London School of Economics and Political Science

Ordinary concerns
Class, value, and mattering among lower-middle-class *Santiaguinos*

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic exploration of lower-middle-class households in Santiago, Chile. The emergence of the lower middle class is one crucial feature of late capitalism in this Latin American country. This class is one structural group created by the failure of neoliberal reforms to deliver social development and the segmentation of job markets to enhance capitalist accumulation. Despite permanent employment, working-class, low-level white-collar, and self-employed individuals cannot find a path to authentic financial stability and social recognition. Further, this class is often characterised by a second trait. Chilean scholars relate lower-middle-class adults to passive citizenship, political apathy, or false consciousness.

Based on sixteen months of ethnographic fieldwork among seven different families, this dissertation explores how parents discern and pursue what matters to them, examining three 'structures of mattering'—post-industrial domestic fantasies, the mood of sacrificial optimism, and a commitment to nurturing. These structures orient parents on their struggle for value in different spheres and encourage them to dedicate their lives to taking care of their families, despite neoliberal precarity.

In this context, I argue that the interface between these structures and the capitalist promises of hard work, self-reliance, and social mobility is more complicated than mere compliance with neoliberal ideologies. By analysing parents' perspectives on labour, housing, parenting and citizenship, the ethnography shows how neoliberal and liberal discourses blend with Catholicism, plebeian culture, and the historical legacy of the developmental state to create a distinct sense of citizenship. This insight contributes to understanding the last thirty years of the post-authoritarian citizenship regime in Chile and processes of class restructuration in urban Latin America.

In memory of Amalia Herrera (1987-2010) and David Graeber (1961-2020)

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Notes on translation and style

All translations from Spanish to English in the thesis are my own. Some quotes have been edited for clarity. To protect the anonymity and confidentiality of my interlocutors, I have changed their names. I have also modified some of their personal details to the same end.

Introduction

One summer afternoon in 2018, I had afternoon tea with Verónica, known as Vero to her friends. She is a sweet, hardworking woman, entirely devoted to her children and her grandchild. We talk about the most recent news report—a young pickpocket hit by a bus while the police were chasing him. Vero shows her disdain for the young thief. Crime and police inaction make her sick. She condemns criminals, ‘They do not want to make the effort, they want everything for free.’ Soon the discussion turns to the issue of ‘poor people’. Like most of my interlocutors, Vero claims that the poor need help to get ahead (*salir adelante*). She knows that vulnerable families can be hardworking. Still, she often characterises them as lazy (*flojos*) and lacking resoluteness (*sin voluntad*). According to her, crooks are lazy and want to get things the easy way.

Up until this point, I had not wanted to approach class in the abstract. I mistrust the type of question that asks interlocutors point-blank what they think about ‘social classes’ or ‘inequality’. Still, I ask her, ‘Vero, what do you think? You talk about poor people, the middle class, the rich, who do you mean? How many do you think belong to each class?’ This was my first attempt to put forward a more global image of class structure. Vero found the question odd at first. Our close relationship had become a direct interpellation. She obviously had to improvise an answer. She has neither thought about the social classes as distinct bounded wholes, nor as numerical expressions. ‘I have never been good at maths,’ she tells me, ‘I do not know…. A third, a third, and a third.’ For Vero, Chilean society is divided into three large groups of equal size. After I probe further, she continues, ‘The poor are supported by the state. The rich do not have to work; they live thanks to their inheritance and income. We, the middle class, are the ones that have to work.’ Finishing our conversation, she returns to the middle class under threat issue, explaining how the state has abandoned the middle class. ‘Nobody helps people like us,’ she concludes.

Vero’s account tells us two important things. First, she imagines class differently from state and academic models. The most important state survey puts lower-income groups—the *vulnerable class,* nowadays—around less than 20 per cent in Chile (MDSF 2017a). In contrast, using the same survey, an influential think-tank calculates the upper classes as 10 per cent of the population (Libertad & Desarrollo 2019). Secondly, class is closer to open-ended forms of personhood and selfhood that express moral attitudes, rather than specific mechanisms of value accumulation or state protection. Vero and the rest of the parents I meet in Santiago do not care about establishing perfect class boundaries.

Vero works as a greengrocer’s assistant in Maipú, her home district. She insists on claiming middle-classness. However, contradictory feelings about her job emerge from our conversations. On almost every visit, she would start recounting how exhausted she was. Exhaustion takes on multiple meanings. She is tired of working long hours without time to rest. She is dissatisfied with her bosses’ treatment. They do not value her and constantly undermine her. She only earns the national minimum wage (around £350 per month). Little money is left over for vacations or personal projects. She does not know how to approach her bosses for a raise. As a 48-year-old woman without a college degree or significant work experience, she finds herself bound to her job. She feels abused and exploited.

Later in the fieldwork, I ask Vero ‘Why have you continued to endure this job? Your kids have grown up. You could work less and be supported by them.’ ‘My family is everything,’ she answers. Her children and grandchildren are her primary moral drive. She wishes to have a happy family, and she is committed to supporting her children. The only way to achieve this, according to her, is to make sacrifices. She means to keep working no matter what—tough jobs, sickness, abuse. Hard work brings money and a fragile sense of economic and relational stability. She knows that she does not have disposable income or significant savings. Thus, her only option is to keep on working.

Vero feels it a necessity to help her children, 32-year-old Isa and 30-year-old Mario. Mario works; thus, he and Vero have an equitable relationship. Isa is a different matter. She barely earns £300 per month. Although Isa rarely asks Vero for money, her mother still feels compelled to help her. Vero does not mind giving her daughter money and shelter. Even though they are adults, her children are ‘everything’ to her. She wants to help them each to achieve a good position and a tranquil domestic life. Exhaustion is not relevant when one has a happy family.

We could interpret Vero’s entanglement with middle-classness as a drive for status aspiration or disidentification with the working class. However, the picture is more complicated. She is middle-class and wants her children to have a ‘better situation’ (*una mejor situación*). This better situation is not about more status or wealth, but freedom, stability, and conviviality. Here, the working-class identity disappears for Vero; being a worker means to be ‘hardworking’, which, in turn, defines the middle class. For her, it is poverty or the middle class.

Class and what matters under a late capitalist regime

Neoliberalism[1] has become the dominant bloc’s hegemonic project since 1978. The dominant bloc[2] has shaped and controlled different regimes on different scales to govern Chile—mostly known as accumulation, regulation, and governance (Jessop 2008, 2015). Ben Ross Schneider (2013) describes how the export sector (the mining, silviculture, fishing, and agricultural sectors) articulates the core of the neoliberal regime of accumulation, which has shaped both regulatory and governance regimes (see also Solimano 2012). Outsourced services, retail, and banking institutions have helped bolster growth and create more jobs. To keep profits high for the dominant bloc, the hegemonic project has undermined labour

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[1] To capture the intensification of global economic and cultural fluxes since the 1970s, researchers have deployed the concept of *neoliberalism*. The category of neoliberalism has had an erratic trajectory, however. Originally framed under the retreat of the state and advance of market forces, current interpretation has veered into diverging domains and processes (Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2010; Clarke 2008; Dunn 2016; Ganti 2014; Hilgers 2010).

[2] We might understand the dominant bloc as an alliance between ruling groups that also mobilises other secondary social groups in their favour through co-optation and capital and resource distribution (Gramsci 1971; Portelli 1977; G. Smith 2011). In Chile, transnational companies, national multisectoral corporative groups, traditional political classes and moral and intellectual intelligentsia constitute the dominant bloc (UNDP 2004; T. Undurraga 2015)

organisations and segmented labour markets to keep wages low and limit the demand for skilled jobs.

The hegemonic bloc set the overall architecture of this accumulation regime under the authoritarian Pinochet regime (1973-1990). The new state project would transform Chilean society profoundly, enacting one of the most aggressive neoliberal reforms in the world. State policy in this era would encourage the privatisation of state companies, the reduction of the social welfare apparatus, the creation of multiple markets for services previously under state supervision (e.g. housing, health, education, essential utilities, and pensions), the reduction of the industrial sector, and the opening of Chilean markets to global fluxes of capital and commodities. In other words, it reversed almost every single political and economic principle that had structured the developmental state in Chile (1938-1970).

In the 1990s, the post-authoritarian governments vocally endorsed the ‘Growth with Equity’ strategy as its global model (Camargo 2006; M.A. Garretón 2012; Leiva 2008; M. Taylor 2006; van dee Ree 2007). This approach to governance puts economic growth at the centre of the state agenda. It expects income equality and social development to come from a successful economic performance in neoliberal terms. Further privatisations of the last public companies and the deregulation of transnational capital investments also characterised this first decade. The project has maintained the drive for privatisation, austerity policies, labour flexibilisation, deregulation, global competitivity and support for oligarchical economic groups until the late 2010s.

The capitalist regime of accumulation built around copper and other metal-mining industries has managed to navigate the commodities cycles in the 2000s and the 2010s. As a result, a compromise between local business groups, transnational companies, and the post-authoritarian state has allowed modification to the neoliberal architecture of Chilean society. The post-authoritarian state has taxed these industries in order to fund experimental governmental policies while maintaining fiscal austerity and controlling inflation. The economic policy has focused on stimulating a slightly more diverse productive matrix, developing the retail sector, banking and information services, and the agroindustry (Ffrench-Davis 2018). Other policies have promoted R&D in agriculture, mining, and business services and have increased the supply of education, helping the expansion of the service sector (B.R. Schneider 2013: 175).

The relationship between state and society has also experienced some degree of change. The mounting social malaise and social movements have forced the post-authoritarian state to enact social and political reforms to strengthen state-led social policy, welfare, and citizenship participation—always organised under neoliberal principles. These governments have improved some welfare programmes but would not modify the programmes’ targeted nature (Farías 2019; M.A. Garretón 2012). Likewise, the post-authoritarian state promotes citizen participation and social empowerment that depoliticise local forms of government and associativity (Leiva 2008: 164ff; Schild 2013). This hegemonic project allowed the expansion of nongovernmental organisations, international agencies, charity institutions and district level administrative offices that enact programmes to assist the poor, deploying biopolitical and disciplinary tactics.

This neoliberal revolution has also had profound effects on class relationships. The occupational structure has changed in the last forty years. In 1971, the traditional working class represented 34.5 per cent, and white-collar workers and self-employed reached 26.2 per cent of the workforce. In 2009, the former constituted 26.5 per cent and the latter 37.1 per cent (Ruiz & Boccardo 2014). Overall, this numerical shift underscores a political and cultural change in class self-identification (Cf. Pérez-Ahumada & Cifuentes 2019). The developmental state had acknowledged the plebeian subject (*el sujeto popular*) and the working class as worthy political subjects, whereas other political interpellations have replaced them under the cultural transformations of neoliberalism. The working-class identity has mostly disappeared from everyday talk and state surveys. Due to the action of the authoritarian and post-authoritarian states, working-class and union politics have almost vanished from the political sphere. Instead, middle-class aspirations have become central to people’s lives. As a result, the overall languages of class became middle-class centric, occluding working-class positions and experiences.

These historical shifts have transformed Santiago. The city is the financial and industrial centre of the country and generates 45 per cent of GDP. However, Santiago is also highly urban, segregated, and economically unequal. The conurbation extends into 35 districts. The city's economic power overshadows the rest of the country's. This power has fostered new middle classes, but also it creates precarious job markets and contradictory political inclusion. Official data have pointed out that poverty has decreased in the last three decades, but new forms of precariousness and vulnerability have arisen. The working class—often characterised as lower and lower-middle-income families—must confront challenges both old and new.

The people I met in Santiago have had different social experiences, but we can identify socioeconomic commonalities relating to this neoliberal revolution. Their household income is around two to three national minimum wages (£670-£1010 monthly). Most of these families have access to homeownership (or stable domestic arrangements) and commodities markets. Still, they have low powers of acquisition and accumulation, which are also highly dependent on economic cycles of growth and crisis. These families typically do not qualify for monthly state benefits but can access specially created social programmes for the middle class. Moreover, they tend to live mostly from paycheque to paycheque, saving the little money left over. Thus, debts with retail or banking institutions are commonplace.

The impossibility of long-term stability determines ordinary life. These interlocutors have problems keeping their families afloat, spending most of their time working to sustain their households. Their dedication to labour impacts negatively on their core commitment to domesticity—i.e. keeping their children safe, content, and healthy, while raising them to become autonomous adults. However, the lack of time, money or energy makes it gruelling to enact domestic life as they would like. Ordinary life is an achievement, which is highly vulnerable to the annihilating forces of layoffs, chronic diseases, natural disasters, or crime.

This economic profile has become recurrent among families in Santiago (Araujo & Martucelli 2012; Araujo 2017). They identify as middle-class, live with working-class means, and confront neoliberal precarity. They aspire to a better life but mostly wish their children to achieve 'a better situation' (*una mejor situación*). This dissertation seeks to understand the challenges this working class—or 'the lower middle class'—confronts in late capitalist Santiago.

The anthropology of (working-, middle-, and under-) class

Class never really goes away. In the 1980s and 1990s, sociologists and anthropologists dismissed the centrality of class due to the increasing societal individualisation and reflexivity linked to late modernity (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991) and the emergence of other social movements (Gorz 1987; Escobar 1992). However, rather than disappearing, class differences and economic inequality have kept increasing, and new forms of class struggle have emerged. In the 2000s and early 2010s, several Marxist anthropologists called for renewed attention to class politics (Durrenberger 2011; Kalb 2015; Kasmir & Carbonella 2006). The call seems to be effective. Research on labour, middle class, and finance classes has revitalised the field. In 2018, Sanchez noted, 'The pages of leading journals currently feature regular discussions of precarity, dispossession and popular engagements with economic inequality.' (2018a: 415). This section addresses how the anthropology of class has examined class phenomena and how it has challenged the traditional consensus around the working class and middle class.

One issue when talking about this topic lies in the difficulty in pinpointing what class is. Class is often understood as a process (*class formation* or *class making)* and the actual arrangement of social groups (*class structure*) related to enduring inequality and social antagonism (Carrier 2015; Crompton 2008; Wright 2005). The primary index of class is unequal access to economic goods and accumulation. Asymmetries in political power, education, prestige, health, and life chances often follow. The roots of the idea of class also imply some degree of permanence and intergenerational reproduction. The actual economic activities can change, but inequality persists.

For this reason, struggles often accompany class making and class structure. Ruling classes enact strategies to shore up the class arrangements. In turn, subaltern classes attempt to navigate or reshape the class structure for their own benefit. Beyond this consensus, class approaches diverge. Scholarly writing proposes class structures in multiple ways—material based or discoursively constructed, strongly structural or practice-dependant, historically variable or theoretical uniform, as an actual entity or a probabilistic construct. Therefore, class itself remains an open-ended question.

Sociological traditions have often followed Marx and Weber in their grasp of class (Carrier 2014, Wright 2015). However, if the core elements are inequality and struggle, these traditions diverge in understanding these issues. For Weber, economic assets determine market capacity in exchange relations, yielding differential control over income, encouraging a ‘differential control over income (life chances)’ among classes (Weber 1978: 302-7; Cho & Brand 2019). People rarely identify directly with class in social life. Instead, they are mediated by ‘status groups’ or ‘parties’, conscious loose groupings that organise their activities in different domains: the communal space of prestige and the state (Wright 2005: 26). Thus, they often struggle to distribute resources—income, property, status, prestige, or legal and administrative prerogatives—while enacting institutions and strategies to ‘hoard’ life opportunities and secure the enclosure of crucial goods to reproduce their domination (F. Parkin 1979: 44).

Marxists agree with these observations, but they also point out that Weberian scholars neglect a crucial mechanism: exploitation (Callinicos 2004: 42; Wright 1985: 74). This neglect means Weberians do not focus on production, occluding how capitalists exploit workers when the former appropriate surplus value from the worker. As most Marxists argue, surplus value is the difference between the value of the commodity produced and the wage received by the worker. The capacity of labour to create value exceeds its cost of reproduction, thus making a margin for the capitalist to appropriate. For Marx, the contractual relationship and increased productivity both help capitalists hide this transference of labour.

Anthropology has approached these issues more unconventionally than sociologists, however. Instead of focusing on class structures or classifications, it has centred on history, practices, and struggle. Weber’s and Marx’s influence, and we may also include Bourdieu’s, have shaped the anthropology of class. Still, the discipline has grappled with the lived experience of class inequality and struggle beyond a grand theory of class (e.g. Durrenberger 2011a; Heiman, Liechty & Freeman 2012; Kalb 2015; Parry 2018).

Thanks to this flexible approach, contemporary anthropological research has yielded insightful examination of crucial questions. The middle-class literature has examined how the ‘rules’ of class classification have changed in the last decades. Late capitalist transformations have modified class relationships, undermining some middle-class fractions and boosting social mobility and new middle classes (e.g. Fernandes 2006 for India, Heiman 2015 for the United States, Zhang 2012 in China). The result is that already established middle classes may lose economic stability and cultural and political influence while simultaneously fending off new middle classes that threaten their place. Thus, new political cleavages between contemporary middle classes have emerged—e.g. progressive versus conservative (Guano 2004), piety versus progressivism (Maqsood 2017), modern versus traditional (Liechty 2003; Donner 2016), local versus global (Sancho 2015)—shaping domestic projects and political participation.

Middle-classness as a site of aspiration has also shown new developments. Late capitalism has portrayed social mobility as the ultimate promise of labour based on individualism and meritocracy (Durrenberger 2011a; Berlant 2011). A sure path for the ones that put in the effort, mobility would compensate with social recognition, stable jobs, satisfying dwellings, and children’s wellbeing. Nowadays, the aspirations of middle-classness have fostered anxiety and despair. The paths to the middle class have multiplied—no longer based on a select group of careers or state positions—but they have also become more precarious and confounding (e.g. Jeffrey 2010 for India; Schielke 2015 for Egypt; Zaloom 2019 for the United States). This internal transformation of the middle class and their more complex relation to the working class and underclasses have also shone a light on boundary making and symbolic differentiation, shifting the ground of what it means to be proper and respectable (Donner 2017).

The working-class literature has explored another set of questions. Confronting the transformation and decline of the Fordist (male and white) working class, anthropologists have attempted to show the persistence of working-class groups and how they have transformed under late capitalism (Kalb 2015; Carbonella & Kasmir 2015). One recurrent question is how the working-class mode of life, prerogatives, and class positions have declined under the neoliberal organisation of labour, the global fluxes of labour and capital, and new techniques of personhood—

e.g. the Chinese state’s *suzhi* and Western capitalism’s *human capital.* (See the following edited volumes: Buroway 2000; Carrier & Kalb 2015; Durrenberger 2011b; Hann & Parry 2018; Kasmir & Carbonella 2014; Narotzky & Goddard 2017). Interrelated with this question, anthropologists have also explored the boundaries between groups of the working class and between the working class and other underclasses (e.g. Parry 2018, 2020; Mollona 2009, 2020). Debates about the cohesiveness and division of the working class at local and global levels have shaped this inquiry, especially considering the rise of right-wing populism (Kasmir & Carbonella 2006; Kalb 2011; Kalb & Mollona 2018). Thus, one ethnographic concern that informs this debate is the type of political consciousness that working-class groups and organisations have—e.g. politically broad or narrow, contentious or collaborative, practical or ideological, conservative or progressive, and cosmopolitan or parochial.

Old and new forms of precarity and vulnerability haunt the lived experience of these classes. After all, neoliberal policy and austerity measures affect stable jobs and social protection programmes. As Han (2018) mentions, it has become increasingly challenging for people to hold onto job security and project themselves in terms of upward social mobility (see also Muelhlebach 2013; Lazar & Sanchez 2019). Anthropologists have problematised well known diagnoses of the present such as the emergence of the ‘*precariat*’ (Standing 2012), the prevalence of *cruel optimism* (Berlant 2011), the rise of *precarity* (Butler 2004; Lorey 2015), and the making of *negative individualism* (Castel 2003). In this sense, Sanchez reminds us of ‘the basic distinction between persons who find themselves suddenly poor and vulnerable (and believe they are able to change this condition), and people who feel that they always have been precarious and always will be’ (2018b: 234). The lesson to learn here is that late capitalism intensifies the ideological dissonance between the promise of labour and the actuality of late capitalist formations.

Most of these issues return us to the hegemonic imaginary of class stratification in the Global North in the twentieth century. Then, the principal class structure often included four segments: upper classes, middle classes, worker classes, and underclasses. The working-class positions relate to stable working conditions and manual jobs engineered by the Fordist work system. In contrast, the middle class appears linked to service industries jobs, bureaucracies, liberal professionals, and small-size and middle-size business owners. These positions often involve more significant income, prestige, and capacity to accumulate capital than the working class. In contrast, the underclasses are the excluded social groups that cannot rely upon stable and dependable wages. Finally, the upper class are the elite—landowners, capitalists, and powerbrokers.

The core elements of such schemes respond to the Western societies of the twentieth century. The dialectic between class struggle and the capitalist state's strategies of governance fostered an environment where labour and capital compromises could advance (Balibar 2014). The emergence of social rights and welfare programmes was a direct product of such settlement. As a result, segments of the population came to be recognised as a 'proper' working class, creating a more robust boundary with the poor and excluded (Carbonella & Kasmir 2015; Skeggs 2004). Often racialised and gendered, lower strata families would represent the unreliable, uncivilised, or contagious vis-à-vis the general society. Something similar happened regarding the relationship between working-class and middle-class families. Due to the expansion of access to higher education, entrepreneurship, and intellectual and service jobs in private and state settings, a boundary between the middle class and the working class emerged, usually coded as blue-collar and white-collar (Heiman, Liechty & Freeman 2012; Savage, Barlow, Dickens & Fielding 1992).

Late capitalist transformations have also significantly impacted this scheme, further encouraging anthropologists to question its usefulness. The last twenty years have profoundly reshaped societies and their class structures worldwide. First, the deindustrialisation and financialisation of Western capitalism encouraged a shift in national economies. As a result, states diminished their support for industrial projects, promoting service industries and facilitating massive industrial jobs transfers to the Global South (Kalb 2012). Secondly, often associated with deindustrialisation, states worldwide privatised state companies, leaving critical sectors of the economy under the rule of global markets and oligarchy led monopolies (Harvey 2005; Jessop 2012). Thirdly, under the banner of austerity and fiscal responsibility, states also have reduced social spending, affecting the access to education, health, housing, and pensions of millions of working-class families (Harvey 2005). Finally, the state has become increasingly hostile to working-class identities and organisations (Silver 2014). If some states had tolerated working-class imaginaries in the twentieth century due to their political role, the pressure from capitalists and global markets would have diminished the state's reliance upon a self-identifying working class. Instead, the state, which had mediated the labour-capital compromise, shifted strongly in favour of capitalists (Duménil & Lévy 2004).

Late capitalist transformations have also redrawn labour relationships. Firstly, companies and industries started enacting flexibilisation or casualisation (Parry 2018), further removing class responsibilities from the backs of employers. For the last thirty years, most new forms of contract imply less security, fewer benefits, and more freedom to dismiss workers. Secondly, a new form of labour ideology impacted the workplace under the guise of technological disruption, global adaptability, and efficiency. Companies should be 'lean', 'flexible', 'transparent', and 'mobile' (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005: Power 1997; Styhre 2014). Workers must be 'reflexive' and see themselves as 'human capital' or 'entrepreneurs of the self' (Ferer 2009; Gershon 2011). The overall goal is to unlink workers from their working positions. Thirdly, both the actuality and the threat of 'the flight of capital' have pushed separation from workers and class consciousness; jobs depend on global fluxes of value and can quickly disappear (Harvey 2003: 94ff). Fourthly, the digital revolution—the digitalisation of contractual, market, and personal relations—has further impacted labour's flexibilisation, creating the so-called 'gig economy' that contributes to blurring the difference between the underclass and the working class (Nunes 2021).

As expected, class structures change constantly, and the twentieth-century scheme is unreliable for an understanding of new class arrangements. It has become a crucial target of critique for its lingering influence on social analysts, as it diverges from the present reality and occludes historical development and global relationships. The unreliability of such schemes has also become a salient issue in grasping how the parents I met in Santiago self-identify and position themselves in the circuits of production and accumulation of value. They could easily belong to different class positions. They are recognised as 'people who work' and identify as middle-class. They acknowledge working-class challenges but also have confidence in the future. They experience precarity while being hopeful about the fruit of their labour. Placing them in the ‘correct’ body of literature is not easy.

A series of anthropological works and essays have examined what we could call the lower middle class. Henrike Donner portrays Kolkata’s lower middle class as low-ranking civil servants and small shopkeepers that pursue middle-classness on smaller budgets and narrow social capital (2015: 138ff.) Maka Suarez (2017) describes the ‘sub-prime middle class’—Ecuadorian migrant workers in Spain who aspire to a middle-class mode of life and dwellings, defined by expensive mortgage loans, immigration bureaucracy, and social exclusion. Zaloom (2018) tracks the weakening of the middle-class in the United States, which has become a social group with middle-level income marred by working-class insecurities. Craig Jeffrey speaks of a rural lower middle class, when describing well off Jat farmers in Uttar Pradesh that have invested unsuccessfully in their children’s education (2010: 38ff.). Finally, Schielke attempts to group his interlocutors as ‘lower middle class’ in Northern Egypt—‘poor but aspiring, educated but not well connected, usually hailing from provincial milieus’ (Schielke 2015: 4). These men live in a ‘future tense’, specific forms of boredom and anxiety stemming from the uncertainty of possible ethical and labour decisions. These lower middle classes may not occupy the same positions in social space or labour relationships. However, these ethnographies share concerns about the distance between the exhausted promises of formal education, credit and state programmes, and the enduring aspiration to middle-classness.

Understanding lower-middle-classness offers a path to exploring class in Santiago, especially as it entangles different dimensions of neoliberal life that come together in parents’ accounts. In other words, this dissertation intends to explore how middle-classness and working-class life intersect. Indeed, self-identification, belonging, and aspiration to middle-classness drive these parents, but labour and working-class dispositions shape the particular standpoint they inhabit.

Class and the struggle for value

What is class, however? This dissertation attempts to rethink class—especially Marx’s and Bourdieu’s projects—reflecting on the multiple struggles for value, economic or otherwise. Exploring the works of David Graeber and Beverley Skeggs, this section sketches how class is understood throughout the following chapters.

Instead of thinking of class as cohesive groups with clear breaks between them (Cf. Giddens 1978: 110), this dissertation joins the Marxist tradition of using class to trace struggles over value—actual or potential, collective or individual, based on accumulation or control. Traditional Marxist anthropologists have long argued that we may understand struggle, conflict, and antagonism within relations of production and reproduction, especially related to the process of value (Kalb 2015; G. Smith 1999, 2015). In contrast, David Graeber, tracing a genealogy through the writings of Nancy Munn, Jane Fajans, and Terry Turner, offers an alternative approach to understanding value and production without abandoning Marxist insights. For Graeber, production is not only linked to commodities or goods but also to the actual production of society itself—social structures, social relationships, and human beings. Value makes these processes of creation possible. Graeber argues that 'value becomes (…) the way people represent the importance of their own actions to themselves: normally, as reflected in one or another socially recognised form. But it is not the forms themselves that are the source of value.' (2001: 47). labour, constituted by values, can produce people, relations, goods, and even explicit tokens of such values. Nevertheless, it requires a domain of realisation—imaginary totalities or social structures—in other words, a space (and time) where values make sense, and their deployment brings 'universes into being' (2013). Production and realisation may not coincide but are related as processes that shape society. Therefore, instead of using abstract *a priori* notions of economy or infrastructure to define class, we may trace classes by examining the dominant forms of production and the values that orient them.

For Graeber, we can see a particular form of production and realisation of economic value related to abstract labour, commodities, money, and wages in capitalist societies (2013; see also T. Turner 2008). However, other processes of value production and realisation become hidden or subordinate to economic value. Economic value, being the dominant form of value, determines exploitation, understood to be either the control over, or the appropriation of, labour. In noncapitalist societies, the production of social value is the dominant process (2001: 74); thus, classes become defined by control over the labour process and appropriation of these values. Considering capitalist and noncapitalist value struggles, Graeber, echoing Turner, declares that the ultimate stake of politics ‘is not even the struggle to appropriate value; it is the struggle to establish what value is’ (Graeber 2001: 88; T. Turner 1978).

Beverley Skeggs’s research overlaps with Graeber’s concern with value. Taking a cue from Bourdieu, Skeggs also starts with the premise that class reflects political struggles but notes the moral tone associated with class. For Skeggs, it informs the access to life chances, goods, and various forms of capital—a Bourdieuan metaphor for resources that determine one’s position in the social space and potential investment to further one’s trajectory within such space. However, Skeggs adds that ‘definitions of class often encode ideas of a person’s moral worth’ (2012: 274). Thus, class always implies specific forms of ‘subject of value’ framed in political ontologies of personhood and devaluation (Skeggs and Loveday 2012). For example, the dominant discourses of subjects of value in capitalist societies are liberalism’s possessive individualism and neoliberalism’s enterprising self (Skeggs 2004). Thus, economic and social values are at stake in class and directly relate to recognition and self-worth (see for similar arguments: Fraser 1995; Sayer 2005).

This dissertation proposes thinking of class as *groups shaped by the potential or actual struggle of dominant values*. In capitalist societies, this struggle takes the form of the accumulation and control of economic value and other associated values linked to prestige and self-worth. As a result, class interests often emerge around the broader class relationships. Concepts such as *class consciousness* (Lukacs 1972[1920]) and *illusio* (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) help me trace such struggles and stakes.

We may explore the social spaces of the middle classes as a specific site of struggle for value. Likewise, work environments appear as another site for economic struggle. Each of them has particular challenges and effects, but, of course, they are entangled with each other. As Graeber and Skeggs propose, it makes little sense to abstract class structures in academic models. The same goes for the positions that these class relations engender. As Kalb puts it, ‘Actual positionality must be discovered in its precise, manifold and situational nature, not simply assumed based on academic models.’ (Kalb 2015: 15). This dissertation will attempt to understand how historically dependent class arrangements condition—but do not overdetermine—parents' experiences; and how these parents elaborate upon these positions. If the concept of class helps trace the different class struggles, it can illuminate exploitation, devaluation, aspiration, and precarity.

Values, motives, and structures of mattering

Nevertheless, as Jane Fajans notes, desire, motivation, and value are related, but not identical, phenomena (2006: 108). She argues that 'Values are what people learn to desire because of their importance in the wider social nexus. Motivation, the acquired or learnt aspect of the schema, arises out of a diffuse bodily desire but becomes oriented to particular social values.' (2006: 108). The dissertation argues that the relationship between class, political activity, and individuals is much more complicated than expected. While value (and its struggles) are concepts essential to grasping what matters to people, values often take concrete forms beyond pure internalisation, realisation, or production.

In Santiago, I witnessed a reality that talks about how values appear in vexed arrangements. Unconscious scenes drive stage values of conviviality and mutuality to shape domestic life. The parents I met follow specific images of blissful domesticity that they stage to build a sense of intimate commitment to their children's contentment. They also embody optimism and parental sacrifice as a mood to prepare themselves for the degeneration of life under neoliberalism. Further, they attempt to actualise the values of dignity, protection, and tranquillity as a domestic atmosphere. Thus, values get actualised as motives based on scenes, people, atmosphere, moods, and ethical commitments.

The notion of motive often involves a sense of desire, concern, or dedication, which creates an affective and moral entanglement. In this regard, the literature on moral sentiments has argued that moral dispositions go beyond an intellectual and conscious orientation of duty. Instead, social groups and moral traditions encourage the cultivation of ethical dispositions and practical judgments (Mahmood 2005; Laidlaw 2014; Lambek 2015b). These embodied inclinations often take the form of affective outlooks that ground the more normative and cognitive elements of moral life (Mattingly 2014a; Throop 2010). Phenomenological anthropologists have found similar conclusions. They have argued that it is impossible to grasp what matters to people if we do not explore how ethics intertwine with the emotional (Kleinman 2006; Lutz 2017). Motives speak about the duality of how we engage with our worlds—organised and messy, pious and permissive, hedonistic and caring.

Mattering—the open-ended process of entangling oneself with attachment objects—becomes the space of the interface between motives and values. This dissertation stems from this insight but extends the argument that, in order to become subjects to act, we need to consent to the force of what matters to us, which establishes the terrain where decisions make potentiality and multiplicity workable (Humphrey 2008). To capture the variety of mattering, I have identified three basic structures of mattering among these parents in Santiago: *fantasy*, *mood*, and *commitment*.

These parents inhabit these structures of mattering and experience the compatibilities and contradictions that emerge from fantasies, moods, and commitments. These concepts reflect three diverging traditions that have addressed the contradictory aspects of mattering: Lacan's *fantasme*, Heidegger's *stimmung* and moral philosophy's engagement with the notions of projects and commitments. Human beings can find themselves in unconscious fantasies, moods, and commitments, which put them on certain tracks and unfold the world as something that matters.

As Heidegger claims in 'Being and Time' (1962[1927]), moods—like anxiety, despair, optimism, or cynicism—'constitute the range of ways in which things are able to matter to us, and are thus essential to a sense of the kinds of significant possibility that the world can offer up for us' (Ratcliffe 2013: 159). In this regard, moods are part of the broader domain of emotions and affects. Thus, we must consider what Ratcliffe argues about moods: 'We experience people, objects, events, and situations in the world in terms of different kinds of significant possibility, different ways of mattering. The range of emotions that we experience reflects this possibility space. All emotions presuppose an appreciation of certain possibilities as somehow significant.' (2009: 355). Moods (*stimmung*) play a central role in entering encounters. These, as the actualisation of disposed-ness that deals with the condition of thrown-ness, disclose the world, and make one care about some particular involvements that constitute one's world (Elpidorou & Freeman 2015; Ratcliffe 2013). For some anthropologists, human beings care about the world because they are attuned to it, as a totality for embodied and practical activity mediated by moods (McKay 2018; Throop 2014).

Moving to *fantasme*, Lacan proposes that unconscious fantasies create imaginary scenarios that ground a sense of selfhood. Lacan's core idea can be grossly simplified as follows: human beings engender a lack that energises desire when entering society—a normative, ordered, and linguistic world—because they experience it as prohibition and imagine the previous state as enjoyment and completeness; thus, they look for something to relive it (Lacan 1991; 2001a). Partial objects substitute this lack, supporting a never-ending process of desire engendering. However, these partial objects must be staged in one's unconscious, and these imaginary scenarios are fantasies (Lacan 2006; Žižek 2009). Lacanian social theorists (Berlant 1991, 2011; Žižek 1998) and anthropologists (Gammeltoft 2016; Moore 2007; Sangren 2009) have pointed out that fantasies—as social imaginaries and unconscious fantasies—contribute to forms of self-representation that sustain both social reality's experiential consistency and one's sense of selfhood.

The last approach to mattering is the idea of *commitment*. This concept covers the personal causes closely related to one's existence. Sayer argues that commitments '…come to constitute our character, identity, and conception of ourselves, such that if we are prevented from pursuing them, then we suffer something akin to bereavement, for we lose not merely something external, but part of ourselves' (2011: 125). In a similar vein, Christian Smith argues that belief commitments '…are what create the conditions and shape of our very perceptions, identity, agency, orientation, purpose—in short, ourselves, our lives, and our worlds as we know them' (2003: 55). Williams joins this position, arguing that, 'A man may have, for a lot of his life or even just for some part of it, a ground project or set of projects which are closely related to his existence and which to a significant degree give a meaning to his life.' (1981: 12). In anthropology, Cheryl Mattingly (2014b) has deployed the notion of 'ground project' to acknowledge human beings' capacity to explore and modify commitments via narration enriches our understanding of the lived experience and social action, focusing on the complex experience relating to agency and responsibility.

These structures of mattering are not just theoretical lenses, subjective states, or psychic forces that emerge in the intersection of subjective interiority and externality. Instead, they are structures that people cannot help inhabiting to achieve a sense of self and personhood. This ethnographic work encourages the central idea that we should treat these structures of mattering as emergent relations among elements or nodes—some permanent, some temporary. These nodes materialise as mental representations, bodily dispositions, and environmental anchors that echo, entangle, and animate each other. These interlocutors find themselves growing through and within these structures, building, modifying, and expanding them as they grow.

Structures of mattering can help us find alternative languages of selfhood formation under capitalist regimes. More traditional Marxist class approaches tend to use the concept of 'class interest' to explain how social groups enact specific strategies consistent with their class positions. In contrast, concepts such as '*ideology*', or '*hegemony*', or '*false consciousness'* are used to explain working-class people's lack of recognition of exploitation and oppression abetted by capitalist institutions (e.g. Durrenberger 2011a). This perspective forces a dichotomy. If a particular working-class individual or group were to pursue active political struggle based on economic inequality, they would be deemed to show class interests by traditional Marxists. Conversely, if they did not do it, they would be considered to be displaying false consciousness or be under the spell of ideology.

Most anthropologists have long resisted this dichotomic analysis. The problem is that ethnographic research may rely too much on contradictory statements or practices to describe the relationship between class, struggles, and subjectivity. These descriptions state incongruencies without attending to the mediating selfhood mechanisms that cause specific subjective patterns. In other words, we know how structural forces put people in contradictory situations, but any analysis of the moral reason why they choose one contradictory resolution over another is neglected. For example, concepts such as *resistance* (Thompson 1978; Scott 1985; Comaroff 1985) and *habitus* (Bourdieu 2013[1977]) try to bridge behaviour interpretable as compliance or complicity with acts of opposition, refusal, and competition. In both cases, both an implicit rationality and an act of resignation enable—to a certain degree—defending embedded moral economies or minor capital accumulation. The trade-off is avoiding unsettling power structures because they could lead to overt violence. This implicit rationality is expected, not unpacked by researchers.

Likewise, anthropologists overuse notions such as *negotiation, contradiction, accommodation,* or *fragmentation* to describe how actions and discourses motivated by class struggle cohabit with expressions of complicity, compliance, and subjugation. For example, Parry suggests that 'Neoliberal conditions expose the neoliberal subject as a *chimera* from an imaginary world.' (2018: 32, emphasis added). Regarding the renewal of the study of class, Sanchez states that 'Engagement with precarity has inspired new analytic responses that are sensitive to the novel *contradictions and tensions* that the development engenders…' (2018a: 417, emphasis added). Moving to the middle class, Heiman, Liechty, and Freeman indicate that '…the question of whether middle classes are progressive or conservative, politically agentive, or politically manipulated, as open to debate, but the debate itself highlights the fact that middle-class practices are often *deeply contradictory*' (2012: 11-2, emphasis added). Likewise, Donner remarks that 'It is important to re-emphasise that the experience of being middle-class is *fractured and contradictory*.' (2017, emphasis added).

Certainly, these works have illuminated the material and symbolic conditions of class, examining the effects of economies, discourses, and technologies that foster these paradoxical attitudes. Furthermore, they have recorded the anxieties, suppressions, inconsistencies, recantations, and silences looming over class incongruencies. Yet, most studies neglect to conceptualise motives and what Collier calls their 'shoving-power' (1999: 13ff.). Instead, ethnographic descriptions often take these words themselves as motives that self-generate shoving-power or as the manifestation of structural forces. As a result, different forms of participation in the world—such as preferences, desires, concerns, duty, interests, goals, and drives—get only vaguely differentiated. The selfhood mechanisms, which metabolise these contextual forces into the accommodations or conciliations required to act, remain hidden. These approaches flatten subjectivity and reduce selfhood and personhood formation to structural forces and their contingent interactions with history.

In contrast, this dissertation suggests that studying structures of mattering contributes to four ways of thinking about class subjectivity. Firstly, it helps understand what mediates the influence of class positionality and other subject positions, outlining the relationship between socialisation, subjectification, and mattering. Secondly, it clarifies the relationship between these structures and the motives that they create as commentaries about people's participation in the world. Unpacking personal fantasies, moods, and commitments helps to situate the generative loci of motives that shove people in one direction or another. Several motives or reasons—with their different scopes and intensities—regularly animate people's engagement with the world, producing contradictory experiences. Thirdly, structures of mattering illuminate how people deal with these conflicting class experiences, making both effortless and agonising decisions. They show how people perform 'strong evaluation' that relates class interests to other forms of motivation. Finally, structures of mattering are not merely an effect of structural forces or social contingency. Instead, analysing them helps clarify how habit formation, reflexivity, knowledge production, social belonging, and environmental modification can be combined to reproduce or transform these structures, affecting how motives with shoving-power occur.

Examining structures of mattering might explain patterns of contradiction and paradox animated by struggles for value. The concepts of fantasy, mood, and commitment help outline how parents in Santiago relate to the universes of value that they find in late capitalism. They interrogate how individuals or collectives distribute urgency, priority, and weight among motives and courses of action. Likewise, they help to understand the spectrum between ends and means. Mattering might also illuminate the emergence of distress, anxiety, and compulsion due to the demands of specific valued attachments.

As positions and discourses, class relationships can foster class mapping, self-identification, and disidentification within capitalist societies. As it involves multiple positionalities within relationships that carry struggles for value, people dedicate themselves to a specific course of action that has numerous consequences.

Along with gender, race, and citizenship, we may observe how class shapes production, realisation, and value accumulation. Yet only rarely does the power of value imply that people seek to reproduce or accumulate it blindly. Instead, the universes of value come to life in different ways—they do not exist as merely ‘units’ or ‘events’ in themselves. Imagination, practice, and semiosis actualise them, affecting structures of mattering. Values as generality may become something personal; or may remain external and quasi-objective, like resources, rules, and capital. These structures of mattering mediate class and bestow value on other domains and elements, making them something tangible and worthy of pursuing.

The fieldwork and the families

This research focuses on answering what matters to working-class families, how these motives materialise as fantasies, commitments, and moods, and how these structures of mattering engage and interface with late capitalism in Santiago. Most of the fieldwork was carried out between August 2017 and December 2018. However, with the permission of my friends in Santiago, I have included some vignettes of subsequent informal visits outside the primary fieldwork.

The fieldwork is slightly different from conventional ethnographies. Instead of community-based research or multi-sited ethnography, this research examines various working-class families that identify themselves as middle-class in Santiago. Rather than choose one neighbourhood or community, I shadowed seven families in Santiago for a minimum of six months.

The recent uptake in ethnographic research in Santiago is the first reason for pursuing this alternative method. Since the 2000s, several researchers have explored class and economic inequality in Santiago. Skewes (2000) and Pérez (2016) have researched *pobladores* in their search for a better life. Ruiz (2015) and Briceño (2017) have examined life in working-class neighbourhoods with deep ties with left-wing parties. Han (2012) has studied the experience of dwelling in one of the most impoverished quarters in Santiago. Finally, Ureta (2006) and Ariztía (2009) have explored middle-class aspirations and domestic arrangements in two city districts. One common obstacle is that most ethnographies focus on communities with distinct historical trajectories marked by political struggles and territorial identities. Most *Santiaguinos* do not share such trajectories with the same degree of commitment; thus, this focus might occlude more mundane domestic projects and how families conceive class and political action. The diversity of families helps us understand how people dwell and build life across different neighbourhoods, dialoguing with the other ethnographic research about Santiago.

A second reason is that the dissertation strongly dialogues with the empirical insights of researchers working in Chile. Looking to make sense of recent transformations, the analysis takes advantage of the similarities and differences of these households. While they share broad economic conditions, similar life projects, and a detachment from political and religious commitments, they differ in age, family arrangements, and political outlook. Considering the similarities, I explore general trends regarding labour, domesticity, citizenship, and class. Likewise, exploring cleavages such as gender, age, politics, and economic success among the families helps illuminate broader tendencies that researchers have found. The objective is to make these seven families dialogue with the broader social context and other ethnographic observations in the fieldwork unrelated to the seven families.

The lack of deep commitment to religious or political institutions is one crucial commonality among these families. This choice may seem odd. Allow me to clarify this point. Although Chile is known as a ‘Catholic country’, the truth is that most Chilean people, especially in Santiago, neither attend religious events regularly, nor look for guidance or advice from religious authorities, nor engage with the Catholic religious system of thought or practices (Bahamondes 2017; Pew Research Center 2014; Valenzuela, Bargsted & Somma 2013). Catholic identification has declined from 75 per cent in 1995 to 51 per cent of the population in 2020, and more than 30 per cent state that they do not practise a religion (Latinbarómetro 2020). Moreover, the importance of religion has declined strongly over the last three decades (Salvatierra & González 2021). In 1990, 51 per cent declared faith to be ‘very important’ in their lives. Only 23 per cent share this view in 2021. Some parents find affinity with Catholic figures such as God, the Virgin Mary, or Saints, and claim to seek comfort or strength by praying and practising vows to a saint. In the fieldwork, these households did not dedicate a lot of time or energy to these practices and rarely considered them core concerns.

Something similar happens with politically inclined families. Despite the influence of political parties and organisations in the last century, most families in Santiago do not sustain active ties to political parties and organisations (UNDP 2019). Likewise, while the politics of clientelism is still present, it is not as massive and intensive as in the developmental state (Barozet & Espinoza 2018; Barrera 1998). Research in Latin America has shown that ideologies and political participation impact how people experience and enact class, politics, and what matters to them (e.g. Holston 2008; Lazar 2008, 2017; Wilde 2013; to name a few). This relative absence in Chile opens a relevant cleavage between the majority and the minority that engages directly in politics. To focus on ordinary concerns, I concentrated primarily on families that do not participate in political organisations, groups, or parties. As we will see, one interlocutor has peripheral connections with housing organisations, which prove helpful as a contrasting case. However, most families dedicate most of their time to figuring out domestic projects.

Considering these observations, I would argue that specific research should be carried out to explore class, value, and structures of mattering among families with profound ties to religious and political institutions.

The objective for working with these families is to feel structures of mattering under the Chilean process of value production and realisation, using them as a vantage point for thinking about the majority of working-class people. Three empirical inquiries guide this project: (1) How do these families understand and perform class and citizenship? (2) How do these families grasp, embody, and pursue what matters to them? and (3) How do these forces interface, engage, and contradict current forms of class structure and political life?

I chose seven families (and they chose me) through the process known as snowball sampling. Firstly, I started contacting families through friends and acquaintances to ask them if they would like to participate in my research. In the beginning, the sampling profile was rather vague: working-class families with children or grandchildren. However, in the first weeks of fieldwork, I realised that it would be better to focus on families that felt part of the middle class. Likewise, I narrowed the focus to families without deep attachments to religious and political institutions. In both cases, the prominence of such traits among working-class families quickly enabled me to find and develop ties with the following seven families.[3]

In the district of La Pintana, I met Violeta. An acquaintance vaguely introduced us by phone, and, despite some initial doubts, Violeta agreed to participate. She is a 45-year-old single mother and lives with three of her daughters: 26-year-old Pancha, 14-year-old Jocelyn, 10-year-old Alondra and a 5-year-old granddaughter. For periods, Roci, her 22-year-old daughter, and her son, 3-year-old Rafa, would join them, depending on Roci's and Violeta's relationship. She works as a low-level administrative clerk. She would like to finish her 'task' (*tarea*) as she said it—see all her daughters graduate from high school and have a good partner who treats them well.

She considers herself middle-class, but she also describes herself as hardworking and humble. Sometimes, she receives state subsidies, or her daughters, Pancha or Roci, give her money. But these occurrences are irregular. The average combined income of Violeta's household is around £750 monthly.

Nearby, a friend introduced me to Ernesto and his family in the district. Ernesto is a 48-year-old man who loves to complain about politicians and football, so he welcomed the opportunity to have a listener. Ernesto and his wife, 38-year-old Karen, love to tease each other and sometimes fight. However, both are committed to their children, 18-year-old Gaspar and 5-year-old Camila. Their goal is to give their children everything they can and help them reach their college education dreams.

Ernesto and Karen consider themselves middle-class but recognise that they live from paycheque to paycheque; thus, they must manage their debts. Ernesto works as a craftsman in a company that sells handmade party supplies. Karen works as a clerk in a money transfer and postal company. Their combined income is around £850 monthly.

Moving to the district of Maipu, there I met Cristina and Alvaro. The 54-year-old Cristina and 60-year-old Alvaro are a blended family, and they have lived together for more than fifteen years. Cristina's children are 26-year-old Noemi and 24-year-old Luchito. Alvaro's children are 36-year-old Clara, 34-year-old Beto, and 30-year-old Pepe. Together, they had 12-year-old Isaac. When Cristina and Alvaro started to cohabitate, the children came to live in the same house. Still, nowadays, Luchito and Beto spend some periods in the family home, primarily due to emotional and economic problems. Most children have their own families and homes. Despite the array of relational conflicts, they are one of the closest families I have encountered in the fieldwork. Cristina and Alvaro, closer to retirement age, dream of living in a coastal town as soon as Isaac enrols in college. They worry that they will not have enough energy to 'finish the homework' with Isaac because they are ageing parents and do not have the same energy as before.

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[3] See Table 1 (page 328) and Table 2 (page 330) for synoptic charts of the participating households in Appendix A. See also kinship charts in Appendix B (page 338).

They feel middle-class and are the closest to middle-classness considering income among these families. Cristina works as a clerk at a small medical practice nearby, and Alvaro works as a truck driver. Their combined income is around £1000 monthly.

Cristina and Alvaro introduced me to Veronica, who lives nearby, in the same district. Veronica, or Vero to her friends, is a 48-year-old single mother who heads her household. She lives with her 32-year-old daughter Isa and her 30-year-old son Mario. Mario has a child, Lucas, and has never abandoned Vero's house. Usually, her grandchild stays with them, as Vero must take care of him in the afternoons. Vero has lived through significant challenges in her life. She has experienced domestic abuse. Her husband was physically abusive until she left the family home, and he disappeared later. Isa found herself in debt and had to return to Vero's home after initial emancipation. All of them are doing better now, but Vero wants tranquillity.

Vero works in Maipú as a greengrocer's assistant six days a week. Her daughter is a cleaning worker, and her son is an administrative clerk. She considers herself middle-class. Yet, she acknowledges her economic challenges and the difficulty of 'getting to the end of the month'. The household income is about £800 monthly.

In the northern district of Recoleta, a friend put me in touch with Soledad and Roberto. Soledad is a 45-year-old teacher, and Roberto is 55-year-old accountant. Their children are Janito, a 19-year-old college student, and Pamela, 12-year-old high school student. As with the other families, the children are their primary concern. They wish to see them in college. They participated in the research project for six months, but they moved to a small town due to their disaffection with urban life.

Like everyone else, they feel middle-class. However, Soledad and Roberto are one of the cases of downward mobility. They had moved regularly from self-employment to wage labour and vice versa. They achieved a prosperous business on one occasion—a small store. In the early 2010s, they reached the conventional middle-class and even bought a house. But after an economic crisis in Chile, they lost almost everything and had to move out. Later, Soledad owned another small business: a struggling language school for pre-schoolers. Roberto studied accounting, but it has been challenging to find a job. Their combined income is around £900 monthly.

In the neighbouring district of Independencia, I met Cecilia and Arturo. Cecilia is a 44-year-old, and Arturo a 52-year-old. Together, they are the parents of Titi, their 12-year-old daughter. For them, Titi is everything. Their only daughter is their primary motivation. Like other parents, they hope to see her enrolling in college and pursuing her dream: being a sailor or an artist. For Cecilia, having their own home is a dream. She spent several years living at her mother’s and then at her mother-in-law’s home. Rather than waiting for state support, she participated in a self-organising housing committee and achieved a state grant to build a middle-class condominium. Now living in an apartment, she dreams of moving up to a house with a big yard.

This family identifies as middle-class but recognises that it has limited means. Cecilia works as an assistant at a nongovernmental organisation linked to the National Service for Minors. Arturo works as a welder in a construction company. However, both would like to have better jobs. Cecilia is studying for a professional qualification (akin to a Higher National Diploma) to become a fully fledged social worker. Their combined income is around £900 monthly.

In the southwestern district of Puente Alto, a friend invited me to a craft workshop where I met Jacqueline or Jacqui. Jacqui is the 68-year-old matriarch of her family. She lives with her husband 72-year-old Jacinto, her 24-year-old daughter Cata and her 17-year-old granddaughter Romi. She also has three older children: 45-year-old Javier, 43-year-old Camilo, and 41-year-old Marcela. All her children and grandchildren are close to her, and she is a vital support to all of them. Jacqueline's story is interesting because it is another case of downward mobility.

Nowadays, Jacqui still identifies herself as middle class, but she clarifies that her past was more prosperous than her present situation. Currently, she rents a house and has worked at a charity institution. Her younger daughter works odd jobs and occasionally sells food in the street. The household income is around £850 monthly.

Method and epistemology

This thesis proposes doing a comparative ethnography of seven homes in Santiago. While the positivist cross-cultural comparison may be out of fashion, anthropologists tend to make comparisons to the extent that they tacitly contrast Western societies with other societies or examine regional differences to gain analytical clarity of the phenomenon studied. These procedures may not be explicit or systematic but are part of how anthropologists think (Candea 2018; Fox & Gingrich 2002).

This ethnographic methodology is not standard. Doctoral theses usually address a single case, community, or institution. An alternative to this model is the multi-situated ethnography that 'follows' a phenomenon, group, or thing across different social contexts (Marcus 1995). My proposal differs insofar as, instead of assuming a fluid case in one or several contexts, it intends to study the research problem by crafting multiple unique cases.

This comparison is carried out by borrowing tools from the critical realism paradigm (for a brief anthropological explanation, see Graeber 2001: 52-4). Critical realism is an alternative to constructionist, interpretationism and post-positivism ontologies (Bhaskar 1998, 2016). I must warn my purpose is to explore my ontological assumptions, not to establish that they are the best or necessary for research, but to clarify them. This section intends to show how this project seeks to achieve argumentative consistency and the ontological resources used to accomplish its goals, as Maxwell proposes (2012: 110). Anthropologists tend to be suspicious of these frameworks, but critical realist researchers value addressing the ontological outlook without reducing it to only epistemological questions (Bhaskar 2016: 23-4). In fact, we must notice that some anthropologists claim to be open to other ontologies while oblivious to their own ontological suppositions that enable said epistemological attitude (Bråten 2022; Graeber 2015).

The main argument of critical realism is that social research must study the causal powers of different entities—social structures, discourses, people, things, infrastructures, and environment, among others—and their mutual interaction, which produces social processes. Causality, as understood by critical realism, differs from Hume's influential model. The latter understands cause as universal laws in the form of a relationship between an event x (effect) and an event y (cause) that precedes it temporally in constant conjunction (or '*whenever variable x exists, then event y will follow*') (Collier 1994: 56-60). Critical realism also rejects the moderate version of this statement—i.e. for a relationship to be causally meaningful, there must be a significant probability that event x follows event y under specific circumstances. Instead, critical realism proposes to see causes as 'causal powers' to be understood as the properties that entities possess that are generated by mechanisms. The notion of mechanism encompasses how the parts of an entity may organise to produce some effect.

Tavory and Timmermans have pointed out that 'Talk of mechanisms evokes the image of the factory in which social processes are identically stamped, instead of appreciating the messiness and abundance of protagonists' lives and narratives.' (2017: 129). However, they argue that 'Being attentive to mechanism-based explanations, ethnographers make explicit the logic of their causal claims. This allows them to see more clearly what other cases might be part of the same set.' (2017: 151). In other words, explanation seeks to explore causation in concrete contexts. Thus, it should not be understood as making predictive statements or applying causal laws.

Critical realism understands social causation within open systems, similar to most ethnographic methodologies. Social research will encounter social processes composed of empirical and non-empirical events caused by various entities activating their causal powers. The researcher must identify through abduction possible entities, mechanisms, and their causal powers to explain the unique trajectory of events and phenomena that characterises the case or cases to be studied (Sayer 2010: 71-5). Insolated mechanisms do not explain a particular phenomenon, but the interaction of various mechanisms contributes to explaining a social process. In fact, some causal powers may cancel out or amplify others.

Entities may be social structures, groups, interactions, individuals, minds, bodies, and everything in between. Moreover, infrastructural, material and conceptual formations can be proposed as entities if we can conjecture their causal powers.

Moreover, critical realism argues that entities and mechanisms exist within open systems that are also emergent and laminated (Bhaskar 2016: 17). Emergence implies that entities affecting social processes exist at different levels of complexity and organisation, reaching new causal properties depending on how their parts relate to each other (Elder-Vass 2010: 17). The four basic levels of emergence for critical realists are body, person, groups (or interactions), and social structures. Groups and social structures are concept-dependent and practice-dependent, meaning that they could not exist without the action and understanding of persons; still, they are not reduced to their actions or beliefs (Bhaskar 1998: 41). Critical realists insist that entities are not more important than mechanisms working at the personal and group level. Similarly, they maintain that the latter mechanisms should not be used to theoretically dissolve the existence and causal power of the former (Archer 1995; Elder-Vass 2010). Related to the previous claim, the idea that social processes exist within laminated systems means that the entities and mechanisms are interpenetrated and nested, making them difficult to isolate from each other from an empirical point of view (Elder-Vass 2010: 50-2). Instead, we must use analysis, imagination, and critique to discover them.

Similarly, critical realism believes that researchers should examine these entities and mechanisms in the context of stratified systems (Bhaskar 2016: 7). Stratification means to make an operative distinction between made between the domains of mechanisms (or real), events (or actual) and phenomena (or empirical). There is no simple way to untangle the difference between these domains. Vincent and O'Mahoney describe it as follows, 'The empirical is what we perceive to be the case: human sensory experiences and perceptions (we observe a driver approaching a speed camera and slowing down). The 'actual' is the events that occur in space and time, which may be different to what we perceive to be the case (we may assume the driver has slowed down before the speed camera when this is not what happened). The real or deep is constituted of the mechanisms and structures which generate (and explain) events.' (2018: 204).

The data collection for this study consists of shadowing everyday life to understand how people decide what matters and how they act accordingly. The objective is to diversify the social processes from similar but not identical units of analysis. Thus, the research crafts seven cases and takes advantage of the massive amount of literature available in English and Spanish to contextualise them.

The ethnographical strategy used to pursue the research questions was to shadow parents in daily activities every week. This approach allowed for observing the labour and dedication put into various attachments and concerns and holding long-term conversations about their lives. I would often probe the conversation with a general question such as 'how was your week?' but discussions were mainly guided by the interlocutors. In this regard, the questions refrained from imposing concepts that could imply certain agential dispositions, temporalities, or emotional investment. Neither desire, concern, nor dedication was an initial focus of my research. Therefore, most early ethnographical conversations dwelt on what mattered to them and how it mattered. In the second half of the fieldwork, I inquired about the relations and contradictions between their accounts and their daily life—to unravel anxieties and contradictions. The ethnographic shadowing entailed sessions lasting from three to twelve hours, and the research period by family varied from six to sixteen months.

This data collection strategy allows for obtaining ethnographic material focused on singular cases. Ethnographic accounts tend to be flexible regarding what is the actual case studied. In contrast, this research intends to explore the mechanisms at play while producing mattering among lower-middle-class households. Exploring different families allows us to analyse mechanisms that do not depend on the surrounding social world but are part of broader processes and entities. The diversity of neighbourhoods permits me to examine agential mechanisms (especially structures of mattering) and how they interact with immediate social worlds and family configurations.

However, this approach presents some disadvantages. One is that the descriptive density reached by these cases is not the same as a single-case ethnography because the researcher is not present for all significant events. A second disadvantage is the lack of descriptive richness of the surrounding immediate social world because the focal point is the perspective of the household. As a response, I rely on the participants' self-reports, encounters with the neighbours and acquaintances, and the literature to address these gaps and construct a better picture of their social life.

The data analysis strategy identifies demi-regularities (*demiregs*) within the cases studied. Demi-regularities are moderately consistent patterns of events—observed or detected—that could help to identify persistent causal powers at work (Lawson 1997). Thus, the analysis detects them within the cases and then across them. The next step is examining the potential mechanisms at play and making conjectures about the causal relationships that may have produced these patterns.

In this way, the analysis proceeds through abduction. Danermark et al. explain abduction as 'an inference where redescription or recontextualisation is the central element. By means of abduction we recontextualise and reinterpret something as something else, understanding it within the frame of a total different context.' (2002: 96). I redescribe the phenomenon by paying attention to *demiregs* in the case, which are also observed across households. As a result, I propose a set of structural factors, most of them consistent with the reviewed literature, that makes sense for understanding the observed patterns. Then, the analysis refocuses on specific aspects of the process that this set does not illuminate. Hence, I advance causal relationships that uncover new mechanisms coherent with the ethnographic material. These elements intend to establish new causal powers and clarify further the described events. At the same time, potentially applicable interpretations that do not fully allow us to understand the process are scrutinised. Finally, the approach follows the *demiregs* and mechanisms in the literature of Chile and other Latin American cities in order to contextualise the findings.

We may take Chapter Four as an example. First, I identify the *demiregs* of abnegation, never-ending work, and the degeneration of life. Then, I review structural factors that allow us to understand these trends: labour markets, the weight of domestic work and the culture of labour in Santiago. However, these mechanisms do not fully explain how *Santiaguinos* transform this suffering into something positive and valued. The next phase introduces sacrificial optimism, which operates as a mood at the personal level but is embedded within domestic relationality. This mood allows us to understand how this transformation process happens. Finally, the last section criticises those interpretations that exclusively link sacrifice with *marianismo* in Chile, asking to pay attention to the influence of the developmental state. This critique also shows the limits of sacrificial optimism. Finally, I propose that this mechanism may contribute to understanding meaningful abnegation in other late capitalist contexts.

This process guides the writing of each chapter. Each chapter works with two cases that have similarities and differences but usually present a *demireg* in common—the form these participants confront a social problem or impasse. In other words, households tend to show structural similarities and resemble how they define the situation around the issue. However, domestic configurations and the immediate social worlds vary in these cases. Likewise, how these participants tackle the problem diverges too.

In parallel, each chapter presents how two households define the situation, act accordingly, and confront the consequences of their actions under late capitalism. The chapters touch on issues such as class and citizenship self-positioning, building a home, embracing never-ending labour, raising children, place making and social boundary making. The final sections of the chapter examine the similarities and differences between the cases to illuminate the social process and how agential and domestic mechanisms create diverging paths.

For example, we first follow Vero's story in Chapter Four. Then, we explore Ernesto and Karen's household to expand and contrast the discussed topics. Both reports show the patterns of embracing never-ending work and neglecting their exhaustion, afflictions, and dread. In addition, both households share structural characteristics. Thus, Vero, Ernesto, and Karen define abnegated suffering as a manifestation of love and ethical actualisation. Sacrificial optimism is the missing piece. The end of the chapter shows how sacrificial optimism interacted with these two different domestic contexts. While Ernesto and Karen must cling to sacrifice's ability to provide futurity, Vero relaxes her abnegated position. In both cases, sacrificial optimism does not produce a single type of effect but interacts with the contexts to consolidate specific paths.

One advantage of this approach to analysis and writing is that it portrays structural mechanisms and agency mechanisms not necessarily in opposition—abstract vs concrete, or generality vs particularity, or homogeneity vs diversity—but in mutual interaction and constant transformation. Likewise, continual comparison enables the identification of the distribution of causal influences that shapes patterns. Moreover, analysing cases in separate places contributes to distinguishing structural mechanisms from the ones embedded in their surrounding social worlds. Finally, the contrastive exploration of the experience of these *Santiaguinos* displays how they make sense of situations.

Some disadvantages also appear. The focus on contrasting households could undermine the understanding of mechanisms embedded in neighbourhoods and districts. In the dissertation, I try to pay attention to specific forms in which the surrounding social world influences the structures, but the focus is on more extensive mechanisms. Because the participants strongly favour labour, domesticity, and more abstract forms of citizenship in their routines and accounts, I concentrate on said elements. I hope readers see my conclusions as complementary to the ones developed at other levels of emergence.

Furthermore, this portrayal divides our attention into two stories, which could seem to neglect the experience and agency of the participants in this research. However, the trade-off is that contrasting stories allow us to understand better the structural mechanisms they confront and illuminate how people develop specific forms of participation in the world driven by particular forms of motivation.

To conclude, I must briefly discuss the grouping categories used throughout the dissertation. The cases have traits in common that help to create the basic analytic categories that grouped them: *Santiaguinos,* the lower middle class, and parents and caregivers. Due to the comparative effort, it is challenging to develop categories to capture similar *demiregs* and acting mechanisms. Nevertheless, I choose these concepts during the writing process because each aspect displays significant elements of their identities and projects. As the chapters discuss, the core participants of this research portray themselves as lower-middle-class and deploy parenting and nurturing their children to construct their sense of self.

