *clausuraron* (it was closed down) and then each one had to come in with a *cuerno* (bribe)... for the famous trade union..." (Alberto)

The irregularity of land tenure, land use, and building regulations represent important constraints as to the building and expansion of a family's house. Given clientelistic practices and corruption, these constraints do not affect everyone equally. Some neighbours are able to regularise their plots or to obtain building permission, even when outside land use and building regulations, because of their political allegiances or through the payment of bribes. As a result, house extension (especially vertical extension beyond the approved three levels) is construed as a manifestation of power and privilege.

4.1 Building a "proper house" to gain respect

Building and consolidating a house is not only the means to communicate and produce socio-economic status, it is also a struggle to build a "proper" house that will gain the family respect. Emma insisted on having a front garden in the space where the living room was built. Having lived most of her life in the countryside, leaving a good portion of open space to be used as a garden was an undoubted priority for her. As her daughter Andrea explains: "We suffered a lot, you come from the country, you come from being free, you come from the street, from being in absolute freedom. Maybe there [in Michoacán] we didn't have such a great mansion, but we had more space." Although sympathetic with her view, Carlos insisted that a "proper" house had to have a living room area and that the garden was therefore a nice but dispensable extra. The family agreed with this view and settled on building the living room. In the building of their house, the Suarez family opted to conform to dominant images of what is a "proper" house. In Santo Domingo, as in other popular settlements, "people tend to produce their housing in accordance with models of housing that they see around them, that is to say, in accordance with the housing values that they internalise through the processes of daily life in a context in which

specific models of housing exist" (Walker 2001: 21). Throughout my fieldwork experience, the residents of Santo Domingo alluded to the condition of their neighbours' houses to say that they were either respectable hard working people that had done something for themselves or to show that they were unworthy people who had not managed to progress. Building a house in accordance with the dominant values is seen as evidence of the family's respectability.

What this suggests is that, aside from the struggle to attain adequate shelter, the family-house process is a struggle to build social acceptance. Families strive to conform to dominant images of what is a "proper" house based on the recognition of the house's significance as a public façade through which they present themselves to the outside world. Building what is generally perceived as a "proper" house enables the family to dissociate from the stigma of being a working class family. Partly due to the lack of legal recognition and the institutional violence – such as evictions – that often accompanies the development of popular settlements, its residents are deeply aware of their marginal position in society. Obtaining legal tenure and consolidating their houses is thus not only a functional act but is also driven by the aspiration to gain respect. As Holston (1991: 448) puts it, in building houses that conform to dominant images families "autoconstruct self images of competence and knowledge that counter and replace those of disrespect and worthlessness that have historically subjugated them to a denigrated sense of their own persons".

Through the building and consolidation of their houses families not only aim to improve their material conditions but, most importantly, they seek to come closer to the dominant image of what constitutes a "proper" house. Walker (2001) illustrates that, in the popular settlements of Mexico City, houses greatly diverge from the urban housing norms during the earlier phases of construction but come to an extremely close conformity of these norms as they consolidate. "The conformity of the physical form of the house can be understood not merely as one of compliance with the dominant norms, but rather, as an active use of those norms in order to express the social identity of the inhabitants of the houses as being members of the broader urban society" (Ibid.: 22). Beyond using the house as a way to express that they share the values of the broader urban society, as Walker suggests, I would argue that through the erection and consolidation of their houses families strive to actively build and image of themselves as respectable citizens and thereby gain social recognition.

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In their struggle to attain adequate shelter, the urban poor confront material and legal difficulties that motivate them to undertake organised political action (Holston 1991: 453). In the case of Mexico City, and the country in general, the struggle for housing, services and land regularisation was part of a broader social movement called the Movimiento Urbano Popular (MUP). As part of the MUP, the struggle for housing became a banner for the marginalised and their claim to be included in society. My informants often referred to how, through their active participation in the establishment of a popular settlement, they learnt that housing was a right that they were entitled to, and were conscious that they were giving a political fight that also surpassed the satisfaction of this particular right. Carmen recalls:

> "And so we began to organise. They [the leaders and those with a trajectory of political militancy] taught us *que no teníamos que agacharnos ante nadie* (that we didn't have to keep quiet before anyone), not to be afraid of the police, of nobody. Not to allow repression against us from the authorities. Defend our rights. They began to give us classes on political education. We were housewives, many of us didn't know how to read and write but we liked to have political education classes. Because, at that time, we were embarrassed to talk and if you see now, I have an aptitude for it because they taught us that as well...Thanks to the *compañeros* that organised us, that came to open our minds, who came to make us see...that there was something we could get from organising, from struggling to have something better. Not to be hmmm *apáticos* (apathetic)... we could achieve something, right? And hmm...and well, also to give our children better things, better education, also...not to beat them. We were poor before, actually we are still poor, but before we were also *pobres de pensamiento* (poor of thought), of intelligence, of...of...of education, of everything". (Carmen)

In most cases, political organisation and activism dies out after the settlement is consolidated. Once the basic material needs, such as the introduction of urban services, are in place, and once the settlement has been regularised, the need to organise decreases. As Beall (2001: 1018-19) notes, community level organisations tend to be short lived because they are created to address immediate felt needs. In addition, as these organisations surpass their original concrete demands they face the challenge of lacking social, legal and political status, a situation that leaves them relatively powerless in the broader formal political arena. Nonetheless, during the initial stages in the struggle for housing, the family-house process becomes a

conscious political struggle in which residents fight for their right to be part of the city, to have their dwellings recognised as legitimate and not part of the precarious shelters of the excluded. It moves beyond the building of social acceptance and socio-economic status through the use of the status of home building and the house as public façade to the participation in an organised political struggle for social inclusion. This struggle moves from working within the margins of the existing conditions and institutions towards a struggle for structural change.

4.2 Building an anchor for those who have migrated

Soon after his eldest brother César set out to build a flat on the first floor of the Molina family-house, Arturo decided to follow suit. Two years later Arturo migrated to the United States with the idea of spending a couple of years saving money to improve his flat and to contribute towards the further expansion of the family-house. Sending money to build a house back in Mexico is one of the most common reasons for migration to the United States. After two years in the United States Arturo did in fact return and married a girl from the neighbourhood. However, soon after he decided to go back to the United States – again with the idea of doing so only temporarily – while his wife stayed in the flat waiting for his return. Years went by and Arturo did not return, Aurora then helped her daughter-in-law to cross the border and join her husband in the United States. In spite of the fact that until this day, Arturo and his family group have been living in the United States, for many years Aurora kept their flat empty and clean for her son to occupy on his return. From the moment in which Arturo received his first payment in the United States, he has sent his mother money so that the family can continue building. The project of building a house back home (both when the migrant's family group is back in Mexico or has joined him/her in the United States) serves as a symbolic bond or anchor with Mexico and as a guarantee of a possible return. But most importantly, even after decades of residence in the United States and given a relative acceptance of permanent residence on that side of the border, building a house back home remains a fundamental project. It justifies the migrant's decision to leave the country and, more importantly, it is a source of status and recognition from his family and *paisanos*. As Mike Davis posits in his book *Magical urbanism,* migrants' social position metamorphoses between the United States and their places of origin. The remittances they send with considerable effort provide them with an important economic status

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and social prestige back home. Thus simple waiters, drivers, and cleaners travel to Mexico to spend their vacations on the impressive houses they have built and enjoy a privileged position in their hometown. Migrants, Davis suggests, are often willing to proletarianise themselves in the United Stated in order to prevent proletarianisation from happening to them back home (Davis 2001: 103).

5. Building and belonging

Thus far I have argued that the production of housing in popular settlements is much more than the mere production of shelter; the family-house process is also a process of building and consolidating families and a process of building social acceptance and inclusion in society. I will now argue that beyond the material and symbolic motivations for house building the fulfilment of the human impulse to appropriate its surroundings by building is what lies at the heart of the family-house process. House building, improvement and expansion are thus often not dependant on a goal oriented (practical or symbolic) reasoning, but building in itself is often the goal. As Alberto put it: "it goes on, *bien a bien* (in reality) one never finishes, building goes on and on".

In the year 2000, Rosa Hernández and Francisco González decided to try their luck, apply for a credit to the INVI's Housing Improvement Programme, and build a flat for their family group in the Hernández family-house. Francisco and Rosa built their flat without a sense of permanence, without thinking this is where they would reside for the rest of their days. Even today, when they continue investing in the flat, they often talk about the possibility of building another house elsewhere. Whether they do move out or not is not what matters here, but rather that the aspiration is not to stay still but to continue building. Therefore, building a house out of permanent material is not seen as setting the family (and its house) in stone, fixing it. In the popular settlements of Mexico City, whether temporary or permanent, houses continue to evolve either through transforming existing structures, building in a new part of the plot or even by building in a new plot altogether. Although it is common for the residents of Santo Domingo to state their reluctance to leave their present houses, an option they do consider and often aspire to is that of moving to a larger plot of land where their building effort can continue and develop. Trading their current house for a finished house, no matter what its characteristics, is seldom an attractive option, but

continuing their building project in a larger plot of land is. Leaving their current house for a larger plot where construction can be resumed is not taken to mean that their old house is abandoned or undervalued. Continuous construction bridges one house with the other, both being part of the same building effort. This suggests that more than acquiring more space and improving their material conditions, continuous building is what is valued. Building is what is at stake.

