SCUOLA DI DOTTORATO
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

Department of Sociology and Social Research

PhD program Urban Studies (URBEUR) Ciclo / Cycle XXXVIII

Symbolic politics, territorial stigmatisation and area-based urban policies in Santiago de Chile and Buenos Aires. The case of La Legua and Barrio Mugica (ex-Villa 31).

Cognome / Surname Scarpitta Nome / Name Lilen Cecilia

Matricola / Registration number 898504

Tutore / Tutor: Prof. Coppola Alessandro

ANNO ACCADEMICO / ACADEMIC YEAR 2024/2025

Abstract

The thesis examines the role of territorial stigmatisation in shaping symbolic politics when dealing with area-based policies in historically stigmatised urban neighbourhoods. It also analyses how these urban interventions and transformations are interpreted at the local level by heterogeneous social groups, contributing to the creation of contrasting narratives and perceptions regarding the local environment. The study adopts a comparative qualitative research design based on two case studies: La Legua in Santiago de Chile and Barrio Mugica (ex-Villa 31) in Buenos Aires. The results show that territorial stigmatisation plays a central role in legitimating different types of urban interventions, ranging from security-oriented policies to integration-driven projects. In addition, symbolic politics can either serve as a space for reordering stigmatisation, as in the case of Barrio Mugica, or as a means to sustain and reinforce it, as in La Legua context. At the local level, the presence of the state has generated internal conflicts by fragmenting the local actors' visions. The thesis contributes to critical urban studies by highlighting the interplay between territorial stigmatisation, symbolic politics and local narratives.

La tesi esamina il ruolo della stigmatizzazione territoriale nel plasmare le politiche simboliche che concernono le politiche territoriali indirizzate a quartieri storicamente stigmatizzati. Inoltre, analizza come questi interventi e trasformazioni politiche sono interpretati a livello locale da gruppi sociali eterogenei, contribuendo in questo modo alla creazione di narrazioni e percezioni contrastanti allo spazio locale. Lo studio adotta un modello di ricerca qualitativa comparativa su due casi studio: La Legua a Santiago del Cile e Barrio Mugica (ex-Villa 31) a Buenos Aires. I risultati mostrano come la stigmatizzazione territoriale giochi un ruolo centrale nel legittimare diversi tipi di interventi urbani, che variano dalle politiche impostate sulla sicurezza ai progetti di integrazione. Inoltre, la politica simbolica può fungere da spazio per riordinare la stigmatizzazione presente, come nel caso di Barrio Mugica, o come mezzo per sostenerla e rafforzarla come nel contesto di La Legua. A livello locale, la presenza dello Stato ha frammentato le visioni degli attori locali. La tesi contribuisce agli studi urbani critici evidenziando l'interazione tra stigmatizzazione territoriale, politiche simboliche e narrative locali.

SUMMARY

Introduction

The stigmatisation attached to specific urban neighbourhoods has been the object of attention by the media, institutional actors and society at large. In every city around the world, there are entire neighbourhoods that have been defined by the public as "no-go areas" or "red zones". Political discursive practices and mass communication contribute to shaping collective imaginaries around stigmatised urban areas, producing countless material and immaterial consequences for residents' lives (Kirkness and Tijé-Dra, 2021). However, their urban representation varies depending on the geographical area and historical moment in which neighbourhoods are inserted. As a result, the way they are managed by public policy often differs considerably. The urban sociologist Loïc Wacquant (1993) coined the term territorial stigmatisation to link the phenomenon of stigma to its geographical dimension, assessing how it is socially, politically, and symbolically produced and reproduced. Territorial stigmatisation thus involves socio-spatial categories and groups tied to structural processes that maintain inhabitants in marginal areas (Wacquant, 2015). The thesis engages with area-based policies implemented in two historically stigmatised Latin American neighbourhoods by using symbolic politics as a multidimensional analytical lens. Symbolic politics refers to political narratives and messages that designate the types of individuals, preferences, and moralities towards which authority is supportive or critical (Mendelberg, 2022; *citing* Gusfield, 1986). However, the analysis incorporates policy interventions to analyse how discursive practices translate into material policies.

The doctoral thesis analyses the symbolic politics used to shape and utilise territorial stigmatisation in the context of area-based policies in historically stigmatised neighbourhoods. It also examines how these urban interventions and transformations are interpreted at the local level by heterogeneous social groups, thereby shaping contrasting narratives and perceptions of the local environment. The research engages with scholarship concerning the concepts of stigma and territorial stigmatisation, specifically its political production, and symbolic politics.

To address the thesis objectives, the research design involves a qualitative study of two popular neighbourhoods located in the Latin American cities of Santiago de Chile and Buenos

Aires. Specifically, the Chilean case focuses on the urban area of La Legua, while the Argentine case examines Villa 31-31bis, now re-named as Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica. Throughout their history, both neighbourhoods have been severely and systematically stigmatised, attracting significant media coverage and political attention. Furthermore, those areas have been targets of major urban policies that have addressed their marginality in various ways. Both cases help to comprehend how the phenomenon under scrutiny is produced in distinct urban spaces since every place is unique in the encounter of different forces. As outlined by Larsen and Delica (2019), the role of academics is to address territorial stigma in its complexity and to provide a better understanding of its social processes. Indeed, how the blemish of place is created and maintained in different places around the world, how specific urban spaces become avoided and condemned and how such avoidance and condemnation are reproduced over time, are all important research inquiries (Slater, 2017). Moreover, by engaging with two Latin American cities, the concept of ordinary cities proposed by Jennifer Robinson (2006) is useful to frame all cities as crucial arenas in the production of knowledge. Indeed,

> "Whereas categorising cities tends to ascribe prominence to only certain cities and to certain features of cities, an ordinary-city approach takes the world of cities as its starting point and attends to the diversity and complexity of all cities. And instead of seeing only some cities as the originators of urbanism, in a world of ordinary cities, ways of being urban and ways of making new kinds of urban futures are diverse and are the product of the inventiveness of people in cities everywhere" (Robinson, 2006:1).

The present doctoral thesis is divided as follows. The first chapter, *Territorial Stigmatisation and Symbolic Politics*, addresses the literature review concerning the concept of stigma, territorial stigmatisation, its political production, and symbolic politics. More specifically, the first paragraph addresses the relational production of the urban space, and the second paragraph presents the evolution of Goffman's concept of stigma. Then, the chapter focuses on the concept of territorial stigmatisation and its political production, highlighting the role of symbolic politics through the work of Bourdieu and Foucault. The last paragraph presents Latin American stigmatisation processes and local struggles.

The second chapter, *Methodology*, engages with the research design and presents the three research questions that have guided the doctoral thesis.

The third chapter, *Población La Legua*, deals with the first case study in Santiago. It first focuses on the neighbourhood's historical and political trajectories, emphasising the different historical paths within the popular neighbourhood. It proceeds with the study of the government programs and interventions to frame La Legua's area-based policies. Then, two paragraphs present the policy implementations based on the territory. In the following three sections, the analysis focuses on territorial stigmatisation, symbolic politics and the conflicting narratives and visions within La Legua.

The fourth chapter, *Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica,* tackles the second case study in Buenos Aires. The first section focuses on its historical trajectory and the territorial stigmatisation suffered in the informal settlement. Then, on the same line as the previous chapter, the analysis focuses on the three thesis themes.

Then, the fifth chapter, *Discussion,* answer the three research questions by engaging with the three categories selected: territorial stigmatisation, symbolic politics, and conflicting narratives.

Chapter One

Territorial stigmatisation and symbolic politics

The purpose of the present chapter is to examine the theoretical frameworks of stigma and territorial stigmatisation, with a specific focus on their political and symbolic production. The concept of territorial stigmatisation links the experience of stigma to its spatial dimension. In doing so, it seeks to study the implications of urban marginality, with its spatial concentration of "degraded" identities, on collective representations. The first paragraph illustrates how space is relationally constructed by displaying the most important forces at play in cities that impact territorial stigmatisation. The second passage begins with Goffman's notion of stigma and continues with the evolution of stigma research, specifically stigma tied to power. In the third section, I examine Wacquant's concept of territorial stigmatisation with a specific focus on its political production through different urban strategies. Then I introduce symbolic politics through the work of Bourdieu and Foucault. The fourth paragraph explores residents' responses to territorial stigmatisation, exposing the different visions about submissive strategies and practices of resistance. In the last section, I present an overview of Latin American cities regarding stigmatisation and the struggle of inhabitants living in informal settlements.

1.1 The production of the urban place

The territory has been traditionally linked to power and has been conceptualised in relation to the nation-state and political jurisdiction (Elden, 2013). As Lefebvre (1991) conceptualises in his theory of the production of space, urban land is the outcome of territorial practices of fringes-making, representations that embody it, and lived experiences of everyday inhabitants. The first one, namely spatial practice, corresponds to the specific social use of space and involves "the projection onto a (spatial) field of all aspects, elements and moments of social practice" (Lefebvre, 1991:8). Its goal is to generate the idea of spatial predictability and cohesion. The second level,

representation of space, embodies how space is conceived by scientists and urbanists, thus constituting the dominant mode of space production in any society. Here, we find the dimension in which power and ideology are embedded (Lefebvre, 1991). The last dimension is the lived or representational space where inhabitants seek to appropriate and change the place through "non-verbal symbols and signs" (Lefebvre, 1991:39). In this process, every agent and social group possesses different degrees of influence over the production of the urban environment. Here, the production of space is contested on the everyday level through the lived experience of inhabitants. As Lefebvre (2000:362) states, the lived experience involves "the space of the everyday activities of users […] a concrete one, which is to say, subjective", thus constituting "a space of the 'subjects' rather than of calculations." Those three dimensions of space production generate an interweaving of power in which there is not a definite relationship between dominance and resistance.

If we understand space as the result of practices, trajectories, and interactions at all levels (*i.e.,* ranging from the local to the global),

> "Those spatial identities such as places, regions, nations, […] must be forged in this relational way too, as internally complex, essentially unboundable in any absolute sense, and inevitably historically changing." (Massey, 2004:5)

Social identities are also relational, embedded and constituted through a complex network of interactions (which include both relations and non-relations). They are not pre-given and fixed "but mutable ongoing productions" (Massey, 2004:5). By questioning the nature of identity, it is possible to challenge fundamental essentialism in politics (*i.e.*, claiming assumptions of authenticity) and recognise the relationship in which identities are rooted (*ibid.*, 2004). Thus, places have evolved as sites of 'meeting' and 'negotiation' (Massey, 1991), where different spatial levels and trajectories intersect at the locale.

The city can hence be defined as a concrete experience where citizens daily appropriate the urban space (Schmid, 2012). Places are not only physical realms without meaning, and cities are evident expressions of an explicit culture (Gravano, 2016). Indeed, their essence is learned from infancy by residents, combining different emotions, practices, and socialisation experiences. These processes generate implied value systems in individual and societal perceptions (Schmid, 2012). In doing so, the city also provokes spatial consciousness (Gravano, 2016), namely the individual's

capability to recognise the role of places in their biography. Moreover, it grasps the degree to which inhabitants and organisations are influenced by urban environments, and vice versa.

Therefore, in a capitalist world, cities are not only the arenas for capital accumulation and commodification. They are also the sites of social conflicts (Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer, 2012). Most of those struggles are against marginalisation and segregation, demanding access to material and nonphysical opportunities of the city and addressing the spatial opposition between centrality and periphery (Schmid, 2012). For instance, many Latin American social movements in shantytowns during the 1980s and 1990s were successful in improving their living environments (*ibid.*, 2012). The notion of 'peripheralization' may also help to better situate the connection between space and population. More precisely, the concept expresses a process-centred perspective that displays how social relations produce spatial implications (Fischer-Tahir and Naumann, 2013; Kühn, 2015). As Kühn (2015:374/375) highlights, peripheralization is a multidimensional process in which the correlation of periphery and centre is "less a spatial fact than a social configuration resting on unequal power relations which lead to uneven spatial development". This approach considers the processes by which peripheries emerge as an outcome of social, economic, political, and communicational practices. It considers marginality as a space characterised by the lack of economic innovation, low-skilled work, poverty, stigmatisation, and powerlessness, as it depends on the centre (Kühn, 2015). However, within the socio-spatial organisation, a periphery may change its position over time, and actors are not stuck in a static environment. Indeed, networks play a role in shifting temporal inequalities (*ibid.*, 2015).

For Marcuse, there are two groups of inhabitants affected by modern restructuring developments: the deprived and the discontented (Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer, 2012). The first category comprises people who are exploited and discriminated against across various social fields. Instead, the discontented are those who are constrained in their life's opportunities. As we can observe, these groups usually overlap. Despite their potential for opposing the existing *status quo*, their action is rarely coordinated since they are a heterogeneous group with different interests (*ibid.*, 2012). Moreover,

> "The possibility for such action is further constrained by the potent force of the corporate media, the daily, routinised language of politics, and the perceived need to deal with everyday crises before long-term, systemic issues can be addressed. And, above all, transformative action is constrained by

> the propaganda of market fundamentalism, the induced appeal of mass consumerism, the technically instrumentalized educational system, the oppressive weight of bureaucracy, and through it all, the overwhelming force of dominant ideologies of exclusion and supremacy (for instance, nationalism, racism, Eurocentrism, Orientalism, heteronormativity, speciesism, and so forth)." (Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer, 2012:6).

The globalisation process has deeply reshaped local places and urban structures. For Lefebvre, the city is heading towards the homogenisation and colonisation of ways of living, producing the crisis of the city (Schmid, 2012). This crisis also arises

> "[…] from a system that both necessarily produces gross material inequality and at the same time produces gross insecurity and emotional discontent and distortions." (Marcuse, 2012:22).

However, as Massey (1991) argues, this era of time-space compression has not simply produced homogenisation. Instead, it has replicated intricate social distinctions and an existing uneven power geometry. The power of some groups to define places and social categories has undermined the influence of others. Massey's (1991) example of the *favela* in Rio demonstrates how individuals can be simultaneously producers of global consumption, such as in music production, and spatially and symbolically imprisoned. Indeed, *favela* residents are the targets of the same system they help to reproduce. These phenomena regarding the production of space, social identities, and the effects of globalisation provide a general framework that helps us to understand the structures in which stigma processes are embedded. Therefore, the urban environment is:

> "[…] the materialisation of the ongoing struggle to represent the norms, values, and meanings that define the community. Thus, reading the landscape involved examining how dominant agents inscribed the world as well as how those inscriptions were regularly undermined." (Anderson, 2015:37; *citing* Rose, 2002:458)

These norms and meanings often reinforce the illusion of a desirable city as a harmonious, homogeneous society. To sustain this fantasy, the existing social problems are then attributed to an otherness, an intruder, through the localisation of negative characteristics that need to be eradicated since they cannot be incorporated (Pohl, 2021; *citing* Stavrakakis, 1999). As a society,

this has also created a culture of fear that has isolated individuals from one another and has promoted the establishment of moral and collective divisions between an 'us' and 'them' (Lee, 2001; Glassner, 2009; Dammert, 2012; Villareal, 2015). The following paragraphs investigate the processes of stigma in depth.

1.2 Stigma

The word *stigma* derives from the ancient Greek στίγμα [stìgma], which originally meant 'mark' or 'puncture', to indicate unusual traits or the immoral status of a person. At that time, stigmatised individuals were usually marked by a cut or burn to disclose the presence of a 'blemished person' to be avoided in public spaces (Goffman, 1963:1). They often were slaves, criminals, or betrayers. In his foundational book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity (1963),* Erving Goffman defines stigma as an "attribute that is deeply discrediting" created through a "language of relationships" (1963:3) to highlight its social relativity. Indeed, stigmatised traits are not inherently disreputable; they acquire meaning through societal classifications and value judgments.

Since communities "establish the means of categorising persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of these categories" (Goffman, 1963:2), people who did not diverge from these deductions are the "normals" (1963:4). However, acceptable characteristics may change over different social contexts since not everyone is subject to uniform expectations of what is considered usual. Thus, the author proceeds to distinguish between a "virtual social identity", a version of the individual legitimised by society that assumes social categories to possess certain attributes, and the "actual social identity", which is the real individual's character (Goffman, 1963:2). Stigma arises when a specific incongruity between virtual and actual social identity happens. At the same time, the author suggests that stigma is the creation and result of human relationships since an attribute that stigmatises a person simultaneously confirms the usualness of another individual. Goffman (1963:4) then defines three types of stigmas: the "abomination of the body", through physical deformities; "blemishes of moral characters" inferred from a person's abnormal behaviour (*i.e.*, mental health problems, addictions, etc.); and "tribal stigma" transmitted through race, nation, or religion.

Goffman studies these stigmatised forms from a micro-level perspective on daily face-to-face interactions, paying closer attention to how stigma is played out across various social contexts and to attempts to manage one's tainted identity (Hannem, 2022). Discredited groups are aware of their disreputable attributes, and this awareness may lead to active efforts to ensure encounters with normals remain comfortable by controlling information. Indeed, stigmatised individuals often cope with the consequences of stigma in their daily life by applying stigma management techniques, such as covering, concealing, passing, or selective disclosure (Goffman, 1963). To some degree, those practices involve deceiving the person's true self and, at the same time, permit stigmatised individuals to avoid social marginalisation. If these strategies of control fail, they seek out social groups that are open to them, such as individuals who share the same stigmatised attribute, those who work for institutions supporting the specific stigmatised social category, or people who know them well in their private sphere. However, all these different scenarios contribute to preserving the legitimacy of dominant value judgments (Goffman, 1963).

1.2.1 The role of power

Since Goffman's conceptualisation, the notion of stigma has been employed across innumerable academic fields, from sociology to psychiatry, and applied to distinct stigmatised groups and contexts. Over time, the author's analysis has paved the way for different definitions of stigma and critiques. One of the most important arguments against Goffman's notion regards the excessive individualistic focus on his analysis and the exclusion of structural factors that contribute to the production of uneven social relations (Oliver, 1990; Link and Phelan, 2014; Tyler, 2020; Hannem, 2022). Indeed, Goffman's research, focusing on the micro-level context, ignores the fact that social interactions are already constructed and influenced by histories of power and confrontation (Tyler, 2020). Thus, Link and Phelan (2001) offer a definition of stigma that gathers the critiques levelled at the concept and considers the role of power in perpetuating stigma processes. For the authors, stigmatisation arises

> "[…] when elements of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination co-occur in a power situation that allows the components of stigma to unfold." (Link and Phelan, 2001:367)

The *labelling* displays the social process of selecting specific human differences for salience. Those differences are often taken for granted and vary across time and space (Link and Phelan, 2001). The second element concerns the *stereotyping* that occurs when the labelling is linked to unpleasant attributes. Then, the process of *separation* implies the division between 'us' and 'them' (*i.e.*, incorporating different negative characteristics). In this way, the label and the stereotyping transform into the foundation for considering the 'others' essentially different from 'us' (*ibid.*, 2001). If the separation becomes severe, it may end up seeing the 'others' as if they were not fully human beings. In this way, it can make every conceivable treatment possible (Link and Phelan, 2001). As a result of the previous dimensions, stigma processes lead individuals to endure *discrimination* and *status loss.* One of the main consequences of stigmatisation is the downward position individuals face in society's eyes. Furthermore, stigmatisation processes can manifest both in people's attitudes towards the target person, but more importantly, through structural stigma (*ibid.*, 2001). In the latter, the taint impacts the structures surrounding individuals, exposing them to a series of unfavourable situations. Indeed, dominant groups employ a broad and flexible range of mechanisms for accomplishing discrimination. When techniques currently in order become difficult to use, new forms are created to maintain the power structure that renders stigma a persistent predicament, carrying numerous consequences (Link and Phelan, 2001). However, the persistent predicament concerns the broad pattern of drawback tied to stigma processes. It does not mean that all stigmatised individuals are uniformly trapped in the same position (*ibid.*, 2001).

To unleash its effects, stigma is entirely reliant on social, political, economic, and cultural power, which is essential for its social reproduction. The concept of power stigma has been coined to describe the role of stigmatisation in exploiting, excluding, and controlling social groups and as a form of symbolic power employed as a strategy of governments (Link and Phelan, 2014). Stigma can be considered as "the commonest form of violence used within democratic societies" (Pinker, 1970:17) and as a type of violence from above that has the role of lowering the value of communities and places while, at the same time, creating new chances for capital accumulation (Tyler, 2020). Therefore, stigmatisation is also "enmeshed with wider capitalist structures of expropriation, domination, discipline and social control", rendering it a form of statecraft ability (Tyler, 2020:17). In other words, the role of power in perpetuating the stigma attached to specific individuals and groups is necessary for its survival and reproduction. As Hannem (2021) argues, structural and symbolic stigma legitimise intrusive and coercive forms of intervention on marginal

groups in neoliberal society. Therefore, in a progressively stratified world, it is crucial to uncover the relationship between structures of power and social uneven interactions between individuals, and the role of stigmatisation in preserving and enacting inequality in society (Hannem, 2022).

Another crucial argument in the study of stigma is that stigmatised groups often end up being portrayed as passive victims when researchers enunciate the limitation that stigma produces (Fine and Asch, 1988; Link and Phelan, 2001). As we will see later in the chapter, stigmatised groups often dynamically employ available resources to contest and challenge more powerful and coercive forces. To this extent, it is prejudicial to represent them as helpless victims (Link and Phelan, 2001). However, since power differential endures, resistance cannot entirely overcome the restrictions enforced. In other words, stigmatised groups may refuse the dominant negative prejudices directed at them, but the dynamics of power make it difficult to successfully counter those representations (Pinker, 1970). As Tyler and Slater (2018) highlight, stigma is thus a form of power that has always been contested in different ways and a crucial terrain of political struggle that needs to be the object of economic, political, and historical considerations.

1.3 Territorial stigmatisation

The urban sociologist Loïc Wacquant coined the notion of territorial stigmatisation to connect the individual experience of dishonour to a structural evaluation of how stigma is produced and reproduced in social, symbolic, and political terms (Larsen and Delica, 2019). Wacquant defines territorial stigmatisation as a "negative public image" (Wacquant, 1993:369) associated with specific inner-city neighbourhoods. In those places, residents suffer symbolic dispossession and are deprived of the management of their collective identities. Territorial stigmatisation superimposes itself on other forms of stigma customarily related to poverty and ethnicity, although it cannot be reduced to one of them (Wacquant, 2007). Indeed, poverty is often solely perceived as a deprivation of material goods and economic income. However, being poor in an increasingly wealthy society affects personal status, as it is considered a social anomaly (Wacquant, 1993). For Wacquant (1993), residential stigma constitutes the most relevant constraint experienced by individuals. It impacts inhabitants' access to opportunities and symbolically confines them within the boundaries of those spatial formations.

He coined the term after conducting a comparative study between the black ghetto in Chicago's southern area and a working-class neighbourhood in La Courneuve in Paris. In those urban environments, the author could observe the effects of the "blemish of place" (Wacquant, 2007:67), naming the deep feeling of neighbourhood taint. In Chicago, the South Side ghetto is a neighbourhood made up entirely of black people where most of the inhabitants are unemployed and live below the poverty line. Instead, La Courneuve, specifically the Quatre Mille social housing, is a neighbourhood located on the outskirts of Paris. The *banlieues* of the French suburbs are often associated with growing poverty, delinquency, immigration (especially of Arab origin), and insecurity. These two neighbourhoods have fundamental structural differences, as Wacquant (1993) argues, rooted in distinctive socio-spatial formations. Segregation in the United States is based on race. In the ghetto, we find a culturally homogeneous world with little state penetration. In France, the composition is more heterogeneous, and institutional presence is high (Wacquant, 1993). The author (1993) emphasises how, quite paradoxically, stigma weighs more heavily on *banlieue* residents than on American ghetto inhabitants, despite the latter being a more oppressive environment. For Wacquant, this is embedded in the historical French ideology of citizenship and participation, and by the fact that once residents leave their neighbourhood and enter wealthier areas, they can usually observe the quality of life of other citizens. This renders individuals more intolerant to their situation. Indeed, race does not entirely limit one's experience of different social environments. The *banlieues* are therefore distinguished by class composition rather than racial spatial formations (Wacquant, 1993). In the ghetto, on the other hand, the colour line is the most visible institutional expression of marginality. Race establishes the order of life and the places or events that individuals get to experience. In other words, Wacquant (1993) displays the great difference between the two contexts. In the first case, we find a stigma mainly associated with residence, while in the black ghetto, we find a conjunction between space and race that makes it difficult to hide the stigma attached to an individual. The US ghetto is therefore an exclusively racial formation, and skin colour becomes the marker of identity that creates an immediate division that cannot be broken. The world outside then becomes an unknown and inaccessible universe (Wacquant, 1993). In this way, it is possible to observe how marginality depends on specific historical and social contexts embedded in the construction of stigma.

In his analysis, Wacquant builds upon foundational theories to explain territorial stigmatisation. He first draws on Pierre Bourdieu's theory (1991) of symbolic power. The concept

explains how authorities and institutions confer a specific significance on the social realm that gives them legitimacy and serves their interests. Symbolic power serves to confirm or change

> "[…] The vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself, [as] an almost magical power which enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through forces." (Bourdieu, 1991:170)

Thus, symbolic power is embedded in a relationship between élites and powerless social groups, in which the latter ultimately legitimise those visions of the world while succumbing to them (*ibid.*, 1991). In Wacquant's book *Urban Outcasts* (2008), the author further develops his notion by incorporating Goffman's (1963) conceptualisation of stigma and the management of discredited identities. Territorial stigmatisation shares similarities with Goffman's moral, tribal, and bodily stigma, as it involves issues of identity and information management. Furthermore, like the mark of race, nation, and religion, place stigma can contaminate all family members. In this environment, Wacquant adds the central "mediation of place as material container, social crossroads, and mental imagery" (Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira, 2014:1272) in which social identities arise. Therefore, it elucidates how individuals develop similar insights and coping mechanisms based on their residence (Larsen and Delica, 2019).

For Wacquant, territorial stigmatisation is a new phenomenon of the era of advanced marginality that arose at the end of the century (Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira, 2014). Indeed, the contemporary feature diverges in five characteristics from previous forms of spatial stigma. First, territorial stigmatisation has reached a partial autonomy from customarily stigmatised characteristics - such as crime, ethnicity, and poverty - while at the same time incorporating them. Second, the phenomenon has been nationalised since

> "[…] In every country, a small set of urban boroughs have come to be universally renowned and reviled across class and space as redoubts of self-inflicted and self-perpetuating destitution and depravity." (Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira, 2014:1273)

Thus, all citizens, including residents themselves and those far from the area, have developed a negative image of the neighbourhoods in question. Third, stigmatised urban places are described as "vectors of *social disintegration*" (*ibid.*, 2014:1274). The label of ghetto is frequently used to

condemn such dissolution. Fourth, people living in those circumscribed areas are racialised by exaggerating their ethnic and physical differences. Furthermore, their beliefs and lifestyle are often described as incompatible with hegemonic national values. The last transformation involves the corrective responses, enhanced by negative feelings, that foster the exaltation of the penal wing to address urban marginality (Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira, 2014). Indeed, once an urban neighbourhood is categorised as a lawless area, it becomes prone to extraordinary measures, "which can have the effect – if not the intention – of destabilising and further marginalising its occupants" (Wacquant, 2007:69).

The stigmatisation attached to those "social purgatories" where "only the refuse of society would accept to dwell" (Wacquant, 2007:67) is produced by discourses of defamation from below, in daily interactions among residents, and from above by political actors, mass media, and bureaucrats. Thus, the conceptualisation that follows is structured in two diverse levels: from above and from below. From above, the role of the state, science, media, and religion contributes to the structuring of social practices and institutional processes. In other words, we find the symbolic struggles over the valorisation and marginalisation of determined social spaces (Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira, 2014). From below, there are the processes and effects of people's sense-making, the management of stigmatised identities, and group aggregations. In Wacquant's concept, territorial stigmatisation grasps, on the one hand, the role of power in producing representations of space. On the other hand, territorial stigmatisation investigates daily life events that help construct social identities and organisations (*ibid.*, 2014). Residential stigma thus affects specific socio-spatial categories and groups that are tied to "multilevel structural processes whereby persons are selected, thrust, and maintained in marginal locations" (Wacquant, 2015:247).

In the past decades, the concept of territorial stigmatisation has gained increasing attention. Wacquant's theory has had a noteworthy influence on urban sociology and urban geography. One of the main arguments against territorial stigmatisation has been the confirmative character of research, concentrating on its impact rather than the conditions for its existence (Hastings, 2004; Slater, 2017). However, the complexity and breadth of the phenomenon have contributed to the fragmentation of the research field. Indeed, its modes of production are manifold, interplaying from diverse levels and with mutable intensity determined by the context (Larsen and Delica, 2019). Larsen and Delica (2019) identify six main realms of research in territorial stigmatisation

and their modes of production. As *Figure 1* displays, the chief modalities of production involve (i) the structural level, (ii) physical space, (iii) residents and outsiders, (iv) service provision and interventions, (v) specialists in symbolic production, and (vi) politics, policies, and bureaucracy. Albeit the graph tends to downplay the relational nature of the phenomenon and intersectional analysis, *Figure 1* presents an overview of the vast literature to locate which are the most researched modalities and gaps in territorial stigmatisation knowledge. In the 'specialists in symbolic production' area, for instance, we can observe how the media has been highly cited as a significant contributor to territorial stigmatisation.

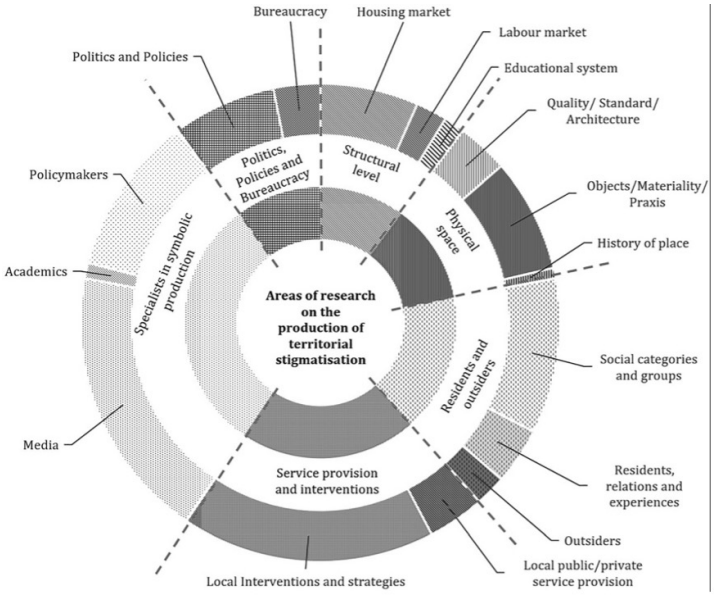

Figure 1. Research on territorial stigmatisation's modalities of production (*source*: Larsen and Delica, 2019).

However, in their analysis of the fields of research in territorial stigmatisation, Larsen and Delica (2019) have found only a few academic works that explicitly investigate the political role. The feature is remarkable given the extensive agreement of the political responsibility in the creation and reproduction of territorial stigmatisation. The next paragraph investigates its political construction and the various interventions directed at stigmatised city neighbourhoods.

1.3.1 The political production of territorial stigmatisation

As many scholars (Mingione, 1996; Auyero, 2000; Crovara, 2004; Auyero, 2015; Blanco and Apaolaza, 2018) highlight, the social and financial system confines the poor in cycles of marginalisation and structural violence, limiting their urban presence and opportunities. That social and physical division has established a 'spatial poverty trap' (UN-Habitat, 2010:13) that have been characterised by (i) unemployment; (ii) gender inequalities; (iii) deteriorated living standards; (iv) social marginalisation; (v) the lack of social exchanges, and (vi) high levels of violence and crime. Moreover, the steady withdrawal of the welfare state has produced other negative effects in marginalised areas, resulting in the disintegration of the local institutions and the expansion of the informal economy, often tied to the drug market (Wacquant, 1993b). Thus, stigmatised residents have progressively been confined in "highly malign circuits of social marginalisation" (Mingione, 1996:9).

At the political level, the territoriality of social configurations has often served to overshadow the active role of politics, enhancing the perception of a problematic pathological space. In other words, stigmatised territories have been used to divert attention from the structural and institutional processes that shape those places and to dismiss historical, economic, and political responsibilities (Slater and Anderson, 2012; Loyd and Bonds, 2018). By obfuscating the conditions of inequality, the responsibility falls into stigmatised individuals and the places where they reside (Sisson, 2021). Therefore, the urban space becomes the object of intervention, as if the spatial dimension were the fundamental problem rather than the spatiality of socio-political issues (Sisson, 2021). From this perspective, the urban environment is the bearer of pre-given characteristics that do not consider social and political implications. Territorial stigmatisation thus comprises techniques for controlling the urban space by developing public representations of degraded places as innate and pathological (Brenner and Elden, 2009). In doing so, place stigma displaces "questions of culpability and collective responsibility away from the state and business sectors" (Gray and Mooney, 2011:10). The spatial proximity of several degraded identities allows for the stigma of all residents by conforming to an oversimplification imposed from above. We can thus observe how territorial stigmatisation operates to merge diverse social categories into overlapping forms of stigma, be they class or race, thus rendering the phenomenon difficult to tackle (Larsen and Delica, 2019; Pinkster *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, stigmatised places evoke negative cultural, racial,

and physical stereotypes that take on different interpretations and influence as the urban context changes (Pinkster *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, it is fundamental to disentangle the different axes (often taken for granted) that intersect and construct place stigma (*ibid.*, 2020).

To some extent, stigmatisation is inherently tied to political authority. In the practice of social control and power, we find manifold actors who appropriate the territory, ranging from state agencies to private actors (Sisson, 2021). Mainstream media are also involved in the management and illustration of marginality. They dramatically portray defamed places and their inhabitants by creating a distorted image and establishing an imaginary perspective of the neighbourhood (Pohl, 2021). In Argentina, the media tend to address the issue of (in)security as if it were primarily a problem concentrated in and coming from shantytowns (Auyero, 2000). By doing so, they implicitly localise one of the major national issues and enhance the perception of slums as impenetrable places (*ibid.*, 2001). In this way, the media reinforce the dominant group's standpoint and display the power differential in contemporary society (Jacobs *et al.*, 2011). As Bourdieu argues, domination

> "[…] is not direct and simple action exercised by a set of agents ("the dominant class") invested with the power of coercion. Rather, it is the indirect effect of a complex set of actions engendered within the network of intersecting constraints" (Bourdieu, 1991:34).

Indeed, territorial stigmatisation is achieved through different forms of capital, namely economic, symbolic, and cultural. Therefore, it becomes crucial to analyse the practices of profit and power which may encourage the production of stigma (Paton, 2018). This can be done by looking towards the actors that craft stigmatisation and by revealing their own purpose. Under neoliberal governance, stigmatisation is used as a mechanism of exploitation that ultimately leads to capital accumulation (*ibid.*, 2018). Stigmatised areas are usually described as red zones, revealing them as unusual spatial formations, to accomplish transformation in these urban environments (Stavrides, 2013). Indeed, when a neighbourhood is labelled as a 'red' or 'lawless' zone, the state may often cast an urban renewal project or a public policy. With the promise of reintegrating the neighbourhood into the city's circuit, they further relegate its residents (Wacquant, 2007). Those places are simultaneously used to authorise new systems of citizenship and regime (Stavrides,

2013). Symbolic defamation may then become the socio-political justification and source for a class renovation of the urban space in which the state is a crucial actor (Slater, 2017).

