Evictions and the Right to Housing

Experience from Canada, Chile, the Dominican Republic, South Africa, and South Korea

Edited by
Antonio Azuela, Emilio Duha, and Enrique Ortiz

International Development Research Centre
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DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

URBAN RENEWAL AND EVICTIONS IN SANTO DOMINGO

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Introduction

This chapter offers an analysis of the process of urban renewal and redevelopment and its attendant evictions as carried out in the city of Santo Domingo during the period of 1986 to 1992. This includes identification and description of official urban-development policies underlying state-promoted redevelopment projects during the period; description of the observed social, economic, cultural, political, and legal impacts that evictions had on residents of the neighbourhoods affected; and an analysis of how these residents and their organizations reacted to this phenomenon, how they involved themselves in the process, and, more broadly, how the urban poor perceived their situation and how they organized themselves.

This chapter has five parts. In the first, we present a brief description of the urban structure and the ways social spaces came to be segregated in the city of Santo Domingo. In the second, we discuss the phenomenon of evictions in Santo Domingo, looking at historical trends, the legal and institutional setting, and the methods and procedures by which evictions were conducted. In the third and fourth parts, we discuss case studies that showed some of the social dynamics involved, focusing on the strategies that the various players in these communities adopted and the roles they played in eviction proceedings and how the communities managed to reestablish their identities and to reorganize themselves in their new surroundings. In the fifth and sixth parts, we attempt to interpret and draw

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1 In collaboration with Ramonina Brea.
some conclusions from the most important changes we observed during the period of study.

For purposes of this study, we took as points of reference three cases of evictions that occurred in working-class districts of the city of Santo Domingo:

- **Barrio Guachupita, located on the edge of the historic centre of the city, along the western bank of the Ozama river** — This was a neighbourhood where the government had built a series of multifamily dwellings facing the Avenue Francisco del Rosario Sánchez, just within the inner ring road. This altered part of the landscape of the original settlement. About 90% of the families who were displaced from this district were relocated.

- **Barrio Maquiteria, located in the southeastern part of the city** — When the Columbus Lighthouse monument was built, families living in the vicinity were evicted, and some were resettled in a government-built housing project nearby, in an area known as Los Coquitos de Los Mameyes.

- **Sabana Perdida, a settlement located in the northeastern part of the city, consisting of 54 barrios** — Construction of the Avenue Charles de Gaulle within the outer ring road led to the destruction of part of this settlement, and most of the families were resettled in a nearby area with serviced lots provided by the state.

In each of these cases, we studied both the people who had been resettled in new surroundings, and those who were evicted without resettlement. In gathering data for this part of the study, we used qualitative interview techniques, with focus groups, in-depth interviews, and life histories.

We began with a system for categorizing the evictions that identified four problem areas for study: motivations, underlying conceptions, the concept and practice of democracy as evident in the behaviour of key actors, and the ways people identified themselves in terms of their community and their relationship to their own urban space.

**The scope of evictions during the study period**

Between 1986 and 1992, some 30,000 families were faced with destruction of their homes, as part of the urban-renewal campaign of the state and the city of Santo
Domingo. Assuming an average family size of six persons, this meant that about 180,000 people were forced to move.

Most of the neighbourhoods affected were in the poorer districts of the city, and relocation typically involved moving people from the centre of town to the outskirts. Some families were relocated in tracts of single or multifamily apartments and homes built by the state in such areas as Almirante, Los Frailes, Sabana Perdida, La Victoria, Guaricano, and Los Alcarrizos Americanos.

These estimates were based on data from press stories and reports provided by the people affected and their organizations. There was no reliable official registry of displaced families. A number of factors cast doubt on the reliability of official reports: the sense of anarchy that prevailed, especially during the era of mass evictions (early 1987 to the end of 1988), inadequate and sporadic census-taking by works contractors, a counting system based on houses and not families, failure to take account of tenants and people whose economic status (or any other status), was "unclassifiable," and the typical bureaucratic habit of underestimating the real impact of such moves.

And yet, a great percentage of the families who were evicted were offered no resettlement. Some of these families were given a certificate from the Dirección General de Bienes Nacionales (DGBN, department of national properties), the agency that was in charge of the process, which was supposed to guarantee their eventual relocation. Others received only a promise that the government would try to improve their situation. Still others seemed to have been given no hopes at all. Meanwhile, all these families had been living in shacks or shelters built by the government, in rental accommodation in other parts of town, with family or relatives, or in the new squatter settlements that had sprung up around the edge of the city.

At the time of our research, many of these families had been without a proper home for 3 or 4 years and had been constantly on the move around the city, seeking a home and a livelihood — with all the disruption and instability of their lives that this entailed.

