ASENTAMIENTOS AND CANTEGRILES
New Poverty and the Moral Dangers of Proximity in Uruguayan Squatter Settlements

Julienne Corboz
La Trobe University

Abstract: *This article analyzes new forms of distinction and inequality generated within Uruguayan squatter settlements as a result of neoliberal policies, class polarization, and the downward mobility of previously integrated populations that have migrated to the informal urban periphery. Based on ethnographic research in Montevideo, this article shows how newly impoverished Uruguayans have dealt with their new spatial proximity and ever-increasing socioeconomic proximity to chronic poverty through the maintenance of symbolic boundaries between themselves and the chronic poor. This boundary work is dependent on the reproduction of a series of moral oppositions, highly reminiscent of hegemonic discourses on the culture of poverty, which cast the chronic poor as dirty, lacking in values, apathetic, disorganized, and responsible for their own poverty.*

In October 2004, I began conducting ethnographic fieldwork in La Chacha, an *asentamiento* (squatter settlement) located on the urban periphery of Montevideo, Uruguay.[1] My main objective was to explore the stories and everyday experiences of downwardly mobile Uruguayans who had migrated to peri-urban squatter settlements after suffering unemployment and consequent impoverishment. Referred to in the literature as "new poverty," this process of downward mobility in Uruguay has its origin in the implementation of neoliberal reforms that have played a key role in transforming the structure and composition of the social classes in Uruguay and their location in urban space (Kaztman et al. 2004). One of my informants, fifty-six-year-old Marta, is an example of a newly impoverished squatter. After having spent most of her adult life renting homes in neighborhoods close to Montevideo's city center, raising two children, and helping her husband run their family business (a small grocery store), Marta fell on hard times when the business went bankrupt in 2001. Her family was forced to build a precarious home in La Chacha, one of Montevideo's many rapidly expanding squatter settlements on the urban periphery. According to Marta, the first two years were the most difficult as she became accustomed to living with previously unknown hardships such as a clandestine electricity connection and lack of services and infrastructure. Most of all, Marta lamented her everyday contact with "*los pobres de verdad*" (the real poor) and her daily exposure to the "*miseria*" she had once been relatively shielded from due to her central urban residence.

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1. The word *asentamiento* is a shortened and more popular version of the official term *asentamiento irregular* (irregular settlement), the latter which is commonly used in academic and social policy literature. La Chacha is a pseudonym. The names of my informants used in this article are also pseudonyms.

Marta's lament became particularly evident on one cold winter morning when I accompanied her to a birthday party in La Chacha. In order to reach the home where this party was to be held, we had to cross a region of the settlement that many of my informants had warned me to stay away from due to the proliferation of chronic poverty one could find there. As Marta and I walked past a garbage heap in this particular region, I noticed a skinny, mangy dog eating something buried in the mound of rubbish, a sight that was not at all unusual. Yet there was something different about this dog and the desperation with which it fed, sufficiently different that I was enticed to approach the dog and inspect its meal. It was the carcass of another dog, already partially devoured. When I called out to Marta that the dog was eating a dead dog, she replied: "It is winter, Julie. It is a difficult time. The poor, they are hungry and desperate and they end up eating each other, like that dog." She was not referring to anthropophagic activities but, rather, to the classic dog-eat-dog idiom as a metaphor for her perception of the poor in times of extreme hardship, who purportedly resort to a self-interested and immoral mode of life. As we walked away, Marta waved her hand behind her and suggested that both the poor and the hungry and desperate dog belonged here: in the *cantegril* and in the rubbish.

Marta's use of "cantegril" to describe the locality of the poor and to link the poor to both rubbish and an immoral way of life reveals a tension between the new and chronic poor, which forms the basis of this article. Like "asentamiento," "cantegril" also refers to a squatter settlement, albeit one with a different historical and social implication.[2] The Uruguayan cantegril came into being in the early 1950s, when the rural poor approached the periphery of Montevideo in search of employment and other opportunities. These cantegriles, not unlike other squatter settlements or shantytowns in Latin America, used to consist of mainly unskilled rural workers with little education who were employed in the informal economy (Bon Espasandín 1963). The demography of cantegriles began to change in the late 1970s and early 1980s when squatter settlements, newly dubbed asentamientos, gradually became populated by the new poor who were expelled from the urban core in a context of downward social mobility. A study by the Instituto Técnico para la Promoción del Desarrollo Integral (INTEC 1995) comparing the demographics of populations living in Montevidean squatter settlements between 1984 and 1994 found that many more squatters in 1994 were or had once been employed in the formal economy, had higher levels of education, and had migrated from urban Montevideo.

Sociological studies typically differentiate cantegriles and asentamientos based on the origin of the residents (rural or urban), socioeconomic profile (the chronic poor or the recently impoverished), the style of formation (spontaneous or organized), and the conditions and quality of housing (more fragile in the case of cantegriles) (Álvarez-Rivadulla 2000). Another key way the sociological literature differentiates asentamientos from cantegriles is in relation to migrants' future as-

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2. According to Bon Espasandín (1963), the name "cantegril" comes from the Cantegril Country Club located in the luxurious Uruguayan beach city Punta del Este. The shortened name was used to describe squatter settlements as a kind of ironic joke.

pirations of social mobility. According to Kaztman (2006), while migration toward the city from rural areas in the case of cantegriles signified possible upward mobility for its residents, the development of asentamientos stems from the downward mobility of those expelled from the city. Despite these sociological differences between asentamientos and cantegriles, distinguishing them according to the social composition and origin of residents can be problematic given the social heterogeneity present in many settlements such as La Chacha. Some older settlements that were once known as cantegriles have received migration from newly impoverished families, just as newer settlements now known as asentamientos have received migration from the chronic poor or those who fit the traditional demographic of the cantegril.