Illustration 32. 2nd Floor of the Hernández family-house: Rosa and Francisco's self-contained flat
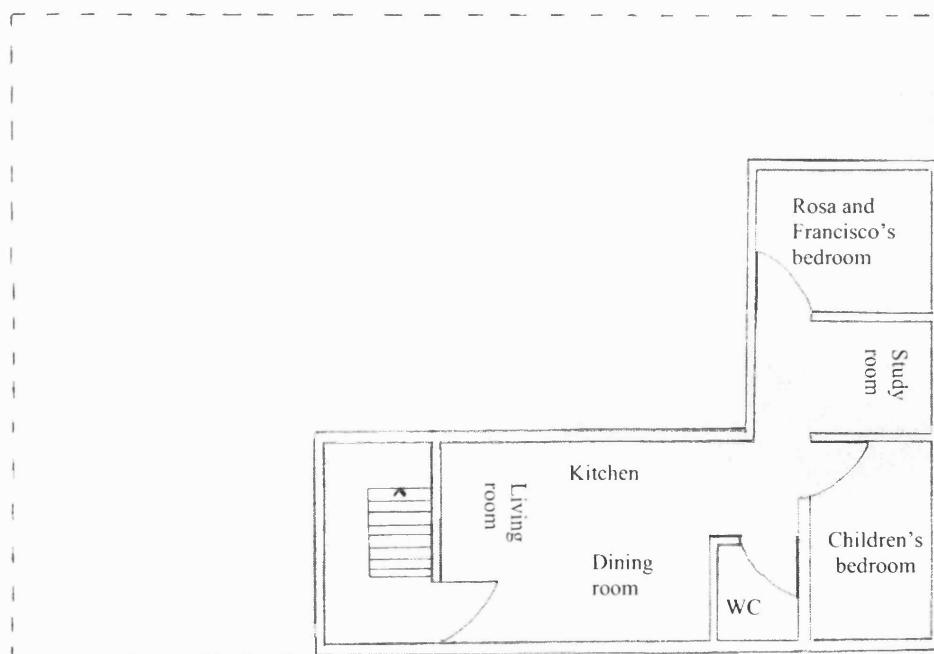
This appetite for continuous building is a result of the human inclination to appropriate our surroundings. As Habraken (1999: 17) posits: "We have the need to concern ourselves with that which touches us daily. Through this concern it begins to belong to us, and becomes a part of our lives. There is therefore nothing worse than to have to live among what is indifferent to our actions." Whether through small actions like painting a wall or hanging a picture or through the demolition or erection of structures, if given the possibility, people constantly transform their surroundings. As a result people and the built environment are in a constant productive relationship.

The ability to transform our surroundings is what enables us to appropriate our surroundings and therefore to feel attached, to feel at home. It is through the active engagement with our built environment that a sense of belonging is developed. House building is therefore not only about attaining adequate shelter or fulfilling symbolic needs such as the acquisition of a certain status. House building is about developing a sense of belonging through appropriation. That is why as Habraken (Ibid.: 20) says: "Building is an impulse which much prefers the act to the finished product". The productive relationship between people and the built environment is continuous in order to incessantly actualise this sense of belonging. The moment the process stops the result is alienation with the surroundings and the impediment of developing a sense of belonging.

Traditional community studies have long claimed the centrality of face-to-face communities, long term residence, and kinship ties for the development and endurance of a sense of belonging (see Tonkiss 2005). In response to this literature, Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005) argue that, in the context of globalisation, belonging results from a process of an "elective belonging" in which emotional attachments to place "need not be conferred by a history of long residence, or by being born and bred in a particular area, but are related to people mapping their own biography through identifying places dear to them. In this way, people can feel "at home" even when they have little or no contact with other local residents, and little or no history of residence in the area" (Ibid.: 103-4). Elective belonging, they elaborate paraphrasing Simmel "is premised on the values of those who come today and stay tomorrow, those who make a choice to live somewhere and make "a go of it" (Ibid.: 53).

In Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements what has made people choose to live and stay in their neighbourhood, what drives them to make "a go of it," is not only a perceived suitability between the neighbourhood, their social trajectory and their position in other fields (Ibid.), it is also their ability to appropriate their surroundings through continuous building. In Santo Domingo, as in other popular settlements, the initial stages of urbanisation of the neighbourhood, regularisation of the land, and early consolidation were characterised by the existence of strong social networks of solidarity and support amongst family and neighbours (Lomnitz 1975). A significant portion of the residents were connected through kinship ties, and there

Photograph 25. "We made Santo Domingo.
With work, with effort, that is why it belongs to us".
Source: Díaz Enciso 2002: 192.

was a constant and active social involvement in the neighbourhood. From the early years of the neighbourhood's foundation, Santo Domingo illustrates how belonging is not dependant on long term residence in an area. The establishment of place identities and attachment, as Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005) claim, is not exclusive to nor stronger amongst those born and bred in the area. The development of the neighbourhood resulted from the invasion of thousands of people who were on the most part strangers to the area and born outside the city. In Santo Domingo the strong attachment to the neighbourhood did not result from being born and bred there but from actively choosing and building this place for themselves. Belonging resulted from the informality of the neighbourhood which required a tightly knit and constant collective endeavour. The lack of regular land tenure brought a constant threat of violent eviction by the authorities or by other urban dwellers who claimed ownership of the land. A robust political organisation was thus necessary for the constant negotiations with the authorities to regularise the land and to organise the protection of the territory. In addition, the regular collective work in which all residents were engaged in order to urbanise the neighbourhood, promoted feelings of solidarity and familiarity amongst neighbours.

As the neighbourhood has consolidated, face-to-face interaction with neighbours and regular social activity within the neighbourhood has been significantly eroded. Based on a study of two low-income neighbourhoods in Mexico City, Salazar Cruz (1996; 1999) demonstrates that neighbourhood consolidation reduces the need to turn to extra domestic relations and that, consequently, solidarity networks amongst neighbours and social activity within the neighbourhood are significantly limited. My fieldwork data suggests that although a significant erosion of this traditional sense of belonging has occurred, place attachment is nevertheless strong in the consolidated settlement of Santo Domingo. If in the past belonging was centred around the neighbours' shared work and productive effort put on the urbanising of the area, today it is built upon the families' productive engagement with their houses. Appropriation and the development of a sense of ownership is now more focalised around the house, before it was expanded to the whole neighbourhood. What is significant is that both in the early decades of the urbanisation of Santo Domingo and in its current state of consolidation, attachment to place resulted from people's active production of the neighbourhood and its houses and not from long term residence in the area. Aside from the fact that the original founders of the neighbourhood were migrants to the city, my fieldwork revealed that there is actually little fixity within the plot of land. People are constantly moving within the plot of land, and also away from it and back, demonstrating once more that attachment is not reductive to long time residence in a same place. Furthermore, although kinship ties are an important element as to why the residents of Santo Domingo feel attached to the place, this is not a necessary condition. Amongst the founders of Santo Domingo there are some who were not accompanied by other members of their family but developed an equally strong attachment to the neighbourhood because of their active participation in its urbanisation and the building of their house. Place attachment is thus not necessarily a result of neighbourhood stability; more important is people's practical and productive engagement with space.

6. Continued building in the face of physical and regulatory constraints

Because of the impulse to appropriate our surroundings people constantly search to transform their residential environments within the realm of what is economically, physically and legally possible. In auto-produced environments like Santo Domingo people have a significantly greater capacity to shape their houses than in the context

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of, for example, mass-produced housing where this is severely limited (see Habraken 1999). However, because even in auto-produced environments this capacity is not limitless, families constantly look for ways to overcome the existing economic, physical and legal constraints and continue building.

The first requisite for continuous building is, of course, having the economic means to do so. Beyond this, the first limitation for endless radical transformation with which the residents of popular settlements are faced comes as the houses consolidate. As temporary material is substituted with permanent material, the extent to which the family is able to transform the house is limited. The use of permanent materials does not stem from a reduced desire on the part of the family to effect such radical transformations on their house, but rather due to the need to trade off this unrestricted capacity to shape and reshape their house for safety, comfort and the improvement of their material conditions. Abandoning certain spaces and building new ones is a way in which families manage to start afresh without having to pull the existing structures down. It is the means through which the capacity to continuously transform the house is guaranteed giving its inhabitants full control over their house. Thus, instead of using up all the existing built up space, leaving people where they are and expanding the house for those who do not already have a space of their own, a common practice is to leave vacant some of the existing spaces.

The irregular topography of the Martínez' plot of land represented an important challenge; at one end the terrain lied 1.5 meters below street level and then sloped down steeply so that the other end was some 5 meters underneath the street. As levelling the plot of land would have been extremely costly and would have been too time consuming the family built the first permanent structures in the relatively even patches that were available. The first structures to be built were three rooms at the back of the plot. Here, the uneven topography was used to place a robust foundation without having to dig out land and then leave the rooms at street level. A few years later, with the aim of gaining more space, a new structure was built at the other end of the plot. As this part of the terrain was at an average of 5 meters under the street, Alberto decided to build a large cistern and then build two rooms above so that their roof was at the same level as the street. Because the rooms were carved into the terrain on three sides ventilation and light were extremely scarce. Years later the Martínez family embarked on the construction of an additional level on top of these

two rooms. The lack of ventilation and light drove the family to dream about having a new house with large windows and fresh air. To achieve this, they decided to build three rooms on top of the ones dug under earth to use them as foundations for future construction at a higher level. Throughout the years, as the house has continued to expand, the rooms in the basement and those at street level have been only intermittently occupied. The rooms in the basement have been adapted into two small flats that share an external bathroom and are occasionally rented out. The ones on the ground floor were occupied for the space of a year by relatives of the family that needed housing and were then left vacant for some time used only as storage space for building material. Today, one of the flats in the basement is rented out and the other one is empty; one of the rooms of the ground floor is used by Karla and the other one is not used. Martha, Lola and her daughter Marisol often complain that they are crammed into a room within their parent's flat but they do not consider the option of moving into the rooms that have been left vacant. Instead, they are contributing to the current expansion of the house on the back of the plot of land where three self-contained flats are being built, with the aim of reorganising the family so that each of Alberto and Dolores' children can have a flat.