As Paton (2018) highlights, political authorities aim to modify citizens' behaviour through stigmatisation techniques that instil shame and humiliation in residents of degraded areas. In this way, territorial stigmatisation is a fundamental step in validating neoliberal agendas (Sisson, 2021) and may be considered a "soft power" pivotal to "moral and economic class projects" (Paton, 2018:921). These mechanisms have enabled corrective interventions, dispossession, and other negative outcomes. As Wacquant (2010) states, the urban squalor and symbolic depreciation of places and their inhabitants

> "[…] provide political leaders and state bureaucrats with warrants for deploying aggressive policies of containment, discipline and dispersal that further disorganise the urban poor under the pretext of improving their opportunities." (Wacquant, 2010:218)

Indeed, another form of state intervention occurs through surveillance and repression policies (Wacquant, 1993b; *citing* Davis, 1990).

Within capitalist ideologies, territorial stigma contributes to simplifying the creation and extraction of value while perpetuating relations of subordination and control (Tyler, 2013; Tyler and Slater, 2018). Territorial stigma thus presents profit-making opportunities for enterprises, new media, and policymakers that contribute to the creation of a "political economy of devaluation" (Tyler, 2018:753). Indeed, urban regeneration policies align with official discourses that devalue residents of targeted neighbourhoods, thus contributing to further disinvestment in these areas (Paton, 2018). At the same time, the spatial concentration of stigmatised groups in specific neighbourhoods assists in bolstering public approval for redevelopment projects, validating residents' displacement for more profitable land uses (August, 2014). In other words, political authorities and private actors aim to generate value while further marginalising a specific urban area and their residents (Wacquant, 2008; Tyler, 2013).

Urban restructuring often develops through interwoven economic and symbolic processes. Accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2008) describes the material extraction of value through eviction, while territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2007) provides the symbolic justification that makes urban transformations socially acceptable. Together, they often enable the wheels of

devaluation and re-valorisation that sustain gentrification (Paton, 2018). Indeed, gentrification has been assumed to be the only possible solution for marginalised territories, presenting the limited choice between it or decay (Slater, 2012; *citing* Hartman *et al.*, 1982). This vision aligns with neoliberal policies and discourses. As Sacks (1986) argues, the land has a manifest ability to divert attention from dominant powers. In this way, the territory appears as a neutral ground to which specific attributes are allocated. When an urban neighbourhood is devalued, this process creates conditions for rent-gap capital accumulation (Kallin and Slater, 2014). Initially, the area experiences significant disinvestment as the state and its economic partners choose not to invest in anticipation of future interventions. This makes territorial stigma a self-fulfilling prophecy, as those decisions simultaneously reinforce the urgency of redevelopment policies (Sakizlioglu and Uitermark, 2014). When the state enacts an urban intervention in a stigmatised neighbourhood, it proceeds to divide the residents of a stigmatised area into subgroups in which some are judged more worthy than others (Sakizlioglu and Uitermark, 2014). In this way, they apply the long-standing strategy of *divide et impera* (*i.e.*, divide and rule).

Time is also a "symbolic construct that allows the manipulation of social reality" and a fundamental strategy of gentrification (Sakizlioglu and Uitermark, 2014:1371). During redevelopment interventions in degraded areas, time is devoted to serving economic goals at the expense of dwellers and the social environment (*ibid.,* 2014). Gentrification is indeed fostered by extended periods of time of economic disinvestment that create the structural conditions for the process to happen (*i.e.*, the widening gap between actual and potential ground rent) (Sakizlioglu and Uitermark, 2014; *citing* Smith, 1979). Time is also used as a strategy for choosing the right moment to intervene or pause during the intervention (*ibid.*, 2014). Deliberate periods of inaction followed by strict deadlines also help fragment resistance, as affected groups struggle to build momentum. As the authors remark, jurisdiction "over time involves the power to take initiatives and strategically wait or accelerate to maximise bargaining power at particular intervals" (Sakizlioglu and Uitermark, 2014:1371).

However, in some urban areas, the perception may be so extreme that it can prevent the circulation of capital and act as a barrier to development (Hammel, 1999). Both gentrification and abandonment thus contribute to transformations in the economic polarisation of the inhabitants, "[…] in which the poor are continuously under pressure of displacement and the wealthy continuously seek to wall themselves within gentrified neighbourhoods" (Marcuse, 1985:196).

Ultimately, the political realm is, at once, a field of forces and struggles shaped by the uneven relations and power geometries (Bourdieu, 1991). To analyse the underlying symbolic power behind social relations, it is fundamental to embark on a "genetic and political sociology of the formation, selection, and imposition of systems of classification" (Sakizlioglu and Uitermark, 2014:1370; *citing* Wacquant, 1992:14). As the next paragraph displays, symbolic politics engages with different meanings that varied social actors ascribe to the urban environment and its dwellers (Sakizlioglu and Uitermark, 2014).

1.4 Symbolic politics

Symbolic politics refers to the sets of political narratives and messages that designate the types of individuals, preferences, and moralities towards which authority is supportive or critical (Mendelberg, 2022; *citing* Gusfield, 1986). In the state's interventions within stigmatised areas, symbolic politics is often used as a tool to reinsert the neighbourhood into the urban fabric. At its base, those discourses then display the expected positive changes of the regeneration processes and set the terms by which places and residents are judged acceptable or not. Then, if stigmatised residents are not able to succeed, they are often personally blamed for being unable to regenerate "or become successful, productive neoliberal consumer citizens" (Paton, 2018:929) and ungrateful for the intervention.

In his theory of political symbolism, Murray Edelman seeks to answer why people accept social inequalities and policies that do not benefit the majority of citizens (Sun, 2024). The author unveils how political discourses carry a symbolic value. They produce a psychological state in citizens that stimulates their emotions and alters their personal desires. This occurs due to the ambivalence of individuals who, on the one hand, seek comfort and, on the other, have a certain need for threat. Political symbols thus provoke this emotional fluctuation in order to obtain political consensus on specific issues (Sun, 2024). In the book *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (1985), Edelman identifies two types of political symbolism: referential and condensation symbols. Referential symbols stress concrete elements that can be empirically identified. These are acknowledged by different individuals in society, allowing a rational understanding of reality. Condensation symbols, by contrast, evoke emotional associations and collective feelings. Political discourses employ condensation symbols to present an overdramatic image, showing few objective

or verifiable details of situations (Edelman, 1985). In other words, symbolic politics aims to reach mass audiences emotionally, with only vague references to concrete public affairs. For instance, persuasion discourses use specific words, such as 'freedom' or 'justice,' to attract policy support (Sun, 2024). These words promise a pleasant future while releasing the public's psychological tension. Thus, language is a key step in the relationship between population and political actors.

However, Edelman, while remarking on the significance of political symbols in stimulating individuals' political sensibilities, denies the view that they are instruments for powerful agents to control society (*ibid.*, 2020). Indeed, he concludes that "there is no implication here that elites consciously mould political myths and rituals to serve their ends" (Edelman, 1985:20). Political elites act as ordinary individuals who try to predict responses to specific social policies. As a result, they evoke a range of different emotions to garner the necessary support and influence societal behaviours, contributing to the maintenance of social order (Edelman, 1985; Sun, 2024).

In the next two paragraphs, I will present Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power and Foucault's regime of truth to display the mechanisms behind symbolic politics and its effects. The aim is to comprehend how language enacts a specific understanding of society and shapes people's perception.

1.4.1 Bourdieu's symbolic power

In his book *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991:37), Bourdieu presents language as an 'instrument of action and power', countering its historical idea as an entity of contemplation. It suffices to recall the polysemy of common nouns – *i.e.*, family, work, love – to see how words acquire different meanings depending on the speakers and the social positions they occupy. To reach a political consensus, it becomes crucial to appeal to a neutral language, even if impartial words do not exist. Therefore, the legitimacy of political discourses relies on the hidden connection between the social field in which they are produced (*i.e.*, the political ground in this case) and the social position of individuals to whom they are addressed (Bourdieu, 1991). More importantly, Bourdieu emphasises the autonomy and generative capacities of language, which can overcome the limits of empirical verification by producing grammatically perfect but semantically empty statements. Therefore, symbolic politics involves the "power of constructing reality" by establishing the actual meaning of the social world (Bourdieu, 1991:166). The author, following

Durkheim, understands the systems of classification as socially constructed and arbitrary. Symbols can generate a consensus over the meaning of the social environment, thus contributing to the reproduction of the same order and social integration. At the same time, Bourdieu distances himself from the Marxist tendency to interpret symbolic systems merely as ideological instruments serving the interests of the dominant class. Instead, he emphasises their internal logic and cognitive function: symbolic forms do not simply reproduce domination but also structure the understanding of the social world (*ibid.*, 1991).

The dominant culture contributes to the integration of the leading class. While this culture simultaneously creates a fictitious sense of social integration, it generates a distinction with other groups and legitimises social hierarchies. As the author states, the leading culture

> "[…] produces this ideological effect by concealing the function of division beneath the function of communication: the culture which unifies (the medium of communication) is also the culture which separates (the instrument of distinction) and which legitimates distinctions by forcing all culture (designated as sub-cultures) to define themselves by their distance from the dominant culture." (Bourdieu, 1991:167)

Inscribed in power relations, symbolic systems are thus mechanisms of domination which produce a symbolic violence capable of imposing a specific meaning of the world to preserve certain interests (*ibid.*, 1991). This is done through a symbolic struggle between diverse social groups. Political discourse represents the strategic use of language to make a concrete social order appear natural, without recognising the underlying classification systems and mental structures. According to Bourdieu (1991:170), what

> "[..] creates the power of words and slogans, a power capable of maintaining or subverting the social order, is the belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them. And words alone cannot create this belief." (Bourdieu, 1991:170)

Symbolic power can thus generate real effects in the social and material world without necessarily recurring to action. It is the power of "making people see" and "believe, of producing and imposing the legitimate or legal classification" depending on the position agents "occupy in the space (and in the classifications that are potentially inscribed in it)" (Bourdieu, 1991:243). The

power of communication mainly depends on the degree to which it is recognised by an influential group of individuals who share their vision of the world and interests within it. In other words, ideas assume a political significance when they are acknowledged by citizens outside the political arena (Bourdieu, 1991). In the political field, "to say is to do", argues Bourdieu, meaning that

> "[…] it is to get people to believe that you can do what you say and, in particular, to get them to know and recognise the principles of di-vision of the social world, the *slogans*, which produce their own verification by producing groups and, thereby, social order." (Bourdieu, 1991:190)

Symbolic struggles are therefore aimed at imposing the authorised vision of the social world and obtaining the "monopoly of legitimate *naming*" (Bourdieu, 1991: 239). The latter confers the strength tied to common sense and collective consensus since it is carried out by a state spokesperson who is the holder of "*legitimate symbolic violence*" (Bourdieu, 1991:239). This gives rise to two diverse positions in society. The first is dictated by concrete and personal interests, while the second, the authorised stance, is perceived as universal and all social agents are judged by it. In this way, the authority vision defines the moral and spatial order of society, converting symbolic distinctions into political realities (*ibid.*, 1991). By imposing social practices, the government

> "[…] institutes and inculcates common symbolic forms of thought, social frames of perception, understanding and memory, State forms of classification or, more precisely, practical schemes of perception, appreciation and action" (Bourdieu, 1997:175).

Thus, symbolic power is strongly linked to the internal division of every society, to processes of stereotyping and discrimination that derive from what we perceive as truth and take for granted. This phenomenon can be seen in the fact that what was considered to be true has changed over time and space, as have the processes of stigmatisation.

1.4.2 Foucault's regime of truth

Foucault developed the concept of the regime of truth by analysing the relationship between knowledge and power and its effects. In *The Discourse on Language* (1972), the author starts from the assumption that

> "In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its power and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality" (Foucault, 1972:216).

Foucault proceeds to enunciate the rules of exclusion that dominate discourse by uncovering its links to power and desire behind the idea of purity and the search for truth. Indeed, external and internal regulations exist within the discourse that serve to control and delimit the act of speaking. Primarily, it is essential to note that the distinction between true and false is historically constituted and relies on institutional support. True discourse presents itself as universal, concealing the mechanism of exclusion that sustains it and that delimits what is accepted as truth and who can pronounce it. Yet it is precisely this detachment that renders the truth blind to the forces that sustain it (Foucault, 1972). For instance, a proposition to be true or false in a discipline must already be "within the true" (Foucault, 1972:224). It must fulfil complex conditions regarding specific objects, techniques, and a definite theoretical field to be accepted in a given time and space.

These systems of exclusion are an epistemological grid from which it is not possible to escape since "exchange and communication are positive forces at play within complex but restrictive systems" (Foucault, 1972:225). In other words, individuals are not entitled to express what they want at any time and place. The regime of truth delineates, at the same time, both the speaking subject and the object of discourse. It is composed of specific discourses, social status, and mechanisms that tie the truth to the systems of power that support it (Guadagni, 2016). Foucault (1972) designates *rituals* as the mechanisms that establish who is entitled to speak, the gestures and behaviour that accompany discourse, and the imposed meanings and effects of the words employed.

Therefore, the concept of the regime of truth highlights its political dimension, showing that truth is not merely descriptive. Instead, it is always the stake of a relationship of command and obedience that must be made visible (Guadagni, 2016; *citing* Rovatti, 2014). Furthermore, the relationship between power and truth also produces consequences regarding the development of specific subjectivities (Guadagni, 2016). Since power is active in every social relationship and relies on discourses of truth, each time something is defined as true or false, it affects individuals by turning into a coordinate of their becoming subjects (Guadagni, 2016:116; *citing* Bazzicalupo, 2013). Foucault calls this process *subjection*, namely, individuals being

> "[…] judged, condemned, classified, forced into tasks, destined for a certain way of living or dying, in function of true discourses that bring with them specific effects of power" (Guadagni, 2016:116; *citing* Foucault, 2009:40).

Discourse thus shapes individuals' understanding of the social world while simultaneously revealing the cultural background of the speaker (Whisnant, 2020). It enables some social categories to say the truth and to be trusted when dealing with specific issues. In this way, élites possess social, cultural, or political power (Foucault, 1972; Whisnant, 2020). In Foucault's theory, power is at every level of social relations and is exercised by establishing mechanisms that ensure conformity rather than by forcing individuals to obey. The discourse thus determines what is considered acceptable, and individuals adapt their behaviours to these norms, unaware that it is the discourse that leads them. The regime of truth can be viewed as the indisputable common knowledge found in every geographical and historical era, though it changes over time.

1.5 Residents' response to territorial stigmatisation

Dealing with the residents of stigmatised neighbourhoods, Wacquant observed that dwellers tend to practice mutual distancing and refuge in the private sphere, trying to distinguish themselves from their neighbours and producing a dissolution of place (Wacquant, 2008; Wacquant, 2009). Following Goffman's analysis (1963), Wacquant (1993) also highlights how inhabitants of degraded areas internalise the standpoint of public narratives and the way they are perceived by the outside world. In other words, Wacquant argues that residents tend to adopt

submissive strategies to cope with stigmatisation, such as concealing their residence and rejecting the neighbourhood's sociability (Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira, 2014). They attempt to ascribe to other inhabitants the negative public narratives that are directed at them, thereby actively contributing to the degradation of their own residence (Wacquant, 2007).

Since stigmatised inhabitants are aware of the discrimination they face, they may seek to adapt their actions to the hegemonic morality inscribed in the urban space (Cosacov and Perelman, 2015), while others may resist the social order they believe to be unfair (Liberatori, 2019). Indeed, appearing as a dangerous individual could be an attractive prospect for, to some extent, reversing the situation of domination and gaining some respect (Garbin and Millington, 2012; Cosacov and Perelman, 2015). In the *banlieues*, Wacquant highlights that young residents are usually the targets of discrimination. As a response to the socio-economic and symbolic violence that subjugates and relegates them to degraded neighbourhoods, they often react with verbal violence and acts of vandalism. They have no faith in institutions' ability to solve their problems (Wacquant, 1993). At the same time, these actions may confirm the prejudice that stigmatised neighbourhoods deserve a corrective response and the state's intervention (Wacquant, 2008b; Garbin and Millington, 2012). Therefore, stigmatised individuals often have conflicting positions regarding the hegemonic norms of the societies to which they belong. If, on the one hand, they manifest a desire to conform and a moral attachment to dominant beliefs, on the other hand, they often display a sense of irony and repulsion towards the dominant culture that oppresses them (Appadurai, 2004).

For Wacquant (1993), territorial stigma affects every aspect of residents' lives, including job searching and meeting new people. Urban representations around stigmatised neighbourhoods generate a strong opposition between 'here' and 'there'. This logic reinforces social imaginaries of 'us' and 'them' that shape moral urban geographies (Pinkster *et al*., 2020). Indeed, residents subject to stigmatisation are not only regarded as inferior, but are also portrayed as transgressors of the dominant *status quo* (Cosacov and Perelman, 2015). Furthermore, since marginalised places concentrate innumerable prejudices about immoral and deviant customs filled with crime, drug trafficking, and violent gangs, individuals of poor neighbourhoods are often criminalised (Chávez Molina and Molina Derteano*,* 2018). Specific physical characteristics, such as clothing, may be followed by localisation and criminalisation (*ibid.*, 2018). For instance, encounters with the authorities are usually with the police. Consequently, when the policemen learn where stigmatised individuals come from, they often change their attitude towards them and become distrustful and

accusatory (Wacquant, 1993). Those practices contribute to reproducing a logic of structural inequality due to geographical location.

Thus, marginalised neighbourhoods have been described as an urban pathology, created by the moral dissolution and deviant behaviour of their inhabitants (Wacquant, 1993). Indeed, society increasingly assumes that disadvantaged individuals choose their lives because of a lack of willingness and laziness (Clery, Lee, and Kunz, 2013). This vision often produces a sense of fatalism and despondency in residents themselves that often denies the possibility of seeing a different personal future. As Wacquant (1993) mentions, dwellers feel condemned to a life of failure. However, aspirations are not individual but are part of a broader cultural context of interactions and social life. As Appadurai (2004:68) displays, aspiration "[…] is not evenly distributed in any society. It is a sort of metacapacity, and the relatively rich and powerful invariably have a more fully developed capacity to aspire". Indeed, stigmatised individuals,

> "[…] precisely because of their lack of opportunities to practise the use of this navigational capacity (in turn because their situations permit fewer experiments and less easy archiving of alternative futures), have a more brittle horizon of aspirations." (Appadurai, 2004:69)

Marginalised groups thus need time and concrete capabilities to find their voice in society.

The critics of this submissive internalisation of stigma claim instead that residents tend to develop an ambivalent or even a positive understanding of their neighbourhood (Jensen and Christensen, 2012). Indeed, noteworthy differences often exist between inhabitants' representations and dominant narratives (Garbin and Millington, 2012). Residents distance themselves from negative descriptions of their urban environment by constructing an affirmative, alternative social image to challenge the stigma attached (*ibid.*, 2012). They also tend to counteract the homogeneity of stigmatisation processes by displaying the heterogeneity of their community. Sometimes struggles may become violent in their quest for new social spaces of liveability, as they may seek to destroy the existing social environment that prevents them from exercising this right (Garbin and Millington, 2012). Public and dominant representations are regularly questioned and challenged by residents through mobility practices and relations entertained beyond the stigmatised area (Sisson, 2021). Moreover, Wacquant's theory does not consider how local associations can temporarily use and accept territorial stigmatisation to earn private or public

funding (Marelli, 2019). Indeed, specific political instruments, such as the area-based method, make stigmatised territories financially competitive for their negative characteristics and problems. In this way, local organisations instrumentalise place stigma to support their work in those areas (*ibid.*, 2019).

Thus, struggles over resistance and domination are ongoing processes for social agents operating at manifold scales within the social space (Garbin and Millington, 2012). The outcomes of those negotiations depend on who holds what kind of capital and to what degree. In other words, every societal field is a place of struggle for the principles of classification in a constant evolution, the effect of which depends on the position each agent occupies in it (Sakizlioglu and Uitermark, 2014). As Garbin and Millington (2012:20179) conclude, it is crucial to highlight the ambiguities of domination and resistance over stigmatisation to avoid "glibly celebrating 'resistance' or drawing overpessimistic conclusions about the impact of placed stigma (although some pessimism may be warranted)." However, it is fundamental to acknowledge that resistance practices are always influenced by hegemonic systems. Indeed, they must partially acknowledge the existing social, geographical, and cultural structures to counteract them. Therefore, even if, to some extent, struggles over stigmatisation may help to reproduce the phenomenon, they yet promote the creation of a different vision of the social space (Garbin and Millington, 2012).

1.6 An overview of Latin American cities

When examining the urban landscape of Latin American cities, it is fundamental to uncover the role of colonialism in shaping their core structure. Cities' foundation was a colonising strategy to impose the settlers' socio-political and economic system and manifest their authority as the dominant power (Hernández and Kellett, 2010). In that urban environment, distinction was highlighted through a complex pattern of exclusions. In colonial cities, certain social groups occupied specific urban places, were subject to diverse jurisdictions and participated in special economic systems (Hernández, 2017). Informal settlements have thus always been an integral part of Latin American urban development. This spatial contrast between ordered and chaotic urbanism has had a significant impact on perceptions of spaces and their inhabitants since colonial times. Indeed, Latin American cities still present colonial configurations of discrimination and segregation in their economic and socio-ethnic organisation (*ibid.*, 2017). White elites still

maintain “economic, political and cultural control, thereby perpetuating a hierarchical system based largely on racial designations created during colonialism” (Hernández, 2017:xxiv).

Furthermore, twentieth-century industrialisation and rural migration to economic urban poles gave rise to several informal settlements in major cities. Those popular districts have continued to be rejected and stigmatised because they did not embody the idea of a modern, progressive city that governments sought to establish (Hernández and Kellett, 2010). Until the mid-1970s, Latin American governments’ responses to informal settlements have usually been twofold, going from total neglect to forced eradication. Over time, as the poor and their places of residence continued to be stigmatised, governments began sponsoring low-income housing projects to enhance the urban environment and the living conditions of their inhabitants (Hernández and Kellett, 2010). Providing basic services and urban infrastructure has become the most used method for tackling the uneven development in Latin American cities (Hernández, 2017). However, this rhetoric has perpetuated a view of physical determinism, which suggests “that complex socio-economic urban problems can be resolved by transforming the physical environment” (Hernández, 2017: ix). When informal settlements are located in a strategic position, governments can propose their demolition or their urbanisation through title regularisation. However, these measures encourage property speculation and the displacement of the poorest segment of the population (De Araújo and Da Costa, 2017). In this way, the complex roots of colonialism and urban marginality remain untouched, and only superficial improvements are possible. Indeed, Latin American cities still reflect colonial configurations in their political structure, social stratification, and ethnic representations, which are evident in their urban territorialisation (Hernández, 2017).

This has led to pervasive racial attitudes and representations that prevent inclusive urban development. Therefore, while local governments may construct schools in stigmatised neighbourhoods and provide professional training to their populations, those programmes often fail to translate into better-paid jobs because the stigmatisation attached to the inhabitants remains intact (*ibid.*, 2017). Numerous findings then confirm the theory of territorial stigmatisation. For Auyero (2007), Wacquant’s arguments may help understand the continuity and discontinuity of informal settlements. Indeed, the continuity consists in the fact that these places have experienced economic disadvantages since their origin. Meanwhile, forms of discontinuity have arisen since the advent of neoliberal policies, creating a new form of relegation similar to that in advanced

societies. Indeed, the phenomena of shrinking local organisations, the violence of daily life, and the state's repressive policies have grown over time (Auyero, 2007).

However, critical of Wacquant's theories, the scholar Zibechi (2012) is reluctant to view inhabitants of informal settlements as mere victims. Indeed, the author criticises the scholars "committed to the first World poor" because they are "unable to see the peripheries as anything but a problem, defined always in negative terms […]" (Zibechi, 2012:203). He strongly emphasises that these populations are never considered as subjects, but only as objects of research. Therefore, Zibechi (2012) distinguishes five features that characterise urban territories in resistance in Latin America and that differ from those of other geographical areas, such as the so-called Global North. There are the following:

1. It is a movement that originates from rural migrants moving into cities, traditionally regarded as the domain of elites. Their arrival provokes changes in social and economic systems and relations. For Zibechi (2012:227), these movements represent "a form of resistance to elite power and an affirmation of the popular world".
2. Their popular neighbourhoods or shantytowns differ from the urban spaces of wealthy social classes. Those settlements have been collectively self-built, and their space distribution has been based on values such as solidarity and reciprocity.
3. These auto-constructed places have created a popular power that impacts the internal social relationships and practices. In this way, the State's reasoning "appears to be subordinate to popular/community logic in these spaces" (*ibid.*, 2012:227).
4. Various economic initiatives have been developed, which can be considered counter-hegemonic, often tied to the informal economy.
5. The control over these territories "enables the urban popular sector to resist, stay put, and survive even as the powers that be seek to break them" (Zibechi, 2012:227).

Moreover, these movements request autonomy (*i.e.*, the *piqueteros* in Argentina) by affirming their social identities. Another similar dynamic has been the territorialisation of those old social movements through long struggles (*ibid.*, 2012). However, the de-territorialisation of manufacture has provoked a crisis since it has "debilitated subjects that were part of disappearing territorialities in which they had previously acquired power and meaning" (Zibechi, 2012:14). Many popular

sectors and shantytowns have thus been relocated to the outskirts of cities, in a process that reveals the rearrangement of the physical environment. For scholars De Araújo and Da Costa (2017), once the government enters and equips those territories with infrastructure and services, the state loses the antagonist position as 'otherness'. Even if urban changes do not align with residents' vision and practical interests, their critiques cannot translate into resistance as in the past. Indeed, solidarity tends to weaken as the state formally reintegrates those areas into the city's circuit (De Araújo and Da Costa, 2017).

Writing about Medellin transformations, the scholar Montoya-Restrepo (2014) presents the evolution of the State towards marginalised communities. In her analysis, the working class has been marginalised from the planned city, which historically belongs to the upper classes. As a consequence, those informal settlements have been developed by their communities, exerting the role of the State (Montoya-Restrepo, 2014). To regain those territories, governments have employed repressive and violent mechanisms, which have provoked a legitimacy crisis. From the 21st century, governments had to transform their *modus operandi* by appealing to inclusive discursive practices that justified the State's violence to guarantee control over those territories (*ibid.,* 2014). In Medellin, this was denominated *Urbanismo Social,* aimed at including informal settlements through urban interventions. The author (2014) then presents the "amphibious State", meaning

> "[...] an Administration that intervenes in territories through military operations to 'take control', exercising the cruellest violence of which it is capable with the utmost brutality; yet, almost simultaneously, it initiates processes of urban transformations in which it proclaims as its guiding principle the inclusion and the overcoming of the structural conditions of poverty, violence and inequality" (Montoya-Restrepo, 2014:170).

Thus, the State imposes the standard necessities of the planned city through a language of rights, proposing public spaces, culture, and housing to make the territory functional to its social control (*ibid.,* 2014).

1.7 Conclusion

The present theoretical chapter engages with the concepts of territorial stigmatisation, state-led interventions and symbolic politics. The thesis emphasises the interrelation between territorial stigmatisation processes and symbolic politics, intended here as an active instrument through which area-based policies are enacted and conducted in highly stigmatised neighbourhoods. The strategic use of the territory is a crucial aspect in stigmatisation processes. As Soja (2009:2) highlights, to take "the socio-spatial dialectic seriously means that we recognise that the geographies in which we live can have negative as well as positive consequences on practically everything we do". In this way, territorial stigmatisation superimposes itself on single layers of stigma (Wacquant, 2007), incorporating all the negative aspects that society rejects. This is achieved through the use of discursive practices inscribed in power relations (Bourdieu, 1991). The discourse thus determines what is considered acceptable, and individuals adapt their behaviours to these norms, unaware that the discourse is leading them (Foucault, 1972). Discursive practices thus involve the strategic use of language to make a concrete social order appear natural, without recognising the underlying classification systems (Bourdieu, 1991). However, territorial stigmatisation produces innumerable material consequences on people's lives and is deeply tied to political authorities. In this way, analysing area-based policies in stigmatised neighbourhoods can shed light on the mechanisms through which certain places are structurally maintained in marginal positions.

Chapter two

Methodology

The chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted in the doctoral research. It presents the research design, case selection, data collection methods, and analytical strategies used to respond to the research questions.

2.1 Research design and research questions

The general objective of the doctoral thesis is to examine the impact of territorial stigmatisation in shaping symbolic politics in area-based policies. Additionally, it explores how contrasting narratives generate different interpretations of the local context in historically stigmatised popular neighbourhoods. The study has a qualitative research design, and it is based on the analysis of two case studies: the urban areas of Barrio Mugica Padre Carlos Mugica, historically known as Villa 31-31bis, and La Legua, located in Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Santiago (Chile), respectively. Data collection consists of three components: semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, and secondary data analysis of policy documents, mass media, institutional events, and videos. These approaches have been selected to clarify the stratified social environment and the different discursive practices present.

The doctoral thesis aims to contribute to the academic literature of territorial stigmatisation and urban geography by posing the following questions:

(RQ1) How has territorial stigmatisation evolved in relation to urban policies in the selected cases? What recurrent themes and discursive frames contribute to the reproduction and legitimation of territorial stigma?

(RQ2) How do symbolic politics enable the interpretation of urban policies in stigmatised areas?

(RQ3) How do contrasting narratives articulated by heterogeneous social actors contribute to different visions of the urban environments under scrutiny?

The concept of symbolic politics is operationalised as a multidimensional analytical category. This is achieved through the analysis of discursive and classificatory practices, and area-based policies implemented in the popular neighbourhoods of La Legua (Santiago) and Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica (Buenos Aires). The concept is used to capture how those urban territories and the related urban policies are constructed, interpreted and contested at the local level. First, the analysis focuses on policy documents, institutional discursive practices, videos of governmental public presentations, mass media, and semi-structured in-depth interviews to understand how territories are framed. Here, the labelling and discursive framework serve to construct the area-based policy and to frame the nature of the urban problem. Indeed, the political interpretation of the urban environment under scrutiny is crucial to understanding its territorial implications. The second dimension concerns the analysis of the concrete policy intervention to analyse how discursive practices translate into concrete policies (*i.e.*, physical interventions, political strategies, security or socio-economic policies). It focuses on specific local interventions that disclose symbolic patterns that mobilise and/or reframe territorial stigmatisation. This is achieved through the study of policy documents, official presentations, policy implementation, and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The third category concerns the analysis of moral hierarchies created through stigmatisation processes, considering area-based policies and the internal urban territory under scrutiny. The last category involves local counter-narratives that contest dominant discursive practices and reconfigure the interpretation of area-based policies.

In this framework, territorial stigmatisation represents the principal lens through which the research employs symbolic politics and area-based policies. Moreover, territorial stigmatisation is spatially and historically situated in the two case studies, focusing on its evolution to grasp how negative representations still influence to varying degrees the selected popular neighbourhoods and their related area-based policies.

2.2 Case study selection

Two main criteria for case selection were included. First, the presence of territorial stigmatisation. The second concerns State intervention through area-based policies, with a great attention to symbolic politics. The case studies of Barrio Mugica (ex Villa 31-31bis) and La Legua are consistent with these research objectives. Both popular neighbourhoods share a long-standing history of territorial stigmatisation. Most importantly, those urban areas have been the targets of major urban policies and political attention. Indeed, La Legua and Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica (ex Villa 31-31bis) are among the most frequently cited urban spaces in Santiago and Buenos Aires. Although the two cases have been addressed through different political approaches, they represent a multifaceted sample of urban policies implemented in Latin America. Moreover, as Flyvbjerg (2006) highlights,

> "Concrete, context-dependent knowledge is, therefore, more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals (Flyvbjerg, 2006:224).

Indeed, both cases display how the variegated discursive practices and area-based policies have been articulated in stigmatised popular neighbourhoods facing social, economic and structural issues.

La Legua is an urban neighbourhood located in the pericentre of Santiago. Since the 2000s, the *población* has been the scene of numerous interventions, mostly security policies, and collective imaginaries of a critical and problematic place. Over time, La Legua has attracted significant media coverage and political attention. Indeed, it is considered one of the best-known neighbourhoods in Chile for being a nest of narcotraffic and crime (Lin, 2020). As a result, La Legua has been an over-intervened territory and a well-known critical neighbourhood in Chile's public policies (Larenas *et al*., 2018). The area-based policies considered were implemented after 2000 and are primarily security policies, with a particular focus on urban policies carried out after 2010. Indeed, the initial idea was to focus on the *Plan Iniciativa Legua* undertaken in 2011. Indeed, especially in the period from 2001 to 2010, it is difficult to draw a temporal linearity between the area-based policies due to the lack of transparency regarding the governmental actors involved,

the different policy names applied and the objectives. However, once on the field, it became clear that the interventions were interpreted as a long-standing single urban intervention.

Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica, originally known as Villa 31-31bis, is the most ancient shantytown in the Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (CABA). Throughout its history, the informal settlement, like the rest of the city's shantytowns, has been highly stigmatised. It has suffered various eradication attempts, but the informal settlement always managed to survive. In 1994, the right to decent housing was included in the city's constitution, highlighting the need to integrate informal settlements and their communities (Bertelli, 2021). Nonetheless, *Law 3.343* was only sanctioned in 2009 and did not receive the necessary coordination to implement its formal inclusion (Bertelli, 2021). Over time, Buenos Aires's neoliberal governance, especially after 2011, has expanded the commodification and privatisation of public lands and market deregulation, while also proposing narratives that include social integration and economic opportunities for stigmatised areas (Sternberg, 2023). Its central location is one of the reasons for the greater socio-political interest compared to other shantytowns dispersed throughout the city. Since 2015, the government of Buenos Aires has carried out the *Social, Economic and Urban Integration Project* to reintegrate the informal settlement into the formal city. The analysis focuses specifically on this area-based policy.

2.3 Data collection and analysis

Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and participant observation. The qualitative interviews involved local actors and individuals in different positions within the field of research, who were selected to provide a variety of perspectives on the case studies. Each respondent was assigned an alphanumeric code to refer to their role in the context. All the interviews were recorded, manually transcribed and anonymised by assigning an alphanumeric code to every respondent. The interview guide varied slightly due to the different positions of actors, and interviewees were free to talk about what they considered important. Furthermore, each respondent signed the *informed consent* module, which contained all information regarding the scope of the research study. Potentially sensitive information was treated with respect and care to avoid potential harm to participants.

In the case study of Barrio Mugica (ex-villa 31-31bis), respondents were selected because they belonged to the following categories:

- **Political actors** (designated by the alphanumeric code A-P): this category includes individuals who hold or have held institutional roles related to the Social, Economic and Urban Integration Project implemented in Barrio Mugica in 2015.
- **Actors who are or were part of the project's territorial team** (designated by the alphanumeric code A-E): this category includes members of the various technical and operational teams involved in diverse areas of the planning and management of the intervention, with different fields of expertise and levels of responsibility.
- **External actors involved in Barrio Mugica** (alphanumeric code A-U): this category includes actors who do not reside in the popular neighbourhood but are active at the local level for various reasons, such as affiliation with universities, neighbourhood media, and/or local schools.
- **Residents who are politically active or work in/for the popular neighbourhood** (designated by the alphanumeric code A-R): this category includes residents of Barrio Mugica with various forms and levels of participation in the local political and/or community life, including formal and informal roles. Their point of view on the project often varies according to their political involvement and the benefits/disadvantages derived from the project.

The interviews were conducted between July 2024 and January 2025. For the first case study, the respondents were 18, and the average interview length was 70 minutes. *Figure 3.1* displays the different codes assigned to each participant and the number of participants. The interviews were conducted mainly in person, with only 3 conducted online at the participants' request.