Sociological literature has explored the social, economic, political, and urban processes that have led to the expansion of squatter settlements in Uruguay, the hardships associated with living with limited infrastructure and few services, and the various forms of social and political organization that squatters adopt (Álvarez-Rivadulla 2009; Ávila et al. 2003; Kaztman et al. 2004; Veiga and Rivoir 2006). Yet much of this literature does not attempt to explore the new social heterogeneity of Uruguayan squatter settlements, whereby the new poor and the chronic poor are now forced to live in close proximity to one another. Nor does it address the meanings that newly impoverished Uruguayans attribute to this new proximity or the various ways they deal with it. In this article, I address this gap in the literature by presenting data from ethnographic research I conducted in seven squatter settlements in Montevideo and its neighboring department Canelones, at various times between 2003 and 2007.[3] My primary methods included participant observation, life history interviews, and household surveys. In this article, I focus on one settlement, La Chacha, where the new and chronic poor have been forced to live in close spatial proximity.[4] I show how this proximity led my newly impoverished informants to work hard at boundary maintenance. They did so by evoking the terms "cantegril" and "asentamiento" and by emphasizing perceived moral, rather than social, distinctions between them. I argue that by doing so, my informants reproduced hegemonic discourses of the culture of poverty through which they positioned themselves as respectable and thus morally superior to the chronic poor (Hannerz 1969; Ortner 2006; Skeggs 2004).

NEW POVERTY IN LATIN AMERICA

There are myriad reasons for the phenomenon of downward mobility and increasing poverty in Uruguay. A key one has been a transformation in the economic development model from import substitution industrialization (ISI) to

3. I conducted research for a period of over two and a half years, including a reconnaissance research trip between July and December 2003 and ethnographic fieldwork conducted between October 2004 and April 2006 and between August 2006 and February 2007.
4. I lived in La Chacha for over eight months (October 2004 to June 2005) and continued to conduct research there until completing my fieldwork in 2007.

neoliberalism, a change that occurred across Latin America with some similar consequences throughout the region. Following the Great Depression of the 1930s, ISI was designed to overcome the vulnerability that Latin American economies experienced as a result of fluctuations in the global market by reducing dependence on imported goods and building internal markets via autonomous industrialization (Portes and Roberts 2005). ISI had some success in Uruguay, particularly in relation to the expansion of opportunities for employment and upward mobility, opportunities which drove the rural-urban migration that would eventually lead to the development of cantegriles in the 1950s. Nevertheless, in the 1970s and 1980s, Uruguay, much like other Latin American countries, experienced growing inflation and an accumulation of foreign debt, culminating in a regional debt crisis and the "lost decade of development" of the 1980s (Harvey 2005, 88). The debt crisis marked the end of the ISI period and led to the implementation of structural adjustment programs accompanying loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). This would mark the beginning of the rise of neoliberalism in Latin America.[5]

The implementation of neoliberal policies across Latin America has involved a number of key processes, including the withdrawal of states as providers of social welfare and employment, the contraction of domestic production, increased labor flexibility, and currency devaluation (Renfrew 2007; Robinson 2004). Neoliberal adjustments in Uruguay were not applied as aggressively as in other Latin American countries, partly due to the popular rejection of attempts to privatize state-owned enterprises through public referendums (Chavez 2005). Nevertheless, structural reforms during the military era (1973–1985) and under subsequent democratic administrations managed to partially dismantle the welfare state (Mesa-Lago 1997) and implement extensive trade and economic reform, leading Uruguay to be ranked "as the second most liberalized economy in Latin America (after Chile)" (Luna 2007, 13). These reforms led to a radical reconfiguration of labor conditions, including the contraction of public sector employment, freezing of the private sector, growth of the informal labor market, and dramatic reduction of urban incomes (Kaztman et al. 2004).

The spread of global neoliberal capitalism has led to class polarization and the rising inequality between upwardly mobile middle- and upper-class elites and some sections of the lower-middle and working classes who are increasingly marginalized from labor markets (Friedman 1999). According to Hoffman and Centeno (2003), Latin America has long been considered to have the most unequal distribution of resources in the world; this has only worsened in the neoliberal era. Although Uruguay continues to show the lowest rates of poverty and indigence in the region, it saw dramatic increases in the period leading up to and following the 2002 economic crisis (ECLAC 2006). During this period, in which

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5. Here I follow David Harvey's definition of neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey 2005, 2).

Uruguay continued to show the lowest level of inequality in distribution of income within Latin America, the gap between rich and poor widened in Uruguay while narrowing in some other countries in the region (ECLAC 2006).