These massive urban-renewal programs had thus significantly aggravated imbalances in the national economy and distracted attention from the search for real solutions to the issue of the people's basic needs for employment, health, and education. Also, these programs were completely ineffective in overcoming the country's serious housing shortage. Consider just how irrational this approach to urban planning was: if we tried to solve the current housing shortage with such projects, it would take an investment of 96,000 million DOP, which amounted to the entire national budget for 15 years (in 1998, about 16 Dominican pesos [DOP] = 1 United States dollar [USD]). Clearly, this process could not continue. The government projects already implemented represented, in financial terms, a
very questionable investment because they involved heavy subsidies, and far from meeting the housing needs of the poorest classes, they served mainly to satisfy the demands of middle-income groups.

On the other hand, the high import component of these investments led to accelerating inflation, which reached levels of more than 100% in 1990. This affected urban housing and building lots in a diversity of ways. House prices and rents were "dollarized," thus putting them beyond the reach of most public and private wage earners. Low-income groups were forced to seek housing further and further from the centre of town and from their places of work. The situation was exacerbated by the lack of protection for evicted families, the illegality of the procedures, irregularities in payment of compensation, heavy doses of disinformation, poorly constructed houses, and disruption of daily life, with their attendant psychological effects on the people concerned. The process of eradicating their settlements was conducted with no thought to the social and economic effects of such upheaval, focusing instead — and even then, only at the best of times — on finding substitute living quarters and providing basic infrastructure. In none of the projects we investigated was there any assessment of the social costs.

Conditions in the original settlements were on the whole satisfactory — people had their protective family and social networks; they provided their own services or could get them close at hand; and they could find work and earn a living, or at least survive. People had a feeling of belonging to a specific space and a specific community, which made it possible to develop a sense of identity, of common history and memories (Morel and Villamán 1990). All this was usually lost with the move to new surroundings.

On one hand, many or even most of the people living in the so-called marginal areas of town made their living essentially in the informal or "underground" economy. This kind of activity could be pursued either within the neighbourhood itself or in other accessible parts of town. A move to some remote location thus implied a loss of access to both the market a person created and the networks that he or she was part of. On the other hand, the areas they were relocated to were for the most part lacking in even the bare essentials. It must be remembered that the settlements where they used to live were once just as short of services. In a sense, then, these people could be considered "urban pioneers," forever being expelled and driven to start the urbanizing process all over again and develop a new area, from which they would once again be evicted.

In all of this, the state played the role of a purely external agent, interrupting the environment these people had created and acting as the vanguard of the habits and lifestyle of that "other city," the officially recognized, or "formal" city. Seldom if ever did the state pay any attention to the neighbourhoods it planned
to destroy, except to intervene as an agent of repression or to build projects around the periphery of the neighbourhoods (for example, the splitting of Guachupíta and Ciénaga by Avenue Francisco del Rosario Sánchez, the separation of Villa Juana and Villa Consuelo by the Quinto Centenario expressway). The state thus had a history not only of avoiding its responsibilities to the housing needs of the poorer classes — which explained in large part the degree of overcrowding we witnessed — but also a history of failure to provide social services in the poor districts.

This land-clearance policy was based partly on straightforward economic or profit motives, tied more specifically to pressures for investment in real estate for commercial and tourist development. But it also had an ideological and cultural side, and thus a political one. On the cultural and ideological front, we could detect the thread of a broadly authoritarian culture of modernization running through the actions and official statements of successive governments. To this thrust we could add a certain set of cultural perceptions and values about the meaning of space, which led governments to promote projects that dissociated and segregated people. Urban development was based on a notion of social development directed to the concentration of incomes, spatial segregation, and social exclusion.

This was the framework of President Balaguer's ideas about urban space, which to some extent made the flow of state funding a function of interests, needs, expectations, and demands as seen through his peculiar optic. With the new Balaguer government, after 1986, we still saw reflections of the cult of monumentality; the desire to make a mark in history with grand public works was just as much a feature of the more recent approaches to the use of city space as it was in the past. The government viewed the building of public works as fundamental to establishing its own political legitimacy. In this sense, one saw many points of continuity between this policy and the redevelopments undertaken in the "Twelve Years" of the earlier Balaguer administration, from 1966 to 1978. However, at the social-policy level, these motives seemed to go hand in hand with a deliberate attempt to disrupt and relocate centres of political opposition so as to keep the city "manageable" and safe for the government's economic-policy goals.

We also found these three dimensions — economic, cultural—ideological, and political — at work among the people affected by urban-development policy. On the economic front, survival networks and mechanisms were completely disrupted because the conditions on which they were built had disappeared or had been transformed. In most cases, the savings and efforts that barrio dwellers had
put into their communities and the role of the *barrios* as focal points of urbanization were ignored or discounted by those who wanted to push these people to the outskirts of town.

On the cultural and ideological front, the community’s identity was fractured, and existing mechanisms for mutual support and solidarity fell apart. Along with the culture of privatization, we saw a kind of lottery mentality, according to which a person had only to win a favour from the state if he or she aspired to a better life. Although this may have served to some extent to legitimize state action, it also helped to encourage an atomistic or individualistic approach to seeking solutions, and it was a constant frustration to those attempting to organize and involve people in collective undertakings.