However, readers should not interpret the categories as an effort to homogenise these vital trajectories. Each social process described is distinctive as multiple mechanisms have affected them—some shared and some specific to each household and individual. Thus, the objective of the category is not to highlight *empirical* regularities among the cases but to point towards certain traits that contribute to understanding the development of fantasies, moods, and commitments as mechanisms. These structures among lower-middle-class *Santiaguinos* resemble each other but are concrete development of vital trajectories and particular forms of relationality.

As discussed, causality is not merely the constant conjunction of causes and effects. Thus, having these traits do not imply the development of these structures. Other intervening mechanisms could explain why comparable cases do not display similar *demiregs* or even the presence of structures of mattering. Instead, the categories suggest examining these aspects and how past and present mechanisms can help to understand the divergence of vital trajectories. Each chapter recognises some alternatives for lower-middle-class parents and caregivers and emphasises how contingency affects the development of concrete mechanisms and the overall interaction of mechanisms involving the production of social processes. For example, the chapters point out alternative domestic imaginaries, the diversity of political stances among the lower-middle-class, and variations in the intensity of sacrificial optimism, among other topics.

Neither of these categories implies that participants feel entirely represented by these terms. While they self-recognise with said categories, they also show tensions in other moments. For example, the use of territorial identities between *Santiaguinos* and district identities, especially in Maipú and Puente Alto, oscillate depending on the context. The label of parent or caregiver is stronger among fathers and mothers, but there are moments when participants problematise its use. Finally, the notion of lower-middle-class represents the contradictory ideas of their perceived class position. The more significant events that display these tensions are part of the dissertation.

A note on native anthropology

My experience as a native anthropologist also affects this research. Native anthropology presents advantages such as broad cultural and linguistic competence when conducting fieldwork. In contrast, the challenges of ethnographic estrangement and the legitimacy of the anthropologist's voice among these communities define this positionality. However, we must notice that Narayan (1993) has already argued against the fixity of a distinction between 'native' and 'non-native' anthropologists. Additionality, Jacobs-Huey (2002) has warned about how 'playing the native card' may hinder self-reflexivity and hide the privileges that relate to the 'insider' status.

While it was true that I benefit from broad cultural competence, my approach to doing fieldwork focused on understanding mattering. The ethnographic experience of mattering was a profoundly subtle and nuanced process that escaped my native experience and forced me to design an emergent ethnographic project. In fact, analysis and writing enabled me to identify the core elements of my argument, which were not built upon notions of closeness or distance from my own experience.

Instead of defining my positionality drawing upon atemporal closeness or distance from an ethnographic other, I believe that the figure of departure is the best way to describe how people in Santiago see me. Although it is hard to pinpoint how research participants perceive the anthropologist, the picture that comes to mind is a member of the lower middle class who achieves success and fulfils the 'dream' of social mobility. In addition, they may perceive me as a 'professional' (college-educated individual) who embodies their ideals of self-discipline and education.

In the fieldwork, my interlocutors asked me for advice on dealing with their children or motivating them to study. They also asked me about the university experience. On other occasions, I found myself helping children, grandchildren, and neighbours study subjects such as philosophy, mathematics, or English. Moreover, sharing some personal difficulties contributed to creating ethnographic rapport, for example, studying in foreign universities with class and race hierarchies.

While unconsciously embodying the role of the departed might help to build rapport, it risked amplifying the participants' focus on education, social mobility, and middle-class self-presentation. It was challenging to accurately assess how much this element played a role in this ethnography. However, I would suggest that their structures of mattering motivated these concerns more than our interactions. Across the different households, they tended to overlook my suggestions about the contradictions of social mobility and tertiary education, especially in the later parts of the fieldwork. Further, most discussions on class and personal struggles tended to become fluidly and quickly more candid and detailed. My interpretation was that they did not attempt to present themselves to match what they saw as my version of middle-classness. Instead, they shared their worlds and stories as a helping hand for a friend or acquaintance, during which they asked me for assistance with matters that worried them.

The chapters

The present dissertation is divided into seven chapters and a conclusion summarising the contents.

The first two chapters trace the contradictory positions in which the interlocutors find themselves within Chilean society. Chapter One explores how these parents and grandparents identify as *lower-middle-class*—a middle class that self-qualifies class belonging—to position themselves in struggles for economic value and self-worth. Chapter Two shows how these parents enact citizenship. The parents I met in Santiago care about voting and abiding by the law, partially embracing liberal institutions. However, *resentment* pervades their sense of citizenship, which reshapes their commitment to the political community. This commitment speaks more about a moral injury arising from politicians' broken promises.

The following chapters explore these parents' layered selves and structures of mattering under this political economy. The focus is on how they experience and discern what matters to them and dedicate themselves to specific courses of action. Chapter Three examines the *post-industrial domestic imaginary* and how it shapes unconscious fantasies of family life. These fantasies stage values such as conviviality, mutuality, and flexibility to encourage desires for domesticity. Chapter Four addresses the mood of *sacrificial optimism*. Due to their precarious low-wage jobs, parents must work hard to maintain their households. However, instead of rejecting work, they see abnegation as a virtue. Sacrificial optimism allows them to upend their suffering into something positive that facilitates the embodiment of their domestic fantasies. Chapter Five discusses *commitments* and *parenting*. It understands these interlocutors' parenting as ethical commitments that entail routines (including an ethical pedagogy), experimentation, and deliberation. Commitments encourage parents to revise and amend habits and practices, fostering a sense of agency and self-responsabilisation.

The last chapters address how parents build social worlds when pursuing specific values and motives. Chapter Six explores domesticity and homemaking as an affective and moral endeavours. Lower-middle-class *Santiaguinos* primarily construct their homes, attempting to produce and achieve the values of dignity and protection. However, late capitalism disrupts their efforts. As a compromise between their concerns and restrictions, they enact *atmospheres of tranquillity*—a sensuous and moral experience of subdued contentment. Chapter Seven delves into the private and public separation. These *Santiaguinos* focus on helping and agreements as the foundation for their engagement with the ethical-political community, conjuring two social spheres, 'the social' and politics.

[redacted]

Fig. 1: Map of Santiago and families’ districts

[redacted]

Fig. 2: Map of Santiago in South America

Chapter One

The Labour of (Lower) Middle-classness

Sites of struggle for value in neoliberal Santiago

Class in Santiago is both loud and quiet. The city is a significantly unequal and segregated community. Social inequality encourages people to mock and resent the upper class or *cuicos*, the name given to the most affluent segments of the populace. However, *Santiaguinos* have difficulty openly admitting their hidden injuries of class—the silent feelings of failure, devaluation, powerlessness, and isolation produced by capitalist transformations (Sennett & Colb 1972: 249-51). Instead, the working class attempt to find their place in society, proudly affirming their personal virtues: hard work and resoluteness.

In one of my earliest conversations with Soledad and Roberto, a couple from Recoleta whom I shadowed, the topic of middle-classness came up unexpectedly. They recounted their economic ups and downs to pin down their class position. ‘We first had a home decor store. But we did not sell a lot. The place was bad. It was a mistake. Then we invest in a snail farm. There were a lot of issues. You need to take care of the snails, and they are fragile. But the lack of publicity doomed the business. We could not sell the creams. That obviously takes you down.’ They joked about their misfortune but also spoke with regret.

When I asked about her regrets, Soledad lamented losing her middle-class home. She recounted, ‘We were heading in the right direction. The business was doing fine, and we had managed to buy a house in a pleasant neighbourhood complex [a condominium in Quilicura]. Then, sales went down from one day to the next, and we could not meet our mortgage payments; we went bankrupt and had to move back to my parents’ place.’ Thinking about their worst moments, Soledad would admit, ‘We had to ask for a cheque. We felt ashamed that we could not provide for our children.’ 19-year-old Janito and 12-year-old Pamela mean everything to their parents.

Poverty does not define Soledad's and Roberto's lives. Yet, they still do confront economic difficulties. Soledad is a good-natured self-employed woman who also takes care of her home. She has a more cheerful demeanour in facing their struggles than her older husband, Roberto. Roberto is more jaded and gets demoralised by the lack of opportunities. Still, they support each other and see themselves as a team. They always presented themselves as a united front—'We took the decision,' 'We failed at the investment,' and 'We learnt from our mistakes'.

At the time of that conversation, they had been leasing a house for almost a year. Soledad had lived there in her youth. Her mother told her about the lease. Despite having a biographic connection, Soledad did not feel properly embedded in the neighbourhood. 'We say "hi", but we rarely meet with anyone. There is not a lot of communal life around here. Everyone in their houses.' Roberto echoed that sentiment. They attempted to focus on their household. Both were grateful they could pay the bills and have a little left over. Yet, they felt something was missing. Soledad recounted, 'It is not the same that before. Roberto does not have a job. Myself, I am struggling with the school, and we do not have the stability that we achieved at one point.' We kept talking about the difference between the past and the present, and two issues arose: safety and access to better schools. They had to survive on limited means and struggled to pay for private schools. Then, I asked them if they felt middle-class to an extent. Soledad and Roberto, almost talking simultaneously, accepted the label. But afterwards, they looked at each other and reached a quiet agreement, acknowledging that they do not fully belong to it.

In the conversation, Roberto and Soledad bounded middle-classness and economic wellbeing to a good education and orderly finances. Roberto explained, 'I am a perfectionist; I like to keep my finances in order. It is part of what I do, you know, as an accountant, I am interested in finance. What I learned is because I am an autodidact. Being organised make you more successful and allows you to take better care of your family.' Soledad agreed with the idea. They repeatedly draw attention to 'being orderly *(ser ordenado*)'. Around this assessment, they suggested several actions: having a budget, paying the bills on time, not spending money on non-useful things, studying, and keeping an eye out for better economic opportunities.

As our conversation drew to a close, Soledad and Roberto confronted that education and economic discipline were insufficient to achieve stability. To a certain degree, they embodied the ideal of economic discipline. They had worked hard, saved money, avoided frivolous expenditures, and studied at technical colleges to get associate degrees. Still, the promise of middle-classness had remained elusive. In 2017, Roberto decided to get a six-month diploma to bolster his possibility of getting a job, as he had been unemployed for months. Soledad was struggling economically with her small business. Considering this contradiction, I asked them, 'What happens when being orderly and educated does not secure social mobility?' I had avoided probing such issues, but their argument genuinely struck me. They quickly retorted, 'The only option is perseverance. One must keep fighting. This is what we intend to teach our children.' Finally, perseverance (*perseverancia*) had become the road to economic stability.

Soledad's father was an industrial worker when she was growing up. Her mother was a homemaker. On the days of the fieldwork, they drove a small private school bus (*furgón escolar*). Soledad recalled the 'working-class' experience of her childhood memories—humble toys, living in close quarters, modest schooling—but proudly portrayed it as being 'in the middle'. Other people were needier and more impoverished than they were. Relative comparisons and gradualism ('more-than' and 'less-than') configured her understanding of class. Soledad moved up and down the middle class to place herself throughout different conversations, but she still felt part of the middle class

Is class and social mobility something that matters to Soledad? Soledad does not appear eager to raise their status and prestige, but she cares about being recognised as middle-class—'the people who work'. Likewise, she does not identify with working-class identities or organisations. Instead, Soledad feels disadvantaged because society is against people like them because she is middle-class.

Similar class experiences come across the families I know in Santiago. The people I meet tend to confront the issue of positionality and class. They approach middle-classness as the primary identity that late capitalist Chilean society encourages individuals and families to think about themselves when addressing social stratification and mobility. Still, adopting middle-classness does not necessarily imply fully embracing it. Instead, it may be about confronting the contradictory experience of ‘being thrown in the middle’ when one’s life conditions and opportunities do not align with any position.

Nowadays, the middle-class identity is ubiquitous in Santiago. Around seventy per cent of Chileans identify themselves by this label (Barozet 2017). Libertad & Desarrollo (2019), a right-wing think-tank, wrote in a celebratory tone that Chile’s middle class represents 65.4 per cent of the population, taking income as the main index. As part of this middle class, the lower middle class make up 41.2 per cent of the populace.

The conventional twentieth-century understanding of class puts forward four distinct classes: upper classes, middle classes, worker classes and a series of underclasses. The working-class positions relate to stable work conditions and manual jobs engineered under Fordism. In contrast, the middle class appears linked to services and clerical jobs, liberal professionals, and small business owners. These positions often involve more significant income, prestige, and capacity to accumulate capital than the working class. In contrast, the underclasses are the poor—the social groups that cannot rely upon stable and dependable wage jobs. However, a series of processes—neoliberal state reforms, the deindustrialisation of the economy, the irruption of credit and commodity markets, and the transformation of the political ontologies of personhood—have reorganised the social distribution of labour and class identities. One dominant phenomenon has emerged due to these transformations: the working class and self-employed adults have begun to self-identify as middle-class.

Confronting this common issue in late capitalist societies, researchers have approached it in an ‘either/or’ fashion. The camp focused on working-class positionality dismisses middle-classness as an ideological effect or a temporary state. For example, Kalb argues that the new global middle class are wage earners that are temporal beneficiaries of international chains of values or state benefits (Kalb 2014: 176; see also Durrenberger 2011a). The middle-class camp, often following Weber’s or Bourdieu’s ideas, highlights emerging groups, focusing on the aspirational dimension of consumption and modes of life. The analysis usually refers to production relationships but neglects the actual networks of exploitation and struggle that sustain such social groups. Donner articulates it, ‘Class identities are always in the making and the “middle class” is equally a site of belonging and a site of aspiration.’ (Donner 2017).

This chapter intends to explore how to understand this clash between middle-classness and working-class positionality. It delves into class, focusing on specific sites of struggles for value. It attempts to read middle-classness along with working-class experiences and not against it. Exploring Soledad’s and Ernesto’s accounts, this chapter describes three threads about how these families engage with class: (1) the recurrent effort to identify themselves as middle-class, (2) the specific class consciousness that emerges among them, and (3) the negotiations around their projects of middle-classness and social mobility. Taking these three threads into account, the main ethnographic argument of the chapter is that we may identify a *lower middle class* in Santiago.

The *illusio* of middle-classness in the late capitalist social space

Is middle-classness recognised as a worthy aspiration or a praiseworthy achievement? Most of the ethnographic research in late capitalist societies confirms this idea. The work of anthropologists has shown vividly how middle classes tend to be associated with good levels of wellbeing, steady income, access to consumer goods and respectability (Donner 2017; Heiman, Liechty & Freeman 2012). Middle-classness also relates to self-described unique qualities that make individuals entitled to political influence vis-à-vis other classes within the political community across different societies (P. Anderson 2019; Fernandes 2006; Guano 2004; Muir 2015; Yeh 2012).

In Chile, hegemonic projects and state strategies have attempted to shape citizenship regimes with participatory devices, laws, and constitutional modifications, but they have also underpinned definitions of worthy personhood that entangle with ideas of a worthy life. Skeggs and Loveday (2012) understand the ontology of personhood as *discursive formations that constitute personhood through valuation*, often linked to conceptions of gender, race, and class. The result is ‘subjects of value’—subjectivities and behaviours evaluated and recognised as worthy.

The dominant ontology of personhood for twentieth-century North Atlantic societies was possessive individualism. Consequently, it has shaped the boundaries between proper middle-classness and the rest (Skeggs 2004). However, the emergence of the developmental state in Chile fostered a subject of value based on the image of ‘the people’ (*el pueblo*), which grounded twentieth-century Chilean citizenship. This hegemonic project had a clear vision of reorganising critical industries such as manufacturing, mining, and construction as part of a new regime of accumulation led by a national political class—and not by foreign capital as past dominant blocs had (Salazar & Pinto 1999a). In order to achieve this goal, the project required domesticating the urban labour force as a new political subject.

State discourse actively interpellated working classes and the poor as ‘the people’, channelling a new political agency into being. However, creating ‘the people’ of the labour force also mirrored the push to civilise and protect the people through state led social work (Illanes 2007; Moyano 2016). Alongside these state efforts, racial and class ideologies at the time began to argue that Chilean people were not lazy and unruly, but a proud race that required a more robust state and a more protected society (Drake 1992; Subercaseuax 2009; Valdivia Ortiz de Zárate & Pinto 2018). Moreover, these political ideas echoed middle-class state inflected progressive values and working-class social demands, institutionalising the labour-capital conflict (Barr-Melej 2001: 57-62; G. Salazar 2012: 169). We might see the governments of Frei Montalva (1964-1970) and Allende (1970-1973) as this political logic’s peak (van der Ree 2007). Under these administrations, the state kept expanding social and political rights to meet ‘popular’ (or plebeian) classes’ demands. Thus, the promises of developmental capitalism covered the middle class and ‘popular classes’, making ‘working-class’ and ‘popular’ identities sources of social recognition and moral standing.

As proposed by Donner (2015) and Bear (2007), among others, class identities and self-worth are connected with ideas of domesticity under capitalism. In Chile, this was also true. The developmental state championed family arrangements that encourage fathers to provide, and mothers to take care of the family household (Olavarría 2000: 18-23; Rosemblatt 2000; X. Valdés 2005: 91-103). They would work together to create conviviality and help each other under the tutelage of fatherhood and the tenderness of motherhood. Middle-class cultural influence would further enhance these domestic scenes around meritocracy, education, and communal civic life, as the state enshrined them as social virtues (Candina 2013b).

The neoliberal project would disrupt this ontology profoundly. The Pinochet regime revolutionised Chilean society. The state eliminated protectionist policies, opened the markets, and privatised public companies and services. This transformation led to bankruptcy in thousands of industries and encouraged massive layoffs. Soon, industrial and mining workers—the backbone of the labour movement—became a minority in the workforce. They represented 27 per cent of the workforce in 1971 and 11 per cent in 2009 (Ruiz & Boccardo 2014). After a period of high unemployment, workers went on either to occupy jobs in the service industry, or to become self-employed, or to reach middle-level positions.

From a legal perspective, the Pinochet regime rewrote the idea of citizenship, emphasising rights and legal obligations and undermining political participation, binding citizenship to the neoliberal regime of accumulation (see Chapter Two). However, the administration also redesigned the relationship between citizenship and social rights and state welfare. The new labour and social policies would homogenise people's citizenship claims and discourage union membership, thus decoupling labour from citizenship (Drake 2003).

The state also enacted a new social protection system focused on poverty and vulnerability. Thus, it eliminated most of the corporatist and universalist social programmes that had dominated the developmental state. Even today, state assistance classifies the populace into (self-sufficient) citizens and the poor—helpless and dependant—whom the state apparatus would assist through targeted social programmes (Borzutsky 2002; Raczynski 1994). Democratic governments have continuously expanded the ways of identifying and classifying these populations without disrupting the neoliberal redesign of social care (Ramos Zincke 2015). Schild argues that this system has also enhanced neoliberal governance 'through projects of self-responsibilisation of society, accomplished in turn through the caring or punitive reregulation of individuals' (2013: 223; see also Rojas Lasch 2020).

In the 1990s, the transitional governments reinforced middle-classness as part of a broader developmental model (*modelo de desarrollo*), which aligned the authoritarian hegemonic project to the democratic environment. These governments vocally endorsed the 'Growth with Equity' strategy as their global model (Camargo 2006; M.A. Garretón 2012; Leiva 2008; M. Taylor 2006; van dee Ree 2007). This approach to governance put economic growth at the centre of the state agenda and expected income equality and social development to come from successful economic performance in neoliberal terms. A natural resource-based and export-oriented economy supported by the financial, service, and retail sectors would generate enough wealth and jobs to keep the country going. For a while, this model 'worked'. As a result, the Chilean economy grew, and poverty decreased.

In the 1990s and 2000s, the model shift strengthened the transformation of the class structure and the centrality of the middle class as subjects of value. The state-based middle class became a minority (Méndez 2010). This group usually invoked respectability and stability linked to state bureaucratic positions and meritocracy sentiments (Candina 2009, 2013a, 2013b). Instead of state middle classes, neoliberal middle classes emerged associated with new markets, self-employed liberal professionals, the expansion of the service sector, and growing private bureaucracies (Barozet & Fierro 2011, 2014; Candia & Balmaceda 2017). White-collar employees reached 37.1 per cent of the workforce by 2009 (Ruiz & Boccardo 2014). This demographic shift affected the income distribution (León & Martínez 2001). The new middle classes improved their relative income position while state bureaucracies' position declined.

Since the Pinochet dictatorship, new scenes of middle-class consumption have also affected discourses of class. These new scenes portray the good life as orderly and obedient families, minding their own (private) business, accessing the world of consumption and credit, and pursuing homeownership (Moulián 1997). According to market-friendly intellectuals, these families dream of taking a vacation, buying a car, going to the mall, and filling their houses with new appliances (Lavín 1987; Tironi 2005). The expanding credit economy supports, and suffocates, such aspirations (Marambio-Tapia 2017). Key cultural forces, such as the media, advertisements, and surveys, have manufactured a domestic imaginary that intersects with aspirational middle-classness. These industries value specific urban neighbourhoods, dwellings and cultural practices that occlude working-class identities and align middle-class aspirations (Ariztía 2002, 2011; Paley 2001b; Rasse, Salcedo & Pardo 2009). Some neoliberal middle-class households have adopted this version of the good life, embracing the new 'Chilean dream'.

This brief history of middle-classness in Santiago shows how several discourses and scenes gravitate around this subject of value. First, this middle-class dream conveys how economic wellbeing appears for most Chilean families. Moreover, middle-classness legitimises specific practices and trajectories to reach or improve socioeconomic status. Finally, public imagination about 'upstanding' families and good values lean towards middle-class lifestyles and morals.

However, this bundle of discourses and representations does not appear fully coherent. Soledad and Roberto's account shows the friction of embracing and performing this form of personhood. While they can identify practices and virtues linked to the middle class—i.e. perseverance, education, or orderly finances—they also acknowledge the struggles to achieve economic wellbeing. Moreover, their narration illuminates the middle class's slippery quality as a subject of value.

We can explore the slippery quality of the current political ontology of personhood, delving into Ernesto and Karen's engagement with middle-classness. Like the rest of the participants of this research, Ernesto and Karen identify as middle-class. Unlike Soledad and Roberto, Ernesto and Karen do not have college diplomas and live with more limited means. Nevertheless, they still share the goal of social mobility, expressing the hope of 'lifting' themselves (*surgir*). As a family, they have problems accessing a better life despite being hard workers. Ernesto works for a living making *piñatas* and other party supplies; Karen is a cashier in a money-transfer company. They and their children—Gaspar and Camila—live in a three-bedroom house in the southern district of San Ramón.

In our earlier conversations, Ernesto and Karen clarified that they feel part of the middle class. They identified as such because they argued that 'they are part of the people who work' and 'between the rich and the poor'. Their explanations were fairly scripted, 'Rich can escape work, and the poor do not work because they are lazy or lack resoluteness.' They also pointed out that families like theirs were part of the ones who relied on their work without much assistance from the state.

One day at lunch, we discussed an illegal encampment where low-income people built feeble dwellings (*campamentos*). That which was a regular expression of bottom-up political action in the city, nowadays had become an uncommon and undesired sight in the urban landscape for most *Santiaguinos*. Both Ernesto and Karen brought up the 'poor children that lived in such conditions', at first disregarding that the same conditions affected the parents. Soon, the discussion veered to whether these people needed help. For Ernesto and Karen, poverty, or 'true poverty' as they would say, meant not having a sturdy home and a regular job. Karen linked the issue to her condition, 'I am middle class because I have a roof, a home. Poor people do not have it. These people live practically in the street, in rooms made of cheap wood, and with any luck, they stand. I live in a sturdy home that I own.' Then, the conversation turned to how one may confront life. Without any question asked, they echoed some of the most traditional neoliberal rhetoric. Karen and Ernesto agreed that poverty also is an 'attitude'. Poverty was related to a lack of will, hard work, and perseverance. I did not intervene much, hoping to hear what they understood for class.

When I was sure that the discussion had arrived at the most stereotypical discourses of class, their ideas took a turn. Karen introduced the issue of luck, which Ernesto accepted. She mentioned, 'Sometimes luck could push you back even if you sacrifice yourself.'. Poverty could be an expression of misfortune. Thus, they concluded that the state should help the poor, especially if deserving. Later, Ernesto further complicated the analysis. He reasoned, 'Everywhere there are good people, rich people who work hard and poor people who strive.' Rather than only conjoining the moral quality of hard work or perseverance with the middle-class identity, he infused this outlook with a degree of universality. Karen echoed his words, returning to the issue of bad luck, 'We are middle-class now, but if something happens, we can go down [to poverty].' Ernesto nodded. I sat silently, listening to their opinions. Luck, individual dispositions, and the gap between cause and effect could explain why hardworking people move across society's upper and lower ranks.

Karen and Ernesto still uphold the fundamental association between middle-classness and 'the people who work', making moral boundaries between the middle class and the rich or the poor. Both come from working-class families, but they do not identify as such. For them, the distinction is having food on the table. We could take this expression literally and metaphorically. On the one hand, it means struggling to buy food daily. On the other hand, it signals the difficulty of paying the bills each month. While some of Ernesto's friends and sisters face problems, his family achieves livelihood thanks to Ernesto and Karen's labour and steady income. According to them, poor people depend on state benefits and odd jobs. The middle class does not need, or will be granted, ongoing help.

However, other moral considerations undermine clean boundaries, as the vignette shows. Luck and effort play a role too. Karen and Ernesto also consider that middle-class families need help when economic crises affect them. On other occasions, they also think middle-class households are not so different from the poor because they struggle with bills and salaries and sometimes depend upon loans and credits. If self-reliance is the starting point of their understanding of class, it is not the whole story.

Without a doubt, the bedrock of thinking about class is the relationship between hard work and middle-classness. This association articulates one recurrent idea: a tripartite class schema of poor people, the middle class, and wealthy people constitutes Chilean society. This scheme reflects economic self-reliance and dependence on state benefits. The core supposition is that perseverance and hard work will secure a steady income and access to proper housing and safe neighbourhoods—the conventional idea of meritocracy among these households. Higher education, in a broader sense, reinforces this possibility, becoming an index and route to the middle class. The centrality of labour virtues echoes what Doukas & Durrenberger (2008) and Lamont (2002) have argued about the importance of self-reliance, work ethic, and domesticity for working classes in France and the United States. However, these parents associate these values with middle-classness, not with the working class

Bourdieu has become one of the critical resources for understanding middle-class groupings. Using concepts such as habitus and field, the French sociologist analyses how actual people recognise, identify, and differentiate social groups into classes that social spaces map. Through these processes, classes can reproduce unequal access to crucial resources and 'hoard' life chances (See Bourdieu 1984, 1987). For the French sociologist, access to and accumulation of material goods and cultural and symbolic resources—e.g. taste, education, prestige, status, honour—determines what we may understand as life chances. Bourdieu uses the metaphor of capital to name these resources (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 97). Additionally, individuals advance their strategies to hoard life chances by political means and deploy everyday strategies based on consumption and public performativity (Bourdieu 1984, 1989). These practices contribute decisively to making and coagulating socially recognised class boundaries. The social space, in a Bourdieuan sense, conjures a widely shared scheme that recognises how individuals share similar positions, habitus and strategies, and, at the same time, contribute to materialising such class structure (Bourdieu 1985, 1987)

Bourdieuan analysis also tracks the stakes that motivate agents to participate in the social space and the never-ending process of boundary making, classification, and performance. Fields establish stakes—or *illusio* (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 116; Wacquant 2013, 2019). Threadgold argues that '[I]f someone is invested in the *illusio* of a field, they are motivated by its stakes as something worth struggling over; they see the investment of their own time, effort, and emotion as a valuable endeavour; and they are committed to reaping the rewards of the field, that is, they see something worth aspiring towards.' (2019: 39). It constitutes the social space as a meaningful arena where individuals must engage and desire to participate (Bourdieu 2000: 165-6).

In that sense, the social space is the prime site for struggles for value, as Bev Skeggs has long argued. One fundamental *illusio* is the access to feeling and being recognised as subjects of value against devaluation and alienation (Skeggs 2004, 2011, 2012). Class *always* implies specific forms of subjects of value framed in political ontologies of personhood (Skeggs and Loveday 2012). Here, we may consider Andrew Sayer's argument on self-worth. Sayer argues that Bourdieu's theory focuses on the struggle of external goods—i.e. material or symbolic goods that are instrumental to other ends—while neglecting internal goods (Sayer 2005). By this concept, the British sociologist means practices that people find good in themselves, often linked with ordinary morality and emic theories of flourishing—e.g. recognition, dignity, and social worth. The social space distributes not only symbolic capital and recognition but also goods that people *feel* as self-worth (Sayer 2005, 2011).

Both accounts show how self-perception, and the assessment of others, is strongly mediated by associations between hard work (and self-reliance) and self-worth. Middle-classness encompasses this association. However, Soledad and the rest do not see an uncompromising link between being hardworking and the middle class. Instead, they consider luck, inequality, and lack of state support can interrupt becoming middle-class.

As a political ontology, the force of middle-classness shapes the social space, creating an expansive middle area where individuals and families can project their ideas about the middle class and conjure internal goods according to such representations. Thus, different beliefs about the social space can suggest specific practices and strategies to embody and perform middle-classness, which may be contradictory or complementary among them. Soledad, Roberto, Ernesto, and Karen coincide that the core discursive practice to claim middle-classness is embodying hard work and self-reliance, especially when referring to domestic projects. Virtues such as perseverance, resoluteness, and hard work display this tendency.

People who work or the working class?

The discussion described in the opening vignette on middle-classness cast a long shadow on my later visits. Soledad and Roberto continuously brought up business opportunities and economic predicaments. Two weeks before Christmas, I visited Soledad and Roberto's home. Soledad had just arrived from work, and Roberto was baking. We quickly sat in the kitchen while Roberto kept an eye on the oven. We started chatting about the week, and I asked them about the holidays. They had bought gifts for their extended family. This household showed the thickest relationships with nondomestic relatives among those I shadowed—one of the few who regularly visited and helped each other.

However, Roberto was more excited about a new business that he was planning with his sister. 'What are you planning?' I asked. Roberto excitedly started recounting his visit to a country chalet (*parcela*) that functioned as an events hall. 'I would like to own something like that, with swimming pools, a dancefloor. I can do the catering. The place could be used for graduations parties, matrimonies, or work parties.' Roberto had been looking for a job for a while. At another time, the feeling of inadequacy arose in our conversations. Ernesto did not contribute much money to the household, which weighed on his mind. He had completed a graduate certificate to have a better chance of finding a job without much success. A baking or catering business was another option. That afternoon, Soledad looked somewhat disconnected from the discussion about the events hall. Weeks later, she would reveal her contention. ‘I am not so convinced with the idea, but I let him; he improves his mood *(avanza)* in that way.’

As the night arrived, I tried to shift the focus. Our conversation went back to Soledad. While Roberto was checking the bread, Soledad revisited one of her recurrent concerns: her struggling language school and her fights with the co-owner, Magdalena. Predicaments arose from her job. First, she did not know what to do with Magdalena. ‘We are too different; I cannot work with her. I have never arrived late. I have never abused my position. I try to do my best. Magdalena is different. She sees the school as a business. I cannot do that; teaching is my vocation,’ Soledad narrated, rushing through ideas. The juxtaposition of approaches was clear. At the time, she owned the school and did most of the work, teaching around eight to ten children. The school—the household’s source of income—was no longer sustainable for her. She needed a change. But Soledad saw the future with uncertainty. She mentioned that she would like to own a homoeopathy store or relocate to the south. I did not know this teacher had taken a decision that night. She was going to leave her school.

Soledad also had problems with her direct manager, in this case, the state. I visited her a couple of times at her language school. There, Soledad would explain that she saw the state as her boss. Soledad’s students were primarily from low-income families that could not pay for her services. Instead, the state granted her money. This arrangement depended on endless paperwork, report writing, evaluations and expert visits. According to Soledad’s view, all the Ministry of Education did was ‘…ask, ask, ask’. She often told me that the paperwork did not leave her enough time to work with the children and resolve work issues with her business partner.

Ernesto had experienced a different side of late capitalist labour markets. Rather than starting several small businesses, Ernesto had occupied semi-skilled industrial positions in places such as a fumigation business, a window installation company, and a party supplies manufacturer. His last job was making piñatas with Fernando. Fernando and Ernesto's labour relationship lasted for years since I met them. They met while working for the latter's parents-in-law's company. However, the harsh management style fostered unhappiness and discontent. Finally, Ernesto and Fernando decided to resign and start their own company. Even with these changes, Ernesto was the employee and earned the minimum wage (around £350 per month), while Fernando was the boss.

On the other hand, Karen had also suffered labour's negative consequences in late capitalist Santiago. Not only she had to perform most domestic chores, but she had to work from Monday to Saturday. She earned around £450 per month. The long hours and the job instability worried her. A temporary work agency hired her. Thus, this company could easily lay her off.

During my visits, Ernesto and Karen regularly talked about work conflicts. Unprompted, they discuss how they cannot deal with their employers' demands, their insufficient wages, and their exhaustion. In July 2018, I paid Ernesto an afternoon visit. This event was one of the first instances that we met without Karen. Ernesto received me working at home: cutting papers, pasting paperboards, and assembling piñatas. In the first hour, we talked about political corruption and the elite. Ernesto had recently come across a small piece of information. 'Choclo Delano', an influential right-wing capitalist and fund manager for a well-known charity in the country, had received a millionaire compensation for his work in the latter. 'An abuse. How could we charge money for that?' Ernesto complained, fuelling one of his long rants against the upper class in Chile as he kept crafting the *piñatas.*

Perhaps echoing that dissatisfaction, he complained about his boss when I inquired about his week. Ernesto had never been shy about sharing his critiques of his boss. Ernesto returned to one of his favourite arguments, 'I do most of the work. Fernando does little to nothing.' He even found it troublesome that Fernando was sometimes not a good seller. Ernesto pushed the point further, 'Fernando has made some terrible business decisions.' After he finished, I replied, 'Have you thought about asking for a raise?' Ernesto had shown doubts about abandoning his job. He portrayed Fernando as a friend and partner despite his grievances. From time to time, he would claim he would talk with his boss to request more money. But the following week, he changed his mind. This day was one of those times.

Returning home, I met Karen at the subway station by chance. She was coming from work. ‘How are you?’ I inquired. ‘Fine, tired,’ she answered, as I had grown accustomed to hearing. This day, however, she looked bothered. After a slight pause, Karen admitted that she did not want to return to her work. This occasion was not the first time, nor the last, that she threatened to quit. Still, she was particularly exhausted that night. She was tired of working with her boss and her boss’ sister. They demanded that she work faster and treat clients more distantly. Karen defended herself, ‘I need space to do my job. I know how to treat customers.’ But, after a pause, she doubts her decision, ‘It is really hard to get a job, I have worked most of the time as a cashier, and I do not have sales experience. Things are hard right now. I am hoping that a supermarket calls [for a cashier job]. I can do that.’ Before we said goodbye, Karen told me that Ernesto did not know about her job search, ‘I do not want to tell him yet.’

Late capitalist labour markets in Santiago have devalued the moral quality of the concrete experience of work. The neoliberal accumulation regime and the imbalance of power between capital and labour have fostered a segmented labour market that arranges two vastly different types of jobs: protected and unprotected (ILO 2018; Soto 2009). Stencher & Sisto (2019) argue that the secondary market is the more widespread and dominant. This one shows neoliberal precarisation: insufficient wages, inequality, underemployment, and low intensity collective bargaining. This market also manifests organisational regimes based on high flexibilisation and neomanagerial techniques (Ramos Zincke 2009; Sisto & Zelaya 2013). Women are particularly vulnerable to this labour arrangement. They earn lower wages than men, have more fragmented labour trajectories and experience more harassment and hostile work environments (Ansoleage, Vezina & Montaño 2014; Gómez & Jiménez 2018).

Semi-skilled working-class positions often do not bring long-term upward mobility or economic stability, which are common among the households discussed in this dissertation. The people I talked to do jobs such as truck driver (Alvaro), craftsman (Ernesto), cashier (Karen), small business multipurpose auxiliary (Vero), and low-level clerk (Cristina and Cecilia). A minority occupy white-collar or skilled working-class positions: accountant (Roberto) and welder (Arturo). However, they have found trouble accessing good jobs in oversaturated markets that discriminate against professionals from low status universities. Soledad could be technically classified as petty bourgeoisie. Jacinto is the only one among them who had occupied a supervisorial position, but he has retired due to health problems.

Do these frictions amount to class consciousness? Marx's work concentrated on class struggle, incorporating the concepts of class interests and class consciousness in order to understand similar questions. For Marx, classes in capitalist societies—as structural positions and actual sociopolitical groupings—emerge around the issue of exploitation (Callinicos 2004: 42; T. Turner 2008: 45; Wright 1985: 74). The capitalist class exploits the working class because labour is the dominant source of value. Thus, the labour-capital contradiction encourages class consciousness. Workers, who share class positions, start valuing the same things, identifying advantages and disadvantages and working to achieve or secure critical goods, e.g. income, capital, land, and legal and administrative prerogatives. A shared class interest emerges. Under this framework, class interest refers to the idea that the material interests of capitalists and workers are antagonistic. Marxist anthropologists have noted that class and class consciousness involve actual struggle and political praxis (Durrenberger 2011a; Kalb 2015; G. Smith 2015). Wright has proposed that we think of class consciousness as work conflicts with direct managers, self-identification with labour positions and belief in the association between challenging circumstances and the roles one occupies within a labour process (Wright 1985).

David Graeber has pointed out that while economic value relates to abstract labour, money, and wages in capitalist societies, other forms of value still require labour, production, and realisation (Graeber 2007b, 2013; see also T. Turner 1984, 2008, 2009). In capitalist societies, other processes of value production and realisation become hidden or subordinate to economic value—e.g. reproduction or political matters (Graeber 2007a). As the dominant form of value, economic value shapes exploitation.

If we follow Wright's empirical indexes of class consciousness, we see how Ernesto, Karen, and Soledad match crucial traits. Firstly, they show work conflict with direct managers. Secondly, they self-identify with labour. Finally, they relate their precarious economic conditions to their current jobs. This consciousness reveals the disadvantaged position when producing, defining, and appropriating labour. For Karen and Ernesto, it is service and manual work; for Soledad, it is self-employment in the educational sector. They recognise that others are controlling their activities and appropriating what they do. They oppose the mismanagement of their abilities and the little money they earn from this arrangement. These parents often feel abused or trapped by their employers' bad decisions.

Most analysts would not describe Soledad as proletarian. However, we must recognise that the working class is always in transformation and may not look like the traditional industrial white male worker (Carbonella & Kasmir 2015; Kalb 2015; Koch 2018). Soledad has little possibility of actual capital accumulation or control of the work process. Her precarious conditions are bound to commodity production. In Chile, most private education is for profit. Finally, she cannot access political organisations because she does not have the energy or time to participate. Here, it is not wages that permit the appropriation of labour, but grants, small subsidies, and exclusive contracts that serve to secure exploitation, control work activities, and exclude self-employed people from more substantive forms of capital accumulation.

The first six months of fieldwork showed me the challenges of embodying middle-classness and pursuing economic wellbeing. At the time, Karen felt it was impossible to find a job to improve the family's financial standing. Alongside this concern, she was worried about not being present in her young daughter's life, leaving her without proper maternal care. 'A flexible thing, something that allows me to work when Cami is at school,' Karen described her ideal job. Sometimes, Karen would also confide that she was unhappy with Ernesto's lack of drive; they needed to find new jobs and earn more money.

Similarly, Soledad and Roberto felt their ability to navigate late capitalism was fractured. Ricardo could not find any jobs; thus, he kept attempting to find business opportunities without actualising them. Soledad was tired of owning the school. The conflicts with her business partner, the demands of the children's families and the lack of money had become recurring issues that stressed her out. Going away from Santiago was becoming the more realistic option. Could these families be reaching a breaking point?

The notion of unfairness permeated these households' moral critique of the economic system. Everyone was highly critical of the rich and powerful. Unemployment, precarious labour conditions, lack of control at their workplaces, and low wages dominated our conversations.[4] These tensions staged the question of what to do. Soledad and Roberto were looking for ways to stabilise their economic situation by moving to the south of Chile or starting a new business. In contrast, Ernesto and Karen were circling the same job opportunities. Yet, Karen felt more alone in her push to improve their economic standing. She pursued other jobs but felt frustrated because Ernesto did not have her 'initiative'.

In both cases, this sense of unfairness did not translate into class politics. In our discussions, these parents were not interested in collective political action—working-class or otherwise—when I suggested union or party politics. Instead, as we saw, parents focused their aspirations on their children. The neoliberal promise of happiness and intergenerational mobility illuminated why people do not go from class consciousness to something more closely following class interests.

Marxist theory frames class consciousness as a collective social achievement. It materialises as a set of political commitments which reflect the awareness of capitalism's central contradictions and the workers' specific interests. Class consciousness also helps to understand capitalism as a social totality (Lukács 1972[1920]). Of course, the absence of political, working-class relationality—for example, relational consciousness of labour (Mollona 2009) or the ethical and political subjectivation of unions (Lazar 2019)—informs the refusal to consider collective action based on this consciousness.

The post-authoritarian state has reproduced the emphasis on middle-classness, sidelining working-class or popular-class identities. Middle-class families are the ideal citizens for social development strategies (Foxley 2011; Libertad y

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[4] We must notice that recent research has found similar findings for Chilean workers (Araujo & Martucelli 2012; Arteaga et al. 2016; Castillo 2016; Pérez-Ahumada 2013, 2017; Pérez-Ahumada & Cifuentes 2019).

Desarrollo 2019; Solimano 2012), and left-wing parties stop using worker identities (Castillo 2009: 82). Other signifiers that would never emerge as political parties—the hegemonic actors in the political sphere—did not fill the gaps in political identities and participation after the 1988 plebiscite (Luna 2008). Additionally, the political system has been hostile to labour and 'popular' organisations after the return of democracy. The transitional governments either excluded, co-opted, or suppressed left-wing parties and labour organisations (Ferer, Durán & López 2009; Haagh 2002; Posner 2008). They also constrained political mobilisation, shepherding grassroots organisations into restricting their participation to district-level and neighbourhood politics (Garcés 2004; Graeves 2007; Paley 2001a).

Pursuing middle-classness with working-class means

Anthropologists have often emphasised the creative dimensions of habitus and life projects shaped by class positions. For example, Liechty (2003) imagines middle-classness in Nepal as a cultural project, engaging with issues of tradition and modernity (see also Donner 2015). Ortner (2003: 13, see also 2006) also leans towards the idea of working-class and middle-class projects in New Jersey in the United States. For her, class emerges in the intersection between positions, projects, and classificatory practices. Following this insight, we can identify three recurrent manifestations of middle-classness across the globe: housing, education, and consumption. The aspiration of reaching or maintaining middle-class status often involves homeownership (Suarez 2017; Weiss 2014), living in well-regarded and exclusionary neighbourhoods and communities (Heiman 2012; Srivastava 2012), or expressing coherent domestic aesthetics (Bourdieu 1984; Donner 2008a; Fehérváry 2012). Likewise, the middle-class position regularly signals access to prestigious positions, often via higher education or the expansion of booming sectors or state bureaucracies (Errington & Gewertz 1997; Fernandes 2006; Freeman 2014; Katz 2012; Jeffrey 2010; O'Kane & Scharrer 2018). Finally, access to and consumption of prestigious goods—such as clothing, cars, food, sports, or artworks—can also signal middle-classness (Bourdieu 1984; Donner 2008b; Freeman 2014; Heiman 2015; James 2017; C. Jones 2012; Liechty 1996). In this sense, the *illusio* of middle-classness facilitates affective investment in specific projects, making stakes more tangible—e.g. becoming more or less prestigious, achieving more or less wellbeing, feeling less or more self-worth—and helping to link these aspects to singular biographical experiences.

Soledad, Roberto, Ernesto and Karen consider education one of the most important things in life. Not only it represents the aspiration to have a better life, but it also directly impacts the kind of plans that they can enact. For example, Ernesto has told me several times that he wants to give everything to their children— Gaspar and Camila—and one of these is enrolling in higher education. Since the dictatorship, for-profit colleges often have monopolised lower-income students whose families must go into debt to pay tuition. The most common form of accessing college is by taking personal bank loans that put students and parents in debt. Nowadays, a new system grants scholarships to the lower 60 per cent of the population according to income, but only if they maintain an average of 5.0 in high school.[5]

Ernesto and Karen repeatedly stated that they want Gaspar and Camila to follow their own dreams—i.e. choose a career of their liking. In 2017, Gaspar was close to finishing high school. The next step was to take the 'University Selection Test', the standardised test for college admissions. His objective was to study computational engineering and become a video game designer. Unfortunately, Chile has a small video game industry. Gaspar was also an average student and desired to enrol in a run-of-the-mill trade school. His wager was risky, and his parents knew it. Even then, Ernesto and Karen supported him and attempted to give him time and space to study. Ernesto even fought Gaspar's teacher because the school assigned too much homework, which burdened the whole family. Karen and Ernesto also agreed that Gaspar should focus on his studies, hobbies, and taking care of his sister from time to time.

One conflictive issue was the University Selection Test preparation. Karen sought to enrol Gaspar in a cram school. Karen thought it would be a better path, 'This way, he would do better; he could prepare better. Everyone says that it is the thing to do.' Ernesto counterargued that their son did not want to go, so there was no reason to spend money on something unnecessary. Karen started to have doubts. Ernesto continued, ‘Enrolling him in a cram school only would put pressure on him. If it is needed, he could study by himself.’ While not entirely convinced, the mother let the issue go. The father insisted that an intelligent person could do well without imposing more classes and homework on him. However, another issue also bothered him. He would explain later,

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[5] Approximately 55 per cent in the United Kingdom scale (C+ in the United States scale).

> The thing about enrolling in cram school is that you go with the idea of being a doctor. You study to become a doctor. You prepare for the test with all your energy, and then you cannot achieve a good mark. The children stay there. They get depressed; I have seen it. It is quick and easy to feel bad, and it is rarer to find the ones who recover. The rest stay there because it is their dream, and they do not even achieve a mark to become a nurse afterwards.

Gaspar did not talk much about the issue, but his apathy let us know that he did not want to spend his afternoons studying for the test. Finally, Karen relented. Afterwards, she concluded that she could not find a reason to force her son to do something he did not want.

Soledad faced a similar problem. She and Roberto shared Ernesto and Karen’s attitude—i.e. nudging their children to higher education without imposing a career. They were happy that Camila was doing well at school and on track to attend a good college. They did not pressure her and only helped with her homework when needed. Due to the influence of Soledad’s career in education, communication, flexibility, and negotiation affected how they saw their parenting. However, the situation with Janito was different in 2017. He did not want to enrol in higher education. He was uninterested and preferred to play video games. Then, Soledad and Roberto started to get anxious. For them, education was crucial, and, unlike Ernesto and Karen, they had found some degree of social mobility using their credentials. This achievement made the benefit of schooling tangible.

In the end, Soledad did not despair. Instead, she slowly helped Janito find something that he might like. While Roberto got impatient, she persuaded his son to enrol in a more pragmatic and accessible two-year degree in laboratory technology. After a couple of months, Soledad was ecstatic. Janito had decided to remain at this college, liked his major, and planned to transfer to a four-year degree.

However, Janito's decision also involved another obstacle to moving to the south. If Janito kept studying at a Santiago college, Soledad would feel forced to stay in the city. One day we were discussing her rearing methods. For Soledad, it was an easy topic. She loved to talk about her motherhood approach. Yet, I noticed Janito's aloofness. Unlike Camila, he did not share a lot with us. 'He is more reserved. Ask her,' Ricardo pointed out, jokingly shifting the attention to Soledad. Soledad quickly accepted that she was overprotective, 'I am a little witchy.'

Then, issues such as going to parties or having a girlfriend came up. Soledad did not approve any of them. A potential girlfriend was the most significant issue. 'And I tell him, do not bring hussy to my house. You have been warned,' she drove the point further, recreating their conversations. Soledad's attitude brought something in Ricardo. While Soledad claimed that most of it were jesting, her husband argued, 'Maybe he [their child] does not know it is a joke.' After laughing along with Ernesto, Soledad was taken aback. She defended herself, 'I always end up being the witch.' Soledad had confided to me her struggles with being an overprotective mother. She accepted that children needed space to experiment and grow and did not intend to be an overzealous mother-in-law. But the desire to protect her children, especially the older child, take hold of her. She suggested that Janito needed more help than Camila, never conceding the accusatory undertone of the discussion. Later, Soledad accepted Janito's life decisions at one point as he stayed in Santiago.

These parents and caregivers attempt to advise children and guide them in specific directions but rarely forbid them from following a career path. In context, this is not strange. On the one hand, this attitude is highly pragmatic. They do not have time or money to supervise them or fear that this would make them unruly. On the other hand, they seem committed to respecting their children's freedom.[6]

Considering all vignettes, we may see how middle-classness exists in the present ('I am middle-class.') and is pursued as futurity ('I want my children to have a better life situation.’). Parents like Soledad, Roberto, Karen, and Ernesto are middle-class people, yet they aspire for their children be even more middle-class (*tener una mejor situación* or *ser más que uno*). They embrace the responsibilities of making children feel happy and loved and mould them into content and upstanding adults in the future. However, when I asked them about the ‘better situation’, they would not offer an explicit scene of middle-class versions of happiness or contentment. Instead, their desires work through scenes that melt and assemble into shifting vectors of aspiration.

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[6] This attitude echoes the other shadowed households. These parents often state recurrent expressions to signal this openness: 'I give them their freedom' (*yo los dejo ser libre*), 'We must respect their freedom [their choices]' (*hay que respetar su libertad [sus decisiones]*), 'They must make their own decisions, and face the consequences themselves' (*son sus decisiones, sus consequencias*).

The issue of upward social mobility became an ambiguous terrain. For example, Ernesto and Soledad argued that achieving a professional degree and better living conditions is important during our conversations. However, they refused to put much pressure on their children. When we discussed ideal work conditions, following interests, having a good job, or working in an environment that offers respect, flexibility, and nonauthoritarian leadership were acceptable pursuits. They also usually tried to downplay the monetary aspect of high-paying jobs and opportunities. Instead, they highlighted the sense of freedom, respect, and ease that upward mobility could bring.

These parents pursue their children’s happiness or contentment, thinking their labour will be enough to achieve this goal. Contentment relates to ideas of proper nurturing (*crianza*) that lead to the transmission of values, good jobs, and overall ethical subjecthood. While improving their economic standing is more or less meaningful, intergeneration social mobility is a core aspect of this project. They relate middle-classness with higher education and do not discriminate actively between more or less prestigious careers. For them, a better life is almost guaranteed to those who become qualified technicians or white-collar workers *(profesionales*).[7]

Karen, Ernesto, Roberto, and Soledad negotiate the demands of education under the pressures of late capitalism in Chile and the aspiration of intergenerational social mobility. This negotiation suggests a manifold of processes I cannot fully unpack here, but I will try to hint at some of them. First, intimacy and attunement to their children's individuality play a role in undercutting the neoliberal construction of middle-classness. Secondly, pessimism and pragmaticism temperate how they assess their children's possibilities. Finally, I would like to focus on how these parents elaborate their version of the middle class as the subject of value using values such as mutuality and conviviality. These developmental values keep at bay the neoliberal urge to exert overwhelming pressure on their children to achieve social mobility and educational capital. This gap shows a fundamental misalignment between the more conventional and neoliberal discourses of middle-classness and their more distinctive ideals of middle-classness.

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[7] Most of the older children among the shadowed households study at technical schools: electricity, auto mechanics, hospitality, computer services, and administration. A few join the Armed Forces or are pursuing professional degrees, but they remain a minority. Some go directly into the workforce, but this is rarely their primary choice. Elite universities and well paid professional careers are out of reach for most of their children.

These families complicate the hegemony of the neoliberal middle class as a subject of value that promotes consumerism, economic aspirations, and compulsive social mobility. These parents reject a lifestyle based on the endless accumulation of wealth and capital for them and their children—i.e. accessing fashionable status commodities and owning financial portfolios. Instead, their projects try to make contented children (and future contented adults).

These households' pursuits of education show a nuanced view that reflects the effort to balance pushing children to a better future and protecting them from disruptive and stressful forces. This last element echoes the discussion of social worth in the second section. According to these parents, social worth does not come from goods or education as indexes of status or rank. Instead, parents hope to be seen by society as good caregivers who work and build protective homes. (I will return to the issue of education and place making in Chapters Five and Six.)

The rejection of hedonistic or status-seeking consumption reinforces their denial of crucial aspects of conventional neoliberal values. Among these parents, most of their investments (e.g. education, housing, and cars) and costly expenses (e.g. televisions sets, mobile phones, computers, and dining room and bedroom sets) are encoded as gifts among kin, celebratory rewards, or to alleviate and improve everyday domestic life. More ordinary expenses also echo this inclination for use over status. They argue that they prefer to access better-than-average commodities because these goods resist wear and tear better and do not break down so quickly—

clothes, toys, appliances, cars, construction materials, and school supplies. In addition, they occasionally would give a gift to other family members or buy an indulgence (*gustito*) for themselves—a new mobile phone, a dinner, or new clothes. However, this practice mirrors motivations closer to the good's enjoyment than maintaining some identification with middle-classness.[8]

A lower middle class

On a summer day, Soledad called me to tell me that our time together would end. She had managed to find a job in a city in Araucanía. She had started working in a small rural preschool and procured a school for her daughter. Ricardo was preparing everything for the move. Only Janito was staying in Santiago. He would live with relatives so he could finish college. She seemed happy and confident. One of the last things she said on the phone after moving was, 'Here [in the south], things are peaceful.'

In contrast, Ernesto and Karen have the same problems nowadays. After working odd jobs, Karen still has her old job as a cashier. She has recounted the same grievances several times now. Ernesto still works as a craftsman and has never asked for a raise. Gaspar studies engineering at a technical school but no longer desires to be a video game designer. He struggles with some courses and wishes to finish soon. Ernesto and Karen manage to respond to everyday contingencies but feel stuck in the same place.

Soledad and Roberto's and Ernesto and Karen's households deal with middle-classness as a subject of value in all its dimensions. In this chapter, I have discussed how they pursue the ideals of the middle class and shown how they have class consciousness. The chapter has also examined how they engage with a middle-class ontology of personhood, combining neoliberal elements with values of the developmental state era. These three threads, which also appear across the other cases, seem to point out the emergence of a particular middle-class group within the social space in Santiago: *the lower middle class*.

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[8] Stillerman (2012) and Ureta (2007a) have also suggested that consumption is more relational than status-oriented among Chilean lower-income groups.

These households mainly identify as middle-class, ‘the people who work’. However, they use expressions such as ‘The ones who make an effort,’ ‘the humble ones’, or ‘The ones who have a hard time getting to the end of the month’ to qualify this belonging. This lower-middle-class identity brings together the duality of middle-classness (as aspiration and belonging), the working-class emphasis on labour and the fragility of their life projects. Or, in Ernesto’s words: ‘We are between the middle class and the poor. It is like the weather. Sometimes the sun comes out. Sometimes a cloud can hide the sun. Other times the cloud gets really dark, and it almost rains, but the sun comes out again, and one goes on.’

These households constitute a *lower middle class*. Joel Stillerman (2010), a prominent scholar of middle classes in Chile, has described the lower ‘faction’ of the middle class as having lower capital volume than other middle classes, modest origins, pragmatism, and a strong sense of social exclusion. They experience being part of society with a permanent threat of social exclusion, or as Robles calls it, ‘exclusion within the inclusion’ (2005). In this regard, Chilean researchers have noticed that intergenerational upward mobility has slowed down since the 2000s, and the risk of falling into poverty among the middle class is a resilient phenomenon despite state interventions (Espinoza, Barozet & Méndez 2013; Méndez 2010; Torche & López-Calva 2008).

Considering these elements, we may define the lower middle class in Santiago as a loose grouping of people who share a lower middle volume of economic capital and a low or lower middle volume of cultural capital. Due to this situation, they are excluded from more intricate acts of class boundary making. Instead, they focus on defining their identity by improving their economic standing, promoting social mobility among their children, and achieving proper and safer livelihoods.

This lower middle class bears the traces of two sites of struggle for value: working-class exploitation and the struggling middle class that cannot fully embody the neoliberal subjects of value. We may see how their fight for self-worth is closer to their consciousness than a struggle against exploitation. Still, their working-class dispositions create a particular kind of class identification. Demanding to be recognised as middle-class, they try accessing the goods that the *illusio* of middle-classness entails self-worth and social recognition. To achieve this end, they must push to be considered part of the middle-class, thus differentiating themselves from the poor. In contrast, the upper stratus of the middle class can create class boundaries using political, aesthetic, and consumption signifiers (Méndez 2008, 2010; Méndez & Gayo 2019; Stillerman 2017).

Lack partially defines the lower-middle-class dispositions that bear the traces of working-class exploitation and an unresolved struggle for value in work contexts. However, the inherited developmental state's political ontology offers alternative value sources to constitute a sense of self-worth. These parents strike a precarious balance between neoliberal ideals of personhood and their working-class dispositions. Skeggs has noticed that working-class families can mobilise different values to resist social devaluation. Here, these families align with domestic values of conviviality and mutuality to counterweight the neoliberal ideals of personhood.

Can we identify them as middle-class or working-class? 'Yes, please!' It is a refusal of choice (see Žižek 2000). These parents qualify their membership to the lower middle class, revealing how they mediate middle-classness and working-class life. This particular perspective mirrors a broader number of people in the social space. We may read tensions between working-class consciousness and middle-class *illusio* as awareness of value struggle. Undoubtedly, the latter holds their attention and presents a more coherent self-image. Yet, their working-class conditions smuggle a specific standpoint regarding lack of capital, emphasis on labour, and conflicts with capital owners.

* * *

This chapter has shown how a group of parents in Santiago experience class. The transformation of class structure in Chile makes it challenging to understand how working-class people may identify as middle-class. I have argued that it is more productive to understand them as lower middle class in the social space. Three crucial threads emerge from this effort. Firstly, they identify as middle class to struggle for value, now expressed as self-worth. Secondly, they occupy working-class positions, experiencing exploitation and reflecting upon it. Finally, their domestic projects bear the traces of working-class dispositions and middle-class aspirations. This chapter helps us contextualise these parents and link class to what matters to them, and it contributes to reading class as a concept that charts sites of struggle for value.

Chapter Two

Broken Promises
Neoliberal citizenship and the lower middle class

Violeta really hates politics. The first time that we met, her personality shone through. She is hardworking, honest, and bad-tempered. According to Violeta, her no-nonsense manner makes her a good worker and a 'difficult person'. She prefers to focus on work and on raising her children and grandchildren. Like the rest of the people I met in Santiago, she is proud of her accomplishments and considers herself middle-class. These projects are the most important; the rest does not matter. Her house (*casa*)—her family, home, and dwellings—dominates her concerns. She will not stray from this path.

Violeta lives in the El Roble sector, near La Bandera, a well-known *población* in Santiago.[9] Historically, this neighbourhood is associated with illegal land seizures led by *pobladores* and leftist organisations in the late 1960s. However, Pinochet's neoliberal policies engendered an explosive increase in the number of inhabitants, the destruction of political ties between families, and the emergence of drug trafficking as a dominant force in the sector. Walking through its streets, traces of the political identity of the place are still visible. Graffiti calling for popular power and revolutionary struggle merge with invocations of feminist and pro-migrant murals. At the large street market on La Bandera Avenue, political activists and operators try to sway shoppers without many successes. However, talk in the street is not about the left versus the right. Instead, people are worried about the fight between ordinary people and drug traffickers.

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[9] *Poblador* is a social and political identity related to the struggles to access housing and homeownership in Chile. It often characterises the lower segments of the working class and may differ from being 'poor' (*pobre*). The name comes from *población.* This notion encompasses different types of social housing neighbourhoods associated with low-quality construction and planning. A población usually may differ from a slum or land seizure, but not always. Both concepts are fundamental in order to understand class politics in Santiago. Thus, as expected, their definitions have changed throughout the last sixty years.

According to Violeta, life outside the home is not essential. She keeps her distance from her extended family, has a few good friends, and attends a couple of gatherings each month. She considers most of these events to be a duty, something that she owes their friends. Apart from that, she refuses to spend more time, energy, or money on expanding her social world. At best, this world is pointless; at worst, it attracts misunderstandings or quarrels (*drama*). The focus on the domestic also informs her distaste for political issues and politics. She keeps at bay the social workers, activists, and local politicians who come to the neighbourhood, even if better political relations might bring new resources for her family. She does not care to go to political rallies or meetings. She even avoids bureaucratic labour (*trámites*). She believes that politicians, bureaucrats, and activists are intrusive people.

Violeta expressed her political disaffection in different ways throughout the fieldwork. Violeta did not care about politics. She got angry sometimes and ranted about politicians all being thieves and liars. She also lamented the lack of state support. However, her main grievance was that politicians—both local and national—made promises all the time and never fulfilled them. For example, one issue was the low pensions given by the state. She complained, 'They have not fulfilled what they promised about the pensions, the one for the old people. That went nowhere. What happened with that promise […]. I am not really up to speed with things, but politicians just talk and talk. They never fulfil their promises.'

These complaints emerged recurrently during the 2017 congressional and presidential elections. The general election was held on 19 November 2017, and the runoff on 17 December 2017. This arrangement created a window of opportunity for the discussion of politics and the examination of the actual engagements with political actors and institutions—or so I thought. Instead, Violeta rebuffed most of my attempts to probe her about issues such as candidates, policy, citizenship, or social movements. My visits yielded neither substantive political situations nor discussions in which Violeta would show her political relationships or allegiances. As a result, these issues did not materialise even in a broad sense.

Despite the elusive nature of politics in Violeta's household, one aspect allowed me to start to comprehend her perspective: the duty of voting. She insisted that Chilean people must vote, regardless of one's political position. Voting and knowing the candidates is essential for Violeta. She even chastised her older daughter because she did not want to vote. After the row, the daughter timidly admitted that she might vote for Sánchez. Violeta was satisfied. Her daughter's option did not matter. It was the voting itself that counted. When I inquired about the importance of voting, she said, 'I like to vote. I am a Chilean woman. It is part of me. It is a right that women now have because we did not have it in the past. Maybe we are not going to change everything that could be changed, but something might be done.'

Before the election, I asked Violeta, 'Do you mind if I ask you which is your candidate?' 'I am voting for Kast,' she told me. José Antonio Kast was the hard-right option representing Pinochet's legacy. Curious about her choice, I queried her reasons. At that moment, I felt a little nervous. Despite the bond that we had created, Violeta often dismissed my political questions. Rather than rejecting the inquiry that day, she indulged me. She chose Kast because 'He believes in God and defends the family,' and followed with, 'He will be tough on the delinquents.' When I inquired about her second option, Violeta told me she might vote for a progressive feminist, Beatriz Sánchez. In her opinion, the mainstream centre-left candidate is a thief, and the centre-right candidate, ex-President Piñera, is a crook. They also represented the same politics that have dominated since the return of democracy—those who failed to fulfil their promises. She closed her musing by remarking that neither believed in God.

When we met the week following the elections, I asked her if she had voted. She said, 'Yes, I told you I would!' with her usual attitude. She added, 'I was tired, but I went anyway.' She was not disappointed that her candidate did not make the runoff; instead, she was more upset that she had to vote for Piñera in the second round. She did not like him, but it was better than the corruption the centre-left would bring.

Violeta's experience is the paradigmatic case that helps me trace two core traits among these *Santiaguinos*' embodiment of citizenship. On the one hand, they manifest a sense of attachment to liberal practices, especially voting and law-abiding attitudes. On the other hand, they maintain their distance from politics, criticising the state, society, or 'the system', as some call it. The critique centres on politicians being self-serving, corrupt, and obstinate and not caring about ordinary people. Further, intensive political relationships make them wary. They maintain some valuable ties but mostly avoid interacting with community organisations, local politicians, and clientelistic networks.