The term *nueva pobreza* (new poverty) has been used to refer to the downward mobility of those middle- and working-class Latin American populations that previously enjoyed a much higher standard of living and social integration.[6] Anthropological and sociological research on new poverty has typically focused on downward mobility in those countries with a significant middle class, both in size and ideology, particularly Argentina and Uruguay (Ward 2004). The most prolific is the Argentine literature, much of which explores the symbolic ways in which downwardly mobile subjects attempt to preserve their status as members of the middle class and as different than the poor, particularly through acts of consumption (Kessler and Di Virgilio 2005; Minujin and Kessler 1995). This literature suggests that despite the downward mobility of the new poor in Argentina, which may involve their drop below the poverty line, they are likely to continue living in formal urban neighborhoods and unlikely to live in close proximity to the structural poor, who typically reside in marginal squatter settlements (Kessler and Di Virgilio 2005; Minujin 1995). Unlike in the Argentine context, new poverty in Uruguay has taken on a peculiar spatial dimension by which the new poor now predominantly reside in marginal peri-urban squatter settlements after having migrated from more central, formal urban neighborhoods. La Chacha is an example of a squatter settlement that has received such migration.

LA CHACHA

La Chacha is located in zone nine of Montevideo's state decentralization plan.[7] At the time of my research, zone nine had the highest rate of unemployment in Montevideo (IMM 2004) and the highest rates of both chronically poor and recently impoverished Montevideans (IMM 2003). Zone nine was the site of the most rapid growth of squatter settlements in Montevideo after 1999 and saw rates of poverty jump from 37.79 percent in 1999 to 62.07 percent in 2003, the year following Uruguay's economic crisis (IMM 2004). La Chacha was formed in 2002, during this crisis. When I began my research in 2004, La Chacha comprised approximately 500 households with almost 3,000 residents. According to a survey I conducted in 2005 of 177 households, and other census data collected in La Chacha over the years, the majority of families illegally invaded land after previously living in rental properties or homes that they owned in urban Montevideo. This data also suggests that the majority of residents had relatively high levels of edu-

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6. The term "new poverty" has also been used to describe a transformation of structural poverty in postindustrial societies, particularly in the United States and Western Europe, whereby the poor are becoming permanently excluded from labor markets, disconnected from social welfare, and increasingly spatially segregated in stigmatized urban neighborhoods (Mingione 1996; Wacquant 1999). The term "new marginality" has been more commonly used in Latin America to describe the same phenomenon, but with some additional characteristics specific to the region (Auyero 1999; Perlman 2006; Ward 2004).

7. Montevideo's state municipal administrative system has a decentralized plan dividing Montevideo into eighteen territorial districts or zones.

cation and insertion in the labor market, confirming that most of the population of La Chacha was newly impoverished.

Despite its predominantly newly impoverished population, La Chacha still comprised a significant number of households (approximately 25 percent) with family members with low levels of education, high levels of activity in the informal labor market, and a prior history of squatting. According to many of my newly impoverished informants, it was this social heterogeneity that led to the popular division of La Chacha into two regions, La Chacha and La Dominguera, the latter encompassing the area described in the introduction, where Marta and I encountered the hungry dog.[8] New-poor residents such as Marta typically referred to La Chacha as the asentamiento and to La Dominguera as the cantegril, frequently emphasizing the spatial border that separated the two (a creek that ran through the middle of the settlement). When I asked them on what basis they made this division, they frequently referred to a number of poor families living in La Dominguera, especially one particular family, the Hernandez family, who were highly marginalized within the settlement due to their previous residence in one of Montevideo's most feared cantegriles. Interestingly, the limits between the asentamiento and the cantegril often shifted according to who was being conceptualized within the spaces being described. For instance, although residents living in La Chacha usually depicted it as an asentamiento, one woman living in this region often complained of a poor family that lived across the road from her, frequently referring to the area across the road as a cantegril when discussing this particular family. However, she was often defensive when she discussed her "barrio" (neighborhood) and quick to point out that it was indeed an asentamiento.

According to the household survey I conducted, there was no difference in the socioeconomic background of residents living in the two regions popularly known as La Chacha or La Dominguera. My research suggests that the border between the two was far from fixed and that boundary maintenance depended not on the social demographic of residents but rather on the reproduction of moral difference.

CLASS AND CONSTRUCTING THE OTHER

Before exploring the various strategies employed by my newly impoverished informants to maintain boundaries between themselves and the chronic poor, it is useful to address where the new poor are located and how they locate themselves (and others) in class terms. Latin American sociologists have typically defined class according to Marxist approaches that highlight the means of production and distribution of products (Portes 1985), while others have additionally incorporated a Weberian approach that integrates the notion of social classes or groups that can be classified according to similar occupations and life chances

8. According to the state municipal administration, the geographical area popularly known by residents as either La Chacha or La Dominguera is officially one squatter settlement, La Chacha. Therefore, when residents approach the state requesting support or resources, they must do so as formal residents of La Chacha.