Plot size also represents an important constraint as to the morphological development of self-help housing. The larger the plot of land, the greater capacity a family has to continue building. The relatively large sizes of the plots in Santo Domingo has facilitated the expansion of the houses and the emergence of complex forms[39]. The Suarez family plot is significantly smaller than the other plots examined in this chapter; with 100 square meters it is half the size of the average plot in Santo Domingo. Notwithstanding the important limitation that plot size signifies for the Suarez family, numerous transformations and long-term building have still been feasible at this size.

Once the house had expanded to its total horizontal capacity the Suarez family intended to continue building by adding extra floors. They applied for a credit to the INVI but the credit was denied with the argument that they had already built the maximum three stories permitted in the area of Santo Domingo. Andrea admitted to me that they actually did not need the extra floor they wanted to build, specially

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[39] Gilbert and Ward (1985) suggest that plot sizes in many parts of Mexico City tend to be larger than in other Latin American cities. This has facilitated the practice of family unfolding and house sharing in the city.

Illustration 33. The Martínez family-house:
Topography and the fixity of permanent structures
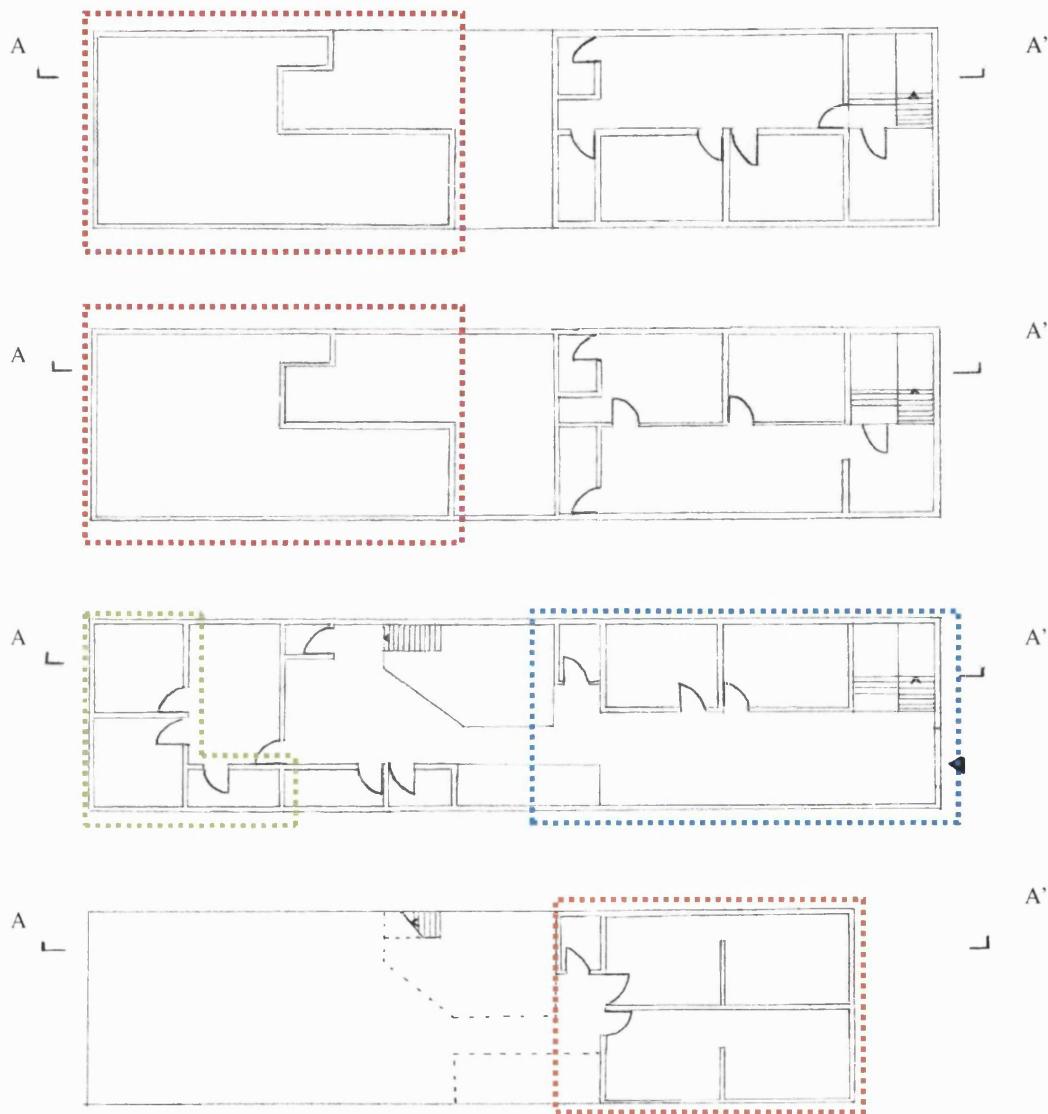
given the fact that both she and her sister have a flat which they rent out. So when the credit was denied she comforted her mother by saying: "I already have my flat, what do you want more house for?" But the reality is that the Suarez family do not really want more house, as in more rooms to fulfil a particular spatial need, but rather, that they wished for further building. Given the added limitation imposed by land use regulations in the area, the drive to continuously transform their house has been achieved through the performance of smaller changes. Once the house expanded horizontally to cover all the ground surface and vertically to the maximum height

Illustration 34. Section A – A' showing topography of the Martínez family-house

First permanent structures

Second permanent structure

Built as foundation for upper levels

Current expansion

Cistern – built together with basement level

allowed, the Suarez family continued to transform their house through the incessant redistribution and redefinition of spaces as well as through improvements and redecoration.

Similarly, in the last years the Molina family-house has not experienced mayor structural changes due to the government's restriction of a maximum of three floors in the neighbourhood of Santo Domingo. As popular settlements consolidate and regularise they are forced to conform to land use regulations set by the city government. In response, most families try to bypass these regulations and build beyond the three stories allowed. They often do so by building quickly before inspectors come and by paying bribes to inspectors and local government officials. When regulations can not be bypassed, the capacity to perform radical transformation is severely hindered but it does not mean that houses remain static. Smaller but nevertheless significant transformations continue to take place both in terms of residential arrangements and physical changes to the house. One of the most common

and visible ways in which the house is often transformed is through painting. The Molina family-house, for example, has been recently painted in a pistachio colour replacing a former beige. Another recent transformation has been the placement of tiles in the inner patio to replace the cement floor and later on a remodelling of the house's entrance gate. Plans to change further floors, plaster walls, and the like, are always in the conversation. Through major or small transformations the house is always in the making, and more than the aesthetic or practical value of these changes it is having the power to shape one's own house what is at stake. As Aurora explains: "Then, those are little details that "don't count", they are not changes where you are going to change the form of the house, or maybe you are going to remodel it. No, but what counts is that you have it well kept, what counts is that you don't want to live just like that." Absence of continuous radical transformation of our residential environments stems from the impossibility of constantly starting afresh. This does not mean, however, that people cease to transform their residential environments. As more radical transformations are ruled out, home improvements and decoration acquire central stage. In Santo Domingo, within the constraints imposed by plot size, land use and building regulations, and the family's economic conditions, houses are under continuous transformation. Together with the increased rigidity of permanent structures, the above constraints determine to what extent the houses undergo major structural transformations or continue to develop through the incessant implementation of improvements, reorganisation of space and redecoration.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the family-house process is more than the struggle to attain adequate shelter and respond to a family's changing spatial needs and aspirations in the context of limited economic resources. What constitutes the essence of the family-house is not the housing form that is produced but the process of building itself. I therefore propose to see the house not only as an expression of its occupants needs, possibilities and values, but to see the *process of building* a house as being of particular social significance.

Although house expansion is often motivated by family growth and depends on the family's economic capacity, the different moments of the family-house process do not represent and/or correspond to given stages in the family's life cycle and to its

economic development. This is because, on the one hand, the process of expansion and consolidation of the house is not a simple linear expansion where an original structure is progressively being added to. The building process often entails the dismantling of structures, the erection of new ones, and the abandonment of others. Secondly, I argue that families do not go through an established and unidirectional life cycle which can be translated into specific spatial requirements. Although it is true that we are all born, age and eventually die, we do not all marry, stay married and have children who will then marry, stay married and have children. Families are made up of people with complex biographies that are different from each other and whose needs and aspirations cannot be predefined. Lastly, I argue that families do not undergo a process of linear economic improvement. In Santo Domingo most families have been actually struggling over the last two decades due to a sustained economic crisis.

Aside from the production of shelter, the family-house process is a process of building and consolidating families. The expansion and consolidation of the house is both the result and the medium for the consolidation of the family. Furthermore, given the indivisibility between family and house, the house functions as a record of the family's achievements. This does not simply mean that by looking at the house one can read the successes and failures of the family that built it. Rather, it means that in recognising the power of the house as a public façade, families actively build status and recognition through the building of their house. The family-house process is thus also a process of building socio-economic status and recognition. Beyond aesthetic concerns, in the popular settlements of Mexico City, the imperative is to build robust houses that will allow for further expansion. As families and houses become through the same building process, it is interpreted that mastering the craft of building a house is parallel to mastering the craft of consolidating a family. A well-built house is thus both a necessary condition for, and evidence of successful family building. In Santo Domingo there is a shared ideal of what building a good house and a successful family means; family cohesion, solidarity and socio-economic progress are encapsulated in the ideal of *juntos pero no revueltos*. This ideal is achieved when the various family groups that make up an extended family are able to live in close proximity with each other but in a different self-contained flat each. In the process of building their houses, the families of the popular settlements actively pursue this socio-spatial arrangement. As a consequence, the house's morphological

development follows this idea even when it contradicts the family's actual everyday practices as well as important material concerns such as ventilation and lighting.