Certainly, citizenship can be a complicated concept. A core tradition links citizenship with the formal membership of, and exclusion from, a political community structured by juridical rights and obligations (Marshall 1950). Discourses and legal apparatuses built upon notions of citizenship are crucial tools for states that ground the experience of nationhood (B. Turner 1990). However, the modern use of citizenship also belongs to an alternative tradition: one that links this notion to the principle of popular sovereignty that haunts liberalism and democracy under the influence of the dialectical demands of equality and freedom (Balibar 2014; Isin 2009). Moreover, recent research on citizenship has pointed out how this concept opens different domains of refusal, resistance and transformation that canalise alternative political projects and demands (Clarke, Coll, Dagnino & Neveu 2013; Hansen 2015). In other words, this concept no longer solely charts how the state shapes political action but has shifted the attention to how people relate to broader forms of political agency, belonging, and community-building, problematising state-centric approaches (Lazar & Nuijten 2013; Lazar 2016). To start, we might understand citizenship *tout court* as actual and imagined political relationships between individuals and collectives that can act, drawing upon implicit or explicit values based on an idea of a political community—e.g. equality, freedom, destruction, creation, submission, fidelity, piety, and genealogy.

One of the dominant discourses on citizenship in Latin America has maintained reservations about the ‘quality’ of citizenship on the subcontinent. Combining descriptive and evaluative elements, this discourse has argued that liberal, democratic citizenship is under threat, especially after the authoritarian wave of governments that defined the period between the 1970s and 1980s. For example, Guillermo O’Donnell (1994) characterises these political regimes as ‘delegative democracies’, contrasting them with ‘representative democracies’. Delegative democracies establish empty democratic institutions and foster electoral politics that benefit populist and authoritarian democratically elected officials, thus creating a ‘winner-takes-all’ system. For O’Donnell, the weakness of democratic institutions—

e.g. free elections, various political parties, and a strong civil society—partially explains how these scenarios may come to be.

Moreover, the absence of liberal democratic institutions prompts the development of illiberal practices and politics—e.g. *caudillismo*, populism, clientelism, political violence and contentious politics—further undermining liberal, democratic citizenship. Matching O'Donnell's diagnosis, researchers have worried about political disaffection (Altman & Luna 2007; Torcal 2006), mistrust (Del Tronco 2013; Quiroz 2019) and low political participation (Klesner 2007; Weyland 2004) among the populace. In summary, liberal discourses in Latin America have understood actual citizenship as the degradation of liberal institutions.

Anthropological research has often criticised liberal discourses, and anthropologists working in the region have been no exception. Instead of assuming a normative version of citizenship, anthropologists have argued that so-called 'illiberal' practices are entangled in multiple and complex ways with liberal institutions. Rather than undermining democratic regimes, these practices create 'grey areas' that support state power (Auyero 2001). These researchers suggest that despite the paradoxical qualities of participatory devices and social welfare programmes, people still find ways to reshape citizenship through clientelistic networks and unorthodox political entanglements (D.M. Goldstein 2005; Holston 2008; Lazar 2004; Nuijten 2013). For example, Sian Lazar (2004) argues that people in El Alto, Bolivia, use clientelism to access the political class that has often excluded them from the citizenship regime. They attempt to personalise their relationship with local politicians during elections, fighting the tendency towards depersonalisation that this institution often promotes. Ansell (2018) makes a similar point for *Sertanejos* in northeastern Brazil. As an alternative to merely voting for the promise of food or material goods, they play the electoral game and develop 'political friendships' with local politicians. They transform their ballot from an impersonal commodity into a morally endowed gift bestowed on the politician. Both cases highlight how Latin American people have broader notions of citizenship than those proposed in liberal discourses.

A closer inspection helps us understand that these interpretations are not necessarily contradictory. However, we could see how they portray actual Latin

American citizenship practices in two different lights: the degradation of liberal institutions and the productive appropriation of liberal citizenship. On the one hand, the liberal discourse imagines citizens abandoning democratic citizenship due to poor institutional design, accrued political dissatisfaction with governments, or the temptations of populism and clientelism. On the other hand, anthropological research in Latin America imagines people as active political agents who can appropriate liberal institutions and find ways to tackle exclusion and devaluation.

This anthropological approach has illuminated citizenship practices in Latin America and is a welcome antidote to liberal discourses. However, it seems less helpful in analysing the experiences of some people I know in Santiago. These *Santiaguinos* understand that citizenship revolves around liberal institutions—voting, law-abiding attitudes, and state monitoring—but this attitude does not translate into a strong modification of clientelism or contentious politics. Instead, they insist on creating a distance with most expressions of politics beyond those institutions. Likewise, the emphasis on the degradation of democratic sentiments by liberal discourse neglects crucial contradictions in these families' understanding of citizenship. For example, they are deeply attached to formal practices but reject state-led participatory mechanisms. They also are well informed on state issues (even if they sometimes deny this). Yet, this knowledge does not foster any interest in participating in civil society, local politics, or neighbourhood organisations.

This chapter attempts to understand the political values and practices of the parents I met in Santiago. Contrary to the idea of the degradation or appropriation of liberal institutions, these parents regard voting and law-abiding attitudes as valuable, yet they still reject other institutions. In particular, I am interested how Jacqui and Violeta embody and confront citizenship as a cluster of practices and ideals. I will argue that affective politics is essential to grasp their disposition.

Anthropologists have become used to exploring the affective side of actual political relationships, but general affective scenes—'sensuous general impersonality' (Mazzarella 2017)—are harder to grasp. To capture this sentiment among *Santiaguinos*, I explore the 1988 plebiscite that enabled the democratic transition from the civil-military dictatorship headed by Augusto Pinochet to the post-authoritarian state. This plebiscite inaugurated a scene of hope among the working class but soon generated a sentiment of resentment as the democratic governments had not fulfilled their promises. Thus, this exploration complements the more material explanation of this particular manifestation of republican ethos and political disaffection. Hopefully, the chapter may widen our understanding of liberal institutions in urban Latin America and the role of affective dispositions in shaping political action and inaction.

The first section explores the core of the republican ethos and its democratic values, exploring vignettes about suffrage, especially the cases of Violeta and Jacqui. The following section describes efforts to keep politics away. We may observe how Violeta, Jacqui, and others avoid dealing with politicians, powerbrokers, and social movements. Simultaneously, they criticise and mistrust politicians. Exploring these practices of critique and dissociation also shows the limited resources of the lower middle class to craft a sense of citizenship. Lack of time, energy, and money keeps people from significant involvement in formal and informal politics. However, resentment also takes centre stage. The last section explores this affective disposition, tracing it back to the political scene of the 1988 plebiscite.

The republican ethos

During the 'Popular Front' governments (1938-1958), the developmental state's construction of subjects of value underpinned a national-popular citizen regime to promote social rights and widen political rights—as part of the promise to enact equality. The 1925 constitution had already vowed to back up the category of 'Chilean citizen' (or nationality) with a series of political and civil rights and the support of crucial dimensions of social reproduction (see Cuevas & Gamboa 2013; M.A. Garretón 2009). Thus, the state interpellated people as popular subjects belonging to a nation; and nationality became a significant device that people could mobilise to secure livelihoods and claim rights and entitlements. Moreover, the state slowly expanded core political rights like suffrage and political organisation to most population segments to match these scenes of national belonging (Nazer & Rosemblit 2000: 219; J.S. Valenzuela 1985).

The state was able to generate a sense of nationhood through its apparatus. Even when state programmes failed to foster citizen sentiments, the political parties and labour organisations catalysed clientelist networks that attracted significant parts of the urban populace. The Frei Montalva and Allende governments (1964-1973) expressed the radicalisation of this logic, where the state kept expanding political and social rights, despite lacking political support and resources to implement such reforms (van der Ree 2007).

In 1973, the military junta led by Augusto Pinochet overthrew Allende's government and began to disassemble the developmental state. As reviewed in Chapter One, two crucial pillars of the neoliberal hegemonic projects were the depoliticisation of social relations by reorienting them around market principles and the construction of a post-military order (Barrett 1999: 8-9). In short, the Pinochet regime erased the developmental state and shaped the incoming democratic society. Consequently, the dictatorship reformulated citizenship as a bundle of individual rights and obligations, weakening the language that articulates citizenship as membership of a political community that entitles one to protection and welfare. This definition survives until the writing of this dissertation.[10]

The return of democracy was a complicated affair. The dictatorship and the centre-left opposition agreed to the celebration of a plebiscite in 1988 that would decide the future political regime. The military junta that headed the dictatorship hoped to legitimise state rule. Instead, the Chilean people voted to reject the authoritarian regime and welcome a centre-left government. Despite having lost, the legal and political institutions created by the dictatorship still contained several 'authoritarian enclaves' that would impede further modification of the institutional architecture and economic system (M.A. Garretón 2004).

After the return of democracy in 1990, democratic governments faced a double bind. On the one hand, these governments were ambivalent about upsetting the neoliberal political economy and citizenship regime inherited from the Pinochet regime. Thus, legal and political modifications to the foundations of the citizen regime were marginal after the transition. On the other hand, these governments needed to move from an authoritarian culture to a more democratic understanding of citizenship. The 1988 political plebiscite enhanced the value of democracy and pluralism among the populace. Likewise, the Chilean people's rejection of violence, economic misery, and authoritarianism had put this democratic demand front and centre. In this scenario, democratic governments somehow managed to respond to people's concerns—poverty, violence, and despair—while managing the neoliberal project and the transitional elitist pacts without significant modifications.

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[10] In 2021, Chilean people have chosen to initiate a constitutional process that might change the citizenship regime.

The transitional governments were skilful in concentrating state power and excluding other actors from the political process. They focused on governing and cohesive political parties guided by consensus seeking, technocratic practices. As mentioned in Chapter One, they either excluded or co-opted or suppressed left-wing parties and labour organisations (Ferer, Durán & López 2009; Haagh 2002; Posner 2008). Political parties have maintained some degree of influence through clientelist networks at the local level. Still, the level of adherence generated, and resources deployed, has been noticeably lower than in the pre-dictatorship era (Barrera 1998).

Despite the transitional governments' so-called 'economic miracle', social malaise and electoral political apathy rose by the end of the 1990s (Castiglioni & Rovira 2016; Lechner 2002; UNDP 2002). To respond to this problem, the Lagos administration (2000-2006) initiated some reforms to build a sense of state leadership and foster a more robust citizenship regime (Gentes 2004; Paredes 2011). Recent governments have expanded on these promises by enlarging citizen participation (Paredes 2011). The state has attempted to drive a sense of dialogue, engagement, and accountability at district levels, introducing new participatory mechanisms, e.g. municipal plebiscites, public audiences, citizenship consultations, and municipal councils of civil society organisations (Delamaza, Robles, Montecinos & Ochsenius 2012; S. Montecinos 2011; Greaves 2004, 2007). However, researchers have emphasised that these new participatory devices have not met citizens' expectations or enlarged popular participation (Delamaza 2015; Pressacco & Rivera 2015; Leiva 2008, 2016).

Throughout the fieldwork, Jacqui and I met in her house in Puente Alto, a southern city in Metropolitan Santiago. My trips could take more than two hours from the city centre. Unlike La Pintana, Puente Alto felt more like an autonomous city with more salient internal social and economic differences. One of the strongest political fiefdoms of the country had grown here since the return of democracy in 1990. In November and December 2017, the road was adorned with posters of politicians seeking election. Until then, Senator Manuel José Ossandón and his allies had won most elections in the district. German Codina—the current mayor and political dauphin of Ossandón—had strengthened his networks in one of the strongest examples of neoliberal political clientelism in the city. Jacqui and her husband Jacinto considered themselves as part of Ossandón's captive audience, but at the same time, they preferred not to engage much in politics.

In the wake of the 2017 general election, I probed her about elections and politics. Instead, Jacqui reframed the question towards her life story. She portrayed herself as a reserved woman with a reduced group of friends. She said, 'I did all my life inside the house and in favour of her children.' She continued, 'But when we had the problem of the house, I went out to look for work; I had to be brave, imagine, I had never worked like this.' Showing me her lack of interest in politics, Jacqui kept talking about the latest issue at work.

When I met Jacqui and Jacinto, they lived a lower-middle-class lifestyle. They had lost their family home due to fraud, threatening their livelihoods. Jacqui had to find a job and a new place to live. Further, Jacinto could not keep working after a neurological event, destabilising their household. Jacqui's life was built upon working around the clock. Jacinto could only watch television and help around the house due to his mental and physical decline. Jacqui kept suggesting a gap between her daily concerns and her political preferences in our conversations. Politics were not as important as trying to help her children and grandchildren, doing her job, or taking care of her health.

In November 2017, Jacqui and I discussed the week at her house. Jacinto was watching television, and Jacqui was tidying the house. I helped a little. After a while, she decided it was time for tea, and we sat down. The table was near the window. From there, I saw a pair of political canvassers. They rushed down the street and did not stop at any house. They just stuffed pamphlets in some mailboxes. I mentioned the issue to Jacqui, who mostly ignored me, 'Sometimes they come, I do not know.' While not wholly surprised, I took the opportunity to ask about the election. Her reflections were swift, ‘I am going to vote for Ossandón. Here [in my house], everyone will vote for Ossandón.’ Voting for Ossandón meant choosing him and everyone close to him: her sister Ximena for deputy, Mayor Codina, among others. Yet, Jacqui later would qualify her position, ‘I like Codina, but I do not worship him.’

Perhaps, the incoming election had encouraged Jacqui to talk—or complain—about politics. When I asked her about the presidential election, her confidence changed, ‘I do not like Piñera; he is dishonest (*turbio*). I have to vote for him. I do not like it. He has a deformed face. I neither like Guiller; he is also dishonest.’ She took another drink of tea and continued, ‘We are a right-wing family,’ setting the issue once more. I took the description at face value, but Jacqui suddenly recalled something. ‘Cata may vote for Beatriz Sanchez because she is a feminist.’ She did not appear bothered. Soon the conversation veered to another topic, as often happened when discussing politics in Jacqui’s household. The holidays were the following month, and Jacqui was already thinking about gifts.

Returning home, I was struck by the notion of a ‘right-wing family’. The conventional notion of right-wing family in Santiago related to devotion to the figure of Augusto Pinochet, strict Catholicism, extreme individualism, and authoritarian attitudes. In our conversations, Jacqui repeated some of Violeta’s claims: ‘Politicians are corrupt and self-serving,’ and ‘They do not offer practical solutions.’ But, putting herself more firmly on a political side, she defied Violeta’s complete critique of politics. For this reason, I was vigilant. Maybe Jacqui was close to right-wing clientelistic networks or found appealing the neoliberal ideology. But neither was genuinely accurate. Jacqui just defined herself as right-wing, mostly in opposition to the ‘*Concertas*’. She did not care about the ideological reasons or the policy-making process. She was neither encouraged to vote due to a deep-seated political identity nor social pressure.

Like Violeta, Jacqui and Jacinto claimed that they disliked talking about politics. Yet they tried to keep up with the elections and politics. When they watched television and someone they disliked appeared, they already had an opinion about the person in question. They would remark, ‘He is a lazy communist,’ or ‘He only wants the spotlight,’ or ‘She is too young to understand the problems of real people.’

They often avoided my soft probes around policy, congressional records, or local influence. However, politicians appeared to be tangible people they could discuss. Despite their self-proclaimed rejection of political talk, we often conversed about national issues prompted by television news programmes.

One thing that Jacqui expressed clearly was that voting was not optional. Reinforcing her point, she repeated the well-known Chilean expression: 'If you do not vote, you do not have the right to complain!' (*él o la que no vota, no tiene derecho de alegar*). When election day came, Jacqui and Jacinto voted in different polling precincts. Jacqui went to a place nearer to home than Jacinto, who insisted on going alone. Jacqui worried, but she agreed to her husband's wish. However, she was right since Jacinto got lost for a couple of hours. After four hours, she and Cata were getting ready to look for him. Then, Jacinto finally arrived home. He had taken the wrong bus and afterwards had become disoriented. Some helpful people aided him in returning home. Despite the commotion, he was happy. He had voted alone and fulfilled his duty. Jacqui was concerned but silently accepted his subtle accomplishment.

I visited Jacqui the following week. In her neighbourhood, some propaganda remained in place or was lying on the street, but most was already taken down. We were discussing the upcoming holidays that day. Christmas and New Year's Eve were two events that were causing problems. In past years, she had enjoyed them with all their children and their families. Yet, things had changed. Jacqui resented the possible absence of one of her children, blaming her daughter-in-law. 'She does not have Christmas spirit,' she remarked bitterly. Jacqui's house was full of elf dolls, self-made paper wreaths, and a Christmas tree. She discussed in detail how the tree was too big for her house. After a while, I tried to probe again about the election. It did not matter. The election was already forgotten.

Voting and political sympathies did not foster deep attachments to actual candidates or parties. Voting had a bearing on the short period of elections. These parents did not dwell on it afterwards. For example, Violeta voiced a recurrent expression among these households, 'We still have to get up and go to work tomorrow, no matter who wins!' (¡*Da lo mismo quien gane, total mañana me tengo que levantar a trabajar igual*!). When elections came around, they would firmly reject the adversary coalition's politics but later be nonchalant about winners and losers. Most participants did not make a big deal of the results and quickly moved on with their lives.

Both stories establish how voting is paramount while politics is expendable. This attitude is part of a 'republican ethos' that characterises some constituencies in Chile (PNUD 2019). Jacqui and Violeta's accounts illustrate the centrality of voting even when rejecting politicians and electoral politics.

Furthermore, Jacqui and Violeta's discourses display their position regarding the law. They reproduce a language of authority and legal equality—following the law, paying your fair share of taxes, being respectful, and creating trust—ideas common among the households I know in Santiago. According to Jacqui and Violeta, being a good citizen entails following the law, respecting people and authority, and not doing anything too illegal (*no andar en nada malo*). This attitude does not mean that they are perfect citizens. On the contrary, minor transgressions appear in the ethnographic record. Some are illegally tapping into TV cable networks and avoiding paying traffic tickets. However, their sense of legal duty is strong and coherent with their lives.

Suffrage and law-abiding attitudes are the main ways of expressing their sense of citizenship. In that sense, they see this practice as a duty and not as some instrumental exchange, as clientelistic logic may suggest. This political stance relates to a particular form of boundary making. Political citizenship is expressed as the avoidance of politics and an extension of domestic life. Being an upstanding member of the ethical-political community means having good values.

Keeping politics away: creating a moral distance

As discussed with Jacqui and Violeta, parents combine this sense of citizenship with an ardent critique of politicians and distance themselves from clientelist networks, community organisations, and social movements. This section explores how people mistrust and ignore politics. Despite their attachment to crucial liberal institutions, Violeta, Jacqui, and the other parents in Santiago cannot find the energy, time, or resources to engage in politics.

On several occasions, I asked Jacqui and Violeta about the visits of political figures to their neighbourhood. But most of the time, they dismissed my probes. ‘They never come here’ and ‘I was not at home’ were typical responses. In reality, politicians and their representatives occasionally visited these parts of the city, their local markets and even their houses. Political campaigns encouraged politicians to charm their constituencies. The local government representatives also dropped by households to announce assistance programmes and promote participation—e.g. Christmas gifts, veterinary services, optometric services, and dance and workout classes.

I witnessed just a couple of these encounters. Jacqui and Violeta treated them as minor episodes and quickly forgot about them. Ernesto, my friend from San Ramón, was more aware of them. We discussed various encounters with the local mayor and his team in 2017. On one occasion, the mayor’s mother stopped by their house to canvass for his and his wife’s votes. He reminisced about how uncomfortable the visit had been. When she arrived, he had told her, ‘Your son never appears around here.’ This utterance had a double meaning. It indicated an actual absence of local government presence and also implied a lack of concern about their daily problems. She responded with a bland, ‘He’s too busy.’ An hour went by, during which the mayor’s mother attempted to defend her son’s public record. Still, Ernesto remained sceptical: some negative experiences with the local government still weighed on his mind; rumours about the association between the mayor and drug traffickers also made him mistrustful. The conversation that followed remained respectful but cold. Karen offered her something to drink, and they chatted a little more. Shortly afterwards, the mayor’s mother left without leaving a good impression.

They still voted for her son despite the friction. Ernesto and Karen despised most right-wing politics, and the mayor was the only one representing a centre-left party. Years later, they still would talk badly about the mayor and his mother. I met with Ernesto and Karen again in 2020, when the link between the mayor and drug traffickers was now common knowledge. Ernesto dwelt upon the visit. He told me, smiling, ’Do you see? He was up to no good.’

These *Santiaguinos* confronted politicians and state agents with a mix of politeness and defiance throughout the fieldwork. They would rarely know them or maintain friendships with them. When these strangers appeared at their door, parents had to identify them. After the formal presentation, they would respond with a quick-witted jocular comment—'You politicians never visit,' or 'You only come here to bother us,' or 'Hurry up, I am busy.' However, they would be cordial and subsequently greet them formally. Next, they would listen patiently to the spiritless political script. These *Santiaguinos* sometimes complained about their living conditions—public spaces, jobs, infrastructure, or transportation—even when these issues were unrelated to the official visit. Ultimately, they would excuse themselves politely and end the conversation. Only afterwards would they talk badly about them (*pelar*) in private and rarely praise them.

I would argue that Jacqui and Violeta try to make sense of their attachment to voting and law-abiding attitudes in a context where the state and politics do not engender trust or sympathy. They create a moral boundary between households and what they perceive as 'politics' to keep these two dimensions apart. Take Violeta's words, for example, 'I do not like politics, I do not follow politics. Politicians are thieves and corrupt. We all coincide with that point. Whoever will be in government, they are all the same. Instead of helping the country, they do the opposite. They do nothing.' This moral boundary takes prominence over actual electoral or bureaucratic encounters. Jacqui and Violeta tend to downplay them in favour of portraying themselves as apolitical.

While other Chilean researchers have highlighted the continuous presence of clientelistic networks in Santiago based on territorial fiefdom (*caudillismo*), political affiliation, and personal affects (Arriagada 2013; Barozet & Espinoza 2018; Lujan Verón 2019), Violeta and Jacqui do not join this type of network. Instead of relying on notions of connections or favours, Jacqui and Violeta highlight their solitude when they must navigate the state.

At the beginning of 2018, Violeta received a little money for her youngest daughters' education. Like other lower-middle-class families, she relied on privately subsidised schools to educate her daughters. Violeta needed to pay the tuition that the state did not cover. The local government assigned her a small grant, but it would soon expire. Violeta was worried. She had her hopes in helping Alondra, her youngest daughter, to enrol in college in the future. The mother would praise her, 'She is the disciplined one; she has perfect marks and plays the violin.' Unfortunately, some papers were missing when she talked to the social worker. Thus, it could not be possible to renew the grant. Violeta was furious, seeing the social worker's attitude as a stonewall and disrespect. Once I suggested finding someone to help her, a coded expression to resolve the issue by political or personal means. Violeta quickly dismissed the idea. 'Who is going to help me?' she asked me.

Jacqui had also encountered the state similarly. In May 2018, we met, and she narrated how she had survived fallopian tube cancer. At the time, Jacqui was seeing a psychologist who told her something that stroke a chord with her. He suggested 'leaving behind stress' and 'laughing a lot' could help her recovery. She described her cancer as a 'depressive cancer'. Despite claiming that the cancer episode was behind her, Jacqui kept a vigilant eye on her migraines and 'bone pain' (*dolor de huesos*). Keeping herself healthy was important to her for several reasons: work, caring for her husband, and remission. So when inflammation in the leg appeared, she started to worry.

A couple of weeks later, Jacqui could not walk. The inflammation had spread to the rest of her leg, making it difficult to move. Jacqui made clear, 'This pain is different.' She had experience dealing with afflictions, yet she did not know why her leg was swollen. Her job was on the line as she needed to walk around collecting donations. Jacqui had attempted to look for answers in a public hospital. She recounted how she spent the night in the waiting room of the Hospital Cordillera without much help. Despite spending the entire night, no doctor could give her a solution. Finally, a nurse gave her some ibuprofen and told her to elevate her feet.

Another week passed, and an answer was not in sight. Jacqui sought help from her local government's social worker, but it was a 'morning lost', according to her. Her anxiety was mounting because she feared that the inflation was a sign of thrombosis—a blood clot formation inside a blood vessel that could be life-threatening if untreated. Jacqui considered consulting a private doctor even if she had to borrow money. Then I asked her, 'Maybe there is someone who could help you?' Jacqui had bragged before about knowing well-positioned business managers and influential people. 'No', she said and continued, 'I have to solve this alone.' At the time, I did not realise that she meant to find care without the help of political connections.

My time with Jacqui and Violeta suggests the ongoing moral boundary between them and the state, politicians, local government or clientelist networks. They combine tactical avoidance and dismissive forgetfulness to portray themselves as lonely people that care for their family and themselves without the help of 'politics'. Yet, I think they do navigate the state independently, receiving little support from political networks, going through formal channels, and engaging in bureaucratic encounters.

Something similar happened regarding more direct forms of democratic engagement. Jacqui and Violeta do not participate in such matters. Most participants in the ethnography are indifferent or unaware of local officials' efforts to enhance local democracy. I often keep track of these efforts on the municipalities' web pages and Facebook pages, but when I ask Violeta, Jacqui, or their families about them, they rarely recall them.

Traces of direct political participation were scarce throughout the fieldwork. For example, one of the times I inquired Violeta, she responded, 'I have never listened about assemblies. No, around here, no. We have a WhatsApp group in the *villa,* and I have never heard of someone meeting for anything, to do something. The only thing they did was to put community alarms, the ones outside.' Other times, I noticed plain announcements on walls or posts about community activities to which people would pay no attention. Once, Ernesto rhetorically commented, 'If they were interested in knowing [about us], they would come here [to our house]!' This extra investment in time is not part of their sense of citizenship.

A moral and social distance defines the relationship between these households and politics. Parents can be standoffish, yet most interactions are cold and civil. While it is difficult to determine if this is entirely genuine for every interaction, I think it holds in broader terms. Ethnographic shadowing showed little evidence of deep engagement between families and nondomestic organisations or agents. Even when they participate in social or political events, a sentiment of courtesy and kindness or one-off transactions justifies their behaviour.

We may identify several historical circumstances in order to grasp this distance. Firstly, both the lack of influence of political parties and the tendency towards political consensus around the Growth with Equity strategy illuminate how these people feel about political outcomes. As stated in Chapter One, most political parties endorse the 'Growth with Equity' strategy as the global model for Chilean society. This approach to governance expects income equality and social development to come from a successful economic performance in neoliberal terms. This consensus induces most politicians and parties to resemble each other. Likewise, technocratic governance begets a sentiment of remoteness from ordinary people. The politics of consensus and compromise makes it unnecessary for most parties to connect on a regular basis with voters as political subjects. Secondly, the lack of answers to their bread-and-butter problems makes ordinary people wary of investing in loyalty to national political figures. People do not find solutions to life's challenges in politics. The political class has scarcely addressed issues such as low wages, meagre pensions, and crime. Similarly, people perceive the educational and healthcare systems to be in crisis. Thirdly, most parents see the state as inefficient, overcomplicated, corrupt, and soulless. Political and economic scandals fill the news, and gossip feeds this perception. Fourthly, the diminished power of local governments and political networks to distribute resources and shore up moral self-worth or political identity also encourages detachment from politics *tout court.*

Moreover, the lack of time and energy resulting from the commitment to labour overdetermines this economy of disaffection. Laboriousness epitomises these parents' daily routines. Wage labour, domestic labour and nondomestic relational labour take up most of their time, leaving them drained and disgruntled. I have called this the degeneration of life. They experience exhaustion, afflictions, and dread and use these embodiments as justification in order to avoid dealing with local politicians and social movements. We may recall that Jacqui and Violeta often related these political relations as surplus effort, which weighed against their routines. They conclude that they do not have much time to participate in political activities. They use their little 'free time' for other serious matters: resolving domestic issues, resting, or socialising with family and friends.

The distance between these households and politics can take different forms: aloof interactions, social critique, political avoidance, and purposive indifference. However, the common purpose of all these forms is keeping a distance between homes and immoral politicians and state agents. Considering the recent political history and the economy of disaffection, it makes sense that these parents and grandparents mostly do not care about the particularities of Chilean politics. Instead, they respond by levelling moral arguments against what they see as corrupt, soulless, or irrelevant. However, one element remains to be examined. Resentment, anger, and indignation permeate their sense of citizenship. The following section addresses this issue.

The 1988 plebiscite as a scene of political hope and resentment

One of the recent efforts of anthropology has been to understand political affects and moral sentiments, especially related to the state and the public sphere. When we return to political ethnographies in urban Latin America, we may see several attempts to analyse the surplus of affective investment in 'personalising' liberal relations and principles. These ethnographic descriptions juxtapose the impersonal liberal institutions with the personal bonds of people's actual ties with political figures and powerbrokers. So what happens when affects are instilled as a 'sensuous impersonal generality' (Mazzarella 2017)? How do we approach affective societal states that sway people into specific political attitudes? This section explores how political scenes can affect political dispositions and engender reactions that influence how people see politics. I return to the 1988 plebiscite to reframe it as a 'political scene' of compromise between the elite and the people. This scene instilled hope in the past but nowadays engenders resentment. Affects not only emerge in political interactions but also as broad, historically grounded political sentiments—what Berlant (1997) calls the 'intimate publics'.

Even in liberal societies, public discourse cannot avoid conjuring a certain national sensorium and grounding some emotional dispositions, translating political values into 'affective dispositions' (Stoler 2004). Mazzarella has argued that, '…the liberal self-abstraction model, conversely, insists on a radical split between spontaneous affective resonances (which are imagined as inherently parochial) and the cosmopolitan potential of an impersonal (which is thus imagined as properly ethical) field of judgment' (2017: 205). Liberal formations have supposedly reserved the rational and nonaffective to the law and citizenship, leaving the affective resonance to the particular citizen's milieu. However, the political anthropologist also notes that, '…[P]ublic discourse addresses us simultaneously on two levels of impersonal generality. One is abstract and pertains to the formal, legal assemblage of citizenship and civil society. The other gets us in the guts: it is equally impersonal but also shockingly intimate and solicits us as embodied members of a sensuous social order.' (2012: 299-300).

A positive valuation of the 1988 plebiscite informs this republican ethos, as the parents mention it as the most favourable political event of the last fifty years. Bargsted, Somma, and Rojas (2019) have found that the generations that voted during the 1988 Plebiscite tended to vote more often than the following cohorts. The people I met with consider the 1988 plebiscite to be the political event that links them most strongly to a sense of national citizenship and historicity. For example, Ernesto and Soledad—the protagonists of Chapter One—remember their participation in left-wing youth groups with fondness. When we talked about that period, they would cherish their experiences and recall how they felt grown-up and had a sense of direction even when they engaged in politics to impress partners or friends. Our conversations would dwell on how politics made sense and on their pride in belonging to a collective. Left-wing parents usually talked about how 'we *won* democracy back' (*nosotros ganamos la democracia*), emphasising their sense of agency and involvement in these political transformations.

Let us return to the 1988 plebiscite to examine the loci of these affective investments. This event decided between the Pinochet regime's continuity or the calling of democratic presidential elections. However, it had also staged a scene of compromise, playing affective attachments and political desires for these parents. As a result, the 1988 plebiscite performed the unintended role of a political event that materialised and grounded the scene, requiring months of political labour, advertising campaigns, and extensive preparation. In Chile, this event was transformational, among other things, because the national political culture changed. The 'No' campaign (the democratic option) foregrounded a new form of campaigning and established the forthcoming elections' route. Creatives, politicians, and social scientists who participated in the ‘No’ Campaign identified three crucial threads that explain its victory: the campaign predominantly conveyed a positive message, the promises were realistic and feasible, and the campaign mirrored the desires of the population and not a top-down political programme (Boas 2009; Tagle 1995; J.G. Valdés 1989).

The issue of the dictatorship was mainly in the background throughout the fieldwork. However, one day, Jacqui started to criticise Hugo Gutiérrez—a human rights lawyer who had worked with the Pinochet dictatorship victims. ‘He is always talking, always with an opinion,’ Jacqui said while watching a news channel. I already knew her self-declared ‘right-wing’ position; thus, this was unsurprising. But Jacqui pivoted from there.

The issue of dictatorship came up, and Jacqui remembered how she and her friends had to hide in the backs of their houses because they feared that the police could consider their gatherings subversive. Despite the dictatorship’s mandatory curfew, Jacqui, Jacinto, and their friends met to drink and play games. Because their house was on a secluded side of Puente Alto, they felt safe. However, the police would come and threaten to have arrested them all. Jacqui and the rest would hide or negotiate with them to avoid arrest. Then, Jacqui mentioned the dictatorship’s human rights abuses and corruption without pondering them. The contrast between everyday violence and ordinary life played a central role in her view. For Jacqui, the plebiscite was the better and fairer option because it allowed the country to return to ‘normalcy’.

When the issue of the dictatorship arose, Violeta also recalled how the military junta terrorised the place where she lived. She lived in Villa Sur, near Villa Francia, a historically politicised neighbourhood. At the time, she recalled how the lack of food and jobs pushed people to protest, and the regime’s repression was swift and terrifying. Her parents and grandmother helped hide and care for protestors during those times. Violeta recalled those times with fear, ‘I saw a lot of things. I sat in the gutter and watched how the buses and tankettes arrived when the protests erupted. You could hear the gunshots. Those were not guns but machine guns. Protestors gathered in Departamental and La Feria Avenue. Most were from Villa Francia, but the rest came from other *poblaciones.* When the police arrived, they ran everywhere.’ She continued, ‘My grandmother handed us pots, lids, and pans to make noise. We could not get out because we were too young.’ One of the things that Violeta recalled with clarity was how her grandmother helped to hide protestors, ‘The military and the police were looking for people. Suddenly, a lot of young men entered the house. All of them waited at her house. The soldiers knocked on the door and broke in. They questioned my grandmother, “Who are they?” She answered without pausing, “This is my nephew. This is my neigbour’s son, and so on.” […]. My grandmother defended people from the police.’

Violeta described the dictatorship as oppression and arbitrary torture affecting innocent people. While not fully committed to celebrating the 1988 plebiscite, democracy was the better option. She recounted, ‘I remember the t-shirts with the rainbow (…), I did not vote, I did not have the right [she was too young], but I saw a lot of people supporting the “No”. We did not talk about politics in my house. During those times, it was not allowed to.’ Her core experience was fear. Violeta drew the main contrast between silence and expression, ‘I felt a lot of oppression. In the past, you could not speak up. Now you can express yourself and what you feel. It was not like that in the past. One had to remain silent because if you protested, they would take your family and yourself. They would kill them. They would shoot them, whereas one was against or not against the government. Now you can express yourself, and everyone has a different opinion.’

This referendum appears as reinstituting the political community through a snapshot of republican values where everyone was respectful of the result despite political polarisation, hate, and suspicion.[11] Violeta and Jacqui imagine the plebiscite as a relatively fair contest that would bring representative democracy back without resorting to the overt violence *Santiaguinos* associate with the Allende government or the Pinochet regime.

We may take a different angle to highlight the affective force of the 1988 plebiscite. A crucial part of the No campaign was the political campaigning and advertising allowed by the Pinochet regime. Television was the primary form of access to the public discourse among key constituencies like women and lower-income groups (Olivares & Ojeda 2018; Quilter 1989). The television campaign was crucial to weaving together different affective threads of the opposition to the dictatorship (Wiley 2006). The centre-left coalition used this message to convey and establish an image of moderation, peace, and pluralistic agreement. The television campaign showed youth, happiness, peaceful everyday life, and familial reunions (see Figure 1). It carried a promise of sociality in direct contrast to the snapshots of political violence that most Chilean people had come to identify with politics.

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[11] Even today, massive support for the 1988 plebiscite has been growing steadily, where 78 per cent would still vote ‘No’ in 2018 (Igualdad 2018). This support is striking if we consider the decrease in support of democracy in Chile (Bargsed & Somma 2018; UNDP 2019).

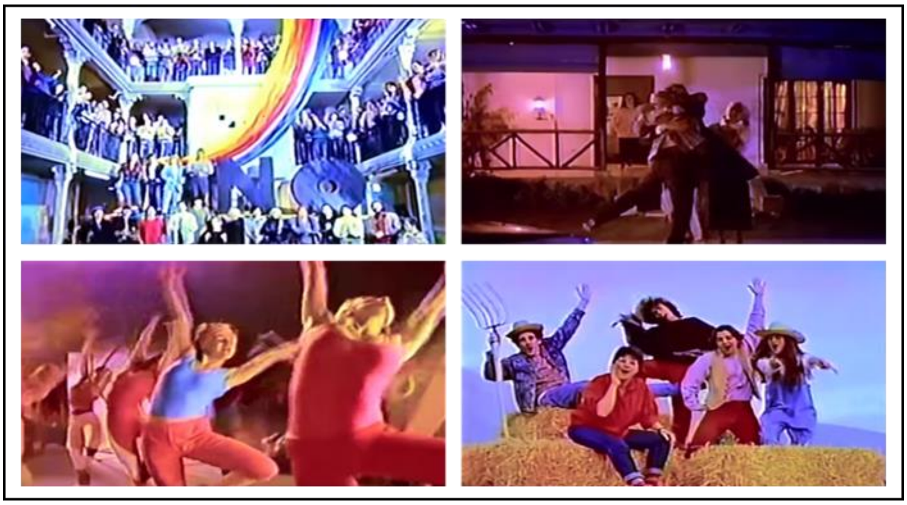
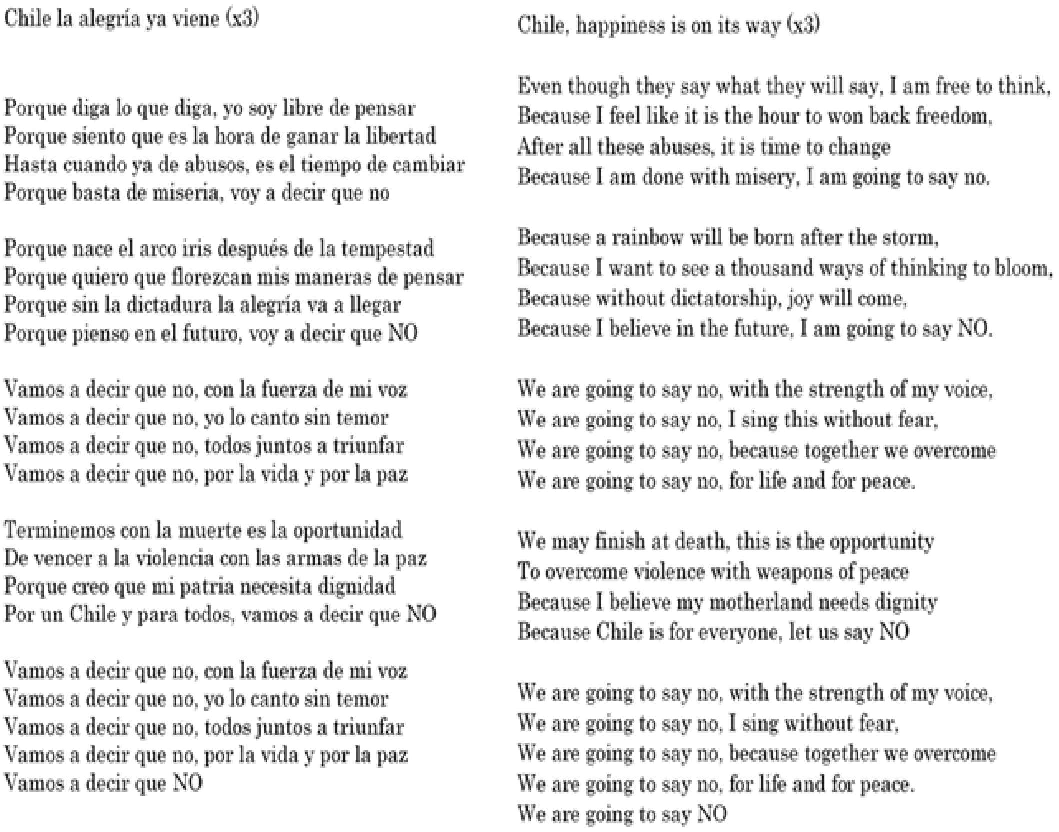


Fig. 3**:** Snapshots of the No Campaign (1988)

Central to the television campaign was the song 'Chile, happiness is on its way.' The song's core message was the promise of a happy future. Take, for example, lyrics such as '…*after the storm, the rainbow will be born*…' or '…*because, without dictatorship, joy will come*…' (see Figure 2). Overall, the plebiscite represented, at the time, a way of moving forward and leaving the dictatorship behind.

However, as I have described, happiness has not arrived. The state did not deliver for the most dispossessed families (Han 2012), and life has not gotten easier. After winning, the centre-left coalition—the Coalition of Parties for Democracy, 'La Concertación'—soon enacted a 'democracy of consensus' (*la democracia de los acuerdos*) based on the values upheld by the No campaign. The political class set the scene of compromise, and people read the citizenship regime as a compromise between different positions. The event also embodies the viewpoint of democracy as the fundamental compromise between the ‘elite’ and the ‘citizenry’. The elites—or, most precisely, politicians—vowed to make the neoliberal game fairer and more accessible to all: thus, everyone could have access to a better life as long they put effort into it. This idea would reverberate across different spheres: personal, domestic, political, and ethical. But the same compromise hindered political reforms that could improve the lives of people like Jacqui or Violeta.



Chile la alegría ya viene (x3)	Chile, happiness is on its way (x3)
Porque diga lo que diga, yo soy libre de pensar	Even though they say what they will say, I am free to think,
Porque siento que es la hora de ganar la libertad	Because I feel like it is the hour to won back freedom,
Hasta cuando ya de abusos, es el tiempo de cambiar	After all these abuses, it is time to change
Porque basta de miseria, voy a decir que no	Because I am done with misery, I am going to say no.
Porque nace el arco iris después de la tempestad	Because a rainbow will be born after the storm,
Porque quiero que florezcan mis maneras de pensar	Because I want to see a thousand ways of thinking to bloom,
Porque sin la dictadura la alegría va a llegar	Because without dictatorship, joy will come,
Porque pienso en el futuro, voy a decir que NO	Because I believe in the future, I am going to say NO.
Vamos a decir que no, con la fuerza de mi voz	We are going to say no, with the strength of my voice,
Vamos a decir que no, yo lo canto sin temor	We are going to say no, I sing this without fear,
Vamos a decir que no, todos juntos a triunfar	We are going to say no, because together we overcome
Vamos a decir que no, por la vida y por la paz	We are going to say no, for life and for peace.
Terminemos con la muerte es la oportunidad	We may finish at death, this is the opportunity
De vencer a la violencia con las armas de la paz	To overcome violence with weapons of peace
Porque creo que mi patria necesita dignidad	Because I believe my motherland needs dignity
Por un Chile y para todos, vamos a decir que NO	Because Chile is for everyone, let us say NO
Vamos a decir que no, con la fuerza de mi voz	We are going to say no, with the strength of my voice,
Vamos a decir que no, yo lo canto sin temor	We are going to say no, I sing without fear,
Vamos a decir que no, todos juntos a triunfar	We are going to say no, because together we overcome
Vamos a decir que no, por la vida y por la paz	We are going to say no, for life and for peace.
Vamos a decir que NO	We are going to say NO

Fig. 4**:** ‘Chile La Alegría Ya Viene’ Lyrics (1988)

Jacqui's and Violeta's experiences of post-authoritarian society seem to make an effort to make sense of broken promises. Jacqui sees a gap between ordinary people and people in power. She emphasises how normal people are the ones who suffer and how middle-class families are the ones who are distressed by the actions of politicians and bureaucrats. Her stories contrast the non-fulfilment of political promises and the difficulties of living. For example, she is dissatisfied with the local public hospital because she had to wait more than twelve hours. Public education also appears to be a problem. According to her, they are not serious about the education of children. She also complains about immigration. In her opinion, the government has been ineffective in protecting ordinary people from criminals, drug traffickers, and illegal migrants. This yearning echoes a third actor, which appears as a threat: criminals. Her discourse is rooted in scripted ideas such as 'the revolving door of justice,' 'criminals do not deserve human rights,' and 'violent crimes should be punished by capital punishment.' Jacqui believes that politicians allow criminals to act by conspiracy or ineffectiveness, making people's lives impossible; thus, maintaining civility is the last option for people like them.

Violeta takes a similar route. She strongly distinguishes between ordinary people, politicians, and criminals in everyday life. Likewise, she mobilises the same kind of scripts about crime and tells me how tired she is of 'delinquency, mugging, *motochorros, portonazos*, kidnappings and everything that is going on now'.[12] In her worldview, politicians 'do not do a thing, instead of contributing to finding a solution'. Violeta may take a little more distance from voting as something central to their sense of citizenship. While voting is essential, living respectfully and honestly also plays an important role. She vehemently refuses when I confront her with the idea that it would make sense to be just like everyone else if everyone is corrupt, 'You have to be good even if politicians are corrupt; one never should be like them.'

Watching television or commenting on the news, Violeta's and Jacqui's households express disaffection with the post-authoritarian governments. The feelings that often come up when talking about the state are that it is the same group of politicians: the centre-left '*La Concertación*' and the centre-right '*Vamos Chile'*. Their criticism targets 'the same people as always' (*los mismos de siempre*). Here, they refer to the same political class that has governed the country for three decades—their routinary protest: nothing has gotten done after all these years. The theme of 'broken promises' comes up again and again. Politicians pledge to help people. However, they never fulfil their promises.

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[12] Violeta evokes the notions of *motochorros* and *portonazos*, crimes highlighted by the media. *Motochorros* are muggings and robberies committed using a motorbike. *Portonazos* are burglaries that use a car to crash the gates and doors to access the houses.

Jacqui and Violeta have experienced the failure of the post-authoritarian government as a failure to meet their promises. Even if civil and political rights have returned, the state has not fulfilled the promise of economic stability and social mobility. Ernesto and Cristina often revive the mantra 'Happiness is on its way' to criticise the broken. This past hope contrasts with present resentment. As Hage has argued, 'Capitalist societies are characterised by a deep inequality in their distribution of hope, and when such inequality reaches an extreme, certain groups are not offered any hope at all.' (2003: 17).

I would argue that one of the main sources of affective dispositions is the enactment and decline of the scene of compromise inaugurated by the 1988 plebiscite. The scene seeks to produce hope, but its decline breeds resentment. We may want to recall Mazzarella's argument that public discourse interpellates as rational subjects and 'gut subjects'. While not wholly instrumental, yet not merely expressive, such scenes draw upon a sense of affective publicity and political participation in historical events and other forms of temporality (Berlant 1997). These framing devices connect personal experiences and public symbols. In more concrete terms, political scenes '…provide systems of identification and connection, while simultaneously inviting acts of novelty, invention, and innovation. Scenes are set within the fabric of everyday life but also function as an imagined alternative to the ordinary, work-a-day world.' (Woo, Rennie & Poyntz 2015: 288). We might decode post-authoritarian democracy through the original scene of compromise. A compromise between the elite (capitalists, cultural leaders, and politicians) and the people animates the transition to democracy.

As I have described, the elite offers the restitution of civil rights and freedom as long as people comply with the restricted form that politics will take. In response, most Chileans accepted the political scene as encouraging a new national spirit, rejecting the terror and moral stagnation induced by the dictatorship and political struggles. The so-called agreement predicated a fight against poverty and economic growth and constituted proper democratic citizenship. Under this scene, ordinary families could finally pursue a better life without being afraid of authoritarian state power or social turmoil. The initial disaster of the dictatorship's neoliberal reform and the general violence had expanded the lack of hope among large segments of the populace. Nevertheless, the 1988 plebiscite managed to restore hope to the intimate public. Then, resentment came after this initial hope.

Resentment in this scene permeates all these political attitudes. Elaborating on Nietzsche, Fassin proposes two ideal types: resentment and *ressentiment*. For the French anthropologist, ressentiment is '…a reaction to historical facts, which generate an anthropological condition: victims of genocide, apartheid, or persecutions experience this condition. It implies not primarily revenge but recognition' (2013: 260). In contrast, resentment is a reaction to a relational situation, which results from a sociological position: police officers, far-right constituents, and long-term unemployed workers may find themselves in such a position. It involves diffuse animosity and tends toward vindictiveness.' (2013: 260). However, both dimensions are mutually constituted in these parents' discourses.

The current scene is the slow weakening of a commitment that some *Santiaguinos* refuse to abandon altogether but feel no one will fulfil. Jacqui and Violeta feel bitter because the relational other—the elite—has offended them, generating a sense of vindictiveness. Likewise, this is a reaction to historical facts—the plebiscite's promises—that have framed them as equals but, as time has passed, have transformed them instead into casualties of late capitalism.

Wendy Brown suggests that resentment in liberal formations comes from 'the prior presumption of the self-reliant and self-made capacities of liberal subjects, conjoined with their unavowed dependence on and constant variety of social relations and forces' (1995: 67). For Brown, both the failure of social and political recognition of these relationships of dependence, and the social mandate of self-reliance and self-making, makes liberal subjects susceptible to resentment. The same political ontologies of self that denote the middle class as subjects of value make individuals prone to this feeling of resentment. When these subjects fail to meet this mandate, they either find themselves guilty of their suffering or reorient their rage towards other people. For Brown, *ressentiment* is a triple achievement: ‘It produces an affect (rage, righteousness) that overwhelms the hurt; it produces a culprit responsible for the hurt, and it produces a site of revenge.’ (1995: 68). Here, the ‘wounded attachments’ emerge—sites of injury that subjects embrace as identity and demands of recognition and restitution—even if these demands condemn them to reproduce these subject positions.

Considering their tenacity in upholding the law and voting, these parents present themselves as righteous citizens. They still hold to their part of the bargain staged by the scene of compromise. We may recall from Chapter One that worthy subjects are the ones who work and build domesticity. I would argue that Jacqui, Violeta, and the rest are disappointed and tend to reject politics because they cannot trust politicians—young and old, progressive and conservative—because of their broken promises. Thus, the anger of their critique and the righteousness of their attachment to formal liberal practices comes from this resentment begotten by disappointment. They have processed the social injury of the post-authoritarian governments as something to which to hold on.

When politicians fail to fulfil their post-authoritarian promises, the decline of a scene inverts the relationship between hope and resentment, undermining hopeful citizenship. Anger becomes the general affective horizon, where small moments of political satisfaction and contentment come off as exceptions or oddities. Therefore, voting, and other liberal institutions, do not represent belonging. Instead, these parents embrace the wounded attachment to the position of ordinary people within the scene. This obstinate attachment expresses their dissatisfaction with their ‘political partners’, the elite, and politicians. They are gesturing, ‘We comply with the agreement, and you do not.’ This resentment informs their detachment to old and new forms of politics, leaving only voting, law-abiding attitudes, and state monitoring. The consequences of a history of state domination and conflicting notions of politics inform keeping the state away (Shah 2007).

This chapter has argued that understanding citizenship in Latin America requires exploring political scenes and how they encourage motives for action.

Anthropologists have paid attention to inequality, violence, liberal institutions, and illiberal practices based on interpersonal relationships. However, the study of 'sensuous impersonal generality'—that I have interpreted as historically bounded affective scenes—helps understand how people constitute themselves as citizens. This element is relevant to how imaginary and imagined relationships, vis-à-vis actual relations, condition citizenship practices.

Finally, we should notice that this chapter does not argue that these traits characterise all lower-middle-class families. The study of politics and ethnography in Santiago (where I have lived most of my life) makes one aware that neighbourhoods and families have reacted differently to changes in the citizenship regime. I would suggest that there are three primary responses among lower-middle-class families in Santiago: strong political apathy, populist political participation, and resentful citizenship. We may consider them as different reactions to the decline of the scene of compromise. This chapter does not argue that all lower-middle-class adults pursue the last type. Instead, it explores liberal practices, distance, and resentment that characterise a plurality of families. These families remain within the scene's imaginary force.

* * *

This chapter has explored citizenship among lower-middle-class parents. These parents perform citizenship by caring about voting, having law-abiding attitudes, and practising state monitoring. Rather than rejecting liberal democratic institutions, they embrace them. However, a distance from politics also occurs. They critique the system, mistrust politicians, and show a low engagement within political relationships, especially in emerging participatory democratic and social movements. Recent history and an economy of disaffection explain this distance, but resentment also grounds these attitudes.

What brings together these threads is the decline of a scene of compromise that has shaped Chilean politics since the 1990s. In the beginning, the scene brought hope as it determined the end of the dictatorship and inaugurated a new era of prosperity and growth. However, when people realised that politicians would not fulfil their promises, people started experiencing frustration. It engendered resentment against politicians and the state and a sense of righteousness. Nowadays, this resentment has made them feel like the moral protectors of the political community, motivating their attachment to liberal democratic institutions.

Chapter Three

Desiring Loving Homes:

The post-industrial domestic imaginary

‘A tragedy’—Jacqui told me, referring to the time when she lost her house. The dwelling in question had been her family home since the 1980s. Once an upper-middle-class matriarch, she must now confront multiple challenges related to her four children and six grandchildren using any available means.

Jacqui lived in a big house in Las Achiras, along with her husband and daughter, in one of the most affluent neighbourhoods of Puente Alto, a small town part of Greater Santiago. Most of her family experiences dwelt there. Her eldest children moved out after getting married or having children, leaving only her youngest daughter at home. She was happy, feeling that she was almost finishing her duty as a parent. The fateful episode came from nowhere. One relative would betray her trust.

One day, one of the ‘cousins’ asked her for a favour. She needed to apply for a bank loan, and one requirement was ownership of a property. Jacqui lent her cousin her house so that she could get approval from the bank. She did not even think about it. ‘Just a little piece of paperwork’, she thought. They did the legal transfer of the house, which then came under the custody of Jacqui’s cousin. It was only a matter of time before the house would return to its rightful owner. Soon after, the cousin moved into the house and claimed it as her own. Holding the legal title and with police backup, she took actual possession of the dwelling. Jacqui and her family had to comply; they did not know how to react. Afterwards, this relative ‘disappeared’. She stopped answering telephone calls or receiving Jacqui’s at the house. It was unthinkable. After exhausting her legal possibilities, Jacqui resigned herself to her fate. ‘… and she kept the house’, she told me with a mix of regret, shame, and anger.

‘I feel uncomfortable,’ or ‘The house had a weird vibe,’ or ‘I never saw myself there,’ she would recount as she remembered all the different houses she visited in her search. Throughout the fieldwork, she rehoused once again. Both dwellings I get to know still felt foreign to her, making her restless. She only chose them because they were cheap and close to her eldest daughter. This relative haunted her relationships. She had a hard time forgiving herself. She never could articulate in words her responsibility for the episode. Like similar cases, the blame shifted to different people, but she appeared burdened. ‘I was so stupid!’ he interjected when talking about the issue. We sometimes arrived at the topic, and then she would reveal some information, always with a cadence of feeling that she had not done enough.

Losing her house was a resounding economic blow. In addition, her husband had a neurological sickness; thus, Jacqui had to work to pay the rent. She had a low-paying position at a charity foundation and received money from her children. Her husband also got a pension. Unfortunately, this amount barely covered the monthly expenses. She was used to a middle-class lifestyle. The adjustments were still arduous.

The psychological effects were more significant than the economic turmoil, however. The tragedy haunted Jacqui’s dwellings and relationships. Without a house, Jacqui had to find a place to rent. She felt uncomfortable in any other house. The compound effect of getting accustomed to a new house and losing her own home in such unusual circumstances had made her wary of new quarters. She moved a lot, from place to place, searching with little relief. Yet, she did not like them. Jacqui thought that the negative emotion of feeling out of place contributed to her getting sick with cancer.

Throughout the fieldwork, Jacqui talked about the fact that what matters in life is family. While jobs and friends were meaningful, she claimed that caring for her family makes her complete. Even as the breadwinner, she still was in charge of household reproduction. Daily routines of sharing meals, acts of tenderness and communication and checking her loved ones’ wellbeing preoccupied her. She also cared about their children’s projects—her grandchildren’s schooling, health, and contentment. When I asked her about domestic life, she asserted that she was content and tranquil regarding her family's fate. Her family gatherings were friendly, and relationships were peaceful.

However, Jacqui felt frustrated with some aspects of her current relationship with them. She showed nervousness about becoming estranged from her eldest sons and daughters. Imagined and actual fights permeated her relationship with her children-in-law. Jacqui often accused them of being bad-mannered or bad-tempered. Further, she worried that they were distancing her children from her, inventing excuses to keep them away from Jacinto and herself.

Another concern was about her grandchildren's happiness. She felt that her older children are not building caring homes. For example, one grandson was homosexual but did not feel supported by his father, Jacqui's son. Another granddaughter had trouble choosing a career, yet her mother nudged her to decide quickly without considering her distress. The lack of tenderness, acceptance, and peacefulness made the third generation distrust their parents and nervous about the future. Jacqui tried to supplement her children's parenting. She could offer them advice and shelter, but doing more would create discord.

Jacqui found some support outside her home but not in her neighbourhood. Her friends had supported her through every misfortune. Jacqui had been friends with Rosa, Francisca, and Natalia since meeting at their children's school. They had dinner and enrolled in workshops. Likewise, her nieces and nephews also visited her—some of them by blood, others the product of long friendships. Jacqui proudly narrated how her house is a spot for meeting friends and family. Yet, Jacqui was showing signs of weariness and detachment. Recently, she mentioned how she did not want to go to meet her friends o host parties at her house. 'I am tired,' she confessed. In contrast, Jacqui felt detached from her neighbours. She tended to privilege places where she could be near her daughters but did not make friends with the people living next door. For Jacqui, her family and friends were enough.

The preceding account has shared elements of what matters to the parents I met with: intimate relationships, household reproduction, and domestic projects. The exploration of lower-middle-classness and citizenship has pointed towards the centrality of domesticity, intimacy, and private worlds for grounding a sense of purpose. While relevant for these *Santiaguinos*, class and politics produce only a fragmentary responsibility. Even when citizenship and class issues appear, they often get translated into concerns about intimacy or domesticity. They care about being present for their children, keeping their house, being loving parents, and supporting their children's dreams.

There is a gap between these motives and secondary qualms and preferences. Unlike concerns about politics and class, domestic issues produce intense manifestations of love, anxiety, and distress. A part of them is deeply at stake when enacting domesticity and attempting to care for their families. The actual or imagined failure to uphold domestic codes and practices distresses them not as mere disappointments. In fact, the intensity of such drives, concerns and commitments becomes a burden. These caregivers often experience psychological distress related to kinship. This desire for a happy family entails a rigorous commitment that contrasts with public or status concerns. These considerations underscore economic and political mandates that spring from subject positions.

This chapter explores the quality of domestic attachments and concerns among lower-middle-class parents. I argue that the dominant theoretical framework used to analyse domestic, intimate relationships—the new kinship studies (NKS)—does not offer enough tools to further the understanding of phenomena such as the desire for domesticity and kinship anxiety. In contrast, Lacanian inspired anthropologists have advanced the centrality of the *imaginary* and *unconscious fantasies* in order to grasp the libidinal dimension of domesticity. Moreover, approaching families through phantasmatic attachments also contributes to identifying the tensions of intimate life. The overall point regarding domesticity is that people like these parents and caretakers build domesticity—and a sense of personhood and agency—through a post-industrial domestic imaginary. Scenes of conviviality, mutuality, and flexibility dominate this imaginary in the name of love and responsibility. However, the impossibility of late capitalist promises of love haunts both personhood and agency, precipitating anxiety as the threat of the dissolution of the self.

Too close for comfort: similarity, desire, and intimate attachments

The study of families has taken a turn in anthropology since the 1990s. After multiple critiques of functionalist and structuralist theories, the NKS emerged as a dominant force in the study of kinship. Influenced by David Schneider's analysis (1980), a loosely related group of anthropologists has researched kinship and similar relationships that reject biological determinism to ask the question: 'what is a relative?'

To this end, the NKS have decentred biological connections and the sociological assumptions attached to them. The different NKS approaches share three crucial propositions that support the rejection of biology as the basis of kinship. Firstly, anthropologists can no longer conceptualise procreation—and kinship, by extension—as *natural*, *simple*, and *given* instead of *human-made, complex, and social* (Carsten 2004; McKinnon 2015; Strathern 1992). Secondly, social relationships are not determined by singular events linked to biological events. The NKS oppose functionalist and structuralist theories that trace social normativity around procreation, birth, marriage, and intercourse, arguing that these events do not necessarily exert a strong determination on relative making in all cultures (Carsten 2001; McKinnon 2017). Thirdly, the NKS understand this type of event as part of a broader set of practices of relative making, such as sharing food, transmitting substances, travelling, and working and living together, among others (Carsten 2004; Howell 2003; Sahlins 2013). The NKS focus not on normative schemes activated by biologically coded events but on the ongoing day-to-day process that creates relative and mutually ethical entanglements (Borneman 1997; Faubion 2001; Stasch 2009). The objective is to free kinship from biology and procreation, reconfiguring this phenomenon as human-made, processual, diffuse, and mediated by multiple practices, substances, and means.

Janet Carsten, one of the most prominent anthropologists associated with the NKS, has crafted the idea of *relatedness* to approach how people create relationships by enacting practices or labour.[13] For Carsten, relatedness is about 'how people generate similarity or difference between themselves and others. Those between women and men are inextricably linked to other kinds of relatedness.' (2004: 84). As anthropologists, we may potentially identify a cultural repertoire of relatedness practices that creates, modifies, and dissolves similarity and difference. For example, Carsten identifies '…small acts of hospitality and feeding, together with longer-term sharing of food and living spaces (…) create kinship where it did not previously exist' as practices of relatedness among the Malay (2000: 18). Additionally, Carsten has highlighted how relatedness repertoires use substances—food, blood, sexual fluids, sweat, and saliva—to produce relatedness.

Throughout the highly influential book 'What Kinship Is—And Is Not' (2013), Sahlins expands this theoretical framework by arguing that kinship is about the *mutuality of being*. He claims that 'kin-folk are persons who participate intrinsically in each other's existence; they are members of one another. (...) [R]elatives emotionally and symbolically live each other's lives and die each other's deaths.' (Sahlins 2013: ix). He later adds that the particular cultural logic of relatedness predicates practices that create relatedness and a sense of commonality (2013: 9). kinship, thus, become a 'manifold of intersubjective participations, which is also to say, a network of "mutualities" of being' (2013: 20). As with Carsten, Sahlins believes that close relatives can '…be intrinsic to the self' (2013: 22).

Carsten and Sahlins are not thinking simply of any kind of relative, however. Their starting point is relatives connected by care work, diffuse solidarity, and emotional bonds (Carsten 2000:1; Sahlins 2013: ix). Furthermore, both Carsten's and Sahlins's concern with personhood reveals how they see relatedness as something that constitutes personhood. Both ideas closely follow the dominant Western strand of kinship ideology, which proceeds from blissful family experiences.[14] Edwards and Strathern remind us of the '…sentimentalised view of sociality as sociability, and of kinship ('family') as community, that pervades much Euro-American commentary of an *academic* kind' (2000: 152; original emphasis; also quoted in Carsten 2013: 246).

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[13] Other concepts like 'events of care and being cared-for' (Borneman 1997), 'kinning process' (Howell 2003), 'kin work' (Di Leonardo 1987), 'intersubjective belonging' (Stasch 2009), 'mutuality of being network' (Sahlins 2013), and 'ethics of kinship' (Faubion 2001) have also attempted to reflect this shift.

[14] Similar starting points shape other anthropologists close to the NKS: enduring relations of care (Borneman 1997), enduring kin networks (Howell 2003), interhousehold affective kin

One of the blind spots in these approaches is the bridge between similarity and the moral, affective, and relational attachments between individuals that kin closeness and identification entail. The effect of care work, diffuse solidarity, and emotional receptivity still grounds what makes a relative. Relative making fosters other feelings and reactions—like distressing sentiments and kinship anxiety—that NKS analysis overlooks or plays down. Some anthropologists have noticed this trend, even attempting to reverse it (Carsten 2013, 2019). They have highlighted aspects such as competition (Sahlins 2013), enmity (Lambek 2011), ambiguity (Peletz 2000), and violence (Das 1995, 2020). [15]

How have some NKS researchers attempted to combine comfortable and distressing kinship sentiments in one framework? Sahlins argues that mutuality of being among kinfolk '…declines in proportion to spatially and/or genealogically reckoned distance' (2013: 53). identification of the degree of relatedness and the distinction between 'own' people and 'different' people also charts the 'degree of participatory belonging' and 'differential compensation awarded to various relatives' (2013: 53). Reviewing Sahlins's work, Carsten drives the point further, arguing that Sahlins '…pays less attention to the ways that kinship accumulates or dissolves over time—processes of "thickening" or "thinning" of relatedness (…) [Vectors or registers of 'mutuality of being'] …such as feeding, procreation, living together, memory, or land, complement or counteract each other in particular contexts.' (Carsten 2013: 247; see also Carsten 2019). Therefore, we may assume that thin relationships come from a lack of activation of relatedness repertoires or vectors. These relationships, often described as corrupted by political or economic

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ties (Di Leonardo 1987), relations of familiarity and closeness vis-à-vis otherness (Stasch 2009), and relationships that most often foster certainty, safety nets and tropes for narration for the self (Faubion 2001).

