When Family Lives Nearby: Kinship, Poverty and Domestic Economies in Santiago, Chile

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Abstract

The study of residential proximity within kinship in the Chilean urban context has focused particularly on household coresidence, a phenomenon locally called *allegamiento*. The emphasis on a political-scientific approach to *allegamiento* has contributed to viewing residential proximity as a "matter of poverty". In this paper I discuss this perspective as a "self-fulfilling prophecy", caused by two sources of reductionism. First, household coresidence has been taken as the main unit of analysis for research on residential proximity. Second, empirical research has been conducted only within poor-family contexts. Carrying out (in progress) ethnographic fieldwork in Santiago de Chile, I propose to overcome these limitations by employing two strategies. First, by enlarging the scale of the definition of residential proximity through an appropriation of Marcelin's concept of "configuration of houses". Second, by widening the scope of socioeconomic life conditions through a comparison of "residential configurations of proximity" across heterogeneous socioeconomic settings. By a preliminary comparison between impoverished and wealthy families I met, I show that coresidence is only a partial aspect of the residential proximity phenomenon involving a variety of *quasi*-coresidence practices within kinship. Afterwards, I point out that the quest for residential proximity within close kinship, or *allegamiento* in its large meaning, is not exclusive to poor families, but is also a "matter" for Santiago's wealthy families. Finally, I suggest that this residential proximity takes place on different specific morphologies, unfolding trajectories and relational patterns, according to socioeconomic possibilities and constraints.

1. The "*allegamiento* approach": the influence of housing policies and survival strategy theories on family residential proximity research in Chile

Studies on intra-kinship residential proximity in contemporary urban Chile focus exclusively on a phenomenon called *allegamiento*[1]. The term describes coresidence between two or more nuclear families as the "the strategy used by households [...] to cope with the lack of housing by sharing a dwelling with another household"[2]. Previous to becoming a technical concept, *allegamiento* was already an indigenous notion used since the end of 19th century in order to refer to a specific residential arrangement (Academia Chilena, 1978; Academia Chilena de la Lengua, 2010; Morales, 2006; Subercaseaux, 1986). In a context of strong rural-urban migration (de Ramón, 1985) and massive irregular occupation of Santiago's periphery (Hidalgo, 2002), the Spanish word *allegarse*, which means "to bring together persons or things" (Real Academia Española, 2012)[3], began to be used in a more specific sense to indicate persons who are temporarily hosted by relatives or acquaintances. This term gained a pejorative connotation associated with precarious living conditions such as overcrowding, lack of hygiene, and personal conflicts within a population highly impacted by unemployment, alcoholism and domestic violence (de Ramón, 1985, 2000; Hidalgo, 2002).

1.1. The political-scientific construction of *allegamiento*

This specific meaning of *allegamiento* is also used in others countries of Hispanic America[4], but Chile seems to be the only one where it was adopted by the technical linguistic field. There, a standardized concept and measures of *allegamiento* are the outcome of a long-term collaboration between housing policy-makers and scholars that began in the 1980's (Sagredo, 2013). At that time, and as a part of the political reforms of the dictatorship, previous government permissiveness to irregular land occupation and

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[1] Arriagada, Icaza, & Rodríguez, 1999; Bustamante &Sagredo, 2009; Castillo, 2004; Centro de Investigación Social (CIS), 2014; Espinoza, 1993; Espinoza &Icaza, 1991; France, 1991; Green, 1988; Mayol, 1988; Mercado, 1992, 1993; Ministerio de Hacienda, 2008; Necochea, 1987; Peliowski, 1993; Prieto, 2001; Saborido, 1985; Santa María, 1988; Tapia, Araos, & Salinas, 2012; Torche, 1993; Urmeneta, 1993; Wilson, 1985.

[2] See: www.observatorio.ministeriodesarrollosocial.gob.cl/casen_def_vivienda.php (last consultation 18/03/2015). Free translation.