In the context of self-help housing, where families produce their houses themselves, houses are able to communicate a great deal about the families that built them. Families are deeply aware of this and consequently allocate their limited resources in a way that allows them to build houses that can provide them with a certain recognition and socio-economic status. Recognition is first obtained through the process of building itself. The act of building, no matter the aesthetic and formal qualities of what is erected is in itself a source of status. Consequently, continuous building becomes a goal. Secondly, in order to build an image of themselves as respectable citizens, families strive to build houses that conform to generalised images of what constitutes a "proper" house. Through the construction of their houses families actively build images of themselves in order to gain social recognition. Though this process entails their awareness of their position as marginal and excluded it does not entail a struggle to counter the structural causes that have placed them in this precarious position. What families build for themselves is a symbolic recognition without challenging their structural conditions, therefore failing to achieve real social inclusion. During the early period of the formation of a popular settlement, people organise themselves and are able to link their demand for housing to broader structural claims. It is in this moments of organised political action that the family-house process has the potential to not only build recognition and acceptance but actual social inclusion in society.

Lastly, I argued that beyond the material and symbolic motivations for house building, the fulfilment of the impulse to build is what lies at the heart of the family-house process. The continuous impulse to build that can be seen in the families of Santo Domingo is a result of the human need to appropriate its surroundings and create a sense of belonging. House building is therefore the process of developing a sense of belonging through the continuous building of the family-house. To actualise this feeling of belonging people continuously transform their surroundings be it through radical building projects or through simple redecoration. In Santo Domingo a strong attachment to the houses and neighbourhood has resulted from the collective endeavour of auto-producing the neighbourhood and its houses. Today, as the neighbourhood has consolidated and there is less need for organised action, solidarity

networks amongst neighbours have weakened. Attachment to the neighbourhood nevertheless remains strong. This, I argue, is because of the families' continued productive engagement with their houses. In Santo Domingo, attachment to place is not so much a result of long term residence in the area. Neighbourhood stability is not a necessary condition for the development of a strong attachment to place; more important is people's practical and productive engagement with space.

CHAPTER NINE – FINAL REMARKS

1. Introduction

The main objective of this last chapter is not to reiterate the conclusions reached at the end of each of the previous chapters, or to provide a summary of what has been argued so far; the pages that follow seek to connect the densification process taking place in Santo Domingo back to its broader context. Based on the case of Santo Domingo, this chapter provides a general picture of the current situation of Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements. In addition, by relating the situation of the consolidated settlements of Mexico City with the current context of economic crisis and shortage of affordable housing, the chapter offers a few final remarks on the processes and challenges that lie ahead.

2. Continuity and revision of extended family practices

My research in Santo Domingo suggests that amongst Mexico City's urban poor family practices are being redefined. Contrary to what might be expected along the lines of a widespread belief that modernity brings the inevitable ascent of individualism to the detriment of the traditional communal family lifestyle, these transformations in family life have not meant that extended family practices are losing weight. The observable transformations in family life are characterised by the emergence of more varied and complex family forms that often imply some sort of extended family arrangement. Though phenomena like female-headed households and single-parent households are more common they do not necessarily lead to the emergence of smaller family units. Family groups that are smaller than the nuclear family, such as single-parents, parents with no children, and single people with no children, do not always reside in separate housing. In fact, amongst Mexico City's urban poor family groups of all sorts tend to cluster together into large extended families. If the current trend of economic crisis, shortage of low-income housing provision and gradual but persistent family change continues, it can be expected that extended family arrangements that result from the clustering of a variety of family groups will continue to grow.

3. The growing pressure of gentrification

The empirical data I gathered in Santo Domingo also challenges the notion that, as a result of consolidation and regularisation, there has been an extensive process of expulsion of the neighbourhood's original population. In fact, most of the neighbourhood's house-owners continue to be the early *colonos* and/or their families. However, Santo Domingo has incorporated large numbers of new residents through the expansion of informal rental housing, family unfolding and house sharing. On the whole, the people that have moved into the neighbourhood through these three processes are of a similar socio-economic background as the early *colonos*. Only a small percentage of the neighbourhood's population is of a higher income bracket and has moved into the neighbourhood buying a plot from an original settler. Today, consolidated settlements are made up by the early *colonos* and by new residents of the same socio-economic strata that have been incorporated through house sharing and informal rental housing. Only a small portion of the population is somewhat more affluent; there has been, as yet, no widespread process of gentrification.

In 2000 the government of the Federal District set out its urban policy with the "Bando Dos" regulations at the core of its framework. Bando Dos aims at recovering population within the Federal District's four central districts, based on the idea that it is best to exploit the existing infrastructure, and containing urban sprawl. However, due to the lack of coordination between the Federal District and the neighbouring State of Mexico the Bando Dos regulation has resulted in a substantial rise of land prices in the former. As a result, the only alternatives for the development of working-class housing are the popular urbanisation of the outlying metropolitan districts, and the densification of the consolidated popular settlements. In addition, as land has become significantly more expensive in the Federal District there is a significant pressure on consolidated settlements due to their development potential for the production of middle-class housing. Consequently, the consolidated settlements of Mexico City are having to absorb part of the demand for affordable housing and find themselves under mounting pressure from the middle classes and real estate developers to release the land to the formal housing market.

Until now the residents of the consolidated popular settlements have resisted the existing pressures to gentrify and have managed to stay in their neighbourhood.

Families have resisted being expelled because of their strong attachment to their houses and to the neighbourhood. My research in Santo Domingo has revealed that part of this attachment stems from the fact that families see the houses they produce and inhabit as being part of their family process and not as an architectural object to be consumed. The houses that families build are inextricably linked to the process of forming families themselves. Losing the house would represent losing the foundation for their families thus having to re-build the family again. The existing strong attachment to the houses and to the neighbourhood also stems from the fact that people have built their houses and the neighbourhood themselves. It is because they built it with their own physical and economic effort that the house is valuable. The house is their own creation, it is part of the process of building a family and not a detached material object of consumption. Mexico City's urban poor are not prisoners within their low-income settlements longing for escape; their settlements are hard earned assets which they will always defend.

Families will continue to resist the pressures to gentrify the area, but the sustained economic crisis they have to endure might eventually force them to sell. If they do sell, they will most probably be bound to fight for housing in the outlying periphery of the city. Given the insufficient provision of low-income housing both by the state and by the private sector in the Federal District, Mexico City's low-income population is still turning to the informal market to access housing. A portion of the population does so through the informal rental housing market and others through the development of irregular land subdivisions, mostly in the outlying periphery beyond the boundaries of the Federal District. In this context, the expelled population of the consolidated settlements would have to invest the capital gained from selling their house to access housing they can afford. As the exchange value of their houses is low in comparison with the high costs of building them, in the long term the sale of their property would entail a significant loss of capital. Consequently, families would have lost decades of strenuous investment and would be left with insufficient capital to acquire a new house that satisfies their needs as the previous one did. They would come back to a similar condition to when they began the housing process thirty years ago, thereby reproducing the cycle of poverty. Moreover, the outlying periphery would increase their levels of marginality. They would be further away from employment opportunities, would have to invest more of their meagre resources on

transport, and would return to a dire situation characterised by lack of services and amenities, all of which would significantly lower their quality of life.

Building on Habracken (1999) I have stated that within the realm of what is physically, economically, and legally possible people will always seek to appropriate their domestic environments by actively shaping them. If people have the possibility to continuously transform their residential environments they will be able to make them their own. In Santo Domingo, as in other consolidated popular settlements where people have built their houses and their neighbourhood by themselves, families hold strong feelings of attachment. Today, as popular settlements have consolidated and there is less need for organised action, solidarity networks amongst neighbours have weakened. Attachment to the neighbourhood nevertheless remains strong. This, I have argued, is because of the families' continued productive engagement with their houses. In the consolidated popular settlements of Mexico City attachment to place and a sense of being at home results not from being born and bred in the area but from people's practical and productive engagement with space.

Families of Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements have seen their capacity to radically shape the residential environment gradually decreased. Even so, embodied memory of past building and continuous transformation through smaller but not less significant changes constantly renew their sense of belonging. If gentrification does take place and the families of the consolidated settlements are expelled, what would be the impact to their sense of belonging? What sense of local belonging could they develop if they move into informal rental housing? What sense of local belonging could they develop if they move into the vast expanses of low-quality housing that commercial developers are now building beyond the Federal District? Residential environments which leave their occupants little or no possibility to actively shape them severely hinder the development of a sense of belonging. Given the tenurial and physical qualities of informal rental housing and of Mexico's new commercial housing developments, which severely restrict people's capacity to transform their residential environments, it seems unlikely that its residents will develop a sense of local belonging through their active engagement with residential space.

Photograph 26. Example of one of the commercial housing developments that are spreading throughout the country.
Source: Scott Peterman. 2006. Ecatepec.