[15] We may add this literature to Marxist and feminist literature that have both also seen struggle and inequality within domestic spaces. However, their focus has not been on the phenomenological or affective aspects (e.g. Harris 1984; Meillassoux 1981; Moore 1988; Ortner 1974; Rosaldo 1974; Rubin 1975; Sahlins 1972; among others).

struggles to appropriate and accrue value, involve less care work, solidarity, or emotional receptivity. The result is that participants experience antagonism, uncertainty, and distress due to inhospitable kinship relationships.

Jacqui and the other parents in Santiago consider blood and law capable of creating relatives. In particular, birthing is an affecting event. Mothers (and some fathers) experience it as the moment they bond with their children for the first time due to the physicality and embodiment of a new life. These phenomena are not strange. As D. Schneider (1980) has long pointed out, blood and law are relevant codes to enact kinship in Western societies. However, parents actively relativise law and blood as crucial languages for creating and thickening relationships. It is common to hear them talk about how parents, siblings, or children do not automatically become family just because of shared blood, state-sanctioned relationships, or childhood cohabitation.

Instead, these parents offer the master metaphor of ‘being there/present’ (*estar ahí/estar presente*) to capture the various practices of relatedness that create kinship. Firstly, they talk about collocation in domestic spaces, sharing daily activities and doing chores to reproduce the household as creating relatedness. Secondly, ‘being there’ is about acts of tenderness—hugs, kisses, hand-holding—that entail some level of physical intimacy. Thirdly, sharing vital events of their life—e.g. birthdays, funerals, graduations, farewell parties, among others—showing support and appreciation counts as being present for others. Finally, giving advice, emotional support and help during personal crises is linked to this metaphor. The overall result is that parents assess the people who have been present (and who have not) in order to discern the degree of care and solidarity they should perform accordingly.

Does Jacqui’s story fit this repertoire? Her attachment to family seems to go beyond identifying similarities between herself and those who have been present. Jacqui transforms these relatives, her close family, into something else altogether. The scam discloses that she feels that she has forsaken a moral responsibility. Even when her family asks her to take care of herself and put the event behind her, she insists on performing her motherly duties over and beyond her children’s wishes and society’s demands. Jacqui loves her family. Thus, she inscribes herself in imagined and recalled scenarios that she has staged. Her family is the product of intense relative making, yet the manifestation of a desire for domestic life saturates these attachments with something other than mutual identification.

Jacqui's desire for domestic life clashes with Carsten's and Sahlins's portrayals of relatedness. Instead of thick attachments that create spaces for care work, solidarity, and emotional receptivity, kinship and domesticity appear as thorny entanglements that open either distressing or comforting possibilities. This situation does not occur because Jacqui fails to embody the culturally prescribed repertoire of relatedness. She diligently performs practices such as sharing food, family parties, cohabitation, collocation, daily conversations, and tender physical contact, even if she is exhausted or sad. Neither it is because her family does not respond to her gestures or abuse her disposition. On the contrary, most of her family are aware of her efforts and attempt to be reciprocal. Instead, distress comes from the attachment to the scenes that promise the ideal life that never wholly actualises, the self-blame that she feels when it does not happen, and the unspoken feeling of disorientation.

I would argue that the focus on repertoires of relatedness loses sight of why people attach to their families, make relatives, or stop making relatives—the libidinal dimension of these processes. Likewise, participating in comforting practices around these processes misses why people embrace and endure the distressing experiences that develop alongside these processes—the stakes of not fulfilling certain roles or not embodying specific images. Family is similarities, becoming and sharing. It is also endurance and coping with the negative, often confounding aspects of ordinary domesticity. While there is attention on the (household-centred and interhousehold) normative and ideal prescription of life among relatives, we know little about how these images inspire complex desires for, and against, relatedness.

A desire for domestic life

Vero usually went from her home to work and vice versa. She preferred to be at home. Some of her friends lived nearby, but she visited them seldom. If she had time, she favoured dropping by her mother's house. There, she could see her mother and her sister's family. It was only a 15-minute walk. Vero maintained a cordial relationship with Lucas's mother and grandparents but never went to their home. 'I was born and raised in Maipú', she stated when I inquired her about her neighbourhood. Vero lived in an area called 'La Farfana', but she reneged this administrative category. Vero understood 'La Farfana' as a specific place nearby characterised by lower-income households. In contrast, she portrayed herself as *Maipucina*.

One time I was walking from the subway station near Pajaritos Avenue. Most streets were quiet. Some families were absent, and others were just silent. The houses were similar— constructions of the 1980s and early 1990s. These structures conveyed the ambitions of middle-classness: cars, numerous rooms, and large living rooms. The landscape was dominated by black railings that guarded small front yards and gardens. Walking through narrow streets, I could barely listen to some conversations. Most families had expanded their houses, building a second level to accommodate larger families.

When I arrived at Vero's house, we sat down for a glass of water. As usual, Vero was exhausted and needed a break. Then, instead of talking about her boss and her family, out of nowhere, she began recounting a dream she had had the night before. I was surprised. Vero had told me about her beliefs in supernatural forces, mostly gravitating around envy and revenge, but a dream was something new. At this point, we had known each other for more than a year and had never discussed her dreaming. Vero continued her narration. First, she walked around her house and did not recognise it. The house was empty, and the wall colours were different. Next, she moved to a cathedral that she experienced as dark and strange. Red and purple dominated the scene. Finally, she saw a coffin at the end of a long hallway when she entered the building. Anxiously, she got near to see who was inside it. The bloated body of her ex-husband was lying inside.

Without any urging, Vero interpreted her dream. She knew that it was about her house. She was afraid of losing it. The ex-husband's family could claim it because the property title was not in Vero's name. If they were to come, she would need to leave the house with her older children and find a new place. The problem was not so much that she would lose the property but rather where all their memories resided. ‘Maybe a new place could be a blank slate,’ I suggested. I thought that she might be seeking a break away from the past. Vero had ruminated about selling the place, but she could not do it without the necessary papers. She had attempted to track her husband down before eventually deciding that it would be better to leave matters alone.

We had discussed the house on other occasions. Vero felt insecure about her situation. Due to Chilean law, she could not own the building without a proper divorce or declaring her ex-husband dead. Thus, he could reclaim half of the house if he wanted it. She rhetorically raised her demands against her ex-husband, ‘It is the minimum that you could do… let me own the house. He owes me all the money I spent raising her children, paying psychologists, what I paid in education.’ Then, she continued, ‘One time, she gave Isa 30.000 pesos (£30); he thought it was enough. No money is enough.’

Vero had found these issues difficult to discuss with other people. However, she felt at ease discussing her past with me for an unknown reason. Episodes of domestic violence had marked Vero’s life. Her husband, a gambling addict, had tormented her and her children for years. Finally, some twenty years ago, he had left the family home, but his haunting unsettled Vero’s life. She told me several times that she had begged him to leave her alone with the children. ‘Just go!’ she had pleaded. At the time, one of her concerns was that her children would not grow up in a loving home. So she tried to give them a better life. She had hidden money to buy them Christmas presents, to make them feel like an average family for one day. ‘Their father was a penny-pinching man; he did not want to buy presents,’ she said. Even holidays were a struggle then.

When the situation reached its limit, she and her children moved in with Vero’s mother to escape the abuse. She worried about her future and did not know what to do. Loneliness dominated her thoughts. Her family had idealised her husband and did not understand what was happening. They only recognized the severity of her suffering after Vero recounted what happened. She had been too hesitant to discuss the violence that she had experienced. Even then, her family had tried to mediate the situation. Her mother told her, ‘You better not regret it.’ However, it was unthinkable that he could live in the same house. Before going, she demanded that he would be out when she would be back. Finally, her ex-husband relented after a couple of months and left the house due to the pressure of Vero's family.

Everyday life eventually returned, despite an undercurrent that disturbed this home even throughout the fieldwork. Vero felt the little and big things that bore the traces of this violence. At one point, we were discussing her daughter's debts. Years before, Isa had moved to Concepción, a southern city, with a girlfriend. Isa and her partner found it challenging to make a living and balance their budget without the support of their families. They used credit cards to cover their necessities without paying them off monthly. Consequently, they amassed debt and could not obtain a loan to settle their indebtedness. Vero had to intervene when Isa could not pay the rent. Finally, Isa returned to Santiago, tired of the fights and living without hope. Vero decided to accept her daughter's return and forced her to follow a payment plan.

According to Vero, this story represented Isa's immaturity (*inmadurez*), which she linked to trauma. She had taken the concept from the psychologists that treated her daughter. Her mother pondered the effects of abuse on Isa's mind. Despite her subsequent good behaviour, Vero entertained the idea that the damage her ex-husband has done hindered her attempts to achieve adulthood, 'She suffered a lot… she is always looking for protection. Her dad harmed her a lot, and she had a difficult time maturing. She also had bad luck with her partners. I have a good relationship with her, but she is more immature than Mario.' She loved her daughter, but sometimes Isa became too tricky to handle, especially with her bad temper.

The return to Vero's ex-husband as a toxic influence was a recurrent gesture. Not only could the missing property title or Isa's immaturity be traced back to him. Vero sometimes did not know how to feel about Mario. She loved him and could rely on him. 'He is my partner, my pillar', she said. Yet, she still wondered if Mario had attempted to fill the void left by his father to become the 'man of the house', impairing his youth. Mario was hardworking and responsible, closer to Vero than Isa. However, he was also stern and taciturn. Her mother often worried about how his personality had made it difficult for him to find a partner. Moreover, Mario and his father had a more profound connection: he took after him physically. From time to time, Vero saw the image of her ex-husband on her son's face. For a split second, she felt afraid. Could Mario inherit some of the evils that have taken hold of his father?

Jacqui's and Vero's accounts speak of two themes I have outlined. First, the object of their attachment in domestic life manifests as mutual care and solidarity as well as the *actual desire* for scenes of idealised domesticity. Secondly, the intensity of these motives engenders kinship anxiety and distressing sentiments. These affective forces do not come from a deficit of enactment of relatedness and care. Instead, an intense desire to enact relatedness as a responsibility begets them.

Moore (1994, 2007), Sangren (2013a, 2013b), and Gammeltoft (2018, 2019) have persuasively argued that kinship often involves desire, opening the dialogue between anthropology and psychoanalysis.[16] While we may identify Freudian influences among these authors, Lacan seems to be the obvious starting point to conceiving desire from an anthropological perspective. As frequently noted, Lacan can be an obscure and provocative author. Nevertheless, his proposition of how desire emerges at the intersection of the subjective and the symbolic via the real can be highly productive. Lacan's core idea can be grossly simplified as follows: human beings engender a lack that energises desire when entering society—the normative, ordered, and linguistic world—because they experience this passage as a prohibition and imagine the previous state, before the process of castration, as full enjoyment and completeness. (Lacan 1991, 2001a, 2001b). Desire (and drives) are the effort to find anything to relive this enjoyment. Human beings, alienated and separated, enter society only to realise that it cannot offer them what they are lacking, and they do not know what the social world wants from them (Fink 1995: 50). This ontological vexation constitutes the split in the subject that creates the unconscious.

For Lacan, we must understand these processes as embedded in three registers: the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real (Homer 1995). The *imaginary* corresponds to images that appear in one's psyche and help make sense of the world and oneself. Henrietta Moore describes it through a comparison, ‘Imagination is an ability, a capacity, an orientation in the world. The imaginary, however, is a different notion focusing on fantasy and the workings of the unconscious, and it is connected both to the self’s ability to create an internal world and to its capacity for agency.’ (2007: 14-5). The *symbolic* covers the domain of conventions, norms, and codes. In contrast, the *real* is the limit of the imaginary and symbolisation, which taunts and unsettles the efforts to pursue one’s desire. It also appears as the inaccessible space wherein lies complete enjoyment. The relationships between registers are far from straightforward, but this brief exposition helps understand fantasy’s fundamental place. Lacan argues that the drive to partial objects relates to the *objet petit a*—the product of introducing the real in the symbolic, bearing the traces of the full enjoyment lost (Lacan 2014). This object must be staged in one’s imagination, and these scenarios are fantasies (Lacan 2006; Žižek 2009). As a result, humans pursue objects of attachment that partially embody and stage the imagined missing enjoyment (*jouissance*) (Braunstein 2003).

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[16] Since Malinowski, anthropology has regarded with suspicion psychoanalysis's more universalistic theories' claims. However, recent commentators have pointed out their potential for building a better understanding of subjectivity (Corin 2012; Csordas 2012; Good 2012; Margiotti Fortis 2018; Mimica 2006; Segal & Gammeltoft 2016).

Tine Gammeltoft summarises it as, ‘The [i]maginary is, in other words, the realm in which we build our images of ourselves and our worlds by interpreting and responding to the symbolic meanings that are imposed on us—and we do so through fantasy.’ (2014: 437). Considering these insights, we may identify three basic processes enabled by unconscious fantasies. First of all, they stimulate desire and support libidinal drives that pursue partial objects as compulsive attachments. Secondly, fantasies help hold together a sense of self, conjuring selfhood images and addressing symbolic formations that the subject has internalised, embodied, and developed. Thirdly, fantasies protect human beings from the abjection of the real and the anxiety caused by the impossibility of accessing *jouissance* permanently. Following Lacanian social theorists, we may see how fantasies’ second and third functions bestow everyday life with fictional coherence and consistency.

Therefore, we may understand domestic imaginaries, among other imaginary formations, as social compounds of practices, discourses, sensoriums, and institutions gravitating around promises of a good or worthy life (Berlant 2011). These promises—carried through plots, scenes, and snapshots—set affective and ethical attachments. These imaginaries are performative, textual, or mental resources used to experience and think about what may happen regarding events—as potentiality—and as the basis of some ethical reasoning (C. Taylor 2004). They encourage unconscious fantasies that ground libidinal economies and ethical repertoires, which often intersect with symbolic repertoires of relatedness.

What scenes dominated these parents' desires in past conversations? Jacqui had conjured images to explain what matters to her. The first image was of her original home in Curacaví. She grew up in an industrial neighbourhood within this small town. According to her account, the enclave was divided into several sectors, depending on the worker's role within the company. Her family lived on the manual workers' side. She talked about the colourful houses and the front yards. 'You could leave your bicycle outside, and nobody would steal it,' she told me. Life was peaceful. She was not bothered by this segregation between employees. An affinity for structure and hierarchy flowed from her words. In Curacaví, she met Jacinto and created her first family home. He arrived as an engineer in charge of the machine room. They liked each other despite their social difference. After a short courtship, they got married. She mentioned how they moved to a new house for upper-class married people. There, she started building a home. She entertained friends and Jacinto's colleagues and hosted her children's parties and get-togethers. Jacqui even decorated the house to her liking, despite it not being allowed. Jacinto would eventually move to another job, prompting the journey to Puente Alto.

On another occasion, we discussed how she arrived at Puente Alto. It was the first time I asked Jacqui to trace her spatial trajectory. The conversation started with her usual reference to Curacaví and later moved on to Las Achiras. 'We had a good time there,' Jacqui reminisced nostalgically. 'It is a big place. We could fit all the cousins,' she was referring to her nieces and nephews. 'They spent the whole summer here. I was used to big parties; I entertained them. I was almost like a mom to them.' Jacqui spoke with a cheerful tone. The parties at her house, full of homemade sweets and water games, continued the theme of getting together with friends and family. I was in silence, listening to their cherished memories of The Achiras, juxtaposing them with the tragedy that marked her search for a home in my mind. She kept talking about the house, 'We had enough space for basketball and kickabout (*pichangas*). If I told you the good time we have with our friends, the parties.' Her friends and relatives gathered in her house, spending the whole night eating, drinking, and celebrating. Jacqui saw these 'barbeques' (*asados*) as a force that summoned all her closer circle.

Jacqui saw these acts as love when discussing these topics. 'This is what you do if you love your family,' she mentioned. Loving one's children and grandchildren was an essential part of what drove her life. She often exemplified love with her attitudes about homosexuality. Regarding Cata's homosexuality, she portrayed herself as always evolving. She explained, 'In the beginning, it was complicated because you do not know. But as time passed, I understood there was nothing wrong with it. We accepted as she was.' Jacqui saw Cata's partner almost as a daughter. 'I feel sorry for her; her mother does not show her that she loves her,' she told me before sharing lunch with them. Jacqui felt that Stephanie's mother could not bring herself to show affection to her daughter. She considered various reasons—her homosexuality, Stephanie's weight, the mother's neurosis—without setting on one. The important thing was that Jacqui saw herself as a different kind of mother who could see past her own prejudices to adapt to her children's happiness.

In fact, she had found herself in the position of protecting one of her grandchildren from their father. Daniel, Jacqui's grandson, visited her around that time. Jacqui mimicked him, 'Grandma, I am going to come out to my father; if things go wrong, may I stay here with you?' She did not even think it, 'Yes, of course.' She desired to protect him. 'You will always have a home with me,' she reassured him. While his father did not fully accept Daniel, he did not kick him out. The living arrangement never came to be. This development was a relief for the grandmother. After all, she had already given shelter to Romi, another granddaughter.

Moving to Vero's case, the dominant images originated from his father's example. When I asked Vero what she wished for her domestic life, she immediately recalled her parents' home, where she felt loved and protected. Her father was an affectionate man who hosted family and friends and aided anyone who needed help. Violeta described it as follows,

> The most important example was my father. I lost him when I was 19, and he was 53 […]. He was everything to me, my father, my partner, my best friend, an example. I learned everything from him.' […] My mother would get mad with him because he would give us everything to his children. We never lack

> something. Following his example, I have sacrificed myself a lot and struggled to provide for my children. Because I did not have a pleasant experience with the father of my children, and I did not want to seek another person for support or love. He was my love; my family is my love, my two children, my grandchild, my siblings, and my mother. I learned from him to be patient, a workaholic, and listen; I learned everything from him! He was a great example.

Furthermore, her father was a generous man—a quality that Vero found remarkable. She described, ‘If he knew about a family without food, there was a box with groceries to help. If he heard about a child without Christmas, it was a gift there. I also experienced that. People that needed help more than me came into my life. Following his example, I helped them, and I am happy I followed his steps.’ Finally, she closed the idea, stating, ‘He left me beautiful teachings and values.’

Vero had also mentioned how important it had been for her that Isa and Mario focused on their studies instead of dealing with a world of violence. Her ex-husband’s departure had helped make her feel at home again. Finding a good balance was essential to this end: a little discipline, a little freedom, and much love—like her progenitor. Vero had attempted to emulate him to rebuild her home after her husband left: she stopped the abuse, got back on track with her children, and gave them a good childhood.

Managing to emulate his parental home also meant bringing celebrations back to her home. Towards the end of the fieldwork, I asked about her favourite memories, and Vero answered, ‘My favourite memories are birthdays, Christmas, New Year’s Eve parties with my children [after her ex-husband left]. He always ruined life (*existencia).* The moment that he left our lives, everything was better.’ She linked this to her father again, ‘I would be a blabbermouth if I tell you that I ever saw my father mad at Christmas. He always said, “The problems of the house are of the house, and the work problems are of the work.” He gave us all the time in the world.’

However, Vero reluctantly admitted that she sometimes struggled to adapt to new things. She often discussed how she grew to accept Isa’s partners and Mario’s early fatherhood. Regarding the latter, Vero explained, ‘When Mario became a father, because, first, he was too young, and I wanted different things for him. He was too childlike. Well, I was also very young when I became a mother. One does not want them to commit the same errors. Obviously, they will do it, but if they are happy, I will keep my opinion to myself. Some things are better omitted'. Vero continued, 'I meant for him to do other things before becoming a father, but he wanted to be a young dad, so he could enjoy being with his child. He was not wrong about that, maybe she [the mother] was not the right person, but I did not meddle.' She concluded this observation, reminding me how happy and grateful she was to have Lucas in her life.

Vero and Jacqui imagine domesticity through scenes of mutuality and conviviality, motivated by the value of love and other cognate manifestations—e.g. tenderness, care, or affection. If I put these different scenes together, it is to show the complicated intertwining of domestic scenes that influence Vero and Jacqui's desires. Vero focuses on her parents' support and help when thinking about positive domesticity. For her, they gave her love, support, and protection. She offsets her husband's shadow with images of protection, restoration, and care that characterise her later parenting. Jacqui takes a similar route. She mobilises nostalgic scenes of care, hospitality and peace to contrast her current distress—i.e. feeling like a nomad between temporary houses and the estrangement from her children. For Jacqui, the idealisation is about what is lost; Vero imagines what could have been.

Two recurrent scenes dominate what they like to personify. First, mutuality appears as the cardinal value. They insist on spotlighting reciprocity among the members of their families. It takes the form of Jacqui and her husband helping their children with their educations and interests, Jacinto's efforts to be helpful at home, or their children's giving them money or assisting them with domestic problems. Likewise, Vero highlights that she must help her children escape her husband's abuse. She owes them a better life. In the present, they continue to help each other by paying for food, listening to each other's problems, and giving each other useful gifts.

The second type of scene that dominates their desire is conviviality. This value permeates the idealisation of domesticity. Vero remembers her first Christmas without her ex-husband: she bought gifts, prepared a nice dinner, and enjoyed a peaceful night with her children. Jacqui underlines both small and large gatherings as special occasions. She values both evening high teas with her family and large parties with her friends and relatives. Being together, having a good time, and sharing memories, jokes, and food appear fundamental to the desired domesticity.

Scenes of domestic life are not a definite set of principles. The primary source of kinship desire is biographical memory. Jacqui and Vero have learnt from their parents, and they imitate, recreate, or improve on certain scenes that entail those practices and values to make them feel content as adults. These caregivers exhibit the traces of being raised by their parents and guardians under the twentieth-century developmental state. They link their experiences with the present circumstances using their reminiscences.

Jacqui, Vero and the other caregivers remember good and bad experiences as children, influencing their ethical musings.[17] As expected, they consider good parents to be the ones who were present or 'had been there'—i.e. who had provided for, talked with, and behaved affectionately towards them: in other words, fulfilling events of mutuality and conviviality. This assessment usually excuses fathers if they were not communicative or did not act lovingly because those were 'other times'. On the other hand, parents assert that common negative traits that define bad parenting include abandoning their children, behaving egoistically, refusing child support, or not making enough effort to build a proper home.

Vero's and Jacqui's parenting styles also address another relevant value: flexibility. Jacqui and Vero confront multiple trials that call for plasticity. They read these concessions as flexibility with the more traditional scenes of industrial domesticity and their own 'ways of being' (*formas de ser*). For them, it is more important to maintain a convivial and supportive home with happy children than to keep insisting on past images of domestic life. Socioeconomic conditions also undermine their capacity to enact ideal domesticity. Therefore, they often claim that 'Learning new things is always a good thing,' or 'One must keep up with the times.' Jacqui and Vero imagine themselves as modern parents, willing to bend past rules and social conventions for their children's wellbeing. This flexibility also manifests itself as an effort to improve parenting. Flexibility becomes something valuable in itself.

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[17] See Araujo & Martucelli 2012: 146-7; Castillo 2016 for similar observations

A brief outline of the industrial and post-industrial domestic imaginaries

What are the origins of such scenes of mutuality, conviviality, and flexibility? Imaginaries, as social formations, have their history and bear the traces of previous generations' elaborations on desire (Moore 2007: 94; see also Sangren 2013b). As public textual formations, they stage specific relations between the domestic and the political community. The last section outlines scenes of conviviality, mutuality, and flexibility that reflect changes to industrial domesticity. These scenes constitute what I have called the post-industrial domestic imaginary. In broad strokes, we may associate an industrial imaginary with the developmental state (1938-1970) and post-industrial domesticity with the neoliberal reforms and late capitalism in Chile (1990-present). This section charts the historical trajectory of the post-industrial domestic imaginary to understand these changes. The goal is to explore the historical dimensions of urban domesticity in Chile.

Before the industrial domestic imaginary, the colonial Catholic domestic imaginary and the liberal-conservative domestic imaginary catalysed vital domestic scenes to a certain degree. The Catholic imaginary encouraged desire, organising scenes based on the fear of good, temperate love, and pious families (Goivovic 2005a; 2005b; Pereira Larraín 2007; R. Salinas 1998, 2005, 2006; Salinas & Goicovic 2000). It also underpinned race structures and the moral economy of honour, becoming central to colonial society (Goivovic 2005a; V. Undurraga 2008). In contrast, the nineteenth-century liberal-conservative state produced a new domestic imaginary by implementing a new civil code and citizenship practices that reinforced gendered hierarchies and the legal privileges of legitimate children over illegitimate (Arancibia & Cornejo 2014: 279; Ponce de León, Rengifo & Serrano 2006; R. Ward 1997). This overall shift in language would signal that communal family honour lost its social puissance as a value, partly replaced by the juridical domain and liberal ideas such as contract and freedom (Caulfield, Chambers & Putnam 2005; Milanich 2009). Nevertheless, neither imaginary could structure domestic life in Santiago as powerfully as expected by the elite.

As Santiago grew larger due to capitalist transformations and waves of migrants in the late nineteenth century, the town transformed into a deeply divided city that congealed the economic and cultural divide between classes (de Ramón 2000; Romero 2007). When women migrated to the city, looking to escape the rural world's violence, they could not enact domesticity and maternal responsibilities as imagined by doctors, the press, and charities. Instead, they had to find jobs or work from home, neglecting children and living in unsafe conditions due to low wages and deplorable working conditions (Brito 1995). Likewise, men did not invest in domesticity, as they migrated continuously, looking for economic opportunities due to the agricultural and mining-centred structure of labour. Since colonial times, hegemonic forms of masculinity among the lower classes did not feature the domestic as an object of commitment; thus, there was little reason to uphold marriage and cohabitation.[18] Finally, deplorable housing, poor public health and social segregation caused an increase in child mortality, child abandonment, and juvenile delinquency (Hidalgo 2000; Romero 1984; Urbina 2002).

The newly formed developmental state project revolutionised the domestic sphere in the first half of the twentieth century in response to these developments. State power to shape domesticity had grown since the 1900s. Schooling efforts, puericulture and hygienist discourses slowly permeated the growing public sphere and state apparatus (Durán 2012; Egaña 2000; Illanes 2007; Serrano 1999; Vera 2016; Zárate 1998). However, a new political project shifted the framework. Instead of liberalism's scientific family or Catholicism's pious homes, the state apparatus mobilised new scenes of domesticity that were about mutuality as the basis of the working-class family (Thomas 2011: 41-3). As Rosemblatt points out, 'This was a gendered project: elites would make men into reliable breadwinners who produced wealth a supported their families and women into diligent housewives and mothers who bore and raised the nation's "human capital".' (2000: 4; see also Lavrín 1998; X. Valdés 2005).

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[18] Chileans have self-described themselves as a country of fatherless children (guachos), reflecting the complex relationship between fatherhood and motherhood as a nation (S. Montecino 1991; G. Salazar 1990).

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the Constitution of 1925 would set the basis for a new political regime to bolster the state apparatus to protect Chilean families. Since the 1930s, the state also reformed segments of the Civil Code to reflect the supposed symmetry between husband and wife regarding patrimony, inheritance, and authority over the children (Arancibia & Cornejo 2014). The Popular Front governments (1938-1954) created a welfare system in coherence with the new imaginary. The state policy included a family wage to anchor the idea of a family wage system: a gendered division of domestic labour and single-income household reproduction (Rosenblatt 2000: 59ff.). The state also restructured a series of other services supported by private organisations led by middle-class professionals to cater to the population: health and sanitary services (Farías 2019; Ibarra 2013), pensions and social security (Renfigo 2017a; J.S Valenzuela 2006), housing and urban planning (Murphy 2015; Rivera 2012), labour regulations (Lizama 2011), and education (Renfigo 2017b, 2019). Most policy innovations created and secured entitlements for workers and their families. Under the new state, mothers found themselves dealing with state agents (social workers, nurses, midwives, and teachers) who attempted to enact programmes intended to craft modern motherhood and wifehood, muddling the logic of privacy and autonomy (Illanes 2007; Pieper Mooney 2009; X. Valdés 2005; Zárate 2017).

This imaginary positioned men and women as partners in mutuality, support, or solidarity to start families. While concrete relations would still reflect power asymmetries and violence, the discursive consensus in the 1940s was that men and women must work together to reproduce and raise children for the nation. Men had to work and provide, while the women had to support their husbands and care for their children. The ideal residential pattern was neolocal—continuing with a Catholic principle—but owning a proper house would become a more attainable goal with the support of housing agencies, industries, and political organisations (Murphy 2015; L. Valenzuela 2008). Tenderness moved to the core of domestic scenes: partners loving each other, children loving their parents and parents loving them back. Under this imaginary, children are an object of care and affection. The idea that children must play and go to school would mature under this regime (Renfigo 2012, 2019; Rojas 2010: 418-49, 456).

The post-industrial imaginary, which influences these parents, appropriates elements of the industrial domestic imaginary that had mutated under the dictatorship and post-authoritarian governments.[19] Consolidated under the latter governments, parents enact accommodation, change, and experimentation. Undoubtedly, the neoliberal precarisation of life has impacted their way of life. Economic and social obstacles created by neoliberal policies have hindered the desire for industrial domesticity (Gutiérrez & Osorio 2008; Baeza, Donoso & Rojas 2013). However, anti-authoritarian sentiments have also affected everyday life and intimate relationships. The end of the dictatorship has entailed a 'democratisation of the social bond', opening a political horizon to assess personal interactions and to criticise perceived excess of abuse (Araujo & Martucelli 2012: 90-2; Araujo 2019: 24-6).

We must notice that two other domestic imaginaries might influence domestic life in Santiago. The first one is the *neoliberal authoritarian domestic imaginary*. The Pinochet regime (1973-1990) spawned a new domestic imaginary forged by a conservative outlook and ideological market principles (Araujo 2009; Thomas 2011: 139ff; Vera 2005). The emerging family fantasy displayed domestic scenes of fathers as leaders and investors while mothers were the house managers and raised children as patriots and Catholics.[20] A second domestic imaginary is the *constructivist domestic imaginary*. Due to the individualisation of biographies and life projects, kinship relations are not powerful affective and normative mechanisms for organising desires and projects by default (Güell 2000; Sisto 2009). Drawing on feminist and progressive discourses, a new imaginary has slowly influenced domesticity. The phantasmatic promise of communication drives the search for tools that create forms of domesticity and parenthood that balance individual desires and family.[21]

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[19] Ximena Valdés has framed this imaginary as a modified 'traditional' order of the nuclear family, conjugal partnership and the strong aspiration of mutuality that allows more pragmatical decisions around the gendered division of labour and affective attunement (2005, 2008). Research on Chilean gender folk models have examined the prevalence of a *pragmatic model* (UNDP 2010: 62-4). *Peripheral fatherhood* (X. Valdés 2009) and *permissive models of rearing* (S. Salazar 2006) also express this process of accommodation.

[20] Chilean researchers have explored this imaginary as *traditional* and *misogynist* gender folk models (UNDP 2010: 60-3); *neo-patriarchal fatherhood* (X. Valdés 2009: 396-9) and the *authoritarian model of rearing* (S. Salazar 2006).

Dealing with the fantasy

The fantasies encouraged by the post-industrial imaginary offer support for Vero's and Jacqui's desires. These psychic images create the domestic scenes of love they pursue. As Lacan suggests, the constitution of the lack, based upon a concrete but inscrutable *objet a*, sets the paradoxical stabilisation of desire. The scenes—together with the biographical role of mother and matriarch—allow them to energise their libidinal participation in the world and capture some *jouissance.* But, like any fantasy, the price is to open oneself to the disruptive effects of this force.

However, we must depart from the more mechanical reading of fantasies and imaginaries here. The process of conciliating life around these fantasies entails making sense of the different structures of mattering in which one dwells. Commitments and moods also ground forms of participation in the world and affect how fantasies may structure motivation. Jacqui and Vero have tackled their fantasies, pursuing diverging paths.

Jacqui still felt stuck towards the end of the fieldwork. She had to move again, and her new house felt burdensome. Jacqui did not move far from her daughter Marcela to protect their relationship. Her less-than-favourite son-in-law was helping to make domestic repairs, but as soon as I arrived, she started to express dissatisfaction. She would often complain, 'I do not like the house, too many problems,' or 'I want my son-in-law out of my house.' Her landlady was also bothering her with the renovations. I could feel how exhausted she was.

Getting close to seventy, Jacqui was still working, searching for homes, and raising grandchildren. The image of having a proper middle-class retirement in the Achiras house was fractured forever. Even at the end, Jacqui felt uneasy about discussing the scam. It was hard to address the issue in a long conversation. The few times she talked about it; she showed a defeated demeanour. ‘I feel like I would do differently,’ she said, referring to her self-perceived responsibility. Losing the house encompassed one critical error that shifted her position within her phantasmatic scene.

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[21] Likewise, studies in Chile have examined this imaginary as *liberal* gender folk models (UNDP 2010: 65); *neo-domestic fatherhood* (X. Valdés 2009) and the *self-confident model of rearing* (S. Salazar 2006).

During the same period of time, Jacqui undertook a new responsibility: giving Romi, her granddaughter, a home. The move started with some tensions and giving up something important for Jacqui. She revealed,

> I do not want Romi to keep living with her mother there, in Maipú. Romi is not like her mother’s family. She [her ex-daughter-in-law] is fine, but the rest of her family have no manners. She has a hard time. I think she is depressed. She tells me that she never sees her father, and her mother’s partners do not like her. She needs a place. I have a room for her here […]. It just needs some tidying up. There I have my crafts, my materials. It is not a problem. I think it could create some conflict. Nicole [another granddaughter] does not get along with Romi. She feels that Romi is my favourite. Far from true.

The last time I saw Jacqui, Romi had arrived at her house a while ago. The relationship between grandmother and grandchild was slightly tense. Initially, the latter was shy and obedient, but later, she felt more comfortable and misbehaved. Jacqui and I sat down for elevenses on the day of my visit. While we were chatting and drinking tea, Romi joined us with her boyfriend. Lost in their world, they were discussing a dance assignment for school. Jacqui griped about the young woman’s lack of interest in academics, attempting to pierce through her bubble. This lament echoed Jacqui’s ongoing disquiet with Romi’s presence. She still loved her and wanted to give her a home, but the tensions were growing. Romi was messy and lazy; Jacqui was strait-laced and hardworking. After fifteen minutes at the dinner table, she left to hang out with friends. Jacqui confessed her frustration when we were alone, ‘I did not think that it was going to be like this.’ ‘Like what?’ I asked. She repeated, ‘like this, like this…’. Jacqui still felt responsible for her granddaughter despite her behaviour. However, the grandmother still was conciliating her domestic fantasy with the reality of raising yet again another child.

The same period felt different with Vero. She talked as if someone had lifted a weight from her shoulders. Vero also revisited the past in the last days of the fieldwork. She still speculated if the abuse made her daughter prone to childishness and forced her son to grow up without enjoying his youth. However, Vero was thinking about things differently by her admission. She stated, ‘For me, they have always been my babies. What changed the most, mmm… I feel a little more relaxed. I do not work so much; both are professionals and have their lives. I look back and say, “I did not fail my task.” Enough! Many people keep asking me to work for them; thank God I am not a bad worker. But not anymore. It is time to stop.’ Vero was seeing the fruits of her labour. Her children appeared as adults with stable jobs and personal projects. She was feeling more confident in relying on them.

Economic and intimate problems had not disappeared completely. Vero was particularly concerned about the fights between Isa and her partner. The feeling that she could not solve all their difficulties became more salient. For example, Vero knew how destructive domestic violence can be and had attempted to warn her daughter. Yet, she accepted that Isa decided to stay in that relationship. Vero could not protect their children from everything.

Jacqui and Vero showed a strong sense of responsibility for their families throughout the fieldwork. Thus, they negotiated the pressures of extended networks of relatives, friends, and neighbours. External sources of moral guidance or authority were not few, but a low normative commitment characterised these engagements. They accepted or rejected advice without binding their families to external norms (See Araujo 2012). This attitude echoed how neoliberalism and the post-industrial domestic imaginary reinforce domesticity as a project enacted by autonomous selves with causally efficacious consciousness. These forces fostered an understanding of domesticity and kinship as a personalised style of living: ‘How we do things here” (*cómo hacemos las cosas acá*) or the house rules (*las reglas de la casa*).

The conciliation of fantasies with the shifting gears of everyday life transforms their sense of responsibility. Jacqui’s and Vero’s recurrent mentions of responsibility and regret disclose how they identify themselves as agents when focusing on their homes and families. Both mothers tend to assume almost absolute responsibility for their children and home, even when the circumstances are skewed against them. Jacqui’s and Vero’s families are far from dysfunctional cases by any standard. Yet, the possibility of moral failure intertwines with a strong sense of responsibility that grounds concerns and commitments to the point that they become coextensive with their sense of self.[22] The domestic imaginary opens an avenue for ethical selfhood, introducing a demand for intentionality and accountability to which they consent as acts of love and affection.

As mentioned above, fantasies help to hold together a sense of self. These domestic fantasies stage the original lack and the promise that love will bring pleasure and enjoyment. Pursuing such objects—conviviality, mutuality, and flexibility—never fulfils this promise. Parents see the scenes of conviviality and mutuality, especially around children, fostering the more recurrent fears. The imaginary makes the impossible promise that love is enough, creating a threat coming from outside of everyday life. Here, distress stems not from thin kin relationships. Instead, thick scenes of domesticity feed uncertainty and uneasiness. Vero's and Jacqui's kinship anxiety speaks not out of a lack of relatedness but rather from a surplus of it.

According to Freud's understanding, we may interpret Jacqui's 'vibes' and Vero's dream as uncanny—anxieties around strange nonhuman forces that mirror and disturb human agency (Freud 2003[1919]). For Lacan, the real unsettles the sense of selfhood and the symbolic order that sustains it (Dolar 1991). As Žižek (2009) and Berlant (2011) argue, the downside of fantasies is that they always crack. A sense of instability or impossibility haunts most of the inner workings and effects of imaginaries, as subjects indirectly pursue the real by embodying their fantasies.

Jacqui has a hard time talking about losing her house. She also laments the permanent hunt for dwellings. Our conversations often end with her saying she is tired and does not want to do a thing. Hospitality—something that brought her joy in the past—does not produce the same happiness. Cautious about her health, Jacqui manages her body as a means to labour. The discussion about remission and cellulitis is about how to keep going and working for others. Despite these struggles, she even takes on more responsibilities with her grandchildren. She says, ‘Her task is done.’ But little points to this conclusion.

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[22] The people I met have internalised the idea that citizenship and worthy personhood means taking care of their children and raising them to be worthy adults. Parenting appears to be the prime cause of children's personalities and destinies. When talking about criminals and deviants, they would ask rhetorically, 'Who raised them?' and, 'Where are their parents?' to assess the importance of good parenting in shaping moral personhood and citizenship.

On the other hand, Vero is trying to let go of some bad memories. She often says that the ethnography allows her to disclose and loosen up. Of course, her maternal role within the scene is still there. But her position has shifted. Vero is trying to take care of herself and build new limits with her children. This new attitude does not necessarily mean independence. Still, it modifies these relationships: being less judgemental about her children’s decisions and allowing them to give her gifts or contributions to the house. More importantly, Vero is trying to secure the legal rights of her home despite being a painful endeavour.

Jacqui and Vero have experienced this anticipatory dread slipping into everyday life. They have developed similar fantasies under the post-industrial domestic imaginary based on conviviality, mutuality, and flexibility. However, they actualise different ways to engage with the imaginary and interweave desire with other structures of mattering. For example, Jacqui negates her efforts and says that her task is ‘done’ but still embodies a matriarchal role. In contrast, Vero is slowly attempting to pursue other desires she has relegated to a secondary position.

We should not read this dissimilitude as a question of less or more freedom or agency. On the contrary, both are attempting to conciliate their fantasy, and its consequences remain to be seen. The power of the post-industrial imaginary to foster unconscious fantasies about love as conviviality, mutuality and flexibility does not mean that everyone attempts to recreate the same scenes or even plays the same role. Instead, it entails the coordinates of the libidinal force around kinship and how these values, which have a specific historical trajectory, appear to channel undertakings.

The post-industrial imaginary can also mould fatherhood scenes. We must consider that fathers like Ernesto and Alvaro, Cristina’s husband, also show this sense of personhood. They feel that their capacity to work and build domesticity defines their moral personhood and personal projects. Although the post-industrial domestic imaginary distinguishes between men and women and instils gendered domestic roles, it demands a general desire for domesticity. According to some interlocutors, women and men would enact natural roles in an ‘ideal world’: men would work, and women would take care of the children. Yet, they live in a world where they must reconcile multiple demands, thus prioritising domestic attachments.

The post-industrial domestic imaginary is not necessarily exclusive to lower-middle-class families. On the contrary, fundamental fantasies travel across classes. When discussing my research with people outside the seven households, most *Santiaguinos* have told me they feel described by most elements. There is no reason to think that some classes or socioeconomic groups monopolise specific imaginaries. What is true is that this kind of negotiation between industrial domesticity and late capitalism is widely recurrent among lower-middle-class families. It makes sense that their struggles for value around exploitation, alienation, and devaluation shape how they live this post-industrial domesticity imaginary.

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This chapter has explored the quality of domestic attachments and concerns among lower-middle-class parents. I agree that relatedness grounds care work, diffuse solidarity, and emotional receptivity, creating domestic motives. However, we need to analyse distressing sentiments and kinship anxiety from the perspective of desire. To this end, we must consider the fundamental categories of imaginary and fantasy. Based on this insight, the third section explores the post-industrial domestic imaginary that fosters unconscious fantasies that materialise as scenes of conviviality, mutuality, and flexibility. These scenes embody and pursue love and tenderness among these families. These fantasies disclose how imaginaries encourage drives to domestic objects of attachment, ground a sense of agency and self and, paradoxically, ‘protect’ them from the impossible promise of love and sacrifice under late capitalism

Chapter Four

Sacrificial Optimism
A domestic mood

As soon as I crossed Vero's door, I asked her, 'How was the trip to Chiloé?'—a popular tourist destination. Excitedly, she answered, 'I tell you, everything was beautiful! We had a perfect time!' Her trip may seem a typical thing for middle-class people to do, but her voice suggested a minor personal victory. It was her first week-long holiday in almost ten years. Before that occasion, she would tell me that her work had stopped her from fulfilling the dream of visiting Chiloé for many years whenever we discussed holidays.

Vero is a 48-year-old mother and grandmother. Vero lives with her adult children in a middle-class neighbourhood in Santiago—Isa and Mario. Lucas, her 6-year-old grandson, often stays with them. According to Vero, her house is humble. The dwelling has neither a second floor nor extra bedrooms, unlike other homes on the block. She is proud of her austerity. It symbolises her sacrifice, making the right decisions, and living a disciplined life.

Gestures of sacrifice, self-denial, and austerity dominated her domestic relationships throughout the fieldwork. Vero had worked at the same wearisome job for the last twenty-two years in one of her most significant acts of sacrifice. She was an employee at a small greengrocer's, and most of her work consisted of cleaning and preparing salads for sale. It was a job that took a lot out of her and barely helped her make ends meet. She often told me that she did not like to strike people as lazy; thus, she spent her time cleaning her boss' house, attending to clients, and tidying up the store. Her workday was from seven in the morning to three or four in the afternoon, after which she often would have to take care of her grandchild until the evening. She worked from Monday to Saturday, sometimes even Sundays, having just a few free weekends each year.

Her work was not only physically demanding but also emotionally draining. The greengrocery was a spatial and kinship extension of her boss Josefa's house. The store was next to the homes of both Josefa and her son. Josefa's husband, Don Tato, the couple's adult children, and their families all lived and worked there as well. This arrangement created a complicated relationship between Josefa, her family, and Vero. For Vero, working there was not strictly an economic activity. She had to deal with domestic disputes and mediate between her bosses and their children and families most of the time.

When I first visited her, she had become accustomed to the idea of having to work hard and make sacrifices for her family—despite her children being fully grown. She knew they were working adults but still felt her duty was to protect and help them. She claimed, 'The thing is, I work very hard (*me saco la cresta*). How could I go on holiday? Who would pay the bills?' She had never found the time, energy, or motivation to take more than a weekend away. The idea of enduring her work and making sacrifices commanded her discourse, 'I have to make sacrifices (*me tengo que sacrificar*) so that I can support the household (*sacar la casa adelante*); nobody is going to give me free stuff: nobody will say, "Here is bread for your family." I am the one responsible for my children. I always have been.' The idea of work dominated her life,

> I had to work in the morning, to have another job in the afternoon. Even at night, I had to work. That way, my children would not lack a thing. I have problems with my bones, but I have had the strength to keep going. There have been moments of struggle, but I have got ahead. When I work, my mind makes me forget the pain. I worked, worked, worked, and when I arrived home, I just collapsed. Mentally, I demanded myself that I could not waver. It was me who could not get sick. I would be very ill, with neurological pains (*dolores neurológicos*), and even then, I went to work. I asked the lord if he could help me to finish my day at work. What I needed was strength to work.

As a result of her dedication to sacrifice, she usually mentioned how little time she has for friends, hobbies, or love. With pride in her voice, she claimed, 'I have no time or energy for that.' When chatting about the few occasions that she went to see acquaintances or tags along with her children, Vero would say that she felt bound to go and did not want to disappoint the people close to her. She believed that one cannot always reject invitations.

Many Chilean researchers have observed the predominance of ideas such as effort (*esfuerzo*), determination (*empeño*), and sacrifice (*sacrificio*) in urban Chile when describing themselves vis-à-vis the demands of labour and domestic life (Arteaga, Abarca, Pozo & Madrid 2020; Castillo 2016; Guell & Yopo 2021; Guzmán, Barozet & Méndez 2017; UNDP 2012: 68-76; UNDP 2018; UNDP & Almabrands 2014). Working-class and middle-class individuals tend to portray themselves as struggling, resolute, and reasonable as they must balance making ends meet and being both good parents and dependable workers. These narratives highlight how responsible they feel not only for their own but also for their family's destiny, even though working and starting a family means affliction and adversity.

For these researchers, this language reflects the larger narrative of neoliberal individualisation and responsabilisation that compels people to accept accountability for their own future. However, researchers tend to neglect the exploration of the sacrificial dimension of this language and what it involves. They treat sacrifice, effort, responsibility, and determination as mere synonyms. In contrast, this chapter argues that sacrifice goes beyond mere speech to reflect an embodied mood that synthesises a fundamental impasse between labour and life.

This chapter explores how gestures, formulae, and actions around the idea of self-sacrifice and self-denial point to *sacrificial optimism*: an ordinary mood for dealing with the fundamental impasses of everyday life and creating enough futurity to keep going for one's children. The following section outlines the impasse these parents experience daily: the lopsided relationship between labour and life. Next, it considers the effects of never-ending labour and the degeneration of life: exhaustion, affliction, and dread. The third section examines how they deploy sacrifice to upend suffering and adversity as a positive and necessary condition for achieving social reproduction or intergenerational upward mobility. Sacrifice here does not emerge as a ritual practice but rather as the experience and cultivation of a mood through the gestures, formulae and cadences that permeate daily life. The final sections examine the relationships between this sacrificial mood, Catholicism, and the Chilean state.

Never-ending work and the neoliberal degradation of life

Sacrifice moves across different registers. Firstly, anthropologists have linked sacrifice with ritual activities that involve killing or offering victims to transcendental beings. These events usually create gift relations, events of copresence, communion or communication channels with gods and other entities (e.g. Hubert & Mauss 1981[1898]; Leach 1976; Robertson Smith 1995[1889]; Tylor 2010[1871]). They also have the power of constituting communities and social hierarchies, using rituals as particular forms of societal representation and sociality (Bloch 1992; Durkheim 1995[1912]; Girard 1989; Valeri 1985). However, sacrifice goes beyond the ritual event. A second register often captures sacrifice as abnegated labour or renunciation that is driven by ethical commitments (Gu 2021; Parry 2015; Shohet 2021; Weiss 2014). Nationhood, communities, and parenthood, among others, encourage individual or collective motives that human beings pursue without expecting something valuable in return. A third register has framed the phenomenon as a sacrificial economy or 'the calculation of loss and gain' (Bourdillon 1980: 12). It understands sacrifice as actions that entail a present renunciation to obtain a reward of greater value in the future (Bialecki 2008; Firth 1963; de Heusch 1985). While the previous register could fathom some form of exchange, the third register highlights this instrumental dimension of sacrifice.

Vero's account put us closer to the second register. She has made her life a commitment to their family fuelled by a promise of love. We must remember the unconscious domestic fantasy that supports her concerns and commitment—the replication of her childhood home. Vero is not concerned with enacting a metaphysical idea of family; neither is she attempting to exchange value with her offspring. As we will see, these possibilities are part of her sacrificial embodiment of motherhood. Yet, Vero focuses on creating a life by abnegation that can sustain a permanent commitment to nurturing and parenting.

The people I met in Santiago talked about sacrificing themselves for their children. Parents and caregivers shared Vero's concerns: an imbalance between life and work. Labour overwhelmed their daily lives. In this regard, wage and domestic labour were strongly burdensome. We might add bureaucratic labour (*trámites*) performed in schools, banks, municipalities, and health centres, among others, as a burden on their everyday lives. Likewise, the relational work enacted with acquaintances, friends, relatives, and neighbours could also add strain. Among these *Santiaguinos*, parenting was loving but abnegated labour.

The value of labour and abnegated labour in Chilean history is contradictory and ambiguous. On the one hand, Chileans have long held the duty of labour to support one’s family and oneself as a moral tenet and one of the informal citizenship requirements: one must work and make an effort to meet individual and family needs. On the other hand, however, they also see work as a threat that can undermine family life, good health, and the necessity for rest. Moreover, working too much can signal the love of money that speaks of an unhealthy obsession with material wealth and the neglect of kinship obligations and convivial relationships. Aligned with core ideas of liberalism, this contradictory interpretation reads labour as a generative power and a citizenship criterion available to most people, but at the same time, it must be limited for the wellbeing of individuals, families, and society.

Women perform the lion’s share of domestic and relational labour. Surveys have shown that Chilean people do not have a problem confirming women’s rights to autonomy and personal projects, but at the same time, they also believe that families and children would suffer if mothers were not at home during their children’s development (GET 2016; PUC & Adimark 2018). Despite some recent ideological changes, women still perform most of the domestic labour needs (Araujo 2005; Olavarría 2017). Therefore, women often find themselves both working to earn a wage and performing domestic chores. The imbalance between new aspirations and the conventional work distribution fosters scenes of modern motherhood, pressuring women to achieve personal, familial, and work satisfaction simultaneously (Murray 2015; Schild 2007; Yopo 2018).

Moving to wage labour, the social experience of work fosters common trends. Both women and men in Santiago manifest conflicted and fragmented subjectivities. The core experience is the sentiment of never-ending work (*trabajo-sin-fin*). As labour presents itself to consciousness as both the problem and the solution, one needs to work to contain labour difficulties (Araujo & Martucelli 2012). Workplace conditions foster an environment where performance tends to become individualised and strategic without only some communitarian and moral orientations (Soto 2009; Stecher & Soto 2019). In a more comparative approach, Arteaga, Greibe, Pérez & González (2016) argue that two understandings of labour appear among low-income and middle-income workers and small-business owners: work as the motor for upward social mobility, and work as a repetitive and banal activity to attain livelihood and social reproduction.

Vero, Ernesto, and Karen—I will discuss this couple later—display most of these tendencies. They embrace being hard workers and self-reliant but do not care much about their job position as an expression of vocation or mastery. Jobs do not appear as a liberating force or a venue for realisation. While grateful, Ernesto and Vero are not enthusiastically attached to their posts, even considering their intimate closeness with their employers. Karen has even tried to change jobs. Instead, labour appears as never-ending and abnegated; one *must* work. For Karen and Vero, the double workday augments this sentiment. Most discussions about jobs, work, and the workday emphasises exhaustion and the mandate of persevering despite everything.

Turmoil emerges at the intersection of the agency of the generative power of labour and the degradation of life due to never-ending work. Vero, Karen, and Ernesto work and keep working until exhaustion, affliction, and dread overwhelm their lives. When I visit them, they are working or thinking about work. When they are not working, they try to idle and rest. Breaks for resting are few. When they have free time, they usually attempt to perform a little more relational work—calling relatives, fixing problems for other people, activating networks—thus having little actual rest.

The experience of labour as never-ending tended to create two recurring concerns throughout the fieldwork. The first one was about fearing they could not provide for the children. In Vero’s case, this fear appeared when discussing her current work situation. A couple of months before her vacation in Chiloé, I visited her. The appointments at Vero’s house usually started with the same question and answer. ‘How are you, Vero?’ I would ask. She usually replies, ‘Good, but very tired.’ That day she was physically and mentally exhausted. ‘I spent the whole morning on my feet, cutting vegetables, you know me.’ She showed me the scars on her hands. Deep and black grooves around the tips almost erased her fingerprints.

These wounds joined the health and physical struggles we had discussed until that point: her hip and back pains; a blood pressure disease inherited from her father; her sleeping problem due to stress; and migraines. Yet, Vero showed me these injuries with some pride. 'One must work,' she drove her point further.

However, what followed was different. I had grown accustomed to hearing Vero complain about Josefa and Don Tato's family, 'They do not love each other, Don Tato does not care about her daughter […]. They like Tato Jr. more. He does what he pleases.' She was critical of their attitudes towards each other and felt trapped by their conflicts. I had gone along with her grievances without understanding Vero's weekly ritual. Her frustration was palpable. Initially, I intended to stay more neutral, but I still asked, 'Maybe you could look for another job?' Vero looked at me like I suggested an implausible alternative. 'I need to work. I have worked there for years. They were kind enough to give me a job. They let me have all the flexibility to take care of my children,' she answered. Vero has worked with them for more than twenty years. They offered her a job that allowed her to reconstruct her life. A little disconcerted, I dropped the issue.

Throughout the following year, I probed if this attitude related to loyalty toward Josefa or gratitude for giving her an opportunity. Vero rejected this view; she did not feel compelled to stay for affective reasons. On another occasion, she said, 'I do not own Josefa anything. If I did, I paid her a long time ago. Instead, Vero offered me back worrying images. 'How are going to pay the bills,' or 'If one does not pay the bills, the banks are going to take the house' were recurrent motifs. Finally, she stated, 'Nobody else will put bread on the table.'

When I asked her why she did not request days off or holidays, she rejected the proposition, conjuring up visions of losing her job. The fear of losing the house or income was more perplexing in Vero's case. Despite not being part of the consolidated middle class, she still has some financial stability. Vero was frugal, a good worker and did not have a lot of standing debt. The most significant amount of money she owed was a credit loan she took to help Isa.

Later, the same day we discussed her injuries, we addressed another concern relating to work that also came up often: 'being present' (*ser/estar presente*). This metaphor organised relatedness. It indexed tenderness, care, and communication among the people I met in Santiago. Vero was concerned about his grandchild, Lucas. She considered Lucas's mother is not present enough in his life. According to the grandmother, the young woman spent too much time at work and with her friends. Without hesitancy, she projected the sacrificial mother onto her ex-daughter-in-law. 'When I worked, I was always present. I always make time for them. Even when my kids were older, I was there. I slept with the door open, so they could feel me when they arrived,' Vero contrasted. Working too much and neglecting your children was a mistake. She closed the issue, remembering her father, 'He sacrificed everything to give us a good life, and he never was an absent parent.'

In the earlier parts of the fieldwork, Vero accepted that she worked too hard and had neglected her health, but she had difficulty seeing and trusting the alternatives their children offered her. Her acceptance of death initially scared me. On one occasion, she said she expected to die young, just like her father. Vero's concerns—not being able to provide and not being able to be there—echoed the other households I shadowed in Santiago.

This experience of the violence of late capitalist labour evokes what different authors have understood this temporality of capitalist life as *exhaustion* (Povinelli 2011), *slow death* (Berlant 2011), or *slow violence* (Nixon 2011). Violence dwells in *quasi-events* or *becoming-events* within the ordinary (Berlant 2011; Berlant & Povinelli 2014; Povinelli 2011)—usually underpinned by impossible decision making, haunting impasses, and aching snapbacks within everyday routines (Stewart 2007). Vero embodies life as a constant struggle to hold on to the generative power of labour, all the while containing the degeneration of life due to the harmful effects of working with a worn-down body and mind. I will refer to this pattern as *degeneration of life* due to its relation to labour's generative power.

In this regard, Vero's story illustrates three expressions of the degeneration of life under late capitalism in Chile: exhaustion, affliction, and dread. *Exhaustion* is a recurrent aspect of the degeneration of life among the participants of this research. Daily conversations dwelt on when they could find the time to rest. Phrases such as 'I did not sleep at all last night' (*no dormí nada ayer*) or 'I am tired' (*estoy cansada*) were repeated over and over as justification for low energy, lack of engagement, or feelings of disorientation. Sometimes they said they did not sleep because they needed to finish some small casual job (*pituto*) or help the children with their homework. At other times, they would claim that they felt restless because of the anxiety of not knowing how to resolve an issue. In an effort to frame the sentiment, they would disclose that, ‘The angst takes hold of me,’ (*es que la angustia me toma*) to explain why their responsibilities overwhelmed them and did not let them sleep. Rest is a weighty matter. These parents would often try to find time and space to rest—to sit down or nap (*pegar una pestaña*)—on their busy days.

Physical and mental afflictions are other expressions of the degeneration of life and the tension between life and labour. The most common afflictions I registered were distress, restlessness, anger, and sadness motivated by personal conflicts or difficult situations at work (Violeta, Vero, Soledad, and Cecilia). Others would claim that their jobs involved repetitive activities that have caused aches and pains in the long run: hands (Vero and Ernesto), back (Alvaro), legs (Jacqui and Violeta) and headaches (Cristina). Furthermore, they often deployed psychological terms such as *depression* (*depre[sión]*) and *anxiety* (*ansiedad)*. However, they also used more colloquial expressions such as ‘I am feeling down’ (*estoy bajoneado*), ‘I am feeling distressed’ (*estoy angustiado*), and ‘I am feeling sad’ (*tengo [una] pena*).

The third effect of the degradation of life is the transformation of anxieties into a *sense of dread* and the irruption of scenes of tragedy. Discussions with these parents about these issues tend to reflect the fragility of their current trajectory. They are afraid that fragile bodies and job instability hinder them from using their capacity to work to earn income. The imagined failure to pay bills conjures scenarios like losing their home or social stigma. While they appreciate good news and family achievements—they are far from acute pessimists—most of them feel anxious about the future, ruminating about what can go wrong. Sometimes they attempt to dismiss these feelings purposively. At other times, they think they should prepare to confront the most unpleasant scenarios, save money, or mentally prepare for the worst.

The temporality of never-ending work makes time precious. Finding solutions to domestic problems during working hours could mean losing part of one’s salary or asking for administrative leave, which is usually reserved for emergencies. Simple concerns—e.g. a broken heater or missing keys—may have a disorderly impact on these families' daily rhythms. Although they may seem invisible, they still consume time. Parents would usually express this idea, mobilising formulae such as, 'It threw me off my game' (*me saco de mi onda*) or, 'It disrupted my schedule' (*me desordenó*) to capture these maladjustments' affective and embodied manifestations.

Upending the degeneration of life by sacrificial optimism

Like Vero, Ernesto worked around the clock. On my first visit to his house, I noticed a small table next to the window looking out onto the street. The table was full of materials and tools such as paper, cardboard, glitter, scissors, and cutters. In the corner of their living room, he had been crafting *piñatas* and paper hats that he could not complete during his regular workday. The simple setting of one table and one chair quietly dominated the scene. His makeshift workshop was across the room. One could see from the dinner table. It was a constant reminder that he was always behind with his work.

He, Karen, his wife, and their children—Gaspar and Camila—lived in a three-bedroom house in the southern district of San Ramón. He worked making piñatas and party supplies. It was vital to note that Ernesto did not work from home. At least, he should not. He supposedly had a regular workplace in his boss' household. As discussed in Chapter One, Ernesto's intimate relationship with his boss Fernando mirrored that of Vero and Josefa—a mix of intimacy and contract relations. Ernesto was an employee and earned the minimum wage (around £350 per month).

The rhythm of labour affected Ernesto and Karen's household. Ernesto would get up early on workdays to go to Francisco's house. There, he made *piñatas* and other party supplies. In the afternoon, Ernesto had to pick up their children from school. He took care of the children until Karen's arrival later in the day. He served the elevenses and watched the children during this time. When I visited them, we chatted a lot while watching television. The younger child often stayed with us while Gaspar played video games in his room. Ernesto kept working on his *piñatas* while discussing that week's football matches. I came to expect that he would comment on how drained he was. Other times his migraines and the pain in his hands also came up. This working-class father was a little more exhausted on the weekday than at the weekend. Because he was more spirited on Saturdays and Sundays, we delved into politics and conspirations. Still, the pile of unfinished *piñatas* surrounded him.

In the later months of the ethnography, I asked if he liked to craft *piñatas.* 'Mmm, yes,' he responded half-heartedly. 'I like it when a finished one. When I see one model, I know I can do it [to replicate it]. That gives joy. I am pleased when it ends up well constructed,' he continued. He also asserted, 'Not everyone has the same skills. You may be good at what you do. He is skilful in something different. I am good doing this.' Yet, he drove the point to something that I had heard before. He stated, 'As long it is an honest job, it is fine.' At the moment, I thought Ernesto was trying to find one concrete good thing to offset this exhausting labour.

He finished the *piñata*, and we moved to the table. Again, the topic of showbiz surfaced. Karen and Ernesto were discussing two celebrities that they perceived as very different. Both were models and had often been embroiled in scandals. But one of them now was a real estate businesswoman, while the other was still going to parties and talking about her love affairs on television. As if Ernesto was trying to comment on the previous topic, he remarked, 'You see, the important thing is that she [the former woman] is hardworking'. Karen agreed.

Labour dominated Karen's life. Not only had she responsible for most household domestic chores, but she had to work from Monday to Saturday. In addition to the long hours, her job presented many challenges during that time: an uncompromising boss, the need to learn to use new operational software, helping foreign co-workers, an abusive system of penalties and navigating the overcrowded public transport system. On top of this, she was the emotional pillar of her home.

Between 2017 and 2018, Karen attempted to find a new job and escape her boss at the money transfer company. Fed up with her, she pursued other opportunities. She found a job cleaning at a hospital and tried to sell homemade food. But, both projects floundered. Karen also tried returning to being a cashier at a supermarket chain, but they did not call her back.

Besides her working environment, another reason also motivated Karen to find a more flexible job. She explained, 'Someone needs to take care of Camila, school is finishing early, and Ernesto cannot watch her. My cousin can do it for a couple of weeks, but I need to do it in the long term.’ Karen justified it, using a mix of the ‘being there’ metaphor and practicality. Nurseries were expensive, and she did not know any relatives or friends who could care for Camila. Yet, Karen also felt that it was her duty as a mother; thus, she should raise her. A more flexible job would allow her to contribute to the household budget while fulfilling her maternal responsibilities.

However, a balanced job never happened. On the weekdays, Karen was overwhelmed. She had to keep working at the company while finding time to organise Ernesto, Gaspar, and herself to raise Camila. Rarely would her relatives help, but this mother mostly sidelined them. Sometimes arriving after eight at night, she still reviewed Camila’s homework and listened to her day even if she was falling asleep. Ernesto had advanced some of the chores, but she had to finish the rest. She worked in the morning on weekends, returning to have lunch. Still exhausted, Karen often took the post from Ernesto and finalised cooking the meal. When we sat at the dinner table, I could see how she closed her eyes and dozed a little bit. Then, I would look at Ernesto. He would keep talking about aliens.

When I ask Ernesto and Karen why they work so hard, their answer is swift and assertive: to give their children whatever they need and to help them as long as they can. Both experience sadness, feelings of inadequacy, headaches, and malaise, but remain unshakeable about their goal. Accomplishing these ambitions is challenging, however. For them, working long hours allows them to keep their family afloat. Their savings are minimal, so they live from month to month. Moreover, they still have an outstanding debt with a retail store they are trying to contest through a legal agency. Several other issues plague their lives: the children’s education, health problems and the legal ownership of their house.