Classification	Interviewees' codes	Number
Political actors	A-P1, A-P2	2
Territorial team of the project	A-E1, A-E2, A-E3, A-E4, A-E5	5
External actors (not involved in the project)	A-U1, A-U2, A-U3	3
Residents	A-R1, A-R2, A-R3, A-R4, A-R5, A-R6, A-R7, A-R8	8

Figure 3.1 The characterisation of interviewees in Barrio Mugica

In the case study of La Legua, the categories slightly differ due to the social environment of the popular neighbourhood and the public policies implemented. The characterisation of the actors interviewed is the following:

- **Political actors** (alphanumeric designation C-P): this category includes individuals who have held institutional roles related to urban policies and interventions in the popular neighbourhood at the municipal level.
- **Local actors** and **residents** (alphanumeric designation C-R): this category includes residents of La Legua with different levels of involvement in local community life, including both individuals who are actively and/or politically involved in local initiatives and residents who are not formally organised but have assisted in the public policies implemented in the area.

- **External actors involved in the area** (alphanumeric designation C-U): this category includes individuals who have previously resided in La Legua and are still present there through professional activities and/or support for local processes.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted between February 2025 and May 2025, averaging 72 minutes each. As *shown in Figure 3.2*, the respondents were 15. They were conducted mainly in person, with only 2 interviews conducted online due to participants' needs.

Classification	**Interviewees' codes**	**Number**
Political actors	C-R1	1
Local actors and residents	C-R1, C-R2, C-R3, C-R4, C-R5, C-R6, C-R7, C-R8, C-R9, C-R10, C-R11, C-12	12
External actors	C-U1, C-U2	2

Figure 3.2 The characterisation of interviewees in La Legua

The qualitative data were analysed using thematic and discursive analysis. In the first step, the categories were broad, including a wide range of diverse phenomena. Here, the three main categories of analysis were identified in relation to the research questions: territorial stigmatisation, symbolic politics, and local conflictive narratives. Within these categories, I produced further, mutually related classifications, leading to more complex categorisations. Given the difficulty in

reaching out to specific actors of the categories mentioned above, data triangulation was carried out to obtain a more complete and consistent understanding of the phenomenon.

2.4 Access to the field

In both the Barrio Mugica and La Legua cases, gaining access to the research field was not easy. It became necessary to find individuals who, depending on their role, could open the way for me in the popular neighbourhoods and engage with interviewees. In the case of Barrio Mugica, to diversify the narratives and voices, I first selected two figures: a political actor and an external individual close to the popular neighbourhood, to reach out to residents. From there, I used the snowball method, thus asking informants about other individuals to enrich my sampling. I used this strategy since it is often difficult to contact them directly. As Noy (2008:330) stated, the snowball model "is often employed as a particularly effective tool when trying to obtain information on and access to hidden populations." Then, once I enhanced my understanding of the social environment, I diversified again among the cluster of neighbours to reach different perspectives and counter-narratives. To achieve this, I participated in specific social activities in the area under study to approach them. Those included: (ii) community tourism organised by neighbours; (ii) the visit to a local school; (iii) the filming of a documentary; (iv) local recreational centres. The interviews with neighbours have usually taken place in Barrio Mugica since they feel more comfortable in their surroundings. Every time, we met in a mutually agreed location, often near the entrances of the *barrio,* and then we entered together. Instead, to get to know actors who are or were part of the project, I participated in: (i) official guided visits within the neighbourhood; and (ii) university seminars. Moreover, the professor who tutored me in Buenos Aires, Carolina Maria Redondo, at the IEALC (Instituto de Estudios de América Latina y el Caribe), introduced me to certain external and territorial actors who have worked in the project.

In the case of La Legua, access to the fieldwork was presented to me as difficult, as people were reluctant to be interviewed. The professor who tutored me, Javier Ruiz Tagle, at the IEUR, gave me the contact details of two individuals who had ties to the neighbourhood. Before allowing me into the popular neighbourhood and among the residents, the gatekeepers wanted to get to know me. After that, the interviews followed the snowball method as in Barrio Mugica. I have spent considerable time in La Legua, especially in Legua Nueva, experiencing the neighbourhood's

daily life. I participated in family and friends' gatherings, football matches, and local activities. This has made it possible to enrich my understanding of the urban territory and my primary data collection. Indeed, the initial distrust was overcome by the connections I created in the neighbourhood. However, it has been challenging to reach out to authorities due to the lack of responses and connections. As a consequence, I had to rely on secondary sources. The difficulties in accessing the fieldwork do not constitute a contingent limitation but rather a structural element of the research context that has guided both the construction of the interview *corpus* and the methods of analysis.

Chapter Three

POBLACIÒN LA LEGUA

La Legua is a *población* located in the central-southern part of the Región Metropolitana de Santiago, the capital of Chile. The term *población* highlights the social production of this space, with a particular emphasis on the agency of its residents and their social and political struggles over time (Larenas, 2021). In this sense, the noun contrasts with the neutral notion of '*barrio'* (*i.e.*, neighbourhood) because its residents claim ownership over the living space, as they materially and symbolically contest the threat of the formal city (*ibid.*, 2021). In public policy, La Legua is often regarded as a neighbourhood, thereby obscuring the socio-political foundation of this urban area (Larenas, 2021). Its urbanisation occurred in stages, from the 1920s to the mid-1950s. Until the mid-1950s, land seizures in Chile were usually carried out in peripheral areas and were not necessarily conceived as a strategy of political pressure. Indeed, La Legua was historically an agricultural land, located in the Chacra La Legua de Macul y Viña La Legua on the periphery of Santiago. However, from the mid-1950s until early 1970s, land occupations began to acquire a socio-political dimension, operating as a tool for disputing the urban territory and pressuring governments (Larenas, 2021).

As Larenas (2021) points out, from 1930 until 1970, it is possible to distinguish two modes of access to housing for the Chilean working class. The first involved the process of social self-provision, through the self-construction of housing, while the second concerned the different institutional mechanisms provided by the State to gain access to social housing. After the 1973 military coup, the location of social housing was determined by the value of land that could be financed with state subsidies (Larenas, 2021). In other words, the state invested in the least valued urban territories, leading to the reproduction of spatial inequality and the territorialisation of poverty (*ibid.*, 2021). Moreover, in the 1980s, the liberalisation of land and the structural transformations of social policies in Chile increased two different aspects of residential segregation. On the one hand, the social homogenisation of urban neighbourhoods inhabited by low-income residents; on the other hand, the perception of those areas as experiencing subjective

segregation (Frühling and Gallardo, 2012). Those contexts increasingly experienced social problems such as drug-trafficking, organised violence and detachment from the legal system. For this reason, from the 1990s onward, numerous public policies have addressed these urban areas in various ways, such as the provision of urban infrastructure, social participation, and cultural development (*ibid.*, 2012).

Nowadays, La Legua lies within the municipality of San Joaquín, historically one of the city's poorer areas compared to the wealthier eastern sector (Ramos, 2015). As *Figure 1* shows, La Legua is now located in the pericentre of Santiago, just *'una legua'* (*i.e.*, a mile in Spanish, which corresponds approximately 4.8 km) from what is considered the historical centre, namely the Plazas de Armas.

Figure 1. Distance of La Legua from the historical centre of Santiago (*source:* SEREMI, 2011).

Its territory is divided into three internal sectors: Legua Vieja, Nueva La Legua and Legua de Emergencia (see *Figure 2*). Each space features different urbanisation patterns and, consequently, demographic characteristics. La Legua is home to approximately 14,000 people, of whom 45%

live in Legua Nueva (approximately 6,000 people), nearly 34% in Legua de Emergencia (just under 5,000), and 20% in Legua Vieja (just under 3,000) (Vial, 2017:293). Although Legua de Emergencia is the least-extended area, it has the highest residential density, with 328,7 residents per hectare (INDH, 2015).

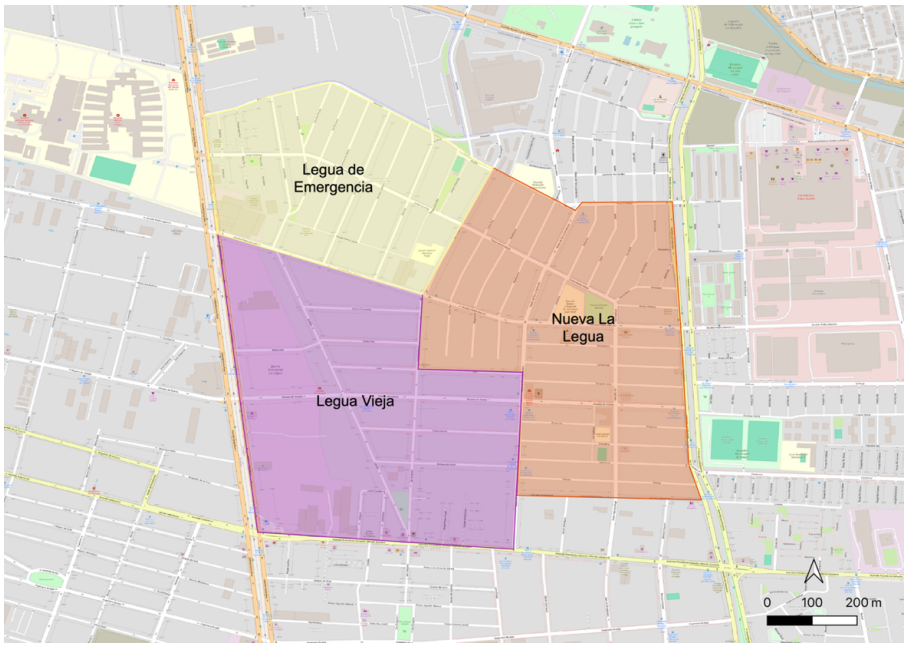

Figure 2. Map of the internal division of La Legua (*source:* author's elaboration, 2025).

Over time, La Legua has attracted public interest for representing one of the iconic '*poblaciones'* of Santiago due to its historical political trajectory, the presence of urban poverty and drug trafficking networks (Larenas, 2021). The stigmatisation of La Legua, tied to its social problems, has created a collective imaginary of a problematic place by attracting significant media coverage and political attention. Indeed, it is considered one of the best-known neighbourhoods in Chile for being a nest of narcotraffic and crime (Lin, 2020). As a result, La Legua has been an over-intervened territory and an 'elite' critical neighbourhood in Chile's public policies (Larenas *et al*., 2018). The community has been marked as a critical and hypercritical neighbourhood, which contributed to sharpening territorial stigmatisation and to producing countless consequences for its inhabitants, such as difficulty in finding jobs or obtaining loans (INDH, 2015). Studies (INDH, 2015; *citing* SENDA, 2011) have shown that people residing in La Legua present a higher

probability of becoming drug addicts and engaging in criminal and aggressive behaviours, as a consequence of social marginality, the presence of drug trafficking and drug consumption in the territory.

Since the 2000s, the area has thus been the scene of numerous policy interventions, making it difficult to reconstruct a clear line of public policies and the political actors involved. Nevertheless, the issue of security and police control has been the thread linking most of the programs implemented. Some authors (Larenas *et al.*, 2018) believe that the significant political interest in this urban area is also associated with its current central location and the existence of a significant rent gap in the land market. In the last ten years, the Municipality of San Joaquin has experienced major urban transformations, ranging from the development of transport infrastructure to the construction of universities, supermarkets and small strip malls (Larenas, 2021). However, this new economic prosperity in the municipal area is believed to be threatened by communities such as La Legua, which are constantly in the media spotlight due to security issues (Larenas, 2021).

3.1 The three Leguas

The territory initially belonged to the municipality of San Miguel, a marginal zone compared to the present-day one, and was incorporated into the Municipality of San Joaquín in 1981(Larenas *et al.*, 2018; Lin, 2020). Even if the area had been inhabited by different groups from the beginning of the 20th century, it failed to develop to the same extent as other districts of Santiago. Indeed, its proximity to slaughterhouses and penitentiaries contributed to the first negative perceptions of this southern area of the city (Lin, 2020; *citing* Palmer, 1984). La Legua's expansion revolves around three distinct phases that have produced visible, long-lasting impacts on its development.

The area, originally known as '*La Legua de Macul'*, lies between three leading routes connected to the city centre. The first wave of the population started between 1922 and 1930 due to the mineral crisis in Chile (Álvarez, 2010). Following the fall in the prices of Chilean raw materials on international markets and Santiago's development of manufacturing industries, nitrate workers from the north began occupying agricultural lands in low-value areas in the Santiago suburbs (De Ramón, 1992; Larenas *et al.*, 2018). This first settlement is known as *Legua Vieja*.

Occupations were silent and progressive, and houses were self-constructed, adhering to building standards, thereby the urban fabric was a regular, homogeneous grid (Larenas *et al.*, 2018).

The second phase of expansion started in 1947, when organised *pobladores*, under the leadership of the Communist Party, collectively occupied the land, thus creating *Nueva La Legua* (Lin, 2020). This was one of Chile's first politically organised land occupations, emerging in response to the growing demand for housing access. Residents included displaced families from *conventillos* (*i.e.,* precarious collective housing or subdivided mansions rented informally) and other land occupations around Santiago (Ramos, 2015; Larenas *et al.*, 2018). Houses were also self-built, featuring variations in frontages and front yards, and they were generally smaller than those in Legua Vieja (Larenas *et al.*, 2018). In the following years, the area gained the reputation of *'little Russia'* (Lin, 2020:6) due to the presence of a politically active communist group.

The final phase of expansion began with the urbanisation of *Legua de Emergencia* in the 1950s. The *Fundación de Viviendas de Emergencia* built emergency housing in its northwest sector for people relocated from precarious informal settlements in Santiago's suburbs, known as *'poblaciones callampas'*. The houses were assembled from wooden panels measuring 3.60 metres wide by 6 metres long. All spaces were initially designated to include only a kitchen and a bathroom (Ramos, 2015). Moreover, housing incorporated internal patios that residents later used as additional rooms to accommodate relatives and expand living space (*ibid.*, 2015). As Larenas *et al.* (2018) state, emergency houses were considered transitory shelters and, as such, did not necessarily comply with habitability and material standards. However, as Lin (2020) remarks, even if the urbanisation plan may be seen as rudimentary nowadays, it was considered a high standard for a popular neighbourhood of the time. Those new neighbours already had a reputation for coming from dangerous informal settlements (Álvarez, 2003). Thus, the plan aimed to civilise that portion of the population by providing them with water, sewage, and electricity systems while controlling their access to the neighbourhood (Lin, 2020). Indeed, La Legua was initially encapsulated by the industries located on its borders, especially the blind passages of Legua de Emergencia. In its northern part, it collided with the massive walls of the *Embotelladora Andina* factory (Álvarez, 2010). At that time, Legua de Emergencia had only one main entrance/exit to a principal avenue, as it was also trapped between Legua Vieja, Legua Nueva, and other *poblaciones* in its southern, eastern, and western sectors. Therefore, its entrance was guarded by a checkpoint.

In the mid-1950s, a second phase of emergency housing construction began. This time, the houses were larger and of higher quality, accommodating the initial residents and new inhabitants who settled in the first dwellings built (Lin, 2020). These overcrowded spaces, consisting of large families, developed a vibrant community life with many different lifestyles. Because of its urban conformation, Legua de Emergencia residents still carry out their activities in public areas, thus creating a different way of inhabiting space compared to the other Leguas (Larenas, 2021). In the narrow passages of Legua de Emergencia, the public figure of the '*choro'* (*i.e.,* the thief), committed to delinquency, began to gain popularity. Despite their reputation, they adhered to a strict code of conduct as they did not usually steal in their neighbourhood (Álvarez, 2010). Therefore, Legua de Emergencia started to be perceived as spatially and socially below by the same inhabitants of the other Leguas, who were already at the bottom (Lin, 2020). Santiago's inhabitants also began to associate two distinctive characters with the whole neighbourhood: left-wing activists and criminals (Lin, 2020). These social identities often led to diverse forms of violence, and this situation only intensified after the military coup in 1973.

3.1.1 Historical development of La Legua

From the 1950s onwards, large textile, bottling, and metalworking factories were established in the surrounding area, thereby contributing to the municipality's industrialisation based on Chile's import-substitution model (Larenas *et al*., 2018; Larenas, 2021). The resulting economic development created the demand for housing destined for the working class. Hence, the municipality modified its urban landscape, adopting a more residential character and becoming one of Santiago's industrial hubs (Larenas *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, the population's homogeneity defined the municipality's political and social identity.

On the day of the military coup, La Legua was the only urban community in Santiago to actively fight the military government on its own territory (Ganter, 2007). As Álvarez (2010:98) states, during those first days, there were explicit threats to bomb La Legua due to Pinochet's fear of a potential uprising from popular neighbourhoods supporting the Allende government. In December 1973, during the *Plan Leopardo*, agents of DINA (*i.e., Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional*, created during the first period of Pinochet's government) attempted to eradicate the local committee of the Communist Party in La Legua. Five communist militants were detained, tortured

and assassinated. During this period, there were many cases of torture against the inhabitants who opposed the military government, many of whom happened in the public space to exhibit the consequences of revolt (INDH, 2015). Many of these dramatic and violent collective histories are still transmitted in the popular neighbourhood, thereby revealing the difficult local relationship with the military and police authority (INDH, 2015). More broadly, this period has laid the foundations for La Legua residents' reluctance to any national intervention in their territory (Larenas, 2021).

Throughout the military dictatorship, which lasted from 11 September 1973 to 11 March 1990, La Legua was one of the many *poblaciones* where the population confronted the military government. Even if Legua de Emergencia was not politically active, the government has likewise conducted anti-criminal raids to murder inhabitants with criminal records or even just tattoos (Álvarez, 2010). Thus, these events horrified the inhabitants of Legua de Emergencia, leading them to prefer silence and step aside (*ibid.*, 2010). This attitude was despised by residents of Legua Nueva and Legua Vieja, who, in contrast, recognised themselves as an active political community (Lin, 2020).

The neighbourhood was raided ten times, making it the second most attacked settlement, along with around 50 murdered *pobladores* (Vial, 2017; Álvarez, 2010). The strong presence of left-wing parties led to brutal repressions, arbitrary imprisonments, and assassinations of many political militants (Larenas *et al.*, 2018). However, from the 1980s, many political, human rights, cultural, and religious organisations arose in the neighbourhood to contest the repression experienced. One of the most crucial actors has been the Catholic church, which shielded and gave space to those organisations at risk of being persecuted (Larenas *et al.*, 2018). Indeed, the conservatives' elites of the dictatorship guaranteed the church's protection during this time (Larenas, 2021). Therefore, young people of the Communist Party used to gather in the local parish for action organisation days (Lin, 2020).

As mentioned above, the time of dictatorship has profoundly affected La Legua, shaping residents' future understanding of state interventions and deepening their distrust of institutions. On a larger scale, the military government, following the liberalisation of the housing market, accelerated the production of low-standard housing, thereby reproducing urban clusters of poverty on the outskirts of Santiago (Larenas *et al.*, 2018). All these different processes gave rise to a new actor in popular neighbourhoods, namely drug trafficking networks. In the 1990s, this subject

became a primary interest for public policy (Larenas, 2021). Indeed, narcotrafficking has become a considerable issue in La Legua, as well as other *poblaciones* in Santiago. In Legua de Emergencia, Manuel Fuentes Cancino, known as *El Perilla*, became the first and most well-known narco (Lin, 2020; Vial, 2017). Therefore, drug trafficking networks quickly expanded to engage a considerable number of inhabitants. The illicit market was viewed as a way to escape poverty, attracting not only people with criminal backgrounds - such as the *choros* (*i.e.*, thieves) - but also residents who had never belonged to the illegal world (Vial, 2017). At the same time, in Legua de Emergencia, a clear distinction has emerged between the figure of the thief and that of the drug trafficker. As Álvarez (2014:69) reports, one of his interviewees declares that "to be a thief, you must be skilful, brave and sneaky. To be a trafficker, it does not matter if you are a coward".

In 1998, a police officer from *Carabineros* was accidentally shot at the entrance of Legua de Emergencia. In response, a considerable contingent of Carabineros conducted raids on most of the houses in the area. The operation lasted until the next day and was marked by violence, involving police vans, helicopters, and even tanks. During this intervention, the suspect confronted the police again, killing another officer and wounding three others. The police arrested a dozen residents, used excessive force on several, and killed the perpetrator, leading to extreme violence (Álvarez, 2010). The occurrence left residents with rage and despair against the government, reproducing the "already distant and devalued image that the dictatorship had built up*"* (Álvarez, 2010:119). Therefore, La Legua ceased to be a popular neighbourhood with social problems and became an urban problem in its own right (Lin, 2020). With the rise of narcotraffic, news reports and television began to focus on raids against illegal activities and violence in La Legua. The community was thus described as an "emblematic expression of a territory controlled by drug trafficking" (Larenas *et al.*, 2018:16). Due to the general state of violence, from the 1990s onwards, numerous public policies addressed problematic urban areas in various ways (Frühling and Gallardo, 2012). One of the urban regeneration programs with an integral approach has been "*Quiero Mi Barrio*", carried out by the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism. However, since some popular neighbourhoods were identified by the State as more problematic and requiring complex solutions, it became necessary to intervene in those urban areas more comprehensively and robustly (Larenas, 2021). This was the case of La Legua.

3.2 Government programs and interventions

One of the first attempts to intervene in those urban areas was the *Programa Comuna Segura Compromiso 100,* implemented in 2000 by the Ministry of the Interior along with the *Asociación Chilena de Municipalidades* (*i.e.*, the Chilean Association of Municipalities), which involved twelve municipalities of Santiago, and *Fundación Paz Ciudadana*. The program aimed to create a long-term model of crime prevention in the communities (Frühling and Gallardo, 2012). The municipality of San Joaquín was included.

In combination, in 2001, the Ministry of the Interior launched the *Barrio Seguro initiative*. This program differed from the previous one in that it involved smaller units of the urban territory, namely circumscribed neighbourhoods within municipalities, and placed a strong emphasis on micro-trafficking of drugs. The decision to implement another neighbourhood-level policy was prompted by the mass media coverage of drug gangs in emblematic *poblaciones.* Indeed, *Barrio Seguro* was a governmental attempt to address public discontent by enforcing the law against various criminal activities (Frühling and Gallardo, 2012). Therefore, the program targeted specific areas, described as critical neighbourhoods, fostering police intervention rather than focusing on prevention, as in the *Comuna Segura* program. The selection of neighbourhoods has been only partly motivated by objective criteria and has not been supported by evidence-based research (Frühling and Gallardo, 2012). In many cases, specific neighbourhoods have been chosen based on the priorities of municipal mayors and public relevance (*ibid.,* 2012). Moreover, the indicators used for the selection have never been made public. The first phase of this urban policy, from 2001 to 2003, gradually expanded to other communities and developed a framework with general and specific objectives over time. The intervention initially tackled Legua de Emergencia, integrating the other *poblaciones* only subsequently. The general governmental aim was to reduce levels of violence and crime in the selected twelve vulnerable neighbourhoods facing the control and violence of narcos, which affects the security and coexistence of local communities (Frühling and Gallardo, 2012; INDH, 2015). The specific objectives were: (i) from the central level, to promote the control of organised crime and criminal violence through police action; (ii) reclaim the public space to allow residents to enjoy it; and (iii) support the participation of local organisations in the elaboration and implementation of prevention measures (Frühling and Gallardo, 2012; *citing* Martínez, 2007).

However, at the end of 2003, the *Barrio Seguro* team concluded in an analysis that the program could not achieve the general goal of ending armed violence in those neighbourhoods (Frühling and Gallardo, 2012). They emphasised the lack of a clear focus and the project's long-term unsustainability. At the local level, the *Barrio Seguro* program increased police presence and patrols in these territories with identity checks and investigations to catch the leaders of different groups of drug-trafficking. Concerning Legua de Emergencia, the principal action was the deployment of police to exhibit to the community that the State had returned and to send a strong signal of the fight against narcotraffic (INDH, 2015). The local territory was thus transformed into a militarised space, with armoured vehicles, tanks, and weapons of war (INDH, 2015; Larenas, 2021).

As a result, other dimensions were included in the program after 2003. One of these was the focus on community mobilisation and development, through strengthening community participation, improvements of public infrastructures, and the establishment of recreational public spaces. Three further dimensions were included: (i) the protection of risk groups, like kids and adolescents; (ii) the social reintegration of people with convictions; and (iii) the access to justice in order to reduce the levels of impunity in those popular neighbourhoods (Frühling and Gallardo, 2012). To implement the project, the Ministry of the Interior hired neighbourhood coordinators to oversee the projects of local organisations, universities and private consultancies (*ibid.*, 2012). At first, the transfer of financial resources was via competitive funds, while later, due to the dispersion of the projects implemented and their limited impact, it was changed to the so-called *Fondos de Ayuda a la Gestión Municipal* (*i.e.,* Municipal Management Assistance Funds), which were applied in accordance with municipal plans (Frühling and Gallardo, 2012). However, the absence of an evaluation of the program made it difficult to assess the extent of its implementation across all popular neighbourhoods. Moreover, the local perception of a state of emergency in Legua de Emergencia, fuelled by numerous complaints from residents about police conduct, led the program to end in 2006 (INDH, 2015).

In 2006, the program was incorporated into the *Plan Comunal de Seguridad* (*i.e.*, the Municipal Security Plan) in an effort to give municipalities greater autonomy and participation (Frühling and Gallardo, 2012). The aim of the plan was to mitigate municipalities' vulnerabilities to crime by targeting the contributing factors to crime and violence (INDH, 2015). This shift coincided with the change of government under the new President, Michelle Bachelet, who

doubted that these programs would be successful because social issues were resistant to government policies (Frühling and Gallardo, 2012).

In 2010, the then-President Sebastián Piñera criticised previous policies and proposed the *Plan de Seguridad Pública 2010-2014, "Chile Seguro"*, to reduce crime. The general objective was to "reduce the risk factors that increase the likelihood of crime, interpersonal violence, perceptions of insecurity, and activities associated with drug trafficking. Complementarily, the aim was to optimise control, enforcement, and proactive arrests in the selected sectors." (INDH, 2015:15; *citing* FSCM, 2014:162). Indeed, evaluations of former programs found that they had minimal impact on crime rates, highlighting also their lack of assessment and management issues. Therefore, the central government developed a new program which allocated government funds to municipalities to address their security problems within their territory. The focus was at the neighbourhood level, involving only small areas with high rates of crime and victimisation (Frühling and Gallardo, 2012; *citing* Ministerio del Interior, 2011). In other words, instead of focusing on densely populated municipalities, limited resources were allocated to smaller areas, and crime reduction became a national priority. The selected neighbourhoods of the *Programa Barrio en Paz Residencial* (*i.e.,* the government focused on two types of urban neighbourhoods: commercial and residential which possess different characteristics concerning crime, thus needing different solutions) shared similar characteristics to those of the previous programs, such as drug trafficking and risk factors that could lead to violence and crime (Frühling and Gallardo, 2012; *citing* Ministerio del Interior, 2010). However, in Legua de Emergencia, the government designed a specific programme at the request of the municipality mayor and the local priest due to the spread of gang violence, as the neighbourhood was not included in the first selection of neighbourhoods. In 2010, the *Plan Integral Iniciativa La Legua* was created to address security issues, neighbourhood regeneration, and social and economic development (Larenas, 2021). As we will see in more detail later in the chapter, the working fields were two: police control and social prevention.

3.2.1 Policy implementation in La Legua

On the 23rd of September 2001, mass media covered the execution of what was known as the 'narco boss' by a rival gang near La Legua. For public opinion, the event seemed to highlight

the impunity enjoyed by drug traffickers in the area (Larenas *et al.*, 2018; Lin, 2020). Furthermore, the aunt of the narco vowed to avenge his death in a public television report, presenting herself as 'the queen of cocaine paste' (Cooperativa.cl, 2001). As a result, the neighbourhood gained national attention, with the media addressing the place as '*tierra de nadie*' (*i.e.,* no man's land) and '*cartel de La Legua*' (*i.e.,* La Legua cartel) (Álvarez, 2010:120). This occurrence led the then-Subsecretary of the Interior, Jorge Correa Sutil, to declare the urgent need to impose the State's authority in La Legua through police control, then meeting the heads of the *Carabineros de Chile* and the *Policía De Investigaciones* (*i.e.,* PDI) to analyse crime in the popular neighbourhood (INDH, 2015; Vial, 2017). Following a massive police raid against drug trafficking called Operation Lazaro, which lasted three days, the Ministry of the Interior launched the first intervention. At the same time, these targeted police operations were considered a government policy trying to 'clean up' communities from drugs and their market (INDH, 2015). PDI interventions have been increasing over time: from 7 in 2006, 10 in 2011, 14 in 2012, to 40 in 2013, representing an increase of 650% (INDH, 2015).

Even if the government declared an intervention for La Legua in general, it is crucial to note that almost all programs referred specifically to La Legua de Emergencia (Lin, 2020). In fact, as Larenas *et al.* (2018) state, the intervention design identified La Legua as a homogeneous territory, failing to consider differences among the three Leguas and overlooking the distinctive actors and internal social dynamics in each territory. The government considered the program a master plan for future implementation among other conflict-ridden populations around Santiago and, more broadly, at the national level (Álvarez, 2010). The initiative was backed by substantial financial resources and appeared to be planned in multiple phases, focusing on two main areas: social welfare and police control (*ibid.*, 2010). The media gave significant attention to La Legua and the public policy it implemented, even though the intervention began without delineating a clear pathway. Indeed, the program executed in the popular neighbourhood proved to be, first and foremost, a matter of law enforcement and police control (Álvarez, 2010; Vial, 2017). The situation led the residents of Legua de Emergencia to endure violence from two sources: drug traffickers, who engage in shootings over territorial control, and the police. Police control has principally involved two key activities: occasional raids and daily presence in Legua de Emergencia (Larenas *et al.,* 2018). The Carabineros had fixed positions within La Legua and were located at six different crossroads to supervise all access to Legua de Emergencia (INDH, 2015).

This state of affairs has provoked countless material consequences over time, such as discouraging taxis from entering and abuse of office (INDH, 2015). For the *pobladores*, the Chilean state's presence was, once again, felt through violence. The local perception was that the mass media did not disclose certain topics, especially negative actions committed by the police (INDH, 2015). In this context, educational and urbanistic improvements remained minimal (Vial, 2017). During the first years of the intervention in La Legua, the focus was on dismantling networks of drug traffickers, often composed of entire families. However, violence persisted.

Coinciding with the change in national government, from 2006 onwards, public authorities explained their perseverance in Legua de Emergencia by highlighting the absence of the State's monopoly on violence in this territory (Lin, 2020). Indeed, they claimed that its urban characteristics rendered it difficult to implement public policies effectively. The labyrinthine form and the encapsulation into the walls of Legua de Emergencia were understood as a key reason behind the ineffectiveness of police action and the proliferation of drug trafficking (*ibid.*, 2020). Authorities even believed underground passages existed in Legua de Emergencia, which led to raids and excavations that ended without results. However, this resulted in a police diagnosis, which saw the urban design of the territory as the principal cause of violence and insecurity in La Legua (Lin, 2020). Specific reference had been made to dead-end streets, where police vehicles had difficulties entering. The methodology employed drew on international practice in crime prevention through environmental design (Lin, 2020; *citing* Vergara, 2008).

During this time, the Ministry of the Interior and the mass media used different names to designate the intervention carried out in La Legua. The most mentioned was '*Intervención*', then they often added '*social*' to the noun. Then, they began to focus on security-related themes, leading to names such as *Plan Barrio Seguro* and *Comuna Segura* (Álvarez, 2010:122). Even the media used different names to refer to the urban policies executed in La Legua. The employment of different names also made it difficult to understand the program's objectives and political responsibilities. As Álvarez (2010) highlights, the designation was not official, and the local population interpreted the presence of the Carabineros and the Investigative Police as an intervention that many referred to as the *Plan de Intervención.* In this context, in 2010, the *poblador* Paulo Álvarez Bravo requested information from the Ministry of the Interior about the goals, governmental bodies responsible, and evaluations of the plan implemented in La Legua, specifically in Legua de Emergencia (Vial, 2017). However, the authority's response accounted

only for the social sphere of the project, never mentioning the role of the police force. Then, the Subsecretary of the Interior even denied the existence of any project related to La Legua, declaring that the *Plan de Intervención* was only a fantasy name to refer to a set of public policies implemented in the popular neighbourhood (Vial, 2017). Nonetheless, the government consistently discussed the plan implemented in the stigmatised neighbourhood publicly, presenting the area-based policy as part of Chile's political agenda (Álvarez, 2010).

In 2011, the parish priest of La Legua, Gerard Ouisse, delivered a letter to the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security (*i.e.*, Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública) denouncing the unbearable violence to which inhabitants were subjected due to narco-trafficking. He then exposed how the population lived in hiding, avoiding public spaces out of fear (Larenas *et al.*, 2018).

> "We neighbours feel powerless as we are forced to live hidden away in our homes whilst drug traffickers rule the streets and walk freely through them, weapons in hand. (...) This collective fear is tearing apart the fabric of social and community organisations, built up over decades of struggle and sacrifice. (...) While this is happening, a culture of silence has taken hold amongst authorities of all kinds, and this silence fosters a sense of abandonment and helplessness in the face of such violence. (...) You know that La Legua is full of decent people, honest workers, who are systematically stigmatised by the media. Many of us, in our daily lives, live as prisoners of the dictatorship imposed by the drug traffickers. (...) As residents, we believe we deserve the right to protection just as much, if not more, than that which is usually provided when an official comes to inaugurate a government office, always accompanied by mass media and police presence." (Ouisse, 2011:no page)

These statements attracted a media campaign that emphasised the situation of death, drug trafficking, violence, and fear in La Legua. The then-Ministry of the Interior, Rodrigo Hinzpeter, responded by declaring the neighbourhood "hypercritical" and requiring complex solutions. Indeed, the letter of the parish was sent after the change of government by which Sebastián Piñera (*i.e.*, with the centre-right *Alianza por Chile* party) became president of Chile. As a matter of fact, La Legua had not initially been selected as a targeted neighbourhood by the new security policies. In the same year, the *Plan Integral Iniciativa La Legua* (PIL) arose, initiating a new generation of neighbourhood policies in Chile (Larenas *et al.*, 2018).

3.2.2 Plan Integral Iniciativa La Legua

The new area-based policy aimed to reduce violence in La Legua and improve the quality of life of its inhabitants (Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública, 2017). However, the key dimensions remained focused on police control and social interventions, thereby conferring the name "*integral"* on the plan (Larenas *et al.*, 2018). Police control was intended to restore public order and to recover public space through short-term and targeted actions by different public agencies, hence facilitating the implementation of social programs. Instead, social interventions focused on preventing and reducing the spread of violence and insecurity in La Legua by addressing the root causes (Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública, 2017). More specifically, the social dimension comprised five main areas: (1) identity and culture; (2) rehabilitation and prevention of drug and alcohol use; (3) education; (4) social development; and (5) urban development (Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública, 2011).

The program adopted a multisectoral approach with a multilevel governance by establishing an executive committee that included representatives from the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security (MISP), the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism (MINVU), the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), the Ministry of Social Development (MDS) and the Ministry of Labour (MINTRAB). Moreover, the Council of Social Organisation (COS) represented the territorial, functional, and community organisations within La Legua, with participation from different departments of the Municipality of San Joaquin (Larenas *et al.*, 2018). This was the first time in Chile that a public intervention formalised such a high level of collaboration among public and private actors (*ibid*, 2018).

The urban development included four dimensions: (i) connectivity, by the opening of new streets and dead-end passages; (2) new social housing solutions; (3) urban and community infrastructure; and (4) soil-related regulatory measures (Larenas, 2021). In 2015, the government, backed by the MINVU, planned to build 244 social housing units destined for families of the three Leguas, organised by Housing Committees. Social housing access is regulated by national *Decree 49* to guarantee the provision of housing for families that belong to the 40% most vulnerable groups in Chile (Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, 2012). However, housing access is mediated by the creation of organised families committees and is subsidised by the MINVU. The price of the house consists of: (i) the amount of the subsidy; (ii) the applicants' savings; and (iii) any additional private and/or

public contributions (*ibid.,* 2012). The house must be occupied only by the subsidy's beneficiary, at least for five years (Chamorro, 2015). The social housing complexes in La Legua were named *Jardines de San Joaquin.* The project was made possible by expropriating land from the *Embotelladora Andina* (*i.e.,* Coca-Cola) located on the northern edge of Legua de Emergencia, and by opening a new street called *Mataveri* (Muñoz, 2021; see *Figure 3*).