(Portes and Hoffman 2003). The Uruguayan sociologist Alfredo Errandonea (1989) measured social class through a combined Marxist and Weberian classification of occupational roles and the location of these roles within capitalist systems of domination. He presented a general structure of four class categories: the dominant class, the middle classes (upper and lower), the working classes (elite, formal proletariat, and lower working class), and the marginal class.[9]

The sociological literature is inconsistent in its descriptions of where the new poor in Uruguay are located in class terms. It typically locates them either within the elite or formal working class that previously enjoyed stable employment during the ISI period (Graña and de Sierra 2004; Kaztman 1996; Kaztman and Retamoso 2005; Roberts and Portes 2006), or closer to a downwardly mobile lower-middle class that has suffered an enormous drop in standard of living (Baker 2001; Veiga 2006; Veiga and Rivoir 2006). While my research suggests that the new poor are highly heterogeneous in their social composition, I also found working- and middle-class categories to be obsolete when attempting to understand how the new poor identified themselves and others. According to Ortner (1998, 3), although an objectivist understanding of class, such as Marxist notions of a "structurally defined set of locations" generated by capitalism, can be useful in exploring broad categories such as the middle class or the working class, it does not address emic conceptions of class or how class identity is historically and culturally constructed and experienced. Nor do objectivist accounts of class address the cultural reproduction of inequality: specifically, how categories of hierarchical difference and distinction are "relationally constituted" and how social boundaries are constructed and maintained through "reference to the other(s)" (Ortner 2006, 27).

Few of my new-poor informants invoked specific class categories such as the middle class or working class when speaking of their own identities. They certainly did so when referring to the Uruguayan middle class, often explaining how the "Switzerland of the Americas" had once ensured that anybody with a stable job (the kind of job was not important) could afford dignified housing and education and thus belong to the middle class. Nevertheless, although many of my informants claimed to have once identified with the lifestyles and resources associated with their own definitions of the middle class, they did not explicitly define themselves as belonging to the middle class. More generally, I found very little "language of class" (Ortner 2006, 19) when speaking with people about their own identities. When I tried to ask people directly, they mostly dismissed my questions, sometimes suggesting, "Aquí somos todos pobres" (Here we are all poor). Yet they were quick to modify their statements when called upon to compare themselves with other, chronically poor squatters who supposedly represented deeply entrenched and inescapable poverty. Although in these circumstances the new poor did not refer to themselves in strict class terms, they did refer to them-

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9. Others have abandoned the use of the term "marginal class" and adopted the term "informal proletariat" (Portes 1985) due to evidence showing that this type of worker is very much integrated into, rather than marginalized from, the capitalist sector (see for example Perlman 1976).

selves as *gente trabajadora* (hard-working people), differentiating themselves from the *pobres de verdad*, who purportedly refused to work.

Although my newly impoverished informants rarely invoked objective class categories to describe themselves and others, they certainly used emic categories to delineate boundaries between themselves and the chronic poor. They commonly did so by differentiating between an asentamiento and a cantegril. As I have noted, the divisions that people made between asentamientos and cantegriles in La Chacha were spatially inscribed with particular borders to separate them (e.g., the stream that ran through the settlement or a road that separated one family from another). However, as Cohen (1994, 53) points out, borders are not the same as boundaries. Cohen argues that while borders are fact, boundaries are as elusive as symbols and thus contestable: "Boundaries are the subjects of claim based on a perception by at least one of the parties of certain features which distinguish it from others." In the case presented in my research, the distinguishing features were morally inscribed. This is particularly clear from the descriptions people gave of cantegriles and *cantegrileros* (those who live in a cantegril), and how these differed from characteristics of an asentamiento. According to my informants' accounts, there were three key groups of traits associated with cantegriles and their residents: dirt, filth, and disorder; lack of values and the transmission of this deficiency to children; and apathy and lack of civic participation.

FILTH, DIRT, AND DISORDER

One key difference between asentamientos and cantegriles named by most of my newly poor informants was that the former was associated with cleanliness and order, the latter with filth, dirt, and disorder. Mariela, a thirty-five-year-old woman who had always lived in rental properties close to Montevideo's city center before squatting with her husband and two daughters, once explained the difference between an asentamiento and cantegril:

> One should not be embarrassed to be poor. But poverty is one thing and misery is another. I tell my daughters that we are poor, but just because we are poor it does not mean we have to live as indigents, badly or dirtily, with everything thrown about and filthy. No. That is how they live in the cantegriles, but this is an asentamiento. . . . In an asentamiento all the blocks of land are large and are measured and divided properly. . . . In the cantegriles the houses are generally made of zinc or cardboard and there is rubbish everywhere and there are pigs and horses and the majority of the families are *hurgadores*.[10]

Mariela's description clearly illustrates the connection made between cantegriles and dirt, filth, and rubbish. This association stretches back to the beginning of urban squatting in Montevideo in the 1950s. In the first book published on informal urban settlements in Montevideo, Bon Espasandín (1963, 21–22) noted that cantegriles were often referred to as *barrios de la mugre* (neighborhoods of

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10. *Hurgador* is the colloquial name given to *recicladores* (recyclers) who subsist from collecting and recycling rubbish. The term is derived from the word *hurgar*, meaning "to rummage" or "to scavenge."

filth), largely because of their location near rubbish dumps. Although few urban squatter settlements would now be located close to formal rubbish dumps, the popular association between cantegriles and filth persists due to the assumption that these settlements are predominantly populated by those who subsist from recycling rubbish (known to Mariela and many others as hurgadores).