Now, where is the optimism? Ernesto’s eldest son, Gaspar, invited me to his high school graduation ceremony in the last month of fieldwork. There, I realised the importance of ideas such as dreams, the future, and better opportunities for regenerating life. These ideas circulated throughout the ceremony; speeches and comments conjured scenes of hardship and sacrifice, pointing out the transformative power of sacrificing for one’s children. The idea that parents’ sacrifices help children achieve their dreams of studying articulated most speeches. Each discourse entertained this view that catalysed an ethical concatenation that connected dreams, sacrifice, family, children, and aspirations. One and all expressed gratitude to the teaching staff and workers in the small Catholic school.

Towards the end of the fieldwork, I asked them what they thought about sacrifice. Karen stated,

> Sacrifice for me is to make an effort, go out to work, sick or not sick, tired or not tired, get to work and comply with my schedule, do what I have to do, and mentally be okay. Even though I am feeling terrible inside, I must put on my 'happy face'. For me, it is not an "Ah, how terrible!" I see it as a sacrifice. I am doing it for my children, for myself, for my house, to get ahead. Still, I would like it to be better paid or valued a little more. It means going out to work every day, even though you are not feeling well psychologically. There, the only thing left is to give yourself the strength needed.
>
> To which Ernesto replied,
>
> There is a song that says, 'After walking a long way, there is a reward.' I do not remember which song. I told my son the same thing. I told him, 'You are going to study, and sometimes it will be difficult for you, but make a small sacrifice, an effort. This will be good for you and your children, not for us. It is very hard. But when you make that sacrifice… when you reach the goal and find that reward, you are going to feel good.' I know that in this country, many people make a great sacrifice to be with their children [...]. For me, the sacrifice is to see beyond the effort.

Like the other parents, Ernesto, Karen, and Vero are mostly optimistic about the future. All of them genuinely believe they could strive and raise their children to have fulfilling and peaceful lives despite their pessimism over the economy and society's direction. Instead of absolute defeatism or cynicism, parents care about their families and homes. This attitude seems to echo national trends among the urban population: optimism about the potential of personal sacrifice and pessimism about society (see Güell 2009; UNDP 2012). They embody moral confidence about their life decisions and the capacity for being causally efficacious regarding their futures.

Since the twentieth century, Chilean citizenship regimes have implied domesticity and the pursuit of a worthy life as political ontologies of personhood. However, under late capitalism and the post-industrial imaginary of domesticity, the core scenes of conviviality and mutuality foster a labyrinthine fantasy. Labour is not enough to generate the domestic plot and ends up bolstering the degeneration of life: exhaustion, afflictions, and dread. People feel that they enact these domestic scenes, and simultaneously they have endured the friction of pursuing them. The fundamental impasse between labour and life generates an iterative and uneasy attachment to the fantasy. Parents commit to middle-classness, domesticity and raising children, but they must find a way to embrace these shifting contradictions that threaten to pull them apart.

Here, I argue that *sacrifice* spills outside the domain of language and ritual. Neither justification nor explanation, sacrifice is the by-product of the embodiment of the post-industrial imaginary. It is a way of Being-in-the-world that attunes them to look at the positive around them and produce futurity in order to gift it to their children.

In the fieldwork, parents and caregivers transform laboriousness and degradation of life into sacrifice—meaningful ways of living, renouncing, and giving. I argue that *sacrificial optimism* is an embodied ethical mood being affected and cultivated by them. As informed by the post-industrial domestic imaginary and biographical memory, the parents and the caretakers of these parents are personal *exemplars* and *counterexemplars* that ground a vague *ethical pedagogy* for nurturing (Faubion 2001; Humphrey 1997; Laidlaw 2014). We may remember that citizenship and domesticity persuasively invite people to make their own rules. There is neither a dominant moral code nor paramount textual support. Instead, we might understand sacrificial optimism as a form of 'feeling-thinking' (Wikan 1995) or 'morality' (Zigon 2009, 2010) learnt by embodying the post-industrial domestic imaginary.

We may consider Martin Heidegger as one of the crucial thinkers on mood. The German philosopher argues that '…*The mood has already disclosed, in every case, Being-in-the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something*.' (Heidegger 1962[1927]: 176; original emphasis). Expanding on that, Ratcliffe states that moods '…constitute the range of ways in which things are able to matter to us, and are thus essential to a sense of the kinds of significant possibility that the world can offer up for us.' (2013: 159; see also 2009).

Jason Throop broadens our understanding of this concept. The anthropologist states that these affective formations are a configuration of intermediate experiences that attune to the world in a concrete way (2014, 2015, 2017). Throop's 'Suffering and Sentiment' (2010) argues that we may examine the transition from *mere-suffering*—a granular experience of social suffering—to *suffering-for*, as intelligible images and emotions as fundamental among the Yap. As a technology of self and ethical virtue, this recurring motif facilitates the internalisation of Yap's social organisation and the experience of a precarious world. Another work that explores this process exceptionally is Mattingly's 'Paradox of Hope' (2010). She shows that Afro-American families cultivate hope through healing dramas that intend to upend the despair felt by the slim possibility of their children's health improvements. From these ethnographic analyses, I have taken the idea that moods are robust relational dispositions that enable attuning to concerns and attachments through quasi-intentional refashioning and cultivation.[23]

A mood does not predefine the world but can reinforce entanglements as encouraging concerns that guide affective dispositions depicted by fantasies. Human beings care about the world as they attune to it through this process in a habitual manner, as a totality for embodied ordinary and practical activity (Zigon 2014a, 2014b; Throop 2014). Simultaneously, individuals care about a plurality of concrete attunements that emerge as potential encounters, wherein the objects offer more salient features to one's consciousness (McKay 2018).

In this regard, the degradation of life is an impasse under late capitalism. Vero, Ernesto, and Karen undertake the sacrificial optimistic mood as a makeshift answer. Readers should not see these dispositions as 'strategies' because they are not meant to achieve any goal in themselves. Instead, I would argue that sacrificial optimism unfolds when people live and labour through exhaustion, affliction, and dread while enduring them from a moral and affective standpoint. In Santiago, parents mobilise moral formulae and intimate gestures in everyday life and inflect memories and speeches with a sacrificial cadence that ties this mood together.

Vero positioned herself as a stoical self when confronting the degeneration of life and never-ending labour. In everyday life, she embodied sacrificial optimism and often performed several gestures that expressed this specific form of abnegation.

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[23] Recent literature has shown the importance of understanding moral habits as something different from practical knowledge or skill (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005: 136).

One of the recurrent snapshots of sacrifice was working on the weekends. Towards the last months of the fieldwork, I addressed her health when we met on a Friday. Vero tended to neglect her headaches, high blood pressure and knee pain. Once again, she was in evident distress entering the weekend. When I visited, she was constantly rubbing her knees. ‘Did you go to the state clinic (*consultorio*)?’ I asked, worried. Sometimes, she had gone to check her illness; other times, she had disregarded her symptoms. In this case, Vero had gone but was not taking the pills prescribed by the doctor. ‘Too much money and they do not do much,’ she explained. Still rubbing her knees, she kept defending her position, ‘They make me feel sick.’

There, I shifted course. Have you considered taking the weekend off?’ Her answer was positive. The idea of taking Saturday and Sunday for herself had crossed her mind, but she needed the money. ‘Everything helps,’ she said. The mandate of never-ending work permeated her position. We kept talking about her job. Then, Vero revisited some ideas I had heard before: ‘No one else is going to put bread on one’s table,’ and ‘One’s is ultimately responsible for one’s household.’

Vero, to a certain extent, was holding out against these circumstances. She intended to get better medical attention and substantive rest in the future. Nevertheless, sacrifice was needed in the present. Later, she dismissed my concerns, ‘I still can do it.’ I experienced her words with a feeling of déjà vu. We had had this conversation a couple of times before. Perhaps, the sacrifice for her children would make more sense if Mario and Isa were younger. However, I found this motivation slightly confounding. They were working adults—more independent and self-sufficient than the average adult children I met in the fieldwork. Still, Vero insisted that she needed to make an effort for them.

The pressure of the degeneration of life was also patent in Ernesto and Karen’s household. As I have mentioned earlier, being exhausted was a recurrent grievance. Ernesto and Karen were burned out, and Karen confessed that she was struggling with being the breadwinner spouse and the responsibilities of motherhood. One Saturday afternoon, we were drinking coffee—just the three of us—and started talking about the difficulties of everyday life. Karen would recount how she would say to herself, ‘In the end, I do it for them’ to endure daily annoyances at work. Likewise, Ernesto reinforced that he worked for his family, planning to bear the pressure until their children could have their careers and families.

From there, Ernesto took the conversation in another direction. He talked about how they did not go out much. Karen jokingly pointed out that Ernesto did not want to go out. ‘He can be such grouch sometimes,’ she clarified. Ernesto responded candidly, ‘I am so tired that it is hard for me to cope with other people’. Instead of refuting him, his spouse agreed. The focus of their lives had become their children. They felt alienated even from Karen’s relatives. ‘They are different from us,’ Karen and Ernesto stated in unison. They felt alone but were somewhat prideful of that. ‘I would not change being a father for anything,’ Ernesto said. Karen nodded approvingly. The degeneration of life engendered social solitude. They have cordial relationships with friends and neighbours. Yet, they admit that only a few people are their real friends. I was part of the latter group.

Throughout their explanation, I recalled how Ernesto’s dream was going on holiday to other parts of Chile. Likewise, Karen had given up going to concerts and her desire to pursue a different career. In both cases, they subtly admitted having other desires. They felt fulfilled. Their family was their most significant accomplishment. Ernesto and Karen had agreed on prioritising working and parenting over other things.

The afternoon continued, and we discussed more mundane things, the latest political scandal and some Netflix series. The night was falling, and Karen had to sort out an issue with a neighbour. Then, she left for 20 minutes. We were alone with Ernesto. That day he was less spirited than usual. He moved his hands over his bald head and told me spontaneously, ‘I am feeling down.’ I was surprised. Ernesto tended to be more subtle in expressing his state of mind. Perhaps, the mandate of maintaining a masculine façade shaped this attitude. ‘Things are complicated,’ he continued. The father confessed that he did not know if he was doing enough. His question was, ‘Am I a good enough father?’ I could only offer a sympathetic ear. He did not say much else, but the idea of being an abnegated father gave him some comfort. I did not want to overstate my opinion because I did not know what good parenting is. Still, Ernesto felt reassured that he had given a lot to be there with their children, something other men would not do. Soon, Karen returned, and the jokes came back. For some reason, her husband claimed he was an expert dancer and would show us the next time he had an opportunity.

These stories talk about how to transform suffering and distress into something else. Vero, Ernesto, and Karen perform small gestures to embody a sacrificial life. On the one hand, they utter formulae to ground the recurring gesture of sacrifice that allows them to constitute their ethical disposition. On the other hand, gestures are subtle refusals or tilts, barely rising to consciousness. These gestures—*self-neglect, responsibility taking,* and *re-prioritising*—embody sacrifice, hardening their bodily disposition and maintaining individual vital courses as part of their daily routines. Gestures of self-neglect are how these parents try to sublimate, overlook, and dismiss their bodily and mental afflictions.[24] Responsibility taking relates to how they reinforce the mandate of self-reliance and iterate the ultimate concern of their lives: their children.[25] Re-prioritising relates to the gestures of strengthening their priorities vis-à-vis alternative aspirations. These parents often choose the perspective of the household over their interests. Personal expenditures and endeavours—e.g. movies, musical performances, dates, and romantic pursuits—must be coded as infrequent occasions of individual enjoyment and indulgences (*gustitos*).

While these formulae and gestures inhabit the ordinary as physical inclination, tunnel vision, recoils, and formulae that they repeat to themselves, I am not arguing that sacrificial elements in ritual settings are not relevant. Sacrificial optimism can ensue in language and more ritualised settings. Parents channel these formulae and gestures as passionate rhetoric, erupting at birthdays, weddings, New

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[24] Lower-middle-income Chileans know that getting medical attention in the public system can take time. Parents also consider that even a low-cost private practice is not an expense that they are willing to incur. As an alternative, they prefer to rely on ready-made solutions: over-the-counter medicine, homoeopathic treatments, massage, or rest.

[25] Recurrent formulae to embody this disposition are ‘I would give them the whole earth if I could’ (*les daría el cielo si pudiera*); ‘I want to give them everything that I did not have when I was growing up’ (*darles todo lo que yo no tuve*); ‘Children are here to be loved’ (*tus hijos los tienes para amarlos*); and, ‘I make sacrifices for them only [and not for myself]’ (*Yo me sacrificó por ellos*).

Year's Eve, and Christmas parties. For example, this is evident at Gaspar's graduation ceremony. Allow me to offer another illustration of this passionate rhetoric of a mother that I interviewed,

> [Regarding a daughter's college graduation] At such moments, you know that everything you did, everything that you fought for, was worthwhile. Those sleepless nights, when you were, like, 'Okay, I have to carry on, keep on doing this for them.' And they repay you like this, [achieving] graduating with a profession. You know that you want to give them everything, and you cannot. When their father left us, I did not know how to send an email. Yes, it took courage to go back to work. [College] is my dream for them. [I am] A little closer to finishing my task.

Sacrificial optimism can traverse different events but usually stays at the ordinary, transfiguring gendered ideological framing of various forms of labour, both for women and men. For example, when children are born, conjugality (and its absence) is framed as a partnership to raise them. Nevertheless, we may identify a gendered dimension in a sacrificial embodiment. These mothers feel more pressure to work harder and oversee domestic labour. They also perform relational labour, managing the emotional environment at home. However, the current demands of post-industrial domesticity have recently started to make similar demands on fathers.

In this regard, Ernesto and Karen open the door to tensions and power relations when trying to embody sacrificial optimism. They are committed to raising their children and exemplifying sacrifice to create futurity. However, it is noticeable that Karen has more responsibilities than Ernesto. She performs a significant portion of domestic labour, works longer hours, and oversees domestic planning. This lopsided distribution of labour generates tensions. Karen feels that she is single-handedly thinking about the future of their family. According to her, it is true that Ernesto works and helps at home but does disappoint her when she tries to encourage him to improve their livelihood. For example, Karen wants her husband to find a new job or ask for a raise, which Ernesto resists.

I would suggest that he feels uncomfortable with these demands and do not know how to navigate neoliberal labour markets. He still wants to be an abnegated father who 'gives their children everything that he did not have when growing up'.

But his prideful attitude seems to hide some lack of confidence about being a good father and provider. Instead of feeling relieved, Karen gets more impatient and annoyed, and Ernesto deflects her concerns with aloofness and jokes. This pattern consolidates the asymmetrical distribution of domestic labour and Karen's emotional burden.

I would suggest that there is a significant difference between occupying father and mother positions in the level of work and moral pressure, albeit both share the mandate of embodying sacrificial optimism. Men can access ways of suspending or escaping these demands more often than women, but they still must self-sacrifice for their families according to the imaginary. As Moore (2007) argues, some ideological transformations can challenge the embodied ideas of masculinity and femininity without profoundly affecting the overall terrain of gendered subject positions.

Here, I reject the strong relationship between ritual, liturgical orders (or cosmologies) and sacrifice, attempting to move the transcendental into the immanent by exploring everyday moods and imaginaries. The association between ritual, sacrifice and liturgical order has been long studied by anthropologists (e.g. Bloch 1992; de Heusch 1985; Hubert & Mauss 1981[1898]; Valeri 1985). However, recent accounts have attempted to uncouple ritual and sacrifice (Humphrey & Laidlaw 2007; Lambek 2007, 2014; Mayblin & Course 2014). The concept of mood captures the duality of consenting—normative or ethical—subjectification and enacting agency. It also removes the hierarchy between ritual time and everyday life (Cf. Lambek 2010, 2015b). In other words, the concept of ethical mood acknowledges daily cultivation throughout both quasi-events and ordinary events.

In summary, sacrificial optimism unfolds when people live through exhaustion, afflictions, and dread, yet manage to endure and upend the degeneration of life through the embodiment of self-sacrifice. This mood engenders an attunement to their ordinary life and daily routines. Likewise, this affective-moral embodiment sustains the practical engagements with their intimate worlds. Engagements can cover practical activities and social interactions. From this Being-in-the-world, they can mount commitments. The heterogeneous assemblage of formulae, gestures, and passionate rhetoric permeates the lives that we have explored, summoning the mood that modifies everyday life and generates futurity. The embodiment of self-sacrifice in acts of love and intimacy transforms the initial suffering into meaningful attunement and a sense of selfhood (Berlant 1998: 281-2, 2008; Povinelli 2002, 2006). Sacrificial optimism works as the moral habituation of the post-industrial domestic imaginary, grounding the possibility of thinking about their children's future.[26]

Sacrificial domestic economies: sacrificial optimism beyond Catholicism

Is the sacrificial mood a makeshift answer engendered by Catholicism and *Marianismo*? The sacrificial dimension of everyday life suggests closeness to Catholicism and its sacrificial ritual complex. As I have argued, we need to separate ritual and mood as sacrificial assemblages. However, the ideas of conviviality, mutuality and sacrificial parenting still seem to be closer to Catholic values. Influential authors in Chile have highlighted the baroque substratum that underlies Chilean popular culture, creating specific syncretic cultural expressions that incorporate Catholic values (Cousiño & Valenzuela 1994; Morandé 1984). They argue the importance of sacrificial economies to cultivate personal relationships, and their displacement by modern social arrangements based on state power and money circulation. In a more anthropological vein, Sonia Montecino (1996) and Marjorie Murray (2015) have argued that the Marian exemplarity and *Marianismo* have influenced motherhood in Chile, thus explaining the recurrence of sacrificial ideals.

The problem with these arguments is that most of them unfold as speculative associations without examining domesticity and kinship's historical genealogies. From a historical perspective, the baroque form of popular participation—a massive liturgical order—helped consolidate social integration and the Catholic cosmovision in colonial society (J. Valenzuela 2001). However, the Church's version of Catholicism lost cultural influence in the nineteenth century (Serrano 2008; B. Smith 1982). The first development was the gradual separation of Church and state, starting in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Jaksic & Serrano 2010; Serrano 2008). While the Church could rely on cultural influence in civil society, the strong secularisation of both the state apparatus and political parties undermined its power. The second development was the Church’s duality stressed in the twentieth century (M. Salinas 1987; B. Smith 1982). The gap between the Church and plebeian religious sentiments widened in the nineteenth century. The coming of the twentieth century would fortify the plebeian streak of Catholic beliefs. Both trends highlight a gap between everyday experiences and the official ethical doctrine.

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[26] I would suggest that constructivist and authoritarian domestic imaginaries share some features with the post-industrial imaginary—i.e. the tendency to upend the degeneration of life by sacrificial gestures. Yet, I think that the practices and mobilisation of sacrifice play out in a different way. Nevertheless, more research should be carried out on the topic.

Nowadays, Catholicism has little force to authorise and modify lower-middle-class families’ core concerns and commitments. In recent decades, the Church neglected its social agenda—human rights and protection of the poor—to focus on conservative politics: disputing the legalisation of divorce, family planning, reproductive rights, and same-sex civil unions (Fleet & Smith 2015). This orientation lost the cultural influence gained due to its role in the democratic transition. As Chilean people started to associate Catholicism with a burdensome tradition, a second blow hit the Church: the paedophilia scandals. People began to link the Catholic Church with the elite and their privileges, losing more support. Recent surveys and research have shown that Catholicism has long been losing its grip on lower-middle-class families (see Latinbarómetro 2017; Adimark 2018, Valenzuela, Bargsted & Somma 2013).

Ernesto and Karen’s household and Vero’s household provide a contrasting perspective. Vero is closer to Catholic beliefs, while Karen and Ernesto have openly distanced themselves from Catholicism. However, both families share a practical remoteness from religion. Neither household attends mass, explicitly follows Catholic teachings, or embraces the influence of Catholic figures or exemplars.

Considering this evidence, I would argue that we must consider the industrial and post-industrial imaginaries to understand sacrificial optimism fully. Since the twentieth century, public discourse has acknowledged a mother’s sacrifice (Zárate 1998). Likewise, the industrial domestic imaginary has institutionalised the relationship between parenting and sacrifice. While there is an overlap between religious sacrifice and family sacrifice, the imagined level of reproduction differs.

Domestic sacrifice purports to reproduce the family. Catholic sacrifice intends to produce an ecumenical congregation.

From an ethical standpoint, the industrial imaginary's public/private distinction resolves a crucial problem in Catholicism regarding the intersection between sacrifice and social life—i.e. the impossibility of '[everyday] universalistic ethic of disinterested giving' (Parry 1986). Catholicism has claimed that Jesus Christ's sacrifice entails the ending of other manifestations of sacrifice and the start of gestures of self-sacrifice in everyday life. The mandates of 'love thy neighbour' and universal solidarity, supported by the sacramental economy, should be the basis of Catholic lay ethics. However, this sacrificial orientation has proven challenging to materialise as it short-circuits the underlying economy of sacrifice: when sacrifice ends, one should get something from it (Derrida 1995). As Christianity's sacrifice is free—giving without expecting anything in return—in order to enable thanksgiving for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, there is a tendency to neglect the pragmatic aspects of immanent life within the Church (Bloch 1992; Mayblin 2014).

Everyday self-sacrifice by laypeople emerges as an almost impossible task, thus fracturing the Catholic lay fantasy. In contrast, the industrial and post-industrial imaginaries take this universalist ethic and metabolise it within the domestic sphere, amalgamating what they construct as natural tendencies and ethical-political responsibilities. However, instead of asking for strict disinterested giving, they ground giving in intimate and loving gestures that create a domestic sacrificial economy.

I would suggest that sacrificial optimism appears as an answer within the long history of capitalist domestic imaginaries. Fraser notes that '…social reproduction is a condition of possibility for sustained capital accumulation; on the other hand, capitalism's orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilise the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies' (2017: 22). Moods can even deal with experiences that could be felt as painfully contradictory, anticipating violence that can wreak havoc on everyday life (Daniel 1996). Sacrificial optimism is the mood for striving to weave oneself back into the late capitalist world. Capitalist institutions have appropriated religious entanglements as the kernel for stimulating work and universes of value in order to address this contradiction. Thus, sacrificial optimism is the paradoxical solution to the compulsive demands of labour. The introjection of cosmological sacrificial logic into ordinary imaginaries transubstantiates work under capitalism—the problem is now the solution. This picture parallels what Povinelli calls *liberalism's bad forgery of Christianity* (2011: 178, 185) and what Santner identifies as *modernity's doxological condition of everyday life* (2015: 96).

The domestication of sacrifice enables families to create a sacrificial domestic economy that resembles something that comes from a transcendental order by performing immanent practices and embodiments (Miller 1998; R. Parkin 2013). In this case, the sacrificial process does not involve sacrificing money or things in rituals but the self-sacrifice of parents' bodies in everyday life. As Vero, Ernesto and Karen cannot produce a substantive surplus of money; their own bodies become the sacrifice's ritual material. As Mayblin phrases it, parents simultaneously are 'sacrificers *and* lambs' (2014: 358, original emphasis).

Vero, Ernesto and Karen embody this specific sense of ordinary sacrifice as part of a domestic economy of labour and ethical behaviour. They claim they expect to be obeyed because of their sacrifices while declaring themselves open to criticism and flexibility. Vero puts this idea clearly when she states, 'I make sacrifices so that they obey me.' (*Yo me sacrifico para que ellos me obedezcan*). Children often acknowledge their parents' authority and sacrifice.[27] Here, love and submission are not two contradictory ideas. These caregivers see themselves as naturally inclined to do good; hence, their children should listen to their commands and make daily life more manageable. The sacrificial economy blurs the distinction between autonomy, authority, and mutual support.

Despite the overwhelming presence of sacrifice as a motif throughout these households, the idea also produced some discontent. While not antagonistic, love and sacrifice might occasionally show some tension. Towards the end of the fieldwork, I asked them about the relationship between sacrifice and loving one's children, and the three of them rejected that they had lost something by loving and nurturing their children. For example, Karen argued, 'I have not sacrificed anything for my children, I have never been a party-goer, I choose to be a mother.’ To a similar question, Vero answered, ‘It is not the best word, perhaps. It may be that the word sacrifice is misused. One does it with love; my children are everything to me. I feel happy and proud of that, of what I have achieved. I had to be a father, mother, and friend. It is not easy, but I could do it. When you want it, you can.’ However, these reactions did not display complete rejection. Instead, these parents seemed uncomfortable with reducing parenting to sacrifice.

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[27] Chilean literature about children and sacrifice echoes this point (Vergara & Chávez 2017; Vergara, Sepúlveda & Chávez 2018).

In both cases, I would argue that the conscious idea that their lives are mere sacrifices for their loved ones implies erasing their sense of agency. Therefore, they move to notions of love, despite using sacrifice and abnegation as motifs all the time to describe the same feelings and dispositions. Such gestures show the importance of commitment as another structure of mattering. If sacrificial optimism gives consistency to everyday actions, the commitment to nurturing based constitutes their sense of purpose and reflexivity.

Another way sacrificial optimism departs from full abnegation is by limiting disinterested giving to adult children. Towards the end of the fieldwork, Vero realised that both of her children were adults and that her grandson was also growing up. She contemplated that maybe she should not sacrifice so much for them. She would always love her children and intended ‘to be there’ for them. But they should start to pursue their dreams independently, which means taking care of themselves. Vero was happy to keep helping them but also gave more attention to her life.

Significant attitude changes occur in parents whose children have made or consented to decisions that show immaturity or create new responsibilities for the parents. Some of these decisions with unwelcome consequences are having children without economic security, dropping out of college, taking drugs, or quitting jobs without a good reason. These events prompt new circumstances that usually undermine this sacrificial mood. As a result, parents question the limits of their commitment to nurturing.

Sacrificial optimism is not the same across the households I know in Santiago. For example, Ernesto and Karen experience emotional fatigue. While still optimistic about striving for economic stability and sending their children to college, they do not know if their labour will make them more prosperous in the present.

Their confident demeanour cracks when they feel stuck at work. However, they do not abandon this mood. On the contrary, they embrace the contradictory promises of labour.

Contrastingly, Vero embodies sacrificial optimism differently. With older children than Karen and Ernesto, Vero feels more self-assured about the domestic sacrificial economy she has built. Mario has a good job, and Isa is finishing her accounting diploma. Despite life being challenging, Vero thinks she has good reasons to see a promising future. From the beginning of the fieldwork to the present, this mother has managed to secure her household reproduction and ease the pressure of the degeneration of life. Vero still personifies sacrifice eagerly, but slightly letting go of the promise of labour has made her feel more at ease.

Between these two poles, we can find the rest of these families. Some embody sacrificial optimism, holding into these gestures of abnegation and a sacrificial domestic economy. Other families are feeling the weight of this mood and the disruption of the production of futurity. The lack of confidence appears when their work does not open roads into a future of social mobility or economic stability. Across most of these households, this structure of mattering tends to be persistent and efficacious, conjuring futurity from exhaustion, dread, and affliction. Yet, its casual power depends on the context. Sometimes the mood is not enough to achieve a sense of purpose. Karen and Ernesto are witnesses to this.

* * *

This chapter has described the mood of sacrificial optimism that emerges in the context of never-ending work and the degeneration of life among these families. I have argued that sacrifice pulls together a heterogeneous assemblage of formulae and everyday gestures that allows families to upend their suffering into something valued. Unlike rituals of sacrifice, sacrificial optimism allows for the suturing of the contradictions of living under neoliberalism, and these parents hope that things will add up to something significant. The last section argues that we must be careful to conflate sacrifice with Catholicism because the genealogy of the industrial and post-industrial imaginaries offers complementary interpretative elements.

Chapter Five

A Commitment to Nurturing

Parenting as ethics

Whenever I went to Violeta's home, she would start the visit by talking about her exhaustion. It is understandable. She worked for a construction company as a low-ranking administrative clerk, far away from her home district La Pintana. The commute could take from ninety minutes to almost two hours, depending on the day. 'How are you?' is a complicated question for her. Most of the time, it evoked a chance to discuss the hardships of her job and her continuous efforts to build a home. Work represented the duality between earning a wage to be self-reliant and being exposed to a hostile and exploitative environment.

Parenting was not an easy task. Vero's daughters could create a lot of trouble. Jocelyn, Violeta's third daughter, had responded to her mother's parenting in her way. Rather than obliquely complying with Violeta's demands as her sisters had done, she rejected them flat out. In turn, Violeta usually felt discouraged by her third daughter's lack of initiative and purpose in life. Alongside this indifference, Jocelyn often refused either to do household chores or to do her homework, upsetting Violeta.

On one occasion, Violeta and I were discussing her job when a conflict exploded. It was a stressful week at work. She had been fighting with colleagues due to their mutual mistrust. Tired and sad, she changed the topic. The house was untidy, and Violeta needed help cleaning it. After asking Jocelyn calmly to do some chores, she got angry since her daughter did not respond. Violeta remarked, 'She is so lazy,' gazing directly at me. She was attempting to get a reaction from her. Meanwhile, Jocelyn just watched cartoons with the rest of the siblings in silence. Her indifference was deafening.

Violeta was particularly desperate about Jocelyn’s attitude towards school. She had attempted to get some information from her daughter about tests or school without success. So when Violeta introduced me to Jocelyn, she described her—in a mixture of jest and disparagement— ‘She does not want to go to high school. She wants to graduate as a bum!’ (¡*No quiere estudiar, quiere titularse de vaga*!). Jocelyn retorted, ‘Yes, it is true,’ without lifting her eyes from her mobile phone.

Jocelyn, as a 14-year-old teenager, had many career decisions ahead of her. The first was to choose a technical school to complete her education. Despite her mother’s badgering and concern, she almost got expelled from her previous school. The teenager, actively enacting her loathing of education, rejected everyone’s questions about her future. She was primarily engrossed in listening to music and in her social circle. Looking for a new school did not interest her.

After Jocelyn graduated from middle school, Violeta asked her to pick a new school. In Violeta’s mind, giving her daughter the freedom to choose a school might give Jocelyn some motivation. Violeta was looking for an alternative method for dealing with Jocelyn’s behaviour. The mother did not deceive herself with the idea, however. She was not expecting a miracle. She knew that Jocelyn would not develop an interest in college overnight. Her only intention was to push her daughter into finishing technical school as a safeguard. Things could get tricky if Jocelyn does not complete high school.

After a couple of weeks, Violeta realised that Jocelyn had not bothered to fill out her application to high school. She was still hoping that her daughter would choose any high school that might seem easier to attend. If Jocelyn would reach a decision, she could perhaps ask for a day off from work and do the filing herself. On one of my visits, Violeta questioned her: ‘Did you look at the schools’ website?’ Once again, Jocelyn ignored her. It was clear to her mother that without assistance and nagging, Jocelyn would lose the school year. Violeta did not want to do the paperwork, but she was willing to do it for her daughter.

The mother nudged her daughter to visit small technical schools nearby during the following week. They found two schools nearby with low requirements for enrolment. However, when I asked how the visits had gone, her response was primarily negative. The school had rejected them because they had neither requested an interview nor abided by the registration deadlines. This problem stuck in her mind. She would revisit the issue before bed. She would ask herself, and then me, ‘Am I doing something wrong?’

After a series of administrative leaves, mother-daughter rows, and more inquiries, they were able to find a new school on which Violeta and Jocelyn were both agreed. The school was close to her house and academically unchallenging for Jocelyn. Her mother was happy just to see her register at any school. A mundane task for middle-class families had become an odyssey for Violeta.

Violeta has remained dedicated to Jocelyn’s wellbeing and future opportunities, despite her daughter’s attitude. She has tried to find a solution that could conciliate the multiple desires at play and the pragmatic calculations of schooling and labour. The circumstances may have persuaded anyone but Violeta to drop the issue. However, this mother’s position is unwavering. It is necessary to untangle these gridlocks.

When I revisited the issue with Violeta months later, little had changed. Indeed, things had gotten worse. Doctors had diagnosed Jocelyn with an immunological disease. Although the treatment could improve her health, Jocelyn resisted any attempt to comply. She had also refused to see a psychologist. At the end of our chat, Violeta was tired again. ‘Let her do whatever she wants!’ We both knew that this would not do. She would never abandon her daughter without a weighty reason. Just like with her schooling, Violeta would keep searching for a remedy to Jocelyn’s malady. Maybe because of relational fatigue, we started talking more frequently about Violeta’s youngest daughter, Alondra. Violeta sent me a WhatsApp message to show me Alondra’s academic achievement medals at the end of the year. ‘I am very proud,’ she wrote.

In the latter parts of the fieldwork, Violeta was still struggling with Jocelyn, and Pancha and Roci were back. Her home was full of her daughters and grandchildren. Drinking tea, we discussed their return. I attempted to open a door for her to vent her frustration about the last turn of events. I asked if something had bothered her. ‘Do you mean the girls?’ Not really,’ she answered. She took the opportunity to restate how proud she was of them, ‘I am proud of my girls. I wanted to have them, to be their mother […]. I have never regretted being her mother. If I had them, it was because God gave them to me; they picked me.' Later, Violeta added, 'You want to help them to be better than you, to have an easier life. You never know how things will turn up.' Even under pressure, she was devoted to being her mother.

Problems with their children are a common issue for these parents. Most of the time, these difficulties are not life-threatening but require attention and care. Parenting involves dealing with these issues and creating routines to grapple with everyday needs. These parents are committed to their children's wellbeing and consider it their purpose to nurture them into contented adults. Indeed, their children's resistance, the degeneration of life, and neoliberal precarisation make parenthood more challenging. However, they persevere. Parents and caregivers attempt to reflect upon their practices and open possibilities for better parenting.

This chapter explores parenting as an ethical phenomenon, identifying commitment as a form of mattering. The second section examines the notion of commitment and parenting. The following section outlines how parents undertake day-to-day routines and adopt an ethical pedagogy to raise their children. The fourth part explores how problems emerge due to the contradictory nature of these routines: and the way parents attempt to resolve them illuminates the nature of commitments. Finally, I discuss the 'end products' of these projects, shedding light on the difficulties of finishing the process of nurturing and maintaining commitments.

Making a commitment

Anthropological deployment of the notion of *commitment* is flawed. Most writing on the topic is more often reserved for exploring anthropologists' theoretical commitments. Commitments seem to be a unique trait of human beings (Archer 2001; C. Smith 2003; Sayer 2011); thus, neglecting this structure of mattering is a relevant oversight of the ways humanity participates in their social worlds. This neglect is especially challenging when researchers conflate commitments with other competing concepts—e.g. desires, goals, motivations, duty, preferences, solicitudes—that could misrepresent the existential quality of such participation.

Commitment seems to be an elusive issue for the growing literature on ethics and morality. Some authors have pursued the concept, mobilising a more subjectivist approach to moral life. For example, Cherry Mattingly argues that long-term commitments to particular projects of care directed to significant others exert a great deal of force and encourage ethical entailments (2014b, 2018a, 2018b). García also relates the concept to promises, both broken and fulfilled. Her work suggests that commitments can be made concerning other people, pledged "ways of being in the world", or even past losses (2010: 110, 120). Schielke (2015; see also 2009a, 2009b) uses the concept to describe ambiguity among the Egyptian youth. Commitment—*iltizâm* in Salafi revivalist discourse—speaks of making religion the sole source of normative practice and volition. Schielke also deploys it, describing emotional and romantic attachments to others that counterweigh religious influence. Notably, James Laidlaw does not use the concept of commitment very often. Instead, he centres his theoretical project on freedom. He argues that human beings self-cultivate and transform themselves, especially targeting their normative dispositions, through 'reflective freedom' (2002, 2014). Laidlaw argues that individuals or collectives engender commitments when they use this freedom to dedicate themselves to moral codes, thus cultivating ethical projects. Therefore, a commitment to ethical projects restricts other values, principles, and technologies that are not consistent with the project one may be pursuing.

In contrast, other approaches explore commitments using a relational or interactional stance. Keane (2016) argues for a strong interactional position of ethical life. Thus, the centrality of commitment—which we could understand as an assumed attachment to upholding moral objects—is mainly directed towards interactions and the effort to keep one's social standing within such events. Awareness and consciousness-raising could objectify commitments to ethical and political stances that groups defend across situations or interactions. Taking a Heideggerian route, Zigon argues that most commitments are relational and defined by ontological attunement to social worlds (as in the 'Being-in-the-world') where one dwells and builds fidelity to one's singular life trajectory enabled by these worlds (2014b, 2017). Veena Das also invokes the moral force of commitment embedded in everyday life, gesture, and language (2011, 2015). A commitment appears as a form of attentiveness to others that goes beyond 'mere' rule-following or technologies of the self (in the Foucauldian fashion). It often demands moral resistance and the effort to keep scepticism at bay. Scepticism plagues ordinary life and can unsettle our dwelling in the world. Michael Lambek takes a similar position in relating commitment to judgement—i.e. a practical and preconscious effort to evaluate the world based on habituation. Commitments can inform these judgements by establishing discursive criteria that can be incorporated as practical evaluations (2015a: 39). They, again, seem not to be worthy of further exploration. Lambek links them to ‘making a pledge or promise’ (2015a: 47), ‘responsibility’ (2014) and a form of ritual-sanctioned intentionality (2007).

I would suggest that what is missing among these approaches is how to unpack a commitment. In most cases, anthropologists use it unproblematically or hint at it obliquely. Despite this lack of clarity, we may separate two frequent uses of the word. Firstly, *free-standing commitments* are specific vows, pledges, promises, or obligations. These acts and their implications are relatively simple. They conjure discrete events that demand normative attachment and call for straightforward courses of action. For example, following the implicit rules of the communication event, fulfilling a promise, or avoiding making an insincere declaration of love.

A second use implies a *core commitment—a surplus of ethical elaboration and affective investment required to maintain a course of action despite active reasons to abandon it, often expressed as dedication.* These courses of action are embedded in relations between the self and significant others that include, not just sentient beings, but also abstract values, spiritual forces and imagined communities, among others. Moreover, furthering these courses of action implies more than following rules, enacting practices, or applying techniques. Instead, a commitment often conveys the effort, creativity, and resilience to create a way forward despite uncertainty, self-doubt, or conflicting values. Diverse authors such as García (2010), Schielke (2015), and Laidlaw (2005) have drawn attention to the challenges in pursuing affective and moral paths. These challenges may be fulfilling promises among Mexican heroin users who want to get better, conciliating Islamic piety with personal desires among young Egyptians, or upholding the principle of nonviolence until death among Jain renouncers. Still, all of them speak about ethical elaboration, affective investment, and struggle. This insight is the starting point of inquiry in this chapter.

If we address the inquiry on the commitment of raising children, the new kinship studies (NKS) have suggested that something similar to commitments are the product of practices of kinning, relatedness, or care to create and maintain relationships (e.g. Carsten 1995, 2000, 2004; Howell 2003; Sahlins 2013). Practices related to such phenomena as food, procreation, sexual relationship, memory, cohabitation, territory, and substance transmission, among others, create similitudes between people, thickening their mutual participation. It stimulates relationships defined by care work, diffuse solidarity, and emotional bonds, which opens the door for the 'abuse of kinship' (Carsten 2019). We may assume that these cultural repertoires often encourage parents to enact these practices with children, creating core commitments by saturation. Children, as objects of dedication, are part of the 'thickest' or 'closest' form of mutual participation and similitude.

In contrast, parenting culture studies (PCS) have tended to focus on the specific set of skills and dispositions that capitalism and governmental formations demand of adult caregivers to ensure that a child becomes a fully grown person (Faircloth 2018). Exploring the experiences of adult caregivers (especially mothers in urban centres across America, Europe, and Asia), the PCS have discovered that motherhood, and sometimes fatherhood, involves 'devoting large amounts of time, energy, and material resources to the child; [and] requires that the child's needs be put first (mothering must be childcentred), and paying attention to what experts say about child development (it is not enough to "make do" and do what seems easiest)' (Faircloth 2018: 2; see also Lee, Bristow, Faircloth & Macvarish 2014; Faircloth, Hoffman & L. Layne 2013). Whether described as 'paranoid parenting' (Furedi 2002), 'out of control parenting' (Nelson 2010), or 'contradictory motherhood' (Hays 1996), 'intensive parenting' creates commitments to nurturing children that involve significant amounts of money, time, skill, and emotional involvement. The PCS identifies that Western societies perceive children as highly vulnerable to risk and long-term harm (Lee, Macvarish & Bristow 2010). Likewise, intensive parenting ideologies and technologies suggest that child rearing is the single most relevant cause determining the wellbeing and development of children (Furedi 2002). The ethnographic evidence of the PCS shows severely negative consequences of intensive parenting: parents cannot keep up with ideological mandates, and children find it challenging to navigate parental and societal expectations.

Despite tracing relevant relationships between cultural, political economy and subjective experience, these approaches have not explored the ethical standpoint of committing to raising children. The NKS and PCS describe parents' and caretakers' experiences, yet they do not contribute to understanding the difference between this passionate commitment and merely following ideological, symbolic, or normative frameworks. In Santiago, parents' commitments to raising children are complex and dynamic issues.[28] They appear to sustain motives in a distinct way—different from desires, goals, preferences, or aspirations. Thus, we need to connect these larger forces with the intimacy of mattering. Indeed, not all parents or caretakers are committed to nurturing children, and not all commitments are about nurturing. Nonetheless, these experiences can illuminate commitment as a structure of mattering.

An ethical pedagogy

Violeta usually talked about her daughters as the most significant project, task or work throughout the fieldwork. She consciously attempted to craft a form of life that reflects such commitment. 'I must be a mother and father,' she repeated when confronting the weight of her duty. Recurrent phrases such as 'No time of anything' and 'I only work for them' articulated her conviction. Like the rest of the participants in this ethnography, Violeta experienced the social mandate of parenting as a drive to, and the responsibility of, nurturing their children (*criar, crianza*).

Violeta's decisions reflected how she positioned herself within the discourse of parenting; she had to nurture her children, so they grow up to both do well and to have values. For Violeta, avoiding suffering intertwined with such aspirations—misery from never-ending labour and gendered violence. However, the concrete expression of these aspirations was not clear. Encouraging social mobility grounded her approach to parenting, but other vectors of aspiration also mediated this disposition.

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[28] Readers might be disappointed that I have not reviewed the anthropology of childhood and child development (e.g. Lancy 2012; LeVine 2007; Ochs & Izquierdo 2009; Szulc & Cohn 2012). Two reasons explain this omission. Firstly, these publications focus on children's lives, while this chapter examines parents' efforts and failures to shape children as ethical subjects. A second reason is that that body of literature primarily explores early childhood. In contrast, this chapter examines parenting as an ethical long-term project and its relationship with a broader political economy. Unfortunately, there is not enough space for proper dialogue between this literature and this perspective in this dissertation.

At close inspection, these vectors appear in the first vignette. First, Violeta realises that her daughters may not share her desires and aspirations; attempting to change them may be challenging. Secondly, the segregation of labour markets and educational institutions forces her to hold more pragmatic aspirations about Jocelyn's career. Her older daughters' lack of translation of academic success into a professional career has also tempered her hopes. Thirdly, Violeta does not wish to see her daughters' working themselves to death for a job that does not pay them well and where bosses are not respectful. Even if she recognises that being a hard worker is a virtue, she also considers that having a 'liveable life' (*vida llevadera*) also matters.

Violeta's efforts could be described as an ethical pedagogy aiming to create *autonomous-but-obedient* subjects. She hopes their children become family-attached yet self-sufficient adults when they grow up. Likewise, Violeta's children must be respectful, follow commands, and comply with authority while having desires, persevering, and resisting abuse. Violeta is not the only one spousing this objective. All the parents who participate in the research perform this contradictory ethical pedagogy. They concurrently socialise their children with individualism, family-centred values, and broader notions of citizenship.

To accomplish this pedagogy, these parents do not make careful long-term planning or meticulous effort to control their children's lifestyles. Instead, the focus is on crafting a daily routine (*rutina*). One essential component of this routine is developing and utilising soft authority and soft obedience. These are dimensions of the hierarchical relationship between parents and children. Parents avoid using the asymmetry of positions to ground the power of making and imposing decisions. Instead, they use tenderness, love, and affection to justify their authority. This approach makes the routine viable and contributes to enacting this ethical pedagogy. Violeta attempts to improve children's conduct by linking command to belonging, thereby creating soft authority. It often materialises by demanding respect (*respeto*), but getting it is not always easy.

Violeta followed the steps carefully in order to handle diverse demands. For example, Violeta awoke at 5:00 am daily to tidy the house and prepare school lunches and supplies on weekdays. At 6:30 am, she woke her older daughters, nudged them to help dress and wash the younger children, and left for work. At around 7:00 am, she arrived at work while her daughters and grandchildren got to school. At 4:00 pm, her daughters returned home and stayed there to take care of the younger ones for a while. Again, Violeta left exact instructions: watch television, get lunch, and do not open the door to anyone, even relatives or acquaintances. In the afternoon, her older daughter would return, and she fed the children again. Finally, at around 7:00 pm, Violeta returned home and checked whether the day had gone well for everyone. Moments for playdates or checking schoolwork were few and far between. On the weekends, she occasionally visited her ailing father or went to the cemetery. Other types of outings were rare.

In one of my visits, I noted one scene that had become recurrent. Violeta was trying to get her daughters to help clean the house. Cleaning and tidying up was impossible during the week due to the long hours working and commuting. Thus, getting up early on weekends to clean the house was essential. On those days, she slept a little later than on weekdays, but as soon she remembered her weekend chores, she got up. Before noon, she would load the washing machine, clean the house, buy groceries at the nearby street market, take care of the pets, and organise the pantry, among other things. There was never enough time.

Violeta attempted to distribute some of these chores among her daughters, but they refused to collaborate. Even though most of the assignments would not take long, her daughters usually did not help her. They rarely responded to their mother’s commands and directives. This lack of understanding was slightly upsetting. The collision between her frustration and her daughters’ indifference fuelled Violeta’s angry tirades about her daughters’ laziness and lack of respect.

Quarrels about chores were common in Violeta’s house. On another occasion, she tried to take her daughters to the nearby street market, and the same problems arose. Again, her daughters resisted her commands. ‘I am tired,’ Alondra said. Next to her, Jocelyn did not even respond. Katya, her granddaughter, was playing lost in her own world. Violeta was losing her patience again. ‘I need you to be ready in ten minutes,' her mother threatened. Jocelyn and Alondra often defied Violeta's authority. While Jocelyn's weapon of choice was indifference, Alondra could be ruthless. Mocking Violeta's intelligence, she demanded clear arguments to accept her mother's authority. Violeta did not lose time finding an answer and just remarked, 'Because I say so.' After thirty minutes, nobody was ready. Irritated, the mother yelled at them. 'Always the same with these girls,' she grumbled. She looked at me, seeking support. I went mute. It was not the first time that I had seen her mad. Yet, I could not understand what was at stake at that moment. 'Let us go, let us go,' she redoubled the effort to get them out of the house. After another 10 minutes, her family were finally ready to go. 'Why do we have to go?' Alondra asked her, mixing provocation with genuine curiosity. Violeta retorted again, 'Because I say so.' This was not the time for debate.

Violeta, her daughters, and I walked a couple of blocks and found the long street market at one of the avenues nearby. Violeta was moving quickly, checking her list and nudging Alondra to remember everything she needed for school. The mother did not speak with the vendors like the other people there. 'I know what I need and where I can get it,' she told me. Meanwhile, Jocelyn was listening to music. A little further, Alondra was exploring the market. Looking at animals and toys, she seemed more interested in what the vendors could offer. Taking advantage of this, I asked Violeta why she preferred to come to the market with her family, 'I like to be with them; I do not like them to be alone at home.' This attitude echoed a previous conversation about the danger of crime, especially for a 'house of women'. Violeta continued, 'It is also good to do things together. It takes longer, but it is better this way.' She was not a woman of tender words. Yet, this was a warm moment.

Visiting Violeta's home contributes to identifying some recurrent parenting practices among these households. Parents and caregivers often assign chores to children with uneven results. The more common assignments for children typically involve keeping their rooms clean, taking care of pets, and tidying up living rooms or dining tables after using them for playtime or schoolwork. Undoubtedly, this arrangement reduces parents' domestic workload and exposes them to domestic conflict like the one described. Moreover, parents and caregivers, especially mothers, usually shepherd family members to share food, talk about their day and create intimacy. They attempt to spend one meal per day together as a family or, at least, to do some activity together once a week. As I have argued, these practices link authority to acts of love, affection, and care, encouraging soft obedience. The result engenders obedient subjects that remain bounded to different normative orders—parental power, civility, and formal authority—in the name of love, as staged by the post-industrial domestic fantasy.

The force of soft authority to encourage obedience also appears linked to the rejection of more noticeable displays of violence and injunctions. Despite Violeta's strong personality, she avoids violence and outright draconian attitudes. On one occasion, she was angry with her daughters. The problem was the same as always. They did not help to clean the house, and the mother was tired of being disobeyed. 'Sometimes, I feel like beating up the girls. But I do not. I am not violent like that,' she said. Violeta saw these moments of violence as contrary to the idea of protection. I was surprised. Discourses of healthy parenting tend to consider scolding or saying 'Because I said so' as acts with a dimension of violence. Although they were not equivalent to abuse, good parenting would not rely on them. 'Do you think girls can feel bad? I asked. Violeta rejected the idea, 'No, I do not hit them. I know I have a bad temper, but I never did anything to them. Sometimes I want to hit them; sometimes I wish to, but I do not it.' Her tone was expositive, but she was not defending herself. Then, she said something I had heard in other households, 'Hitting may build your character. You learn not to do things.' Little stunned, I asked if it was like a kind of education. She replied, 'Yes, but I do not do it. That was from before [older generations].' Within these moments of tension, she prefers softer forms of authority—which in this case includes scolding—as she tried both to prevent imposing themselves on her children and to incite more resistance.

A particular moment during the fieldwork revealed how Violeta approached parenting. During our time together, Violeta was particularly emphatic about insulating their children from harmful influences, delinquents, drug addictions, and abusive men. In addition, she tried to shape her daughters' relationships with male friends, potential suitors, and boyfriends.

Her trepidations also manifested with her older daughters. In particular, she did not like Santo, one of Roci's paramours. When I visited them, sometimes Santo came around. His presence was palpable. Talking loudly, he greeted Violeta, ‘How are you, mom (*suegrita*)?’ with a sarcastic tone. He tried to make his way into the living room. From the kitchen table, Violeta responded without removing her attention from the orange she was peeling, ‘You are around here again?’ Without coming close, Santo realised the tension and grinned. Violeta continued, ‘Did you bring the milk and soft drinks?’ Then, without waiting for a response, she amplified her stance, ‘See, you promised things and never fulfilled them?’ Her tone was playful but sharp. Like a battle, he had to stand his ground. Santo only could ask for forgiveness and sympathy, ‘Next time, I promise, mom!’ But Violeta carried on with the attack, ‘You are nothing like a saint (*santo*). Are you gay? Look at all your jewellery.’ After twenty minutes, Santo was no longer smiling. Bothered by the cold reception, he decided to leave. Roci and he shared a moment outside the house, and she returned alone. When afterwards I asked Violeta about the exchange, she was categorical, ‘I do not like him. I do not trust him.’

Santo’s visit is another example of how Violeta tries to protect her daughters. Like the quarrels, these moments are quasi-events, weaved into ordinary life. Vero tries to interrupt connections carefully through advice and nagging—but often without prohibitions or injunctions. Likewise, gossip serves a similar purpose, which intends to draw attention to the negative traits of other people’s characters behind their backs. Finally, showing discomfort or annoyance about someone’s presence or semblance could achieve the same goal. The common thread between the ordinary moments is creating obedience without resorting to excessive violence, cruelty, or punishment. Soft authority comes from love and affection—not capriciousness and arbitrariness.

However, Violeta also wishes to engender a sense of autonomy in her daughters. Therefore, she allows her children to pursue their own wishes and responsibilities, enabling spaces where they can express their independence vis-à-vis herself as a mother and protector.

Throughout the fieldwork, moments of autonomy punctuated the scenes of obedience. For example, Jocelyn and Alondra were resistant to Violeta’s effort to leave the house because they were doing activities they enjoyed. Jocelyn was listening to music, and Alondra was watching television. Earlier, they had played with an X-Box. They borrowed it from one of Roci's friends, who also decoded it to have free games. Violeta even enjoyed the cheap deal and played a little on Friday night. Overall, the daughters were free to spend their free time as they wanted to, finding only her mother's occasional sarcastic nudging on their way. Homework was necessary, but Violeta allowed them to distribute their time to their liking. Moments later, shopping at the market was another occasion where Jocelyn and Alondra expressed their autonomy. They moved freely around the market, choosing what to look at. While always watchful, Violeta allowed them to move at their own pace. She even bought some of the toys that Alondra had chosen.

Around Christmas time, Violeta briefly reflected on the matter. She framed the issue as property. 'These things belong to them,' she would argue. It was coherent to Violeta that their children should choose their things since they would be using them. That year, she bought Jocelyn's headphones and a doll for Alondra. 'It was they want it,' she anticipated my question. Like the other parents I met in Santiago, Violeta attempted to satisfy their children's desires for goods. When there was not enough money, she negotiated what and when to meet their children's wishes, offering birthdays or Christmas as occasions for more expensive gifts.

Things are not the same between Alondra and Jocelyn. Violeta feels that younger children are easy to deal with. For her, adolescents and adult children are more challenging. Autonomy among them takes a different aspect. As seen in Jocelyn's vignette, Vero has reached a point where she does not impose her view on education on her daughter. She joins the rest of the parents and caregivers in this pragmatic flexibility. They would often use the expression, 'I am not one of those parents who prohibits everything or who does not let their children study whatever they want (*No soy como esos papás que prohíbe todo, que no deja a los cabros estudiar lo que quieran)*' to signal this attitude. Instead, Vero finds passing marks and finishing school or college good enough.

The endpoint of this pedagogy is to create obedient-but-autonomous adults that can be independent of their families but still feel bound by family relationships and values. One recurrent metaphor for this autonomy as responsibility is initiative (*iniciativa*). Violeta envisages as a drive, 'It is learning to take advantage of opportunities, to not just to stay idle, like waiting to be hand things over.'

Conversely, its opposites, laziness (*flojera*) and idleness (*falta de dirección*), affect children's lives negatively. Without initiative, they will not reach maturity.

We can see how Violeta's ethical pedagogy is a long-term commitment to nurturing her children. The moments of soft authority mix with moments of autonomy. From early childhood to adulthood, Violeta tries to shape her daughters and granddaughters as obedient-but-autonomous subjects. The day-to-day routine covers basic needs, nurturing, and a pedagogy that combines belonging, obedience, and autonomy to achieve ethical subjectification. Violeta and the other parents and caregivers enforce these parenting practices. Nevertheless, they know parenting requires flexibility—and a little pragmatism—to approach problems and gridlocks in new ways.

Shifting course: commitments as moral engines

Cristina has a complicated relationship with her sons, 27-year-old Luchito and 12-year-old Isaac. She and Alvaro, her husband, earn enough income to maintain an uneventful lower-middle-class lifestyle. They live in Maipú in a middle-class neighbourhood nearby Vero's house. This community is humble with working-class origins but represents the new aspirations of the lower-middle-class after the dictatorship. The working-class identity has no longer part of the cultural fabric of the place. Instead, families speak of social mobility and middle-classness when you talk with them. Renovations and expansions dominate the landscape. Cristina's house follows this trend.

Cristina also has better relations with their neighbours than Violeta. She is more comfortable introducing me to them. These conversations show the same concerns that I have found in other parts of the city. Recurrent discourses about fear of crime, state corruption and personal entrepreneurship appear. These families insist that decent—or middle-class—families are the real victims of society. Cristina and Alvaro echo these ideals. While parents like Violeta, Vero, or Ernesto present themselves as out-of-place in their respective communities, they seem to embrace more clearly the aspirations of social mobility and consumption.

Cristina and Alvaro’s attitudes display some level of obstinacy or tenacity, depending on your point of view. Their children are not examples of success under late capitalism. The more comfortable are stuck in the lower middle class without good jobs or economic stability. The exception is Cristina’s daughter, Noemi, a petty officer in the army. This position has granted her a better status than her siblings and stepsiblings. The struggles of credit and debt are recurrent among these adult children.

However, most of Cristina and Alvaro’s concerns were about Luchito throughout the fieldwork. He had found it challenging to maintain jobs despite having a degree from a trade school. He also cannot cultivate healthy personal relationships, according to her mother. Cristina thought that Luchito needed to mature and lacked initiative.

Cristina was more committed to intergenerational upward mobility than the other parents participating in this research. Thus, she spent more time supervising Isaac’s routine, demanding obedience, and trying to influence his decisions. She often imposed her views on his development, schedule, and decisions. Her routine was the most rigid among the ones that I recorded. Alvaro took a back seat regarding parenting. He usually tried to tell her to relax, be more flexible, and let Isaac have a little more freedom. Cristina found it hard to comply with this. She did not want Isaac to fail at school. She thought he might enrol in a good college, or even the Army Officers School, with good enough marks.

Cristina showed a crucial distinctive trait. She rejected the idea that motherhood was easy and intuitive for her. When we were discussing her difficulties with Luchito, she stated,

> It was difficult for me to decide to be a mother because of the issue of my ex-partner [Luchito’s father]. A lot of violence happened there. I would not have had children with him because it was difficult, and I quickly realised who he was. I thought about it; it took me three years to have Noemi. I wondered from the beginning if I wanted to have children with him. Then, years passed, and it never happened until Luchito came out, another son. There I said, ‘It is what it is; just move forward.’ So, did I yearn to have a child? No. I took responsibility because I knew those little people were my responsibility. But if I wanted it... I had to take care of them. I had nowhere to return them [she laughed].

Cristina told me that she wrote her own parenting rules. She could take ideas from various sources and evaluate them in context. On the radio, Cristina often hears Pilar Sordo, a famous self-help and parenting pundit in Chile. While interesting, she thought that Sordo's pieces of advice were pointless. For example, the pundit usually would insist that parents should not forget that they are in command (*mandar*) at home. This version of authority is impossible for Cristina to enact. She did not want to be just someone who gives orders, but she also did not believe that her children would listen to her if she did. Cristina could also take inspiration from the Catholic Church. She could seek out her local priest, expecting him to help her to be more understanding and patient, albeit she neglected Catholic teachings or refused to see herself in the Virgin Mary or the Holy Family. Finally, psychologists were an option when her budget afforded it. But I only recorded short-term therapy.

She experienced self-doubt from time to time, which encouraged her to examine her past experiences. In a nutshell, she was afraid of history repeating itself. Luchito—Cristina's son from a previous marriage—was a constant source of problems. He had had a complicated relationship with Alvaro. According to Luchito and Cristina, the divorce and feeling out of place in Alvaro's house have strained family relationships to the point of pushing him down the wrong track. Nowadays, Luchito has problems keeping a job and staying sober. When we discussed the issue, Cristina added that he went from being a good student with excellent marks to having problems at school and home. She tried to straighten him out, but she could not. Instead, she insisted that bad influences overtook him at a vulnerable phase of his life.

Adult Luchito also had a belligerent character. One day, due to a row with his landlady, he found himself without a room and again turned up at Cristina's home. When he was staying at Cristina's, Luchito told me, 'I respected and loved my mother. I am trying to do better.' Still, conflicts began to brew while they lived under the same roof. Cristina felt ambivalent about Luchito's return. Soon, they spent most of the time together quarrelling. The mother often claimed that he did not respect the house rules. He came back late at night, usually under the influence of alcohol and drugs. Eventually, tired of row after row, she banished him from the house. Only by Alvaro's reconciliatory efforts did she forgive him and set new coexistence rules in an attempt to achieve a convivial home. Unfortunately, their dynamic proved to be a vicious circle. After a while, Luchito would break the rules again, and the rows would start anew. They quarrelled for most of the second half of 2018. In the end, Alvaro negotiated an amicable exit for the son to preserve the fragile relationship between them. It was better to have a friendly relationship than forced cohabitation.

Alvaro's intervention was not strange. He had played the role of mediator between Cristina and her son. Cristina and Alvaro performed an unbalanced gendered distribution of labour and authority, allowing Alvaro to play the part of the flexible parent. In contrast, Cristina, who oversaw most parenting activities, emerged as the stricter parent. It was common for her to take more decisions by herself, only accepting some input from his husband from time to time. Alvaro—more enthusiastic than other fathers—performed only minor chores, such as watching over Isaac when Cristina was absent or driving him to places. Cristina felt this distribution was unfair. Alvaro could avoid being the strict parent and left most of the challenging parts of parenting to her. Still, his role as a mediator had helped reach agreements with Luchito.

Cristina felt conflicted about the state of the relationship for months. The mother was deeply aware of her past actions and recognised her own responsibility. At one point, Cristina told me that she feared not being a good mother and how angry and violent Luchito could get. At the peak of her self-doubt, she confessed nervously, 'I just do not want Isaac to become a DEADBEAT!' *(¡Solo quiero que [Isaac] no sea un POBRE WEÓN!*). A year later, I received a phone call from Alvaro to let me know that Luchito was back at their house. The cycle was repeating again.

Parents like Cristina and Violeta have had difficulty imagining the end of parenting. They use phrases such as, 'when the task is done' (*cuando la tarea esta hecha*) or 'when they have their own families' (*cuando tengan sus propias familias*) to convey the end of parenting without making it clear when this would be. Yet, the expression, 'You never stop being a parent' (*uno nunca termina de criar*) captures the more widespread sentiment among these parents—especially mothers—who feel that these personal commitments are for life. Parents gravitate to ideas such as parenting as something without end; thus, disavowing their commitments is hard for them. As long as their children respect them enough and show a minimum of effort, these parents will keep on supporting them.

Accordingly, Cristina found it difficult to abandon Luchito. Despite his many faults, he was trying to leave drugs and held down a job. Cristina's most urgent concern was that Luchito might negatively influence Isaac. He liked to take care of his younger brother and spend time with him, and Cristina wondered if this relationship could push Isaac closer to emulating Luchito's life decisions. This possibility forced her to decide between supporting the older child and protecting the younger one. She felt that she must do something different to avoid a negative outcome—history should not repeat itself.

In the final parts of the fieldwork, we reviewed her relationship with Luchito. I asked Cristina, 'How did you feel when your children did not become college-educated? She added a couple of elements that further clarified her disappointment,

> For me, it was disheartening. I do not know. One must not have many expectations of the children, considering that I always told them [to take advantage of their opportunities]. They wasted them because they were intelligent children. They were not people with learning disabilities, disability problems or many terrible shortcomings like other children [...]. They are also vulnerable because their father abandoned them. They had an emotional rift with their dad that affected them. For me, those things must always strengthen you, not tear you down. It is an idea of mine that I cannot instil in 'the other' [her children]. Now I understand it. But I already did that. I had already demanded, asked, argued, and punished, but they are different people. They have lived different things. I was also a vulnerable person. It is not an excuse.

Cristina and Alvaro experienced a double bind. On the one hand, despite their numerous disagreements, they made material, emotional, and relational efforts to accommodate Luchito. His presence created complications, and they had to allocate more resources and perform more intensive relational labour. On the other hand, Cristina had become tired of Lucho's antics and was afraid for Isaac's future. This fatigue pushed her to more moments of self-reflection about her commitments, marked by two crucial endpoints: Should I help him? Should we cut ties with him?

Parents like Violeta, Cristina and Alvaro are dedicated to parenting contented children as ethical subjects—a commitment to open-ended ideas of ontological actualisation. Hence, parents must move in this direction somehow. They deploy mostly biographical memory and phantasmatic scenes as guidance in building routines, and flexible parenting embraces compromises, improvisation, and leaps of faith. Because parenting is not always successful, they attempt to make innovative and discontinuous states a reality, changing their approach to these moral puzzles.

As Cheryl Mattingly tells us, ethical projects often involve experimentation and deliberation. Deliberation here describes how people engage with moral puzzles in everyday life. Using ideas such as ‘disappointment’, ‘challenges’, ‘worries’, and ‘tragedies’, Mattingly conjures scenes where individuals attempt to resolve contingent issues to cultivate worlds that matter to them. Reflexivity entails imagining or playing out scenarios examining how to balance moral goods and virtues. For this, she emphasises human beings’ narrative selves. Individuals achieve a ‘discordant concordance’ among the projects and virtues they might pursue through self-narration (2014a, 2016, 2018b).