4. Is densification a solution to affordable housing shortage?

Though gentrification has not yet taken place, the consolidated settlements of Mexico City have not remained unchanged; they are currently playing a fundamental role in the provision of housing for the city's low-income population which has led them to become increasingly dense. The current situation is that of an insufficient production of social housing, decreasing feasibility of self-help housing processes, a notable lack of affordable formal rental housing, and the construction of large expanses of commercial housing developments which are generally too expensive – in terms of the actual cost of buying a house there and the high costs that come with their remote location – and inadequate for the needs of low-income families. In this context, a large number of families are moving into informal rental accommodation in the consolidated popular settlements. In addition, low-income families in need for housing and most of the recently formed families whose parents or relatives own a house in a consolidated settlement are being drawn to secure a place for themselves

in a multifamily plot and build something for themselves there. Through the development of informal rental housing, family unfolding and house sharing the density of the consolidated settlements is reaching very high levels. The houses in these settlements are expanding horizontally and vertically to their maximum physical, structural and legal capacity housing a rising number of people. As long as the gentrification of these settlements is contained and no alternatives for housing the low-income population are found, consolidated settlements will continue to densify. If densification is effectively planned it can contribute to the development of a sustainable, compact city. If the goal of providing economic support and technical guidance so that densification takes place without generating problems of overcrowding – currently pursued by the Housing Improvement Programme (PMV) of the Institute for Housing of the Federal District (INVI) – is accomplished, densification represents a viable solution for the provision of low-income housing. But, if densification intensifies without proper economic and technical support, it will lead to overcrowding.

My research has shown the process by which the residents of Santo Domingo have acquired a disposition towards communal family life. In this context, the ideal scenario for most is to live *juntos pero no revueltos*; to live in close proximity to one another, to feel accompanied and count on support, but to be *aparte*. If the consolidated settlements of Mexico City continue to densify reaching generalised levels of overcrowding, families will find it harder to reach this ideal. There will be a greater mismatch between the existing *habitus,* which predisposes people to search for the *juntos pero no revueltos* ideal, and their actual conditions of existence. If this happens it remains to be seen whether the present *habitus* will adapt itself and continue to make a virtue out of necessity, if the mismatch will urge people to move both physically and socially (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005), or if it will lead to organised political action demanding housing.

In the situation of intensive densification families use their limited space in a tactical way (de Certeau 1984). Through tactical everyday practice families adapt their living spaces as much as possible to fit their needs and get closer to their socio-spatial ideal of living *juntos pero no revueltos*. In the consolidated popular settlements of Mexico City, family members have developed a variety of tactics to introduce or transform socio-spatial boundaries in order to define their multifamily plots as being made up

of one or a number of self-contained flats, and one or a number of distinct family groups. For as long as they are able to remain in these settlements, families will actively engage with their spatial conditions of existence through tactical practice. It is to be expected that as the settlement becomes more dense reaching conditions of overcrowding, these tactics will become less effective. The transformative capacity of people's spatial tactics will decrease as it becomes harder to manipulate increasingly restrictive spatial conditions.

5. New forms of exclusion

If no solution to the affordable housing shortage is found and the families of Mexico City's consolidated settlements are forced to cluster in overcrowded conditions or if they are expelled from their settlements as a result of gentrification, they will be faced with new forms of economic, politic and symbolic exclusion. The production of Mexico City's consolidated popular settlements was not solely the result of a struggle to acquire adequate shelter, it was also a struggle to be included in society. As a result of their exclusion from the formal housing market the families that produced these settlements have experienced the material consequences of exclusion first hand. They are therefore well aware of their marginal status in society. In addition, Mexico City's urban poor have long suffered the symbolic consequences of exclusion leading them to have a denigrated sense of their own persons (Holston 1991). The housing process has enabled Mexico City's urban poor to construct a sense of themselves as respectable citizens thus counteracting one of the negative effects of marginalisation. By actively building their houses and using them as public façades they have been able to construct an image of themselves as integrated people in society. It is important to note that, in spite of the importance of the acquisition of this limited political and symbolic empowerment "the paradox of autoconstruction is that it develops through the reiteration of the kinds of property relations that ground the very social order that exploits them as workers" (Ibid.: 448).

Today, the residents of Mexico City's popular settlements are still significantly marginalised. In fact, due to persistent economic crisis, argues González de la Rocha (2006), the urban poor currently find themselves in a social and cultural context of *radical exclusion*. If, in this context of cumulative impoverishment, no solution is found for the current shortage of affordable housing, leading families to cluster in

overcrowded conditions or to move into poor informal rental housing, Mexico City's low-income population will not only find themselves in more precarious conditions in the material sense, but would lose the ground they have gained in constructing a dignified sense of their own persons. They would return to the condition they held before the housing process in which they were economically, politically and symbolically excluded.

6. Conclusion

At present, the consolidated settlements of Mexico City are absorbing part of the demand for affordable housing through a process of intense densification. At the same time, as a result of rising land costs in the Federal District, they find themselves under mounting pressure from the middle classes and real estate developers to release their land into the formal housing market. Unless the city finds a way to adequately respond to the housing needs of the low-income population, the consolidated popular settlements of Mexico City will continue to absorb the need for affordable housing by clustering in multifamily plots and through informal rental housing, or they will give way to the pressures to gentrify and provide housing for the middle classes. Both of these scenarios place the families of these settlements under the threat of new forms of economic, politic and symbolic exclusion.

If the consolidated settlements continue to absorb the demand for affordable housing through uncontrolled densification, overcrowding levels will continue to rise creating socially and materially unsustainable conditions. As a result of overcrowding, families will find it harder to reach their ideal of living *juntos pero no revueltos*. In addition, if overcrowding levels continue to rise, the transformative capacity of people's spatial tactics will decrease as it becomes harder to manipulate increasingly restrictive spatial conditions.

Following, on the other hand, the future scenario in which the consolidated settlements of Mexico City gentrify, the current residents would be displaced, forced again to fight for housing in the outlying periphery of the city, and unable to break the cycle of poverty. In these settlements attachment to place and a sense of being at home has resulted from people's capacity to shape their residential environments. If gentrification does take place and the families of the consolidated settlements are expelled into informal rental housing or into the recently built commercial housing

developments, where people's capacity to transform their residential environments is severely restricted, it seems unlikely that its residents will develop a sense of local belonging through their active engagement with residential space. It remains to be seen what the impact of gentrification on people's sense of local belonging will be.

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APPENDIX

The family trees presented in this section are meant to provide a sense of who the families with whom I carried out research are, and give a rough estimate as to the number of people that were dealt with. It is important to keep in mind that there was a significant imbalance as to the times I saw and spoke to each of these people. As noted earlier in the text, both participant observation and conversations took place mostly with women. Some of the people represented in these diagrams I only saw once or only greeted as they entered the house. Furthermore, the family trees provided in this appendix are an over simplification of the families with which I worked. In the search of clarity, an arbitrary limit to the family has been set around the offspring of the couple who founded the plot and their descendants. Beyond this limit, only those who were living in the family-house at the time of fieldwork are included in the diagrams. People renting accommodation in the plots have also been excluded from the diagrams. However, for every plot I indicate whether rooms have been rented in the past or whether they were being rented during time of fieldwork.

The family trees included in this appendix are also meant to facilitate the reading of chapters 5 to 8 by situating all of the families and the people mentioned in these chapters. In order to avoid unnecessary complexity that would make the understanding of the families more difficult, I have only provided names for the people that are named in the text. It is important to note that these are not the only people with whom I held interviews or informal conversations.

Plot 1: The Robles family
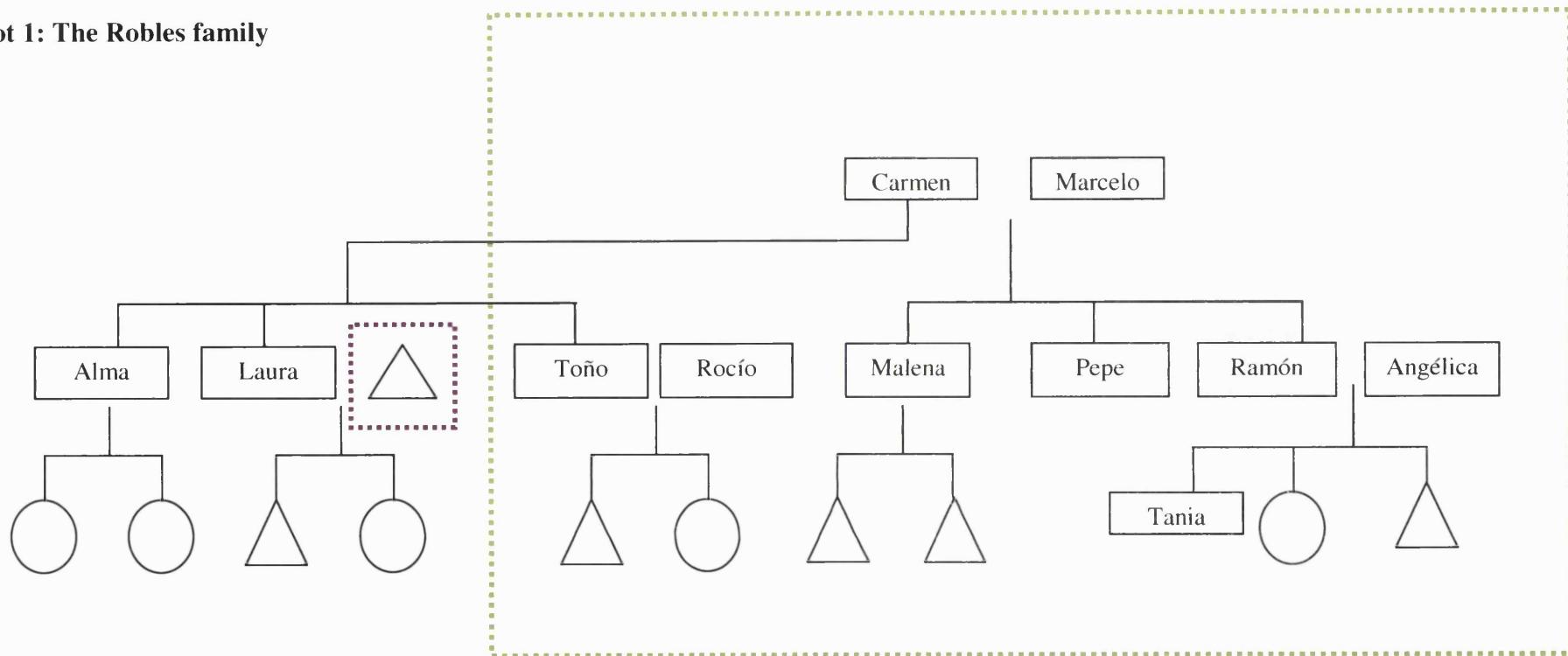
.......... People living in the plot during time of fieldwork
▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪ Living in the United States during time of fieldwork
Reconstituted family: Alma, Laura and Toño are the offspring of Carmen's first marriage
No rooms for rent
Plot size: 60 square meters