Another way in which my informants linked dirt and filth with cantegriles was through criticism of dirty children and their polluting qualities. According to rumors that circulated extensively throughout La Chacha, not only were the chronic poor surrounded by their own filth, their children were covered in it. Dirty children were the source of much neighborhood gossip, and residents often labeled them as the source of contamination, particularly in relation to disease. For instance, at the beginning of my fieldwork a large number of people living in La Chacha became ill with hepatitis A. While some residents criticized the lack of an adequate sewerage system as the probable culprit, many people launched a moral attack on poor children, who supposedly enjoyed playing in overflowing sewage pits and whose parents allowed them to do so. These children were believed to be the vectors through which illness was spreading throughout the settlement. Consequently, many parents kept a close eye on their own children, sternly forbidding them to go near the *"gurises mugrientes"* (filthy kids). When the young daughter of a couple living next door to me became ill, her mother even questioned a number of residents and their children to find out if her daughter had been in contact with "cantegrileros" while at school.

Given fears of the polluting quality of filth and dirt, it is perhaps unsurprising that many residents of La Chacha rejected the opportunity to construct their homes out of mud. This opportunity arose out of a project sponsored by the Faculty of Architecture at the University of the Republic, which involved teaching squatters to use mud instead of concrete in the reconstruction of their homes. After all, mud insulated effectively in both summer and winter and was a cheap construction option in settlements where soil (and thus mud) was easy to come by. Although soil does not necessarily carry the same negative connotation as dirt, I found evidence to suggest that mud carried a particular stigma associated with poverty and rural life that was closely linked to negative perceptions of cantegriles. This was evident when few residents of La Chacha participated in the mud housing project, several feeling insulted at the suggestion that they should live in mud houses, which they associated with a backward way of living typical of *"el campo"* (the countryside). In the words of one woman: "If I wanted to live in a mud shack I would go to el campo. What do they think we are? We save our money to build our homes from concrete and they tell us to use mud? They are crazy! Do they think that we want to live in a cantegril?"

A project that aimed to improve squatters' quality of life by giving them the skills to build better homes failed at least partly because of the association they made between mud, poverty, and an undesirable rural way of life. This association was also likely connected to the fact that many rural *ranchos* (shacks) in Uruguay were once predominantly made of mud (Vidart 1998), potentially raising fears of being labeled as backward or premodern.

Although rubbish is linked to cantegriles for a number of reasons associated

with historical and material circumstances, the connection between dirt, filth, disorder, and cantegriles is primarily a symbolic one. Long ago Douglas (1966, 44) demonstrated that dirt is disorder, "matter out of place," and by cleaning and removing dirt we are "positively reordering our environment, making it conform to an idea" (1966, 3). In the case of Uruguayan squatter settlements, cantegriles and cantegrileros are cast as out of place largely because of perceptions of their rural and thus backward origin, which contrasts with their location in urban space. Dirt, rubbish, and even mud contribute to the construction of symbolic boundaries between urban and rural, modern and premodern. This is perhaps best illustrated by fears of pollution from hurgadores, who not only subsist from rubbish but who often do so while working with horses, the quintessence of rural life and premodernity (Renfrew 2007). Dirt is thus a powerful marker of difference that indicates social and moral distinctions between people (such as the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural, the good and the bad) based on the purity, order, and integrity of groups (Masquelier 2005; Skeggs 2004).

CHILDREN AND THE TRANSMISSION OF POVERTY

As dirt is a potent marker of difference, its proximity threatens to pollute and thus degrade the integrity of hierarchical social distinctions. In the case of discourses of filth and poverty in cantegriles, this is particularly clear in relation to children. During the outbreak of hepatitis A mentioned above, some children were seen as vectors of the contamination of illness because they were perceived as dirty and defiled. These fears subsided once the outbreak of hepatitis was controlled. However, over time I found evidence of more persistent fears that poor, dirty children might be the vectors of something much more damaging: the continuation of poverty itself. A primary theme underlying popular criticisms of dirty children was the purported deterioration of their values and, furthermore, the values of their parents, who would allow their children to exist in such a state.

I began to observe the connection my informants made between cantegriles and the deterioration of values early on in my research; in particular, one day while I was at home preparing food for Pablo, Cristina, and their seven-year-old daughter Micaela, the family that had kindly taken me into their home in La Chacha. Micaela had come home from school very upset because a boy in her class had stolen her pencil case. Cristina asked her daughter if the boy was from the settlement and Micaela replied, "Yes, he lives over there in the cantegril." Cristina was quick to correct her daughter, exclaiming "Mica! Do not be badly behaved, calling it a cantegril!" Micaela insisted that the children who lived "over there" always arrived at school dirty, sometimes without shoes, and that they all lived in tin shacks, unlike the families in "the asentamiento." Cristina nodded and said, "Yes, it is true. But we must try not to judge them. It is not their fault that their parents do not have values and do not take good care of them. That is the only world they know." Cristina then explained to me, "Here, even though we are poor, Micaela always goes about wearing shoes and with her hair clean."