[3] *"Allegamiento: [...]Reunión o concurso de personas o cosas allegadas, [...]Aproximación, unión, estrechez [...]"* (Real Academia Española, 2012)

[4] In Argentina, Puerto Rico and Uruguay (Real Academia Española, 2012).

self-construction of housing came to an end, contributing to a dramatic growing housing deficit which lead to the unveiling of *allegamiento* as a mass phenomenon (Castillo & Hidalgo, 2007; Necochea, 1987; Santa María, 1988). Since then, *allegamiento* has became a synonym for housing deficit[5] and is systematically measured by the National Household Survey[6]. In spite of it's descriptive character, the concept of *allegamiento* still bears pejorative moral considerations. In this sense, it can be considered as a "target notion" (*notion cible*, in French), a category that identifies a phenomenon as a moral problem that has to be eradicated (de L'Estoile, 2015, p. 11). More specifically, *allegamiento* has been often depicted as a family morphology that obstructs the development of the ideal nuclear-family model (Mercado, 1992, 1993; Wilson, 1985).

Highly dependent on public policy logics and priorities, academic research on this field has shown itself to be unable to criticize and challenge basic concepts and assumptions of *allegamiento* as the mainstream approach for analyzing intra-kinship residential proximity. As a consequence, most Chilean social research on the subject suffers from some important limitations. The first limitation is that household coresidence is taken as the main unit of analysis and little attention is paid to residential morphologies that go beyond the physical boundaries of a given dwelling-place. The second limitation is the overestimation of economical aspects used to explain family residential proximity and neglecting the role played by kinship rules and practices (Araos, 2008; Tapia, Araos, & Salinas, 2012). Finally, this research conceives *allegamiento* as a "target notion" that opposes nuclear and extended family morphologies in moral terms.

1.2. Household strategies of survival, residential proximity and poverty

Most Chilean research on *allegamiento* explains family residential proximity as a "household strategy of survival", thus reinforcing some of the aspects mentioned above. This perspective was very influential in

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[5] In Chile, official measures of quantitative housing deficit add two components. The first is the estimated number of households and nuclear families that don't have an exclusive dwelling (named *allegados*) and that are supposedly able to hold a residentially autonomous life. The second is the estimated number of dwellings classified as materially "irretrievable" (Moreno, 2013).

[6] CASEN is the National Survey of Socioeconomic Household Characterization, carried out by the Ministry of Social Development. CASEN is a probabilistic national, regional and communal representative survey, administered bi- or tri annually since 1990. For details, see:
http://observatorio.ministeriodesarrollosocial.gob.cl/casen/casen_obj.php

Latin America during the 1980s and 1990s[7] arguing that in order to cope with critical material scarcity, individuals turn to kindred in order to restructure residential morphology and to reduce living expenses at the household level. This viewpoint emphasizes the individual agency ruled by economic maximization rationality[8] within a context of strong structural restriction (Fontaine & Schlumbohm, 2000; Schmink, 1984). Thus, residential choices that are apparently harmful at the individual or nuclear family-level (due to a lack of privacy and autonomy) appear to be rational in the light of the optimization of collective material well-being (Arriagada, 2003; Schmink, 1984)[9].

I propose to distinguish two stances within Chilean research based on survival strategies. The first has an economic-quantitative orientation, while the second is closer to social anthropology and ethnographyy. In the former, authors are often interested in comparing household morphologies throughout all socioeconomic settings, but consider family residential proximity strictly as coresidence. Nevertheless, as has been suggested for other neo-local residence's cultural contexts (Bonvalet, 2003; Bonvalet & Lelièvre, 1995; Pfirsch, 2008), in Chile sharing the same residence is more frequent among lower income households. Even if these results seem to support the survival strategies hypothesis, they are blind to non-coresidential morphologies of proximity (Araos, 2013). On the other hand, authors conducting socio-anthropological qualitative research are more interested in intra-kinship solidarity practices that go beyond shared dwelling boundaries. However, under "popular classes" or "urban marginality" frameworks, these observations are always restricted to poverty settings.

Therefore, either by reducing the definition of residential proximity to coresidence or by restricting the scope of analysis to families with low socioeconomic conditions, quantitative and qualitative survival

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[7] According to Wellace (2002), the "household strategies" notion was first used by research conducted in Latin America and Africa in the 1970s and 1980s dealing with economic behaviour of the urban poor, notably in informal economy frameworks. Along the same line, Schmink(1984) maintains that the "family survival strategies" concept was used for the first time by Duke and Pastrana in 1973, in a study of poor families living in Santiago de Chile's periphery. According to the author, the household strategies of survival approach has been explicitly fostered in Latin America since 1978 by the Social Research Program on Latin America Population (PISPAL).