Thus, eviction was a way to condition people by inducing or generating in them a set of values that would determine their attitudes, ambitions, and expectations and the approaches they took to solving their problems and to satisfying their needs. Thus, to the extent that social relations were still based on paternalism and dependence on hand outs, patronage, and “connections,” poor people were infused by word and deed with the idea that they had to find their own ways to channel their demands and satisfy their needs. The official terms for classifying the education, lifestyle, and social level of evicted persons betrayed an elitist and exclusivist approach, felt within the communities themselves, contributing to the differentiation and segregation of people’s demands and claims on the state.

At the political level, we saw the breakdown of community organizations, people’s long-standing traditions of mutual trust, and their will to offer resistance. The process of putting these together again had to start all over in a new location. Another angle to the process was potentially military, in the sense of making it easier to penetrate and control the city’s most strategic points. Then too, evictions were sure to disrupt electoral participation, by forcing changes to voters’ lists and constituency boundaries (COPADEBA 1990).

A new and significant feature in this urban renewal process, in contrast to those undertaken on previous occasions, was the greater degree to which people were prepared to resist. In earlier times, the people affected may have grumbled among themselves, but they organized no opposition and made no attempt at negotiation. Resistance was left up to individuals, who could seldom stand up to the power of officialdom. And yet, in the period under study, we observed what we would call a current of opposition and a movement to challenge both the form and the content of urban-renewal projects.

We should note that people’s reactions to these processes were not all the same. To the extent that such projects held out hope for meeting the legitimate
and deeply rooted longings of people for better housing, this could lead to different expectations, depending on people’s situations. For example, the reaction of a tenant would not necessarily be the same as that of his or her landlord, nor would members of an organized group see things in the same way as those who had no such affiliations. What was new about the reactions we observed was that organized residents’ groups seemed to help shape the way other people responded. The resulting capacity to put up resistance and propose alternatives stood in sharp contrast to that in earlier times, when people were simply evicted under deplorable circumstances.

**Urban structure and the segregation of social spaces**

Over the previous 30 years, the physical face and the human dynamics of Santo Domingo had gone through a series of major changes. This continuous process of modernization had symbolically brought people into the world of modern consumerism, values, and lifestyles through the influence of the media, but it had also increasingly excluded these same people from the material benefits of that world by denying them opportunities to work (Villamán 1992).

The fall of the Trujillo regime in 1961 opened the floodgates all over the country — suddenly, the closed-door policies and barriers to internal migration, typical of any dictatorship, disappeared. Numerous poor communities that had for years been hemmed in began to move toward the main cities, driven by the precarious nature of life in the poor towns of the interior and drawn by the opportunities for social mobility that the style of development at the time seemed to offer. The flow of migrants from the countryside, natural demographic growth, and a new model of industrial development, based on import substitution and the concentration of public investment in the major cities, combined to contribute to a rapid process of urbanization. The proportion of the population living in cities rose from 16.6% in 1920 and 23.8% in 1950 to 52.0% by the time of the census in 1981. Between 1920 and 1981, the number of towns in the Dominican Republic with more than 5,000 inhabitants rose from 7 to 60 (ONAPLAN 1983). The most pronounced feature of this new settlement pattern was the dominant position assumed by Santo Domingo. The metropolitan area of the capital began to account for 30% of the national population, more than 50% of the urban population, and between 70 and 90% of industry, commerce, services, and administration.

In the absence of any urban-development policy — the last city plan for Santo Domingo was drawn up in 1956 — and with a management style that encouraged speculation in the appropriation, distribution, and use of urban space, the cities simply mushroomed helter-skelter. Santo Domingo grew from 1.5 km² in 1945 to more than 200 km². Expansion at first occurred mainly along the city’s
east-west axis. In the more recent years, the main thrust of growth was to the north, into highly productive agricultural lands, either through spontaneous seizure or direct state encouragement. This was true of areas like Los Alcarrizos, Pantojas, Guaricano, and the expansion of Villa Mella toward Sabana Perdida and of La Victoria toward the Hainamosa area along the Mella highway. This intraurban mobility was driven mainly by state-sponsored urban-renewal projects of the more recent years (Cela 1992) and made it increasingly difficult to provide and coordinate proper services.

To this we must add the markedly regressive distribution of space: in 1981, 64% of the population of the National District (Distrito Nacional) — living in the so-called squatter settlements — occupied only 20% of the total urban space, whereas the remaining 35% occupied 80% of that space. This could be seen in the distribution of social classes within the city, among the following zones (ADN-CI 1992):

- **Colonial and Nueva** — These were middle-class residential areas undergoing a transition to services zones. They constituted a very small area (25 000 inhabitants), with an average density of 156 persons/ha.

- **The eastern zone of the city** — This zone was roughly equally middle class (41%) and working class (44%), with a few poor barrios (15%). It had about 460 000 inhabitants, giving it a relatively low density of 123 persons/ha, and was cut off from the rest of the city by the Ozama and Isabela rivers.