My new-poor informants were not just critical of parents on the basis of how they chose to raise their children, they were also critical of them because of the

number of children they had. One family in particular was frequently criticized for its large number of children. Monica and Luis moved to La Chacha with their eleven children in 2002, after having lived in a squatter settlement in the interior. Monica had given birth to thirteen children, two of whom had died. According to Monica, one was stillborn and the other died within six months of birth due to a congenital illness. Rumors often circulated that Monica's children had died due to neglect, starvation, or some kind of parasitic infection brought on by the "filth" in her home. Furthermore, residents were quick to criticize Monica and Luis for continuing to have children at all, arguing that anybody who had so many children without the economic means to support them was morally questionable, largely due to their role in reproducing poverty. In a conversation I once had with Monica, I asked her whether she had always wanted a large family. She answered: "In this life there are so many doors that are closed that I cannot open. But motherhood is a door that I can still open. Of course I want to walk through that door." Although critical judgments of Monica's family size cast her as irresponsible and morally corrupt, she made it clear that motherhood was a form of agency in a world that had offered her very few possibilities.

Underlying the criticisms that many residents launch toward poor families and their children is a strong desire to construct moral boundaries between themselves and others. One of the reasons they may do so is through fear of the danger "that they eventually become cantegrileros themselves" (Renfrew 2007, 221). One of my informants, Sara, a forty-six-year-old mother of three sons, stated this specifically in relation to her fears of becoming chronically poor:

The one thing that none of us want is to drop down to . . . the lowest level. Those people do not know any other reality. They are the ones who have probably always lived in cantegriles. . . . The reason people do not want them is because they make us scared, scared that we . . . may end up at the bottom. And my children. That is what I fear the most. That they will end up there also.

In order to address her fears, Sara monitored the movements of her two younger sons closely, only allowing them to spend time with children that she classified as coming from "good" and "respectable" families. This was a common strategy among parents, who displayed similar anxieties. Many newly impoverished parents I knew even restricted their children from attending neighborhood events or gatherings that they believed might bring them into contact with unruly and "dangerous" children.

Fears about the deepening of poverty have led parents to monitor their children carefully out of fear that they may somehow be polluted by the poverty of others, particularly other children. This reveals a broader strategy to maintain moral distinctions between themselves and those referred to as cantegrileros. This was clear through criticisms of families (and of women in particular) that had "too many" children. Perceptions of the supposed hypersexuality and fecundity of the poor have long been associated with moral discourses of excess (Skeggs 2004), thus distancing and disassociating the poor from the order of the "respectable" classes. By maintaining moral distinctions, my newly impoverished

informants were distancing themselves from a perceived dangerous class (Morris 1994) that threatened to contaminate both them and their children.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND THE APATHY OF THE POOR

Another key trait that was commonly associated with cantegriles was the purported apathy and lack of civic participation exhibited by the chronic poor. According to common discourse, cantegrileros were lazy, did not want to work, and had no interest in participating in civic or political processes that might enable them to escape poverty. The common perception was that those who had migrated from cantegriles had become accustomed to not working or paying for anything and that they continued to want everything free (*todo gratis*). Perceptions of a deteriorating work ethic intersected with criticisms of welfare dependency and reliance on the state. Several events that occurred in La Chacha during July 2005 clearly illustrate how these discourses operate.

In April 2005 thousands of poor Uruguayan families submitted applications for a new social welfare program named Plan de Asistencia Nacional a la Emergencia Social (PANES), which included access to a payment of approximately US$60 a month, referred to as *el ingreso ciudadano* (the citizen's income). The application procedure took much longer than expected, leading to multiple protests staged by applicants across the city of Montevideo. In July 2005, a group of residents from La Chacha orchestrated a protest several blocks away from the squatter settlement, demanding attention from the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES) and a visit from a social worker who could verify their PANES applications. As I approached the scene of the protest, I spotted Sandra, a member of the Hernandez family. I asked Sandra about the protest and how the idea for it had eventuated. Sandra explained that the school holidays had begun and for the following two weeks their children would be unable to eat at the school soup kitchen. She complained that if the poor residents of La Chacha had begun to receive the PANES citizen's income, feeding their children adequately would not be a problem. Thus, that morning a group of neighbors had decided to stage the protest in the hope of attracting attention to their cause.

After the protest I walked to La Chacha and began speaking with a group of residents, including Pablo and Cristina (my host family). Pablo asked me if I had just come from the protest. I answered yes and also casually mentioned that I had not seen him or the others there. Pablo looked at me sternly and exclaimed that he was not interested in PANES: "I want a job, I want to work. Not like those *bichis* who go out to fight when they run out of money to buy wine."[11] Pablo suggested that those "bichis" never participated in community activities and always wanted the government to solve their problems. Several people nodded their heads, and a woman added that destructive protests with burning tires gave the asentamiento a bad name. She complained that the news that evening would present an image

11. *Bichi* (short for *bichicome*) is derived from the English word *beachcomber* and is used in Uruguay to refer to the poor or homeless in a derogatory way.

of La Chacha as filled with "cantegrileros," obscuring the fact that most of the residents were good, hardworking people who would prefer to work than receive handouts from the state.