Figure 3. The north part of La Legua de Emergencia after the urban transformations (*i.e.*, IT1 and IT2 show the opening of streets and passages; IT3 the opening of Legua de Emergencia passages; IT4 the expropriation of industrial land) (*source*: Fondecyt N°1201488, with author's modifications).

During the presentation ceremony for the new social housing, the metropolitan mayor, Claudio Orrego, presented the project as an integral approach to address the historical debts owed to the inhabitants of Legua de Emergencia, highlighting the extensive participation of the residents (Constructora Oval, 2015). In 2018, after the relocation of neighbours in Villa Los Jardines, the Ministry of the Interior and the then-Chilean president Sebastián Piñera implemented the '*La Legua Sin Muros'* program (*i.e.,* La Legua without walls), aiming to demolish the walls that separated Legua de Emergencia from the rest of the city and the new street Mataveri, where the new social housing was located (see *Figure 3*). As the president stated during the collapse of the first wall ceremony,

> "[…] We are not only tearing down the physical walls, but we are also beginning to tear down the walls of poverty, segregation, and stigmatisation. Walls that, for so long, have affected the quality of life of the inhabitants of La Legua. I am fully aware that La Legua is a *población* where Chilean families live. And Chilean families all want the same thing. For that reason, in addition to tearing down these walls, which means integrating La Legua with the rest of the city, we are going to install a unit of the community investigation police, with specialised personnel, social workers and psychologists, so that they can integrate with the people and help this community to progress" (24 Horas -TVN Chile, 2018).

However, the new neighbours of *Villa Los Jardines* (composed of former residents of Legua de Emergencia) tried to oppose the demolition of the northern walls of Legua de Emergencia with several protests. They felt vulnerable and feared the shootings that occurred in the neighbourhood, as their houses were located opposite the streets where the clashes usually took place (Muñoz, 2021). Indeed, the walls directly protected them from the shootings. Therefore, the government had to arm the new dwellings and departments to prevent crazy bullets. The mass media manipulated this controversy to distort reality, implying that the walls represented a long-standing division between La Legua and Villa Los Jardines II (*ibid.*, 2021). Indeed, Villa Los Jardines II was presented to the public as a fourth territory within La Legua's borders (Lin, 2020). Thus, they interpreted the situation as a clear example of stigmatisation towards La Legua's inhabitants without explaining that all the residents came from the same neighbourhood, as they were families who had gained access to social housing.

The program implemented within the territory under study has primarily focused on physical interventions and police control, thus downplaying the other dimensions and rendering the multidimensionality of the territorial intervention only an aspiration (Larenas *et al.,* 2018). These public policies have often addressed the problems rather than intervening on the roots that had generated the context of drug trafficking, violence, and segregation in the first place (Álvarez*,* 2010; Larenas *et al.,* 2018). The focus on territories has often diverted attention from the structural and institutional issues underlying those places, such as historical, economic, and political interpretations and responsibilities (Slater and Anderson, 2012; Loyd and Bonds, 2018). In this way, the urban space becomes the object of intervention, as if the spatial dimension were the fundamental problem rather than the spatiality of socio-political issues (Sisson, 2021). Similarly, most programs in La Legua had a contingency character, as they responded to emergencies by

attempting to mitigate social problems without addressing their structural causes (Larenas *et al.*, 2018).

3.3 Territorial stigmatisation in La Legua

Over time, the long-standing stigma attached to La Legua and its residents has changed. From being described as a place inhabited by delinquents and leftists, the neighbourhood gained popularity for the violence generated by drug traffickers over their land struggles in the 1990s. Since 2001, most television channels have produced at least one report on La Legua, intending to reveal how residents could live in a place governed by violence (Álvarez*,* 2010). The territory, specifically Legua de Emergencia, has been utilised by the government to bolster coercive measures since authorities have prioritised security policies. As President Ricardo Lagos stated during a discourse in 2002, the intervention aimed to:

> "Invest heavily in those neighbourhoods where crime and drug trafficking threaten to take over streets and squares. We are starting with the hardest part, Legua de Emergencia. Together with the Municipality of San Joaquín, we will continue to help this population get back on their feet, so that they're never stigmatised again, and its residents never again feel ashamed about saying they are from La Legua. I do not want any Chilean to feel uncomfortable sharing where they live, as is happening today. If we do this right, we will all be proud of the place we call home." (Ganter, 2016:289; *citing* Ricardo Lagos' discourse in 2002)

On the one hand, the use of specific phrases (such as "crime and drug trafficking threaten to take over" and "the hardest part") produces a language of emergency that frames La Legua as an exceptional territory in need of special solutions. On the other hand, while the political discourse explicitly embraces a de-stigmatisation narrative, it continues to reproduce the long-standing territorial stigma towards the neighbourhood. The expression "get back on their feet" followed by "they're never stigmatised again" subtly implies the population's responsibility for the situation of violence in their place of residence. Moreover, the use of adjectives such as "critical", "hypercritical", and "emblematic" in institutional narratives and documents has only worsened the blemish attached to La Legua. With the term "hypercritical", the Ministry of Interior and Public Security defines a place "where drug trafficking and high levels of violence and/or fear severely

affect the daily activities of residents or people who frequent these areas" (MISP, 2010:58). Therefore,

> "The State itself has also been responsible for this discrimination, by categorising La Legua as the pilot 'critical neighbourhood' for the first security policies, when the country did not yet have the experience to design policies in this area and was not yet training professionals to intervene in these contexts, an aspect that is essential considering the vulnerability of the environment, which could affect their relationship with the inhabitants and even their own physical and mental health. Hence, residents perceive that they have been the subject of trial and error, or of public policies that do not dialogue with each other" (INDH, 2015:55).

The neighbourhood of La Legua has thus become a label for the best-known conflictive *población* in Santiago and Chile. The name of the neighbourhood has been overused and overexposed over time. Indeed,

> "There were even questions during the presidential elections that were directed not only at the country and the issue of security, but also to how to solve the problem of La Legua." (C-U1).

As a result, the perception is that La Legua, with all its history, shortcomings and social problems, has always suffered a strategic exploitation by a wide range of political actors. At the local level, this has produced an internalisation of stigma or, at least, a preconceived idea of how people might perceive them. In the words of a resident,

> "As a brand, La Legua had negative connotations, so there was no reason for the boys and girls to feel proud when referring to their place of origin; that didn't exist. On the contrary, they tried to hide it... I understand it very well because I was raised that way. My mum always told me that I had to say I wasn't from La Legua, and my grandmother said the same thing: don't say you're from La Legua because it can cause you problems... Because if someone steals something, they might blame you... And there are specific cases, like specific cases of people who, in job interviews, have been denied the job because they are from here... These are things that still happen today" (C-R7)

The constant presence of the police in La Legua has only reinforced the neighbourhood's negative reputation. Indeed, since the beginning of state interventions, media reports have

predominantly focused on repressive operations, neglecting to contextualise their scope or the concrete effects of the area-based policies. Even when positive narratives emerge, they are often perceived as anomalies in a context implicitly depicted as irremediably compromised (Lin, 2020). In this framework, stigma functions as a mechanism of fictitious spatial causality, explaining all forms of violence to territorial belonging and contributing to the continuous redefinition of its social and material boundaries (Lin, 2020). Moreover, the use of territorial stigma has contributed to justifying public interventions while increasing the marginalisation of the area. Indeed, the negative perception of the popular neighbourhood has been used to highlight the actions carried out by the government and validate aggressive policies. La Legua is not discussed in positive terms, emphasising concepts such as drug-trafficking, violence, and raids. Thus, these narratives have not contributed to a radical shift in how this place was perceived, but they have only served the political interventions' objectives. As one of the residents underlines, mass media have a great role in perpetuating this situation, creating hostility and reticence towards those who want to enter and narrate life in the territory. Indeed, an inhabitant recounts having been interviewed by the television during a social and community activity implemented in the neighbourhood and when he saw the spot:

> "I heard my voice, and suddenly they started showing images of shootings, of police operations from long ago. In this way, they cause harm to the neighbour, because afterwards they leave and you're the one who stays here, you're the one who crosses La Legua or walks... And, based on that, I don't talk to the press. We're tired of this situation." (C-R8)

As a consequence, those circumstances only intensify feelings of exhaustion and distrust, as they feel that "people are not interested in positive aspects of this community, they are only interested in morbid curiosity" (C-R8).

Although the *Iniciativa Integral La Legua* (2011) was presented as an integrated program, it replicated historical trends in urban intervention and security (Larenas *et al.*, 2018). At the local level, this situation results in a constant perception of police intervention, without a coherent and definite line of the various public policies implemented in the area. Residents felt constantly "intervened upon", as if the violence perpetrated during the military dictatorship had never completely ended. For them, the police are the most present institutional actor in La Legua de Emergencia, given that almost all police interventions were directed towards this section of the

neighbourhood. Furthermore, over time, La Legua, especially Legua de Emergencia, has been repeatedly described by public interventors as an urban labyrinth, a place to *"*see disorder where there is none", thus presenting "more a stigma than a reality" (Lin, 2012:121). The institutional focus on the physical elements led the stigma to become autonomous in its reproduction (Lin, 2020), without changing the underlying roots of poverty and violence in the neighbourhood. Thus, all the public policies implemented are viewed as disastrous, as it is emphasised by a resident in the following extract:

> "The police are part of the failure of everything in La Legua... Everything that has been added to La Legua has been a failure... Considering how La Legua is now... With everything they've done, with everything that's been invested, we should say: hey, we got out of that, how good we are... No. So, all of that is a failure." (C-R8)

Indeed, the criminalisation of residents attached to the repression and police control violated residents' fundamental rights, increasing inhabitants' perception of stigma and alienation from society and the State (Álvarez, 2010). Indeed, at the local level, police repression has been for the dwellers the only testimony of the State's presence in La Legua (Póo, 2014). Between 2006 and 2016, La Legua Human Rights Committee (*i.e.,* Comité DDHH La Legua) received a total of thirty-six reports of violence from residents of Legua de Emergencia, displaying a pattern of police aggressive practices (Vial, 2017). At the local level, the intervention is perceived as a form of control over inhabitants. Police practices demonstrated to be filled with stigmatisation and gave the feeling of being designed for ordinary citizens and not for drug trafficker networks, only seen as a justification for their presence in the territory. Residents perceived:

> "They put us through an aggressive intervention where they controlled you on every corner. We were a militarised population with the police doing whatever they wanted… The issue of mockery, the problem of detaining you for as long as they wished, on a corner for 15/20 minutes, and if they wanted to keep you for an hour, they kept you… Asking you stupid questions. So, they tried to belittle you, telling you: you are nothing… But we did prove that we were something, because we also fought back against the intervention" (C-R9).

At the local level, the different area-based policies implemented in the urban area over time are perceived as an endless intervention. Police violence obscured any punctual physical or social intervention carried out, engraving in residents' memories the violence experienced in their bodies and daily lives. Public policies have not improved the stigmatisation attached to La Legua; in fact, they have used it to justify their aggressive interventions. The analysis suggests that broader political concerns have been articulated through La Legua, positioning the popular neighbourhood at the centre of long-standing stigmatisation processes. This resulted in the perpetuation of social vulnerability and marginalisation, which has enabled stigmatising practices. Thus, symbolic politics has materialised in arbitrary decisions and police repression.

Nowadays, the territorial stigma attached to La Legua is perceived in a less aggressive manner than in the past due to the aggravation of drug-trafficking and violence in other *poblaciones* in Santiago. The checkpoints are no longer continuously and permanently present in La Legua de Emergencia. However, when crime occurs in surrounding areas, it is often mentioned as if the negative event had occurred within La Legua (Muñoz, 2021), perpetuating and exploiting territorial stigmatisation for clickbait. The question that emerges is "how could this place, which is most often cited as an example of insecurity, crime, violence and drug-trafficking, have disappeared from political discussions and mainstream media?" (C-U1). The empirical data support the idea that La Legua is strategically utilised for political ends, reactivating the stigmatisation to justify specific urban interventions. In the interviews, it transpires that the role of mainstream media and the political focus are towards the reproduction of marginality and violence in other urban environments. However, this situation hinders the vulnerability and social problems still present in the neighbourhood.

3.4 Symbolic politics and governance practices

The institutional focus on security policies implemented to address the issue of drug trafficking in La Legua has not produced the desired outcome. At the local level, they have resulted in police corruption and the loss of institutional legitimacy. Indeed,

> "The first police officers who arrived here, stationed at a checkpoint, were corrupted immediately (…) They were on the corner, so what were they doing? They weren't protecting ordinary residents; they were protecting traffickers." (C-R5)

Thus, security policies have been interpreted as an exercise of power rather than a form of protection. For residents, drug-trafficking has increased with police presence, designating a linear sequence: "the more *pacos* (*i.e.,* a Chilean slang to define police officers), the more drug trafficking, the more crime" (Del Campo, 2021). During the interviews, it has emerged the profound distrust in law enforcement measures and the perception of security as a ritual emptied of its meaning, enhanced by the ambiguity of public interventions at the local level. As a result, two major feelings have arisen due to this militarised environment: fear and hatred. In fact, these two different aspects have evolved as younger generations appear to despise police officers. According to an interviewee,

> "Things have changed in younger generations. The feeling of popular neighbourhoods towards *pacos* is more hate than fear, which isn't good either, but it is better than fear. Ultimately, hatred mobilises you; while fear paralyses you. I talk with friends, neighbours, and it's hard to find positive aspects… It's hard. They've always treated us badly here." (C-R7).

Therefore, at the local level, security-oriented policies have been translated into police corruption, stigmatising police practices and the perception of a militarised space. Territorial stigmatisation appears to enable this differential treatment and the implementation of policies. These forms of symbolic violence are not only limited to security policies, but they can also be found in the urban dimension of the public policies implemented in Legua de Emergencia. For instance, in the first years of the intervention, some urban changes were made, such as the construction of grass verges. In fact, they were constructed during the municipal government of Farías (2000-2004) and were received as a great manifestation of the stigmatisation attached to their neighbourhood. In the words of a respondent,

> "His biggest intervention was to develop grass verges. And that was a joke and an insult to the community because they built these little bowls to plant trees in, and they painted the cement structure

> green by simulating grass… And that was a crucial factor in people saying: ok, enough is enough. We're poor, but don't contribute to this marginalisation they already have." (C-P1)

Here, urban interventions appear to mask structural inequality, further enhancing a sense of marginalisation and abandonment. Almost all residents described this urban transformation as stigmatisation, interpreting it as "a mockery of residents" (C-R10). More importantly, as the next symbolic politics will also show, it can be inferred that the public policies implemented in La Legua did not have a point of contact with the local community. They were not involved in residents' needs and the roots of the social malaise. Instead, they have been imposed from above, in a top-down process.

Another example of the distance between institutions and the community represents the implementation of *La Legua Sin Muros* in 2018. The president Piñera attended the ceremony, followed by the press. As mentioned above, the plan aimed to tear down the walls surrounding the northern part of Legua de Emergencia, which would finally result in its "integration" (24 Horas - TVN Chile, 2018). The symbolic ceremony took place early in the morning with a great press entourage and no residents, since no one had been notified. This was perceived as the principal way the government interacts with La Legua's residents, which is "to be in the community but not see anyone" (C-U1). Therefore,

> "(…) rendering inhabitants invisible who might share a gesture, a decision, that comes from the top down. Consequently, it had little audience, both in how it is thought and felt, how it is executed, and how it is projected. We continue, therefore, to live under the definitions that the impositions of power have established for us… And this is an example." (C-U1)

Furthermore, the collapse of the physical walls was considered a fundamental step for achieving social integration, as it is suggested by the comparison with "the walls of poverty, segregation, and stigmatisation" that are believed to fall with them (24 Horas - TVN Chile, 2018), thereby linking the physical environment to the structural conditions of social inequality. As a result, the persistence of marginality and violence in Legua de Emergencia is supposed to serve framing the various symbolic politics by some residents. Indeed, as one respondent declares,

> "It serves their purpose to keep the concept of emergency latent. I've always said that the emergency will end when the Legua de Emergencia ends, because it makes no sense to have an emergency for 70 years. So, it was never a real emergency; they never wanted to address it. Some people have made a living off the name of La Legua de Emergencia. Some undersecretaries have built their careers talking about the *población.* Every president has come through here sooner or later..." (C-R11)

Here, the emergency concerning Legua de Emergencia refers to the historical housing solution, which was not intended to be inhabited for such a long time. Indeed, the houses in this section of the neighbourhood are overcrowded and share structural problems concerning the material degradation and the sewage system. The initial transitory nature of Legua de Emergencia houses has been transformed into an emergency that has been used to frame different area-based policies. *Figure 3* displays a passage of Legua de Emergencia, opened in 2018, and the houses.

Figure 3. A passage of Legua de Emergencia (*source*: author's picture, 2025)

However, within the *Plan Integral Iniciativa Legua,* there were some urbanistic improvements. Most of these transformations occurred within Legua Nueva, as it is considered the centre of La Legua. Indeed, it possesses the main services and urban life (Larenas, 2021). More in

detail, the physical developments implemented during this program were framed under the governmental program of *Programa de Recuperación de Barrio* (also known as "*Quiero Mi Barrio*"), led by the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security and the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism (MINVU, 2013; MiParque.cl, 2014). It aimed to improve and revitalise public and collective spaces by tackling their physical deterioration (MINVU, 2013). As a result, the project involves: (i) the repaving and improvement of 30,000 m² of street with the remodelling of sidewalks and cycle paths, as the principal avenue Jorge Canning ; (ii) the enhancement of green spaces and the Salvador Allende square; (iii) the improvement of public lighting (MINVU, 2013; MiParque.cl, 2014). In addition, in 2013, the *BancoEstado*'s opening in the territory was considered a symbolic measure, representing that "the State of Chile can also reach this population" (C-P1). The *Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública* carried out this initiative, along with the Municipality of San Joaquín, different government ministries, the private sectors, and NGOs. During its inauguration, the then municipal mayor, Sergio Echeverría, spoke:

> "In a *población* that has been so stigmatised, the opening of this bank branch comes to change that perception and transform the identity of this community, because ultimately it means that there are people in La Legua who work hard, who are honest, and who want to start their own business." (24 Horas, 2013)

In the BancoEstado online history, the institution's social role is still remembered, highlighting the opening day as an historical milestone for the "emblemática población" (BancoEstado Corporativo website). At the same time, the text mobilises existing forms of territorial stigmatisation while proposing a de-stigmatisation narrative. Indeed, it describes the popular neighbourhood as a place torn by drug trafficking and crime, but with people seeking out a better future. Finally, the BancoEstado proceeds to exhibit that, from 2013 onwards, they have been carrying on an expansion plan throughout Chile. In this sense, La Legua seems to operate as a symbolic site through which different institutions can build and legitimise their narratives and/or actions to reinforce their role. However, at the local level, the bank was received with great surprise. A hint of pride can be noted in the following extract:

> "We have a bank. Which *población* has a bank? We, as a Legua, have a bank…" (C-R4)

For the inhabitants, the bank represented a step against the marginalisation experienced. But still, the initial thought was of fear that it could not last, given the possibility of being robbed. The interviews reveal the existence of subtle forms of disbelief in other residents' proper conduct within the community itself.

3.4.1 Municipal governance practices during the Plan Iniciativa Legua

As we have seen, the *Plan Iniciativa La Legua* initiated a new wave of financial investments in the area, involving various dimensions and actors. The Municipality of San Joaquìn positioned itself at the intersection between various national agencies and the local neighbourhood. One of the political actors interviewed, who worked for the municipality during those years, recounts the difficulties in creating trust among the community.

> "It was really tough at first to get into the neighbourhood, because there was a diffuse mistrust produced by the last authorities' interventions. People would say: No, here they come again … It's like everybody knew that La Legua was a brand and that this brand generated income for various projects, but that, in reality, none of them reached the communities." (C-P1)

La Legua, as a *brand* at the disposal of public policy and political interests, has generated distrust in residents, already exacerbated by the police presence in the neighbourhood. This situation was overcome using two different strategies: (i) generating connections with different key community actors (such as the local church and territorial organisations); and (ii) speeding up the implementation of the diverse projects to generate trust by showing the physical results. However, at the municipal level, the stigmatisation attached to La Legua has served to frame the interventions into a broader dynamic that could ultimately emphasise their actions and could be translated into good local practices to be exported to other neighbourhoods. In other words,

> "I think it had a positive effect, because we always framed it strategically as follows: if we managed to do good things in La Legua, this would serve as a model to be replicated in other municipalities facing similar problems. So, of course, we tried to turn the negative stigma into a positive one… I mean, if it is possible to carry out an intervention here, then it is possible to do it in the rest of the country" (C-P1).

The extract suggests that La Legua is seen as a testing ground through which interventions acquire symbolic meaning and value. Stigma is therefore instrumentalised and mobilised within public policies, becoming an important dimension for interventions' design, justification and communication. Indeed, from the beginning (*i.e.,* 2011),

> "When the priest Ouisse sent the letter to the authorities of the time - Minister Hinzpeter and the President Sebastián Piñera - this was the starting point. So, we got involved. We said: let us form a strategic alliance with the Church… Both the mayor and the priest said: this is the way forward, let's make the most of it... And that's when we established the need to carry out an intervention because, in Chile at that time, there were maybe a million people living in *barrios críticos*, and the symbol of these *barrios críticos* was La Legua." (C-P1).

As Marelli (2019) highlights, local associations can temporarily use and accept territorial stigmatisation to obtain public funding. Indeed, specific political instruments, such as the area-based method, make stigmatised territories financially competitive for their negative characteristics and social problems. In this way, place stigma is instrumentalised to support work in those areas (*ibid.*, 2019).

The political symbol of La Legua also impacted the discursive frame of local authorities directed at the community. The fact that La Legua is homogenised in public and institutional representations was presented as a way to join forces to overcome its long-standing stigmatisation.

> "We knew that La Legua Emergencia was the heart of the matter, but this also had an impact on La Legua Vieja and La Legua Nueva… And that's why we brought all the organisations together to tell them, look, this time we need to generate a benefit that doesn't only reach the Emergencia, but that…Because of the stigma that you recount, or that everyone raises, they don't ask you: In which Legua do you live? Because living in the Emergencia, in the Nueva and in the Vieja is different…" (C-P1)

In fact, despite internal boundaries, the public opinion does not differentiate among the diverse inhabitants of La Legua, merging the community of La Legua Vieja and Nueva with La Legua de

Emergencia. As the following paragraph displays, the public focus on La Legua has enhanced internal differentiations and visions in the *población.*

3.5 Competing narratives and visions of La Legua

The boundaries of La Legua lie at a critical junction in the production of spatial representations, marked by a double tension between external discourses and internal dynamics (Lin, 2020). Indeed, symbolic politics produced by the media and institutional actors tend to blur the boundaries between La Legua de Emergencia and its surrounding areas, assimilating the entire territory to a stigmatised population. This generalisation contributes to an indistinct and simplified representation of the area. Within the community, efforts are observed to precisely circumscribe the margins of Legua de Emergencia to contain and localise the stigma through practices of territorial distinction (Lin, 2020). Indeed, the stigma towards La Legua de Emergencia can be seen in implicit forms of talking. When people from Legua Vieja and Legua Nueva need to walk to Legua Emergencia, they state '*ir pa' abajo*', namely 'to go down there'. In contrast, *'ir pa' arriba'* – to go up there - is a phrase used to move to the other Leguas from Legua de Emergencia. These idioms do not carry a geographical meaning, as one resident recounts:

> "It doesn't make sense geographically; it's a cultural thing... It's because the residents of Legua de Emergencia feel inferior to everyone else. And that has to do with stigma... And that's how it is. The residents of Legua de Emergencia... Within La Legua itself, they have also been stigmatised. It's something else architecturally... Culturally..." (C-R7)

Those can be considered cultural phrases that display the internal stigmatisation experienced within the area. The interviews reveal personal stories that highlight these cultural differences through accounts of childhood experiences, such as parents' warnings not to play with children from La Legua de Emergencia or gather in the other neighbourhoods, and differences in games. In fact, while there is a general preconceived notion that positions popular neighbourhoods at the bottom of the social ladder, within the internal borders of La Legua, it is possible to further identify Legua de Emergencia as another degree below this hierarchy. At the local level, it often embodies all the stigmatising representations and narratives produced. As a result, the strategies applied by inhabitants are to symbolically delimit the area carrying the name La Legua or to try to differentiate

the neighbourhood's relationships to distance themselves from the stigma they experienced. As can be observed in the following extract, the interviewee grew up thinking the other parts of La Legua were different neighbourhoods. In his words,

> "In fact, when I grew up, I began to realise that they had three different names and that that place was also La Legua. I was always taught that where I lived was La Legua, but that beyond that it was not La Legua." (C-R6)

These elements may suggest that, although the stigma affects the entire area, it is often stratified within it, often unconsciously, creating symbolic hierarchies between neighbourhood sectors. In this sense, La Legua is not only subject to stigmatisation from the outside but also reproduces dynamics within that make La Legua de Emergencia the most symbolically vulnerable place. However, territorial stigmatisation can occasionally be used to the advantage of its residents. In some interviews, it emerges that going to other *poblaciones* and saying you are from La Legua is like displaying a mark of danger, which commands immediate respect.

Moreover, these social dynamics impact people's perception of their space and their personal condition. Residents of Legua de Emergencia perceive their environment as more difficult and stigmatised, while inhabitants of Legua Nueva tend to present a more positive narrative, emphasising the changes that have happened over time. However, a new hidden marginalisation linked to the Legua Vieja sector is spreading throughout the neighbourhood, where the large houses are divided internally and sublet to migrants.

At the same time, despite internal stigmatisation, there is a strong recognition of the family ties that exist among Legüinos (INDH, 2015). In the interviews, it is possible to glimpse a social "backbone" that holds the neighbourhood together even in the most critical moments, especially in Legua Nueva. Some residents show a willingness to protect and to understand the difficulties of their neighbours, even when the dominant stigmatising discourse tends to reduce everything to violence and drug trafficking. It is in this space that grassroots organisations produce counter-narratives that seek to re-signify La Legua as a place of solidarity, historical struggle, and pride. This is a form of resistance that, despite its fragility and tensions, constructs an alternative way of narrating the neighbourhood to showcase the community's diversity, in contrast to a generalised

stigmatising vision. This is often achieved through the protection among neighbours, as clearly explained in the following extract:

> "In La Legua, nobody knows anything, nobody hands anyone over… Let it be the conduct that they proposed to us…They came, they killed, they beat, and we defended ourselves, and we still defend ourselves with silence." (C-R9)

Different ways of representing the neighbourhood emerge, showing how beauty is also present in their place and the pride residents take in their historical roots.

The analysis suggests that the violence perpetrated in La Legua Emergencia has had consequences for the surrounding *poblaciones*, thereby increasing the local marginalisation and stigmatisation. For a resident of Legua de Emergencia, the shootings are part of the problem. Indeed,

> "If you were to ask the neighbours in the area, they would agree that we should get everyone from La Legua out of here (...) When they fire shots into the air, the bullets are bound to come down at some point… So, there are complaints from other neighbourhoods… So, there's always that perception of La Legua that never changes…" (C-R8)

When the government decided to tear down the walls of La Legua Emergencia and open the Mataveri street, the surrounding *poblaciones*, with similar socio-economic conditions, opposed the attempt to connect the popular neighbourhood to their territories. At the municipal level, the great focus on La Legua has also created local conflicts. Indeed, the Municipality had to create two distinct *Comité de Allegados*, committees to obtain access to social housing solutions composed of organised families, one for La Legua and one for the rest of the local neighbourhoods. Indeed, the surrounding neighbours did not want to move to social housing where people from La Legua were relocated. Indeed,

> "Because the municipal residents used to say: I want to go to live somewhere, but I don't want the people from La Legua to come there. And that was an issue. And it was an issue for La Legua's residents themselves, because they would say: Why do we have to live only amongst ourselves?" (C-P1)

Therefore, it can be inferred that territorial stigmatisation is also stratified at the local level, provoking the long-standing feeling of marginalisation that La Legua's residents experienced. As the next paragraphs outline, drug trafficking networks are a central actor in influencing this situation.

3.5.1 Drug-trafficking networks

The drug-trafficking network is an important actor in area-based policies, the interrelated symbolic politics and community practices. Regarding urban policies, it reconfigures the State's actions within the local environment, especially in Legua de Emergencia. Indeed, the drug trafficker serves as the figure around which area-based policies are articulated, influencing the institutional vision of La Legua in general and the actual practices in Legua de Emergencia. This, in turn, allows for the reproduction of territorial stigmatisation. The general distrust of the State towards residents can be inferred by a phrase of the then prosecutor Alejandro Peña in 2006, during a television report, that displays both the stigmatisation attached to La Legua and the reason behind police interventions. He said: "out of every thousand people in La Legua, 900 sell, whilst the rest store it" (Escobar, 2010:83), thus making explicit the logic behind their widely presence in the territory and their violent practices.

At the local level, the presence of drug trafficking networks has activated distrust systems not only towards outsiders entering the territory, but also among residents themselves (Ganter, 2016). On the other hand, drug trafficking has generated economic profits in a territory marked by poverty. Indeed, as one of the interviewees states, recounting the entrance of narcotrafficking:

> "At some point, the drug trade takes hold, and those people, desperate to save their own skins, start getting involved… And that's when the mess really hits the neighbourhood, and the drug spots start popping up, where people's lives are clearly turned upside down… I mean, a neighbour who's picking up the rotten tomatoes on a Sunday, and by next week they're running a drug spot (...) We don't condemn our neighbours either, because you have to be hungry, you have to be cold, you have to be penniless, you have to hear the little kids crying with hunger before you realise what's best for you… So, consequently, they got involved, and ultimately, it's all about survival." (C-R11)

However, by generating a micro-economy, some residents of Legua de Emergencia believe that the community's way of thinking and practices has changed. The fear of crossfire has discouraged the use of public spaces and socialisation, also enhanced by police practices of violence. Therefore,

> "The widespread market of drugs has led to a significant deterioration in human relationships, a loss of trust in neighbours and within the neighbourhood, and a sort of breakdown of the community". (C-P1)

Their presence has diminished community ties and grassroots organisation, especially in Legua de Emergencia. The RED OLE is a clear example. In 2001, the *Red de Organizaciones de La Legua de Emergencia* was created by clustering different religious, cultural, recreational and social grassroots organisations (Álvarez, 2010). It aimed to reoccupy the public space through various initiatives for young people and children, contesting the presence of drug trafficking and the police (Ganter, 2007). The organisational objectives were to receive public funds to direct towards La Legua de Emergencia. However, around 2007, the organisation dissolved due to the "initially covert and later violent campaign by residents linked to drug trafficking" (Álvarez, 2010:126). Indeed, participants of the RED OLE were believed to be covert informants for governmental institutions. As a result, some of them were even forced to leave La Legua (*ibid.*, 2010). However, this was not the last attempt to organise local organisations, as the next paragraph outlines.

3.5.2 Local organisations

According to interviews and fieldwork, local organisations in La Legua can be divided into territorial, political and functional groups. Territorial organisations are represented by the *Junta de Vecinos* (*i.e.*, Neighbourhood Council), which operates in the three Leguas. Political organisations are few and currently have little presence in the territory, mostly located in Legua Nueva. Then, there are numerous functional organisations, many of which are geared towards children and teenagers, offering sports, cultural and recreational activities. Within this social environment, functional organisations can be further divided into two groups: on the one hand, autonomous organisations, which choose not to have ties with the government's institutions and, consequently, their funding; on the other hand, those groups more open to dialogue with the State, and in particular with the Municipality, which is the intermediary between national institution and

the neighbourhood level. Nowadays, local organisations appear disjointed and fragmented. Two different levels of conflict have contributed to the current situation.

During the implementation of the *Plan Integral Iniciativa Legua*, the focus was turned to social organisations. As mentioned above, the *Consejo de Organizaciones Sociales* (COS), which consisted of territorial, functional, and community organisations, was created to promote and support their territorial community work. Economic resources, often fragmented and scarce, were distributed amongst organisations through project-based funding. As a result, internal divisions have emerged among organisations that were open to working with the municipality over the distribution of scarce economic resources. According to the fieldwork, the competition for public funds has generated internal conflicts and rivalries by focusing exclusively on the allocation and division of financial resources. The distribution mechanism was intended as a democratic exercise of voting, with the municipal preference for projects that would operate daily on the territory. However, without clear guidelines and continuity, this has led to only short-term, utilitarian alliances that have ultimately undermined community ties. In the words of one interviewee, this was the last local initiative to act collectively:

> "There were about 100 organisations there. I participated, but I stopped participating because all they talked about was money distribution. It has no soul. First, let's define common projects, and then we'll see what's needed for those projects, (…) But no, what they did was only to distribute the money. And in those divisions, of course, those who ended up with less or no money were going to complain. Others simply marginalised themselves because they observed this situation. And I think that was the last major organisational fracture in the community… Some people ended up hating each other." (C-R9)

Furthermore, while a segment of La Legua's local organisations have actively participated in the Council of Social and Cultural Organisations, another sector has harshly criticised the government's plan and all those involved in it (INDH, 2015). Autonomous organisations assert their independence in the name of the freedom to collectively create what they desire, without being administered or funded by the state. Political organisations, such as the Communist Party, believe that the social policies implemented in La Legua were only "bread and circuses for the organisations" that bring nothing concrete for future development. Indeed, there is a widespread belief that there is no political desire to invest in a community that has been heavily stigmatised

and marginalised over its history. Most importantly, these groups defend their freedom of criticism, without any commitment that might limit it. As one interviewee states:

> "It would be quite illogical to say, hey, the State violates us, but nevertheless, it funds us." (C-R11)

The State violence perpetrated in La Legua has been intended as a mechanism for disciplining and conforming social identities, while utilising territorial stigmatisation for implementing security policies. Indeed, for many autonomous organisations, the interventions implemented in La Legua have only aimed to modify "our practices, our languages and lead us to an apparent state of normality that we supposedly lack. A process that, ultimately and fundamentally, considers our ways of life unacceptable and undesirable" (Fisura, La Legua Interpretation Centre, website's presentation). These accounts suggest that area-based interventions in La Legua have been experienced, at the local level, as attempts to normalise the stigmatised population as a condition for its inclusion. Instead of reducing territorial stigmatisation, those government practices have seemed to reinforce symbolic boundaries between what are considered acceptable forms of city life.

Chapter Four

BARRIO PADRE CARLOS MUGICA

Until a few years ago, the *Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica* was widely known as *Villa 31-31 bis*. The ex-*Villa 31* is the most ancient shantytown in the Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (CABA), as its history dates back to 1930. At that time, informality was still a phenomenon of limited size and temporary nature due to lenient land-use legislation, easy access to soil on the city's outskirts, and social upward mobility (Van Gelder *et al*., 2016; *citing* Torres, 1975). Nowadays, more than 45.000 residents live in Barrio Mugica. As *Figure 1* displays, the low-income neighbourhood currently holds a privileged position, as it is located near the Recoleta district, one of the most valuable areas of the city. Indeed, Barrio Mugica is within walking distance of the Puerto Madero financial centre and the national president's office (*i.e.,* Casa Rosada). Moreover, the Illia highway, which reaches the famous Avenida 9 de Julio and the Obelisk, crosses the urban settlement, making the shantytown the first thing people notice when entering the capital of Argentina. Therefore, its central location is one of the reasons for the greater socio-political interest compared to other shantytowns disseminated around the city. Over time, mass media have addressed the low-income settlements as "the poverty that is impossible to hide in the centre of Buenos Aires" (El País, 2016) and the "most symbolic *villa miseria*" (BBC, 2019), among other characterisations.