[8] Nevertheless, this economic maximization rationality could be conceived differently, according to disciplinary orientations, with an oscillating stress on deliberated reasoning processes of individuals, at one end, and on implicit *habitus* reasoning process, at the other (Fontaine & Schlumbohm, 2000)

[9] I stress the important influence of Larissa de Lomnitz's ethnographic work on survival strategies in a Mexican shantytown on later research in Chile and Latin America (Lomnitz, 1975, 1977). Lomnitz thoroughly describes the formation of "complex domestics units" as the neuralgic core of kindred networks, explaining them as "socioeconomic mechanisms" substituting lack of social assurance and "positively resolving adaptation problem in a hostile urban environment" (De Lomnitz 1975, p. 27–28. Free translation from Spanish version).

strategies stances end up confirming a "self-fulfilled prophecy" in which residential proximity is considered *a priori* as a "matter of poverty".

2. Overcoming *allegamiento*: the study of "residential configurations of proximity" across heterogeneous socioeconomic settings

My research seeks to study intra-kinship residential proximity in Santiago by overcoming some of the limitations of the *allegamiento* approach. I propose to broaden the research subject in a dual sense: by enlarging the definition of residential proximity, and by comparing cases from heterogeneous socioeconomic settings.

2.1. Beyond coresidence: from "extended *allegamiento*" to "residential configurations of proximity"

During my first fieldwork among poor families living in two shantytowns in Santiago[10], I reconstructed the "leaving-home" process (*décohabitation*, in French) of some families[11]. For each nuclear family, what seemed to be a process towards gaining residential independence at a narrow spatial-scale of dwelling, from a larger spatial scale turned out to be a reorganization of everyday relationships. By settling near to the former residence -e.g. in the same building, on the same street, or on a nearby street-, the members of kin-related families that had lived together under the same roof could still visit and interact each other on a daily basis. To account for this, I first proposed the concept of "extended *allegamiento*" (*allegamiento ampliado*) as an arrangement that allows one to gain residential independence without a substantive disruption with the former configuration (Araos, 2008). The search for *quasi*-coresidence arrangements (Attias-Donfut & Renaut, 1994; Pfirsch, 2008, 2009, 2012) was one of the reasons that some individuals I met had refused or ignored social housing offers. Social housing opportunities were often a synonym of geographical remoteness and social isolation and individuals preferred to wait longer in order to be able to

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[10] In 2006 and 2007 I met with fifteen poor family groups that were residentially related (mostly co-residents) who lived in two shantytowns of Santiago. For more details, see my Master's dissertation (Araos, 2008).

[11] In the majority of my fieldwork cases, coresidence and *quasi*-coresidence practices take place between members of a "descendant group" of three or four generations, which Lomnitz and Lizaur (1986) call "large family" (*gran familia*, in Spanish).

settle near their kinship networks. Aspiration for "extended *allegamiento*" suggests that opposing nuclear and extended family appraisal is not always suitable[12]. In fact, both nuclear family autonomy and "local family entourage" (Bonvalet, 2003) could be simultaneously promoted through specific residential arrangements that allow a compromise between them.

Pioneer ethnographic studies conducted within different contemporary urban settings have shown the inadequacy of reducing residential proximity morphologies to coresidence (Lomnitz & Lizaur, 1978; Mitchell, 1972, 1973; Willmott & Young, 1957). However, as with my own concept of "extended *allegamiento*", these studies do not propose alternative concepts to actually replace coresidence as the fundamental unit of analysis. Finding a new unit of analysis became inevitable when I conducted a second fieldwork among wealthy families in Santiago[13]. In these cases, the concept of "extended *allegamiento*" was no longer appropriate since sharing the same residence was not the cornerstone of residential proximity, but rather exceptional and transitory. Residential proximity involving several separated dwellings was instead the salient morphology. Individuals who lived in different dwellings preserved reciprocal and stable daily interactions and considered themselves to be "living together".