The following morning, news began circulating throughout La Chacha that the "cantegrileros" were organizing another protest. I went to investigate and found that rather than protesting, several members of the Hernandez family, including Sandra and her two brothers, were setting up an *olla popular* on the road near their home and were planning to invite the children of the settlement to eat there at lunchtime everyday throughout the school holidays.[12] They received food donations from local supermarkets and cash donations from drivers passing by. Eight children came to eat that day but word spread quickly and over the following days more children attended. The olla popular lasted the entire two-week period of the school break and the residents of La Chacha who participated in the two-week mobilization frequently communicated a strong sense of pride in relation to their capacity to organize something so successful and, furthermore, to provide for their children.

Although the mobilizations across the month of July 2005 were empowering for some families, they attracted much criticism from other residents of La Chacha who perceived the protest and the olla popular as blatant displays of the chronic poor demanding handouts, either from the state or from their neighbors, in order to feed their own children. Some residents complained that the "cantegrileros" were projecting a bad image of the barrio. They suggested that those watching the news or passing by either mobilization would walk away with the image of poor, begging squatters rather than a group of people working hard to legitimate their housing situations. Other residents complained that the cantegrileros were individualistic and incapable of participating in civic action that required thinking beyond their own immediate personal or family concerns.

According to Wacquant (1997, 334), a "trope of disorganization" is common in sociological work on poverty, whereby the poor are persistently viewed as lacking the necessary organization to effectively remove themselves from poverty. This trope is also very much present in everyday public life among newly impoverished squatters in Uruguay. Rather than interpret the Hernandez family's mobilizations as forms of effective organization aimed at achieving important ends, many residents of La Chacha accused the Hernandez family of being immoral and of reproducing dependence. The chronic poor were constructed as actively producing their own poverty, as "agents of their misfortune" (Renfrew 2007, 229), due to a deterioration of values and lack of desire to remove themselves and their children from misery's clutches through hard work and true participation in civic life.

DISCOURSES OF THE CULTURE OF POVERTY AND THE DANGERS OF PROXIMITY

The moralizing tendencies described in the ethnographic vignettes above demonstrate how my newly impoverished informants have cast the chronic poor

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12. *Olla popular* is used in Uruguay to describe a communal cooking experience whereby those participating all contribute an ingredient to the *olla* (pot).

as responsible for their own poverty. The moral distinctions employed, and the discourses that sustain them, are not necessarily specific to the Uruguayan context. They resemble a broader discourse that has existed for several hundred years in various cultural contexts, which separates the poor into moral categories fixed into binaries: the deserving and undeserving poor (Katz 1989), the reputable and disreputable poor (Matza 1966), and the respectable and unrespectable poor (Morris 1994). Across various cultural contexts, these moral divisions have been concretized into hegemonic cultural beliefs about the very nature of poverty. From the early nineteenth century to the present day, a series of assumptions about poverty have become firmly entrenched in both political and public discourses: poverty is the fault of the poor, it "is spread by a sub-culture based on vice, filth, and moral ignorance," and social welfare further weakens the poor's morality and desire to work (Morris 1994, 12). These assumptions about poverty are deeply implicated in the anthropologist Oscar Lewis's (1966) "culture of poverty" theory, which posited a subculture generated from the poor's marginalization from the dominant culture. According to Lewis (1966, xliii), the distinct values of the poor led to certain pathological behaviors and ways of survival that kept them trapped in a cycle of poverty that would be transmitted to the next generation. Disorganization, apathy, and dependence are common features—or, as Wacquant (1997) suggests, "tropes"—of the culture-of-poverty discourse popularized by Lewis.

Assumptions about the existence of a culture of poverty not only permeate hegemonic understandings of poverty, they also become the vehicle through which distinctions are made. This is clearly demonstrated in anthropological and sociological literature that shows the various strategies used by respectable subjects in order to locate themselves above perceived outcasts and undesirable others, particularly by reproducing moral distinction (Ortner 2006). For instance, Hannerz (1969) found that in an African American urban ghetto in Washington, DC, self-described "respectable" residents differentiated themselves from other, undesirable residents whom they characterized as morally corrupt because of their purportedly excessive alcohol consumption, violence, and diminished aspiration to work. In the case of my newly impoverished informants, distinctions between the new and chronic poor were also made through a series of moral oppositions: I am not at fault for my poverty but they are; I live cleanly and in an orderly fashion but they live in filth and disorder; I pass on positive values to my children but they reproduce poverty through the degeneration of values; I am hard working but they are lazy.

According to Skeggs (2004, 4), the construction of moral distinctions that cast the poor or unrespectable working-class subjects as deviant and different than others depends on a process of "misrecognition." Skeggs draws from Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) discussion of misrecognition as the basis on which the power of the dominating classes is rationalized and thus legitimated. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, 168) argue that complicity in one's own domination relies on a process of misrecognition (similar to Marx's notion of false consciousness) whereby the power of the dominant is naturalized and legitimated based on a series of assumed and essentialized characteristics. This process of misrecognition constitutes symbolic violence, "the violence which is exercised upon a so-

cial agent with his or her complicity" (1992, 167). Skeggs (2004, 4) suggests that a similar process of misrecognition occurs when classifying the powerless: they "are also misrecognized as having ascribed and essential characteristics" such as apathy, immorality, criminality, and dependence, without necessarily having to achieve or display such characteristics or values.