Plot 2: The Hernández family
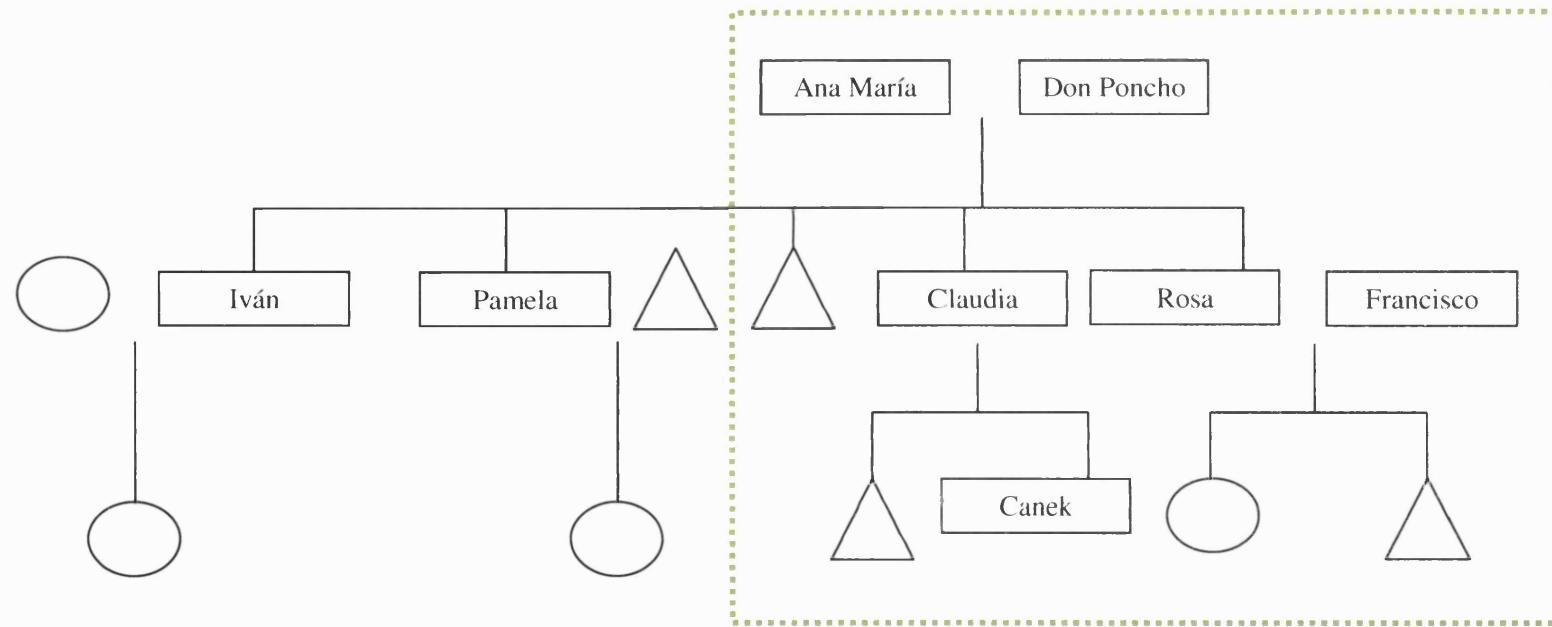
.... People living in the plot during time of fieldwork
No rooms for rent
There have been several sharers in the family-house
Plot size: 176 square meters

Plot 3: The Ortiz family
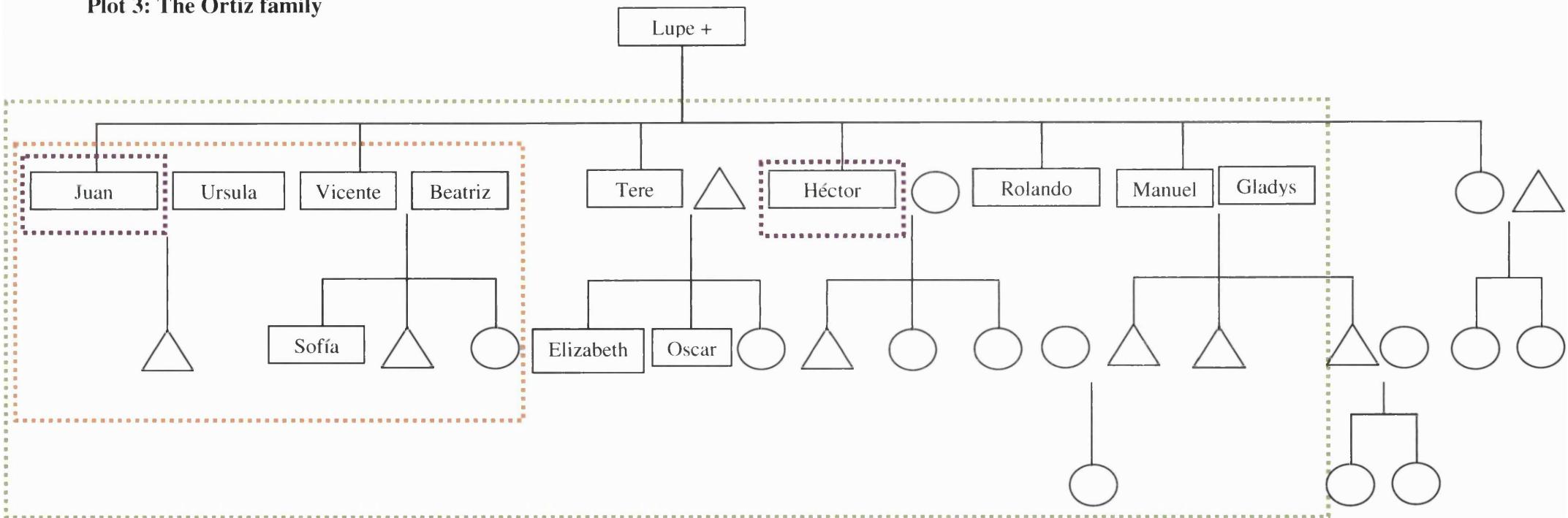
.... People living in the plot during time of fieldwork
.... Family groups with whom extensive participant observation took place
.... Living in the United States during time of fieldwork
No rooms for rent
Plot size: 200 square meters

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Plot 4:
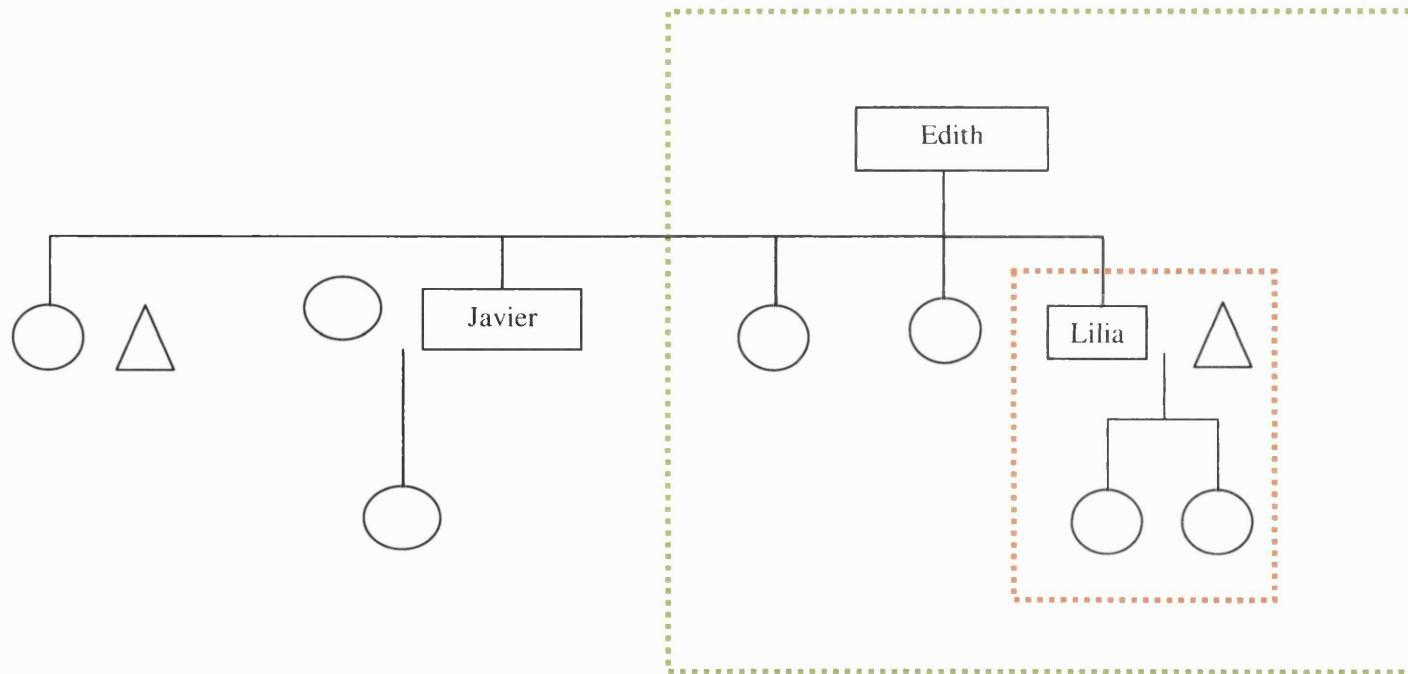