These households abound in moral puzzles. Violeta has quarrelled with her older daughters about their life choices. Vero feels that she still must protect her daughter, Isa, from her girlfriend and her own immaturity. Ernesto and Karen quarrel because he is too flexible and undermines Karen’s efforts to discipline the children. Soledad and Roberto were worried about their older son’s drive. Cecilia and Arturo are afraid that they have spoiled their daughter. Despite being older, Jacqui dwells on her children’s faulty parenting and her grandchildren’s suffering.

Parents roughly imagine confronting two problematic scenarios: overindulging and teenage rebellion. Both outcomes are likely and raise unwelcome challenges for the household. First, caretakers worry that their children could become ‘spoiled brats’ or ‘mama’s children’, who overwhelm them with demands. Alongside this concern, they think that spoiled children do not develop the capacity to resolve their own problems and do not allow themselves to be proper objects of care. Parents suspect that pampering children (*regalonear*) creates harmful dependence (*dependencia*).

Teenage rebellion is the second adverse scenario. When parents give too much autonomy to their children, teenagers become unruly and disrespectful. They become unable to participate as proper family members. They would say their children are too independent, do as they wish or are cocky. Here, the problem is the excess of autonomy. Children follow their own desires, disavowing parental advice and commands. Later, children, especially teenagers, shun domestic life and age-appropriate conduct.

Violeta and Cristina think that spoiled or rebellious children may point to adults who lack maturity, initiative, or independence, all deeply related notions. Adults who cannot balance respect and autonomy cannot fully reach social adulthood. Even when the particulars of this ethic remain obscure, they feel that rebellion or dependence are early signs of this lack of balance.

What do we learn about these mothers' dedication to achieving ethical subjectification? The first thing to note is that these forms of mattering require self-awareness and the creation of a self-image. Cristina wishes to protect her children, and Violeta hopes Jocelyn will become more responsible. Both desires express a commitment to their children, embedded in the post-industrial domestic imaginary and the ethical pedagogy of obedience and autonomy. However, their routines do not match their children's desired development, and problems arise. Luchito's defiance and Jocelyn's laziness become moral puzzles. They manifest a mild ethical breakdown that disturbs the routine (Zigon 2007).

To resolve these predicaments, Violeta and Cristina start talking to themselves. They interrogate themselves—their desires, concerns, and dedication. What matters? And how to secure it? Violeta realises that she is not only committed to obedience and social mobility; Cristina discerns that being ethical means choosing one son over the other. These mothers renew and revise their commitment through their inner conversation and widen how they understand their children's flourishing.

Single decisions or choices do not make commitments. Instead, commitments predominantly work *upon* desires and concerns. Fantasies play an essential role in feeding the self with desires and drives. Similarly, we occasionally become aware of specific forms of attunement and relational concerns—solicitude in Heideggerian jargon—encouraged by moods. However, commitments work by consciously consenting to them as a moral responsabilisation that involves resolving dilemmas. For example, Cristina must choose between being a reliable mother to Isaac or a helping figure to Luchito. Likewise, Violeta must assent to one form of motherhood: either reaffirming her authority or protecting her labouring body. In both cases, these alternatives make sense within post-industrial domestic fantasies and the sacrificial optimism mood. However, committing to one has stakes undetermined by the immediate forces that shape the context of her decision.

Reflecting on these cases, I would argue that commitments articulate second-order motives, mediated by reflexivity and conscious responsabilisation to encourage dedication. Harry Frankfurt has famously described second-order volitions. In ‘The Importance of What We Care About’ (1998), he attempts to explain how human beings can want specific and compelling desires to become one’s will. Frankfurt claims that people may have different fragments and divergent first-order desires. Yet, when people choose and cultivate particular desires (or concerns) as part of their way of being, it modifies these first-order desires and defines human beings as singular selves.

Similarly, Charles Taylor (1985) has argued that human beings are strong evaluators. He adds that individuals tend to develop a vocabulary of worth, pointing to higher and lower forms of desire and incommensurable sets of values. For Taylor, individuals and communities evaluate what matters to them to achieve a worthy life. The Canadian philosopher claims that these evaluations have little to do with ‘the attraction of the consummations’ and more with the ‘kind of life and kind of subject that these desires properly belong to’ (1985: 25).

Cristina and Violeta try to see where their actual commitments lay when they question themselves. As Mattingly argues, human beings examine actual or imagined scenarios. In addition, they often involve internal dialogue and conversation to discern what matters to them. When Violeta addresses questions such as ‘Do you really want Jocelyn to go to a better school?’ or ‘Do you really want to leave her alone?’ she tries to figure out not only her current first-order desires but also the vectors that guide her commitment and what the limits are. Likewise, Cristina is thinking about focusing on Isaac or making a final effort to solve Luchito’s issues.

Margaret Archer has described reflexivity as an internal conversation that is often made public. She writes, ‘internal dialogue is the practice through which we “make up our minds” by questioning ourselves, clarifying our beliefs and inclinations, diagnosing our situations, deliberating about our concerns, and defining our own projects.’ (2003: 103). Against the more episodic nature of the anthropology of ‘moral problematisation’ (Laidlaw 2014; Zigon 2007, 2010), We may notice that these deliberations often involve ‘long conversations’—ongoing internal and external reflections about their commitments.

Luchito’s defiance and Jocelyn’s laziness are already part of the everyday concerns simmering under their daily routines. When confronted with the actual events—the rule-breaking and the lack of investment in schooling—these mothers are not completely surprised or thrown off their routines. After all, they have assessed their children’s struggles and personalities, especially if these aspects have emerged as problems during their internal conversations about motherhood. Moreover, one expression of their commitment is the desire to protect and help their children flourish. Thus, they anticipate and even search for such problems.

As one experiences this process from the first-person position, the self feels responsible for these processes of mattering. This responsibility becomes a calling that justifies affective investment and existential stakes. Commitments become part of the self, ‘…the kinds of commitments that people find so deep to who they are that they might not care to go on with their lives without them, or would not know themselves if they no longer had them’ (Mattingly 2014b: 12; see also Williams 1981).

Children, as the subjects of commitments, demand more than routines. Dedicated parenthood—supported by commitments as structures of mattering—among these households is not a smooth journey. It implies resisting the temptation to give up and accommodating the goal of autonomous-but-obedient subjects with other demands. Yet, above all, it commands imagining and devising children’s flourishing or ontological actualisation, again and again. Although the post-industrial domestic imaginary and sacrificial optimism can conjure up everyday practices to achieve this end, a commitment remains open-ended. A surplus of ethical elaboration and affective investment assures innovation and moral striving.

The question of mattering is missing from the accounts of new kinship studies and parenting culture studies. In a symmetrical but not identical fashion, both bodies of literature neglect how parenting commitments involve this strange surplus of ethical elaboration and affective investment. The repertoires of relatedness in the NKS, expressed in ritual and everyday routines, mainly sustain the saturation that defines parenting. The ideologies and technologies of intensive parenting in PCS beget anxious commitments without examining the personal dimension of their ethnographic interlocutors. In these approaches, Violeta and Cristina are primarily cultural performers or victims. Decisions are an expression of cultural repertoires or paranoid ideologies. Instead, tracing the nature of her commitment allows for exploring how parents incorporate and elaborate upon symbolic formations. Routines become an object for reflection.

The endgame of a commitment

Cindy Katz has famously argued that both capitalist accumulation and parents' anxiety about the future have transformed childhood into a 'spectacle'—'a site of accumulation, commodification, and desire' (2008: 5). This incites casting children as accumulation strategies, ornaments, and waste (ibid; see also 2012). We might link this spectacle to the intensification of intensive parenting. However, one of the central insights of PCS is that working-class parents tend to reject intensive parenting and enact a different set of values in rearing their children.

Annette Lareau (2003) has described the differences between two styles of parenting: natural growth and concerted cultivation. Concerted cultivation means that middle-class parents feel entitled to social mobility and opportunities, thus anxiously intervening in their children's lives and schedules in order to expand their social and cognitive skills. (See also Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik 2013). Natural growth, most common among low-income families, sees children spending more time alone and defining their activities more autonomously. Due to these parents often working longer hours, their children enjoy more freedom but lower academic support.

In broader strokes, the distinction between 'leaving alone' and 'pushing to success' has been helpful for mapping class differences among parenting practices in urban centres around the world. Anthropologists have found that in places like

China, India, and Egypt, the middle class often pushes children towards securing upward mobility and white-collar jobs through cultivating skills and valuable habits (Donner 2008a; Jeffrey 2010; Kuan 2015; Sancho 2015; Schielke 2012). In contrast, Gillies (2006) and Evans (2006) show how British working-class mothers reject intensive parenting, focusing on keeping children safe and helping them to endure the schooling experience. Likewise, Sudanese and Dominican migrant working-class mothers in the United States and Spain have also demonstrated resistance to intensive parenting, incorporating collectivism and freedom as values (Jiménez 2014; Jaysane-Darr 2014)

In Santiago, Méndez & Gayo (2019) have described how upper-middle-class parents manage schooling, children's social circles and access to cultural resources to accumulate social and cultural capital and create sociocultural distinctions among middle-class fractions. Similarly, they note the centrality of cultivating skills for parenting practices. Unsurprisingly, their work describes these practices as 'high-intensity parenting' and 'frantic lives' (2019: 84-5).

Considering that middle-class and working-class positions influence these parents, it makes sense that their approach to nurturing attempts to conciliate two sets of values. Parents like Cristina and Violeta are caught between middle-class and working-class styles of parenting. While such parents push their children towards social mobility and valuable career skills, they also accept that their children must make their own decisions and balance different aspects of their lives. They also restrain themselves from pressuring their children academically. In the end, these mothers' expectations are modest: to raise contented adults and ethical subjects with some degree of ability to navigate the Chilean economy.

Have children met their parents' expectations under late capitalism? A plurality of the children has faced roadblocks in accessing social adulthood. By problems, I mean that they have returned home after a failed relationship, have no means to sustain themselves, have not maintained a long-term job, or have dropped out of a higher education institution. Their parents still support them, but they see a lack of connection between personal desire and self-responsibility in their offspring. They are sensitive to their children's plights, albeit frustration and anger interrupt everyday moments.

Most of the families that I visited had adult children living with them. Cristina, Alvaro, and Violeta experienced the return of older children during the fieldwork. When I started the ethnography, Vero already lived with their older children. At the beginning of this research, Soledad and Karen were unsure about their children's career prospects. Finally, Jacqui had been instrumental in steering her older granddaughters to social adulthood. The parable of the prodigal son is the standard depiction of older children's comings and goings.

In Chile, lower-middle-class young adults have problems accessing stable positions in the job market and keeping long-term conjugal cohabitation. Thus, they need to return to their family home for support. Adulthood remains elusive for a significant part of the younger generations among lower-middle-class households in Chile (Canales, Opazo & Camps 2016; MDSF 2017b; Krauskopf-Roger 2019; Sepúlveda 2016).[29]

Violeta's older daughters—Pancha and Roci—had shown some promise in middle school; however, they did not develop career skills later in life or enrol in college. Instead, they focused on building intimate relationships. At twenty, Roci went to live with her husband and their child. Pancha did the same later. Yet, both returned home due to domestic disputes with their partners. These domestic upheavals mirrored their fragmented career trajectories: dropping out of trade schools and having problems finding stable jobs.

In the last month of fieldwork, Violeta had different attitudes towards her daughters despite these similarities. Violeta had a warmer relationship with Roci. Her second daughter was no longer working in December 2018. She had worked as a guard and had not looked for a job after being laid off. One day, I asked Violeta if that bothered her. 'Not really. I am calm with Roci in the house,' she answered. Her daughter cared for her sisters and daughter, Katya, which lessened Violeta's anxiety at work. Violeta had no problem welcoming her and her granddaughter into her home if it meant being able to protect them from Roci's partners. Violeta continued, 'It is a matter of distributing ourselves between upstairs and downstairs only.' Roci had not made a monetary contribution to the house; still, her mother recognised her aid. She took care of the household members while Violeta was absent.

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[29] We might consider this a mere coincidence, but recent literature on young adults has pointed out how adulthood markers are changing almost everywhere in the world (Durham & Solway 2017; Juaréz & Gayet 2014; Mendoza-Denton & Boum 2015). Further, these changes have predominantly fostered vexing or negative affective states regarding the transition to social adulthood, especially in areas affected by late capitalist transformations (Boddy 2017; Mains 2017; O'Neill 2017; Schielke 2015; Pedersen 2018; Frederiksen 2017).

However, a certain nervousness in Violeta's voice was noticeable as time passed. We talked on the phone in 2022. 'Roci is still in the house; she has been around for years,' the mother reminded me again. 'She helps me with the girls,' she told me. Then she added, 'At some point, she has to go to work, and she is going to help me with the bills.' Finally, Violeta sighed and concluded, 'We need to see some money; no money has been seen.'

The relation with Pancha was tenser. Like Roci, she returned in the last months of 2018 due to domestic disputes. Back with her son Rafa, the daughter stayed at her mother's house. Pancha was 'good for working,' as Violeta would say. She landed a position as a bank clerk and was thinking of studying management at a technical school. But, despite working and being more orderly than Roci, Violeta already had emotional distance from her. She spoke little with her and leaned less on her to run the house.

When I spoke to Violeta in 2022, the relationship had exploded. 'She is not living here; she is living with her grandmother,' Violeta said. The mother resented this closeness. Before Pancha's departure, Violeta had seen some attitudes that she did not like. She recounted the events, 'Pancha's boyfriend tried to grope Jocelyn when she was living here. It was a party, and I was not there. I never liked that kid. I told Pancha, "I did not like this, and I do not want to see him here anymore. He will not come to the house. I have to take care of mine. If you do not want to open your eyes, it is your thing," and that is when she left.' Violeta insisted, 'I do not care. She never contributed to the house.'

The mother revealed another episode that had intensified the break: a fight at her father's house. After another row with her mother, Roci defended her, but Pancha was on her grandmother's side. The woman did not let Violeta see her ailing father. Roci tried to help her enter the house, but Pancha did not get involved. 'I did not know if it was on purpose, but she turned the volume up of the radio. So my father never knew what happened.' With anger in her voice, Violeta said, 'More than anything, it hurts me that she has not supported me. It is supposed to be the three of us [herself, Pancha and Roci].' When we finished talking, she assured me that she was trying to have a better relationship with her, 'She started to walk away alone, and alone she is coming back'. However, the emotional wound was still felt.

As we have seen, Luchito posed a different kind of problem to Cristina than Pancha to Violeta. When I spoke to Cristina in 2021, she sounded more determined to keep Luchito at a distance. She summarised her stance as follows,

> With Luchito, it has been a rivalry for a long time. It has been 14 years trying to support him in some circumstances that did not give results, throwing in the towel at the end because it was no longer my issue. I talked about it with a psychologist; I talked about it with my boss, who does therapy. He is a grown man; he is 28 years old. I wanted to do many things; he accepted my help for a while. I do not want to do it anymore. I do not want to continue. I do not think so. He always blames the other [...] So, at 28, you cannot force him to do things. He must do everything of his own volition. So I decided to cut the 'taking charge' feeling, stop wondering what he was doing with his life. I am not interested. It is not that I am not interested in how he is doing, because I know he is okay, because if he were in problems, I would have already known. I know that even in that aspect, he depends on me. If something happens to him, he will tell me, 'Mom, this happened', but since I know he has not spoken to ask me for money, I know that he is fine. But I also cut that off because he was always asking me for money. He never talked to me to say, 'Hello, mom, how are you?' 'How did you wake up?' I must admit that he has returned the money, but it has always been a cycle, and there came a time when I said, 'enough, enough'.

This ethical pedagogy runs into an impasse. In late capitalist Santiago, lower-middle-class parents and caregivers have found nurturing children into autonomous-but-obedient subjects challenging. The practices are contradictory and opaque, but trying to arrive at a satisfactory end seems to be the hardest part under the constraints of late capitalism. Violeta and Cristina try to steer the children to mature, become independent and be attached to family and moral values. They show optimism despite past dejections and have even learned to lessen their expectations of what can be accomplished within Santiago's educational system and labour market. A mix of pragmatism, flexibility and pessimism permeate their reflexivity. However, adult children that have not reached maturity pose a problem: What to do with those children? A grey area appears, where these children must assume the consequences of their acts, but parents and caregivers still help them.

While not all lower-middle-class parents encounter the same problems, it is telling that all the households that participate in this ethnography have shared similar issues. These parents and caregivers rarely abandon their older children. Despite their problems, they are invited again into the family home. Violeta and Cristina experience emotional fatigue trying to resolve the commitment to nurturing they assumed. The perpetual evaluation of their children's potential also adds to this fatigue. Violeta and Cristina understand that the late capitalism context and their own family experiences may not encourage their children's success. Still, they try to see the potential paths that would allow them to complete the ethical pedagogy they have settled for themselves. Fatigue can take different forms. In Violeta's case, it is the feeling of betrayal. For Cristina, it is the never-fulfilled expectations.

We must notice that the reasons generating tensions were never about children not being successful professionals or contributing money to the house. Instead, personal reasons mediated economic conflicts. For Cristina, it had to do with her son not taking advantage of the opportunities they were giving him to build a life for himself—an idea that strongly resonated with the other households. For Violeta, it was her daughter's lack of commitment and loyalty. In both cases, creating more problems to finish the 'task'—rather than less—underlay these concerns.

I would suggest that these parents and caregivers understand these tensions as a form of moral reciprocity linked with sacrificial optimism. Even considering how multiple forms of oppression and exploitation, among them late capitalism and patriarchy, undermine the possibility of fulfilling this commitment, they tend to interpret the situation as a breach of respect or trust. Parents want children to become obedient-but-autonomous subjects, able to form their own families and home. When they perceive that their children are not taking the opportunities to fulfil this future for themselves, they become displeased. Then, if children's behaviour creates more unwanted responsibilities for the parents, the latter interprets the situation as disrespect for their initial sacrifice to raise them. This impasse raises tensions and accelerates kin conflicts. While not all lower-middle-class households experience these tensions, the presence of moral reciprocity seems relevant to understanding the limits of the commitment to nurturing.

If *criar* is a core commitment—a surplus of ethical elaboration and affective investment required to maintain a course of action despite active reasons to abandon it—forsaking it is not a painless task. The parents and caregivers endure moral fatigue to find a middle ground under their circumstances. The subtle openness to their children's actualisation puts them in a position that makes them reckon that they might be wrong in their ways and a new solution could be possible. Then, mutual demands may strain these relationships, but parents rarely entirely dissolve them.

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This chapter has explored the idea of commitment, examining how desires and concerns become an emergent structure of mattering. In parallel, it describes the core commitment among the lower-middle-class parents I shadowed in Santiago: nurturing. Instead of focusing on relatedness or intensive parenting, I have centred the analysis on parenting as an ethical commitment that entails routines (including an ethical pedagogy), experimentation, and deliberation. Considering Cristina's and Violeta's approaches to moral puzzles of parenting, the main sections have noticed that commitment is a structure of mattering that depends on the internal deliberation of events that may or may not be separate from everyday life. Internal deliberation enables one to decide on, assent, or consent to first-order motives, shape them into commitments, and later revise them as quasi-objects. The last section explores the consequences of pursuing this commitment—unfulfilled expectations and moral fatigue—under late capitalism and its contradictory mandates.

Chapter Six

Tranquillity at Home:

Protection, dignity, and tranquillity

Every time that I visited Violeta’s house, I felt slightly tense. The ambience reminded me of a house of cards. It was in the small details—smelly socks under the couch, the unwashed dishes, Jocelyn’s silence, or school notebooks out of place. By any standard, her house could not be described as untidy. She always used to find time to clean and organise despite long working hours. I helped a little on my visits, mostly to get out of the way of her fast, determined movements. Yet, something was brewing beneath the surface. Violeta’s stress and gruff demeanour suggested she was alert for incoming crises. One detail could unravel a series of problems that she had contained successfully so far. Nothing could be out of place. The history of how she got this house is a patchwork of different stories and observations.

Violeta had to find a new home to get out of her parents’ house. She lived with them after escaping from her marriage. She shared a place in Pedro Aguirre Cerda with her ex-husband and their three daughters. But her experiences of domestic abuse drove her to leave him. Violeta narrated it as follows, ‘I called my dad, and I told him, “I am sorry, but I want to go back to your house; I want to go, dad. I just need a small van to take my things.” Then, I took my furniture, my things, only what was mine. That was the last time that he would hit me. I told myself, “This idiot wants to kill my baby; he wants to kill my baby again.”’ With her father’s help, she managed to flee. The husband immediately disappeared, fearing retaliation.

The peace did not last long, however. Violeta’s mother made her life impossible as soon as she returned. Violeta described the experience as ‘uncomfortable’ because she had to live in one bedroom with her three children. ‘The room was too small, and all of us were piled over,’ she remembered. It was also uncomfortable due to reasons of intimacy. Violeta did not want to reside with meddlesome relatives, especially her mother. She described her personality as a mix of overbearing and neglectful. Mother and daughter fought all the time.

Violeta decided to look for a house. ‘It gave me tranquillity having my own home. I was fighting with my mother all the time. It gave tranquillity. She spent all the time mistreating my girls when they were younger. Sometimes I did not have money to give them the food, and she threw it away not to feed them.’ Then, she emphasised, ‘I would have owned my house earlier. I had my saving account at the Banco de Desarrollo […]. There, I put 1 UF (£30) each month to have what the state asked you. But I loaned the money to my brother. My mother pestered me a bunch. She said, “Your brother is getting married. Come on, loan him the money.” I was an idiot. Do you think they paid me back?’

In the past, Violeta did not see the contradictory dimension of the spatial relationship with her family. She had decided to buy a place near her parents’ home despite the conflicts between her and her relatives. Two sets of demands drove her search. Firstly, Violeta pointed out that the state insisted on a house near a medical centre, transportation, and schools for the children. Secondly, she wanted a place nearby her father and, to a lesser extent, her siblings. While they were not friendly, they could still help her. Her father was a completely different issue. She adored him and could not stand to be away from him.

Despite some initial concerns, Violeta decided to buy the house using a state housing programme. She loved her place, but her experiential affinity with it was not immediate. She could sell it later if needed. The paperwork was gruelling. ‘I went to the SERVIU a lot,’ she claimed. Service for Housing and Urbanism (SERVIU, by its initials in Spanish) is the primary state institution for accessing affordable housing for the working class. Her visits to the SERVIU building during that year were recurrent. ‘I would miss work for a couple of hours or ask for the earliest available appointment,’ she recalled. There always a document was missing. Other times she needed reports from the local government. Without much help, she had to rely on Roci to get blueprints from them. She could not skip work because money was discounted from her salary by his boss. Violeta also explained that she had to add a clause to the title—under article 150 of the Civil Code—to secure that she was the single owner of the house, leaving her still husband without any legal access to the property.

Another requirement consisted of a visit from a state inspector. The objective of the evaluation was to examine the quality of the construction and guarantee that the asking price was fair. After some resistance from the previous tenant, Violeta, the owner, and the inspector managed to access the house. The real problem appeared when the inspector pointed out that one of the backyard walls was unfinished. The house was unsuitable for a state grant without an adequate separation from the next-door place. Therefore, somebody had to complete the building before the evaluation. At that point, Violet acted quickly. She persuaded the state agent to help her. Without bribing him, according to her story, the man agreed to omit the detail from his report and only take photographs from a certain angle that would hide the missing wall. 'The inspector was kind enough,' she recollected, sharing a sense of relief.

Violeta was beyond happy the day that the check was ready. 'It took a while, but when there is a will, there is a way,' she clarified. She folded and hid it in her clothes. The owner received it to close the transaction the same day. It did not take long for her to move all her things and be ready outside her new house. But another disappointment was waiting for her. The tenant had resisted her visits for a reason. The woman had taken the water heater and some plumbing, leaving the property in bad shape. 'I found the house in bad condition, but I did not care. I just laid out my mattresses, and we slept on *our* house that day,' Violeta concluded the retrospection.

Violeta's house stands at the intersection of motivations rooted in the past and projections into the future. It reflects her ongoing effort to perform self-reliance and give shelter and protection to her daughters and grandchildren. Likewise, the building bears traces of the struggle to make a place in the world away from his ex-husband's abuse and her mother's neglect while attempting to be close to her father. The house is a complicated and fragile device to raise and protect her children and escape some terrible things she has experienced.

There were some problems that Violeta had to confront to achieve this goal; one of them was overcrowding and managing space. Violeta needed to provide shelter for all her daughters and grandchildren. The older daughters and their children came and went; thus, she never knew how much space would be required. Like other lower-middle-class *Santiaguinos*, Violeta had made some renovations to her house. Her family built them using low-cost construction techniques, professional skills, and improvisation. She had set aside a space for the living room, the dining table, and the kitchen—sink, refrigerator, and stove—on the ground floor. The stairs led directly to the first floor, where one could find two bedrooms and one bathroom that she had renovated with the help of her family.

However, the harsh reality was that her home could not hold more people, and the feeling of overcrowding had begun to sneak into the house. Violeta thought the immediate solution to this problem would be to build another room in the small backyard. One of her daughters could sleep there, and then she might redistribute the space more comfortably.

On one occasion, she took me to this part of the house. The area was a small rectangle full of construction materials, a laundry machine, and discarded items that had not found their way into the trash bins. The usually reserved woman started to tell me a good deal of her thoughts and feelings regarding this quarter of her house,

> This is the backyard. Do not focus on these things [Violeta pointed to a pile of building materials: bags of cement, bricks and tools]. My father left them there. He and my brother said that they were going to be back to build the (new) room. Look at this wall. They built it, but they were kind of drunk when they erected it. If you check it, it is crooked. Yes! They barely did anything. I HAD TO FINISH IT! [she shouted] They were drinking the whole afternoon. The wall had to be finished. The guy who sold us the house left the wall half-built. You could see everything from the next-door backyard. Worse yet, these neighbours! They play music at full blast. Here is where I want to build the new room [pointing to a corner]. Maybe I can rent it, or one of the girls could live there. Ugh! Everything is messy here. We should clean it. These girls… never help.

Violeta also framed the wall as an issue of protection. She also wanted to close the backyard. She argued, ‘They were men in the next-door house. I was afraid that something might happen to the girls.’ When recalling the abuse, the mother could not help but try to eliminate any possible threat. It was one of the times that she was talking about the past and present at the same time. We had talked about her efforts to protect her children from the violence committed by men before, but her words did not indicate a particular emphasis on them vis-à-vis other threats. It was just the way things were for Violeta. Weaving in the permanent suspicion of men, she insisted on how the wall ensured security. ‘That was just some stripes of shade netting and boards. At any moment, it could fall, or the [next-door] men could enter,’ she emphasised from the living-and-dining room, looking through the window. I thought that maybe my soft manner excluded me from the category of dangerous men.

Throughout my visits, Violeta insisted that criminals and drug addicts, men and women, roamed the streets. She had even been mugged a couple of times. Yet, she was more worried for her children. They could only be outside the house under her supervision or someone she trusted. When she saw any children alone in the street, it was a sign of neglect. Therefore, being inside and together was essential for Violeta. She preferred to have a big television in the living-and-dining room so her daughters and granddaughter did not get bored staying inside. Likewise, she happily obliged when opportunities to get satellite cable or video games arose. Of course, illegal dealings are cheaper than the official option, but she does not care. As long as the children were entertained, it was enough. ‘They need to have something to do,’ she declared.

A safe home had been a recurring topic of conversation. Following the backyard inspection, she showed me the railings in her house. When she bought it, the house already had a metallic fence, but she had painted and covered it with boards so pedestrians could not see inside the house. But the whole structure was feeble. ‘With a karate kick, the whole thing would come down,’ Violeta insisted.

One of the last times I saw Violeta, she was happy because the community had installed community alarms. A small device was a key to safety. It had a direct connection with the police in case of emergency. ‘If I see someone weird is one button, and this one is only when you find an intruder,’ she told me while displaying it. It was another way to confront crime.

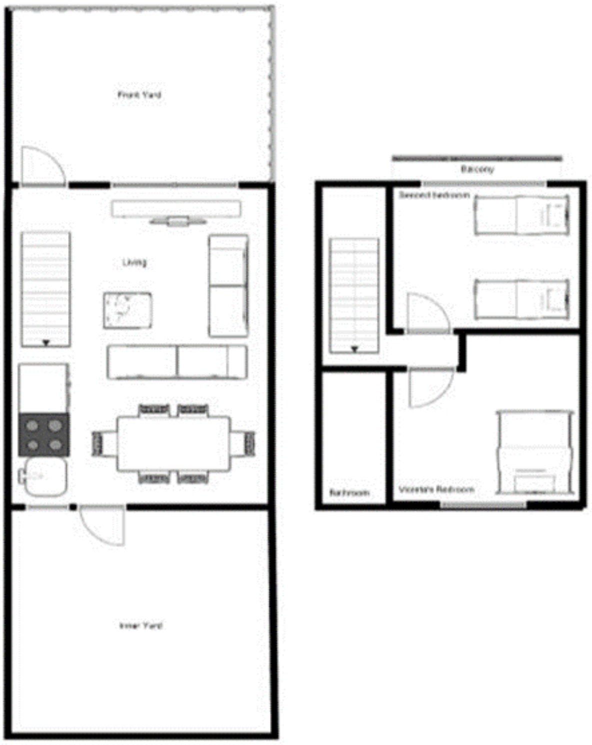
Front Yard
Living
Inner Yard
Balcony
Second bedroom
Bathroom
Violeta's Bedroom

Fig. 5: Violeta’s house

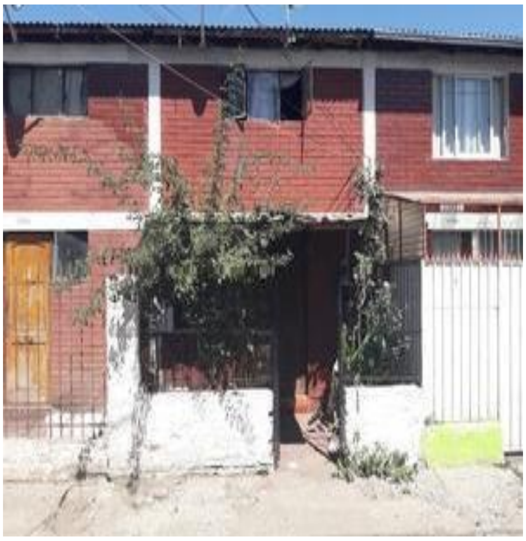

Fig. 6: Front view of a house like Violeta’s house

Violeta and the other lower-middle-class people I know have a complicated relationship with their houses as material structures and intimate spaces. A myriad of beliefs, dispositions, actions, and aspirations shape their connection with the domestic. Houses could be an economic good for them, in which they invest money and expect future returns. They also reflect memories, life experiences, and expectations about carving a haven in the world. Likewise, houses sometimes express widely circulated social values such as respectability and status. They are also the means of expressing personal taste, aesthetic preferences, and spiritual needs.

Homes *(casas)* are the critical anchor that ground experience and the central infrastructure of routines and projects in Santiago. These parents and caregivers are concerned that their houses mostly—but not solely—be spaces for living together, resting and raising children. Here we must recall the close relationship between domesticity, focal relatedness, and physical spaces (Carsten 2004; Hamberger 2018; Yanagisako 2015). Building a home often overlaps with the process of kinship categorisations and practices of relatedness.

In the Chilean case, the post-industrial domestic imaginary has focused on defining nuclear family categories and practices embedded in a family home. In their minds, households, houses, and homes are the same things. They express this overlapping emphasis, using the word *casa* (home or house) to refer to the different dimensions of domestic dwelling: the actual building, the household economy, the family that resides in the same place, and the moral project.

In this regard, anthropological and sociological approaches that focus on domesticity acknowledge the complexity of house and home experiences (For a literature review, see Després 1991; Mallett 2004; Saunders & Williams 1988). Before the 1990s, a modernist meta-approach had dominated the anthropology of houses and homes. This perspective understands *houses* as household units or physical structures, usually representing a section within broader kinship or political-economic arrangements (Chayanov 1966; Evans-Pritchard 1940; Fortes 1969; Meillassoux 1981; Sahlins 1972). A culturalist-oriented variant has argued that houses express underlying cosmological or value-oriented structures instead of purely material and normative forces (Cunningham 1964; Bourdieu 2000[1970];

Forth 1981). These approaches share the view that houses are finite, coherent and discrete objects.

Feminist anthropologists have advanced several critiques of these anthropological approaches to households. Harris argues that ‘the domestic as a category contains all sort of assumptions about the natural status of the activities and relationships contained within’ (1984:152). She also questions the rigidity of household boundaries, arguing that past experiences of coresidence can render them fluid even when local ideologies insist on portraying households as bounded and self-sufficient (1982: 151). Yanagisako further elaborates the critique, arguing that this kind of description ‘obscures the complex social processes through which people negotiate the relations that produce households’ (Yanagisako 2015: 231; see also Collier, Rosaldo & Yanagisako 1982).

Considering these insights, contemporary research has moved to an understanding of houses as *ongoing processual assemblages, in which different materialities and forces converge, shaping long histories and biographies of making, dwelling, and unmaking* (Samanani & Lenhard 2019). (See for similar arguments: Feld & Basso 1996; Helliwell 1996; Carsten 2004; and Allerton 2013). Instead of bounded and discrete units, houses are processes in the making constituted by multiple assemblages and boundaries in permanent flux (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995). These processes reveal an open-ended existential necessity for rootedness or embeddedness that drives human beings to make places in which to live (Feld & Basso 1996; S. Ward, 2003). Conversely, place making can also create moments of tension, deferral, and displacement (Navaro-Yashin 2009; Stewart 2007; Hinkson 2017).

The chapter explores this process by examining the values these parents and caretakers attempt to enact and how they relate to multiple contexts, demands and commitments. It argues that ethnographic descriptions of houses must attend to the gap between intent and compromise. The literature on houses and homes tends to highlight place making as causally efficacious. Inhabitants make houses through the realisation of themes, values, or sensory imagination under specific cultural and historical conditions—e.g. cosiness (*hygge*) in Denmark (Bille 2015) or liveliness (being *ramé*) in Indonesia (Allerton 2013). Certainly, anthropologists have noticed that violence, oppression, poverty, and scepticism can obstruct or shatter domestic projects. In such cases, ethnographic analysis has focused on the failure to enact these ideals (Stewart 1996) or the process of regeneration of domestic life (Das 2011).

Here, I suggest going one step further than Inge Daniels, who proposes to examine the complicated and contradictory intersection between social ideals and the messy actual use of houses (2015). This chapter explores the intersection of social discourse, personal idealisation and concrete compromise that animates quiet tensions and incongruities. The neoliberal degeneration of life engenders these quasi-events and makes it challenging to reach harmonious solutions. In contrast with Daniels's description of Japanese houses that highlights the capacity to organise this incongruence felicitously, lower-middle-class dwellings in Santiago cannot create a balanced resolution. Instead, they put together a home, pursuing, struggling, and failing to enact the values of protection and dignity. Atmospheres of tranquillity offer an affective compromise that holds different values and themes together, leaving a gap between intent and outcome. The results are complex mosaics of values and affects articulated by gender and class.

This chapter tracks this argument, grounding lower-middle-class urban dwellings on dignity and protection—values that have animated Chilean political housing struggles. The third section describes how these parents enact dignity and protection and the impasse that makes the realisation of these values impossible. In response, they settle for fashioning tranquillity. Here, tranquillity entails a compromise between their intentions and their means. Finally, the last section argues that they engage in atmosphere setting and tactical aloofness to create atmospheres of tranquillity in an affective and sensual manner.

The political economy of housing in Santiago

The traditional Western philosophical understanding of houses as spaces has highlighted the experience of privacy and comfort. Being at home usually involves the feeling of being at ease, where subject and object become indistinct, and natural attitudes emerge. In industrial contexts, privacy and comfort articulate key motifs that inform secondary motifs such as protection, intimacy, cosiness, respectability, and individuality (Chapman & Hockey 1999; Kaika 2004; Young 2005). However, this perspective depends on middle-class and upper-class views. The experience of private and legal property associated with these classes at the beginning of the twentieth century authorises values such as privacy and comfort. Houses are about establishing solid ontological grounds for homely worlds and building the boundary between private and nonprivate.

In contrast, Latin American history has shown how houses, moral standing, and citizenship keep intertwining even after families achieve homeownership. Urban Latin American anthropology has addressed the process of homeownership and the construction of domestic spaces, illuminating the conflictive relationships between the state, social movements, and unruly denizens (Holston 2008; Murphy 2015; Pérez 2016, 2018; Procupez 2008, 2015; Skewes 2000). The fight for proper housing, homeownership, and the right of the city entangle the domestic experience with the broader political landscape, where dwelling and resistance are interconnected. This literature's relevant lesson is that even when low-income families can access the dream of homeownership, domesticity is far from privacy and comfort. These populations must confront new and old problems—social stigma, low-quality construction, disrupted communities, and grinding bureaucracy, to name a few—that disturb the domestic's conventional sense.

The modern idea of private homeownership is relatively recent among underclass and working-class families in Santiago. Before the latter part of the nineteenth century, the fluidity of residence strategies, active migratory movements, and the low standards of domestic refuges among the popular classes established a context wherein a humble shelter, shared cohabitation, or transiency were enough (de Ramón 1990; Goicovic 2005a). As discussed previously, the rise of the industrial domestic imaginary compounded a series of domestic and citizenship concerns that have driven working-class families to pursue nuclear kinship and neolocality. Coherently, these practices required a consistent form of dwelling that would harbour these new aspirations of intimacy and privacy and hold the nascent disciplinary and biopolitical practices (Castillo & Letelier 2017; X. Valdés 2005: 97ff).[30]

The relationship between dwellings and the industrial domestic imaginary got more intricate as homeownership became a more achievable goal for large segments of the popular classes. The state expanded housing projects and acknowledged and assisted low-income urban settlements that had seized land illegally on which to live (Espinoza 1998; Murphy 2015). The improved living standards of working-class families also enabled more significant homeownership rates (L. Valenzuela 2008).

However, the neoliberal experiment enacted by the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990) changed the relationship between families and their houses (Garretón, M. 2017; Hidalgo 2004; Rivera 2012; Sugranyes 2005). While the developmental state had framed housing as a political right, the authoritarian government discourse aimed to transform Chile from a *country of proletarians* into a *country of proprietors*, shifting houses from politics to market solutions (Thomas 2011). One core ambition was to decouple housing from workers' rights, political parties' influence, and community organisations and to link them to the registers of individual achievements, consumers, and markets.[31]

By the end of the dictatorship, the authoritarian state had still not grappled with the housing deficit. Thus, post-authoritarian governments (1990-present) inherited the mandate for more affordable and available state-subsidised housing (Rivera 2012). Due to this pressure, the state launched an aggressive plan of public-private partnerships to build entire neighbourhoods. After the first decade of increased state action, the housing policy was considered a success and widely regarded as crucial to alleviating poverty and homelessness in the country (Ducci 1997). Since then, state agencies have widened the socioeconomic focus of housing schemes to allow a more significant number of lower-middle-income families to benefit from the subsidies. Nowadays, homeownership reaches around 62 per cent among lower-income and lower-middle-income groups, and stable residence hovers at about 80 per cent (MDSF 2018).

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[30] The industrial domestic imaginary established that working-class houses must be clean and tidy. As child mortality was one of the state's core concerns, the science of maternity and rearing (puericulture) authorised biopolitical measures (Pieper Mooney 2009; X. Valdés 2005). Catholic and secular social workers facilitated the expansion of the state discourse and the transformation of domestic spaces, shepherding mothers into embodying these concerns about order, cleanliness, and boundaries. (Durán 2012; Illanes 2007).

[31] From a more structural viewpoint, the government also intended to consolidate the land and real estate market and reconfigure the urban landscape, thus activating new sources of accumulation and governance (Boano & Vergara, 2017; Hidalgo, Pausen & Santana 2016; Fuster-Farfán 2019)

Several complications counter this narrative of success. The aggressive expansion of social housing has not been able to help all families to secure stable dwellings, maintaining a housing deficit. Since the 2000s, two related phenomena have expressed this issue: families without access to state housing assistance, lodging with relatives (*allegados*); and the slight growth of long-term squatter settlements (*campamentos*). Following a long political tradition, *pobladores* organisations have addressed these issues, demanding better housing policies to achieve a better life and dignity (Pérez 2016; Angelcos & Pérez 2017). Furthermore, the quality of state-subsidised housing has created predicaments—i.e. low-quality subsidised constructions, unsafe neighbourhoods, fragmented communities, and the lack of access to services and workplaces (Ducci 2009; Rodríguez & Sungrayes 2005). Moreover, scholars have identified a strong nostalgia for squatter settlement life among the people who have experienced the transition to lower-middle-class neighbourhoods, highlighting the current dissatisfaction with community life (Besoain & Cornejo 2015; Márquez 2004, 2007; Skewes 2000). As a result, recent research has found that, when considering housing decisions, lower-middle-class households value the sense of attachment to their childhood homes, often eschewing other aesthetic considerations, or see their choice of home and neighbourhood as restricted by economic and social resources (Stillerman 2017: 10).

The political economy of housing illustrates two historical threads regarding the access and experience of urban poor and working-class families. Firstly, homeownership struggles are closely related to the moral yearning for a good life, dignity, and citizenship. Secondly, the relationship between domestic imaginaries, state action, and housing policies draws attention to domestic dwellings as places of protection. According to housing discourses, a good house enables parents to protect their families and consolidates their quality of life.

Building a home: dignity and protection

Before moving on, it may be necessary to restate the notion of value and values used throughout this thesis. Graeber argues, ‘Value becomes (…) the way people represent the importance of their own actions to themselves: normally, as reflected in one or another socially recognised form.’ (2001: 47). The objective is linking (economic) value and (sociological) values, revealing how both versions describe the capacity of creating and transforming social relationships (Graeber 2001, 2013; T. Turner 2008). Values systems constitute the process of production and realisation that materialise the products of labour and creativity in relationships, persons, roles, tokens, tools, and commodities, among others.

Therefore, different forms of production and realisation can produce value, or *values*, in order to create and transform domestic relationships. Rituals are essential to making temporal and spatial boundaries and for connecting houses with lengthier genealogies (Allerton 2013; Bloch 1995; Meloni 2017; Saile 1985). Alongside rituals, events of creating, buying, modifying, and appropriating goods and commodities are significant for developing a sense of homeliness and embeddedness (Garvey 2005; Miller 1988; Olesen 2010). In contrast to discrete events, quotidian acts and routines of conviviality or improvisation can thicken domestic relationships (Carsten 1995; Das 2011; Dudley 2011; Pink 2004).

I started seeing some of these processes after the first couple of months of fieldwork in Ernesto and Karen’s home. It was the first week of January 2018. I remember walking from the underground station to their house. I yelled ‘Hello!’ and they quickly welcomed me in. Sat in their living-and-dinner room, we start talking about the week. This little ritual often meant talking about the latest political scandal, but that day was different. We started talking about the holidays. Remembrance dominated that year. Ernesto narrated how it was different from other years, ‘This is the first time without all of them. Of course, we were sad.’ They had spent the scorching summer day resting and preparing Christmas dinner. At night, the family paid a short visit to one of Karina’s uncles that lived nearby. Later, the adults drank tequila and paid respects to the ones gone when they returned home. Similarly, New Year’s Eve was a peaceful affair. After dinner, they spent time together and sang karaoke. The same uncle visited them to wish them a Happy New Year. ‘It was peaceful,’ Ernesto said when finishing the rundown of the end of the year.

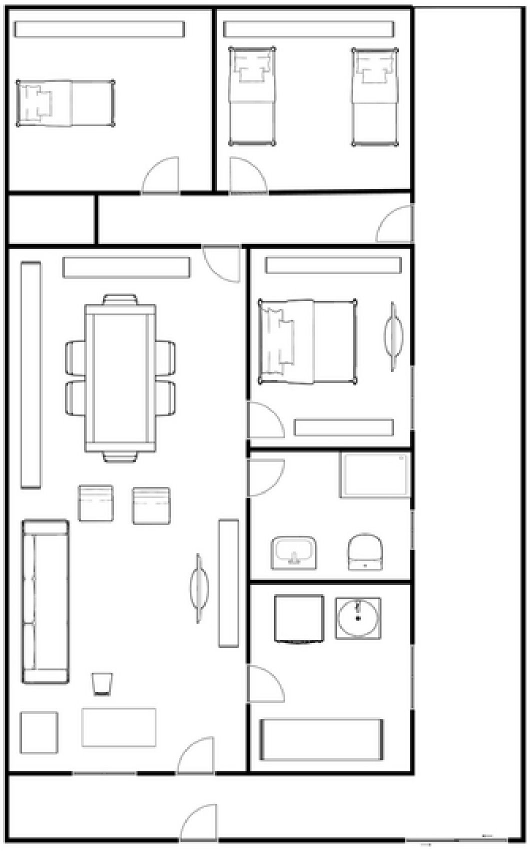

Fig. 7: Ernesto and Karen’s house

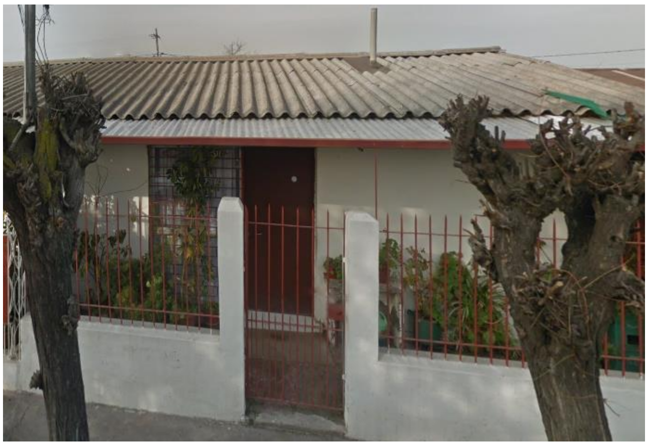

Fig. 8: Front view of Ernesto and Karen’s house

Then, the conversation was about the house. I timidly asked about the place, 'Did you live here with your parents?' Ernesto started talking about the passing of their parents and the situations that his family were in at that moment. He had informally inherited the family house from his parents (See Fig. 7 and 8)—who had died a couple of months before the ethnographic visits had begun. Having also lost his older brother, Ernesto's closest relatives were now his sisters, who could demand selling the house and dividing the money according to Chilean inheritance laws. Without other legal or kinship strategies to contest this legal imposition, Ernesto's family live with the uncertainty of losing their home.

'My sisters are going to kick us out,' Ernesto joked with a note of seriousness. 'Hopefully, they will not', Karen quipped. His husband resumed, 'I spoke with my sisters, and they said they do not have problems with us staying here, at our father's home. One day, they came to see my other sister. She was sick. She was also more straightforward. My sister told them, "Now that I am ill, you would not kick me out". "No, you must stay here," they told her.' There, Ernesto admitted that he was spying on them. When the sisters came to the main house to greet Ernesto, he invited them to come in. According to Ernesto, they replied, 'We do not like to come here because we hate the across-the-street neighbours.' Ernesto claimed that since that day, they had not come. Karen pointed out that his sisters also said they missed their parents too much; thus, a visit would bring great sorrow. While accepting Karen's observation, Ernesto reinforced the portrayal of estrangement, 'They have not come. They have not visited them at the cemetery even. We have never encountered them.'

I did not ask many questions that day. At that moment of the fieldwork, I was trying to understand what matters to them and how it matters. I listened to Ernesto's revelation mostly in silence. To keep the conversation going, I probed about the building's history. 'Is the house self-build?' I inquired. Ernesto recounted the events,

> This house is part of the *operación sitio*.[32] My parents lived at the bus stop 28 of Santa Rosa Avenue. All of this was part of the La Bandera estate. When the

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[32] The *operación sitio* was a housing policy in the Frei Montalva government (1964-1970). Due to the political pressures of *pobladores* and the working class to access

> news of the land partition arrived, my parents came here to build a house. They marked the property with lime, the house four. My father started constructing, doing everything needed, but the space was ample. He divided the place among family and relatives, and my mother was mad. He had lost too much ground. My father was like that, generous.

Ernesto was not interested in the house's history, however. In change, he focused on the memories and the grief. The dweller continued, 'Here, we have been through a lot of sadness but also happiness: my nephews' births and my own children's births. Oh! The face my father put when he received his first pension check.' Then, he took an external perspective, 'People also said that here we did not do anything, that there was always sadness here. [But] I have never felt anything wrong here. I have never seen something bad. If I buy this house and God allows it, it is going to be soon. I will not do much. I like the house as it is.' With the disclosure of this yearning, the conversation took another turn. Afterwards, we kept chatting about other things until lunch was time.

It was noticeable that Ernesto and Karen were attached to their house. They were dealing with the grief of the passing away of his parents and brother. The family often recalled memories of conviviality, celebrating Christmas dinners, New Year's Eve parties, or Sunday football matches on television. Memories also dwell there, comforting him. It was also clear that Karen cared a lot about the house and its memory. It was not strange that she echoed Ernesto's words. Ernesto's parents welcomed her there. Despite living crowded together, she had found it a place to start a family. According to her account, Karen and her mother-in-law had a good relationship because the daughter-in-law's attitude was helpful and respectful. She also helped Ernesto care for his ailing family when they were dying.

Their house reflects past experiences and plans for the future. While grief and anxiety are intertwined with Ernesto and Karen's domestic project, it also has a long-term orientation to build a safe haven for their children. Paralleling Violeta's efforts, they try to keep the children inside, away from the street. Part of these

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homeownership, they allow people to self-build their houses in land seizures, marking the ground with lime or chalk. The government would subsidise basic services such as water, sanitation, and gravel roads.

endeavours involves crafting spaces for them and organising spaces around the house.

Improving her home was a secret yearning for Karen and Ernesto. On one occasion, Ernesto mentioned, ‘If I had money, I would buy and renovate the house. I have not done it because the house is not mine. But, even then, I would not change a lot. I would change some wood beams and columns. I would change some of the railings but mostly the gate because it is falling. I would plaster some walls again. But my main wish is to build a second floor. To build a room for everyone so my children can be comfortable doing their own things.’

These wishes mirrored Karen’s continuous work to find a space for everyone in the house. Karen stated they had enough space for the living-and-dining room (*living-comedor*) and rooms for the children. But her hunt for a more comfortable dwelling manifested in the constant rearrangement of the living-and-dining room. She attempted to find the best possible way to make the family’s different activities compatible: Cami’s playing and drawing, Ernesto’s workshop, a place to watch television and the dinner table. Gaspar had a PlayStation and a television in his room, so that was less of a problem. In the final days of the fieldwork, Ernesto finally got a third room ready, which had not been in use because it had belonged to their parents. Yet, nobody moved in, to my knowledge.

Protection also relates to assessing the neighbourhood. In Ernesto and Karen’s case, they like the community. They feel that it is a peaceful neighbourhood to live in. They describe it as tranquil (*tranquilo*), humble (*humilde*) and of civil people (*de gente educada*). Even if they recall some criminal incidents, they still think it is an excellent place to live.

Towards the end of the fieldwork, I proposed reviewing their perception of their community. Discussing the safety of the neighbourhood, Ernesto explained, ‘Thieves have stolen something from everyone here [the neighbourhood]. Thieves repeatedly stole from my next-door neighbour because they entered from the back. He put barbed wire and sharp irons to stop them, but they entered from behind. They have stolen plants, gas, televisions, everywhere, but they have never stolen from us. One time someone who did not know better jumped the wall and entered but quickly escaped. We think he was just running from the police.’

Then, I asked about their own railings. I recalled when Ernesto had spoken about the ‘good old days’ when people had only some wood fences and children were free to leave their bicycles on the street. ‘Did you install the railing?’ I asked. However, Ernesto surprised me, ‘Here, my dad put the railing because he was afraid someone could break into the house when everyone was at work. These protections have been there for more than thirty years. I have not changed them. I have not put wooden planks on them because I do not like “not to see” who is around.’ Ernesto was talking about one of his favourite activities: snooping on his neighbours from his living-and-dinner room. He continued, ‘There I am watching all day which comes along. I am not too fond of planks. I cannot see.’ Finally, Ernesto returned to the core point, ‘I am really sorry for the people that have a nice house, and some good-for-nothing robs them […], but I like living here.’ A robbery was a misfortune, yet a minor event in an otherwise good neighbourhood.

Karen, Ernesto, and Violeta’s attachments to their houses manifest the project to articulate past and future experiences of protection in conjunction with conviviality and mutuality. Different practices and actions can generate protection. The most straightforward is owning or securing the place where they live. Homeownership is a recurrent reality among lower-middle-class families, but sometimes long-term leasing is an acceptable option. Another form of protection is safeguarding children from harm. These parents attempt to protect them from crime using railings, walls and other devices that reinforce the separation of an inside from an outside. The third form of protection is the construction of havens that echo this separation. These parents aspire to create a domestic space that enables both private areas for their members and family spaces when the family is together. Finally, continually assessing the outside—the neighbourhood—is a vital practice for this endeavour. The recurrence of crime and the friendly but composed communal relationships are the more recurrent criteria to assess the safety of a place.

Dignity was a different matter than protection in the fieldwork. Ernesto and Karen portrayed dignity as a limit. The discussions on dignity were sparser than the ones about safety during the fieldwork. The issue of dignity often came related to *mediaguas* and *campamentos* (see Fig. 9 and 10). Violeta and Ernesto had had casual encounters with these spaces. Both grew up in working-class neighbourhoods; thus, the phenomenon may be alien to them. We may recall

Ernesto’s and Karen’s discussion about a *campamento* in Chapter One. They saw squatters as failing to protect their children. However, they also depicted poor people as abnegated and doing their best for their families. In this context, they perceived achieving a house as dignity. Accessing homeownership was the acknowledgement by Chilean society of these efforts.

[redacted]

Fig. 9: Front view of a ‘*mediagua*’

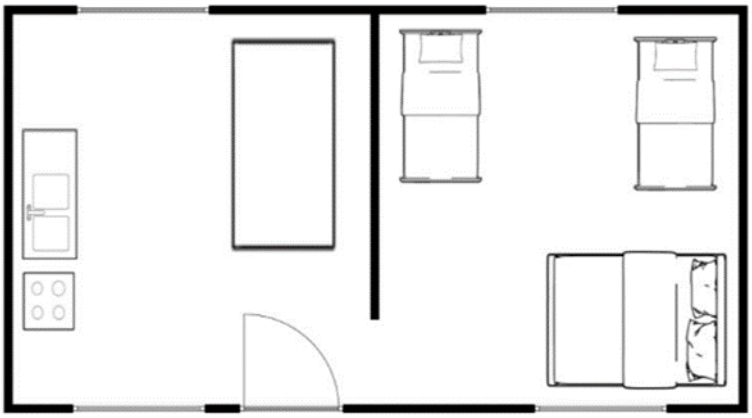

Fig. 10**:** Interior of a ‘*mediagua*’

Similarly, Violeta complicated the relationship between dignity and homeownership. She considered dignity to have complex meanings. When discussing her life, she singled out her house as an achievement. The house represented her capacity to emancipate herself. Some of her siblings had not yet accomplished this goal, which made her proud. Her residence was humble but respectable by Chilean standards. Although situated in one of the city's poorest neighbourhoods, it was neither part of a social housing project nor a squatter settlement. Instead, it was a property that she bought and renovated herself. However, living in *campamentos* was not necessarily an experience of indignity. Violeta echoed the idea that good, resolute, and hardworking people can be found anywhere, including in those places.

However, when the issue of poverty arose, I asked if she saw herself as middle-class. Violeta was adamant. She claimed, 'I am not poor. I am middle-class. I have a house, a job, my things.' In fact, when I asked her about what she felt about the idea of dignity in the final stages of the fieldwork, she responded, 'No, the house gave me tranquillity, the one that I did not have in the other house because I spent most of the time fighting with my mother, the girls were small, and I could not be there all the time. Thus, it was not dignity but tranquillity because I went to work worried, and they arrived first.'

The Chilean ethical-political community has deployed the language of dignity for more than one hundred years, outside of housing struggles. Its primary source is the Catholic Church. Its doctrine puts the idea of 'human dignity' front and centre. In the nineteenth century, dignity underpinned a corporativist ethical discourse, emphasising respect for the human capacity for work and for organic groups. However, the dominant universalist and personalist ideal about human decency—concerned with the sanctity of human life, its vulnerability, and the access to material and spiritual assistance—first appeared in the 1940s (Millbank 2014: 80). In Chile, it was the relationship between progressive sectors of the Church and the workers' movement that helped the transition and dissemination of the latter definition at around the same time. At the time, dignity did not play a prominent role in left-wing ideology. The largest leftist governments of the century—the Popular

Front (1935-1938) and the Popular Unity (1970-1973)—subordinated dignity relative to citizenship and equality (See Milos 2009; Silva & Henríquez 2017; Vidal 2014). A shift in the 1980s restored the political life of dignity. The 1980s Constitution, written by the Pinochet dictatorship, acknowledged equal dignity in its first article. In parallel, the Human Rights Movement against the dictatorship has also deployed the same notion, influenced by the Catholic Church (Martínez & Ortiz 2019). Furthermore, many grassroots territorial organisations have mobilised it, linking it to the emergent identity of *lo popular* (Garcés 2017; Oxhorn 2004). Finally, the 2019 social unrest (*estallido social*) has been using this value to articulate its demands, making it one of the dominant political vocabularies in contemporary Chile.

I would argue that these lower-middle-class *Santiaguinos* tend to take for granted dignity, at least more than protection, but this value still has moral stakes. Dignity is about how being treated ethically allows one to have a life. Ernesto, Karen, and Violeta find the questions about dignity obvious because they feel they have already achieved the self-image of being self-reliant, hard workers, and good parents. Having a home is an aspect of these achievements. They feel removed from the struggle for housing. Thus, they do not associate dignity with their own place making.

We must notice that even when poverty could appear linked to indignity or lack of dignity, Ernesto, Karen, and Violeta offer a more nuanced view. The failure to embody it calls others to acknowledge the ethical effort, not evaluate it. The admission of a lack of dignity demands improved social recognition or the material support required to achieve this quality—or, as the three of them often say, 'helping those in need.'

We may notice how the achievement of dignity and the struggle for protection imbricate. Having dignity is to protect one's family; protecting one's family involves dignifying practices. This close association makes sense if we take the post-industrial imaginary as the source of the scenes. The significant difference between both values is that dignity appears to be binary. One may be *digno* or not. I have not recorded the idea of degrees of dignity used in serious contexts. This perception does not mean that the boundary is clear and not fuzzy. Instead, it speaks of this value as an achievement one might gain or lose.

In contrast, protection is a scale. One might protect well or poorly, but parents rarely say they are not protecting their families. This view echoes the discussion on middle-classness. They rarely stop belonging to this class, despite the downward movements in the social structure. Instead, they might offer excuses, elaborations, and broader categories. Something similar happens with protection. They can find opportunities or challenges to protect, yet they never stop doing it. Thus, this dimension of protection might smuggle considerations about respectability into their concerns. An improved capacity to take care of one's family overlaps with middle-class indexes—e.g. safer neighbourhoods, better houses, higher incomes, and more appropriate parenting—creating a space for evaluation and scrutiny.

Some class disruptions of place making

Neoliberal precarisation—limited resources, never-ending work, and the degeneration of life—threatens household reproduction and sabotages domestic place making. Thus, social reproduction becomes an ongoing burden. They overwork or do temporary jobs (*pitutos*) to earn supplementary income. Likewise, budgeting, seasonal frugality and thriftiness help them keep costs under control. Credit cards and bank loans are risky alternatives because they could accrue more debt. Holding onto dignity and producing protection are not easy tasks.

As we can see, building the ideal home for Ernesto and Karen is not easy. Ernesto and his family are facing the possibility of being evicted by his sisters. Moreover, money is always tight; thus, they cannot renovate or build more rooms. Karen attempts to reorganise the space, but that is not enough to give new rooms to their children. Quiet tensions affect their domestic life. Similarly, they know that crime is an issue. Despite loving the neighbourhood, they fear their children and prefer to keep them inside.

Ernesto and Karen believe that owning their home would be the solution. But money is the issue. In Chapter One, I discuss how Karen attempts to encourage

Ernesto to find a job and earn more money while Ernesto feels uncomfortable risking the relationship with his boss. The lack of money affects the pursuit of a home that reflects their yearnings. As described, Ernesto dreams of doing a lot of renovation to the house, but little can be done under the current economic circumstances. In addition, they must add unexpected costs to the budget because their children are growing and have new needs and wants.

Similarly, Violeta also has problems achieving her ideal home. She shares some of the same difficulties that Ernesto and Karen have. This *Santiguina* fears crime and wants to keep her children and grandchildren safe. To accomplish this goal, she must create a space that can maintain that clear difference between the inside and the outside. The inside is where she can give each a room and privacy while crafting communal areas. She wants to fix the leaking roof or change the ceramic floor, but above everything, she wants to build more rooms for her family. Yet, living with a razor-thin margin of savings makes it impossible. Not even the backyard project is feasible under the current situation.

Violeta likes living in a house. A house has more room and is more open than a middle-class apartment. It also covers the basic needs of having a family life, according to Violeta. She is thinking of a more traditional middle-class household (for example, see Fig. 11 and 12). Regarding her ideal place, she has told me she prefers to keep living in a house. Still, she would like to have more space, ‘I want a room for each of my daughters and granddaughters because they are older and want to be alone in their own space; more space more than nothing is what I would like.’ On the other hand, an apartment is too small and enclosed. It creates a sense of enclosure that does not allow one to move freely, get out, or reorganise one’s home. She sees that it might generate a sense of safety but does not see a significant difference between a house and an apartment. A bad convivence may happen if one has a single lousy neighbour.

Karen, Violeta, and Ernesto—and the other parents and caregivers that participate in this ethnography—deploy the language of moral striving in conjunction with ideas of managerial skills to express the challenges of social reproduction under such contradictions. These statements portray their domestic economy as fragile and restricted. Through phrases such as ‘keeping the house going' (*sacar la casa adelante)*, 'living from month to month' *(darse vuelta en el mes),* or 'support the home' *(mantener la casa),* parents signal the cyclical nature of household reproduction. They also use expressions such as 'paying the bills' (*pagar las cuentas),* 'sticking to the budget' *(ajustarse al presupuesto)* and 'manage the money' *(administrar las platas)* to convey the more managerial side of reproduction. Thus, the spatial and temporal coordinates are the nuclear household and the month.

Can these parents rely on kin networks for help with their housing situation? Han has shown how 'a time of shared intimacy makes possible an explicit recognition of critical moments through acts of reciprocity that sustain mutual obligation' among neighbourhoods in one of the most impoverished neighbours in Santiago (2012: 78). Araos (2016) takes another route to make a similar point. She describes how families in Santiago gather around one or both parents' homes, creating extended forms of domesticity and dwelling that exceed the force of cohabitation. Households are permeated by multiple relations of kinship that sustain specific ethical responsibilities shaping intimate life. Both show how the urban poor and the working class in Santiago follows similar trends to those in urban Latin America, where household boundaries are porous, and its flexibility allows them to engage in adaptative strategies for household reproduction and parenting (Bustamante & McCallum 2011; Fonseca 2003; Morris 1981; Santillan 2009; Walmsley 2008; see also Stack 1974 for an Afro-American community in Chicago).

However, these *Santiaguinos* insist on boundary making. Ernesto and Karen constantly build a moral barrier between their home and the rest of their social worlds. They emphasise the responsibility and sacrifice involved in creating a home while downplaying the role of relatives and friends in accomplishing this task. They even show a little pride and sadness when they discuss how they have lost contact with friends and family due to being hard workers. Likewise, Violeta takes pride in trying to strive alone. As noted, she has a tense relationship with her mother, disrupting the whole kinship network. The hostility engenders relationships with her siblings and in-laws marked by unspoken sourness and awkwardness. Even her father, whom she loves, gets caught in the middle.

[redacted]

Fig. 11: Front view of a middle-class house

[redacted]

Fig. 12: Interior of a middle-class house

Place making among these households is condemned to an impasse. Parents need more money, energy, and time to deal with the deficit of protection and the threat of indignity. However, accessing these resources requires labour that could jeopardise their bodies, minds, and relationships, thus undermining their capacity to produce these values. For example, they could attempt to work harder or pressure their children into accepting more responsibility. Unfortunately, this manoeuvre could endanger the control of domestic issues or the delicate relationships with their children. They know that younger and older children usually disavow their responsibilities, causing parenting friction. This scenario makes it unlikely that parents would reorganise domestic labour. In turn, spending energy and time resolving domestic issues could overwhelm parents, hampering their moments of rest and endangering their capacity to work. The economic instability and the degeneration of life make it challenging to enact modifications to their domestic routines without adding further financial burden or work.