So far, the concept of "residential configuration of proximity" has allowed me to carry out an adequate analysis of my fieldwork. I have developed it based on two principal sources. In his research on Italian upper-class families living in Naples, the French geographer Thomas Pfirsch (2008, 2009, 2012) uses the concept of "residential configuration" based on Norbert Elias' concept of "social configuration" (Elias, 1991). Stating that "individual residential settlement and mobility are affected by residential localization and mobility of other family members" (Pfirsch, 2008, p. 205), Pfirsch stresses the spatial dimension of daily interdependent practices between kin-related domestic units. In his research conducted in a Brazilian popular-class zone in Bahia, Louis H. Marcelin (1996, 1999) proposes the concept of "configuration of

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[12] In his classic work on Brazilian working class residential patterns, KlassWoortmaan (cf. Woortmann, 1980) showed that building a *casa*, as the residential space for a nuclear family, is not opposed to building a *moradia*, as the residential space for extended kinship. On the contrary, within the favela and social housing settings studied by the author, individuals often desired to settle their own family's residences within a network of kin members living nearby.

[13] In 2013 I met with eight residentially related groups of wealthy families (mostly non co-residents) living in the upper-class zone of Santiago, the "Northeast triangle". For more details, see my Master's dissertation (Araos, 2013).

houses"[14]. He underlines the cognitive dimension of residential interdependence by defining it as "a set of houses linked by an ideology of family and kinship "(Marcelin, 1999, p. 33).

My own still in-progress definition of "residential configuration of proximity" takes into account elements from these two approaches. On the one hand, this concept describes the fact that a number of kin-related families reciprocally maintain a minimal geographical closeness that is not defined primarily by a given measurable distance but by a relational one: that of being able to easily visit each other on a daily basis[15]. On the other hand, this concept captures the experiencing dimension of proximity inherent to families that share the same setting of common daily life. In other words, individuals do not just live "close to" others but rather "with" and "together". Even if their houses are not contiguous, the everyday face-to-face relationship creates a sense of unit that enables individuals to distinguish between "us" and "the others" [16].

2.2. Beyond poverty: comparing across heterogeneous socioeconomic settings

Understanding intra-kinship proximity as "residential configurations" has allowed me to study this subject beyond poverty settings and has also pushed me to reinterpret the role of material constraints and opportunities. I propose that the comparison between different socioeconomic conditions of life must consider not just "factual" residential differences in themselves, but "factual" in the light of the "possible"[17]. More specifically, this implies an effort to distinguish between the "factual", the "feasible" and the "desired"[18].

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[14] It is interesting to note that Marcelin's concept of "configuration of houses" is also in debt with Norbert Elias's concept of "social configuration", as Eugenia Motta has pointed out (Motta, 2014, pp. 127–128).

[15] Starting from this definition, I could consider as "equivalent" a wide range of family residential morphologies that so far Chilean research has taken as absolutely heterogeneous: several families living in the same dwelling; living in adjacent but separated dwellings; living in separated non adjacent dwellings, even sometimes distanced by some kilometers; or several combinations of these possibilities.

[16] My own definition of "residential configuration" differs in a certain way from the reformulation of Marcelin's "configuration of houses" proposed by Eugênia de Motta (2014). As I understand it, Motta's concept depicts relations between houses "taking a particular house as a reference point", but where "houses related to each other do not constitute discrete units and the relations between them are not always expressed through the language of kinship" (Motta, 2014, p. 127). Considering specificities of my fieldwork, I prefer to call these latter situations "residential networks", distinguishing them from "residential configurations" in the Marcelin's sense. I think this distinction is especially relevant when studying very segregated urban settings, such as the city of Santiago.

[17] Eugenia Motta (2014) and Benoît de l'Estoile (2014) have recently proposed very suggesting analysis in a similar direction.