- **The northern zone** — This zone included the poor barrios along the Ozama and Isabela rivers and neighbourhoods on their way to becoming slums. Working-class areas accounted for 60%; the poor areas, 25%. This zone had the highest density of all: 417 persons/ha (or more than 580 persons/ha if one included the poor barrios).

- **The area to the east of Avenue Luperón and south of Avenue John F. Kennedy** — This was mainly middle class (45%) and upper middle class (46%), with pockets of poor barrios. It had about 800 000 inhabitants, distributed among 35 neighbourhoods, with a relatively low density of 76 persons/ha, and included service and recreation zones.

- **The northwest area of the city** — This was where the better-off people tended to move. This was a thinly populated zone, with only 65 000
people and a density of 26 persons/ha. It comprised eight neighbourhoods, of which 75% were upper class; the rest, middle class. This part of the city also included undeveloped areas.

- **The zone to the east of the city** — This included districts near the Herrera industrial park and the satellite town of Los Alcarrizos. It comprised a total of 14 neighbourhoods, with some 300,000 people. Most of these were poor *barrios* (63%) and working-class areas (28%). Because they were relatively large, these neighbourhoods had a lower density, at only 47 persons/ha, than the poor or working-class districts in the northern zone.

- **The zone that included the two satellite towns of Sabana Perdida and Guaricano** — This was where many migrants and evictees had settled. With fewer than 100,000 people, it had a relatively low density, thanks to its physical size.

This spatial distribution could be correlated with a regressive income distribution. The period between 1984 and 1989 saw an alarming concentration of incomes, thanks to the effects of the economic crisis, inflation, and public-spending policies. In 1989, the poorest 34.3% of families received only 8.8% of national income, whereas the richest 11.8% received 44.2%. For 1989, it was estimated that 56% of the country’s population was living below the poverty line, and of these, 35% was living in absolute poverty. This situation probably became worse with the 13% drop in real gross domestic product between 1989 and 1991. In 1992, it was estimated that 4.2 million Dominicans (or more than half the population) were poor and that 2.5 million were living in absolute poverty.

Until the beginnings of the 1980s, the pattern of urban growth, and particularly the expansion of Santo Domingo (ONAPLAN 1983), had produced development in accordance with an externally oriented growth model. This involved heavy state involvement in the economy, relative stagnation in agriculture, uneven industrial growth, and an accelerating process of “marginalization” (Duarte 1980) of the urban population, as a result of their low degree of absorption into the formal labour market and the unbalanced use of the urban space (land, housing, industry, services; Chantada 1991a, b). The 1980s saw the beginnings of two basic socioeconomic trends. The first was the restructuring of the nation’s productive capacity, under the influence of the “extroverted-accumulation” model, based on tourism, customs free zones, and, to a lesser extent, agroindustry as poles of growth. The second was the economic policy of 1986–90, which was a massive
The price of urban land rose, and the landholding structure tended to become more concentrated;

- Thousands of families were evicted and removed to outlying districts, lacking community infrastructure and basic social services;

- Regressive trends in the housing market intensified;

- Urban sprawl accelerated as the capital itself grew and new suburban centres formed and spread into rural parts of the National District; and

- The so-called informal economy flourished: the rate of open unemployment in Santo Domingo rose from 21% in 1981 to almost 30% in 1990, whereas informal employment began to generate up to 65% of jobs in some districts of the city. (Informal employment accounted for 32.5% of the National District’s economically active population in 1983.)

The housing problem was worth particular attention. During these years, the housing market became more exclusivist and regressive, thanks to inflation in the cost of land and high construction costs provoked by government building programs and their demand for inputs and foreign exchange. This also helped to drive up interest rates and shorten lending terms, which in turn led to a sharp drop in private residential construction.

According to Ayuntamiento del Distrito Nacional (ADN, National District government) (ADN–CI 1992), between 1987 and 1991, 40% of the 1.550 billion USD total budget for public-sector construction went into housing and urban development, with 60% of this investment concentrated in the country’s southeastern region. Of this, in turn, 70% went to the city of Santo Domingo, underlining the high concentration of urban investment in the capital city.

The state had a virtual monopoly over housing construction. As the purchasing power of the middle classes eroded, the private financial sources that were supposed to supply credit to the middle classes shifted their focus to more profitable sectors. Only the highest income groups had access to mortgage financing. Because the state owned most of the land surrounding the city and thus dominated the real-estate market, one could expect to see future projects take shape in these areas (such as Sabana Perdida, Guaricano, Los Alcarrizos).
The increase in Santo Domingo’s housing deficit for 1981–88 was estimated at 75 000 units (ONAPLAN et al. 1987; ADN–CI 1992), which when added to the shortage at the beginning of that period gave a cumulative qualitative deficit of 237 808 units out of an existing total stock of 365 000 — and 40 400 of those units were classed as unlivable. This suggested that about 65% of the housing in Santo Domingo was deficient, and 11% was unusable. Studies also showed that the housing deficit was mainly a matter of quality and related to poor construction and services, compounded by the lack of community infrastructure and uncontrolled urban sprawl (ADN–CI 1992). The informal sector was in fact the main builder of housing, accounting for about 80% of all units. Families paid for them from their own savings, with no financial or technical assistance, and they were usually built on unserviced land with no legal title.