The reality is that these families do not expect the complete realisation of protection and dignity. Instead, they attempt to compound the quiet threat of losing dignity, the challenge of enhancing protection, and other secondary themes into an ongoing sensuous compromise. The ubiquitous language of *tranquilidad* (tranquillity, peacefulness, quietness) plays this role. Parents discuss this notion to convey how they are still moving forward without life-shattering problems. It signals compromise without abandoning the overall goals. The commensurability that this affective disposition affords, in turn, helps to achieve tolerable arrangements between different values.

This idea of tranquillity is not strange among Latin American households. Research has identified the importance of this motif on the subcontinent. Pertierra (2015) links the concept to long-term comfort among the Mexican middle class. Green (1988) argues that Bolivians relate homeownership to stability and control over living spaces in Santa Cruz. Broader ethnographic descriptions have also examined the category. Walker (2015) grounds the idea of tranquillity in the long-term development of a eudemonic individual style of life among the Amazonian Urarina people, and Kray (2005) argues that tranquillity implies communal consensus, evenness, balance, and equilibrium among the Dzitnup in Yucatán.

Among these lower-middle-income families, tranquillity is a recurrent expectation that travels across different domains.[33] Tranquillity is a shorthand way of saying that no new problems disturb their lives. In everyday life, these parents usually respond to inquiries about the weekly happenings in their lives with the word ‘tranquil’ (*tranquilo*). Tranquillity (or quietness) can also describe children when they mostly stay at home and do not cause problems. *Santiaguinos* tend to describe neighbourhoods as *tranquilos* when discussing areas that are not necessarily too dangerous due to criminal activity. Even regarding economic matters, ‘*estoy tranquilo’* means that they have been able to keep their jobs and meet most economic obligations, like debt payments or bills. People experience peace of mind when they do not have outstanding debts or concerns about a layoff or lack of money. The notion also has a relational dimension, as it can describe the satisfactory resolution of domestic issues or the absence of critical disagreements between family members (*tranquilos*). *Santiaguinos* feel uneasiness (*intranquilidad*) when friends, partners, and children do not follow their routine as usual or give out-of-character retorts. Finally, people experience tranquillity when they are not interrupted by noisy neighbours or unwelcome guests and do not have to experience the disruptions arising from their children's activities.

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[33] A recent UNDP report points out how tranquillity (or peacefulness) emerges as a distinct goal among lower-middle-income individuals (UNDP 2012).

This concept is different from joy, happiness, or bliss. Even though these parents deem these notions as positive and achievable to a certain degree, they are too intemperate and irreversible to describe their lives. In contrast, tranquillity is a moderate, grounded, and feasible state of wellbeing. Tranquillity implies a compromise.

Tranquillity is a meaningful adjective that describes situations that balance different values into tolerable resolutions in various domains: economic, relational, domestic, psychological, and even political. It is apt for expressing the aspiration of having a good enough life under neoliberal precarisation. For that reason, it is widespread in Santiago and does not belong only to the working-class or middle-class sensorium.

Atmospheres of tranquillity

Until this point, I have not discussed what tranquillity is. Rather than talking about it as a value—thus, stressing its circuits of production and realisation—tranquillity is better understood as an atmosphere, a kin concept of mood (see Chapter Four). Hence, parents actualise tranquillity to manage sensory and affective stimuli by performing *atmospheric labour*. Concepts such as moods and atmosphere find a shared genealogy in the Heideggerian idea of *stimmung* (Thonhauser 2021). Although often used interchangeably, we still can trace the difference between their philosophical traditions. Mood speaks about what matters to constitute a ground layer of one's engagement with the world. Instead, the concept of atmosphere directs to contagion—mutual interactional and intersubjective affective constitutions (Ahmed 2010: 39-40). Likewise, it usually refers to the accrual of affects and emotions that fill the spaces we inhabit (B. Anderson 2009; Bille, Bjerregaard, Sørensen 2015; Bohme 1993; Brennan 2004; Pennartz 1999; Pink & Leder 2016).

When talking to parents, they usually articulate their domestic atmosphere with words such as tenor (*ánimo*), ambience (*ambiente*), feeling (*onda*), vibe or sense (*vibra*), gesturing to shared sentiments mediated by the home. Parents have used the idea of atmosphere (*atmósfera*) just a couple of times, and its connotation maintains a close relationship with the previous concepts. We may note that the spatial boundedness of atmospheres does not entail that they are static or discrete. Atmospheres are attached to spaces but not overdetermined by their physical or infrastructural traits.

I would suggest that the importance of feeling and staging atmospheres of tranquillity is paramount. *Atmosphere setting* is the leading practice of atmospheric labour. If we return to Violeta's account in Chapter Five, several values materialise from that vignette: comfort, respectability, cleanliness, isolation, order, and hierarchy. They were significant for her, yet she preferred tranquillity above all other values, as the conflict resolution showed. She avoided confronting her daughters and returned to the quiet environment, even if it required her to be patient.

Atmosphere theorists have claimed that acts can shape and transform atmospheres despite their quasi-autonomy as affective objects (Griffero 2014a, 2014b; Schmitz 2016).[34] Violeta, Ernesto, Karen, and the rest of the parents find that managing sensory stimuli is not strange activity. They decorate and paint using specific colours to produce cosiness. They also acknowledge that cooking aromas are often essential for generating a homely ambience. Plants, heating, and furniture are also significant for place making.

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[34] Recent anthropological research on domesticity, atmosphere and ambience has drawn attention to how people use light (Bille 2015; Pink & Leder 2016; Shaw 2014), temperature (Daniels 2015), decoration (Garvey 2005; Olesen 2010) and smells (Law 2001; Wise 2010) to establish collective sentiments and feelings and mix sensuous, affective, and relational cues.

Despite the multitude of cues, one kind of stimulus is fundamental to understanding tranquillity: *sound*. It supports domestic attunement. In Spanish, *tranquilo* means peaceful or tranquil, but also quiet. Sensory disruptions such as screams, loud music, rows, and sharp sounds often upset sonorous atmospheres. As expected, these parents frame disturbances to tranquillity by sound as noise (*ruido, bulla*). Among their daily concerns, *ruido* is recurrent. When they are not trying to address it, they complain about it.[35]

A visit to Karen and Ernesto's house usually involved walking five blocks from the underground station. Most of the walk was silent. The station was on the longest ring road in the city, but the street noise disappeared as soon as one started walking away. The environment became quieter. Even in the days of street markets, the noise was not prominent. The vendors were somewhat subdued. On other days, one could barely listen to televisions and radios inside the houses of the *población*.

The quietness was accentuated when I entered Karen and Ernesto's house. The television was in low volume while Ernesto made *piñatas*. In his room, Gaspar was playing his game using headphones. The only noise came from Cami's tablets. She was watching videos about a horror game. I noticed the anguishing screams. Our conversations and activities used soft voices to the point that I found myself whispering. When we were having lunch, it was usual that Karen hushed Cami. As we attempted to chat, the videos got noisier, and the daughter's interjections got louder. Her mother did not take this lightly. 'Turn down the tablet,' she ordered. Showing unmitigated obedience, her daughter turned down the volume and kept playing with her food.

Throughout the fieldwork, neighbours were the primary source of disturbances. While Karen and Ernesto could control the noise inside their home, they could only negotiate with the people around them. Although they were happy about the level of tranquillity, a couple of households caused inconvenience. On one occasion, Ernesto narrated one crucial event,

> Few people make noise here. I have one loud neighbour. He is our next-door neighbour. The guy threw a party until late at night. Some girls started

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[35] See also Skewes (2000: 104-5) and Ureta (2007b) for similar observations on noise among lower-income groups in Santiago.

> screaming. They were having a good time, but my daughter got scared. I talked to him. I do not care about myself. But do not mess with my children. I told him, 'We need to talk, Rodrigo.' He asked me to join him in buying soft drinks. While walking, Rodrigo acknowledged the issue, 'I know what this is about.' Then, I told him, 'Yes, we are going to talk in good faith because I do not want to have problems with you. Look, I have my bedroom next to your house. My daughter was sleeping with us. I did not like what was coming from your house. I am nobody to tell you if you should or should not have parties, but you crossed a line. My daughter got scared by all the yelling. She thought someone was hitting them.' He had crossed a limit. Then, he [Rodrigo] responded, 'Give me a limit,' I replied, 'You must give yourself a limit; you are the homeowner.' So, he decided that midnight was good.

At another time, Ernesto started complaining about a nearby evangelical woman,

> I have this neighbour that lives across the street. She went from having a crazy life to being an evangelical person. On the weekends, she puts Christian music on loudspeakers facing the street. I am not interested in that. To each his own (*cada loco con su tema*). But the fact that she puts them for everyone in the world. I get mad. I get mad not because of myself. Some people work at night. They need to rest. I have noticed the small details, though. When she is feeling regretful… with a little of conscience, [she does it]. For example, she had been chosen to have the community alarm, but she refused. She told the guys this and that. In the end, they ended up putting the alarm somewhere else. It only took 10 minutes. But she refused. Then, the following weekend, she put on the music. It was her consciousness.

When discussing the neighbourhood, Ernesto and Karen recognised that these were specific events and liked the place. Karen mentioned, 'I love to live in a peaceful neighbourhood. It is as you can hear now. One does not listen to screams, which sometimes may happen. But one does not hear fights. At most, you can hear barking dogs. That may be the most boisterous.' Ernesto joined her, 'For example, you can hear that someone is working [some noises started when we were discussing tranquillity], but people are really respectful.'

By contrast, Violeta showed a more critical dimension of tranquillity, one where unquietness kept nagging her. In the early months of the fieldwork, Violeta had not considered moving to another house. She had neither the time nor the money to search for a new place. She had already experienced the gruelling process of applying for state subsidies and did not want to do it again. However, I was surprised when I discovered in 2020 that an opportunity provided by an ex-boss could help her access new dwellings. This man wanted to help her. He still worked in the construction sector and offered her a house built by his company at a moderate rate as long she would return to work for him. Violeta agreed to these terms. Having more space and moving to a safer place could help resolve some tensions.

In retrospect, something changed after 2018. Violeta had gotten more concerned about the violence in her vicinity, 'I have been mugged a third time. I bought a pepper gas that I carry in my pocket', she told me. Later, she continued, 'I have thought about looking for something else, here the thing is worse, and the person [his dad] that kept me around is no longer alive.' She was not at peace any longer. Her next-door neighbours were also creating new problems. Violeta usually complained about their late-night parties and loud music. She often told me, 'These idiots kept me awake until late!' Neighbours' rows were standard. She was even blamed for loud noises and stench coming from her house. 'I do not know what they are talking about,' she claimed, dismissing the accusations. In addition, Violeta had accused these neighbours of being lazy, drug addicts, and drunks. 'They only make a fuss (*bulla*),' she sentenced. She had made clear that she has not liked every next-door neighbour on the right of her house, but the last one was the worst for her,

> Here, one can hear everything. I would love that nothing could be heard, but you can listen to everything here. The punches, the screams, and they are miserable here; I mean the neighbours. I called the police several times […] I obviously did not give them my name or my address. I called them anonymously, but it still is *heavy* [in English]. They went and did not do much. Now, with these ones, I won the lotto […]. These ones do not allow me to rest. You can see me, how peaceful I am. We do not make a fuss. The only sound that you can hear is the girls playing. Next door, when they are partying, they start drinking, smoking, and fighting with curse words, punches, and everything. And they kick out everyone whom they invite, with such scandal.

Violeta felt that she could not understand what the neighbours were doing. When I suggested talking to them, she rebuffed the idea, 'They will not listen.' The house on the left had not given any problem until that moment. She explained it as just a matter of personality, not the result of communication or building communal ties.

In contrast, Violeta could control the noise inside the house. She mostly spoke the truth when she claimed that her place was quiet: no noisy parties, loud televisions, or fights. The few gatherings were relatively quiet. The only exception was Violeta scolding the girls for not obeying. As described in Chapter Five, her children and grandchildren tend to be disobedient—not helping with cleaning, being late or refusing her commands. Slowly, Violeta would get mad due to her daughters' lack of appreciation.

Nevertheless, whenever a row started between Violeta and her children, she mostly kept the peace around the house and avoided the issue. This attitude did not mean she had forgotten, but she was too busy to keep quarrelling. Finally, after a couple of turbulent exchanges between household members, the mother decided enough was enough and kept tidying up. She sometimes grumbled with frustration but later calmed down. Tranquillity prevailed again.

These dispositions do not foster a tyranny of silence by any means. Birthdays, football matches, and street fairs often break the quietness, but people tend to be aware of the disruption they are making even then. Echoing concerns about having the implicit right to personal indulgences, enjoyment and the need for family and individual life, these parents understand that everyone would like to have a party or watch a football match on special occasions. As long as neighbours keep to an adequate noise level, it is fine by them. However, they condemn those continually making noise and do not respect people who work. Awareness of the sound is part of their sense of citizenship.

The predominance of quietness and tranquillity illustrates one urgent requirement to strive in late capitalist Santiago. These parents need calm to rest, plain and simple. Even if they value the occasional get-together or party, their house must be a haven that enables them to regenerate their bodies and minds to keep working the next day. The management of sound in atmospheres of tranquillity allows them to sleep and rest without disruption.

Tranquillity translates one fundamental aspect of their domestic experience—sound is one of the most salient sensible cues. Sensing and reproducing atmospheres of tranquillity becomes a primary task that makes households into homes and tangible experiences of belonging. Tranquillity can be the decisive factor in staying or initiating the process of finding a new location. Of course, the resources and capital to find and produce tranquillity are deeply related to class positions, but these *Santiaguinos* still try to find ways to achieve it. As an ongoing negotiation between resources, relationships and spaces, tranquillity is a fragile compromise, not an unreachable ideal.

These atmospheres of tranquillity make houses a tangible space to intervene and contribute to establishing emotional and moral boundaries. Parents and caregivers focus on maintaining these atmospheres, reinforcing the boundaries between the inside and outside. The interior appears as the place of protection and domesticity, and the exterior is the source of harm and disorder. The continual understanding of nurturing and place making as activities done by themselves, and only themselves, also reinforces this boundary-making process.

This account has attempted to expand the anthropology of houses' core proposition—i.e. houses are processes—paying attention to the coexistence of values, the quiet undermining of their realisation and the patchwork solutions. This accommodation does not mean that parents and caretakers abandon the foremost values or create inauthentic compromises. Far from it, both elements play a role in place making and building domesticity. An insightful ethnographic account should pay attention to both and the gap between them. Considering these domestic arrangements, these houses appear as mosaics of values held together by atmospheres of tranquillity. Late capitalist contexts encourage the pursuit of multiple themes and values while undermining parents' capacity to achieve them. As a result, these parents must confront loud and quiet contradictions and incongruities.

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This chapter describes families' experience dwelling in Santiago. The history of housing struggles reveals the centrality of two values, protection and dignity, as crucial to understanding current dwelling forms marked by lower-middle-classness. These values also shape how these parents build domesticity. However, neoliberalism short-circuits their production and realisation, opening the space to create tranquillity. Tranquillity becomes a ubiquitous language to capture the idea of an everyday life that does not encounter disrupting problems. It becomes a compromise between driving values and other secondary uses of the domestic space. The final section has shown how these families pursue this as an atmosphere under late capitalism.

Chapter Seven

The social, the political, and the domestic
The boundary making of social worlds

I called Cristina to confirm the Wednesday visit. But she turned me down, ‘I am going to go to the municipality building. I must do paperwork. We better leave it for another day.’ I tried to insist and reminded her that these moments were necessary for the ethnography. It did not help. She replied, ‘Do not bother, Nacho. It is for the hearing aids again. Come by on Thursday.’

Cristina was referring to hearing aids that she wanted to buy with the help of the local government. A degenerative ear disease that caused progressive deafness affected her audition. ‘It is a disease that occurs at age 65, but it got it earlier,’ she explained. Her husband had a similar problem. When she went to ask the first time, a municipal employee explained that Alvaro did not qualify for assistance. She was told that the municipal benefit only existed for people ages 65 and above. Without any help, they bought the device by themselves. When she began to have similar problems, she went to ask again. ‘I knew the benefit existed for adults over 65; maybe there is another benefit,” she explained her past reasoning. ‘Of course, nobody told me the first time that if I presented papers, I could access a discount. I know I must pay something according to my place [in the social protection scale]. I know I must pay. I would pay it,’ she continued.

The procedure was to gather documentation to prove that Cristina belonged to the most vulnerable 60 per cent of the population. Additionally, she had to bring three quotes for hearing aids so that the local government could choose one to make the purchase. This evaluation would require obtaining pay stubs, verifying expenses, and reviewing her social protection file. A hearing aid for this disease could cost up to 400,000 pesos (400£), almost all of Cristina’s monthly salary. However, if the government bought it, she would only have to pay 10 per cent of the price.

The process was stressful and took eight months. Cristina went to the social work offices multiple times to deliver papers and 'put pressure' on them, as she described it. In particular, the fact that she had to submit quotes multiple times frustrated her. In her words,

> In the first part, where I had to leave papers, I went about five times. Then to the interviews with the same assistant, I went several other times. I had to collect documentation of my salary and explain why I could not buy [the device]. [I had to] show the expenses I had for my house. Because I had a young son in school—Isaac's expenses—I had to show papers for the school tuition too. I had to defend everything to justify in order to meet my goal. They would ask me for one thing; then, they would ask me for another. Look, the quotes even expired. Time passed, and the quotes were valid for three months only. Then, there was still no result of what the office should deliver to me, so the quote expired. Three months had already passed, and I had to go again to the same three places they had sent me to bring new quotes. These places were nowhere near each other; one was in Maipu, the other was in the centre of the city, and another was in the mall. Then, I had to go because [they told me], 'You know… No. The quotes are already expired, and we need them to be updated,' and I had to do the whole paperwork again. From there, we waited three more months, and again I did it. Yes! It took months for them to give it to me. At the third quote, my file entered the system. I thought, 'They're going to send me again. It is going to be three months again,' but the social worker told me, 'No, it is going to be ready. Look at this list.'

The arrival of the hearing aid took a while. As the months passed, I checked with Cristina, 'How did you do with the thing?' 'Well, but it is the same as always,' she would answer. Cristina was referring to the same routine I had witnessed. She would get up early at 5:30 a.m. to drop off her son at the bus stop and arrive at 7 a.m. at the local government building. There the security guard distributed only 100 tickets to the people. At 9 o'clock, they began to attend to people; meanwhile, they had to wait outside the building. At opening time, they made them pass and had to wait until the social workers called them. From there, Cristina met for ten or fifteen minutes with a woman behind a desk who told her what paper was missing or how her request was going. Then, the municipal worker would put some documents on the file and fill in some information on the computer.

Knowing the state of her request was a demanding task. Somewhere along the way, I asked Cristina how it was going. She told me that she was putting some pressure, 'In order to move forward, to be seen, you must go there, to ask, to put a little pressure. The pressure does things because I am there, on top of what I need.' Something along the same line she answered me when I asked him why she did not call on the phone to the social worker, 'If you call, nobody answers the phone. They give you four phone numbers to call and nothing. I understood that nobody is going to answer you if they are full of people there in person. Answering a phone is going to waste their time because people are going to ask you the same thing people would ask you in person.'

When the device finally arrived, towards the end of the fieldwork, I asked her to give me her opinion of the local government in light of the events. Cristina focused not on the right-wing mayor, Kathy Barriga, but on the officials. She perceived certain limits in bureaucratic action but also reflected on the possibility of users abusing the system, as some did not need assistance. She declared,

> The local government... Mmm… In fact, people there only do their job because they must do it. Actually, in this regard, I am more apathetic. I do not care if they like me or not. If I am going to make a request that I know I can do, what I have the right to do, then I will do the paperwork. One realises some workers need to pay just a little more attention to their job, to have a little more kindness, to be more empathetic. I also understand this happens because there are people who take advantage of the system, and then I think those who work in social things develop a shell (*piel de chancho*) so as not to approve all the requests because people can go and ask for a lot of things. People have the right to many things, so for that reason, I believe that they must maintain a distance at work so as not to get involved further, because they also must detect who are the ones who need it [the help] and those who do not.

However, Cristina agreed that the situation showed a lack of respect. She remarked, 'Of course, it is a lack of respect. Every time I went, people would get into fights with both the person who gave you the number and the person who called you to the office. People complained, "hey miss, how long am I going to be here" all the time.' Her perspective focused on the lack of knowledge or empathy of the other. Municipal workers did not bother to know or accurately check the users' needs. Cristina assessed, '[I do not like] that lack of empathy that people have, especially those who are working in the social side. It is the things that are not seen in social assistance. So you distrust because things are discovered, because things come to light because things are proven with documents. That one did this, that another stole a thing. Then, this is why there is no money for this; that is why there is no money for that.’

At one point in the fieldwork, I wanted to return to the problem of elections. Like the rest of the households, Cristina did not care about the event. She told me that she had voted for the centre-right option, Sebastián Piñera, because ‘After the other option [centre-left parties], I did not see good results from previous governments, so I am going to take a shot with this one, to see what happens.’ When I asked about her experiences with the mayor, she said, ‘No, Kathy Barriga, zero contribution, zero contribution, zero contribution, and I never saw an additional benefit. I only found it [the device] because I inquired. I never saw anything good.’ However, she then delivered a substantive critique, ‘You know? The system is so rotten. I think it is an issue of people’s character. It is not a mayor’s issue. They [bureaucrats] would say, “No, we are fixing this; we are installing that.” Nothing happens. The main avenue out there has horrible holes.’

In Santiago, most people in this dissertation do not engage with social movements or state participatory mechanisms. Instead, they embrace voting and broad law-abiding perspectives as citizenship practices, encouraged by the decline of the scene of compromise. This scene frames the political society as an agreement between the people and the elite to create a democratic neoliberal society. However, formal citizenship practices do not fully cover what they think politics is or could be. Moral discussions about agreements, respect, trust, helping and dignity often overlap with a never-ending flux of grievances about political parties, local associations, politicians, and the state.

This chapter intends to clarify the process of boundary making that produces the separation of three social worlds: the house, the social and politics. The following section explores this ethical formation and how it draws upon values expressed in everyday life, focusing on the issue of helping and making agreements. The third section explores how the values of respect and trust shape the moral force that grounds this sense of citizenship. Finally, the concluding part scrutinises the intensification of this ethic in contemporary Chile and its ideological implications.

Politics and the subtle work of boundary making

Political anthropology has shown an interest in the contradictory quality of Latin American political communities. Anthropologists have examined how these democracies often depend on illiberal forms of citizenship and political participation (Bielh 2004; Holston 2008; Forment 2011; D.M. Goldstein 2005; Grimberg 2009; Grisaffi 2013; Hita & Gledhill 2014; Lazar 2008, 2017; Mollona 2020; Nuijten 2013; Procupez 2008, 2015; de Vries 2002). Moreover, crime, protests and institutional violence maintain a complex relationship with democratic and liberal arrangements, refuting the simplistic antagonism between violence and democracy (Arias 2007; Arias & Goldstein 2010; Barragán & Wanderley 2009; Caldeira 2000; Caldeira & Holston 1999; D.M. Goldstein 2005; Goldstein, Achá, Hinojosa & Roncken 2012; Goodale & Postero 2013; Schavelzon 2010; Zeiderman 2013). Anthropologists have also made an effort to reframe the relation of social movements to liberal citizenship (Álvarez, Dagnino & Escobar 1998; Dagnino 2003, 2006; Escobar 1992) and the consequences of the colonial and postcolonial state in current citizenship arrangements (Coronil 2013; Hale 1997; Jackson & Warren 2005; Wade 2008). Due to these dynamic contradictions, the discipline has understandably focused its attention on active forms of citizenship—the most pronounced forms of politics that resist, subvert, or confront state-sanctioned citizenship.

However, this approach often misses the daily political and ethical-political experience of more conventional, mundane citizenship—i.e. how people often navigate ordinary citizenship and its ideological scenes and disavowals. Authors such as Matthew Gutmann (2002, 2004) in Mexico and Donna Goldstein (2003) in Brazil have explored the interface between everydayness and intimacy with citizenship. One of the crucial insights of these ethnographies is that we should not overstate the ordinary case as a site of resistance rather than explore it as a site of compliance and disorder. These accounts illuminate everyday urban life where subjects dwell in political futility while being subjugated to state and non-state forms of violence and authority. Rather than performing insurgent citizenship or actively working through the state bureaucracy, these communities enact moral performances of political dissent as a form of disidentification with authority (e.g. sarcastic comments, jokes, grumbling).

This chapter explores political gestures through the notion of helping and how it relates to making agreements. Instead of exploring sarcasm and jokes, the argument delves into everyday warnings, advice, praise, and complaints. Throughout Cristina’s vignette, issues of respect, trust and agreement are foregrounded. *Santiaguinos* usually talk about these values across different spheres. They constitute a moral vocabulary for social relationships within and outside their homes. These parents pay particular attention to promises, deals, and understandings when making these evaluative statements. At times, the world seems divided between those who help and keep their word and those who are unhelpful and untrustworthy.

Everyday problems configured Cristina’s relationship with the state and local government. The first of those problems was a hole in front of her house that the municipal public works office did not want to cover—a hole formed in the pavement outside his home due to water leaks (See Fig. 13). At first, no one came, even though Cristina had been calling for months. When someone answered her calls, the worker informed her that the case was closed due to an administrative error. The same person suggested sending an email with a video pointing out that the problem persisted. She followed all the instructions, but nothing happened. Then, after a couple of weeks, a group came to solve the problem. However, they came only to repair the pipe. Someone else should fill in the sinkhole that had formed in the ground.

The head of the crew warned Cristina that the next team had to bring more material to fill the hole since what was removed would not be enough. She diligently sent another email with a video attached to inform the issue’s status. When the new crew arrived, history repeated itself. They did not have enough soil to repair the entire sinkhole. A fight quickly escalated between the woman and the subcontractors. Ultimately, they decided to fill the hole even though the sinkhole would probably sink the pavement again. After a couple of weeks, the asphalt gave in as predicted (See Fig. 14). While trying to call the local office again, Cristina encountered a bureaucratic nightmare. She complained,

> Do you know what the answer she gave me was? ‘We can do nothing because the company that worked with us and did that job no longer works with the government. The only ones who could take responsibility for that work were

> them, and if they no longer work with us, we cannot force them.' So, I asked, 'Who is responsible? Who are the ones who will cover the holes from now on?' [She answered] 'It is not that we do not have another company, but they will not assume the cost of that operation.'

I could only interject, 'All of this on the phone?' Cristina continued her narration,

> No, yes, everything on the phone. I see [going to the office] as a waste of time. With what they answered you on the phone, I said to myself, 'She is going to answer the same nonsense,' and there you have to stand in line and spend hours to be heard. It is a total lack of respect; the answers were nonsensical. They were like, 'I cannot solve the problem for you because, literally, because the company that worked with us no longer do jobs for us.' [...] I tell her, 'Ok, it is that simple, yeah, that is good! So simple (*in sarcastic tone*)! If something happens to me… You have to record there explicitly that if something happens to my vehicle, I am going to sue the local government.

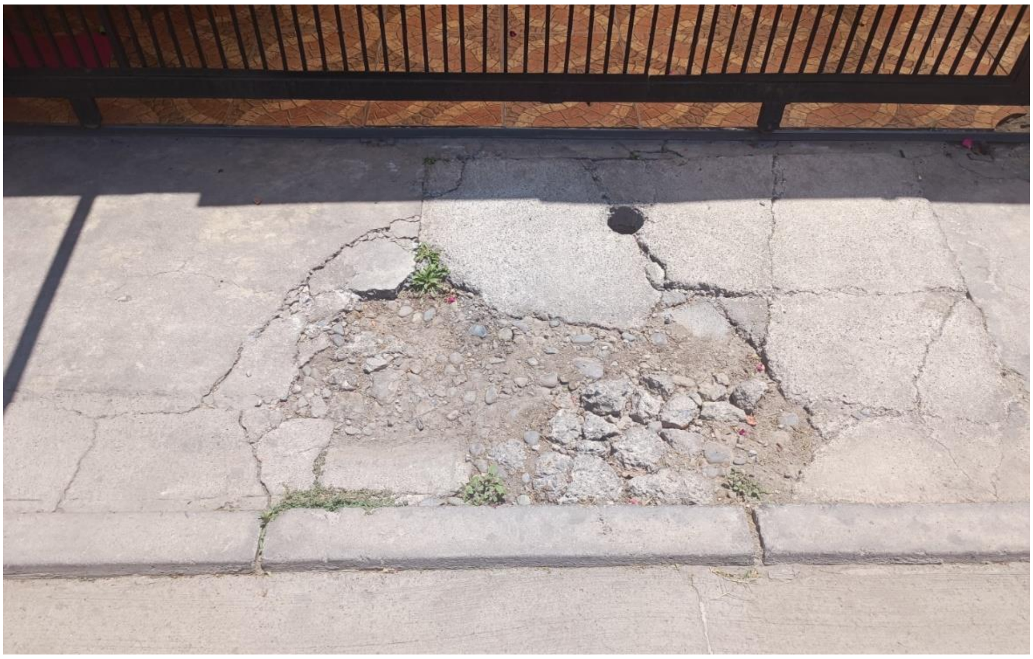

Fig. 13: Cristina's 'repaired' sinkhole

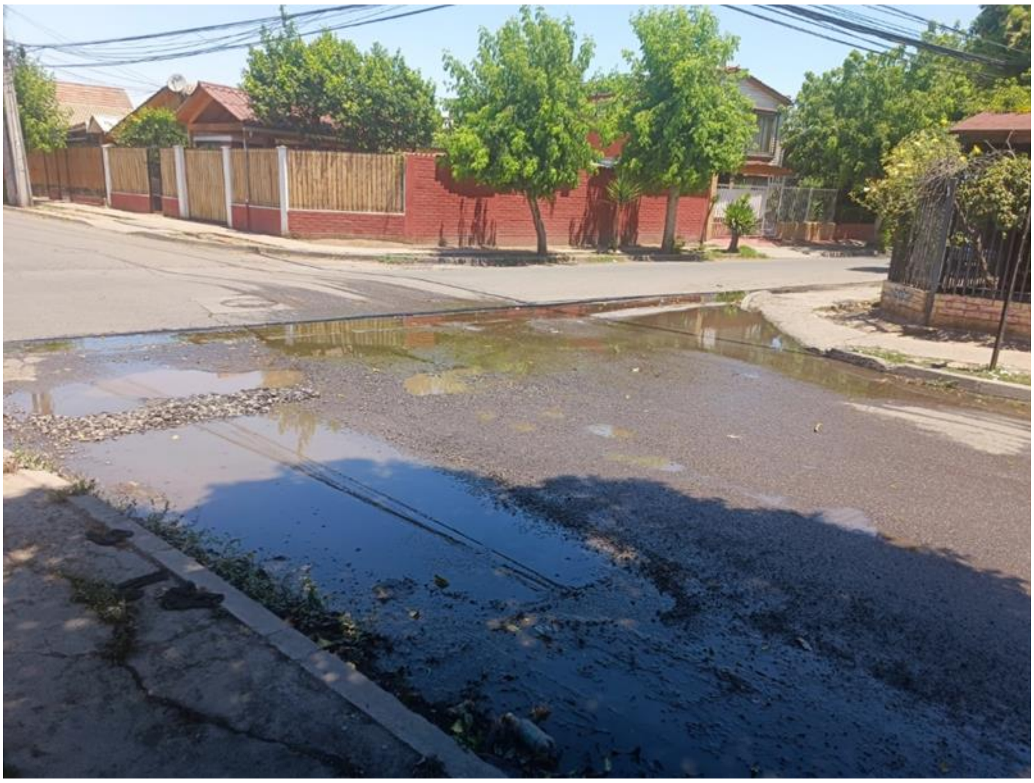

Fig. 14: Water leaks

A little earlier in the fieldwork, Cristina had similar political problems with the security infrastructure of her community but now at the more local level. Walking through her neighbourhood was to pass through a series of iron gates and being surrounded by metal railings. While the iron gates were not legal when installed, the neighbours welcomed these structures. The households gathered the money to install them but never created an organisation to administrate them. Thus, many problems emerged as time passed. In some cases, ambulances could not reach houses to attend to medical emergencies. Other people did not close the doors letting strangers use the small public squares in order to drink alcohol and do drugs. Finally, some gates were broken, and no one repaired them.

On one occasion, Cristina mentioned that she attended a neighbourhood council meeting, ‘It has been years since I went to a neighbourhood council meeting. When I heard, I went because security issues were already being discussed, the gates.’ Gates are a topic for Cristina and Alvaro, her husband. They depended a lot on using their car and considered it a risk to their safety to get out to open the gate by hand. Coincidently, a group of neighbours proposed installing electric gates with their own money but only handing out remote controls to whoever would contribute to the project.

Afterwards, Cristina recounted how a fight broke out at the meeting. One side wanted to install the gates privately to defend itself from crime. The other side did not accept the gates because they felt the project was being imposed on them and constituted an expense they could not make. In the end, the group trying to set up the gates withdrew from the meeting, as they technically did not need permission from the community.

Although Cristina considered the difficulties of access and payment, she approved the gesture, 'Why if you did not put any [money]… why would you have the right to have access through that electric gate? I understand it. I understand that it has to be like that [...]. If safety is an electric gate for them, and they have more money to do it, let them do it. However, they have to give them access to others, although we have to pay for it.' Her cadence showed some fatigue on the subject. While trying to be sympathetic to both sides, she was tired of all the infighting and the lack of results. That occasion was the first and last time I knew she went to a neighbourhood council meeting.

Towards the end of the fieldwork, I asked Cristina to recapitulate these events. 'Do you think these things have anything to do with politics?' I asked. Cristina, without hesitation, answered affirmatively. Surprised, I thought I would hear some Nietzschean version of how power struggles are inevitable. Instead, Cristina started talking to me about what she understood about power, 'Everything happens through politics. Everything has a cunning arrangement. Everything, for me, is a political good; nothing is a social good. Nothing is because "Let us do it for the neighbours." [...]. I see it on both [political] sides. I do not have any fixation; I see that both sides are like that. If things do not work, it is because they see things from a political perspective instead of the social perspective.'

I knew the distinction, but I had never considered it a basic coordinate for my interlocutors. My anthropological training prompted me to think that the social process was social *and* political. Even so, Cristina presented me with a substantial distinction between the two. From there, I inquired her, 'What is social then?' The woman began to break down the idea by making a political critique, 'That they [people with money or power] would worry about the problems that people really have; that they go through life inserting themselves into the social realities that exist.’ Then, she focused on the fact that deputies and senators never visited the surrounding area. She continued, ‘[They come] only when they need the vote. With the paraphernalia, they bring artists, with the flags and the whole thing. Those times are the only moments you see them.’

Taking advantage of the moment, we kept discussing the difference between the social and politics. I asked Cristina if two famous Chilean charities were social: El Hogar de Cristo and the Teleton Foundation. Both institutions are one of the most recognised and supported in the country. However, Cristina said, ‘I have some doubts that they are social’. After a pause, she collected his ideas, ‘It is all so misused; so much empathy is missing. That thing when people do not give a thought if you are cashing in on someone (*cagándote a alguien*). Nobody minds it. “[They think,] if I get a chance to cash on someone, I am going to do it.”’ Finally, she added that the social is linked to social aid, often exploited by politicians and users who abuse the system.

The social (*lo social*) and politics (*la política*) are distinct spaces for the lower-middle-class households I know in Santiago. Both notions belong to the Chilean political language (Baño 1985). The social tends to be closer to associative links, and politics often covers the state apparatus and public discourse. The former is the space of communal organisation among peers. It is the arena that catalyses nonkin relationships and where people help and support each other. Housing committees, neighbourhood associations, charity organisations, youth organisations, seniors clubs, church organisations, and unions inhabit the field. Conversely, politics refers to political parties, local government, clientelistic networks, state apparatus and the broader national stage. The operations of the state and the pursuit of legal and political authority define politics. As with most boundaries, this delimitation is porous and fluctuating.

The difference marks politics as unreliable and the social as where people, politicians or otherwise, can help each other. Cristina’s outlook points to two critiques that are common among the lower-middle-class families I know in Santiago. First, these *Santiaguinos* see state corruption as undermining the fairness and authenticity of the mechanisms of mutuality and solidarity. They often voice, ‘Politicians only work for themselves’ (*Los politicos trabajan para ellos mismos*). This statement could lead them to see individual politicians as corrupt and nepotistic officials who misappropriate funds and profit from them. It can also refer to how some parents see political parties: as only interested in getting elected, vying for positions, and benefiting from political conflict. The second interpretation emphasises that parties do not work together for the general improvement of the country. Political parties are too focused on their ways of seeing the world and do not know how to dialogue with each other. In both analyses, electoral politics engenders a game of winners and losers that prey on politicians’ character faults and undermines proper popular sovereignty.

In contrast, these *Santiaguinos* tend to grasp the social as voluntary, supportive, and diligent. To them, it extends through helpfulness and solidarity, and the relationships catalysed by this orientation. ‘Doing social’ (*hacer algo social*) is about caring and aiding others. One decides voluntarily and personally to assist other peers (*ayudar*), share company (*acompañar*) or assist the vulnerable (*caridad, solidaridad*). As the vignette shows, a formal charity or association does not automatically make them social. In the same way, social elements can appear in the state since there are mechanisms of social assistance that can genuinely positively affect people.

Still, the social and politics are ‘outside’. These households have turned to the private sphere, where they can maintain their agreements and understandings. Following the discussion in Chapter Two and Six, the primary boundary is between the home and the outside. Their homes may feel like contradictory and uncanny places where one’s fantasy keeps slipping away little by little, but it is still better than the hostile worlds of strangers. Thus, they use their time, energy, and resources to fulfil domestic commitments. When they have time, they can stop by the social, albeit it depends on their domestic routines and projects. Late capitalism has created a massive breach between the state, the social and the domestic sphere for this lower-middle-class generation. The workplace and the neighbourly life can offer some intermediate forms of relationality from time to time. Yet, domestic worlds dominate their concerns.

Keeping politics away (and the social close)

Cecilia lives in a lower-middle-class neighbourhood in the district of Independencia with Arturo, her husband, and her daughter Titi. Cecilia is a resilient woman. She has experienced good and bad times. Growing up in a working-class family, she grasped how to be supportive from a young age. Maybe, that was why a child-welfare organisation hired her as an assistant for social workers. Being ethical in the broken landscape of vulnerable low-income childhood is crucial for her sense of personhood.

Cecilia actualises some of the patterns described in other chapters. First, she believes that all politicians steal or are corrupt; and those who do not and ‘draw the attention’ of the public, as she would say, are the best. Second, she believes voting is a civic duty won in the 1989 plebiscite. Finally, she values helping people who need more: children, young people and the elderly.

Cecilia has an important difference from the other parents, however. She has come closer to the ideal of citizenship that activists and scholars consider active. Since her youth, she has participated in housing committees and social programmes and has a more nuanced knowledge of the state apparatus. Her political world is larger than the rest of these lower-middle-class households. She is used to dealing with politicians, bureaucrats, and neighbours. Nevertheless, she remains at the periphery of the state machinery, occupying an ambiguous position on the political scene that animates citizenship.

Throughout the fieldwork, Cristina made the distinction between the social and politics. Being sociable is ‘talking and partying’, but social is ‘participating and helping’. Both opposed politics, which related to ideological conviction and the electoral machine. Cecilia agreed with Cristina that the electoral system created competence and abuse. However, unlike Cristina’s argument, she thought political beliefs motivated people positively. In her view, politics could be about ‘understanding the other’.

Her recent social project started when her daughter Titi was born. Despite having an amicable relationship with her parents and siblings, Cecilia began looking for her own house, as the familial home was overcrowded. At first, she and her family went to live in her mother-in-law's house. However, Cecilia often felt ignored or undervalued by this woman, making her depressed. Moreover, she felt anxious and did not want to keep living with her mother-in-law. Finally, after a couple of months, her mother convinced her to move back home. 'We will figure it out,' she told her. Her family tried their best to accommodate everyone in the tiny house, but it was evident that they needed extra room.

Even when the post-industrial imaginary allows young couples to forego neolocality, the practical side of cohabitation can create undesirable relational tensions in an otherwise caring relationship. Thus, the challenge of finding a home appeared again. However, instead of merely saving money, she followed in her parents' footsteps and started a housing committee. For Cecilia, opting for the social was not strange. Her parents had had a long trajectory of helping around their neighbourhood and joining union and community political efforts.

A new phase of her life had begun. Although the family-centred approach underpins state housing programmes, one can form a committee to organise community-based housing projects. This opportunity gives families more control over the construction and direct access to local authorities and building companies. This alternative to neoliberal state programmes has gathered public support in urban Chile, echoing the long tradition of housing struggles.

Initially, she was a little afraid and frustrated by the process. The committee had to be composed of people from diverse districts by law, associating strangers with diverging motivations. This arrangement fostered tension among the members of the committee, which worried Cecilia. After a lot of work, meetings, and discussions, the committee secured a construction company, a plot of land, and funds. The new condominium conveyed the hope of domesticity and new social standing.

The reality of the community was far from peaceful coexistence. Residents had moved from embracing collective action to retreating to the private, shifting from deliberation and dialogue to defending individual interests. Cecilia still participated in the meetings of the condominium's board, the group responsible for sorting problems out. From there, she grieved about how people gossiped about everything the board did without participating themselves.

Some people had spread the rumour that she had stolen money from the community. Cecilia recounted how she confronted the story calmly but acknowledged that she was enraged. This smear campaign denoted a lack of respect. These people acted as if they did not know her and did not recognise everything she had done for them. This speculation was a personal affront. As she comes from the social (*vengo de lo social*), she knew that hindrances like this could occur. ‘I prefer to discuss the issues,’ she added to express how conversation can help heal political disputes. Rather than the social aspects of the conflict, the moral injury worried her. ‘What did I do to lose their trust?’ she asked at the end of her reflection.

The housing struggle also connected Cecilia with the local government. All her dealings with the state apparatus—especially the National Housing and Urban Planning Service—and the building company had brought her much frustration, damaging her view of bureaucracy. However, she had a slightly better opinion of the local government. Through the housing struggle, she became acquainted with Erica, a councilwoman for the local district. Cecilia admired Erica as she also came from the *pobladores* movement. ‘She is not like the other politicians; she fights for people like us; [and] knows how hard it can be,’ she mentioned once.

To an outsider, Erica was a broker who exchanged favours for political support across various housing committees and social organisations. According to Cecilia, Erica was a trusted politician. When Cecilia’s mother needed a job, Erica offered her a placement as her secretary. It was hard not to see the emotional component that animated this clientelist network. From her perspective, the councilwoman cared about ordinary people. They all chatted like old friends whenever I visited the district government building.

Cecilia’s understanding of politics reflects the values of respect, trust, and helpfulness. Her claims and demands permeate her relationships with neighbours, who are also fellow housing committee members. Likewise, the ties between Erica and Cecilia’s family also manifest mutual expectations of such values. Helping others depends on respect and trust that underpin practices and discourses on solidarity and mutuality.

There is a connection between the values of respect and trust with helping others. People like Cristina and Cecilia are assessing who can help them and whom they can help. Explicit or implicit agreements mediate these relationships of assistance, help or solidarity. In this regard, I would suggest that two principles articulate this ability to reach agreements and support. First, *the core mandate is to meet one's agreement,* which means that one attempts to reach an agreement and fulfil one's deals, pacts, and promises, no matter what form these may take. Here, we refer to intimate commitments, friendship ties, work contracts, political dealings, and resentful citizenship. Keeping one's word helps to organise the world. These arrangements do not appear as formal contracts. Instead, we may track the moral force of agreement that comes from finding ways to cooperate in a balanced and practical way.

Nevertheless, an additional mandate supports this logic and problematises the first mandate. These parents acknowledge that *agreeing parties must recognise their dignity and vulnerability mutually*. This principle establishes that sometimes one cannot fulfil agreements for reasons beyond one's control. In concrete terms, they justify not keeping their word, stating that poverty, distress, or sickness can hinder this duty. It reveals that one '…sometimes just simply cannot carry out' (*A veces, uno no puede cumplir*). Thus, the core mandate must consider that exceptional conditions can temporarily suspend this mandate and must encourage people to help the other, provisionally disregarding the rules of the agreement.

The two first values—*respect* and *trust*—guide perceptions and actions linked to *helpfulness.* Agreements channel this relational disposition. Each arrangement can have its scope, degree of explicitness and internal rules, but discussing deals often conjures the idea of parties consenting to voluntary exchanges. As a result, claims, complaints, and points can appear across different spheres of sociality beyond the political sphere. This perspective stages a society regulated by multitudinous agreements that benefit those involved. As expected, ambiguity and negotiation are not uncommon, as anthropologists know. The opening between the core principle and the acknowledgement of dignity affords a space that begets a terrain for negotiation and dispute, wherein the moral vocabulary can express agreement and disagreement.

The traces of claims of, and demands for, respect emerged in multiple parts of Cecilia and Cristina's lives. For Cristina, there was a lack of respect on the part of the local government every time they did not process their demands on time or did not deliver rational answers to their questions. For Cecilia, neighbours not believing her version of events showed a lack of respect because she had a good reputation within the community. As depicted in the vignettes, the ongoing process of mutual help depended on tacit agreements between the parties. In the case of Cristina, it was between her home, the local government, and neighbours. In contrast, the primary pact in Cecilia's case was among community members and former fellow *pobladores*. Cristina and Cecilia also infused respect with a domestic dimension in the fieldwork. They demanded respect when attempting to enact soft obedience and build a sacrificial domestic economy (See Chapters Four and Five). This value manifested as a language they used to express concrete and explicit agreements between them, family members, and spouses. Conversely, the failure to uphold these agreements implied disrespect.

The most prominent use of lack of respect or disrespect among these households is bureaucratic friction and misunderstandings. When dealing with the state, they must perform bureaucratic labour (*trámites*) to petition the state—following procedures, waiting, filling forms, and responding to officials' requirements. When the state does not react to their petitions accordingly, they say they have been disrespected. Likewise, we may also see how the scene of compromise also bears a trace of the logic of agreements and mutual help at the national level. Politicians fail to meet their promises, disrespecting their constituencies and ordinary voters. Likewise, when powerful people (celebrities, wealthy people, and politicians) break the law without punishment or accountability, these interlocutors interpret it as a lack of respect.

Respect can relate to two other nondomestic events. First, parents and caregivers conjure it to talk about how they would like to be treated with deference and civility. They expect tacit agreement in encounters between people who do not know each other—e.g. dealing with customer service, talking with friends, and attempting to get into a cramped subway car. Secondly, respect can usually slip into deference towards authorities or law officials, especially when criticising other people’s behaviour. Thus, people claim that one must obey teachers, officials, police officers and managers.

Respect is also a domestic issue. Children must show deference to their parents because they make sacrifices for their future and wellbeing. In return, parents must consider their children’s desires and preferences without imposing arbitrary decisions. Sacrifice optimism insists on children showing consideration for their abnegated parents, and soft obedience practices actively mobilise this concept as a demand.

Nonetheless, respect can also summon the idea that agreeing parties must recognise the dignity and vulnerability of the other. As discussed in Chapter Six, dignity can draw from universalist ideas or address more specific forms of moral personhood. Thus, one form of dutiful behaviour could be not to uphold the agreement but to make the necessary accommodations to maintain someone else’s dignity. The more explicit expression of this second expression of this value is the expectation of being treated equally, without bias and malice due to their social origin or personal shortcomings. Another expression is when parents have not performed citizenship as the state expected—forget to fill out a form, arrive late to a meeting, or do not comply with official instructions—and still wish to receive help. Even politicians are expected to forego legal structures to uphold the dignity of people. *Santiaguinos* insist that politicians have a responsibility towards the people (*se deben a la gente*). The formula ‘*se deben*’ implies that they have a debt to ordinary folk: a moral duty to help one’s constituents, above and beyond the formal duties of their office, should motivate them to do good.

The concept of respect can sometimes sneak into ethnographic descriptions without much discussion. Filkestein (2008) writes that anthropologists have not been concerned with this concept. He argues that while anthropologists have studied respectful behaviour, they have not confronted the task of conceptualising it. Anthropological work confirms this point. For example, anthropologists have studied respect as personal standing (Bourgois 2003), compassion (Bolin 2006) or deference (Shohet 2021) without making explicit the theoretical challenges of deploying it.

Santiaguinos tend to move between two versions of respect—one about acknowledging others' dignity and one about being mindful of fulfilling agreements. This value creates a space where deference, compassion, and social standing coexist. However, the price of cohabitation is permanent ambiguity. Respectful behaviour can manifest compassion and love, or underpin authority relationships, and vice versa. Likewise, the constant concern with being disrespected affects their sense of personal standing, but this worry may relate to others' upholding their dignity or to a more concrete agreement.

Respect was hard to pin down without considering trust (*confianza*). In the ethnographic vignettes, Cristina and Cecilia displayed trust and mistrust as fundamental political values. On the one hand, the lack of coherent answers or the ability to cooperate engendered a specific state of alertness in Cristina. She felt exhausted from dealing with municipal workers and annoyed by talking with her neighbours. These sentiments made Cristina wary of the other party—she could not produce or fulfil agreements. On the other hand, trust and mistrust in Cecilia appeared as the community's accusation and her confidence in Councilwoman Erica. Cecilia saw the loss of faith on the part of the community as another symptom of the breakdown of the bonds previously formed in political struggles. This injury reached the point where Cecilia did not feel embedded in her community and wanted to settle elsewhere. On the contrary, the relationship with Erica was one of trust and reflected the logic of mutuality. Erica fulfilled her promises and helped the community and Cecilia's family.

Then, what is the role of trust within the ethic of agreement? We might understand it as *the temporal projection of the capacity to meet agreements*. This value is about sensing future transgression or the memory of broken promises or understandings. When others violate the terms, they start accumulating a sense of mistrust; when others uphold their word, they build it. Memory and instinct play vital roles in the process of trusting. *Santiaguinos* may recall experiences or use 'gut feelings' to assess others' reliability to typify them and organise their social worlds.

In politics, mistrust is dominant, and trust is an anomaly. Parents are wary of politicians and other institutions linked to the state and the powerful. They doubt and suspect the state and most of its institutions—e.g. the state apparatus, politicians, political parties, and bureaucracies. This lack of confidence in the state mirrors personal stories of feeling disrespected by white-collar and service workers.

In contrast, civil society engenders more trust among these families, even if they do not have much time to engage with it. Formal NGOs, residents' associations, senior clubs, and youth clubs appear trustworthy because they help people meet (*juntarse*) and offer companionship, support, and resources. Parents have confidence in most of these organisations. Likewise, the value of trust also appears related to less rigid forms of solidarity—e.g. gifts (*favores*), spontaneous community kitchens (*ollas comunes*), raffles (*rifas*), savings pools (*pollas*), and charity bingos.

Moving to the domestic arena, one example of trust is parental-filial relations. This value makes a good home, according to these parents and caregivers. They feel that family members must have confidence in each other. However, trust and love are not the same. Parents say they love their children but often trust one or two more than the others for practical matters. Thus, children engender it by appearing more prepared to carry out roles or tasks for the household or to reach adulthood. Parents expect one child to be more dependable—often, but not exclusively, a daughter. They see them as trustworthy (*me da confianza*). Parents often describe these children as 'partners' (*socio, partner*), 'right-hand person' (*mano derecha*), or support (*apoyo*).

Sociological tradition relates trust to risk, often highlighting how social systems need it in one way or another to offset error and deception (Javale 2003). However, Corsín Jiménez (2011) has criticised this western-centric view and pointed out the connections between it and corporative discourses on management and accountability. Further, recent ethnographic research has questioned the way this concept is associated with confidence (Rubaii 2020), intimacy (Ystanes 2016), cooperation (Haas 2016), and truth (Liisberg 2015). Thus, instead of relying on essentialist definitions, anthropologists are focusing on the process of trusting and mistrusting (Broch-Due & Ystanes 2016: 24; Geschiere 2019). In this sense, mistrust should not be understood as merely the absence of trust but as a distinct form of sociality or engagement (Carey 2017: 3ff; Mühlfried 2019: 11).

However, respect and trust set the context in which moral demands about agreements and vulnerability make sense throughout many spheres and temporalities in Santiago. Each deal has its particularities—tacit or implicit, political or domestic, demanding or casual, fuzzy or discrete. Trust establishes the more protracted temporalities that weave the events or characters associated with actions of respect and disrespect.

The yearning to help others

When we were reviewing the main ideas of the thesis, I asked Cristina, do you think that the system justifies behaving like politicians? She opened her eyes and answered with a resounding ‘No’ and quickly elaborated,

> It does not justify me being a bad person; because, on the contrary, I help the one I can help... If I can do charity work in my job, [I will do it]. I will do it if I know I can make a prescription that an old lady needs because she cannot come to the doctor again or get the money, especially now that the doctor charges full price. If it is a prescription for monthly medication that she has to take for a lifetime, I will do it […]. If I can do it and it does not affect the doctor and me, why not. I do not even ask him. I know they need it because I know them. I am not a bad person with whom I can help because I know what is happening. I have been working in that job for 15 years. Because people go since I work there, I know their reality. As I know their reality deeply, I do not like them taking advantage of the doctor.

Cristina was not the only one with a yearning to help. When discussing his retirement to a coastal town, Alvaro, Cristina’s husband, talked about how he would like to help his community. He told me, ‘[There], I would drive a large tanker and bring water to the old ladies so they would not have to pay so much.’ He mulled over the expense and his free time. Alvaro felt that helping the elderly was his way of giving something back (*devolver la mano*) and showing gratitude for his life.

Likewise, Cecilia revealed a yearning to help others throughout the fieldwork. Cecilia considered assisting others through her work as a social worker assistant and her connection to Councilwoman Erica. Cecilia told me about her work, ‘I do not have a vocation exactly, but I am studying for a degree to stay here.’ However, she was not indifferent to the cases she worked on. Every time we talked about the situation of children in the National Service for Minors, her demeanour changed. There she confronted horrible instances of abuse and violence that Cecilia would attempt to give a fair amount of dedication. She described her attitude, ‘You try to do the best you can for these kids. They have suffered so much violence for someone else to come and do this to them; I do not know how I do it sometimes, it is complicated, but I am glad I can help.'

In the same way, Cecilia thought about helping through her ties with Erica. She had not only helped her family but also aided many people, according to her. Cecilia saw herself as a point of connection between her and those who need it most, 'She has helped so many people. She has worked with social organisations, residents, and other people.' The activist admired Erica and always turned to her if she had a problem, 'If someone needs something, I do not know, medicine or something else. I approach Mrs Erica. She finds ways to help.' These forms of clientelism are the exception and not the rule, in Cecilia's opinion. Politicians are uncaring, but Erica is an oddity.

For *Santiaguinos*, *helpfulness* (*ayudar, cooperar, apoyar, ser solidario*) is about aiding each other wholeheartedly. Reciprocity, mutuality, and solidarity have a long theoretical history that I could not address faithfully here. Instead, this subsection takes Rakopoulos's insightful words as inspiration, 'Exploring solidarity ethnographically reveals bridges of the self, of personhood-building based on partaking in affirmed social relationality.' (2016: 149).

As members of the ethical-political community, they believe everyone should help and be helped by each other. This tenet is especially true if there is a form of agreement mediating such relationships. Throughout the dissertation's vignettes and examples, we may see that those agreements entail helpfulness at their core. The current political scene, even in decline, animates the idea of mutual aid and support between powerful and ordinary people to achieve their goals. Likewise, domestic scenes stage mutuality and family members must contribute to building domesticity and fulfilling the scenes. In institutional contexts, these *Santiaguinos* frame their decisions and actions as mutual help, too. Employers and employees exchange labour for wages, and politicians and electors trade support for favours and electoral support. This value traverses spheres and animates a variety of relationships because agreements imply collaboration and solidarity, as both parties can benefit from the reciprocity or exchange.

Helpfulness is a tricky matter, in any case. We may remember that fidelity to agreements functions as the core ethical principle, but the necessity to acknowledge others' vulnerability and dignity limits it. Vulnerability becomes salient when people might not fulfil their agreements or might need a supplementary level of support. In this gap, claims, demands, and negotiations can arise. Thus, people can expect more mutual support from their relationships and feel exempted from giving it due to the general fragility of their own lives.

The idea of mutual helping underscores the difference between the social and current definitions of the public sphere. Nonkin relationships defined by potentially authentic trust, respect, and support constitute the social. This concept is noticeably different from definitions of the public sphere that depends on debate and dialogue. For example, Habermas (1989: 27) has proposed a definition based on public debate that deploys reason and critique to engage with governmental issues. Unspoken rules should govern these communicative situations, mirroring principles such as mutual acknowledgement, freedom to intervene in the discussion and the rejection of coercive means intended to impede another participant's speech. Arendt (1998[1958]) also relates citizenship with a space of equality and freedom where citizens can influence each other via speech and persuasion. This arrangement is possible because citizens develop intersubjective bonds—based on culturally shared values, mutual knowledge, or concrete encounters—to build a common world (See also Benhabib 1992). Even more current commentators relate citizenship and the public sphere to speech virtues. Proposals such as Foucault's *Parrhesia* (1985) or Sloterdijk's *Sophrosene* (2005) illustrate a balance between autonomy and self-government—which facilitate the challenging of social conventions without losing the sense of commonality and solidarity among fellow citizens—that become essential in order to build a public sphere.

This difference between discursive ethics and an ethic of mutual help and agreements confirms Sian Lazar's research on South American urban citizenship (2008, 2017). Lazar argues that citizenship is 'a bundle of practices that constitute encounters between the state and citizens' (Lazar 2008: 5; see also Lazar 2016). In urban Bolivia and Argentina, neighbourhoods, local organisations, and unions create citizenship, drawing from multiple sources to pursue active and collective political action. Liberal ideas and institutions are only one of those resources. In this sense, it is striking that the lower-middle-income households in Santiago—far from the more active citizenship of Lazar's examples—also take from various discourses to articulate agreements and the post-industrial domestic imaginary—e.g. the Catholic tradition, liberalism, plebeian culture, and the developmental state neoliberal ideologies. From their perspective, a society of labour and agreements materialises, which personalises liberalism and neoliberalism to a certain degree. They believe Chile is not a society of individuals who alienate their labour and celebrate contracts based on exchange calculations. Instead, the ethical-political community is a complex web of moral agreements that mandate diverse forms of work to achieve better lives as individuals, households, and the nation.

To these *Santiaguinos*, helpfulness and agreement operate as ongoing ethical considerations regarding social relations. They underpin the domestic, the social, and politics, among other areas. Due to this, it also provides a map of the imaginary and actual relationships that people can use to read the world, taking their household as the centre of it. From an intimate form of reciprocity to broader forms of solidarity, political deals, and contractual relations, these *Santiaguinos* experience belonging as an ethic of helpfulness and agreement, which requires intuitive abilities regarding respect and trust.

The intensification of boundary making

The hegemonic narrative in Chile has suggested a history of individualism, political disaffection, and protests that have undermined democratic institutions from the early 2000s to the late 2010s.[36] The political scene of compromise has declined, affecting the everyday experience of politics and the hegemonic project's capacity to organise moral and political sensibilities. Furthermore, Chilean neoliberalism has predominantly dissolved dense social relationships, leaving behind patterns of thin sociability and severer individualism.[37]

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[36] We must consider that the recent events of the 2019 social unrest (*estallido social*) have pushed Araujo (2019) to problematize these interpretations.

[37] UNDP research has reported that Chilean people's feelings of disrespect and distrust of political authorities and institutions have increased (UNDP 2012: 46, 203-10; UNDP 2015: 20, 45, 95; see also MacClure & Barozet 2016). Interpersonal trust has also remained low

Considering this literature, we may raise one relevant point. The decline of the scene of compromise, which generates a sense of political collective, means that the ethic of agreement has become less persuasive. Thus, it will eventually disappear or dissolve, opening the way for a new ethic for sociality and citizenship formations. As we have seen, both Cecilia and Cristina are tired of politicians and are also exhausted of society in general. This disaffection has encouraged them to critique the system and disavow most politics.

However, Cecilia's and Cristina's accounts intensify notions of mutuality and agreements. Likewise, they deploy boundary making, seeking to define the spaces of domestic life, the social, and politics. Politics become relevant because nondomestic relationships are experienced as more threatening and unstable. We may recall Cecilia's experience with the condominium board. The negotiations around trust and respect were fundamental to her moral standing, which carried little political weight. Cristina's dealings with the local government and the neighbourhood council display the same need to assert trust and respect. This boundary-making process even reaches the point where a disappointed Cristina sees politics contaminating the social.

Moreover, Cristina and Cecilia want to teach their children these values. They never fully describe them but suggest actions such as giving and receiving respect, looking for trustful relationships and helping others in need. This attitude has challenges, such as unruly children, uncooperative partners, aloof relatives, uncaring bureaucrats, abusive bosses, and delinquents. Still, they are confident that they must continue to uphold these values.

In this context, Cristina has crafted a political stance that follows a version of citizenship that includes beliefs in the importance of voting and a law-abiding attitude. However, she embraces being a good person who helps others and upholds agreements. As discussed in the previous section, Cristina strongly believes in supporting the underdog if her current way of life allows it. Likewise, she

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when factoring in the Chilean political culture and human development policies (Latinbarómetro 2017). Likewise, recent research in Chile has suggested that there has been a significant change in solidarity patterns since the pre-neoliberal period (Arnold, Thumala, Urquiza, 2006, 2007; Dockendorff, Román, Energici, 2010; Román, Ibarra & Energici, 2014).

emphasises the mandate of resisting abuse. Her way of 'dealing with the system' draws upon her daily life as a mother, neighbour, and administrative clerk.

In contrast, Cecilia is struggling between two types of political stances. One is the attitude that deals with her experience as a *pobladora* and activist. Mobilised by convictions and connected to political networks, her vision of the political world and state machinery is more pragmatic and complex than Cristina's. But on the other hand, Cecilia experiences political exhaustion. The friction resulting from living in the community and the idealisation of condominium life has caused a change of perspective, which put her closer to Cristina's outlook. Her decision to leave the condominium and start somewhere else reflects this fatigue. Still, she is interested in continuing to help. Although she says she does not have much of a vocation, our conversations show great interest in helping to address injustices affecting youth. This internal conflict reflects her vision of society, where she sees a society divided by solidarity and individualism. '40 per cent and 60 per cent,' she quantifies it.

Does the political stance reflect a political fantasy? Attempting to clarify his notion of fantasy, Žižek states that, as long as a community experiences social life as organised and structured, it has to disavow its conditions of impossibility to overlook its internal contradictions (2013: 233). This gesture creates two fantasies. First, a symbolic fiction underpins everyday life, making sense of one's desires and sacrifices. A second fantasy stages and personifies the disavowal, creating characters unbound by social norms who steal the enjoyment lost. Considering this insight, the political stance on mutuality and agreements—along with the post-industrial domestic imaginary and scenes of compromise—is a manifestation of the symbolic fiction that authorises forms of everyday life for lower-middle-class households.

The second fantasy conjures many negative figures—the undeserving poor, the idle rich, the lazy bureaucrat, the corrupt politician, and the monstrous criminal—to stage a secular theodicy, which complements these symbolic fictions. If we follow the several vignettes, parents compose these characters as threats to their way of life. Žižek (1993) notes that racist fantasies attribute a twisted relation with labour to this perverse other: they work too much or live idle carefree lives. The suspicion is that they find enjoyment in sacrificing almost everything or appropriating other people's work. In Santiago, these figures align with the last scene. They do not embody hard work, self-reliance, or upholding the ethic but rather take from others what they need for themselves: money and time. As a result of this ubiquitous menace, parents worry about displays of disrespect, reasons for mistrust, and obstacles to helping and being helped. However, nebulous evils hinder a dramatic scene of antagonism—households do not have a clear enemy to oppose. (This aspect denotes a critical difference from racist fantasies that create a single racial figure to resent). Thus, households prioritise defending themselves haunted by these figures.