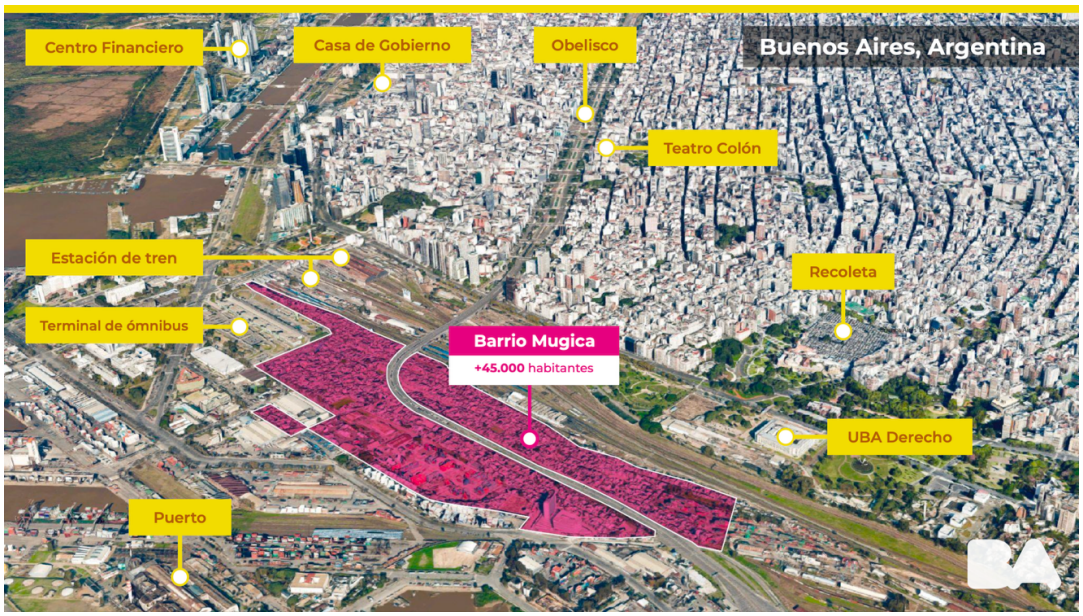

Figure 1. Barrio Mugica position (*source:* BA Integración, 2024)

Since the 1950s, *villas miserias* have become a widespread reality in the city. The term referred to the general occupation of vacant and often public land by the poorest segment of society, violating governmental regulations (Van Gelder *et al*., 2016). The addition of the adjective *miseria* near the noun *villa* invokes the most forgotten and vulnerable strata of society in the urban imaginary (Codebò, 2020). Their urban design was highly irregular and dense due to their expansion process; indeed, people built their dwellings one next to the other or in the spaces available (Van Gelder *et al*., 2016).

As stated by Auyero (2000), *villas miserias* have been, and in some respects continue to be, the "repository of so many (mis)representations, of so many hopes in the past, and so many fears in the present" (p.102) and the site of social and political activism. Firstly, during the 1950s, shantytowns were depicted as evident illustrations of Peronist failure, while later, in the 1960s, they were considered places in need of redevelopment (*ibid.,* 2000). During the 1970s, *villas miserias* were seen as the epicentres of revolution, while, during the authoritarianism of the 1980s, they were portrayed as impediments to economic and social progress. In the last decade of the 21st century, shantytowns were considered impenetrable crime zones and no-go areas to be feared (Auyero, 2000). The media, focusing excessively on public (in)security, did not miss mentioning *villas* and *villeros* (*i.e*., a derogatory term used to label people living in those informal settlements)

as the main urban problem and threat (*ibid.*, 2000). This dramatised representation of social polarisation seemed to be inscribed in the city's consciousness, as well as in space.

4.1 Genealogy of stigma and trajectories of urban intervention

4.1.1 Villa Desocupación

The first informal settlement near the port was established in 1933 and named *Villa Desocupación*. Many journalists of the time soon began to denounce its poverty in contrast to the modern lifestyle of Buenos Aires (Snitcofsky, 2022). Roberto Arlt (1932, *cited in* Snitcofsky, 2022) described recurring situations within this urban setting, including arson attacks by police aimed at evicting residents from the area, and self-organised soup kitchens that encouraged cooperation among the inhabitants. To manage life in the informal settlement, slum dwellers organised themselves by dividing internal sections and selecting their territorial leaders from their neighbours (Snitcofsky, 2022, *citing* Liborio, 1997). Carlos Sibellino (1933, *cited* in Snitcofsky, 2022), in its journal article "La VILLA de la MISERIA dentro de la CIUDAD MARAVILLOSA" (*i.e.*, The MISERY VILLAGE within the MARVELOUS CITY), presented the shantytown's inhabitants as mainly composed of Eastern European immigrant men without families. There was a high presence of Polish, Czech Slovaks and Lithuanians migrants due to a construction company that hired them for the expansion of an underground (Snitcofsky, 2022). When the project ended, they were unable to find another job due to the national economic crisis of the time. In 1934, the *villa* was inhabited by 2,903 people, mainly unemployed, and started to be known as *Villa Esperanza* ironically (Snitcofsky, 2022).

The *Junta Nacional* proposed a forced eviction in 1935, moving all residents to the *Albergue Oficial* or scattering them to other areas of the city. Thus, the intervention was both repressive, with the employment of the police to remove civilians, and one of state assistance, in which food, accommodation, and education were provided to the people who were relocated to the official hostel (*ibid.*, 2022). The intent behind the eviction of *Villa Desocupación* might be found in the description of the operation:

> "All buildings erected in the area of Canning Street at its junction with the River Plate, which were unhygienic and, in addition to uglify the appearance of the area, constituted a serious health

> concern, have been demolished, and strict surveillance has been established to prevent the re-emergence of a similar camp" (JUNALD, 1938:18; *cited in* Snitcofsky, 2022:47).

The governmental perception that the *villa* uglified (*i.e., afear* in Spanish) the city shaped the local vision around informal settlements and enhanced future territorial stigmatisation. In a similar effort, local newspapers published about a homicide in the slum that coincided with the eviction, linking crime to its removal (*ibid.,* 2022). The place was thus described as a "hotbed of material and moral infection", "unfit for an advanced country like ours", "providing shelter for individuals of all ideologies […] and disruptive activities" (Snitcofsky, 2022:50, *citing* Ré, 1937). As a consequence, people living in poverty were thus marked as sharing an immoral character, attributing them the responsibility for their condition.

4.1.2 The resettlement process: 1940-1970

Between the end of the 1940s and the 1970s, *Villa 31* began to repopulate in a progressive and disorderly manner. Indeed, with the implementation of import-substitution policies in the 1940s and the subsequent collapse of the agricultural economy, rural migrants from the country's interior flocked to the capital city, where industries were concentrated (Auyero, 2001). Gradually, this situation led to the growth of informal settlements, as the massive migration outstripped housing construction (Van Gelder *et al*., 2016, *citing* Keeling, 1996). Migrants from neighbouring countries (*i.e*., mainly from Paraguay, Bolivia, and Peru) fled to Buenos Aires in the 1960s. In addition, the worsening economy contributed to rendering informal settlements a permanent housing solution (Van Gelder *et al*., 2016, *citing* Bellardi and De Paula, 1986).

Initially, *Villa 31* was not conceived as a single entity, but was composed of six distinct sectors: *Saldías, Inmigrantes, YPF, Comunicaciones, Güemes* and *Laprida* (Snitcofsky, 2022). Indeed, it was only in the 1970s that it became a compact area of 46 hectares with no more free space. Over time, the inhabitants have constructed community infrastructure, built housing with more durable materials, and developed main roads within the settlement. The first residents were people from European countries (*i.e.*, Italians and Poles), but, as already mentioned, internal rural migrants and those from neighbouring countries soon began to arrive, captivated by jobs in the port and on the railways. In fact, the informal settlement was located in a privileged position near the city centre, close to the main construction works (Snitcofsky, 2022).

The areas of Inmigrantes and Saldías were the first to be populated. The first *pobladores* of Saldías were immigrants, initially Europeans, who were railway workers. Over time, other waves of migrants (*i.e.*, often railroaders too) settled in the area with the support of their union, using buildings already constructed for other purposes as their homes and creating new housing with waste materials (Snitcofsky, 2022). This gave the popular neighbourhood the characteristics of a shantytown. In 1946, the government constructed the first precarious houses of the Inmigrantes area (made of wood, but with water, electricity, and sewage systems) to house Italian migrants who came ashore after the Second World War (Snitcofsky, 2022, *citing* Bordegaray, 2013). Both areas had high population density, especially the latter one.

Around the 1950s, the YPF sector was created and followed by Comunicaciones and Güemes. In the 1962 census, the area was already denominated *Villa 31*, with a population of 6,731 inhabitants (Snitcofsky, 2022, *citing* Pastrana, 1980). Except for the context of Inmigrantes, the other areas had no access to electricity or sewage systems, and there were few public taps for potable water (*ibid.*, 2022). The last popular neighbourhood, Laprida, was settled in 1964 when the State gave abandoned wagons to a hundred families coming from the provinces of Argentina.

4.1.3 The first Plan de Emergencia (1956) and community organisation

During the first military junta, known as *Revolución Libertadora* (RL), that supplanted Juan Domingo Perón's government in 1955, the military government proposed the elimination of these informal areas. Indeed, *villas* were considered one of the urban issues left by Peron's policies (Massidda, 2011). The *Plan de Emergencia* (1956) was the first document to identify the city's shantytowns as an urban anomaly.

Shantytowns, dispersed throughout the city, were given numbers in order to identify them, but were inaccurately identified. It is during this time that the shantytown near Retiro started to be known as *Villa 31.* In its material descriptions of slums, the document proposed a simplified representation of those areas by evoking images of monstrosity and chaos, in contrast to the symmetry of Buenos Aires (Codebò, 2020). Shantytown's inhabitants were viewed as immoral, making the mere presence of *villas* a moral problem (Massidda, 2011). As the Plan de Emergencia stated,

> "Coming from poor areas, without resources and without working habits, [the residents] have been attracted to the big city in search of economic betterments and indulgences of urban life. But the social environment of the *Villas Miserias*, in which they have gathered by force of circumstance and for the lack of both incentives of their own and social help, contributes to worsening their natural tendencies and transforming these slums into permanent foci of epidemics and moral degradation: in the majority, their inhabitants require an urgent action of social readaptation." (Massidda, 2011: 45/46; *citing* Comisión Nacional de la Vivienda, 1956:39)

In other words, residents were held accountable for their living situation, and the military government designed new neighbourhoods in which they could live to be re-educated (Massidda, 2011). Furthermore, the 1958 Map of the *Plan de Emergencia: eliminación de las villas miseria de la Capital Federal,* circled shantytowns as they were "small impurities" (Codebò, 2020:91). By stigmatising and demarcating those urban territories, the military government shaped the perception of the city: the poor began to be viewed as the enemy and doomed to extinction *(ibid.*, 2020). Shantytowns were thus seen as a dangerous condition that needed to be eradicated for the benefit of the entire city.

In this period, the first community organisations began to develop, often constituted by women, to improve residents' living conditions. In *Villa 31*, the first *Juntas Vecinales* (*i.e.*, neighbourhood committees) were created, chosen by alleyway and blocks, for the community management of available resources (Snitcofsky, 2022). In 1958, all the *pobladores* of *villas* united themselves in an organisation: the *Federación de Villas y Barrios de Emergencia de la Capital Federal* (FVBE). Their aim was to cope with the different forms of violence they experienced, related to expulsions, detentions, and repressions. Residents' position might be noted in the "Boletín de la Comisión Vecinal de Villa Comunicaciones" (*i.e.*, Villa Comunicaciones Neighbourhood Commission Bulletin) in 1960:

> "[...] our *villa*, like others, is constantly growing. Where can we go? Nowhere else: WE WILL STAY RIGHT HERE. We have a right recognised by the Constitution itself, and we must defend ourselves. Resisting eviction is our slogan" (Snitcofsky, 2022:85, *citing* Boletín de la Comisión Vecinal de Villa Comunicaciones, 1960).

In the following years, during Illia's administration (1963-1966), a dialogue was established between the *villas* and the central government, despite the municipality of Buenos Aires often trying to oppose the FVBE. Indeed, the local government aspired to eradicate all the city's shantytowns (Cravino, 2009). In *Villa 31*, improvements were reached, such as the creation of a school called "Bandera Argentina" and the inauguration of a drinking water dispensary, attended by the president himself. Regarding these achievements, the residents were keen to point out that they were the result of a tenacious struggle by the *pobladores* (Snitcofsky, 2022). To claim legitimacy over the rights they demanded, the residents recognised themselves as workers whose outcome benefited the entire community. In their words,

> "We have had to fight for a long time against the incomprehension and insensitivity of officials from different governments, who have only thought about making our *villas* disappear, but never about solving our problems, let alone building affordable housing for workers. We have even had to overcome police obstacles to lay one brick on top of another" (Snitcofsky, 2022:93, *citing* Nuestra Palabra, 1965).

4.1.4 The eradication programs and the military dictatorships

In 1968, the *Plan de Erradicación de Villas Miserias,* under the military government of Juan Carlos Onganía, proposed the eradication of shantytowns by moving their inhabitants into densely populated blocks (Massidda, 2011). In a journal article (Revista Siete Dias Ilustrados, 1968) the main title stated "Argentina will not have *villas* miserias" describing slums as "home to nearly one million Argentines, Bolivians, Paraguayans, and Chileans", "precarious, overcrowded, promiscuous, unhygienic dwellings" that have grown "tirelessly, stubbornly, like a chronic disease" forming "parallel societies, with their own laws and customs, isolated from their surroundings by subtle social barriers or impenetrable physical fences". The article concluded that, if the pilot project were successful, it could serve as a key policy for major capitals worldwide, which are "plagued by various versions of the contemporary housing crisis" (Revista Siete Dias Ilustrados, 1968). The national government then withdrew institutional recognition from the *Federación de Villas y Barrios de Emergencia de la Capital Federal* (FVBE), and as a consequence, any form of dialogue was interrupted (Cravino, 2009). Since the FVBE could no longer communicate with the State, it began to break down and lose momentum. At the same time,

the *Junta de Delegados* (*i.e.*, Delegates Committee) was created in *Villa 31*, reuniting all the neighbourhood committees of the six sectors. In 1970, the Committee declared that residents were not opposed to the eradication but wanted to remain there until they were given their permanent social housing, which was to be located within the capital (Cravino, 2009). During those years, the priest Carlos Mugica initiated his political and religious activity in *Villa 31*. As a result, the informal settlement became the most organised neighbourhood in the capital, bringing together cultural and football centres, traders, and mothers' clubs (Cravino, 2009, *citing* Pastrana, 1980). However, the organisations within the *villa* began to divide between Peronism and the Communist Party, differing on their views on how to deal with the state and their demands. The population reached 24,385 inhabitants by 1971 (Cravino, 2009, *citing* Pastrana, 1980).

In 1973, the *Ministerio de Bienestar Social* (*i.e.*, MBS, the Ministry of Social Welfare) proposed the eradication of *Villa 31*, following the Plan already outlined, and convened the neighbourhood committees, which did not accept the programme (Cravino, 2009). The Ministry thus decided to overcome the residents' stance by seeking an agreement with the Municipality to evict the shantytown's inhabitants. Consequently, the Delegate Committee decided to reach out for support from the local institution. Residents' actions demonstrate that they sought support from various institutions and organisations that shared their goals or were less hostile at particular moments in history. Moreover, by seeking assistance from the public opinion, their demands were heard, and the eradication was postponed (*ibid.*, 2009). That same year, the government decided to begin construction of a motorway that was to pass through *Villa 31*. When the *Junta de Delegados* found out, they asked to postpone the project until their houses had been constructed. To this end, several housing complexes were built for the inhabitants, almost all of them located in the province of Buenos Aires (Cravino, 2009). However, compared with the main objectives, those projects achieved limited results in eradicating shantytowns in the city centre (Oszlak, 1991). One of the reasons might be the contradictory attitudes towards *villas miserias*, between their total eradication and the aim to find a solution to the housing problem through their social advancement and re-education (*ibid.,* 1991).

In 1976, the last military dictatorship came to power and proposed the most violent policies on the eradication of all informal settlements. This time, under Jorge Rafael Videla's guidance, the government destroyed shantytowns, effectively reducing their presence in the city centre. The Municipality, under the rule of Osvaldo Cacciatore, took a decisive and active role in the

eradication of slums. The eradication plan took on the characteristics of a military operation and consisted of three main phases: (1) the freezing (*i.e.*, *congelamiento*) of *villas miserias*, (2) discouragement (*i.e.*, *desaliento*), and (3) the final eradication (Oszlak, 1991). During the first stage, they established the dimensions of shantytowns, the territorial density, and the effective population that would be eradicated. Then, the second phase involved actions that would lead slums' residents "to find no reasons to justify their continued presence" (Oszlak, 1991:163) in the informal territory, thus discouraging them by "placing the population in a state of total defencelessness and precariousness" (Oszlak, 1991:163). The eradication was the final step, in which residents would be proposed different options: (1) the transfer to their owned land, (2) the return to their home-country or province, (3) their independent departure, or (3) a minimum credit support (Oszlak, 1991:164).

However, the most striking feature was the use of advertising campaigns to frame the issue of shantytowns for the public according to Junta's political strategies through mass media, press conferences, magazines, and special reports. Indeed, they wanted to destroy any sense of empathy towards the inhabitants of *villas miserias* (*ibid.*, 1991). To this end,

> "It was necessary to destroy a double image, arguing: (1) that the 'problem of slums' did not originate simply from a chronic housing shortage and insufficient income levels among their inhabitants; and (2) that these inhabitants constituted a special class of the population, unworthy of assistance or tolerance from society and the State. The official discourse, therefore, predefined the slum dweller as a social actor, stigmatising not only their 'living' conditions but also their human qualities" (Oszlak, 1991:158).

Therefore, in the 1977 campaign, the government stressed the following aspects:

> "(1) Slum dwellers like to live in slums, a kind of 'ghetto' where 'no one enters' and where they are integrated into a particular socio-economic structure with special internal laws.
> (2) These are people with very low employment levels, generally foreigners from neighbouring countries, who have a different cultural background and bring the customs of their places of origin to the urban environment.
> (3) They have sufficient means to access other forms of housing, as many own cars, businesses, land and houses.

(4) They obtain benefits and privileges that other city dwellers do not enjoy; they do not pay taxes or utilities, they run illegal businesses or are part of organised mafias.
(5) Many of them are criminals who find comfortable refuges in the slums.
(6) They are an easy political clientele for popular parties and movements, which mobilise this population with demagogic promises" (Oszlak, 1991:159/160).

The principal interlocutor of this campaign was the urban bourgeois, considered as the government's most important ally. Instead, slum dwellers were depicted as voluntary outcasts (*ibid.*, 1991). Shantytown's inhabitants were vulnerable to torture and other kinds of state violence (Massidda, 2011). In another effort to control the spread of *loteos populares* (*i.e.,* popular housing developments), Provincial Use Law 8.912, enacted in 1977, forbade the creation of lots without proper and formal infrastructure (Van Gelder *et al*., 2016). Along with the violent intent of eradicating *villas miserias*, this law progressively pushed poor inhabitants into further marginality and informality. Indeed, families living in urban areas began to occupy land in the periphery to seek shelter. *Villa 31* was one of the few shantytowns in the city centre that managed to survive the eradication process, while the government destroyed the school, all the infrastructure and the public space built over time were destroyed (Cravino, 2009).

4.1.5 The repopulation process

The gradual reconstruction of *Villa 31* began in 1984. The process relied on the previous organisational experience to rebuild the settlement from scratch and counted on many of the evicted residents returning to the territory once the dictatorship ended (Cravino, 2009). During this period, the idea of the permanent establishment of *villas miserias* was consolidated, shouldered by the State itself through different legislations (Snitcofsky, 2022). Indeed, in 1984, the new democratic president Raúl Alfonsín approved the *Programa de radicación y solución integral en villas de emergencia y núcleos habitacionales transitorios de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires*, which, although it has had limited effects, opened up a series of state interventions aimed at the urban integration of slums in their place of origin. In the process, the repopulation process changed the internal organisation due to the fragmentation, the lack of historical codes of conduct, and the development of clientelism (Snitcofsky, 2022). However, in 1987, the *Movimiento de Villas y Barrios Carenciados de la Capital Federal* (MVBC) was created with the aim of obtaining

permanent settlement in their territory of origin, understood as access to land title, thus claiming their right to the city (*ibid.*, 2022). In 1989, there was a talk between the MVBC and the Mayor of Buenos Aires, which ended with the approval of Decree 1001 that highlighted for the first time the actual possibility that the lands where *villas* were located, owned by the national government, could be sold to their residents for less than market value (*ibid.*, 2022).

However, by the end of the same year, the country's economy was collapsing with an inflation rate of 5000 per cent, contributing to the downfall of many previously middle-class families (Ainstein, 1996; Van Gelder *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, these processes experienced a disruption due to more urgent demands: the inhabitants' famine. As a response, community dining rooms were established but began to rely on the government's funds for their survival (Snitcofsky, 2022). This situation contributed to undermining the existence of independent organisations and increasing the practice of clientelism in Buenos Aires' shantytowns. The figure of the *puntero* emerges, referring to territorial leaders who use their position of mediators between the government and their neighbours for their own sake (*ibid.*, 2022). It is at this stage that the sense of collective identity among the working classes shifts from being defined by work to being demarcated by the territory as a place of residence (Snitcofsky, 2022, *citing* Merklen, 2010). At that time, social exclusion and marginality intensified to the point of becoming a key aspect of shantytown residents (Auyero, 2000). Indeed, during the Menem administration (1989-1999), Buenos Aires' poverty was significantly exacerbated by the introduction of neoliberal adjustment and austerity programs implemented (Auyero, 2000). Consequently, the number of people living in *villas miserias* increased, resulting in its urban densification and consolidation as permanent enclaves. At the same time, social policies aiming at reducing poverty were chaotic and fragmented, thus not contributing to the mitigation of the residents' plight and resembling a policy of containment (Auyero, 2000). Moreover, these harsh reforms involved the privatisation of public services *(i.e*., water, gas, electricity, and urban transport) and the flexibilisation of labour, among others (Van Gelder *et al*., 2016). The establishment of a more 'flexible' labour force (Auyero, 2000:101) - through reforms that reduced the charges of hiring and firing employees - contributed to the spread of informality. According to Auyero (2000:100), in the 1990s, informal settlements transformed into hyper-shantytowns because they faced the high risk of "becoming functionally disconnected from the rest of society" due to the state's neglect, the withdrawal of the formal economy, and the disintegration of the *villas*' organisational structure.

However, in 1991, Decree 3.330 institutionalised the *Programa de Integración y Radicación de Villas y Barrios Carenciados de Capital Federal* with the creation of a committee, composed of territorial leaders who were charged with many institutional responsibilities. Indeed, the local organisations "had to act as collectors on behalf of the State, which also meant taking on policing duties to prevent new occupants from entering, and they ended up becoming spokespersons for official decisions" (Snitcofsky, 2022:288). This situation provoked a representation crisis in *Villa 31*.

4.1.6 The threat of eradication in the 1990s

The National Constitution recognised Buenos Aires' autonomy in 1994, and the right to decent housing was included in the city's Constitution, highlighting for the first time the need to integrate slums into formal law. Law 3.343, which required the provision of infrastructure and prohibited the eviction within *Villa 31*, was only sanctioned in 2009 (Bertelli, 2021). However, *Villa 31* did not follow the pattern granted to the other shantytowns of the capital due to the rentability of its urban land (Snitcofsky, 2022). Indeed, the government proposed relocating its residents to other neighbourhoods and a mega-project, known as *Proyecto Retiro*, to revalue the port area by selling to high-purchasing acquirers. Moreover, they planned a section of a motorway to pass over the informal settlement, which led to the outbreak of conflicts and the return of bulldozers (*ibid.*, 2022). An order signed in 1994 authorised the clearance of the area and offered three different options to its residents who had to leave the *villa*. The first was a subsidy of 12,000 Argentine pesos for residents who wanted to return to their place of origin; the second offered access to a loan of 25,000 pesos; and the last option concerned relocation to a social housing unit in another neighbourhood of the city (Snitcofsky, 2022). Most of the population rejected the proposed options, and while the demolition continued, the conflict intensified. It was during those years that the issue of *Villa 31* began to be addressed in the media by focusing on the value of the soil on which the informal settlement was located (Snitcofsky, 2022).

In 1995, during a local protest against the eviction, Mayor Jorge Domínguez was filmed insulting demonstrators, while 35 houses were torn down by the construction machinery for the motorway. Furthermore, the mayor issued Decree 110, which authorised the use of public force to expel the population without a court order (Snitcofsky, 2022). To end this situation of violence, in

1996, nine priests, later joined by public figures, began a hunger strike to put an end to this dramatic situation. After 14 days, following the intervention of the bishop coadjutor, Jorge Bergoglio, the government announced that the eviction would cease, although some houses were demolished to make way for the motorway construction (Snitcofsky, 2022).

4.1.7 The new century

In December 2001, after Argentina declared the largest financial default in world history on its international debts, more than half of the population fell below the poverty line by 2002 (Fidel, 2004; Van Gelder *et al*.,2016). *Villa 31* began to be a heterogeneous place, displaying a varied social stratification (Cravino, 2009). Indeed, some houses were composed of more compact materials than others, with more floors, and the cost of the internal territory varied according to the shops available in the area and its urban configuration. Since the 1990s, this situation has manifested as a crisis of representation within the settlement, highlighted by the lack of codes of conduct that once underpinned coexistence and by the issue of drug consumption (Snitcofsky, 2022). The diffusion of *paco*, namely cocaine paste, became widely used in shantytowns due to the affordable price and the financial distress experienced by dwellers (Epele, 2011). To cope with national economic instability, many inhabitants became *cartoneros,* who recycled waste to sell. *Villa 31 bis*, constructed after the motorway was built, was viewed by the authorities as a distinct settlement from *Villa 31*. Consequently, the delegates from *31* and *31 bis* belonged to two autonomous organisations (Cravino, 2009). At that time, *Villa 31* still had its historic sectors, among which were Guemes, Inmigrantes, Comunicaciones, YPF and Autopista. Instead, *Villa 31 bis* was internally divided into the "barrio chino" (*i.e.,* Chinese neighbourhood), used pejoratively to imply danger, "barrio ferroviario" (*i.e.,* railway neighbourhood) and "el fondo" (*i.e.,* the bottom) (*ibid.,* 2009). The internal division is shown in *Figure 2.*

In 2002, the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Urban Planning of Buenos Aires, along with Javier Fernández Castro, began working on an urbanisation project for *Villa 31*, which led to the creation of the *Mesa por la Urbanización* in 2006 (Snitcofsky, 2022). However, the urbanisation project of the informal settlement was at a standstill until 2015, when the political opposition between different political parties at the national and city levels ended. Indeed, a recurring problem through the years has been "the lack of a guiding principle in urban planning

and the lack of coordination between the many institutions at different levels of government dealing with land and housing" (Van Gelder *et al.*, 2016:1970).

Figure 2. Internal neighbourhoods of Villa 31-31bis (*source:* ACIJ, 2021).

In 2005, a new threat arose when the *Instituto de Vivienda de la Ciudad* proposed a project, coordinated by the *Ministerio de Infraestructura y Planificación Federal de la Nación* with the participation of the *Secretaria de Planeamiento de la Ciudad*, which designated the partial eradication of *Villa 31* and the total eradication of *Villa 31 bis* in order to complete the final section of the Illia motorway and the start of a mega project in the Retiro area that would involve its urbanisation. As a result, the two organisations of delegates from *Villa 31* and *31bis* joined forces to protest and claim their right to reside in the area (Cravino, 2009). At the governmental level, there was no further news on the matter until the 2007 election campaign, when the eradication of *Villa 31-31bis* was once again proposed. Indeed, Macri's city election campaign tackled the problem of *Villa 31* with an eradication discourse (Bertelli, 2021). He proposed the eradication of the shantytown, despite arguing for the urbanisation of the other *villas* disseminated in the capital. On that occasion, Macri reiterated the vital importance of the area for solving logistical problems related to the port (Snitcofsky, 2022). The former mayor even prohibited the entry of construction materials to halt its growth, but the intense neighbourhood struggle ensured that *Law 3.343* was

approved in 2009. In this way, the law guaranteed the urbanisation of *Villa 31*, relying on Castro's project.

The political situation changed when Mauricio Macri from the PRO party (with a liberal and conservative orientation) was elected president of Argentina, and the Buenos Aires mayor was Horacio Rodríguez Larreta from the same party. Larreta decided to urbanise *Villa 31*, beginning negotiations for a 150-million loan from the Inter-American Development Bank and a 170-million loan from the World Bank (BID, 2017). This political decision represented an ideological shift of the PRO party.

4.2 The Social, Economic and Urban Integration Project

In 2015, the local government launched the Social, Economic and Urban Integration Project with the aim of integrating the popular neighbourhood into the formal city, making the then-Villa 31 "*un barrio más de la Ciudad"* (*i.e.*, one more neighbourhood in the city). The intervention was conceived as a comprehensive approach, carried out in the "most visible slum of Buenos Aires" (Larreta, 2017). Indeed, as one of the city official states during the interview, Villa 31 represents

> "The abstraction of all the slums and the popular neighbourhoods. Then, doing it there had a double, triple or infinite meaning from the symbolic point of view...therefore, the project was done with a comprehensive approach in the most visible place and with the highest complexity because there is a melting pot of political parties and organizations" (A-P2)

The Barrio Mugica has a large presence of political grassroots organisations that do not align with the PRO party, as they used to proposed eradication discourses in the past. Moreover, all the respondents interviewed emphasised the strategic location of the popular neighbourhood, especially the financial value of the soil on which it is located. In the words of one political actor,

> "This is a neighbourhood located in a strategic part of the city of Buenos Aires, possibly… if there were nothing here on this land, it would be the most expensive land in the entire city of Buenos Aires. Now, there is a reality… that 45,000 people live here and that a settlement has grown in it, one of the

largest settlements in the city… and possibly one of the best known in Latin America and the world." (A-P1)

As Bertelli (2021) highlights, the project was also seen as a model for the rest of the country and as a good policy practice that could be transferred to other cities facing similar challenges. Indeed, the intervention was presented as the first socio-urban integration project to bring together the best practices of other South American countries (such as Colombia and Brazil) and "surpassed them" (A-P2).

4.2.1. Policy foundation and political actors

Law 3.343 (Boletín Oficial de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires), sanctioned in 2009, was the first attempt to regulate the criteria for the *urbanización* (*i.e.,* urban development) and the *radicación definitiva* (*i.e.,* permanent residency) of the Villa 31-31 bis. For that purpose, the *Mesa de Gestión y Planeamiento Multidisciplinaria y Participativa para la Urbanización de las Villas 31 y 31 bis* (*i.e.,* the Multidisciplinary and Participatory Management and Planning Committee for the Urban Development of Villas 31 and 31 bis) was created, whose role was to plan and implement the urban development project; design the mechanisms for land-title regulations and the criteria concerning the construction of new housing solutions and the consolidation of existing housing; and to provide infrastructure to "achieve full integration (*i.e.*, *integración total*) into the urban fabric of the neighbourhood and its surrounding area" (Art. 7°). The Multidisciplinary Committee consisted of representatives of the different government departments, from the City Housing Institute (*i.e., Instituto de la Vivienda de la Ciudad*) to the Ministries of Social and Urban Development (*i.e., Ministerio de Desarrollo Urbano* and *Ministerio de Desarrollo Social*), while other members were invited to participate, as the University of Buenos Aires and the Railway Infrastructure Administration S.E. (Art. 5°). Moreover, two delegates of the community were included in the meetings to "give voice to their concerns regarding the decisions that directly affect their neighbourhood" (Art. 6°). The present Law made it clear that the project "will not involve forced evictions" (Art. 9°) and that residents who need to be relocated shall be guaranteed a housing solution of similar characteristics within the neighbourhood's perimeter.

As can be seen, *Law 3.343* represents the basis upon which *Law 6.129* is built, serving as a complement to it. Indeed, *Law 6.129* was sanctioned in 2018, following the 2015 launch of the

Social, Economic and Urban Integration Project. It aims to redevelop the neighbourhood while providing its integration with the rest of the city. However, the project is part of the masterplan of the comprehensive development of Retiro-Puerto, whose objective is to promote "the interconnectivity and integration of the urban fabric between Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica, the port area and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires", among others (GCBA and MPF, 2022: no page). Here, the *Secretaría de Integración Social y Urbana* (*i.e.,* SECISyU - Department of Social and Urban Integration) is designated as the enforcement authority (Art. 4°), posteriorly denominated *Unidad de Proyectos Especiales Urbanización Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica* (*i.e.,* UPE) in 2021 (Decreto N° 264/GCABA/2021). Its main function consists in (i) defining and implementing, in conjunction with other departments, all the policies and processes necessary to the re-development, permanent settlement and social integration (*i.e., re-urbanización, radicación definitiva e integración social*) of the Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica; (ii) designing and promoting measures to improve the socio-economic integration of residents in the formal economy and the competitiveness of the local economy; (iii) implementing an "Active Transparency Programme" to provide residents and citizens of the entire city of Buenos Aires with information regarding the progress of the project; (iv) reporting to the *Consejo Consultivo* (*i.e.,* Advisory Council) on general progresses (Art. 5°).

The functions attributed to the SECISyU suggest that the institution is responsible for the overall management of the project, from its design and implementation to the inter-institutional and public coordination and monitoring. Despite the existence of participatory bodies, this concentration of functions displays a centralisation of decision-making power. In this regard, the *Consejo de Gestión Participativa del Proceso de Re-urbanización del Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica* (*i.e.*, CGP - the Participatory Management Committee for the Re-development of the Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica) was established to "ensure compliance with the present Law" (Art. 6°) and was composed of different representatives of government departments and the corps of counsellors of the Padre Carlos Mugica neighbourhood. The main functions of the CGP are to issue recommendations on the planning and implementation of the project, to encourage active participation of the neighbourhood's residents, and to request and access reports from the SECISyU (Art. 8°). However, its recommendations are not binding and, in the case consensus is not reached, the enforcement authority "shall act in full exercise of its powers" (Art. 10°). In this way, while promoting participatory governance, the non-binding nature of recommendations limits

CGP's influence on the redevelopment and integration project. At the same time, the participative method legitimises the public policies implemented in the neighbourhood. Therefore, participatory measures appear to coexist with a centralised structure of governance.

As mentioned above, the *Secretaría de Integración Social y Urbana* was created in 2015 for the sole purpose of managing the shantytown of Retiro. Its exceptional creation, given that the other popular neighbourhoods that Larreta's government has urbanised were under the Secretariat of Habitat and Social Inclusion (SECHI) and the City Housing Institute (IVC), has been justified by political actors to ensure adaptation over time to the ongoing process. In the words of a political actor interviewed,

> "I believe that one of the main qualities of the structure that drove us forward was its versatility and how we constantly adapted to the new reality, which is very difficult in a public structure. (...) I believe it was key that the organisation emerged from the project, and not that the project was placed within an existing organisation. (...) If it had emerged within the Ministry, it would have been very difficult to do everything we did and change as many times as we did, or undergo the transformations that the organisation underwent..." (A-P2)

At the local level, this has initially translated into a spirit of "starting by getting things done" (A-E4) and the proposed mantra that "it's better to ask for forgiveness than permission" (A-E4), producing the vision that

> "The project did not start as a public policy process, but rather as the idea of intervening and how to intervene, on a case-by-case basis, without a comprehensive approach (…) and that those [*i.e.,* residents] who wish to accompany us do it, and those who do not, not." (A-E4).