This study (ADN–CI 1992) also suggested that 14 000 new units every year would be required to meet the demand for new housing. At the then current rate of construction, the deficit each year would be about 8 000 units, unless, as the study indicated,

the official sector makes some profound changes to type of housing it builds (finished residences), its financing (highly subsidized) and its main motivation (urban renewal that usually increases shortages, since many of those displaced are not relocated), and unless the private sector can put significant funding into housing.

### Evictions in Santo Domingo

#### Overall trends

The phenomenon of evictions in the city of Santo Domingo long predated the period under study. Indeed, since the 1950s, the state had been uprooting great numbers of people in the course of reshaping the city and had provoked massive intraurban migration toward the outskirts. Together with the influx of people from the countryside, this had had among its main results the uncontrolled growth of the urban perimeter.

We identified three key periods in this history (Cela 1992):

- The latter part of the Trujillo era;

- The Twelve Years of Balaguer’s previous government, 1966–78; and

The first period was highlighted by the building of the Duarte bridge, in the early 1950s, and the demolition of part of Villa Duarte, whose families were moved to the barrio known as Guachupita. This district was later to take in families displaced by construction of the Luis Eduardo Aybar ("Morgan") Hospital, and the Social Improvement (Mejoramiento Social) and Maria Auxiliadora settlements. That decade also saw construction of the Espaillat and Luperón barrios, through expropriation of the sugar cane fields belonging to the Vicini family in the northern part of the city. The occupants of those lands were sent to the Gualey and Los Guandules settlements, located on unserviced land, and were given usufruct papers by DGBN.

Starting in 1967, in the wake of the unstable political era that followed the fall of Trujillo, the state once more began construction work. Its objectives, from a certain historical distance, could be summarized as follows (Cela 1992):

- **To sanitize highly visible districts like Matahambre and Honduras** — In the same spirit, multifamily dwellings were built as a kind of visual screen, or "Potemkin village," at the entrances to the Duarte and Sánchez bridges and along major thoroughfares, like avenues 27 de Febrero and Francisco del Rosario Sánchez.

- **To build a proper roadway infrastructure** — The old project to build an inner ring road was restarted but reached only as far as Avenue Padre Castellanos. Avenues 27 de Febrero, John F. Kennedy, Winston Churchill, and Luperón were also built at that time.

- **To embellish the city** — This in fact gave it an appearance quite out of keeping with its predominantly working-class nature. Major undertakings in this regard included the restoration of the old colonial city and Independence Park, the Zoological and Botanical Gardens, and the Paseo de los Indios and improvements to their surrounding areas, including the Los Millones district.

- **To open state-owned lands on the outskirts to relocate working-class families expelled from the city centre** — First, the industrial zone of Herrera was extended right up to the planned satellite city of Las Cabañas, in an effort to clean up or disguise visible slums like El Ancón and La Ciénaga (for a detailed analysis of this process, see Hirujo [1991]); later, the government built the Los Alcarrizos area, and finally, Sabana Perdida.
This construction plan involved shifting thousands of families around the city and accounted for about one-third of the national budget in those years — and yet, most of the projects had nothing to do with working-class people. The people who were uprooted had to relocate, either voluntarily or under compulsion, to new lands that had few if any basic services, that were far from the urban centre, and that belonged to the state.

The evictions that took place during the study period could be divided into the following stages:

- The massive-eviction stage, from early 1987 to the end of 1988;
- The accelerated-construction stage, from the end of 1988 to mid-1990;
- The period of crisis and adjustment, from mid-1990 to early 1991; and
- The 1991/92 period.

The massive-eviction stage (1987/88)

In mid-1986, President Balaguer returned to power, bringing with him the construction policy that had been a basic feature of his public-investment policy and his management style during the Twelve Years. Low-cost housing projects were started up again (Guachupita, Los Mameyes, etc.); urban road improvements were undertaken (the Quinto Centenario Expressway, the extension to José Contreras, the outer ring road, etc.); and several monumental projects were launched (the Columbus Lighthouse, the National Aquarium, rebuilding of the ancient city walls and the Plaza de Armas, etc.), as well as a number of middle-class housing subdivisions (José Contreras, De Delgado, Faro a Colón, etc.).

The state’s undertakings in this period were massive and overwhelming. They gave the impression of “a bombed-out city, with whole blocks demolished and thousands of families living in shacks, while others had to try their luck, for better or worse, in the outlying, poorly served areas.” When cries of alarm were raised by community groups in the northern zone (the parte alta, or upper town) of the city in early 1987, a public debate ensued over the implications of the Indicative Development Plan for the Northern Zone of Santo Domingo, prepared by Oficina Nacional de Planificación (national planning office), ADN, and the German Gessellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ, society for technical cooperation), and sponsored by the president himself (ONAPLAN—ADN—GTZ 1987).
The state proposal focused on construction of the outer ring road and the advantages that it would have, not only as a way to ensure roadway interconnections but also as an axis for future development and growth around the perimeter of the city. A basic premise of this plan was that it would help solve the city’s housing problems by providing serviced lots, houses, infrastructure, and urban amenities for low-income families.