It is important to acknowledge the production of hegemonic discourses of power and distinction and "how value becomes attributed and attached to particular cultures, selves, and classes" (Skeggs 2004, 79). However, it is also necessary to understand the purpose these distinctions serve when maintained by those who are under threat of falling into poverty or who have already done so. In his discussion of Uruguayan squatters, Daniel Renfrew (2007, 215) refers to the process of distinction making as "refracted othering," whereby the poor "internalize hegemonic culturalist constructs and redirect them onto those living in similar socio-economic situations." He argues that one of the reasons for doing so is in response to the threat of downward mobility whereby the downwardly mobile fear following the same trajectory as the chronic poor. Although this process of refracted othering is concentrated around categories of class distinction, it may also occur around other, sometimes interconnected, social categories such as new and old migration. For instance, in her ethnography of violence and crime in Brazil, Teresa P. R. Caldeira (2000) described a lower-middle-class neighborhood in São Paulo in which long-standing residents (predominantly downwardly mobile children of European migrants) reinforced moral boundaries between themselves and poor, recently arrived migrants from the Northeast of Brazil, who were perceived as dangerous criminals and thus responsible for escalating insecurity. Caldeira (2000, 31) argues that long-standing residents' reinforcement of boundaries was based on their shared categorization with newcomers as migrants, whereby "the category closest to the narrator but still different, must be most emphatically distanced and condemned."

While Caldeira's work illustrates how the ambiguity between groups and fear of sameness can generate the need to emphasize moral boundaries, other scholars have found evidence to suggest that these boundaries may be directly associated with the spatial or territorial mapping of difference. For instance, in Javier Auyero and Débora Swistun's (2009) ethnographic work on risk and environmental contamination in a shantytown on the periphery of Buenos Aires, they found that old-time, lower-middle-class residents reproduced moral boundaries between themselves and newer, low-income migrants by displacing certain types of toxicity or contamination onto both new migrants and the region of the shantytown that they inhabited. A similar kind of territorial displacement of threat of contamination, albeit of a moral kind, is occurring in Uruguayan squatter settlements. This displacement in Uruguay has not been articulated through the lens of new or old migration but rather through the terms "asentamiento" and "cantegril."[13] These terms were certainly once used in the literature to refer to new and old histories of land invasion. However, they have now become moral categories that newly impoverished people use to delineate social boundaries between themselves and the

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13. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that unlike in Argentina, it is the new migrants (the new poor) who make accusations of moral corruption emanating from old migrants (the chronic poor).

chronic poor. Extending Skeggs's (2004) discussion of the process of misrecognition projected onto the poor or powerless, my research suggests that in Uruguay, those misrecognized characteristics that are typically linked to the chronic poor, such as apathy and immorality, have been additionally mapped onto vocabulary once used to identify contrasting patterns of squatter migration.

CONCLUSION

In an interview with Homi Bhabha conducted by Gary Hall and Simon Wortham (1996, 63), Bhabha suggested that "the real problem of differentiation is not distance but proximity. The real problem of difference is similitude. All the affect, anxiety, disavowal comes not at the point at which differences can be binarized or polarized. The problem of translation and the problem of mistranslation—these happen because differences are, complexly, in some ways very small." It is proximity and similitude that impels people to work hard at boundary maintenance and to exaggerate difference in light of the threat (and possibility) of sameness (Skeggs 2004). That dichotomies such as middle class/ working class and traditional/modern are increasingly ambiguous and difficult to separate in some contexts (Bhabha 1998) is all the more reason for individuals and groups to search for difference and ways to maintain it. In Douglas's words, the blurring of boundaries can produce chaos and disorder: "It is only by exaggerating between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created" (Douglas 1966, 4).

My newly impoverished informants' attempts to create a semblance of order are rooted in very real transformations in the broader political economy and how these have affected their everyday lives. The implementation of neoliberal policies in Uruguay, as in other Latin American contexts, has resulted in class polarization and growing inequality between upper-middle-class elites and some sections of the lower-middle and working classes. As a result, the differences between middle- and lower-class categories are becoming increasingly ambiguous. This has become exacerbated in Uruguay due to the new spatial concentration of poverty, by which downwardly mobile populations are now living in marginal squatter settlements and, consequently, sharing everyday social space with the chronic poor. Fearing spatial and socioeconomic proximity to chronic poverty, some newly impoverished Uruguayans attempt to retain their status and symbolically distance themselves from a dreaded but possible future of permanent poverty through a process of boundary maintenance. They do so by reproducing a series of moral distinctions between themselves and the chronic poor that reflect well-known dichotomies found in poverty discourses in multiple historical and cultural contexts.

While the hegemonic discourses associated with poverty, which blame the poor for their own poverty, are not new or specific to the Uruguayan context, recent patterns of squatter settlement migration have certainly created new opportunities for the reproduction of these discourses. These discourses are being articulated through particular terminologies traditionally used in sociological and social policy literature to indicate different types of squatter settlements, invasion histories, and demographic populations. In poor, peri-urban enclaves, the terms

"asentamiento" and "cantegril" have become emic expressions that constitute the most salient language for exaggerating social and moral distinction.

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