.... People living in the plot during time of fieldwork
.... This family group sleeps in a rented room two houses away from the family-house but carries out all other activities there
Reconstituted family: elder daughter is the offspring of Edith's first marriage
Rooms have been rented in the past
Plot size: 100 square meters

Plot 5:
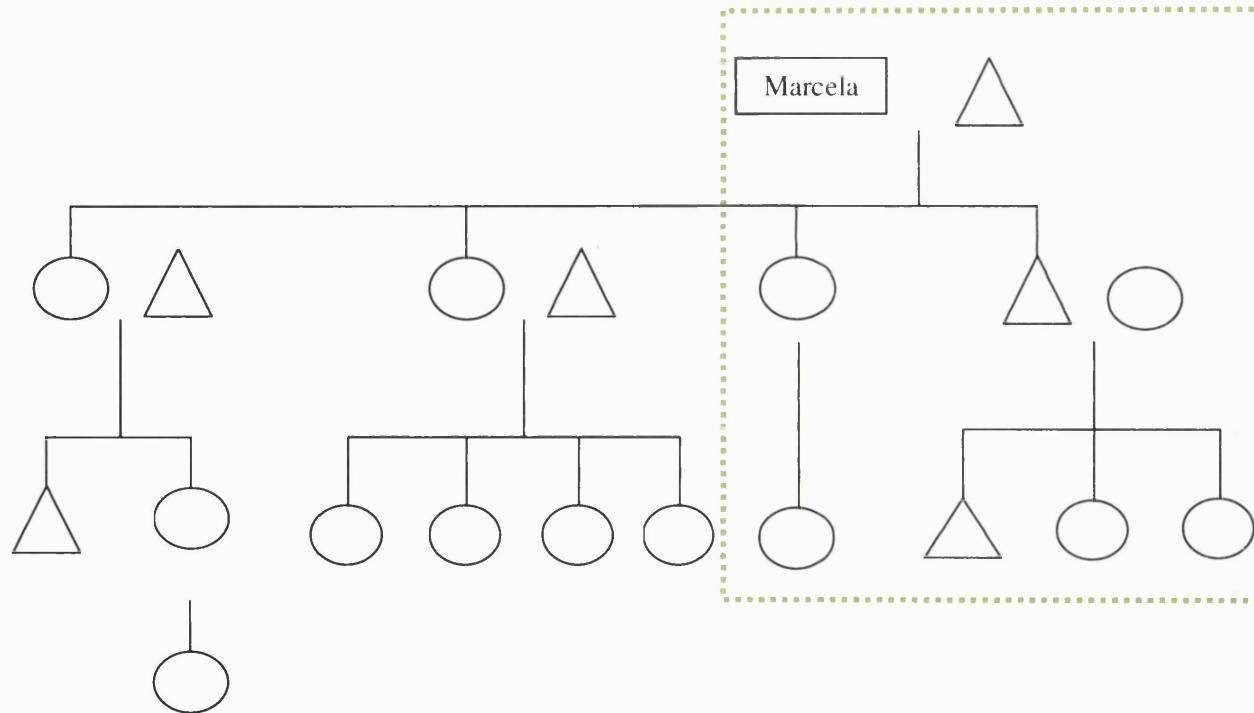
.... People living in the plot during time of fieldwork

No rooms for rent

Plot size: 500 square meters

This plot is particularly large because Marcela comes from a family of *comuneros* and was thus able to claim a 500 square meter plot at the time of the land invasion. During the time of fieldwork all the built up area was located in one half of the plot. The remaining half has been distributed amongst Marcela's offspring and is awaiting construction.

Plot 6: The Molina family
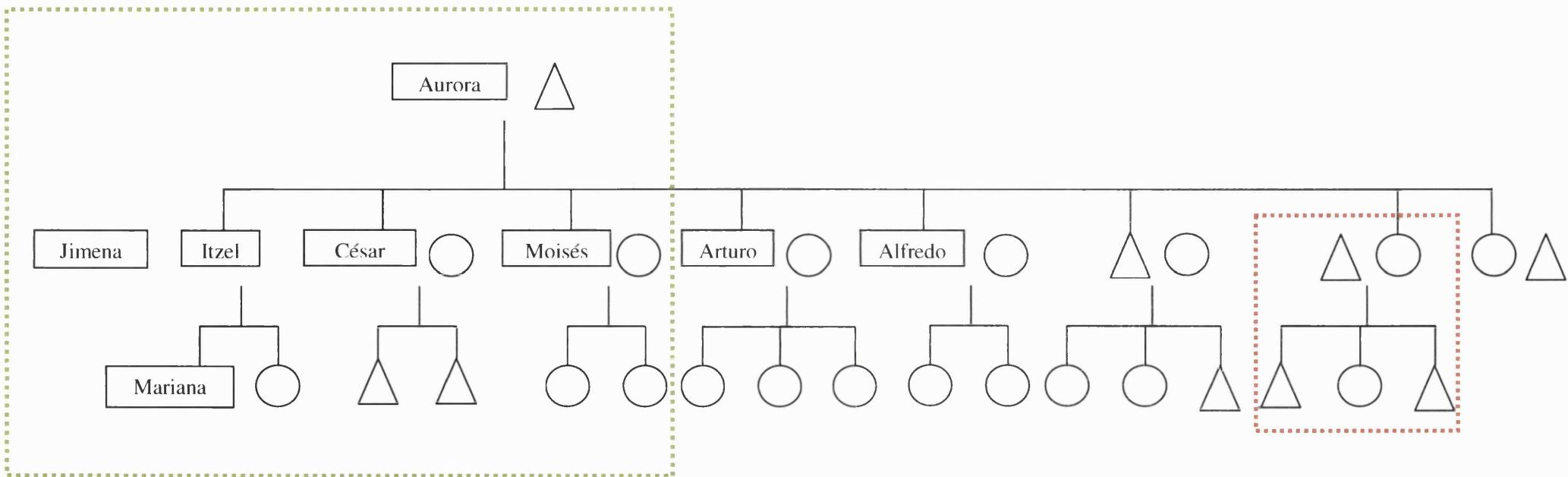
.... People living in the plot during time of fieldwork
.......... Live in the house next door
Rooms were being rented during time of fieldwork
There have been several sharers in the family-house
Jimena is Aurora's niece and she is currently living in the family-house
Plot size: 150 square meters

Plot 7: The Martínez family
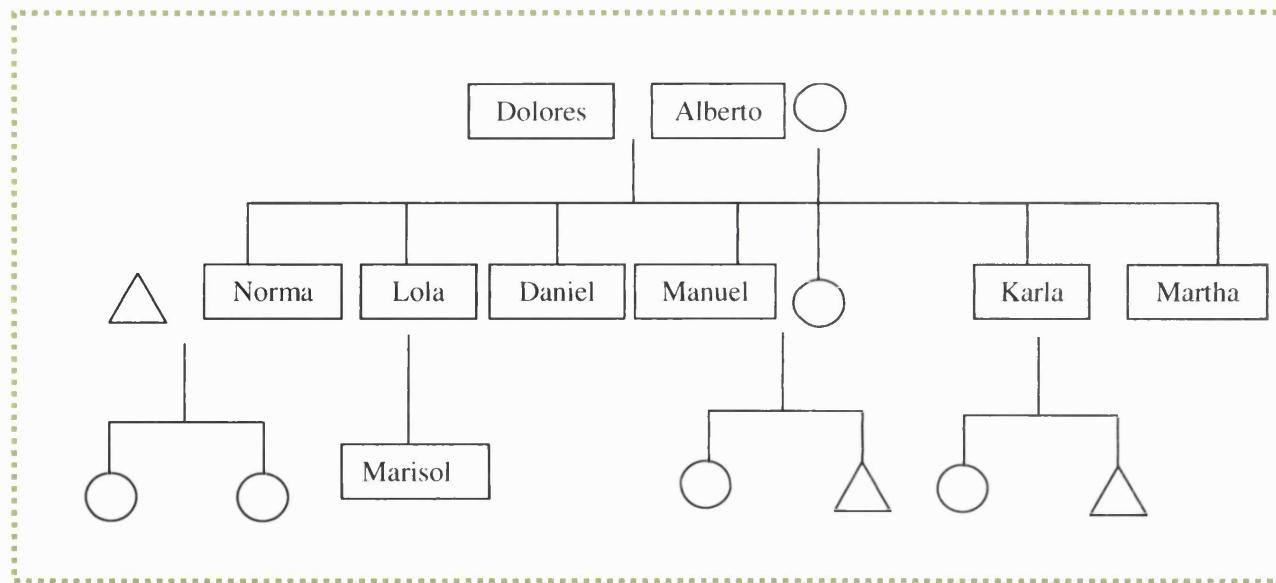
.... People living in the plot during time of fieldwork
Rooms were being rented during time of fieldwork
There have been several sharers in the family-house
Plot size: 280 square meters