The official plan came to represent an implicit plan for urban renewal of the entire city, as it embraced work already undertaken since 1986 in various areas of Santo Domingo. Thus, although it referred specifically only to the northern zone, it was closely related to projects under way or about to be launched all over the city. Various critiques of this proposal pointed to a set of underlying features and intents (Cela 1987; COPADEBA 1987; Somocurcio and Florian 1988):

- The plan was to attract commercial and tourist investment to the centre of the city by increasing the value of urban land as a basis for the project’s financial viability. Thus, the purpose behind the renewal of the inner city, with its focus on the building of the inner ring road, was to promote the city’s tourism potential for the 1992 celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Columbus’ voyage. Along with this roadway, renewal was planned for a group of settlements (Guachupita, Los Guanículos, Gualey, Las Cañitas, 24 de Abril, Simón Bolívar, Cristo Rey, La Zurza, and other nearby barrios), which, with inclusion of Villa Francisca, would affect about 400 000 people.

- The plan was to make space available for commercial and industrial investment by building the outer ring road. This would establish a road link between the seaport, the airport, and two planned industrial zones.

- The plan was to get rid of the troublesome elements in the working-class barrios of the upper town by shunting them to the outskirts. Memories of the 1965 revolts and the riots of 1984 suggested it would be wise to eliminate this centre of political protest and opposition.

As early as October 1986, Comité para la Defensa de los Derechos Barriales (COPADEBA, committee for the defence of barrio rights) was warning inhabitants of the northern zone that they faced eviction. This organization was formed in 1979 and was by 1987 very active in a number of initiatives aimed to create international awareness of the problems concerning barrio rights in Santo Domingo. It conducted participatory research on conditions in the barrios of the
northern zone; it organized mass protests against the designs of Indicative Plan; it contacted other popular-action groups in neighbourhoods threatened with eviction; it held meetings with technical advisors, church representatives, and various authorities; it used the social communications media to spread information and revelations; it organized block committees all over the area; and it picketed DGBN and the German Embassy, which was involved in the project through the GTZ. This social movement grew to significant proportions during 1987 and even managed to take part in the world Habitat seminar in Berlin to seek international support for these protests.

In November 1987, there was an assembly of 126 delegates representing block committees in 20 barrios and 21 community organizations. This assembly adopted the People’s Protest Against Evictions, based on the results of the research conducted earlier. For the first time, organized residents were proposing an alternative approach to renewal based on popular participation, as opposed to the prevailing state-led forms of urbanization. In this way, the organization of barrio residents became, itself, an interlocutor with the state, not merely to convey protests but to make proposals. This represented a quantum leap in the rise of the urban people’s movement. The scope of the official plan was at last reined in, as a result of the unbeatable combination of strong resistance from barrio dwellers and their organizations in the northern zone; repeated questions raised by religious figures, intellectuals, and social institutions; charges from international bodies of violations of human rights; and, finally, the economic crisis that cut off the State’s ability to invest in major construction projects. Nevertheless, the evictions continued in the centre (Villa Juana, Villa Consuelo, San Carlos, Villa Francisca, Guachupita), in the southwest (los Kilómetros, on the Sánchez highway), the southeast (Maquiteria and Faro a Colón), and the northwest (Sabana Perdida). A research report by COPADEBA in 1990 claimed that more than 40 barrios were taken over and that more than 20,000 families were uprooted during this period.

In 1988, a committee of experts assigned by the Habitat International Coalition and MISEREOR performed an evaluation that provided direct confirmation of the charges leveled internationally. As a result of their conclusions and recommendations and of the approach that resulted from the earlier proposals of the barrio organizations, more than 100 people from diverse social and professional groups in the country met with experts from countries of Central America, the Cono Sur (the Southern Cone of South America), Europe, and Mexico, at an International Seminar (For a City with Popular Participation) and set out the Alternative City (Ciudad Alternativa), sponsored by COPADEBA and Centro Dominicano de Asesoría e Investigaciones Legales (CEDAIL, Dominican centre for legal assistance and research), as an alternative to the state’s urban-development strategy.
This new vision proposed, among other things, the upgrading of the barrios, the strengthening of grass-roots organizations, the development of a neighbourhood cultural identity, the preservation of ecological resources, the implementation of a participatory methodology, the involvement of the state in the proposed solutions, the decentralization and democratization of municipal government, and support for the claims of barrio dwellers already suffering from, or threatened with, eviction. Later, in January 1989, a multidisciplinary team of experts was formed to work with the city’s grass-roots organizations in what represented a new experiment in this country: popular groups collaborating with technical specialists to formulate and channel proposals to improve their neighbourhoods and defend their rights as citizens. A new avenue was thus opened for proposals and negotiations, which brought an entirely new dimension to the process.