While the SISU is presented as a tool for institutional flexibility, at the level of territorial teams, it is also interpreted as a lack of clear public policy, which has caused problems of inefficiency and lack of sustainability over time. Moreover, it indicates an approach that initially does not envisage participation and is based on the logic of creating credibility through action, as emerges from the interviews and the official documents presented by the government.

4.2.2 Law 6.129 guidelines

The guidelines of the area-based policy implemented under the *Social, Economic and Urban Integration Project* follow the principles "of social and gender equality, non-discrimination, sustainability, spatial and environmental justice, the right to the city, and socio-urban integration and inclusion", safeguarding "the preservation of the neighbourhood's identity and existing community ties" and prohibiting "forced evictions" (Art. 2°). Most importantly, Article 2° emphasises the need to guarantee that current residents can remain in the neighbourhood in the long run "by promoting measures that strengthen their roots in the community". Thus, the final purpose is the *integración* with the rest of the city and the *radicación definitiva* of its inhabitants in adequate housing solutions.

At the same time, these normative propositions are operationalised through a detailed set of housing policies, encompassing relocation procedures, tenure security, eligibility criteria and housing solutions. Indeed, access to housing is conditional upon registration in the censuses (carried out between 2016 and 2018), the presentation of a national identity document and residence in the neighbourhood, the absence of property ownership in the city, and the fact that the applicant has not benefited from a housing solution under other social housing programmes (Art. 30°). The enforcement authority shall implement a New Housing Construction Programme within the neighbourhood for the residents living in areas affected by structural and environmental risks (as in the case of houses under the highway), urban changes due to the provision of public spaces or the reorganisation of blocks (*i.e.,* opening of corridors and streets), but also building beyond repair (Art. 34°). In all the other cases, the Housing Improvement Programme is implemented, aiming at improving housing conditions to permit the regularisation of property ownership (Art. 40°). This is obtained through the connection to public services and infrastructure (*i.e.,* water and electricity), the appropriate disposition of housing spaces based on the number of residents and the structural safety of the building (*i.e.,* ventilation, lighting) (Art. 41°). Then, once houses are "legally eligible for registration and are connected to public services", the SECISyU proceeds with deed registration and the transfer of title, "bearing the cost and fees associated with the first registration" (Art. 44°). Thus, residents may obtain the legal possession of their property if they pay the total amount of their mortgage (Art. 52°), fixed in 30-year monthly instalments with an interest rate of 4% (Art. 60°).

The legal framework also establishes the mechanism for determining the financial contribution required for housing. Indeed, according to Art. 59°, the total amount is calculated on the basis of multiple criteria, primarily linked to the relationship between the housing size and the overall building capacity of the plot. In the case of beneficiaries of new housing solutions, it is considered the previous housing status of residents, divided between owners (*i.e.,* the amount considers the possible difference between the square metres of the original house and the housing solution where they are relocated) and tenants (*i.e.,* the total amount is calculated by the square metres of the new housing solution). However, the monthly payment is determined by the total income of the beneficiaries, declared on an annual basis (Art. 61°). For the residents whose income falls below the basic food basket, the payment is postponed until the next annual declaration. In this case, the SECISyU shall promote the inclusion of the adult members in training courses or employment programmes to improve their socio-economic situation. Moreover, beneficiaries with physical disabilities or retirement age are exempted from payment. Art. 58° declares that "under no circumstances shall an inability to pay infringe upon the rights recognised in this Law in favour of the beneficiaries". This calculation mechanism reflects an attempt to introduce a differentiated, equitable system of contributions by taking into account the material characteristics of housing units and the socio-economic situation of residents. At the same time, it proposes a shift from universal welfare provision towards a model in which beneficiaries and informal territories are inserted into the formal economy and neo-liberal logics. Indeed, beneficiaries of the project are presented as responsible subjects, expected to actively contribute to their own integration into society. Therefore, residents become not only rights-bearing subjects, but also responsible property-holders whose right to the city is conditional on their entering into the neo-liberal society. Other articles of *Law 6.129* reinforce the regulated nature of property rights within the project. If a purchaser is unable to demonstrate a minimum period of two years in the neighbourhood, there is a financial penalty which requires the person to pay up to three times the value of the mortgage (Art. 53°). Moreover, the enforcement authority may exercise the right of first refusal over transferred properties during the first years following the allocation to provide the functional unit to other residents (Art. 55°). These provisions may be interpreted as mechanisms against speculative dynamics, aimed at protecting the long-term community from displacement and limiting potential gentrification processes. However, these measures also enhance mechanisms of

control over the community, distinguishing between residents through selective criteria that define legitimate belonging.

Furthermore, *Law 6.129* includes the management of future urban development and the potential uses of space. It states that the neighbourhood may develop upwards, and the airspace may be formally registered alongside the property. However, this can be accomplished only with the prior consent of residents. Moreover, Art. 51° introduces the possibility for the *Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires* (*i.e.,* GCBA) to acquire the remaining building rights over unoccupied buildable areas. This suggests that the neighbourhood is controlled by restricting spontaneous/informal development and imposing urban planning regulations that align the future transformation of the neighbourhood with formal and institutional priorities. This can also be noted in the *Resolución 118* (2016), which implemented control mechanisms to halt the entry of large-scale construction materials into the neighbourhood. Then, the protocol authorises the monitoring of six neighbourhood entry points by the Argentine Federal Police and other law enforcement institutions. The main problems identified in the present resolution are the informal construction of "vertical extensions without structural calculations [...]; the complete occupation of plots and communal spaces, affecting ventilation, natural lighting and sanitary conditions [...]; and the construction on sites designated for planned or existing urban infrastructure"(Resolución 118*,* 2016), among others.

The *Social, Economic and Urban Integration Project* also involves the economic development of the Barrio Mugica by registering already existing economic activities and authorising new ones. However, the latter must generate at least 20% of formal and sustainable employment to the benefit of residents and diversify the pre-existing economic sector (Art. 71°). Moreover, external contractors awarded for works in the neighbourhood must employ a minimum of 20% of residents to carry out the job to enhance the employment of inhabitants (Art. 72°). While these measures aim to foster socio-economic inclusion, they suggest a broader process of formalisation in which existing informal practices become the target of the transformation.

4.2.3 Main pillars of the Social, Economic and Urban Integration Project

More specifically, the project has three main pillars:

(i) Urban integration

Urban policies focused on the provision of infrastructure, such as pavement and lighting on public streets, and public services (*i.e.,* electricity and sewage systems, the construction of aqueducts to provide drinking water and storm drains), with "the same conditions as the rest of the City: formal, stable and safe connections" (BA, 2024:17). In 2024, the houses connected to electricity service were 78% and 98% those to the water grid (BA, 2024).

New public spaces were created, especially the largest park in the neighbourhood, which is located under the Illia highway. Indeed, once the people living there were evicted, 23,000 square meters were left free. The space was used to build a new public area that also served to merge the neighbourhood and enhance mobility practices, as it was seen as a physical barrier generating insecurity (*ibid.,* 2024). The residents were relocated to the new housing developments, named YPF and Containera. Moreover, all the streets in the Barrio Mugica were given formal addresses, chosen by a participatory process. The names selected aimed to display Latin America's nature and diversity (BA, 2024).

Finally, the housing upcycling program was implemented for existing houses (*i.e.*, called *macizo*), focusing on the houses' exteriors as well as on interior improvements. Indeed, the public policies aimed to acknowledge and enhance what was already there, as "there is also a symbolic issue to be addressed: the vast majority of houses were built by the same families that inhabit them, with their own hands" (BA, 2024:21). A program called "*Más Color"* was implemented to beautify the public space and economically boost inhabitants (*ibid.,* 2024) by painting houses of colours. For that purpose, cooperatives composed of residents have been hired to do the work. For the authorities, urban integration involves the material components of the Barrio Mugica, as well as its identity and subjective elements.

(ii) Economic integration

The project focused on the creation of a new entrepreneurial development centre called CeDEL (*i.e., Centro de Desarrollo Emprendedor y Laboral*), which offers professional courses and job placement for residents. The chosen place carries symbolic value as it previously was a drug trafficking bunker before being converted into a place of "opportunity" (BA, 2024:33).

Indeed, the mayor Horacio Rodríguez Larreta initially installed his office there, where he used to go once a week with journalists to symbolically display his presence in the neighbourhood, as remarked by a political actor interviewed. Furthermore, the economic integration encompassed the creation of virtual platforms (such as *Recoveco* and *Mugica Emprende*) to open local entrepreneurs to the city market, and the establishment of private companies in the popular neighbourhood to encourage formal employment (*ibid.*, 2024). Another program implemented was *A Todo Reciclaje* (*i.e.*, ATR), a recycling program working with collection cooperatives of the neighbourhood to promote environmental sustainability and cultural change while generating economic returns.

(iii) Social integration

This dimension involves the construction of three new medical centres and two educational centres. The *Marìa Elena Walsh* educational hub was the neighbourhood's first public school and is located near the new housing developments. At the same time, they transformed the nearest school in the *Mugica Educational Hub*, which is now the largest school in the city with a capacity of 1,800 students (BA, 2024). Most importantly, the new headquarters of the city's Ministry of Education has been moved within the neighbourhood. In this way, it is believed to contribute to the economic revitalisation of the area while symbolically sending a message of inclusion with the rest of the city (BA, 2024).

4.3 Territorial stigmatisation as a premise

The selection of the three main areas of the project is based on a specific representation of Villa 31-31bis*,* focusing on its structural issues, as emerges from an official teaser for the project in 2024. *Informality* is showcased as the main challenge for modern societies and the principal root of all the problems experienced by the residents of the popular neighbourhood (BA, 2024). Here, the informal settlement is depicted as lacking basic infrastructure, making it prone to disease and other risks. *Villa 31* is thus presented as made up of dirty roads, houses with inadequate living conditions, and dark, insecure areas (BA, 2024). The lack of formal address is also seen as a reason for job discrimination, thus excluding the wider framework of the phenomenon and failing to

problematise their institutional and historical responsibilities. Therefore, the place is subtly viewed as being inherently pathological, reproducing a logic of territorial stigmatisation.

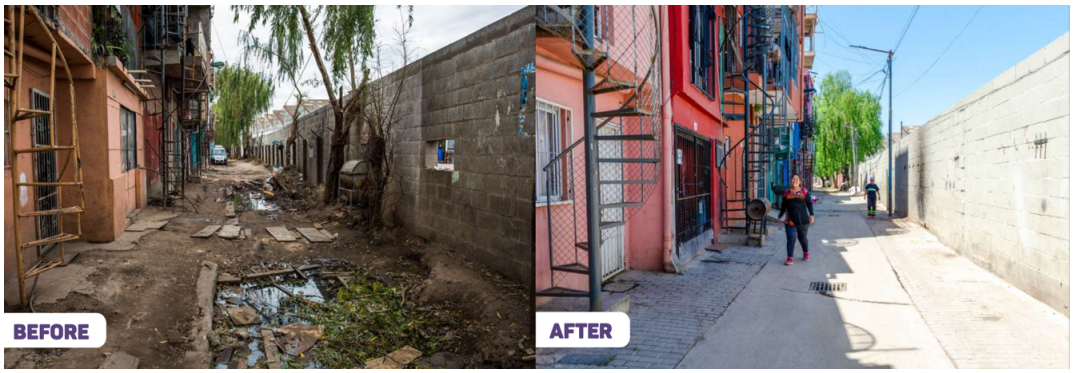

Figure 3. The same street before and after the implementation of the Integration program (*source:* BA, 2024).

Indeed, the changes proposed by the intervention are based on the exaltation of the pre-existing territorial stigma and marginality to validate and underscore the political action on the territory. This aspect can be observed in the pictures chosen for the presentation, which show the neighbourhood before and after the project's implementation. As *Figure 3* highlights, the first picture is often dark, while the other is brighter, in a way to inspire hope and 'normality'. This may suggest that, through the employment of dramatic discursive narratives and images, the area-based policy carried out by the city government appears exalted. In other words, territorial stigmatisation is used as the premise for the political engagement within the informal neighbourhoods and as a legitimation for their work, while emphasising the transformation brought about by the political party.

The stigma attached to *villas miserias* has long-standing roots in Argentine society, as the previous paragraphs highlight. The urban space incorporates innumerable collective representations that have been transmitted over time, generating a spatial and social division between the formal city and these urban enclaves. In the eyes of residents, nowadays, the territorial stigmatisation attached to the popular neighbourhood and its residents comes from various aspects, such as:

> "One aspect of stigma concerns land occupation without paying anything at all... So, I think the stigma comes from that side, like the issue of the settlement as such. And also, the *visual and* aesthetic aspect… Because it's so different from the French-influenced look of Buenos Aires… It's like the visual aspect has an impact, making residents from other parts of the city dislike this neighbourhood. And then, there's the whole issue of drug trafficking and insecurity, but... It's more noticeable because it's a very vulnerable neighbourhood. So, because it's such a vulnerable neighbourhood, it's easier to blame it, or it's easier to bring out all the bad things because the people who live there, let's say, are the worst... and because "they come to usurp the land"."(A-R4)

The present extract is remarkable because it sums up the foundational starting point from which political narratives are constructed. Indeed, three stigmatising aspects are highlighted: (i) land occupation and usurpation; (ii) the negative connotation attributed to the physical aesthetic of the neighbourhood; and (iii) the issue of insecurity and drug trafficking. As the following paragraph shows, some of these stigmatising features have been addressed in symbolic politics to reformulate them.

4.4 Symbolic politics

4.4.1 The culture of payment

One of the objectives and, to some extent, the legitimations of the project have centred on the "exercise of responsibilities and the culture of payment" (BA, 2024:18). This aspect is notable given the extensive manner in which it has emerged in interviews and institutional discourses. In terms of the project's communication, the concept of *integración* appears to be related to the acquisition of "the same rights and responsibilities" (Larreta, 2017) by residents. However, specific focus is placed on the *obligations* faced by the entry of the informal settlement into the formal city and economy. Indeed, the notion of "paying taxes, paying for services" seems to become central in obtaining the integration aspired, capable of reversing the stigmatisation attached to the territory and its residents. The following interview extracts display the connection between the integration and the economic formalisation, which, in turn, is tied to the retrenchment of the welfare state in the informal settlement.

> "The project aims towards a State that leaves here; it doesn't aim towards a permanent welfare state. And how does the State get out of here? Well, by urbanising, registering property and ensuring that residents have the same rights, and also the same obligations, as the residents across the street [meaning residents of Recoleta, one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods of the city]... And pay their bills... And pay for their electricity... And pay for their water and pay for all the services they receive here from the state." (A-P1)

In another passage, the interviewee continues:

> "(…) part of urbanising is that, I mean, 'hey, we're urbanising, that's fine, but we're keeping people lazy', no, you're not keeping people lazy, you're giving future generations the tools to not be like that, so they don't have to be assisted by the State... like others were" (A-P1)

This vision appears to be deeply influenced by the stigmatisation often tied to shantytown dwellers. Indeed, the political actor interviewed presents the project as a means of integrating these informal territories into the system, thereby solving the welfare-state problem. All this, however, is achieved by utilising, on a more or less conscious level, the pre-existing stigma associated with popular neighbourhoods. The adjective "*lazy"* is often used to describe people living in popular neighbourhoods, and their perceived unwillingness to make sacrifices pervades Argentine society (Adamovsky, 2009). Indeed, in the extract above, it is generalised that previous generations of *villa* residents were lazy, reproducing the long-standing stigmatisation. Therefore, there also appears to be an attempt to discipline the "poor" and educate them in a way to instil the morality of the "formal city", in this way naturalising the stigma attached to them. This can also be noted in the following extract:

> "(…) When they start to see certain improvements, they also begin to get used to living together, to respecting regulations, to understanding that they can no longer do whatever they want in the neighbourhood, to understanding that they have to start respecting public spaces… Because, well, as I say… You wanted urbanisation. Well, urbanisation comes with benefits, but it also comes with obligations that you have to fulfil (…) today the neighbours, internally, are being educated and guided towards this process of integration...." (A-P1)

In this way, full citizenship is achieved through financial productivity, thus dividing formal citizens from slum dwellers. The latter need to comply with the hegemonic moralities to be accepted in the formal city. As Cosacov and Perelman (2015) highlight, the middle class perceives itself as taxpaying citizens in contrast to the shantytown's inhabitants, who are considered to be economically sustained by the government. Therefore, the concepts of *integración* and *re-urbanización* appear to be linked to the economic responsibilisation of inhabitants and their entering into the formal city's circuit through their compliance with hegemonic norms and values.

4.4.2 The new Barrio

Symbolic politics are also trying to cleanse the identity of the place with the change of name from *villa* (*i.e.,* shantytown) to *barrio* (*i.e.,* neighbourhood in Spanish) and the identity of the residents from *villero* (*i.e*., a derogatory term used to designate a person living in a slum) to *vecino* (i.e., neighbour) (Sternberg, 2023). Indeed, Villa 31-31bis was renamed *Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica* in honour of the founder of the *cura villero* movement (*i.e.,* priests living and working in shantytowns), who worked in the urban settlement until his assassination by the Triple A (*i.e., Alianza Anticomunista Argentina*) in 1974. The priest Carlos Mugica fought for the rights of Villa 31 residents, living alongside the community, and founded the Cristo Obrero parish. His struggle was based on grassroots organisations, giving voice to social inequalities and opposing the eradication of the informal settlement. Consequently, the *barrio* has been branded as a new space of gastronomic cultures due to the high density of migrants from other South American Countries. As Sternberg (2023) highlights, political actors have created new positive terms to (re)integrate stigmatised groups and spaces into society, erasing the negative connotations associated with them. This symbolic transformation can also be interpreted as another attempt to 'normalise' the informal settlement by attributing positive connotations to previous stigmatised features. Indeed, *villas miserias* are racialised due to the high presence of inhabitants coming from neighbouring countries. In this way, previously stigmatised characteristics are reframed by transforming labels of marginality into elements of attractiveness and legitimacy.

Furthermore, the employment of the term "*vecino*" reveals important tensions within the discursive construction of the neighbourhood. On the one hand, the expression appears to create a

subtle hierarchical distinction between residents and external actors working on the project, as emerges from an interview with a member of the local team:

> "All the time you're there in the middle of the discourse that you don't want to discriminate, you don't want to use words that aren't appropriate, but it's also a commercial speech, a political speech, even talking about *vecinos*. In the rest of the city, there are also development projects, and you don't say *vecinos* of Palermo [a wealthy neighbourhood in Buenos Aires]... they usually refer to them with other words. Here, it's as if they were my neighbours, and I don't live there. So, there's also a bit of stigma attached to the people who live there... as if they didn't have the tools and we're going to give to them..." (A-E2)

Rather than functioning as an inclusive category, the term is perceived to implicitly mark residents as a subordinate group. On the other hand, this political speech erases social, economic and cultural differences (Sternberg, 2023) between the *vecinos* of a popular neighbourhood and the rest of the formal city. In other words, it operates through a process of homogenisation, whereby all historical and political responsibility is nullified, and all citizens seem to start their path in the social world from the same place. In this way, any inability to live according to the institutional and moral logic of how a *vecino* should behave is deprived of its social context and the broader nature of social problems, reducing them to personal responsibility and failure. The language of inclusion appears to depoliticise inequalities by framing residents as equal participants while implicitly reproducing asymmetrical power relations. As a respondent sums up, symbolic politics around the project mainly were:

> “We are all good, we all live in Disneyland, and here we are all beautiful. We love them. I walk around the neighbourhood, hugging people, carrying my *mate* [*i.e.,* a typical Argentinean beverage], as an act of love for the poor... which actually hides the fact that there are conflicts of class, gender, race, and income level.” (A-U1)

However, behind the image presented, the popular neighbourhood continues to face issues that lead some residents to believe it remains a *villa.* In the words of a resident, the living experience within the popular neighbourhood is still limited by infrastructural problems. Thus, it is considered

> "A *villa.* I call it a *villa* because a *barrio* is when you're already urbanised, and here it's far from that... Outside the official route that the government takes along the main avenue, the new houses, under the motorway, everything they want to show you... Well, but when you go further in, the streets are a disaster, the sewers flood, the cables fall, the poles are falling down, there are fires everywhere, power cuts, we don't have water in summer..." (A-R1)

Nonetheless, for some residents, the renaming of the popular neighbourhood is viewed as a way to get rid of the stigma tied to the title assigned to them during the dictatorship. They feel the name was imposed and perceive the number *31* as the most stigmatising feature. In the words of a resident,

> "They put a stamp on popular neighbourhoods (…) and these numbers are like a stigma on that population. (…) Before calling it Villa 31, I would prefer that the residents be referred to as... just one more neighbourhood of Buenos Aires..." (A-R6)

The change from *villa* to *barrio* appears to operate primarily at a symbolic level, without fully displacing the stigmatising markers historically associated. As it is observed by a political actor:

> "For me, the important thing is to start calling it a *barrio.* I repeat we must not lose sight of the fact that it was born as a *villa* and that, even though it is now a *barrio*, it will continue to have the appearance and certain aspects of the way people from the *villa* behave." (A-P1)

This statement illustrates how territorial stigmatisation is rearticulated as the stigma is displaced onto certain behaviours of residents, and it is perceived as a source of difference from the rest of the city.

In this environment, community tourism has become popular, generating contrasting perspectives on the subject. Some interviewees perceive it as a way of bringing the formal city closer to Barrio Mugica, highlighting its peculiarity and helping to tackle the stigma attached to it, while others see it as an exoticization of poverty. The local reality of *Visita Mugica*, a community tourism made up of residents of the neighbourhood, was created as a brand in 2023, while their work started in 2019 with guided tours. The initiative was backed by the city government by provisioning the necessary tools for their project (*i.e.,* public visibility and training) and the Buenos

Aires City Tourism Board, which conferred them the tourism promoter accreditation. From their perspective, their local work helps to counteract the long-standing prejudices and misinformation attached to them and their neighbourhood. Indeed,

> "The issue of prejudice is the main objective: to break that down. (...) It always happens that people tend to come with some fear, with something in the back of their minds that's bothering them, or they simply come out of morbid curiosity - which also happens - thinking: right, I'm going to visit the most dangerous slum in Argentina... So, well… At first, it's hard to get through to these people with the whole story, but afterwards they leave with a completely different idea" (A-R4).

The collective ideas of shantytowns as "crime zones to fear and avoid" (Auyero, 2007:22) are endogenously reframed by local actors through narratives that emphasise the distinctive character of the popular neighbourhood, as historical roots, community struggles and their variegated gastronomic culture. As it is emphasised by a resident (A-R5), one of the long-standing stigmas comes from the origin of its population:

> "The vast majority, when we start a tour… Once we asked, 'Who do you think first settled here? And most people thought Bolivians, Paraguayans or Peruvians. And when you tell them it was Italians, they're like, 'What?', they don't expect it."

As Garguin (2007) points out, before the rise of Peronism and the subaltern working class, the middle class was not distinguished from the population in general, thereby embodying the idea of whiteness, modernity and European descent for all the Argentines. However, the rift produced by Peronism disrupted this homogenous image of the population, revealing internal divisions along lines of class, culture and race (*ibid.*, 2007). In this way, the middle class identity reinforced what Guano (2004:71) describes as "elitist mythologies" of superiority over the working class. By foregrounding European origins, these accounts disrupt taken-for-granted associations between informality, migration from neighbouring countries, and marginality, further contributing to the reformulation of the neighbourhood's symbolic identity.

4.4.3 The aesthetic concern and the neighbourhood's future

Symbolic politics is also used to change the negative connotations attributed to the physical aesthetic of the neighbourhood. The program "*Más color*" is a clear example, with the painting of the house's front following a palette of 14 colours, from which inhabitants had to choose the one they preferred. The intervention was presented as involving not only "the physical and material components of the neighbourhood but also its subjective, identity-related and sociability elements" (BA, 2024:24). The colour palette was the one that supposedly

> "(…) represent the neighbourhood, that is, the ones that give it meaning... Why? Because of their culture... So, there was the colour yellow because it represented the corn of Bolivia, the colour green for everything concerning the greengrocer's… like all the colours that refer to the roots of all the people who live in Barrio 31, who are not only Argentineans." (A-E5)

Once the neighbours have chosen the colour for their houses, local cooperatives (*i.e.*, self-administered organisations composed of residents) proceed to paint them. However, residents were reluctant towards the program because they considered it more of an external aesthetic concern, in an attempt to make the popular neighbourhood more attractive and acceptable to the rest of the city. In the words of a neighbourhood resident,

> "They (*i.e.*, the government) are very obvious; this is all for the show, why? Because this is a very visual area, if the houses remain with exposed brick, without plaster or paint, it is obvious that the government "did nothing". But if you at least painted the outside, the government could lie and say that yes, all the comprehensive improvements have been made, that is, all the internal improvements to the house, when in fact you only painted the outside of the house. The person inside still has everything the same, (…) there are places in the neighbourhood that do not even have sewers or bathrooms. So, what kind of urbanisation are you trying to sell? A façade, which is this... they sell a lot, and Villa 31 has a lot of marketing." (A-R1)

The empirical data suggest that they tried to recreate a tourist image with colourful houses, like those found in the famous Caminito in La Boca (Buenos Aires). For some respondents of the territorial team, an external component has been incorporated in the colours and public spaces of Barrio Mugica. Indeed, there was a search to create an impact for the pictures, and architects who designed the public spaces sought references from Denmark's squares. Moreover, the Illia

highway that crosses and divides the neighbourhood was initially thought to be transformed in a high park, emulating New York's High Line Park, by moving the highway to the eastern frontier of the neighbourhood. At the end of 2016, the government began construction of the pylons for the new motorway, but in 2018, it was announced that the project would be suspended due to a lack of funding. The intervention was the subject of controversy and criticism, as it did not meet the residents' needs nor did it contribute to improving their quality of life (Cravino and Ons, 2023). However, it is important to note that the envisioned future of the popular neighbourhood is its integration into the city's formal circuit, with the development of its surrounding areas. The project in Barrio Mugica is part of a wider intervention in the Retiro area aimed at enabling its re-functionalisation (Ons, 2021). Indeed, major private and public development projects are being carried out alongside the redevelopment of Barrio Mugica, mainly road and transport works (*ibid.*, 2021). In the future, the intervention aims to create an area where diverse socio-economic identities coexist, fostering social mix and "positive gentrification". In the words of the political actor interviewed,

> "Our vision for the neighbourhood in 2050 was... companies set up in the neighbourhood, bus routes running through the whole neighbourhood, everyone with their title deeds, everyone paying for services, people who weren't from the neighbourhood living in the neighbourhood, people starting to choose to live in the neighbourhood. And 2050 was not a random date because it was exactly 30 years after they would have to pay for their properties, which meant they would have free disposal of their title deeds and be able to sell if they wanted to. (...) I know it's a contradiction, an oxymoron, but positive gentrification, not in the sense of gentrification that implies unwillingness, but with the willingness to generate a social mix and for the levelling to be upwards. In other words, the neighbourhood should not be expelling people because it is expensive, but it should be interesting for someone who wants to... for another neighbour who does not live there but wants to move in." (A-P2)

It is important to underline the function of title deeds. Indeed, as mentioned above, Law *6.129* (2018) provides for residents to acquire their property through a 30-year mortgage. The final amount to be paid is not made explicit, which has generated uncertainty and fear among residents. Indeed, land title regulations have only come into effect for residents who have been moved to the new housing complexes (Cravino and Ons, 2023). In the previous quote, the year 2050 is chosen

because they imagined that inhabitants would then be legal owners of their property and would have the freedom to choose. Here, external constraints are not considered. Therefore, various features of this extract are useful to better frame the implications of the area-based policy. The social and urban integration is interpreted as a process of "positive gentrification", which is believed to create a social mix that will eventually raise the socio-economic standard in the Retiro area, without producing displacement. On a deeper level, the integration aspired could serve to establish the hegemonic moral values of the space and its inhabitants in the long run, trying to discipline identities that do not conform to the final expectations. In addition, the vision underestimates the social and economic external factors that could limit residents' climbing of the social ladder. The objective of integrating through social mixing can also be observed in the installation of the Ministry of Education of Buenos Aires headquarters in the popular neighbourhood. This has generated a daily flow of administrative officials and different people who work and/or move around the Barrio Mugica, at least in the area where it is located.

4.5 Conflicting narratives at the local level

The Social, Economic and Urban Integration Project has fragmented the neighbours' responses and perceptions, thus creating conflicts, different narratives and interests at the local level. Some residents have found better prospects and improved their standard of living. For them, the *urbanización* has produced transformations they never expected to happen in their neighbourhood. Those respondents emphasise the positive changes brought by the CeDEL (*i.e.*, the entrepreneurial development centre), which have generated connections with "the outside" (A-R2) and job opportunities for the working-age population. Indeed, before the integration project started,

> "Looking for a job was more difficult. The routine was to leave early in the morning, hand out CVs here and there, and get rejected everywhere because you had your address here (...) I mean, I already knew that, but I didn't lose hope, right? And you ended up working illegally, which was the easiest thing to do, because they couldn't hire you legally. So, when CeDEL arrived here... It was very important for young people (…) because it gave you hope that you could get a job officially or that you wouldn't have to change your address. That happened to me because I refused to change my address." (A-R5)

Indeed, following Goffman's (1963) and Wacquant's (1993) stigma management techniques, in the past, residents often concealed their addresses and personal information to get rid of the stigma attached to their territory and, by extension, to them as individuals. Many of these difficulties were enhanced by the name of the neighbourhood "*Villa 31"* that "carried a lot of prejudice and stigma that already marked you before you even entered a place" (A-R4). The change of name and the provision of formal addresses have enhanced how some residents perceived themselves in the social environment and in their daily lives. For a respondent, young generations do not experience the same difficulties of living in a shantytown, at least to some extent, regarding stigma in the job market. As a resident emphasises,

> "I think they don't feel it as much as we did at the time; they don't feel like, 'oh, we live in a slum'. I don't think they feel that way anymore... and they don't feel the burden that we felt or things like that... I couldn't say. I feel like they have it easy." (A-R4)

Some of those residents now work in public organisations and community centres, leading to changes in the internalisation of stigma among inhabitants and in local narratives. In other words, as one respondent highlights,

> "They would ask me, 'Where do you live?' I live here, I'm your neighbour... and they couldn't believe it. 'Do you live here?' It's like a person working for them in a public organisation, who is obviously already idyllic to them, couldn't possibly be from a slum." (A-R2)

This suggests that stigmatisation is not only attached to place, but also to the embodied experiences of the residents themselves. Various residents' daily trajectories may be interpreted as resistance practices (Sisson, 2021; Garbing and Millington, 2012) that challenge (sometimes interiorised) dominant representations of the stigmatised neighbourhood.

However, even if these transformations appear to have modified the daily lifepath of some residents who previously lived enclosed in their own district, the project is not seen to have reached every corner of the popular neighbourhood and every inhabitant in the same manner. Indeed, there are areas of the *barrio* that, due to geographical distance, have less access to important centres such as the Ministry of Education and CeDEL, resulting in various levels of integration and

development depending on the location. Not everyone perceives the transformation brought by the integration project as positive. The empirical data collected reveal a significant discrepancy between the policy proposal and residents' daily experience. One of these involves the aspired urban integration with the rest of the city through urban transport, an important element in the official narrative of the Barrio Mugica's integration. In the words of local inhabitants,

> "Our law says they have to make sure ambulances and public transport can get in, and that real integration is achieved with public transport crossing the neighbourhood, right? Well… In 2016, we had five bus routes that served us here (...) When they came into the neighbourhood, they started changing everything and removed all five of them, which were the five services most used by residents (...) Then, two years ago, they sold this in the newspaper as a sign of economic integration: 'the bus enters Villa 31'... As if a bus had never entered before." (A-R1)

> "What we do know is that, out of seven bus routes, only two run, and they run at the working hours of the Ministry of Education" (A-R6)

On the one hand, symbolic politics displays the neighbourhood's 'integration' to counter its historical portrayal as a marginalised space. On the other hand, these practices risk reproducing new conditions of exclusion while generating distrust in the local community towards the policies implemented. Another important discrepancy concerns the upgrading of existing housing, as discussed above, delays in their refurbishment and the provision of public services (Cravino and Ons, 2023). Consequently, a segment of neighbours are still living in precarious conditions and have not benefited from the project's implementation. The arrival of the state, after multiple historical attempts at eradication, even by the PRO party that was seen "supposedly as the enemy" (A-R7), has provoked fear and distrust. Consequently, the local encounters between political and territorial organisations and residents were not without conflict. The analysis displays that the urban environment is not shaped only by a dominant narrative but emerges from the interaction among contrasting endogenous discursive practices articulated by heterogeneous local actors.

There have been and still are several areas of division that have caused internal fragmentation among residents, leading to clashes between them. Economic interests and different political orientations have given rise to diverse narratives, which have produced different understandings of the integration proposed by the project. Furthermore, the historical roots and

long-standing community struggles of *Villa 31* have contributed to residents' distrust towards political authorities. The vision of a resident can help to grasp the feeling of rejection they experienced from the formal city.

> "So, today, the development process is designed to make us just another neighbourhood in the city. What does it mean to be just another neighbourhood in the city? It means we won't be able to live there. Why? Because we... the city itself has expelled us to where we are now, in a shantytown or on the street, for example... And what will happen to us? They are going to remove us, just as the city eradicated us, the city expelled us. The system itself is going to expel us from here, because this is designed to create Puerto Madero 2. (...) And we already know what they want; they are coming for our land." (A-R1)

As a result, some respondents believe that the main aim behind the project is to gradually expel them when financial costs become unbearable. This is the point at which fear and distrust of the state merge, as memories of exclusion are still present. Therefore, a widespread perception exists that the area-based policy is a pretence that hides a process of land revaluation and progressive expulsion through title deeds and unaffordable loans. As an interviewee sums up,

> "In other words, they give you the title deed, they give you the land, but then they create impossible conditions for people to live in, so you have to sell up and leave. That's how they move forward." (A-R7)

Therefore, while the political actor interviewed envisions a 'positive gentrification,' at the local level, this may be interpreted as a form of future displacement.

With respect to local participation in the integration project, it appears to have created fragmentation among inhabitants around political ideas and economic profits. The cooperatives of Barrio Mugica (*i.e.*, self-administered organisations composed of residents) were put in charge of carrying out various programs, such as the construction and demolition of houses, the recycling program (*i.e.*, ATR – A Todo Reciclaje), and telecommunications. The investment in these local cooperatives has led to a conflict of perspectives between profit-making opportunities and the representation of community interests. Indeed, many of these residents were also delegates who

participated in the Participatory Management Council to represent the shared interests of their districts. To quote an interviewee,

> "When they (the city's council) started to divide... They also focused on cooperatives. There was a lot of work for the cooperatives... but if you have all the cooperatives working for the city government, there is tension. Why? Because the cooperatives are the same people who later hold positions like delegate, who will represent us, and who must sit down and negotiate with the city government what kind of redevelopment our neighbours want. But, if these delegates are the same ones who have the cooperatives, how are they going to complain to their bosses about the wrong things? I have spoken with them, and they told me, "Don't worry, things will improve later." When will things improve? But, in the meantime, they approved everything." (A-R8)

According to some residents and an external actor, this has made the neighbourhood more dangerous, given the conflicting interests and visions at play in the popular neighbourhood. Indeed, the *Proyecto de integración* has not only transformed the physical environment, but it has also reconfigured social relations by generating new opportunities and, at the same time, new conflicts. The problem of participation is also highlighted by a political actor, displaying the limits they encountered around this issue. The respondent presents the characterisation of the people who participate in the city's council:

> "It's always the same crazy people who go to citizen participation meetings, who are either people with nothing better to do or who have something very bad to complain about because they don't know where else to go to spit it out, or who are motivated by partisan intentions or by a desire to cause harm or by some more specific agenda. (…) When 10 neighbours say that they have already discussed the issue in their area, they are speaking for another 100 who said absolutely nothing and maybe want the opposite." (A-P2)

The interviews reveal that, at the local level, this conflict has resulted in violence between neighbours with different interests and between residents and the State. Initially, the government was not well-received. The political interviewees emphasise the need to build trust among the population. Their strategy was based on the vision that they would achieve this by quickly delivering on their promises. The problem was that acting without initial participation, with a

mega-project not supported by real public policy, created even more mistrust among those who were already wary. Some residents interpreted this behaviour differently, displaying various forms of class discrimination, as one respondent recounts:

> "There was very little collaboration, because it's a class issue…They're from the upper-middle or the upper class, so they still believe they're one step, one rung above. So, they don't come to ask you, they come to give you orders, they come to say: Ok, we have this project, we have this, we have that. They never come to say: Hey, what shall we do?" (A-R7)

Furthermore, the regulation of the public space emerges as a crucial dimension through which processes of inclusion and exclusion take form, as it is shaped by institutional interventions that define which practices are considered legitimate. The removal of the pickers' carts from public roads within the neighbourhood exemplifies this dynamic. Indeed, those interventions directly affect vital economic activities for certain neighbours, representing their primary source of income.