Plot 8: The Ornelas family
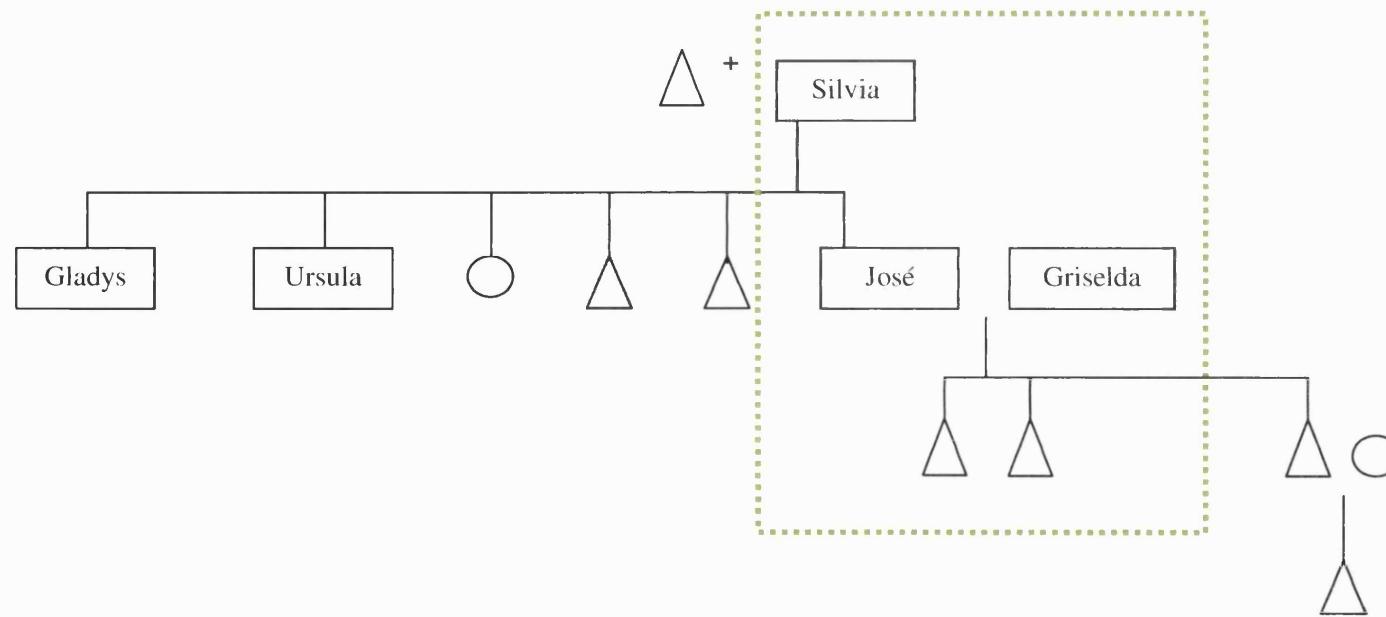
.... People living in the plot during time of fieldwork
Rooms were being rented during time of fieldwork
Plot size: 200 square meters

Plot 9: The Ornelas Rubio family

Jacinta

Silvia | + | ○ | Mari | Omar | Karina | Rosario | △

Gladys | Ursula | + | △ | △ | José | △ | △ | △ | △ | △ | △ | ○ | ○ | Jerónimo | △ | △ | ○ | △ | ○ | ○ | △ | ○

△

○

Not born yet

············ People living in the plot during time of fieldwork
Ursula and Gladys currently live in Plot 3
José and Silvia currently live in Plot 8
No rooms for rent
Plot size: 200 square meters
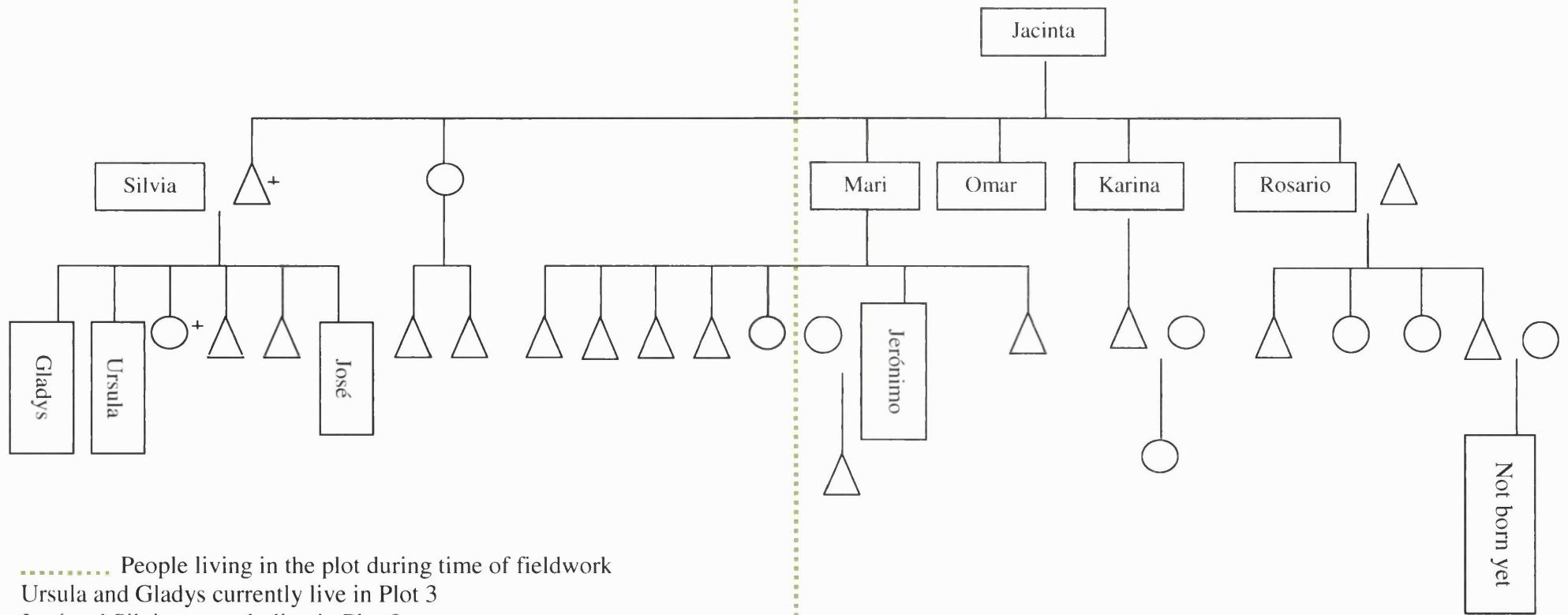
Plot 10: The Suarez family
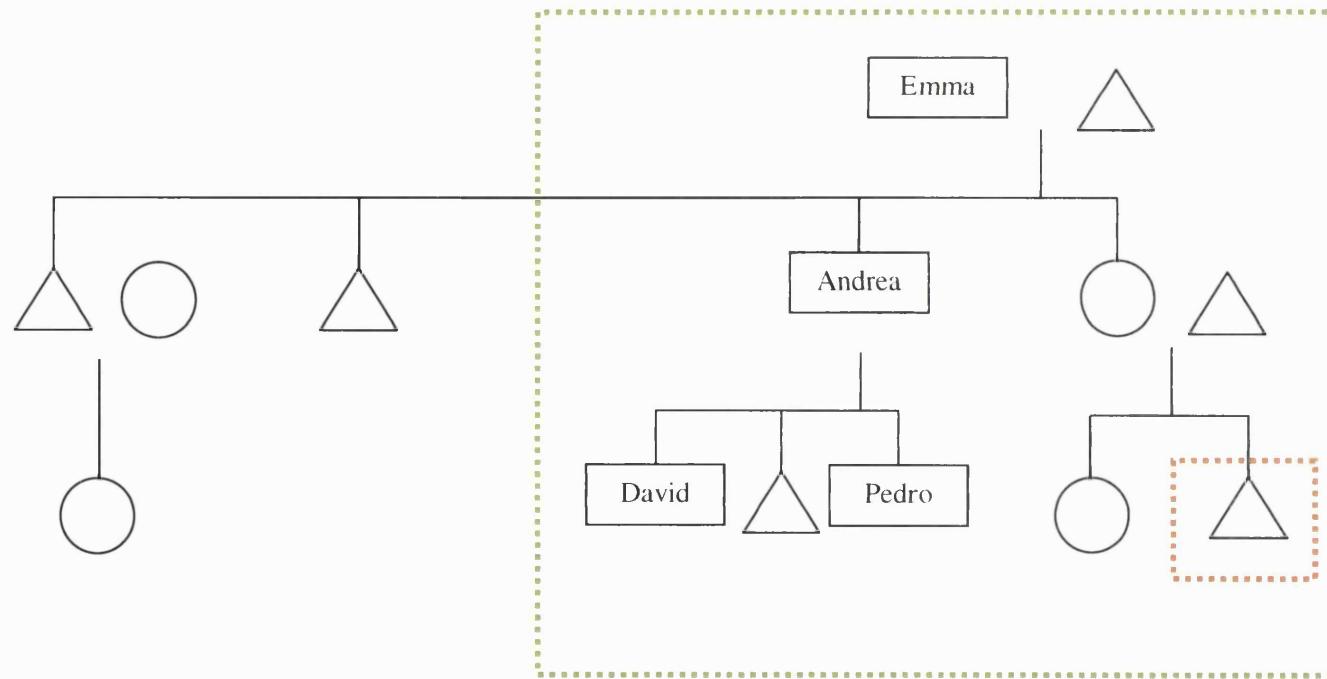
.... People living in the plot during time of fieldwork
.... Lives in family-house most days a week, the remaining days he lives in a small room his parents rent close to where he studies
During time of fieldwork the Suarez family was looking for a student to rent out one of their rooms
Plot size: 100 square meters