The accelerated-construction stage (1988/89)

With the 1990 elections approaching and the growing urgency of preparations for the 500th anniversary, the expected visit of the Pope, the unveiling of the Columbus Lighthouse, and so on, the pace of work was speeded up on all those projects that had provoked such a wave of evictions in the previous stage. This stage saw the burgeoning of the peripheral settlements, with the inflow of people driven from their homes by the state and the consequent disintegration of neighbourhood communities.

The crisis and adjustment stage (1990/91)

The elections of 1990 and the attendant focus of state funds on politically motivated activities coincided with the economic distortions caused by the uncoordinated recovery policies launched in 1986 to decrease construction investment, which had been financed largely by simply printing money. Inflation in 1990 reached the three-digit level. Only a few projects continued, and these were chronically behind schedule. New projects were postponed, awaiting the electoral results and the impact of the International Monetary Fund-inspired financial-policy adjustments. The country entered what we might call a waiting period.

On 1 May, 1990, the Declaration of the Evictees of Santo Domingo was issued. Some 5000 people, representing about 8000 families who had been evicted more than 3 years earlier met at the Club Mauricio Báez, at the instigation of COPADEBA and with the support of priests and various organizations, and presented their analysis of the current situation:

- Families were facing excessive rents, and promised housing and apartments were late;
• Families were not paid for improvements they made, or payment was devalued by inflation;

• Few apartments were allotted to displaced families (17% in Villa Francisca, 10% in Guachupita, 8.5% in the eastern zone, 6.7% in Calero, none in Villa Juana, Villa Consuelo, Villa Maria, and Los Farallones de Cristo Rey);

• There was no relationship between the number of apartments under construction and the number of displaced families, and many units were being allotted to people who had not been evicted;

• There were no common standards for projects with respect to down payments, treatment of tenants, etc. (institutions responsible for the process had no clear standards); and

• Some of the projects had serious design and construction flaws.

The reasons underlying these problems were summarized as follows:

• Private manipulation of the projects by contractors who enjoyed authority even over the police;

• The authoritarian nature of the projects and the absence of any public input into them;

• Complete lack of information on the relocation process;

• Frequent resort to verbal, physical, and institutional violence;

• Discrimination among affected families for economic and political reasons; and

• Lack of planning and consistency in project execution.

The following demands were accordingly issued:

• Neighbourhood groups had to be allowed to review the lists of eligible beneficiaries for each project;
• Finished apartments had to be handed over to beneficiaries, before 16 May (election day), in accordance with the chronological order of those lists;

• DGBN had to publish, before 16 May, the number of apartments under construction in each project and the revised list of beneficiaries;

• Promises to give lots in Almirante or Pantojas to the tenants of Faro a Colón had to be kept; and

• Neighbourhood committees had to be involved in resolving cases in which there are not enough apartments.

Despite this concerted action, the results were disappointing. The unity that people momentarily showed soon proved to be weak and tentative. Disputes among the groups involved made the problems of coordinating efforts worse. Many of these problems arose from bilateral negotiations that some of the groups were engaged in with the authorities. Meanwhile, Dr Balaguer was reelected for the 1990/94 term. Although this inspired hope among evicted families that the projects would now be completed and that they might at last be relocated, it led to serious concerns in other areas that the long-slated evictions would now start to be carried out in their communities.

The 1991/92 period

In September 1991, the state suddenly sent the army into the barrios of La Ciénaga and Los Guandules, ordered the inhabitants to be evacuated immediately, and started to evict them — all of this in complete disregard for talks that were then under way with officials and experts to try to resolve the serious health problems in those barrios. With its decrees 358 and 359, the state took over the very three settlements that had been trying to introduce and manage real urban improvement in Santo Domingo: La Ciénaga, Los Guandules, and La Zurza, located on the western banks of the Ozama and Isabela rivers.

Along with citing the arguments that the places were unhealthy, polluted, dangerous, and uninhabitable, the state spoke of the need to open up space for business and tourist investment, to beautify the entrance to the city for the fifth centenary, and to remove obstacles in the path of urban schemes (in temporary suspension) for which it was hoped there would soon be more public funding.

One year after these presidential decrees, the following situation prevailed:
• More than 200 families were removed from La Ciénaga and gradually resettled in various housing projects or lots on the city’s periphery (Los Alcarrizos, La Victoria, Guaricano, Ciudad del Almirante).

• More than 100 families were evicted from La Zurza to make room for a water-treatment plant and an adjacent avenue. Most of these families were left homeless for several months in temporary shelters nearby, waiting for their promised relocation, and were finally moved after pressure was applied from local organizations.

• The self-help efforts that had been under way in these barrios, whether in an organized or spontaneous fashion, were paralyzed. The military occupation of the area, the state of siege that prevailed, and the impossibility of getting material resources resulted in complete stagnation or deterioration of living conditions.

Recent evictions had not been limited to these settlements. They had also been recorded in other parts of the city — in the vicinity of the Luis E. Aybar Hospital, El Timbeque, Villa Duarte, etc.