[18] While "factual" corresponds to already realized possibilities, the "feasible" and the "possible" constitute a horizon of still unrealized possibilities which however, through anticipation (as a conscious project or "pre-reflexive

Poor families I met in Santiago were strongly dependent on social policies for access to single-family housing. Given the specific conditions of Chilean housing and urban development policies (Brain, Iacobelli, & Sabatini, 2006; Sugranyes, 2005), the "feasible" options of poor families in Santiago are often reduced to two opposing alternatives: overcrowded coresidence with ascendant family members or geographical remoteness from them. Even though intermediate alternatives were not easily available for the families I met[19], to combine house independence with kindred proximity was still the "desired" scenario. As a remotely realistic but highly desired possibility, it contributes to shape the *de facto* residential morphologies. For example, families with the opportunity of access to social housing had chosen to take palliative decisions to cope with coresidence side effects in order to preserve the possibility of having a chance to move nearby in the indefinite future[20]. Based on this finding, I became interested in comparing the role of the "feasible" and the "desired" in shaping "factual" residential morphologies across families dealing with highly heterogeneous socioeconomic restrictions and opportunities. By conducting fieldwork with families belonging to the 5% wealthiest of Santiago and living in upper-class neighborhoods, I was able to carry out a preliminary exercise of comparison between intra-kinship residential proximity configurations from two opposed socioeconomic settings[21]. I summarize below some of the principal findings of this first comparative exercise.

First, among the wealthy families I met, I noticed a wide variety of spatial morphologies that enabled different degrees of arrangements between each nuclear family's intimacy (having a separated dwelling) and extended family proximity[22]. I call these "loose proximity" forms, as opposed to "tight proximity"

protention"), shape present choices (Bourdieu, 2003; Schütz, 1973). As a part of a horizon of the possible, "feasible" corresponds to currently available alternatives that individuals face and evaluate at a given moment, whereas "desirable" corresponds to alternatives not presently available, but considered as someday feasible ideals.

[19] The process of living-home nearby that I described above as "extended *allegamiento*" often occurs very late in the family-life cycle and is considered by them as a kind of "privilege".

[20] People waited for a "stroke of luck" (as winning the lottery) or participated actively on *allegados* committees (*comités de allegados*) that were often supported by NGO's and local organizations that worked to "twist" the geographically expansive logic of housing policies (Bustamante & Sagredo, 2009).

[21] At present, in my PHD dissertation I seek to go further into the cross-socioeconomic setting comparison. In order to do so, in 2014, I conducted a third fieldwork study with fifteen middle-class family groups living in Santiago and I re-contacted some of my former lower and upper-class cases. I will also conduct new fieldwork this year to fill some information gaps of all my previous studies. Since I haven't processed all the material from my last fieldwork, I don't include it in this document.

[22] For both wealthy and poor contexts, almost all residential configurations include members of a single bi-lateral descendent group or "stock" (including from three to five descendant generations).

forms of coresidence. Among such large typologies it is possible to find a wide range of morphological variations. I found tight proximity forms among the residential configuration of wealthy families, but this was relatively marginal compared to loose proximity forms. Among poor families I found exactly the opposite; leading me to the hypothesis that there may be a sort of trade-off between tight and loose forms of residential proximity configurations as the economic opportunities and expectations of families increase. That is related with both differential opportunities of access to separated dwelling (by renting or by owning) and urban mobility conditions of families.

Second, I noted that the path toward the formation of residential configurations of proximity is not the same in poor and wealthy settings. This difference can be well depicted by Attias-Donfut and Renault's distinction between "staying-forever coresidence" (*corésidence de toujours*, in French), and "re-cohabitation" (*récohabitation*) (Attias-Donfut & Renaut, 1994) or the "getting-close-again" process. The wealthy families I met had developed deliberate and expensive projects of intra-kinship spatial reunification, after a period of relative geographical dispersion and relational independence between the nuclear families involved. I called this the "conjugal phase" of adult children and I found that it generally coincides with the beginning of adult children's own family formation and their professional and economic stabilization. By contrast, I found neither this project feature nor this conjugal phase of children among poor families. Interviewees further depicted their residential morphologies as the result of a spontaneous or "natural" process in which offspring just "stayed forever" at the parental house, and so on for the next generations.