> "They were removed because they were in a public space (...) If you don't think about the urban development process and say: Well, there's a percentage who have to work with their carts, so how do we ensure they have a public space where they can park their carts?" (A-R8)

In this way, the city's government not only reorganise the space, but actively disciplines its uses.

Another particularly sensitive issue was the relocation of families living under the Illia motorway, an area historically occupied by 1,200 families, to another district of the Barrio Mugica, near the Ministry of Education. The space where houses were located was transformed into a public square, as can be seen in *Figure 4*. All the territorial team and political actors interviewed have highlighted the transformative nature of the project, as summarised by one of those:

> "The route of a motorway cannot be the roof of any family; it cannot be the roof of any home... Therefore, not only was the largest development process going to be undertaken, but also the largest relocation process in Latin America, involving the relocation of 1,200 families." (A-P1)

Figure 4. Under the motorway, where houses were located. Some houses were still in demolition in September 2024 (*source*: author's picture, 2024).

However, for many residents, their homes were the fruit of years of effort, filled with memories and symbolic value. Some evictions were violent since residents did not want to move. The aesthetic arguments often used to convince them, "we are giving you a more beautiful house", collided with the neighbours' lived experience. As one woman from the neighbourhood put it:

> "What is your standard for nice? Because I've lived where I am for many years, and my house is nice, I love it the way it is. Thus, find a different argument to convince someone to leave their home." (A-R2)

For many residents, the new houses built with drywall did not align with the value of their brick-built homes, feeling that they did not take into account the inhabitants' expectations.

Figure 5. The new houses developed for the relocation of residents living under the Illia highway (*sources:* author's picture, 2024).

4.5.1 Internal divisions

On the local level, there exists an internal stigma among the *vecinos* themselves. As emerged in several interviews, what is externally valued as cultural and gastronomic diversity may also obfuscate an internal stigma linked to the place of origin. In an extract of an interview,

> "The issue of nationalities here... there is discrimination among Latin American brothers themselves... I mean, it happens, and it's ugly to see, because... well, we're all from the same place, we're all from South America... So, that exists, and it hasn't changed yet, and it's a shame because... It's horrible to hear an Argentine mock a Bolivian or a Paraguayan, for example, which is what happens most often. And that also happens here, let's say, with insults, with a lot of things like that... which aren't good, but nothing, it's super difficult to change." (A-R4)

The empirical data support the existence of an intra-neighbourhood stigma. Indeed, the racial heterogeneity that coexists in popular neighbourhoods does not imply that "ethnic and racial considerations are not relevant to the way urban space is organised and the forms taken by social interaction" (Grimson and Segura, 2016:43). Moreover, racial markers often intersect with socio-economic inequalities, contributing to the development of differentiated forms of belonging and exclusion within the local environment. Another internal division happens within the different districts that formed Barrio Mugica.

> "Yes, there are many prejudices within the neighbourhood itself, there are a lot of prejudices. If I tell my dad, 'I'm going to *barrio chino* [*i.e.*, another area of Barrio Mugica] to visit a friend, he'll say, 'What are you doing there? They steal a lot there". I mean, there are... But that's because he has the same prejudices as people from outside." (A-R5)

The same stigmatising discourses that are often directed by society at large towards shantytowns and their residents can also be found internally within the various districts of the territory under study, known only to the inhabitants themselves. Considering that the residents' daily path often takes place within their residential district, the stigmatisation is partially reflected in less visited areas to which they associate the same stigma features, such as insecurity and delinquency.

4.6 Conclusion

In December 2023, Jorge Macri was elected mayor of Buenos Aires, and the integration project entered a phase of targeted investments. Indeed, the Barrio Mugica project no longer has the same budget as in the past, and the project's focus is now more aligned with security issues.

However, the government continues to be present in the area, remarking that "the transformation never stops", as *Figure 4* displays. The interviewees considered that the project is still incomplete, and that some aspects are going backwards. In the words of an interviewee,

> "I see the project as an incomplete process that will have many setbacks at the social level, and will perhaps generate greater rejection of the State's presence in the neighbourhood, because other variables of conflict will increase, such as poverty, insecurity... And, I think that will lead to greater rejection of the project overall. If the State project manages to survive, let's say, this... what I imagine

in the coming years, I do believe that in the future it will be a neighbourhood that will continue to grow, that will have a better quality of life for the people who live there, but through their own efforts and incentives...” (A-E2)

Figure 4. A street within Barrio Mugica (*source*: author’s picture, 2024).

The interviews reveal the neighbourhood’s heavy reliance on the city government to avoid a return to informality, as some public places are already deteriorated and are disconnected from the electrical grid. Residents who were not relocated are still afraid of what their future will be concerning the title deeds and the mortgage they will have to pay to finally become owners of their houses.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The chapter discusses the results from the analysis of the two case studies across the three operational categories: territorial stigmatisation, symbolic politics around area-based policies, and the conflicting narratives and visions that arise at the local level due to stigmatising processes and urban policies. Therefore, the discussion directly addresses the research questions of the present doctoral thesis.

5.1 Territorial stigmatisation

As mentioned, the concept of territorial stigmatisation, coined by Wacquant (1993), connects the personal experience of disgrace to the place where these individuals are often concentrated. The spatial proximity of several degraded identities allows for the stigma of all residents by complying with an oversimplification imposed from outside. Stigmatised places evoke negative cultural, racial, and physical stereotypes that take different forms and influence as the urban context changes (Pinkster *et al.*, 2020). For the urban sociologist, territorial stigmatisation superimposes itself on other forms of stigma commonly associated with poverty and minority ethnicities and represents the most striking constraint experienced by inhabitants (Wacquant, 1993; Wacquant, 2007). The use of the concept may enable a structural evaluation of how stigma is reproduced and utilised to achieve specific political objectives. In fact, its implementation towards specific urban neighbourhoods, regarded as unusual spatial formations, can serve to authorise new systems of citizenship and regime (Stavrides, 2013). In the present thesis, the cases of Barrio Mugica and La Legua demonstrate that territorial stigma has been an evolving process intertwined with their political intervention and, as a result, a precondition and reason for their strategic and political reconfiguration. At the same time, those interventions have implicitly exhibited the hegemonic values that those urban neighbourhoods appeared to be lacking.

The case study of La Legua displays how territorial stigmatisation was employed to construct an image of the popular neighbourhood that legitimises aggressive and containment policies. The Chilean *población* is located in the central-southern area of Santiago, initially in its periphery and only recently in the city's pericentre. The information is remarkable in giving a hint of how political interests and presence in the area have evolved, while validating the idea of peripheralization (Kühn, 2015) as a multidimensional process in which peripheries may change position over time, and residents are not stuck in a static environment. The historical marginal area initially belonged to the Municipality of San Miguel and was incorporated into the Municipality of San Joaquín in 1981 (Larenas *et al.*, 2018; Lin, 2020). From the beginning, the district's proximity to slaughterhouses and penitentiaries already contributed to its negative external representations (Lin, 2020; *citing* Palmer, 1984). Therefore, La Legua's development originally occurred in an agricultural land on the city's outskirts, supposedly an area less valuable to political authorities. The first wave of individuals who settled in the area known as *Legua Vieja* were usually previous nitrate workers from the north of Chile due to the fall in the prices of Chilean raw materials on the international market and Santiago's development of manufacturing industries (Álvarez, 2010; De Ramón, 1992; Larenas *et al.*, 2018). In 1947, the second phase of expansion occurred through organised *pobladores* under the leadership of the Communist Party, thus creating the *Nueva La Legua* settlement (Lin, 2020). This time, residents included displaced urban families from precarious collective housing or informally subdivided mansions, and other land occupations around Santiago (Ramos, 2015; Larenas *et al.*, 2018). The final phase of expansion began with the urbanisation of *Legua de Emergencia* in the 1950s by the *Fundación de Viviendas de Emergencia* (Ramos, 2015). This emergency housing was destined for people relocated from precarious informal settlements in Santiago's suburbs who already had a negative reputation (Álvarez, 2003), thus concentrating discredited groups and poverty. Therefore, the three distinct phases of urban development had produced the following neighbours' characterisation: (i) poor countryside migrant families; (ii) the politically active communist group, whose area began to be known as '*little Russia'* (Lin, 2020:6); and (iii) displaced urban families and criminals, whose principal representation was incarnated by the *choro* (*i.e.,* the thief) (Álvarez, 2010). At the external level, Santiago's inhabitants began to associate two distinct groups with the whole neighbourhood: left-wing activists and criminals (Lin, 2020). A key factor that has allowed territorial stigmatisation to reproduce has been the political dissolution of the internal borders of La Legua. In other words,

this has offered the possibility of drawing on the different forms and layers of stigma, internally diversified amongst the three areas, thus institutionalising the employment of territorial stigmatisation. In this way, during the Chilean military dictatorship (1973-1990), the leftist political position of La Legua Nueva was used to intervene violently in the territory and, at the same time, to take advantage of the situation to conduct anti-criminal raids in Legua de Emergencia to murder inhabitants with criminal records (Álvarez, 2010).

During the 1980s and 1990s, given the critical situation of hunger, marginality and government inability to address social problems, a new actor was inserted and began to identify the *población*: drug trafficking networks. In this environment, La Legua ceased to be portrayed as a popular neighbourhood with social issues and became an urban problem in its own right (Lin, 2020). With the rise of narcotraffic, news reports and television began to focus on raids against illegal activities and violence in La Legua. The community was thus described as an '*emblematic expression of a territory controlled by drug trafficking*' (Larenas *et al.*, 2018:16). As a result, from the 2000s onwards, La Legua has become the reference and emblem of security interventions, thereby representing the best-known conflictive *población* in Santiago and Chile and increasing the stigma attached to the area. This urban place has been politically mobilised as a paradigmatic case through which other stigmatised neighbourhoods are interpreted, thus incorporating various negative collective imaginaries. Moreover, the interventions implemented after 2001 have focused on La Legua Emergencia, in turn affecting the entire territory of La Legua. Indeed, its internal borders have been dissolved in favour of a homogenised representation that erases the place's social complexity. This has provoked a respatialisation of territorial stigmatisation, thereby allowing its intensification. The neighbourhood has been portrayed as a "lawless space" governed by "drug trafficking" and "violence", with its name overused and overexposed in political speeches and mass media. The analysis suggests that broader political concerns have been articulated through La Legua, positioning the popular neighbourhood at the centre of long-standing stigmatisation processes. In fact, its internal differentiations have enabled their strategic employment. By producing a language of emergency, La Legua has been framed as s an exceptional territory in need of special political solutions.

The second case study of Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica, historically known as *Villa 31-31bis*, displays how the informality tied to shantytowns has been symbolically translated into negative representations of the area and its inhabitants. However, before entering the neighbourhood's

genealogy of stigmatisation, it is important to analyse the Argentine term *villa miseria* as the "repository of so many (mis)representations" (Auyero, 2000:102). The expression is abstracted from a specific, physical and concrete place. Indeed, the *villa miseria* comes to signify a series of negative connotations that may be symbolically applied to all informal settlements which carry that prefix. As a result, when analysing territorial stigmatisation and its reproduction, it becomes vital to understand how this general notion has been constructed over time to comprehend the historical trajectory of *Villa 31.* The ex-*Villa 31* is located near the port of Retiro in the city centre and is the oldest shantytown in the Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (CABA), with its history dating back to 1930. Its location might be one of the reasons explaining the greater socio-political interest compared to other shantytowns disseminated throughout the city. From its beginning, the informal settlement and residents' use of space have been represented as opposed to the modern lifestyle of Buenos Aires (Snitcofsky, 2022), thereby increasing the social polarisation between people living in the formal city and those tied to informality. During the first military junta, the *Plan de Emergencia* (1956) was the first document to identify the city's shantytowns as an urban anomaly. In its material descriptions of slums, the document proposed a simplified representation of those areas by evoking images of monstrosity and chaos, in contrast to the symmetry of Buenos Aires (Codebò, 2020). This division then became inscribed both in the city's consciousness and in space. Throughout its history, *Villa 31* has been the scene of various eradication attempts, state abandonment and community struggles to integrate and urbanise these areas. Under the military government of Juan Carlos Onganía in 1968, the *Plan de Erradicación de Villas Miserias* proposed the eradication of shantytowns (Massidda, 2011). *Villas miserias* were seen as a parallel society, "home to nearly one million Argentines, Bolivians, Paraguayans, and Chileans" (Revista Siete Dias Ilustrados, 1968). In 1976, the last military dictatorship came to power and proposed the most violent policies on the eradication of all informal settlements. However, the informal settlement of Retiro had managed to survive. The use of advertising campaigns was an important mechanism to destroy any sense of empathy towards the inhabitants of *villas miserias* (Oszlak, 1991). In fact, shantytowns were presented as *ghettos,* and their population was composed of: (i) jobless individuals; (ii) usually coming from neighbouring countries with different customs; (iii) freeloaders; (iv) criminals; (v) political clientele for populist parties; (vi) individuals who do not pay taxes; and (vii) organised mafia (Oszlak, 1991:159/160). Thus, it has been inferred that informal settlements were places of moral deviance, social disorders, criminality, foreignness, and

state dependency. Labels such as *vagos* (*i.e.,* lazy), *mantenidos* (*i.e.,* freeloader), and *okupas* (*i.e.,* squatters) have contributed to identifying residents as undeserving subjects and the territory as inherently pathological. These terms were condensed into the derogatory term, which refers to people who lived in *villas miserias*, the *villeros*, and have laid the foundation for collective imaginaries that have been difficult to eradicate. It is within this stigmatising framework that the *Social, Economic and Urban Integration Project* started in 2015, positioning the informal settlement as a space in need of correction, normalisation, and integration into the formal city. The *integración* appears to lie upon the preexisting territorial stigmatisation of the popular neighbourhood, rendering the stigma functional to the project. The stigmatisation does not disappear but evolves from an overt expression into a more subtle, functional one. Here, informality is depicted as a temporary condition to be adjusted through the integration into the formal system and by downplaying structural inequalities.

In the two case studies presented, territorial stigmatisation remains a structuring element that continues to shape, to varying degrees, the representation of the neighbourhood and the different urban interventions. As we will see in the next paragraph concerning symbolic politics, stigma is utilised and addressed in particular ways and for different political intents. Both places are presented as inherently pathological, fuelled by immoral behaviours and violence. In the collective consciousness, those urban neighbourhoods carry what Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira (2014) define as the nationalisation of territorial stigma. That is, one of the characteristics of the phenomenon of advanced marginality by which specific neighbourhoods have been "universally renowned and reviled across class and space as redoubts of self-inflicted and self-perpetuating destitution and depravity" (Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira, 2014:1273). In La Legua, the territory is seen as a place of violence, inhabited by drug-trafficking, and its name has been branded as representing one of the best-known conflictive *población* in Santiago and Chile. Barrio Mugica is seen as "the abstraction of all the slums and the popular neighbourhoods" (A-P2), and the focus is placed on its informality as an illegal land occupation, racialised by the representation of migrants from neighbouring countries. From this perspective, the urban environment is the bearer of pre-given characteristics that do not take into account wider social and political conditions that made their emergence possible (Sisson, 2021). In both case studies, this is often achieved through the external homogenisation of the targeted urban area, thereby abstracting its social complexity and reducing it to specific negative connotations that justify the political interventions. This provokes

the narrowing of their historical and evolutionary trajectories, resulting in a form of presentism. In this way, territorial stigmatisation remains at disposal if political objectives are not achieved. As Paton (2018) highlights, political authorities aim to modify citizens' behaviour through stigmatisation techniques that instil shame and humiliation in residents of degraded areas. In this way, territorial stigmatisation may be considered a "soft power" pivotal to "moral and economic class projects" (Paton, 2018:921). Furthermore, by obfuscating the conditions of inequality, responsibility falls into stigmatised individuals and the places where they reside (Sisson, 2021). The thesis argues that territorial stigmatisation plays a central role in determining how degraded urban places are governed and transformed.

5.2 Symbolic politics

Symbolic politics refers to the set of political narratives and messages that designate the types of individuals, preferences, and moralities towards which authority is supportive or critical (Mendelberg, 2022, *citing* Gusfield, 1986). In the case studies of La Legua and Barrio Mugica, it emerges that different policy mechanisms are used to approach the urban neighbourhoods considered "problematic" and, therefore, in specific aspects, exceptional compared to common forms of urban and social development. Consequently, those diverse public policies aim to reintegrate the space into the urban circuit. In the two cases under study, the urban policies selected are structurally different. In La Legua, security policies have dominated the governmental agenda, with limited social and urban interventions on the sidelines. In Barrio Mugica, the City's government proposed a social, urban and economic project in 2015, thereby changing previous eradication discourses. Fundamentally, these urban policies interact with territorial stigmatisation through symbolic politics. These political accounts both serve as a space for reframing stigma and as a means to sustain the interventions being implemented. In this way, symbolic politics involves the "power of constructing reality" by establishing the actual meaning of the social world (Bourdieu, 1991:166).

Concerning the Chilean case study, in 2001, mass media covered the execution of what was known as the 'narco boss' by a rival gang near La Legua, thereby provoking great concerns regarding the impunity enjoyed by drug traffickers. This occurrence led the then-Subsecretary of the Interior, Jorge Correa Sutil, to declare the urgent need to impose the State's authority in La

Legua through police control (INDH, 2015; Vial, 2017) and prompted the Ministry of the Interior to launch the first of a series of neighbourhood-level security policies to address public discontent (Frühling and Gallardo, 2012). The stigmatisation attached to the urban neighbourhood becomes part of the symbolic policies proposed alongside government interventions, constructing La Legua, specifically La Legua Emergencia, as an exceptional space requiring drastic solutions. Symbolic politics has used representations of space as "emblematic" and "critical" to achieve this end. Those discourses have enabled aggressive and arbitrary interventions, conceived according to a logic imposed from above, in a top-down process. Initially, the intervention, known as *Barrio Seguro*, first tackled La Legua Emergencia, integrating the other *poblaciones* only subsequently. The government considered the program a master plan for future implementation among other conflict-ridden populations around Santiago and, more broadly, at the national level (Álvarez, 2010). The program was backed by substantial financial resources and appeared to be planned in multiple phases, focusing on two main areas: social welfare and police control (*ibid.*, 2010). However, the program executed in the popular neighbourhood proved to be, first and foremost, a matter of law enforcement and police control (Álvarez, 2010; Vial, 2017). Police control has principally involved two key activities: occasional raids and daily presence in Legua de Emergencia (Larenas *et al.,* 2018). The Carabineros had fixed positions within La Legua, located at six different crossroads that control all access to La Legua de Emergencia, given the idea of a militarised space (INDH, 2015; Larenas, 2021). Although other dimensions were included in the program in 2003, such as community mobilisation and public infrastructure improvements, the *Barrio Seguro* ended in 2006 due to multiple residents' complaints (INDH, 2015). One of those public infrastructures involves the construction of grass verges that were locally received as a visible manifestation of the stigmatisation attached to their neighbourhood, as the Municipality painted the cement structure green to simulate grass. It can be inferred that these public policies implemented in La Legua did not have a point of contact with the local community. They were not involved in the residents' needs, and the roots of the social discontent. At the local level, they have occasioned police corruption and the loss of institutional legitimacy. As a result, security policies have been interpreted as an empty exercise of power rather than a form of protection. In this way, territorial stigmatisation becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Sakizlioglu and Uitermark, 2014), as it designs urban policies that ultimately confirm it. Thus, at the local level, even urban changes are conceived as stigmatising, aimed at the continued marginalisation of the popular neighbourhood.

In 2011, the *Plan Iniciativa Legua* was created to address security issues, neighbourhood regeneration, and social and economic development (Larenas, 2021), after the parish priest of La Legua denounced the unbearable violence to which inhabitants were subjected due to narco-trafficking. The working fields were twofold: police control and social prevention. Again, the then-Ministry of the Interior, Rodrigo Hinzpeter, declared the neighbourhood "hypercritical". Although the program was presented as comprehensive, it replicated historical trends in urban intervention and security (Larenas *et al.*, 2018). The empirical data suggest that the persistence of marginality and violence in La Legua Emergencia serves as a mechanism for framing symbolic politics. In other words, the Chilean case indicates the complete instrumentalisation of the popular neighbourhood, always at the disposal of securitarian political ends. The neighbourhood of La Legua thus represents a symbolic site through which different institutions can build and legitimise their narratives while reinforcing their role. La Legua has become a *brand* for public policy and political interests; its stigmatisation is instrumentalised and mobilised, becoming an important dimension in interventions' design, justification and communication. Another remarkable feature is the political dimension of scale, between broader structural framings and the neighbourhood level. Indeed, national security-oriented policies were translated into the circumscribed area of La Legua, producing a back-and-forth process between national and local governance. Indeed, the previously mentioned *Plan Iniciativa Legua* was designed at the request of the Municipality's mayor and the local priest, as the neighbourhood was not included in the national *Programa Barrio en Paz Residencial* implemented by the then-President Sebastián Piñera. Moreover, it displays a scalar process by which complex socio-spatial issues are rearticulated and localised at the local level. Therefore, symbolic politics contributes to making the selected territorial scale natural in order to address the problem.

In the case study of Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica, symbolic politics implemented during the Social, Economic and Urban Integration Project in 2015 have produced a reordering by putting long-standing territorial stigmatisation in motion. The project has three main pillars: (i) urban integration; (ii) social integration; and (iii) economic integration. Its final purpose is the *integración* with the rest of the city and the *radicación definitiva* of its inhabitants in adequate housing solutions, regulated by *Law 6.129*. The renaming of the area, from *Villa 31-31bis* to *Barrio Carlos Padre Mugica*, and of its inhabitants, from *villeros* to *vecinos*, has questioned the long-standing stigmatisation applied to the popular neighbourhood. Thus, symbolic politics has been in

a constant reformulation and dialogue with the stigmatisation attached to informality. The *barrio* has been branded as a new space of gastronomic cultures due to the high density of migrants from other South American Countries, thus reframing indicators of marginality into elements of attractiveness and legitimacy. As Sternberg (2023:71) highlights, those "discursive spaces and new identities were actively shaped in a way that would highlight the virtues of urban transformation while obliterating any memory of a stigmatised space and identity". At the core of this ideology, to sanitise the term *villero* by substituting it with *vecino* (*i.e.,* the word evokes a bourgeois identity that connects the right to the city to pay taxes and homeownership) is a form of both celebrating the country ideology of whiteness and European background and reproducing the idea that urban spaces belong to social groups with specific characteristics (*ibid,* 2023). At the same time, the term *vecino* contributes not only to the obliteration of stigmatisation but also to the structural conditions of social inequality. Therefore, if, at the end of the "*integración*", residents are not able to succeed, they might be personally blamed for being unable to "become successful, productive neoliberal consumer citizens" (Paton, 2018:929) and ungrateful for the intervention. Moreover, at the local level, the term appears to create a subtle hierarchical distinction between residents and external actors working, implicitly marking residents as a subordinate group.

The concepts of *integración* and *re-urbanización* have been tied to the formalisation of the area, thus interacting with the stigmatisation related to informality. In this way, residents are integrated through an "exercise of responsibility and culture payment" (BA, 2024), to install the morality of the "formal city" and introduce the hegemonic logic of citizenship. In this way, full citizenship is increasingly linked to financial productivity, clearly demarcating the formal citizens from slum dwellers. Therefore, symbolic politics appear in a direct dialogue with the previously mentioned visions of shantytown dwellers as lazy and welfare-dependent. This passage can be observed in the formalisation of title deeds for the acquisition of property by its residents through the payment of a thirty-year mortgage. Residents are not only rights-bearing subjects but also responsible future property holders whose right to the city is conditional on their entering into the neo-liberal society. In this way, they are expected to actively contribute to their own integration into society. The State, through the SECISyU, acts as the legal regulator of the local space and its development, disciplining its local use and logics. From the empirical analysis, it emerges that the final vision of the *integración* was aimed at a "positive gentrification", which was believed to create a social mix that would eventually raise the socio-economic standard in the Retiro area,

without producing displacement. Thus, the aspired integration can be interpreted as a way to establish the hegemonic moral values of the space and its inhabitants, by trying to discipline identities that do not conform to the final expectations. It is possible to notice a constant negotiation of the social conflict, with the intent to cover it by replacing and eliminating previously stigmatised terms. Thus, the historical moral and social stigmatisation attached to *villas miserias* translates into the attempt to discipline the "poor" by educating them and installing the morality of the "formal city". This can be observed in the economic measures aimed at the legalisation of previous economic activities and the entry of private companies to generate legal employment. Indeed, they suggest a broader process of formalisation through which existing informal practices are redefined as objects of transformation to be corrected, rather than practices embedded in the socio-economic fabric of the neighbourhood. At the local level, the integration of the popular neighbourhood has occasioned the perception that any aesthetic renovation was directed at outsiders' eyes, in an attempt to make the Barrio Mugica more attractive and acceptable to the rest of the city. As Bertelli (2021) highlights, the project was also seen as a model for the rest of the country and as an internationally good policy practice.

The two case studies present diverse forms of interaction with territorial stigmatisation. In the case of La Legua, symbolic politics operate by mobilising narratives of drug trafficking and violence, thus legitimising security policies. In this way, stigmatisation is not only reproduced but institutionally reinforced. In other words, long-standing negative representations are activated by urban policies to achieve political ends and make the various political interventions natural. On the contrary, the case of Barrio Mugica displays a wide range of social, economic and urban policies that aim to integrate the area into the formal circuit. By choosing this approach, symbolic politics provide a re-interpretation and re-ordering of stigmatisation processes by enabling the emergence of different terminologies. It is important to note that Barrio Mugica is located in one of the most economically valuable areas of Buenos Aires, making its integration a politically strategic objective. Thus, symbolic politics do not eliminate long-standing territorial stigmatisation but reorganise it in forms that align with wider processes of urban transformations. The concept of *Social Urbanism* (Montoya-Restrepo, 2014) provides a useful lens to frame the trajectories of both neighbourhoods. As can be seen in Barrio Mugica, through the use of discursive practices of inclusion, the State gives access to public spaces and services, housing, education and culture, while at the same time controlling and producing new forms of symbolic and sometimes coercive

violence. It can be seen in the forced relocations of the inhabitants living under the Illia highway. Instead, in the case of La Legua, the State's violence and repression is complemented by physical "benevolent" interventions. In this way, the "amphibious State which represses and violates is also the one that guarantees rights" (Montoya-Restrepo, 2014:171). Building on this, the present thesis suggests that area-based policies in stigmatised neighbourhoods reshape and are shaped by territorial stigmatisation, thereby contributing to stigma reconfiguration.

5.3 Conflicting visions at the local level

For Wacquant (1993), inhabitants of degraded areas tend to internalise the standpoint of public narratives and adopt submissive strategies to cope with stigmatisation (Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira, 2014). They attempt to ascribe to other inhabitants the negative public narratives that are conferred on them, thereby actively contributing to degrading their own residence (Wacquant, 2007). Although these behaviours are part of local practices established by residents, especially in the past, the analysis suggests that it is reductive to consider inhabitants' narratives and logic solely from this perspective. Indeed, an ambivalence exists between a positive perception of residents' neighbourhood and their internalisation of stigma and submissive strategies. The two case studies display that noteworthy differences often exist between inhabitants' representations and dominant narratives (Garbin and Millington, 2012). Residents often distance themselves from the negative description of their urban environment by constructing an affirmative and alternative social image of their local environment (*ibid.*, 2012). They also tend to counteract the homogeneity of stigmatisation processes by displaying the heterogeneity of their community. According to Garth Myers (2011), urban inhabitants "in their daily struggle […] develop their own rationality and logic of behaviour, which often do not comply with externally imposed visions of the city". At the same time, it is difficult for marginalised actors to access networks and negotiate power because of their position in powerless socio-spatial areas (Kühn, 2015). In the Latin American context, the segregation of the working class from the wealthy and middle classes has led to the construction of urban communities that dispensed with the nation-state as the regulator of urban planning processes (Montoya-Restrepo, 2014). Thus, those urban areas, characterised by informality and illegal practices, developed without the latter and the planned city belonged to the upper classes (*ibid.*, 2014). The area-based policies in La Legua and Barrio Mugica illustrate the

forms by which the nation-state regains control over those territories. Based on the empirical analysis, the government's involvement in those urban communities through area-based policies and discursive practices often produces contrasting narratives and visions. Indeed, the government presence mobilises symbolic politics aimed at legitimising urban governance models with the mobilisation of territorial stigmatisation. Symbolic politics thus creates fault lines to penetrate the local territory and to achieve political ends.

In the case study of Barrio Mugica, the *Social, Economic and Urban Integration Project* (2015) has fragmented the neighbours' responses and perceptions, thereby creating conflicts, different narratives and interests. The encounter among heterogeneous social actors has provoked conflicting visions around the urban neighbourhood and its transformations. At the local level, the government's entrance has brought new political narratives and social understandings of the area and its inhabitants. This situation has triggered social conflicts over how land valorisation should be, and the voices have diversified. The *Secretaría de Integración Social y Urbana* (*i.e.*, SECISyU) has been designed as the enforcement authority, with the following centralisation of decision-making power. However, participatory measures coexist with this centralised governance structure. In this regard, the *Consejo de Gestión Participativa del Proceso de Reurbanización del Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica* (*i.e.,* CGP) has been created to ensure the project's compliance. Due to (historical) local distrust of the government's intention to redevelop and permanently establish the community in its original territory, the authority's strategy has been to create "trust" among residents through achievements, even before Law 6.129 was sanctioned. This has, in turn, provoked even more mistrust and has been interpreted as a lack of clear public policy. Moreover, it is important to note that the PRO party position (*i.e*., with liberal and conservative orientations) has changed, as Macri tackled the problem of *Villa 31* with an eradication discourse for the 2007 city elections (Bertelli, 2021). When Larreta (from the same political party) decided to redevelop the area, the local distrust was justified by the belief that the political party did not have at heart the local community's interests, as the informal neighbourhood had always been considered a problem for the city. Indeed, the Barrio Mugica has a large presence of political grassroots organisations that seem to act as an internal glue in the narrative struggles. For the political opposition, the project is interpreted as an attempt to gentrify the neighbourhood, including the community's consequent displacement. In this case, counter-narratives strategically employ stigma by redefining the government project as guided by neo-liberal values and questioning the

legitimacy of the proposed urban transformation. Here, it can be observed that grassroots organisations also mobilise symbolic politics to reframe the government's urban transformations. While the government emphasises the positive changes brought about by the intervention and minimises its limits, those counter-narratives present the urban environment as a demonstration of how territorial stigmatisation still operates. Thus, the area-based policy acted as a narrative fracture, intensifying existing differences. Indeed, the coexistence of competing narratives in this urban environment has undermined the local construction of trust between the government and residents, as the latter experience urban transformation through often incompatible visions. This can also be observed in the dual perception of the urban space as *villa* and *barrio*, whose names are often interrelated.

The area-based policy has also led to new economic opportunities for several local actors in the Barrio Mugica. The economic investment in local cooperatives has created a conflict between profit-making opportunities and the representation of community interests. Indeed, many of these residents were also delegates, who participated in the Participatory Management Council to represent the shared interests of their districts. The results have been the rise of conflicting narratives among diverse local actors, which have translated into political protests against the government, internal conflicts among different cooperatives, and between supporters of the government and political grassroots organisations. The analysis displays that the urban environment is not shaped only by a dominant narrative but emerges from the interaction among contrasting endogenous narratives articulated by heterogeneous local actors. However, the unequal power among different actors to impose their vision over the Barrio Mugica produces concrete social consequences. Moreover, the structural differences embedded in the project between residents who have been relocated and those included in the upcycling programme (*i.e., macizo*), as well as disparities in physical improvements and mortgage schemes, have further fragmented residents' responses and understandings of their urban environment, thereby reinforcing processes of internal differentiation. However, internal differentiations already existed within the popular neighbourhood. Indeed, while the urban area has been externally homogenised under the vision of a multicultural *barrio* where *vecinos* live, the analysis displays the complexity of the local environment. The area is internally divided into various districts, each of which has different social and local practices. Local practices and internal residents’ mobility often occur within one’s own neighbourhood, which seems to create a narrative of stigmatisation among the different areas and

entities present at the local level. This emerges as an internal way of translating and renegotiating the external stigmatisation directed at popular neighbourhoods. Moreover, there is an internal socio-economic stratification, with different housing situations, thus contributing to various perceptions of the space according to individuals' needs and personal interests. In addition to these differentiations, intra-neighbourhood stigmatisation also exists. Indeed, what has been revalued as cultural and gastronomic diversity transforms, at the local level, into a stigma linked to place of origin, thus reproducing stigmatising racial markers within the territory's boundaries.

In the case study of La Legua, different local postures have translated into contrasting narratives regarding the government, either as a violent and coercive actor or a necessary but limited source of resources. These contrasting visions represent diversified positions within an institutional arena, shaped by uneven access to resources, legitimacy and organisational needs. The *Iniciativa Integral La Legua* adopted a multisectoral approach with multilevel governance, and the Council of Social Organisation (COS) represented the territorial, functional, and community organisations in La Legua, with participation from different departments of the Municipality of San Joaquin (Larenas *et al.*, 2018). This participative council has been the last attempt to prompt a local collective organisation in La Legua. However, the COS acted as a critical juncture, provoking lasting internal division and organisational fracture. Rather than strengthening local cohesion, the competition to obtain public funds has generated internal conflicts and rivalries. The distribution mechanism was intended as a democratic exercise of voting, with municipal preference for projects that operate daily in the local area. Indeed, the short-term, activity-based funds have transformed community organisation into a competitive field, as various organisations were positioned differently according to their access to institutional resources. Therefore, there was a segment of the population that actively participated in the Council of Social and Cultural Organisations in La Legua, whilst another sector harshly criticised the government's plan and all those involved in it (INDH, 2015). The latter's vision is that it would be illogical to be funded by a State that daily violates its residents, and whose only aim is to give the population only "bread and circuses" without addressing the root causes of their marginality. Nowadays, local organisations are mostly funded by municipal project-based competitive resources, and are disjointed and fragmented. In this local environment, another actor is crucial: drug-trafficking networks. Their presence has shaped both area-based policies and understandings of the urban environment. Concerning area-based policies, drug trafficking is the principal actor upon which

urban policies are articulated, influencing the institutional vision of La Legua. Their articulation at the local level exacerbates an already existing mutual distrust between residents and the State. Moreover, at the local level, narcotrafficking has diminished community ties and grassroots organisation, especially in La Legua Emergencia. Indeed, the RED OLE, comprised of different La Legua Emergencia organisations, was unable to succeed due to the "initially covert and later violent campaign by residents linked to drug trafficking" (Álvarez, 2010:126). Local inhabitants, who participated, were believed to be covert informants. Thus, the presence of the government and drug trafficking networks has generated a general mistrust among residents themselves in La Legua Emergencia. At the same time, this actor, while provoking violence and the neighbourhood's marginalisation, has supplied material scarcity by providing residents with economic benefits that the formal economy has never offered them. Therefore, the protection among neighbours through silence can be interpreted as a way of protecting themselves from the general violence exercised by the national government, from the beginning of the neighbourhood's history. The coercive policies experienced throughout La Legua's history have created a community that protects and supports itself through community ties. However, while strong local ties exist on the quotidian level, collective and political organisation has progressively weakened, resulting in the depolitisation of community action.