I would suggest that the interaction between post-industrial domestic fantasies and the political fantasy of helping and agreement promotes boundary-making practices. The domestic-political separation materialise as spaces that host relationships with different degrees of mutual aid and trust. That arrangement does not mean that the domestic world is immediately equivalent to houses or politics with state institutions. Cecilia sees Councilwoman Erica as almost family, and Cristina sees their neighbours as politicians in the context of the council. Here the social appears as a terrain of ambiguity where support can emerge—in the form of state assistance, social associations, or charities—whose agreements are fragile.

These fantasies allow lower-middle-class *Santiaguinos* to establish a sense of self—the ordinary but upstanding citizen. They also contribute to organising the coordinates of political and domestic agencies, grounding their self-efficacy. In the same way, they can project this sense of agency onto others to raise claims of responsibility and liability embedded in these circuits of helpfulness and agreements. These theatres of accountability can be actual or imaginary. *Santiaguinos* make claims to other people while navigating social life or constructing imagined settings of dispute. These instances feed their self-image and contribute to assembling a moral self.

As we have seen, Cristina is more comfortable with these fantasies and develops a political stance consistent with a sense of agency that develops mainly domestically. Contrastingly, this political fantasy entices Cecilia to transform her political dispositions. The comparison allows us to see how they perform boundary-making practices using similar coordinates, but whose projections on the social world are not necessarily the same. Cristina more antagonistically opposes home to the political, dismissing the contradictions in her stories. Contrastingly, Cecilia sees a more fluid relationship between domestic, the social, and politics, although the boundaries between them are hardening.

Among these households, we can find a series of boundary-making gestures: a permanent critique of the political, a dedication to the domestic, the moral negotiation with the social, and the dismissal of internal domestic conflicts. Boundary making allows charting multiple relationships based on the degree of agreement and mutual help. Moreover, these gestures help to create a self-image to consolidate models of self-efficacy and agency.

The argument has suggested looking for everyday warnings and grumbles to understand the ethical formations that underpin these parents' sense of belonging to, and citizenship of, a political community. This ethnographic account of a more conventional form of citizenship complements the focus on more active forms of political action that characterise political anthropology in urban Latin America. Further, it brings together the anthropology of ethics and the anthropology of citizenship to illuminate the moral foundations of an ethical-political community.

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This chapter describes how boundary making creates three spheres: the domestic, the social and politics. These parents deploy these gestures as the foundation for their engagement with the ethical-political community. Helpfulness and the ability to make agreements relate to this effort. As seen, there are two values—respect and trust—that ground this process. The social and politics articulate the terrain of gestures and acts beyond the domestic. The nonkin relations defined by potentially authentic trust, respect, and support constitute the social. Finally, we must note that both the decline of the scene of compromise and neoliberal precarisation have begotten the intensification of boundary making.

> *'In capitalist logics of askesis, the workers' obligation is to be more rational than the system, and their recompense is to be held in a sense of pride at surviving the scene of their own attrition.'*
>
> Lauren Berlant
> (Berlant, Helms & Vishmidt 2010)

Conclusion

The emergence of the lower middle class is one crucial feature of Chilean late capitalism. Countries like the United Kingdom and the United States have experienced the rise of socioeconomic groups defined by low-middle income. Yet, commentators have framed the problem as the precarisation or decline of previously protected classes—i.e. the professional middle class or the industrial working class (Jones, O. 2020; Kearney & Harris 2013; Petersen 2020; Whiteford 2019; Zaloom 2019). In contrast, the lower middle class in Chile appears to be one single structural group created by the failure of neoliberal reforms to deliver robust economic development and access to social goods to large segments of the population. Shoehorned between the professional middle class and the poor, it describes skilled manual workers, low-level clerical and service workers and self-employed individuals. It also depicts people with college degrees working in saturated job markets (e.g. teachers, journalists, psychologists, and accountants). In the early 1990s, these vulnerable groups began moving upwards in the social structure due to the economic expansion after the 1982 crisis, the broader access to higher education and the consolidation of the urban services sector. However, large-scale intragenerational upward mobility slowed down in the late 1990s. As a result, households could not find a path to authentic economic stability and got stuck, hovering over poverty. The promise of wellbeing predicated upon hard work, entrepreneurship and meritocracy cracked under the pressure of the Chilean regime of accumulation and labour. Nowadays, most households have difficulty sustaining livelihoods, achieving economic security, and approaching a eudaemonic life, despite having a steady income and permanent employment.

Several factors explain the failure to create a thriving majority. A weak welfare state, the deregulation of labour markets and the curbing of trade unions' power have created a social environment where workers have limited options to access fair employment and a decent income. Instead, working-class households rely on a cluster of strategies to make ends meet—e.g. overwork, frugality, frequent use of credit cards, 'gigs', and some limited support from personal ties. They 'keep their heads above water' but mostly live from month to month. Households may sometimes try to get ahead—get a professional degree, move to a new city, or start a new business. Once again, neoliberal precarity and the degeneration of life undermine their efforts.

Once the promise of intragenerational social mobility vanishes, intergenerational social mobility takes its place. Most of these households want a better life for their children. They yearn for their offspring to access better and more rewarding lives. While money is an important issue, better lives also involve ideas such as happiness, contentment, emotional wellbeing, and autonomy. Parents in Santiago push their children to higher education and better-paying jobs, but they do not deceive themselves. They know that their children may not be suitable university material, or that a professional career may not guarantee contentment. Feelings of love also thwart any impetus to overburden their offspring with demands for self-discipline, educational excellence, and economic ambition. Their children's lives cannot only be about studying and working.

This dissertation has attempted to understand what gives life 'meaning' when households must confront multiple struggles without a clear endgame in sight. Berlant asks herself repeatedly, 'Why do people stay attached to lives that don't work?' (2011). Parents recognise that their current projects and routines are unlikely to produce a better life, yet they hope that love, sacrifice, and resoluteness will offer a different future. Thus, it becomes necessary to explore the interface between political and economic forces and the selfhood mechanisms that motivate them to embrace specific courses of action—or, what I have called, structures of mattering.

With these questions in mind, I examine the development of the lower middle class in Chapter One. *Santiaguinos* tend to self-identify as middle class when asked. Several reasons make it difficult to understand their attachment to the label. A high degree of income inequality, commonplace exclusion from social goods, and economic uncertainty may deter parents from seeing themselves in ‘the middle’. Yet, the lower middle class makes sense when we take into account the several struggles for values in which these parents find themselves. They classify themselves as lower middle class—a middle class that self-qualify their belonging—in an effort to put together diverging claims about their lives.

As a result, this class emerges as a particular interpretation of their position within labour and moral relationships. They mainly identify as middle class or ‘the people who work’. Still, they add expressions such as ‘the people who make the effort’ or, ‘the humble ones’ or, ‘the ones who have a hard time getting to the end of the month’ to qualify this belonging. Dual struggles for value—labour and self-worth—condition them. Thus, they try to configure a self-image that incorporates both aspects. The lower middle class supports their conflicting and vexing experiences of value and class.

Along with lower-middle-classness, we may find a particular experience of citizenship. The parents that I met in Santiago care about voting, law-abiding, and state monitoring. Rather than rejecting or altering liberal democratic institutions, they embrace them. This endorsement, however, does not mean lack of criticism or lack of defiance. On the contrary, they critique the political system, mistrust politicians, and demonstrate low-intensity political engagement. Moreover, they actively cultivate a moral distance from politics. Their lack of money, energy and time partially explains this attitude. Additionally, there are active forces of disappointment, anger and bitterness that shape them.

The decline of the scene of compromise grounds this resentment. The 1988 plebiscite that decided the return to democratic government provided hope since it mandated the end of the dictatorship. The post-authoritarian elite and the populace had reached an implicit compromise. The former would bring a new era of prosperity and growth, while the latter must behave like good citizens. When politicians did not enact the necessary transformations, working-class families felt deceived. Thus, a sense of righteousness underpins their embrace of liberal citizenship. It makes them feel like the moral protectors of the political community, encouraging their attachment to liberal democratic institutions.

These parents' most pivotal desire—i.e. taking care of their families—interfaces with those subject positions. They achieve a sense of self and personhood through domestic love. Having a contented family, protecting their children, and building a proper home helps them organise their lives. The post-industrial domestic imaginary nurtures such desires. It fosters unconscious fantasies that materialise as scenes of conviviality, mutuality, and flexibility that embody and stage the pursuit of intimate love and tenderness among these families. However, exploring these fantasies also discloses the dual aspects of distressing sentiment and kin anxiety.

Animated by post-industrial domestic fantasies, the parents I met embodied a specific mood that encompassed their life: sacrificial optimism. It is a bodily and relational disposition to live an abnegated life dedicated to labouring on behalf of their children's future. Parents must keep working without end, both to secure their precarious achievements and to enable the possibility of social mobility and wellbeing for their children. Yet this never-ending work entails the degeneration of life among these families—exhaustion, affliction, and dread. However, instead of recoiling, these parents exude optimism. They believe that their labour can deliver a better future for their offspring. This mood pulls together a heterogeneous assemblage of concerns that allows them to upend their suffering into something positive.

By following these desires and concerns, parenting becomes a conscious effort that demands personal responsibility. While the domestic fantasies and the sacrificial optimism mood appear as demands that get underway outside one's will, their commitment to nurturing shows the relationship between purpose and consciousness. As an ethical commitment, parenting entails routines, a pedagogy for raising children, experimentation, and deliberation. Living a dedicated life among these interlocutors depends on internal deliberation events that are sometimes separate from everyday life. Internal deliberation enables people to choose, decide, assent, or consent to first-order desires and concerns, transforming them into concrete courses of action. As a result, reflexivity allows them to mediate the impacts of neoliberal precarity and intensive parenting. However, their children's problems in reaching social adulthood show the limits of these commitments.

Motivated by these fantasies, moods, and commitments, parents build homes to take care of their families. The history of Santiago's housing struggles reveals the centrality of the two values of protection and dignity as crucial to the understanding of current dwelling forms marked by class. The former is a core moral value that describes basal self-worth and wellbeing. The latter, in contrast, speaks about one's capacity to protect one's family. However, neoliberalism short-circuits the production and realisation of these values, forcing parents to compromise. To this end, tranquillity becomes a ubiquitous mode of participation. It means that one's personal and domestic life has not encountered disrupting problems; thus, it can continue.

This ethnographic exploration of domestic fantasies, sacrificial moods, and commitments to nurturing has contributed to the thinking of some aspects of the anthropology of the family and households. Addressing multiple bodies of literature—new kinship studies, parenting culture studies, and the anthropology of houses—it has been argued that anthropology must pay closer attention to imaginary scenes that motivate parents to negotiate and accommodate different values and attachments while embedded in domestic social relationships. The tensional relation between imaginary and symbolic registers also suggests focusing on how individuals encounter cultural repertoires of relatedness, parenting, and place making.

At the same time, the gap between imagined and actual arrangements illuminates the influence of class. Anthropologists have often deployed this factor to signal a relative deprivation of resources or a coherent culture of domesticity or parenting. Yet, throughout the chapters, class has also materialised as positional interests defined by different struggles for value. In Santiago, these parents fill the gap by pursuing courses of action, encouraged by these structures of mattering, attempting to create domestic worlds that embody what matters to them. Phenomena like never-ending parenting, tranquillity, sacrificial optimism, and the value of flexibility reflect these compromises of diverging motives, including class interests.

How does this focus on the domestic affect politics and citizenship? These parents engage with the political community by boundary making. They organise society, separating the domestic spaces, the social and politics. These boundaries reflect social worlds where the possibility of helping and making agreements differ. Two values—respect and trust—contribute to charting these social relationships and assessing different forms of sociality.

Considering this account, we can address some of the anthropology of class's questions regarding subjectivity and political positioning. The successive waves of neoliberal reform and accommodation have shaped the struggles for value that gave rise to the lower middle class. These parents exist around economic sectors that have experienced little transformation in the last two decades. In contrast, the market economy impulses the mining, financial, and commercial sectors, excluding these households. Without a high volume of cultural or social capital to access sources of accumulation, these parents are offered the awkward position of 'exclusion-within-inclusion', and they take it. Despite their critiques and disavowals, they accept the rules of the game and reject current politics.

What does constitute this lower middle class as a political group? We know that domestic life and the ethic of agreement underpin their political outlook. It is true that there is a diversity of political positions and stances among lower-middle-class households. As I have described, the parents vote for both centre-right and centre-left candidates. They also have different opinions on political matters. However, their (wounded) attachment to liberal institutions and ordinary life pushes them to centrist positions. They share a moral fidelity to hard work, self-reliance, domesticity, and ethical agreements. Likewise, the rejection of radical projects of social transformation drives them to the centre. These parents are afraid of economic crises and political violence, which they link to historical left-wing and right-wing projects that have failed. Mistrust for utopias marks their political engagement.

These homes can be cautious but are hardly traditionalists. The 'traditional-modern' cleavage interacts with the post-industrial domestic imaginary, creating a hybrid stance regarding political and moral positioning. Since these parents' domestic fantasies stage flexibility as the central theme, active resistance to change does not suffocate intimacy. Parents acknowledge their children's personal desires and preferences. They know that their children want to get body modifications, access the latest trends, and attend parties. Most parents are open to discussing controversial issues such as feminism, nonmarital sex, alcohol use, homosexuality, and marihuana use. Due to this flexible outlook, they also make accommodations in their lives. They even chase flexible views of romantic relationships and intimate desires.

A difference materialises between being ‘family focused’ and being traditional. Family values motivate parents, but they are not entrenched in self-images drawing upon *tradition* or *religiosity*. Instead, they see themselves as modern parents, balancing the different demands acting on and within their households. Extreme traditionality or religiosity is connected to devoted Roman Catholic or Protestant families, which evoke repression, control, and unreasonableness.

This relationship between the domestic and political worlds advances a supplemental perspective to the anthropology of citizenship in Latin America. This body of literature has thoroughly explored the manifestations of active citizenship on the subcontinent. I have portrayed these parents’ more passive form of citizenship as a comparative ethnographic description, engendering two insights. First of all, liberalism and neoliberalism discourses have failed to create a strong sense of citizenship among these households. Instead, these households use multiple sources to put together their understanding of citizenship. This orientation matches other ethnographies of active citizenship examples in Latin America. In this low participation context, the rejection of politics is explained better by the degeneration of life and resentment rather than by the efficacy of neoliberal versions of citizenship and personhood. Secondly, there are broader ethical and affective forces that underpin citizenship, an element often omitted by these authors. Certainly, this body of literature has put attention on the affective and ethical dimensions, including how people contest the abstract and universal quality of Western discourse on citizenship and personhood. However, it has undertheorised the broader mechanisms hidden from view. The present dissertation has drawn upon Lacanian social theorists and the anthropology of ethics to delve into political fantasies and the ethics of sociality to address this omission.

Finally, this conclusion must address one question. Does this political outlook entail compliance or latent resistance? The answer is complex. This dissertation has attempted to understand the relationship between class and selfhood formation in late capitalism. In the introduction, I argue that more traditional Marxist class approaches tend to use the concept of 'class interest' to explain how social groups enact specific strategies consistent with their class position. The analytical primacy of interests fosters a dichotomy between class interests and false consciousness to explore class subjectivity.

Most anthropologists have long resisted this dichotomic analysis. Instead, ethnographic descriptions have used concepts such as *resistance* and *habitus*, or notions such as *negotiation, contradiction, accommodation, or fragmentation* to understand these subjective incongruities. The problem is that these interpretations may rely too much on describing contradictory statements without unpacking their interlocutors' motives.

This dissertation suggests that studying structures of mattering can offer an alternative path for the examination of class consciousness and praxis. Considering this insight, this argument has approached class subjectivity among lower-middle-class households differently. The starting point is that the neoliberal hegemonic project has governed different social relationships of production and realisation of value, attempting to instil values and valuable objects through economies, discourses, and technologies. Individuals and households interface with these mechanisms, creating structures of mattering since birth that grow as vital machines in response. These structures of mattering do not just gather hegemonic or counterhegemonic influences that filter the world using specific representations or embodiments. They work by making associations between ideas, dispositions, and environments to provide motives with ontological force. In that way, they establish the basic architecture of selfhood and personhood.

Agency may be deployed to reshape the relationships that make up such structures by combining environmental modification, relationality, knowledge production, reflexivity, and habit formation. Thus, they become means of self-affectation. Structures of mattering, contradictorily, react and resist such efforts, as quasi-objects composed of, and emergent from, relationships independent of one's will. Due to this duality, they manifest a strange and contradictory quality—i.e. an alien power that still feels like part of oneself. Attending the mechanisms that encourage accommodation and negotiation, mattering can give a clear picture of how individuals and collectives participate in struggles for value.

Throughout the dissertation, parents show that focusing on their domestic worlds can translate into moral and strategic indifference to political matters. While not insulated from politics, they reinforce a moral boundary between politics and homes. They indeed critique the elite, have frictional encounters with the state, and refuse most political discourse and mechanisms of participation. Yet, they are far from sabotaging accumulation regimes or undermining political structures. In this case, criticism, friction, and disorder do not amount to substantive resistance.

The structures—post-industrial domestic fantasies, sacrificial moods, and commitments to nurturing—complement neoliberal citizenship and political ontologies of personhood, authorising a version of ‘ordinary life’ for lower-middle-class households. Families in Santiago have gravitated around this ordinariness, paying a high cost. Parents and caretakers are exhausted, anxious, and lonely. They spend most of their time creating value for labour markets and ethical-political communities. Without energy, time, or resources, their lives become driven by never-ending work and relational tensions at home that add to exploitation and domination. Only the fragile promises of intimate love and a better future hold this arrangement together.

However, pursuing these motives creates friction around the different social relationships of production and realisation. Parents have disturbed the hegemonic project’s efforts to banish working-class interests, introduce neoliberal participatory mechanisms, establish neoliberal domestic imaginaries, promote intensive parenting, and forego the pursuit of eudaimonia.

Is this misfortune the last word on lower-middle-class *Santiaguinos*? No. The continued sabotage of social reproduction by late capitalism in Chile reached a breaking point in 2019, activating a different response from the same fantasies, moods, and commitments. If these structures of mattering at one point enable capitalist accumulation and power structures, they can also, at another point, disrupt them when what matters is in jeopardy. The following coda will briefly touch on this shift.

Coda: After October 2019

On October 18th, 2019, unforeseen social unrest (*estallido social*) shook Chile. After almost thirty years of post-authoritarian governments and social order, massive protests would disturb ordinary life in Santiago. It began with a small protest over the rising cost of public transport that disrupted the city slightly. The protests soon spread across other towns and neighbourhoods, fostering a climate of civil disobedience. The post-authoritarian state responded to the mobilisation by repressing the masses of protestors. This reaction only encouraged more malaise and anger among the populace. The state hoped that the *estallido social* would fizzle away as had other movements before it. Instead, the movement grew in the following weeks. At its peak, millions of people took to the streets, and public support for the daily demonstrations reached 80 per cent, shattering the left-right divide.

Before October 2019, protestors had held demonstrations, marches, and rallies to a certain extent. Students, feminists, and environmental activists had taken the streets to protest and push for reforms with moderate success. Nonetheless, the *estallido social* expressed greater and deeper demands. *Santiaguinos* took the opportunity to call for a less gruelling ordinary life: better wages, access to healthcare services, better pensions, improved housing programmes, fairer gender relations, a cleaner environment, and more inclusive citizenship. In other words, the unrest was about almost everything that was wrong with late capitalism. In February 2020, the movement continued to be strong around the country.

A lot has changed since the beginning of 2020. The global COVID19 pandemic, an economic downturn, unforeseen waves of immigration, a series of elections and referendums, and one constitutional drafting process have shaken Chilean society. Friends like Ernesto, Karen, Violeta, Cristina, and Vero are perplexed by the unending series of dramatic events. Political life alone has contributed to this sense of disorientation.

On the one hand, political discussion is more polarised than before. The 2021 presidential election saw the collision between José Antonio Kast, a far-right and anti-immigration candidate, and Gabriel Boric, a left-wing former student-movement leader candidate. Although Boric won with a twelve-point margin and a historic number of votes, analysts have highlighted the division in Chilean society. On one side, far-right groups have become more vocal, building an anti-immigration, pro-authoritarianism, and pro-capitalist narrative. On the other, left-wing groups have pushed for collectivist and anti-capitalist projects, pushing away more moderate citizens.

On the other hand, 62 per cent of voters rejected the left-leaning constitutional draft in the 2022 national plebiscite, closing one of the last avenues for addressing the demands of the *estallido social*. Political parties are now trying to propose a new constitution by implementing a shorter, more institutional, and ‘expert-oriented’ procedure. The populace is divided. The right-wing sectors are calling to vote against the upcoming draft. Left-wing collectives, parties, and social movements still do not recover from the defeat and see these events as a betrayal of the spirit of the *estallido social*. The most centrist positions have a hard time identifying the path forward.

In 2022, I returned to some households to find that some things had changed, and others were still the same. These parents were still fixated on domestic issues and mistrusted politicians. They conveyed disappointment and disorientation. Ernesto expressed disappointment about the result and could not see how things could turn out for the better. He and Karen voted in favour of the new constitution. Vero and Violeta showed more negative reactions. After welcoming the idea of a fairer society, they quickly mistrusted the constitutional convention. They voted to reject the draft. Cristina and Alvaro’s perspectives changed as time passed. Initially, they supported the spirit behind it, but mistrust arose later. They also voted against it. They repeated two crucial ideas. First, the people behind the draft were trying to change everything about Chile without considering the ‘good things’. Secondly, political parties negatively influenced the process, usurping the will of the people.

Despite the differences between these households, they all still created distance from politics, moving within a narrow range of possibilities close to the centre of the political spectrum. The rising polarisation had not affected them. Admittedly, they were more distressed about crime, migration, inflation, low wages, and political unrest than five years ago. Yet, they had not yielded the scene of compromise.

I would suggest that structures of mattering may contribute to understanding how these *Santiaguinos* have reacted. I suspect that lower-middle-class families I know in the city do not want a complete transformation of Chilean society. Instead, they want *some* changes that would promote a fairer society that addresses what they saw as abuse and encourages mutual respect. These households also expect more access to educational and labour opportunities for their children. These yearnings reflect latent demands that we can read throughout the chapters. However, they exist alongside their enduring political attitudes. A strong division between domestic, the social, and politics still shapes their stances. They still view politicians and their promises with suspicion while focusing their dedication to their families and domestic life.

Different constituencies converged in the populace supporting the *estallido social*, each with its own ever-evolving political demands and expectations. It is possible to imagine that lower-middle-class families were not seeking radical change as social movements and left-wing activists. Instead, they consented to the protests mobilising their understanding of citizenship based on resentment, boundary making and moral critique. When the politics of the constitutional convention echoed post-authoritarian politics, these mechanisms—post-industrial domestic fantasies, sacrificial optimism, and the commitment to nurturing—gained strength. After an initial welcoming of the political situation, these parents and caregivers rejected what they perceived as the breakdown of everyday life. They reframed the process as broken promises and returned to see politicians as corrupt and inefficient.

The partial U-turn becomes more evident when compared to the politics of the younger generation. While the children of the 1988 plebiscite are making sense of the decline of the scene of compromise, the youth yearn for something different, perhaps, a new social pact. This generation positions itself differently, pushing for progressive reforms. Most members of this age group are under thirty-five years old—Gabriel Boric was thirty-five years old when elected. Undoubtedly, this generation is more comfortable in the public space and less afraid to disavow domesticity. The feminist movement, the increase in neoliberal individualism, and the rising economic and moral costs of starting a family have weakened domestic structures of mattering. This generation has also lived with the frustration engendered by the promise of post-industrial intimate love. As a result, absolute sacrifice is no longer an authoritative model among the youth. Likewise, the meaning of parenting is changing quickly. As a result, the puissance of the post-industrial domestic imaginary to model ordinary life is waning. Thousands of lower-middle-class households may abandon this libidinal economy, chasing after new promises—domestic or otherwise. New fantasies, moods, and commitments will emerge to hold together lives that keep being traversed by multiple value struggles.

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Appendix A

Heads of the household (age)	Neighbourhood (District)	Jobs (Monthly income)	Housing situation	Budgetary self-perception
Violeta (45)	El Roble, La Pintana	Low-level administrative clerk (£750)	Homeowner (state subsidy, completed).	Violeta said her salary was enough to pay her bills but limited her expenses to achieve this end. She declared that she had no significant debts but acknowledged that Roci’s financial support would allow for more economic stability.
Ernesto (48) and Karen (38)	Población Paraguay, San Ramón	Craftsman and cashier (£850)	Access to long-term residence depending on informal inheritance arrangements (state grant, ‘*operación sitio*’).	Ernesto and Karen struggled to cover monthly expenses. They needed both salaries to this end. They had a debt with a retail store that they considered significant, but they were legally contesting it with the help of a specialised pro-bono legal firm. I consulted them several times about the issue, but they did not show much concern about it. Months like March and December were more challenging because of the children’s expenses.
Cristina (54) and Alvaro (60)	La Farfana, Maipú	Administrative clerk and truck driver (£1000)	Homeowners (Alvaro’s private loan, paid in total).	Cristina and Alvaro had more economic stability than the rest of the families, declaring that they had no debts they could not pay monthly. However, they built a house in a coastal town for which they took out a loan. At the end of 2018, their truck had a series of problems, which raised their spending again.
Vero (48)	La Farfana, Maipú	Greengrocer’s assistant (£800)	Access to long-term residence depending on ex-husband’s absence	Vero declared not having budget problems because she was ‘frugal’. She maintained a debt due to Isa’s problems, but they paid the

			(state-supported private loan, paid in total).	loan at the end of the fieldwork. Vero had small savings that she put together monthly, allowing her some budgetary flexibility. Mario and Isa also contributed money to the household.
Jacqui (68) and Jacinto (72)	Villa Puente Alto, Puente Alto	Street fundraiser and retiree (£850)	Short term renting	Jacqui and Jacinto had financial problems. They depended on Jacqui’s income, Jacinto’s pension, and Cata’s informal jobs. She also received irregular monetary support from her older children. Jacqui claimed to have significant debt but did not detail its magnitude.
Cecilia (44) and Arturo (52)	Barrio Mirador Viejo, Independencia	Social worker’s assistance and welder (£900)	Homeowners (state subsidy based on housing committee)	Cecilia and Arturo depended on the two salaries to cover their expenses, but Cecilia declared not to maintain significant debts. Both had good jobs that allowed them to experience economic stability.
Soledad (45) and Roberto (55)	Barrio Salzburgo, Recoleta	Teacher and informal worker (£900)	Long-term leasing in Santiago.	Soledad and Roberto had economic difficulties produced by failed past ventures. The level of debt was significant, but Soledad declared that they could still pay the bills.

Table 1: Synoptic chart of households (elaborated by the author based on data)

Household members (relationship, age)	Nondomestic family relationships	Neighbours, friends, and acquaintances
Violeta (45) Pancha (Daughter, 26) Roci (Daughter, 22) Jocelyn (Daughter, 14) Alondra (Daughter, 10) Katya (Granddaughter, 5) Rafa (Grandson, 3)	• Violeta's relationships with her family were not fluid regarding communication or visits. Because of the spatial closeness, her daughters visited their grandmother and relatives. But Violeta avoided talking to or visiting them throughout the fieldwork. • Violeta loved her father, and it was her constant concern. But she usually would not be able to visit him. Then, unfortunately, his health deteriorated in the final parts of the fieldwork, and he died shortly afterwards. • The relationship with his mother was highly conflictive. I did not register care work, exchanges, gifts or emotional support between Violeta and her mother. Every mention of her mother was filled with anger or sadness. • The ties between Violeta and her siblings were less strained, but they had no fluid relationship. Violeta usually criticised and disqualified them. They appear as helping figures only in a couple of accounts. I did not register any mutual visits throughout the fieldwork. • Violeta often emphasised that her	• Violeta said she does not have many friends. I did not register many relationships based on constant communication, care work, emotional support, gifts, or exchanges. When discussing these friendships, she described them as a group of people that occasionally had fun together but were not close friends. • Roci encouraged these friendships because she perceived her mother as too focused on work and motherhood. • I recorded that Violeta went out with friends or attended work events twice a month. She mentioned that she enjoyed these brief outings but was also tired and bound by duty to go. • Violeta had a critical view of her neighbourhood and showed no interest in building friendships with her neighbours. She had cordial relationships with a minority of neighbours, but she mentioned that it was because they were peaceful and private people. • Violeta often insisted that she did not like to ask for help, whether in terms of care work, goods, or financial support.

	primary concern was her immediate family and father.	
Ernesto (48) and Karen (38) Gaspar (Son, 18) Camila (Daughter, 5)	• Ernesto and Karen had no meaningful relationships with Ernesto’s sisters, who do not live nearby. • They maintained a relationship with his sister, who lived on the same property, but Ernesto was emphatic that there were two separate households. • I recorded that each house was a separate building, did not share cooking or chores, and had independent access. The sister occasionally borrowed tools. • Karen’s relationship with her family was strained. When I asked her about them, she told me they gathered more in the past than in the present. • I recorded four meetings with her family in a year, mainly birthdays or charity events. • Karen felt estranged from her mother. She compared her to Ernesto’s mother and thought her mother did not care much about her. • Ernesto and Karen kept a more constant relationship with an uncle who lives nearby. But they treated him more like a neighbour. I registered a couple of instances of care work among the households throughout the	• Regarding the neighbourhood, they declared to have cordial relations with their neighbours. My records confirmed this attitude. In general, they talked with them, and there were several instances of simple favours. • I also recorded that Ernesto and Karen indicated they would like to help a couple of neighbours in financial trouble but could not do it because they did not have time or resources. • It should be mentioned that two neighbours helped Ernesto and Karen with food boxes during COVID-19. Later, they recounted how surprised they were and how they had seen their neighbours in a different light. • Ernesto and Karen also noted that they did not like asking for favours. • Karen stated that outside of family circles, she did not have many friends and did not have much interest in having them. However, on other occasions, I met a couple of her friends from work. Karen mentioned that she was surprised that one of those friendships had lasted so long. • Ernesto stated that his friends were from before his marriage and that he did not see them much. I only

	fieldwork.	witnessed one visit of those friends. He dropped by unannounced because he was nearby. • Ernesto and Karen also accepted two invitations for outings between 2017 and 2018. • Ernesto is also close to his boss. But I did not record meetings outside work. • They repeatedly reported feelings of loneliness and detachment.
Cristina (54) and Alvaro (60) Isaac (Son, 12) Luchito (Cristina’s son, 24) Beto (Alvaro’s son, 34)	• Cristina and Alvaro have good relationships with her adult children (and their families) who do not live with them: Noemi, Clara, and Pepe. • The closest families are Noemi’s and Pepe’s, who have children similar in age to Isaac. • Cristina did not have a relationship with her sister. Cristina alleged personality problems and conflicts over an inheritance. I only recorded one encounter with a nephew. • Cristina’s parents died. His mother passed away more than five years ago, and his father recently, but they were estranged. • Alvaro had a good relationship with his sisters. According to him, they often celebrate holidays together in the past. However, he said that they met less regularly due to his commitments. I recorded two gatherings from August	• Cristina had three significant friends in the neighbourhood. They offer her emotional support and help with practical matters, like taking care of her house in her absence and borrowing domestic equipment. • Alvaro also had two friends in the neighbourhood (*compadres*). They mostly shared stories when they saw each other in the afternoon. Alvaro declared himself dedicated to the family. • Cristina and Alvaro stated that they often do not go out beside Isaac’s school activities and family reunions with their children. • In addition, Cristina and Alvaro built a house in a village near the coast in 2018. They dedicated an essential part of their free time to this project. Beto was also involved in the construction. • Cristina said that the ethnography

	2017 to December 2018. Alvaro’s parents died a long time ago.	allowed her to discuss things that mattered to her and that it was challenging to discuss in other contexts. • Alvaro also pointed out that ethnography was a good place to discuss personal problems.
Vero (48) Isa (Daughter, 32) Mario (Son, 30) Lucas (Grandson, 8)	• Vero has a good relationship with her family: her mother and siblings. She regularly visits her mother and her sister’s family, who live together. • Vero insisted that her family only gives her emotional support and that she does not like to ask for help, whether in terms of care work or financial aid. She also stated that she could not discuss her problems in detail with them, despite their emotional support. • Vero also talked with her brother on WhatsApp, but he visited her less. She said the spatial distance affects the relationships. I recorded two visits in one year and a half. His daughters were mentioned a couple of times (‘the cousins’), but I did not record any visits from them.	• Vero also had a group of school friends but did not see them regularly. They mainly held conversations on WhatsApp. I recorded four one-on-one and group meetings in one year and a half. She told me that she felt compelled to hang out with them because Mario encouraged her. • Vero had deep ties with two families in her neighbourhood. Vero’s children are friends with the children of these families, which is the base of the relationship. I registered a significant level of support and emotional closeness between them. However, Vero tended to see these bonds from an asymmetrical point of view. She often highlighted that she had helped them greatly, and they thanked her greatly for her aid. I would suggest that Vero slightly underestimated the intensity of those bonds, but I do not have certainty about this issue. • Vero is also close to her boss. But I did not record meetings outside work.

		• Vero was the most emphatic among the participants to focus on how the ethnography allowed her to discuss problems that she had not discussed with anyone.
Jacqui (68) and Jacinto (72) Cata (Daughter, 24) Romi (Granddaughter, 17)	• Jacqui had fluent relationships with her children and their families: Marcela, Javier, and Camilo. Marcela and her family lived nearby. • The women of both households help each other and perform care work across these homes. I regularly registered instances of sharing meals and gifts among them. Jacqui often worried about being spatially close to Marcela. • However, Jacqui had significant tensions with her children-in-law, especially with Marcela's partner. Their interactions were sarcastic or aggressive exchanges. Yet, the son-in-law helped her with repairs and renovations. This was not a joking relationship. In the final parts of the fieldwork, I asked about the reasons for their hostility. She explained that it was his personality that made the relationship hostile. She also blamed his left-wing leanings. • A recurring theme for Jacqui was the importance of spending the holidays with her children and their families.	• Jacqui also had three good friends who offered her emotional support. However, Jacqui isolated herself more from them in the second half of the fieldwork. I recorded a significant decrease in mentions and visits in this phase. • Jacqui also said that her house summoned many people in the past, mainly friends and family Jacinto. However, she admitted that the meetings had decreased in recent years. • Jacqui was also close to one of Jacinto's nieces. I recorded three visits in one year. • She was adamant about the idea that she was tired of hosting and preferred to keep her circle small. She often related this attitude to her age, health, everyday concerns, and work problems. • During the field, I recorded a large gathering or birthday party once a month. They were around eight to ten participants on average. • She mentioned that she rarely made

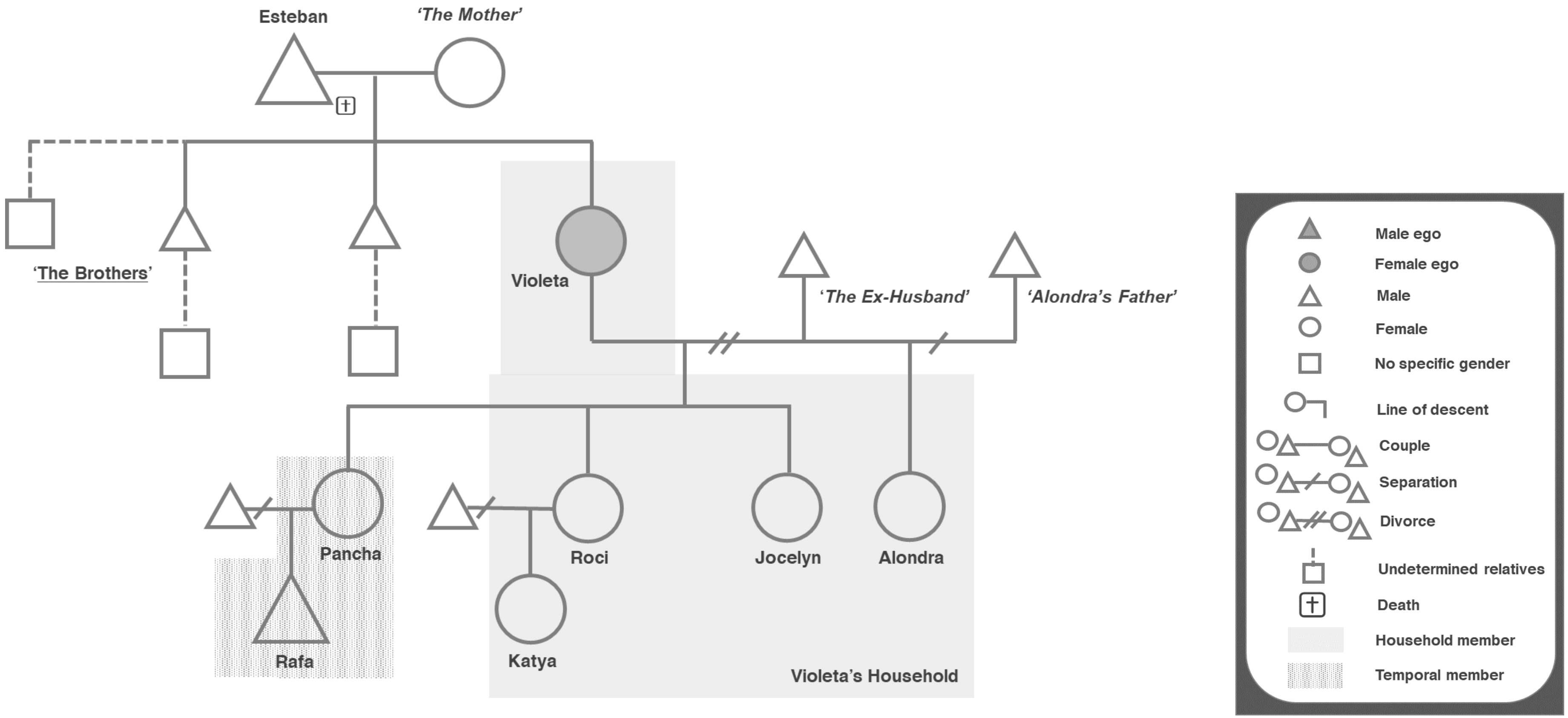
	However, this yearning was challenging to fulfil throughout the fieldwork.	friends in different neighbourhoods because she moved often. Instead, she preferred to maintain cordial relationships.
Cecilia (44) and Arturo (52) Titi (Daughter, 12)	• Cecilia had good relationships with her parents and siblings, even though she did not mention them much throughout the fieldwork. • The ethnographic record did not show regular visits among them. However, they chatted with each other using WhatsApp more regularly. While Cecilia did not talk much about mutual support, her past stories showed recurrent emotional and economic support. • The spatial distance, everyday routine of the condominium, and limited domestic budget might contribute to this situation. • Cecilia was not on good terms with Arturo's family, and Arturo only kept minimal contact with them.	• Cecilia also had contradictory relationships with her neighbours due to the community's issues. However, Arturo did not display involvement in these relationships. • She told me that while maintaining relationships with the people in her community, she was also tired of the conflicts. She quickly listed her problems with her neighbours. • I recorded that Arturo had a couple of friends in the neighbourhood. But I did not record many interactions. • I did not record many causal visits from other people to their houses. Cecilia told me she preferred the privacy of her home and spending time with her spouse and daughter.
Soledad (45) and Roberto (55) Janito (Son, 19) Pamela (Daughter, 12)	• Soledad and Roberto had meaningful relationships with both sides of their family, especially Soledad's side. They showed the thickest bonds with their extended family among the households I shadowed. They visited each other regularly, talked on WhatsApp and offered emotional support. This is the only case I	• Soledad and Roberto had cordial relationships with their neighbours. They stated that they are friendly but not friends with them. I did not record visits, support or care work. • Soledad had a couple of friends, but the one who stood out the most was Magdalena, with whom she co-owned the language school. The relationship

	registered where people were more open about financial support among relatives.	was tense due to the conflicts about the school. • Roberto did not mention significant friendships before moving outside Santiago. But I do not have certainty about this issue.

Table 2: Synoptic chart of relationships (elaborated by the author based on data)

Appendix B

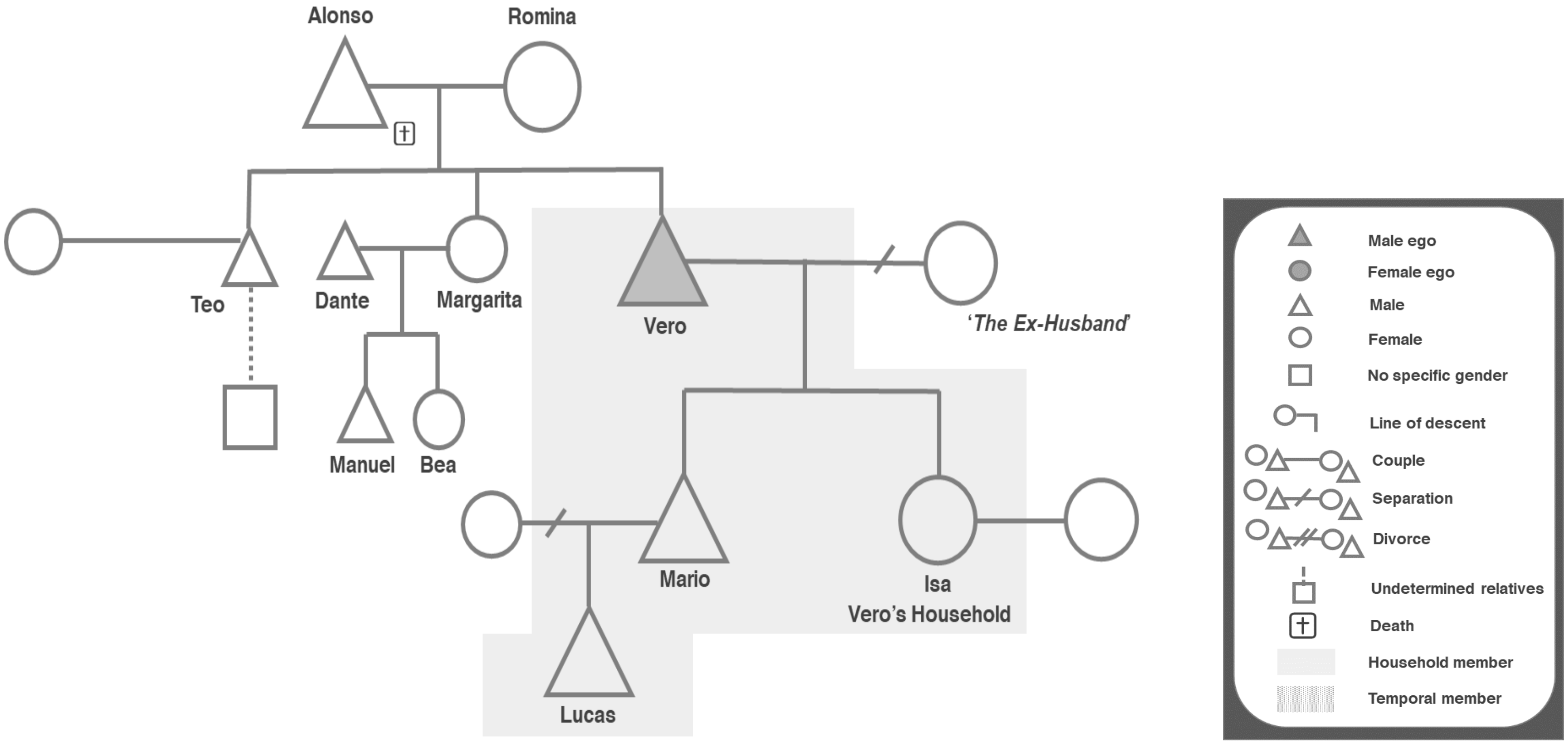
Fig. 15: Violeta’s kinship chart


Esteban
‘The Mother’
‘The Brothers’
Violeta
‘The Ex-Husband’
‘Alondra’s Father’
Pancha
Rafa
Roci
Katya
Jocelyn
Alondra
Violeta’s Household
Male ego
Female ego
Male
Female
No specific gender
Line of descent
Couple
Separation
Divorce
Undetermined relatives
Death
Household member
Temporal member

Notes:

1. Named relatives are the more significant relationships.
2. Underlined grouped relatives are groups of people that participants do not discuss regularly but occasionally appear in the ethnographic record as collectives.
3. Relatives in cursive are significant individuals who have negatively impacted the participants.

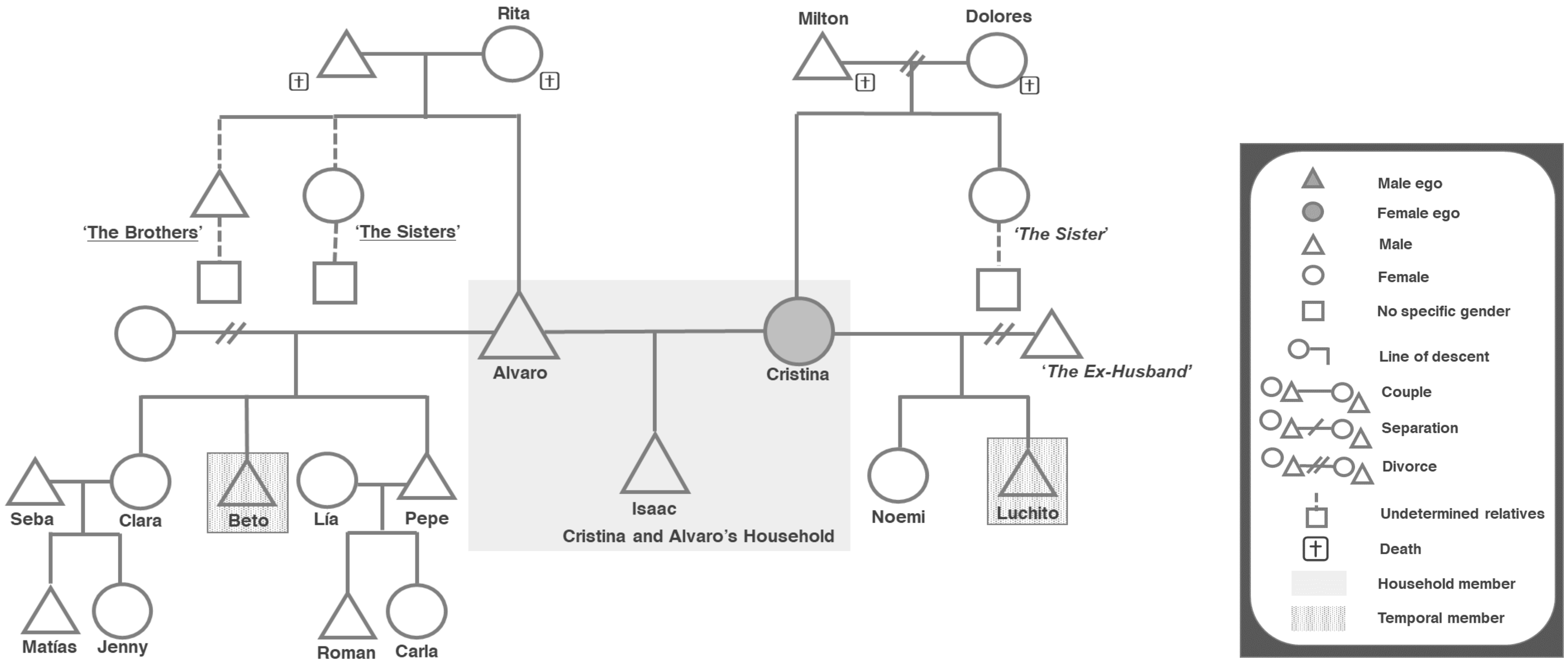
Fig. 16: Vero’s kinship chart


Alonso
Romina
Teo
Dante
Margarita
Vero
‘The Ex-Husband’
Manuel
Bea
Mario
Isa
Vero’s Household
Lucas
Male ego
Female ego
Male
Female
No specific gender
Line of descent
Couple
Separation
Divorce
Undetermined relatives
Death
Household member
Temporal member

Notes:

1. Named relatives are the more significant relationships.
2. Underlined grouped relatives are groups of people that participants do not discuss regularly but occasionally appear in the ethnographic record as collectives.
3. Relatives in cursive are significant individuals who have negatively impacted the participants.

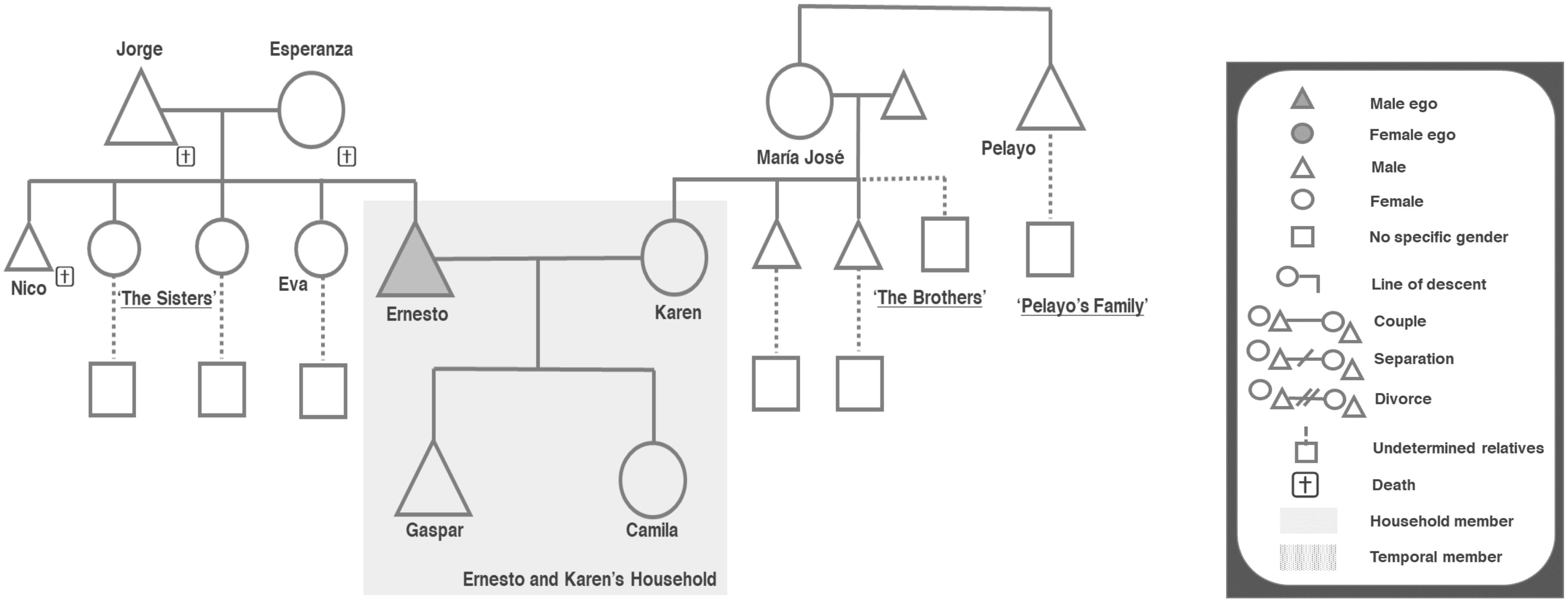
Fig. 17: Cristina and Alvaro’s kinship chart


Rita
Milton
Dolores
‘The Brothers’
‘The Sisters’
‘The Sister’
Alvaro
Cristina
‘The Ex-Husband’
Seba
Clara
Beto
Lía
Pepe
Isaac
Cristina and Alvaro’s Household
Noemi
Luchito
Matías
Jenny
Roman
Carla
Male ego
Female ego
Male
Female
No specific gender
Line of descent
Couple
Separation
Divorce
Undetermined relatives
Death
Household member
Temporal member

Notes:

1. Named relatives are the more significant relationships.
2. Underlined grouped relatives are groups of people that participants do not discuss regularly but occasionally appear in the ethnographic record as collectives.
3. Relatives in cursive are significant individuals who have negatively impacted the participants.

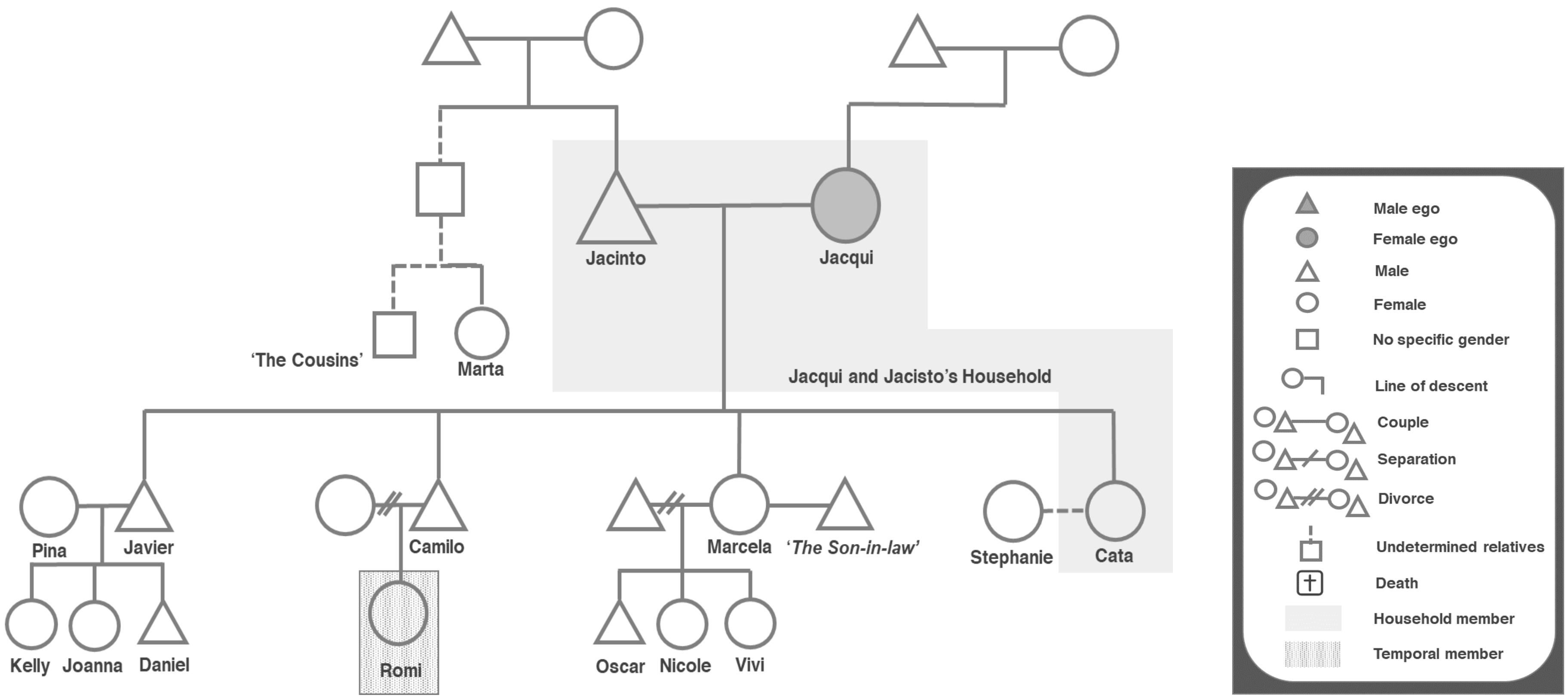
Fig. 18: Ernesto and Karen’s kinship chart


Jorge
Esperanza
Nico
'The Sisters'
Eva
Ernesto
Karen
Gaspar
Camila
Ernesto and Karen’s Household
María José
Pelayo
'The Brothers'
'Pelayo’s Family'
Male ego
Female ego
Male
Female
No specific gender
Line of descent
Couple
Separation
Divorce
Undetermined relatives
Death
Household member
Temporal member

Notes:

1. Named relatives are the more significant relationships.
2. Underlined grouped relatives are groups of people that participants do not discuss regularly but occasionally appear in the ethnographic record as collectives.
3. Relatives in cursive are significant individuals who have negatively impacted the participants.

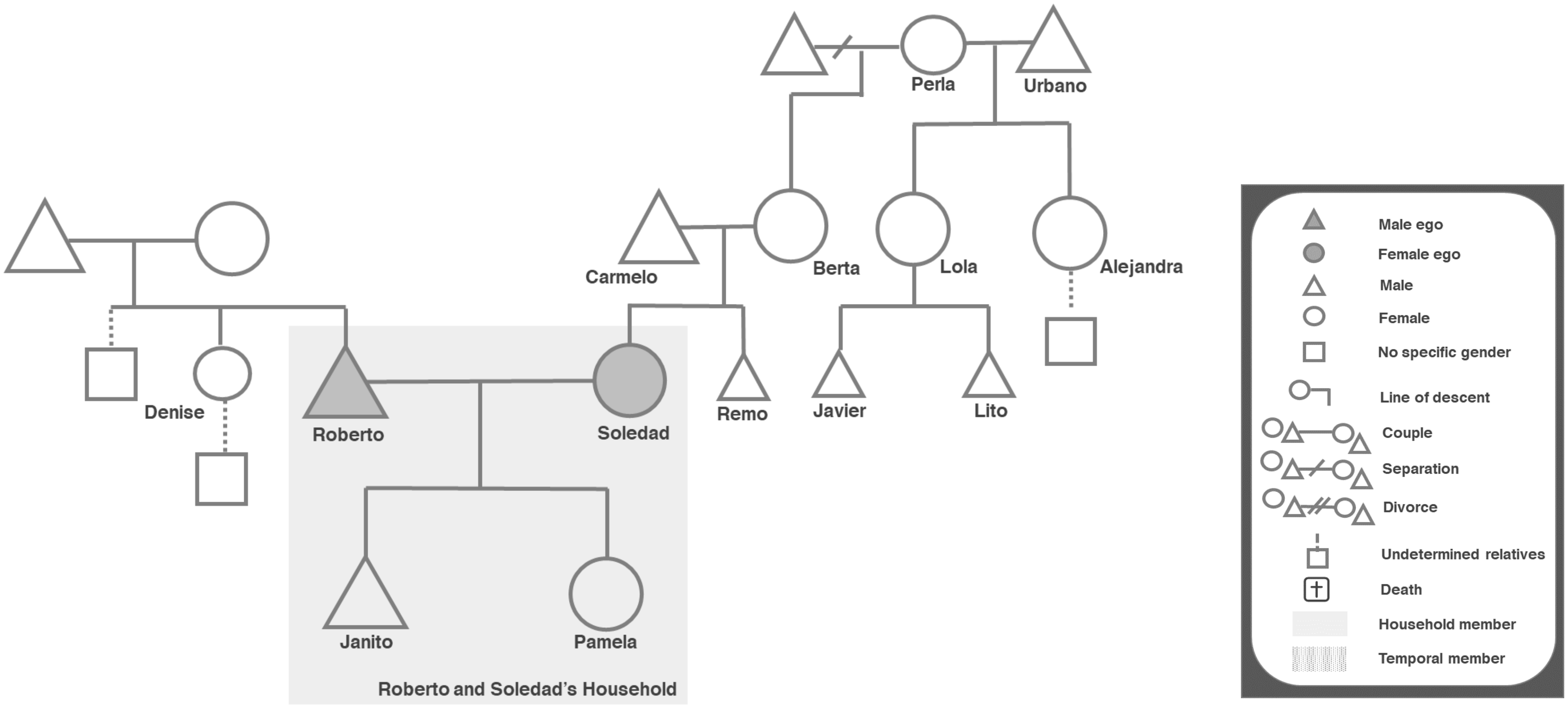
Fig. 19: Jacqui and Jacinto's kinship chart


Jacinto
Jacqui
'The Cousins'
Marta
Jacqui and Jacisto's Household
Pina
Javier
Camilo
Marcela
'The Son-in-law'
Stephanie
Cata
Kelly
Joanna
Daniel
Romi
Oscar
Nicole
Vivi
Male ego
Female ego
Male
Female
No specific gender
Line of descent
Couple
Separation
Divorce
Undetermined relatives
Death
Household member
Temporal member

Notes:

1. Named relatives are the more significant relationships.
2. Underlined grouped relatives are groups of people that participants do not discuss regularly but occasionally appear in the ethnographic record as collectives.
3. Relatives in cursive are significant individuals who have negatively impacted the participants.

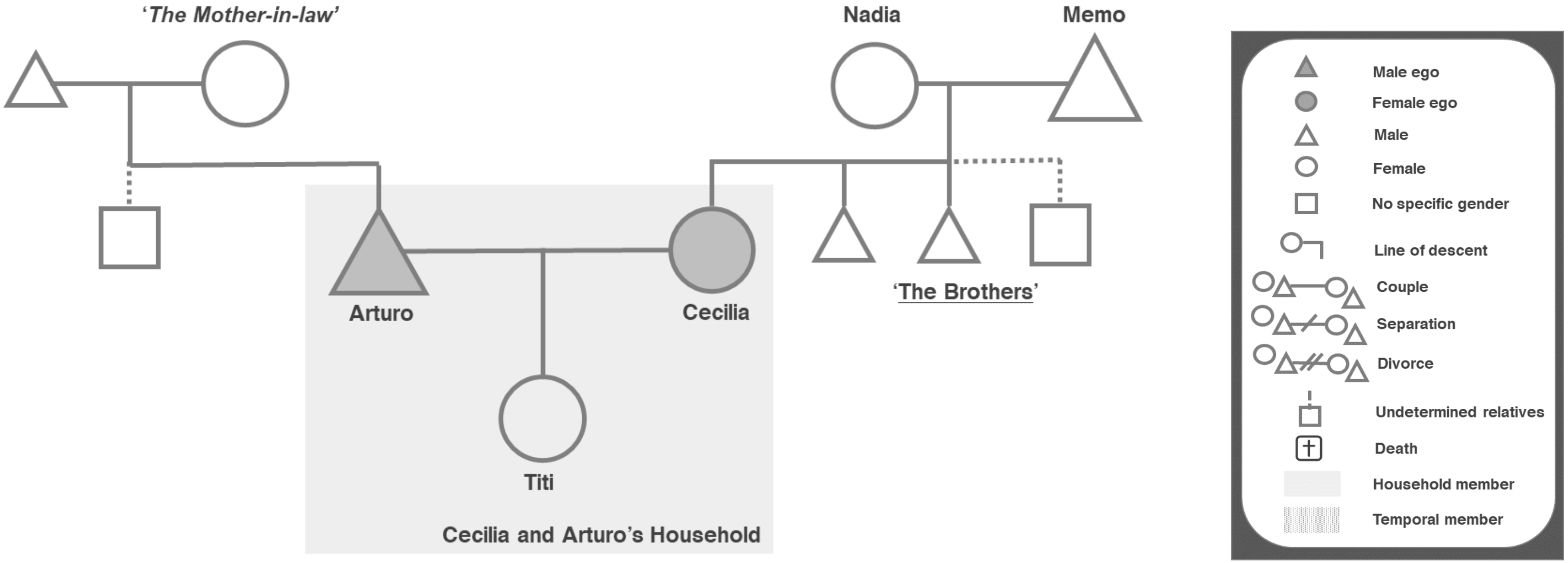
Fig. 20: Soledad and Roberto’s kinship chart


Perla
Urbano
Carmelo
Berta
Lola
Alejandra
Denise
Roberto
Soledad
Remo
Javier
Lito
Janito
Pamela
Roberto and Soledad’s Household
Male ego
Female ego
Male
Female
No specific gender
Line of descent
Couple
Separation
Divorce
Undetermined relatives
Death
Household member
Temporal member

Notes:

1. Named relatives are the more significant relationships.
2. Underlined grouped relatives are groups of people that participants do not discuss regularly but occasionally appear in the ethnographic record as collectives.
3. Relatives in cursive are significant individuals who have negatively impacted the participants.

Fig. 21: Cecilia and Arturo’s kinship chart


‘The Mother-in-law’
Nadia
Memo
Arturo
Cecilia
Titi
‘The Brothers’
Cecilia and Arturo’s Household
Male ego
Female ego
Male
Female
No specific gender
Line of descent
Couple
Separation
Divorce
Undetermined relatives
Death
Household member
Temporal member

Notes:

1. Named relatives are the more significant relationships.
2. Underlined grouped relatives are groups of people that participants do not discuss regularly but occasionally appear in the ethnographic record as collectives.
3. Relatives in cursive are significant individuals who have negatively impacted the participants.