Third, both "staying forever" and "getting close again" configurations of proximity are possible because of the key role played by parents. Whether by playing an "active" role stimulating their adult children to come back close to them (as is the case in most of wealthy families), or a "passive" role by not pushing their adult children to leave home (as is the case in most of poor families), it is on the backs (and pockets) of parents that residential configurations of proximity lie. If that was true for both wealthy and poor families I met, I found that father played a more salient role in wealthy families configurations, instead that in poor families the role played by mother was more fundamental. From what I could observe, the parental role works mainly through "practical generosity", a highly unrestricted disposition to give or to

share a wide variety of goods (property, money, residential place, time) with their descendants, thereby guaranteeing material conditions for spatial closeness and placing adult children in an ongoing in-debt position. The parental residence works as the "anchor" around which children's families' residences crowd. For the same reason, the death of anchor-parents is often the event that precedes the end of a given residential configuration, even if it could be rebuilt around the children that take the place of anchor-parents[23].

Finally, three types of relational practices concerning all forms of residential configuration of proximity could be distinguished. First, "useful" practices, which seek to solve any member´s individual or collective problem[24] (cooperation or support). Secondly, "useless" practices, consisting of socializing, specifically being and spending time together. Thirdly, "conflictive" practices, which hamper both mutual cooperation and socializing practices. I found all of these three kinds of relational practices present to a relatively similar extent in the residential proximity configurations I studied, regardless of the socioeconomic setting of the families. This challenges strategies of survival approaches that generally overstress cooperation and support interactions and neglect socializing practices by modeling residential proximity as a function of the domestic production of utility[25]. Regarding conflictive and anti-cooperative practices, I found that the tighter and more precarious the conditions of residential proximity, the more conflictive are the relationships. This probably contributes to widespread negative views about intra-kinship coresidence, as is implicit in the *allegamiento* approach. However, I observed that looser morphologies of proximity also constitute a fruitful field for conflict production, which especially concerns everyday processes of between-family boundary delimitation and intra-family problems due to filial-conjugal fidelity tension and the integration of in-law members.

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[23] A similar pattern was depicted by Lomnitz and Lizaur for families living in Mexico city (Lomnitz & Lizaur, 1978, 1986)

[24] This aspect of residential proximity as been recently studied by some French authors using the "practical kinship" approach, through a renewed concept of *maisonnée*, defined as a group of individuals daily linked by a common goal (*cause commune*), who could live in separate residences (Gollac, 2003; Weber, 2003, 2005).

[25] Otherwise, some authors have highlighted useless or socialize practices involved in intra-kinship residential proximity but just concerning upper-class family settings (Pfirsch, 2008, 2009; Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot, 1989).

3. Discussion

The concept of "residential configuration of proximity" has allowed me to overcome some of the limitations of the Chilean mainstream approach to *allegamiento*. During my fieldwork with poor and wealthy families living in Santiago, I observed different ways of constructing a residential morphology consisting of several descendant families that gather around their parental dwelling. Such a residential morphology can be spatially tighter or looser, follow different pathway formations, be mother or father-centered, and entail different kinds of relational practices. However, in all cases, it consists of a similar long-term spatial and relational configuration: that of members of descendant groups of at least three-generations durably living nearby and "together".

Paradoxically, the effort to overcome the *allegamiento* approach through a "residential configuration" perspective has led me to recover a broader and more ancient meaning of the Spanish word *allegamiento,* that is "to bring together persons or things" (Real Academia Española, 2012). In that sense, *allegamiento* is not a phenomenon that exclusively concerns poor families of Santiago, but is also a "matter" for Santiago's wealthy families. Thus, economic constraints that compel kin-related families to share the same dwelling are not sufficient to understand the search for daily living-together residential morphologies. Nevertheless, my preliminary findings also suggest that socioeconomic opportunities and constraints do play a key role in shaping morphologic specificities of such residential proximity. Unequal conditions of property, dwelling access, housing policies dependence and urban mobility, among others, seem to play an important role in shaping families' horizon of the "feasible".

My in-progress fieldwork seeks to delve more deeply into these research hypotheses. So far, my comparison exercise has been a simple and dichotomistic contrast between "poor" and "rich" families. Therefore, the observation across family groups from a larger and more heterogeneous set of socioeconomic life conditions is one of my major concerns. In doing so, I seek to distinguish those elements that shape residential configurations of proximity that can actually be attributed to specific socio-economic conditions from those that are crosswise to families living in Santiago. In this sense, I think that distinguishing between the "factual", the "feasible", and the "possible" can be very fruitful.

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