The boundaries of La Legua lie at a critical junction in the production of spatial representations, marked by a double tension between external discourses and internal dynamics (Lin, 2020). The territorial stigmatisation experienced by residents has enhanced local practices and narratives of territorial distinction to distance themselves from the stigma imposed. By symbolically delimiting the area carrying the name La Legua or by trying to differentiate the neighbourhood's relationships, those practices have unconsciously perpetuated the external vision of their territory. These elements may suggest that, although the stigma affects the entire area, it is often stratified within it, often unconsciously, creating symbolic hierarchies between neighbourhood sectors. In this sense, La Legua is not only subject to stigmatisation from the outside but also reproduces internal dynamics that designate La Legua Emergencia the most symbolically vulnerable place. At the same time, the stigmatisation experienced has given rise to positive narratives within the neighbourhood by seeking to reverse the negative connotations attributed by dominant discourses, as Garbin and Millington (2012) highlight.

These findings suggest that, within highly stigmatised areas, residents develop differentiated visions of their urban environments. The government's presence in those territories has generated internal conflicts by fragmenting the local actors' visions. On one side, institutional actors are viewed as providers of economic opportunities and services at residents' disposal. On the other side, their area-based policies appear violent and arbitrary in the case of La Legua and a threat to their survival in the case of Buenos Aires. The results give nuances to narratives that tend to homogenise or downplay community responses to urban transformation. However, the two case studies differ considerably, as different area-based policies enact specific visions of the urban environment and mobilise various local actors and forms of stigma. In the case of La Legua, the government interventions unfold in an environment marked by drug-trafficking networks, thus rendering them a crucial actor. Indeed, their presence has shaped both area-based policies and understandings of the urban environment. Instead, in Barrio Mugica, political grassroots organisations actively articulate counternarratives, using symbolic politics to negotiate the enacted vision around formality and informality. In both cases, governmental mechanisms have produced fault lines that have facilitated the consolidation of State presence in those marginal areas. At the same time, the same strategies have enhanced local distrust in governmental institutions, already embedded in the long-standing stigmatisation. Territorial stigmatisation thus frames both area-based policies and the transformations concerning the local environment, thereby shaping residents' and governmental perceptions.

5.4 Conclusion

The doctoral thesis explores how territorial stigmatisation operates through symbolic politics and area-based policies in the case studies of La Legua (Santiago de Chile) and Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica (Buenos Aires). Furthermore, it analyses how these urban interventions and transformations are interpreted at the local level by heterogeneous social groups, thereby shaping contrasting narratives and perceptions of the local environment. Thus, the thesis suggests that territorial stigmatisation remains a chief element through which neighbourhood and residents' representations are presented and the different urban interventions are articulated. State-led interventions designate the lines that divide deserving and undeserving communities, thereby reproducing the stigmatisation. Despite the structural differences between the predominantly

security-oriented policies implemented in Santiago and the redevelopment project in Buenos Aires, the thesis argues that territorial stigmatisation is used in symbolic politics as a mechanism of reinforcement or reordering. Therefore, place stigma becomes an active instrument through which political actors legitimise specific forms of interventions. Moreover, by analysing the phenomenon from within those historically marginalised places, the thesis grasps the complexity of contested urban places. The findings suggest the importance of taking into account local actors' fragmented responses to State presence when approaching area-based policies in stigmatised neighbourhoods.

Bibliography

Adamovsky, E. (2009) *Historia de la clase media Argentina: apogeo y decadencia de una ilusión, 1919-2003.* 1° ed. Buenos Aires: Planeta.

Ainstein, L. (1996) Buenos Aires: A case of deepening social polarization. In: Gilbert, A. (ed.) *The Latin American Mega-City*. New York: United Nations University Press, 133–154.

Álvarez, P. (2003) *Fragmentos: Orígenes de la historia y tejido familiar de la Legua Emergencia.* Santiago de Chile: UDP.

Álvarez, P. (2010) *Vidas Intervenidas. Prácticas e identidades en conflicto. La población Legua Emergencia (1949-2010).* Universidad Academia de Humanismo Cristiano. Santiago: Universidad Academia de Humanismo Cristiano.

Álvarez, P. (2014) *Legua Emergencia: una historia de dignidad y lucha.* Ed. Universidad Diego Portales.

Anderson, J. (2015) *Understanding Cultural Geography: Places and Traces.* Routledge.

Appadurai, A. (2004) The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition. In: Rao, V. and Walton, M., (eds.) *Culture and Public Action*. Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, California, pp 59-84.

Arlt, R. (1932) "Desocupados de Puerto Nuevo". *Revista Actualidad*, N. 3, Buenos Aires.

August, M. (2014) Challenging the rhetoric of stigmatization: The benefits of concentrated poverty in Toronto's Regent Park. *Environment and Planning A*, 46(6): 1317–1333.

Auyero, J. (2000) The hyper-shantytown: Neo-liberal violence(s) in the Argentine slum. *Ethnography*, Vol. 1(1), 93-116.

Auyero, J. (2001) *La Política de los Pobres: Las Prácticas Clientelistas del Peronismo.* Buenos Aires: Manantial.

Auyero, J. (2007) Introducción. Claves para pensar la marginación. In: Wacquant, L. (2012) *Parias urbanos. Marginalidad en la ciudad a comienzos del milenio.* Manantial: Buenos Aires.

Auyero, J. (2015) The Politics of Interpersonal Violence in the Urban Periphery. *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 56, Supplement 11:169-179.

BA Integración (2024) *Barrio Mugica – English versión.* Pdf version.

BA Integración (Buenos Aires Ciudad) (2018) *Ley N° 6.129 Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica.* Pdf version.

BancoEstado.cl – website. Available at: https://www.bancoestado.cl/content/bancoestado-public/cl/es/home/inicio---bancoestado-corporativo/acerca-de-bancoestado---bancoestado-corporativo/historia---bancoestado-corporativo.html
[Accessed March 2026]

Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (2017) De Villa a Barrio: integracion social y urbana en Buenos Aires. *BID*. Available at: https://blogs. iadb.org/ciudadessostenibles/2017/05/12/villa-31/ [Accessed October 2024].

Bazzicalupo, L. (2013) *Politica. Rappresentazioni e tecniche di governo*. Carocci: Roma.

Bellardi, M., and De Paula, A. (1986) *Villas Miserias: Origen, Erradicación y Respuestas Populares.* Buenos Aires: CEAL.

Bertelli, L. (2021) What kind of global city? Circulating policies for 'slum' upgrading in the making of world-class Buenos Aires. *EPA: Economy and Space*.

Biblioteca Nacional de Chile (2012) *Decreto 49.* Available at: https://www.bcn.cl/leychile/navegar?idNorma=1039424

[Accessed March 2026].

Blanco, J., and Apaolaza, R. (2018) Socio-territorial inequality and differential mobility. Three key issues in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Region. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 67:76-84.

Boletín de la Comisión Vecinal de Villa Comunicaciones (1960) *¡No al Desalojo*! Noviembre 1960.

Boletín Oficial de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (2009) *LEY 3.343.* Available at: https://boletinoficial.buenosaires.gob.ar/normativaba/norma/140635
[Accessed November 2025]

Boletín Oficial de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (2018) *RESOLUCIÓN 118 2016 SECRETARIA DE INTEGRACION SOCIAL Y URBANA.* Available at: https://boletinoficial.buenosaires.gob.ar/normativaba/norma/330790
[Accessed December 2025]

Bordegaray, D. (2013) Padre Pichi Meisegeier y la Villa 31. Una opción por la fe y la justicia entre dos dictaduras. *Cordis. Revoluções, cultura e política na América Latina*, São Paulo, N.° 11:5-34, Jul./Dez.

Bourdieu, P. (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1997) *Pascalian Meditations*. Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA.

Brenner, N., and Elden, S. (2009) Henri Lefebvre on state, space, territory. *International Political Sociology*, 4(3): 353–377.

Brenner, N., Marcuse, P., and Mayer, M. (2012) Cities for people, not for profit: an introduction. In: *Cities for people, not for profit. Crital urban theory and the right to the city.* Ed. by Brenner, N., Marcuse, P., and Mayer, M. (2012). Routledge: London and New York.

Chamorro, C. D. (2015) *Viviendas subsidiadas en la región metropolitana: ¿cómo solucionar el problema urbano que enfrentan sus habitantes?* Tesis magister, Universidad de Chile.

Chávez Molina, E., and Molina Derteano, P. (2018) La discriminación como una forma dinámica de desigualdad. El caso de preadolescentes y adolescents en el Ámbito Metropolitano de Buenos Aires. *Estudios Sociológicos*, Vol. 26, No. 108: 483- 510.

Clery, E., Lee, L., and Kunz, S. (2013) *Public attitudes to poverty and welfare, 1983-2011: Analysis using British attitudes data.* London, UK: NatCen Social Research.

Codebò, A. (2020) Against the Grid: The Cultural Emergence of Villas Miseria in Buenos Aires. *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 29:1, 85-107.

Comisión Nacional de la Vivienda (1956) *Plan de Emergencia*. Buenos Aires: Argentina.

Constructora Oval (2015) *Primer conjunto de viviendas sociales en La Legua Emergencia.* Constructora OVAL [online]. Available at: https://www.constructoraoval.cl/noticias/primer-conjunto-de-viviendas-sociales-en-la-legua-emergencia/ [Accessed May 2025]

Cooperativa.cl (2001) *Ejecutivo se querelló contra la "Reina de la pasta base".* Cooperativa.cl [online]. Available at: https://cooperativa.cl/noticias/pais/ejecutivo-se-querello-contra-la-reina-de-la-pasta-base/2001-09-26/140400.html [Accessed November 2025]

Cosacov, N., and Perelman, M.D. (2015) Struggles over the Use of Public Space: Exploring Moralities and Narratives of Inequality. Cartoneros and Vecinos in Buenos Aires. *Journal of Latin America Studies,* 47(3): 521-542. Cambridge University Press.

Cravino, M.C. (2009) *Entre el arraigo y el desalojo. La Villa 31 de Retiro. Derecho a la ciudad, capital inmobiliario y gestión urbana.* Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento.

Cravino, M.C., and Ons, M. (2023) El "modelo Padre Mugica": urbanismo social en las políticas de reurbanización de villas de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. *Sessão Temática 02: Políticas públicas e gestão multiescalar do território urbano e regional.*

Crovara, M.E. (2004) Pobreza y estigma en una villa miseria argentina. *Política y Cultura*, autumn 2004, No. 22: 29-45. Buenos Aires.

Cué, C. E. (2016) La miseria imposible de ocultar en el centro de Buenos Aires. *El País* [online]. Available at: https://elpais.com/internacional/2016/01/31/argentina/1454256457_080524.html [Accessed December 2025]

Dammert, L. (2012) *Fear and Crime in Latin America: Redefining State-Society Relations*. New York: Routledge.

Davis, M. (1990) *City of quartz: Excavating the future in Los Angeles*. London: Verso.

De Araújo, S. H., and Da Costa, E. B. (2017) From Social Hell to Heaven? The intermingling processes of territorial stigmatisation, agency from below and gentrification in the Varjão. In: *Negative Neighbourhood Reputation and Place Attachment. The Production and Contestation of Territorial Stigma.* Ed. By P. Kirkness and A. Tijé-Dra. Routledge: London and New York.

Del Campo, M. (2021) *Respuesta a Tomás Mosciatti sobre el narcotráfico* [video]. Youtube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5k8vX_v1R0 [Accessed April 2025]

De Ramón, A. (1992) *Santiago de Chile (1541-1991) Historia de una sociedad urbana.* Colecciones Mapfre.

Edelman, M. (1985) *The symbolic uses of politics.* University of Illinois Press.

Elden, S. (2013) Secure the volume: Vertical geopolitics and the depth of power. *Political Geography*, 34: 35-51.

Epele, M.E. (2011) New Toxics, New Poverty: A Social Understanding of the Freebase Cocaine/Paco in Buenos Aires, Argentina. *Substance Use & Misuse*. Philadelphia, Vol. 46, Fasc. 12: 1468.

Escobar, C. F. (2010) *Seguridad ciudadana y pobreza en reportajes televisivos sobre Legua Emergencia.* Tesis magister, Universidad de Chile.

Fidel, C. (2004) Orientación y peculiaridades de la política económica, social y habitacional en la Argentina. La década del 90. In: Cuenya B., Fidel C. and Herzer H. (eds.) *Fragmentos Sociales. Problemas Urbanos en la Argentina, Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 125–156.

Fine, M., and Asch, A. (1988) Disability beyond stigma: social interaction, discrimination, and activism. *J. Soc. Issues*, 44:3–22.

Fischer-Tahir, A., and Naumann, M. (Eds) (2013) *Peripheralization. The Making of Spatial Dependencies and Social Injustice.* Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Fisura – Centro de Interpretación. Población La Legua Chile. [website]. Available at: https://fisura.cl/la-legua/ [Accessed May 2025]

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006) Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363

Foucault, M. (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language.* New York: Pantheon.

Foucault, M. (2009) *"Bisogna difendere la società".* Saggi, Universale Economica Feltrinelli.

Frühling, H., and Gallardo, R. (2012) Programas de seguridad dirigidos a barrios en la experiencia chilena reciente. *Revista invi,* n°74: 149-185.

Fundación San Carlos del Maipo - FSCM (2014) *"Estudio Iniciativa Legua" diseño de un modelo de intervención territorial focalizada en base a la cosecha participativa de los alcances de Iniciativa Legua. Informe de Resultados*. FSCM. Santiago.

Ganter, R. S. (2007) Territorios de la furia. *ARQ,* n.65 Santiago, abr. 2007, pp. 22-24. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0717-69962007000100005

Ganter, R. S. (2016) Narcocultura y signos de transfronterización en Santiago de Chile. *Mitologías Hoy. Revista de pensamiento, crítica y estudios literarios latinoamericanos.* Vol. 14, December 2016, pp. 287-302. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/mitologias.396

Garbin, D., and Millington, G. (2012) Territorial Stigma and the Politics of Resistance in a Parisian Banlieue: La Courneuve and Beyond. *Urban Studies*, 49: 2067– 2083.

Garguin, E. (2007) 'Los Argentinos Descendemos de los Barcos': The Racial Articulation of Middle Class Identity in Argentina (1920–1960). *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies,* 2:2, pp. 161-184. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17442220701489563

Garth, M. (2011) *African Cities: Alternative visions of urban theory and practice.* Zed Books: London and New York.

Glassner, B. (2009) *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things.* New York: Basic Books.

Goffman, E. (1963) *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Prentice-Hall Inc. UK.

Gravano, A. (2016) *Antropologia de lo Urbano*. 1a ed. Santiago: LOM ediciones (Colección Ciencias Humanas y Sociales). ISBN: 978-956-00-0669-1.

Gray, N., and Mooney, G. (2011) Glasgow's new urban frontier: 'Civilising' the population of 'Glasgow East'. *City*, 15: 4–24.

Grimson, A., and Segura, R. (2016) Space, urban borders, and political imagination in Buenos Aires. *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies,* 11:1, pp. 25-45. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17442222.2016.1121584

Guadagni, G. (2016) Regimi di verità in Michel Foucault. *Materiali foucaultiani,* a. V, n 9-10, January-February, pp. 107-126.

Guano, E. (2004) The Denial of Citizenship: “barbaric” Buenos Aires and the middle-class imaginary. *City & Society,* Vol. 16, Issue 1:69-97.

Gusfield, J. R. (1986) *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Hammel, D. (1999) Re-establishing the rent gap: an alternative view of capitalised land rent. *Urban Studies*, 36: 1283-1293.

Hannem, S. (2021) Risk, Structural Stigma and Power: Keynote Address to the 2018 Couch- Stone Symposium and IX Annual Meetings of the European Symbolic Interactionists. *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, 52:187–204.

Hannem, S. (2022) Chapter 4: Stigma. In: Jacobsen, M.H. and Smith, G. (eds.) (2022) *The Routledge International Handbook of Goffman Studies*. 1st edition. Routledge International Handbooks. (pp. 51-62)

Hartman, C., Keating, D. and LeGates, R. with Turner, S. (1982) *Displacement: How to Fight It*. Berkeley: National Housing Law Project.

Harvey, D. (2008) The right to the city. *New Left Review*, no. 53: 23–40.

Hastings, A. (2004) Stigma and Social Housing Estates: Beyond Pathological Explanations. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 19: 233–254.

Hernández, F. (2017) Introduction. Locating Marginality in Latin American Cities. In: *Marginal Urbanisms: Informal and Formal Development in Cities of Latin America.* Ed. by Hernández, F., and Becerra, A. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Hernández, F., and Kellett, P. (2010) Introduction: Reimagining the Informal in Latin America. In: *Rethinking the Informal City. Critical Perspectives from Latin America.* Ed. by Hernández, F., Kellett, P. and Allen, L. K. Berghahn Books: New York, Oxford.

INDH (2015) *Estudio de caso. Violencias y derechos humanos en La Legua.* Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos, Santiago.

Jacobs, K., Arthurson, K., Cica, N., Greenwood, A., and Hastings, A. (2011) *The Stigmatisation of Social Housing: Findings from a Panel Investigation* (No. 166). Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

Jensen, S.Q., and Christensen, A. (2012) Territorial Stigmatization and Local Belonging: A Study of the Danish Neighbourhood Aalborg East. *CITY*, 16 (1-2): 74-92.

JUNALD (1938) *Memoria Elevada al Ministerio del Interior: 1936-1937*. Buenos Aires: Compañía Impresora Argentina.

Kallin, H., and Slater, T. (2014) Activating territorial stigma: Gentrifying marginality on Edinburgh's periphery. *Environment and Planning A*, 46: 1351–1368.

Keeling, D. J. (1996) *Buenos Aires: Global Dreams, Local Crises.* Chichester: Wiley.

Kirkness, P., and Tijé-Dra, A. (2021) *Negative Neighbourhood Reputation and Place Attachment. The Production and Contestation of Territorial Stigma.* Ed. By P. Kirkness and A. Tijé-Dra. Routledge: London and New York.

Kühn, M. (2015) Peripheralization: Theoretical Concepts Explaining Socio-Spatial Inequalities. *European Planning Studies*, 23:2, 367-378. DOI: 10.1080/09654313.2013.862518

Larenas, J. S., Fuster, X. F., Gómez, J. L. (2018) Vidas cotidianas intervenidas: cuando el estado irrumpe en el territorio. El caso de la población La Legua, Santiago de Chile. *Revista Electrónica de Geografía y Ciencias Sociales Universitat de Barcelona.* ISSN: 1138-97, Vol. XXII N. 584.

Larenas, J. S., Fernández-Valderrama, L. A., Ramon Moreno, J. P. (2018) Regeneración de barrios como política pública, la experiencia chilena como primera aproximación en el sur-global. El caso del Plan Integral Iniciativa Legua. *Colección Investigaciones: IdPa _04_2018.* Departamento de Proyectos Arquitectónicos, Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura, Universidad de Sevilla. (Pp. 123-137).

Larenas, J. S. (2021) *Racionalidad Neoliberal, Gubernamentalizad y Política Urbano-habitacional: Producción de Subjetividad Neoliberal en el Chile de Hoy.* Tesis Doctoral: Universidad de Sevilla.

Larreta, H. R. (2017) Buenos Aires as a Global City. London School of Economics and Political Science – Latin American and Caribbean Centre. Available at: https://richmedia.lse.ac.uk/iga/20171106_1800_buenosAiresAsAGlobalCity_slides.mp4 [Accessed May 2025]

Larsen, T. S., and Delica, K. N. (2019) The production of territorial stigmatisation. *City.* DOI:10.1080/13604813.2019.1682865

Lee, M. (2001) *"The Genesis of 'Fear of Crime."* Theoretical Criminology, 5(4): 467–485.

Lefebvre, H. (1991) *The Production of Space.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Lefebvre, H. (2000) *Everyday Life in the Modern World.* London: Athlone Press.

Liberatori, M. (2019) Las ambigüedades del miedo: un análisis etnográfico sobre inseguridades en una villa de Córdoba, Argentina. *Etnografica*, Vol. 23 (1): 27-47. Doi: https://doi.org/10.4000/etnografica.6255

Liborio, J. (1997) *Masas y Balas*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Biblioteca Nacional.

Lin, T. (2012) *Desarmar en Laberinto. Violencia, estructura física e intervención en Legua Emergencia.* Tesis de Magister, Instituto de Estudios Urbanos y Territoriales de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

Lin, T. (2020) Del terror rojo al terror a los pasajes. La evolución del estigma territorial en Legua Emergencia. En: Ruiz-Tagle, Javier, Gricel Labbé y Martín Álvarez (Eds.) *Marginalidad Urbana y Efectos Institucionales: sociedad, Estado y territorio en Latinoamérica a comienzos del Siglo XXI.* Santiago, Chile: RIL – Colección Estudios Urbanos UC.

Link, B. G., and Phelan, J. C. (2001) Conceptualizing Stigma. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27: 363 – 385.

Link, B. G., and Phelan, J. C. (2014) Stigma Power. *Social Science & Medicine*, Structural Stigma and Population Health, 103 (2014).

Loyd, B. G., and Bonds, A. (2018) Where do Black lives matter? Race, stigma, and place in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. *The Sociological Review*, 66(4): 898-918.

Marcuse, P. (1985) Gentrification, abandonment and displacement: connections, causes and policy responses in New York City. *Journal of Urban and Contemporary Law*, 28, pp.195– 240.

Marcuse, P. (2012) Whose right(s) to what city? In: *Cities for people, not for profit. Critical urban theory and the right to the city.* Ed. by Brenner, N., Marcuse, P., and Mayer, M. (2012). Routledge: London and New York.

Marelli, C. M. (2019) The commodification of territorial stigma. *Urban Research & Practice*, DOI: 10.1080/17535069.2019.1683600

Martínez, F. (2007) *Sistematización de Experiencias en Terreno: Programa Barrio Seguro, Ministerio del Interior, Gobierno de Chile*. Santiago, Chile, Centro de Estudios en Seguridad Ciudadana, Instituto de Asuntos Públicos de la Universidad de Chile, Documento de Apoyo Técnico No 4, Proyecto de Apoyo y Difusión de Programas, de Prevención Comunitaria del Delito.

Massey, D. (1991) A global sense of place. *Marxism Today*, Vol. 38:24-29.

Massey, D. (2004) Geographies of responsibility. *Geografiska Annaler*, 86 B (1): 5-18.

Massidda, A. L. (2011) The Plan de Emergencia (1956). The Argentine Debate about Housing Shortage Then and Now. *Scroope Journal 21,* Cambridge Architecture Journal: 42-51.

Mendelberg, T. (2022) Status, Symbols, and Politics: A Theory of Symbolic Status Politics. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, Issue 6, November 2022, pp. 50-68.

Merklen, D. (2010) *Pobres Ciudadanos. Las clases populares en la era democratica (Argentina 1983-2003).* Gorla: Buenos Aires.

Mingione, E. (1996) *Urban Poverty and the Underclass: A Reader*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Ministerio del Interior (2010) *Manual de Caracterización de Barrios. Barrio en Paz Residencial.* Santiago, Chile, Subsecretaría de Prevención del Delito, Unidad de Prevención División de Seguridad Pública.

Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública (2010) *Plan de Seguridad Publica 2010 Chile Seguro.* Santiago: MISP.

Ministerio del Interior (2011) *Programa Barrio en Paz Residencial.* Santiago, Chile, Subsecretaría de Prevención del Delito, Unidad de Prevención División de Seguridad Pública.

Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública (2011) *Ministro Hinzpeter se reunió con alcalde de San Joaquín y Consejo de Organizaciones Sociales y Culturales de La Legua.* Gobierno de Chile: Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública [Online]. Available at: https://www.interior.gob.cl/sitio-2010-2014/n6459_18-12-2011.html [Accessed May 2025]

Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública (2011) *Plan de Intervención SENDA*. *Comuna de San Joaquín.* Chile.

Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública (2017) *Minuta. Planes Integrales para Barrios de Alta Complejidad (BAC)*. Subsecretaría de Prevención del Delito: Gobierno de Chile. Available at: https://www.camara.cl/verDoc.aspx?prmID=102905&prmTIPO=DOCUMENTOCOMISION [pdf]

Ministerio de Vivienda y Urbanismo – MINVU (2013) *Memoria explicativa. Plan seccional. Zona de remodelación La Legua.* Art. 72 del DFL458/75 LGUC.

MiParque.cl (2014) *Remodelación urbana de La Legua cambiará para siempre la vida de los vecinos.* Available at: https://miparque.cl/es/remodelacion-urbana-de-la-legua-cambiara-para-siempre-la-vida-de-los-vecinos/
[Accessed April 2026]

Montoya-Restrepo (2014) El urbanismo social: las tácticas de un *estado anfibio*. Bitácora*, 24(1) Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá

Mota, C. V. (2019) Cómo la crisis en Argentina cambió la vida en Villa 31, el barrio marginal más antiguo y emblemático de Buenos Aires. *BBC News Mundo* [online]. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-48847992 [Accessed December 2025]

Muñoz, F. H. (2021) *Vivir entre la violencia policial y la violencia narco: Configuración política del espacio barrial y organizativo ante las intervenciones socio policiales del Estado en La Legua Emergencia.* Tesis de licenciado, Universidad de Playa Ancha.

Noy, C. (2008). Sampling knowledge: the hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(4), 327-344.

Nuestra palabra (1965) *3 de febrero de 1965.*

Oliver, M. (1990) *The Politics of Disablement*. London: Macmillan.

Ons, M. (2021) Asentamientos informales y grandes proyectos urbanos en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. *Estudios Demográficos y Urbanos*, Vol. 36, No. 3(108), pp. 891-920.

Oszlak, O. (1991) *Merecer la Ciudad. Los Pobres y el Derecho al Espacio Urbano.* Estudios CEDES, Hvmanitas.

Ouisse, G. (2011) *Carta a Sr. Rodrigo Hinzpeter, Ministro del Interior.*

Palmer, M. (1984) *La comuna de Providencia y la ciudad jardín: un estudio de los inicios del modelo de crecimiento actual de la ciudad de Santiago.* Santiago de Chile: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Facultad de Arquitectura y Bellas Artes.

Pastrana, E. (1980) Historia de una villa miseria de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (1948- 1973). *Revista Interamericana de Planificación*, Volumen XIV, N.54.

Paton, K. (2018) Beyond legacy: Backstage stigmatisation and 'trickle-up' politics of urban regeneration. *The Sociological Review*, 66(4): 919–934.

Pinker, R. (1970) Stigma and Social Welfare. *Social Work*, 27 no. 4: 13-17.

Pinkster, F. M., Ferier, M. S., and Hoekstra, M. S. (2020) On the Stickiness of Territorial Stigma: Diverging Experiences in Amsterdam's Most Notorious Neighbourhood. *Antipode*, Vol. 52 No.2: 522-541.

Pohl, L. (2021) Imaginary politics of the branded city: right-wing terrorism as a mediated object of stigmatisation. In: *Negative Neighbourhood Reputation and Place Attachment. The Production and Contestation of Territorial Stigma.* Ed. By P. Kirkness and A. Tijé-Dra. Routledge: London and New York.

Póo, X. A. F. (2014) La prensa escrita en Chile como articuladora de imaginarios que promueven el orden "desde arriba": el caso de La Legua y el diario La Tercera. *GT15: Comunicación y Ciudad. ALAIC, PUCP.*

Ramos, T. M. (2015) Estrategias de protección y supervivencia en contextos de tráfico de drogas y actuar policial. *XI Jornadas de Sociología*. Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires.

Ré, J. A. (1937) *El problema de la mendicidad en Buenos Aires, sus causas y sus remedios*. Buenos Aires: Biblioteca Policial.

Revista Siete Días Ilustrados (1968) Argentina no tendrá villas miseria. 06/02/1968 [online]. Available at: https://www.magicasruinas.com.ar/revistero/3/villas-de-emergencia.html [Accessed January 2025]

Robinson, J. (2006) *Ordinary cities. Between modernity and development.* Routledge.

Rose, M. (2002) Landscape and labyrinths. *Geoforum*, Vol. 33: 455-467.

Rovatti, A. (2014) Dimmi chi sei. Foucault e il dilemma della veridizione. *«aut aut»*, n. 362 (2014): 35-48

Sacks, R.D. (1986) *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sakizlioglu, B., and Uitermark, J. (2014) The Symbolic Politics of Gentrification: The Restructuring of Stigmatised Neighbourhoods in Amsterdam and Istanbul. *Environment and Planning A,* Vol. 46: 1369-1385.

Schmid, C. (2012) Henri Lefebvre, the right to the city, and the new metropolitan mainstream. In: *Cities for people, not for profit. Critical urban theory and the right to the city.* Ed. by Brenner, N., Marcuse, P., and Mayer, M. (2012). Routledge: London and New York.

Sibellino, C. (1933) "La VILLA de la MISERIA dentro de la CIUDAD MARAVILLOSA". *Sintonía*, Año I, 28 de octubre de 1933.

Sisson, A. (2021) Territory and territorial stigmatisation: On the production, consequences and contestation of spatial disrepute. *Progress in Human Geo*graphy, 45(4), 659–681.

Slater, T. (2012) Missing Marcuse: on gentrification and displacement. In: *Cities for people, not for profit. Crital urban theory and the right to the city.* Ed. by Brenner, N., Marcuse, P., and Mayer, M. (2012). Routledge: London and New York.

Slater, T. (2017) Territorial Stigmatization: Symbolic Defamation and the Contemporary Metropolis. In: Hannigan, J. and Richards, G. (2017) *The SAGE Handbook of New Urban Studies.* London: Sage Publications. (pp.111 – 125)

Slater, T., and Anderson, N. (2012) The reputational ghetto: territorial stigmatisation in St. Paul's, Bristol. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 37(4):530-546.

Smith, N. (1979) "Toward a theory of gentrification. A back to the city movement by capital not people". *Journal of the American Planning Association,* 45(4):538-548.

Snitcofsky, V. (2022) *Historia de las villas de la ciudad de Buenos Aires: de los orígenes hasta nuestros días.* Colección Agenda TU. Tejido Urbano. Editado por: Bisman, H., Engelman, P.; prólogo de Roviralta, P. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Bisman Ediciones.

Soja, E. W. (2009) The city and spatial justice. *JSSJ,* 1/2009.

Stavrakakis, Y. (1999) *Lacan and the Political.* Routledge: London.

Stavrides, S. (2013) Contested urban rhythms: From the industrial city to the post-industrial urban archipelago. *The Sociological Review*, 61(S1), 34–50.

Sternberg, C. (2023) *Spaces, Culture and Discourses in Buenos Aires and Chicago*. Palgrave Macmillan, Springer Nature, Switzerland.

Sun, X. (2024) Murray Edelman's Research on Political Symbolism. *Philosophy and Social Science*, Vol. 1 No. 10: 67-71.

Torres, H. (1975) Evolución de los procesos de estructuración especial urbana. El Caso de Buenos Aires. *Desarrollo Económico,* 15:281-306.

Tyler, I. (2013) *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. London: Zed Books.

Tyler, I. (2018) Resituating Erving Goffman: From Stigma Power to Black Power. *The Sociological Review*, 66: 744 – 765.

Tyler, I., and Slater, T. (2018) Rethinking the sociology of stigma. *The Sociological Review*, 66(4): 721–743.

Tyler, I. (2020) *Stigma: The Machinery of Inequality*. London: Zed Books.

United Nations Habitat (2010) *State of the World's Cities 2010/2011. Bridging the urban divide*. United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

Van Gelder, J.-L., Cravino, M.C., and Ostuni, F. (2016) Housing informality in Buenos Aires: Past, present and future? *Urban Studies Jour*nal, Vol. 53(9): 1958-1975.

Vergara, J. (2008). *Cirugía urbana para población La Legua.* Santiago de Chile, Chile. Available at: http://www.plataformaurbana.cl/archive/2008/07/07/cirugia-urbana-para-poblacion-la- legua/

Vial, T. S. (2017) *Informe anual sobre Derechos Humanos en Chile 2017.* Centro de Derechos Humanos, Facultad de Derecho, Universidad Diego Portales. Santiago de Chile, Primera edición: noviembre de 2017, ISBN 978-956-314-392-8

Villareal, A. (2015) Fear and Spectacular Drug Violence in Monterrey. In: Auyero, J., Bourgois, P., Scheper-Hughes, N. (eds.). *Violence at the Urban Margins.* Oxford Scholarship Online: March 2015.

Wacquant, L. (1992) "Toward a social praxeology: the structure and logic of Bourdieu's sociology". In: *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Eds. P. Bourdieu, L. Wacquant (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL) pp 1–60.

Wacquant, L. (1993) Urban Outcasts: Stigma and Division in the Black American Ghetto and the French Urban Periphery. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 17: 366– 383.

Wacquant, L. (1993b) "Elias in the Dark Ghetto". *Amsterdams Sociologisch Tidjschrift* 24, 3/4: 340-348.

Wacquant, L. (2007) Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality. *Thesis Eleven*, 91 (1): 66-77.

Wacquant, L. (2008) *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Urban Marginality*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Wacquant, L. (2008b) Ordering insecurity: social polarization and the punitive upsurge. *Radical Philosophy Review*, 11(1), pp. 9–27.

Wacquant, L. (2009) The Body, the Ghetto and the Penal State. *Qualitative Sociology*, 32(1): 101-129.

Wacquant, L. (2010) Urban desolation and symbolic denigration in the hyperghetto. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 73 215–219.

Wacquant, L., Slater, T. and Pereira, V. B. (2014) Territorial Stigmatization in Action. *Environment & Planning A*, 46: 1270–1280.

Wacquant, L. (2015) Class, ethnicity, and state in the making of marginality: Revisiting territories of urban relegation. In: Roy, A. and Crane, E.S. (eds) *Territories of Poverty: Rethinking North and South*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 247–259.

Whisnant, C. (2020) *Foucault & Discourse. A Handout for HIS 389.* Wofford College.

Zibechi, R. (2012) *Territories in Resistance: A Cartography of Latin American Social Movements.* AK Press: Oakland, Edinburgh, Baltimore.

24 Horas - TVN Chile (2018, 7th December) *Piñera lidera destrucción de muros en La Legua: "Queremos que la gente tenga una vida en paz".* [Video] YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKF0zh1hEk4 [Accessed May 2025]

List of Figures

Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia (2021) ¿Cuánto avanzó la reurbanización en el barrio Padre Carlos Mugica en el periodo 2016-2021? ACIJ.

BA Integración (2024) Barrio Mugica. Integración urbana, economica y social. Presentación institucional. Available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gu-4UojaNPiJi7mqDmo0U9NIk2XjZu3a/view [Accessed October 2024].

BA Integración (2024) *Barrio Mugica – English versión.* Pdf version.

FONDECYT Nº 1201488 *"La Política de la Marginalidad Urbana: institucionalidad de la pobreza y roles de género en la reconfiguración de las "'poblaciones emblemáticas".*

Larsen, T. S., and Delica, K. N. (2019) The production of territorial stigmatisation. *City*. DOI:10.1080/13604813.2019.1682865

Ministerio de Vivienda y Urbanismo – SEREMI (2011) *Informe Final Fase I. Programa Integral Recuperación de Barrios Población La Legua, Comuna de San Joaquín.* Santiago.