An important feature of this stage was the progress being made in negotiations between DGBN and the inhabitants and their representatives. The credentials of the people who spoke for the barrios — priests, neighbourhood councils, and barrio committees — had been progressively recognized, which was unheard of in the earlier stages. This helped in several ways:

• It encouraged a greater exchange of information between the state agency and the barrio organizations;

• The families who had been evicted were more clearly identified, thanks to census-taking by the barrio groups and expert assistance (as in La Ciénaga, for example), which allowed the community to more easily monitor fulfilment of the agreements;

• Families were helped to move from one home to another and given some advance knowledge of where they were going;

• More thought was given to the situation of tenants; and
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- Evictions had less of the massive, compulsory character that they had had a few years previously.

Thus, the recent agreements between DGBN and the community priests represented a real step forward. These agreements established procedures to be followed:

- Assessment standards were established for rating housing;

- A common policy was established for the treatment of tenants (provision of a lot and materials for building a house or an award of 5000 DOP);

- The right of every owner of a dwelling to a dwelling was established;

- Agreements were to be negotiated before demolition started;

- A ratio was to be observed between the number of evictions and the number of housing units under construction;

- When relocation did not proceed house to house, new units were to be assigned in a strict order of chronological priority;

- The evicted people's organizations themselves were to draw up these lists; and

- Committee meetings were to be held every 2 weeks until evictions ended and everyone was resettled.

Clearly, things were not done in these ways in 1987 and 1988, at the time of the most violent evictions. Also, although this uprooting still had the predictable effects of scattering people to the suburbs and breaking up their social networks, the negotiations and agreements that then took place did represent an improvement over past practice.

**The legal context**

The first thing that struck one about the whole issue of human settlements in the Dominican Republic was the obsolescence of the existing legal framework. The accelerated process of urbanization and expansion of the country's one great
metropolis took place within a legal structure built in the 1940s and never updated to take account of the socioeconomic changes since then. True, in the early 1970s, an attempt was made to revise Law 675 on Construction, Urban Development and Public Improvements, but this move was frustrated by the National Congress.

Over these years a de facto situation developed: about 70% of the population of Santo Domingo and a similar proportion of other towns in the country lived in working-class barrios and poor shantytowns and made up the so-called informal sector. This sector produced 85% of the housing, which was most of the time built on state-owned land, where people had almost no access to financing, materials, or technical assistance. Despite their importance in shaping the urban space, these people were left out of prevailing regulations and laws, and in addition to being obsolete in terms of the formal sector, these regulations and laws made no attempt to cover the informal sector.

It must be admitted that this situation was partly due to the generally permissive attitude that the state took toward the barrios that sprang up on the state’s properties but also to the fact that it gave people direct encouragement to build squatter settlements on its unused lands. Then, once the land value increased because of the efforts of the inhabitants, they were caught up in the process of evictions. In this way, “the State allows ‘illegal urban development’ as a reflection of a tacit, or sometimes explicit, pact between the State (owner of the land), the municipal government (the legal and administrative authority) and the legal owners of urban lands,” with this implicit clause: “that such settlements shall pose no obstacle to the creation of new building lots, when the real estate market and construction capital are ready to build” (Chantada 1991b).

To appreciate the legal workings of the evictions that took place, we need to draw a clear distinction between three types of occupants: (1) those who owned their house and the land beneath it; (2) those who owned only their house or certain improvements; and (3) the tenants.

In the first case, if a family facing eviction owned the house and the land, it enjoyed formal legal protection. The landownership provisions of the Dominican Constitution and Law 344 provided a legal procedure for state expropriations, whereby once a political decision was made to conduct a renewal project in a specific geographic location, the state was empowered to issue an executive decree that these lands and buildings were of “public interest” and to purchase them for its purposes as long as it complied with legal procedures and formalities.

This legal structure provided two ways for the state to acquire properties decreed to be of public interest: it could negotiate an amicable settlement with the landowner with respect to the price of the property and thereby avoid the need to enforce consent through trickery or physical or psychological violence; or, if it had
to, the state could go to court and seek expropriation and an order setting the price for the property in question. The court had then to determine whether expropriation was justified and, if so, set a fair price. These procedures were not followed by the state in the evictions under study. The owners of the properties were for the most part never told how the value of their holdings was to be determined — their values were manipulated arbitrarily by the private contractors hired for each project. On top of this, many other irregularities occurred; frequent physical intimidation and aggression took place; payments for demolished houses were often late, with no adjustment for inflation; houses were sometimes knocked down before people had even moved out of them; legal contracts guaranteeing the right to a new home were never honoured; and so on.

In the second type of situation, in which the family owned only the house or buildings but not the land beneath, Law 39, of 1966, came into play. This law empowered the state to regularize the legal situation of people with limited financial means by granting them the state-owned lot on which they had built a dwelling. This legal provision, moreover, recognized ownership of the property by the person who had developed it, regardless of whether there had been a formal transfer of title. In the preamble to that law, it was expressly recognized that poor people who had built dwellings on state lands had acted from the justifiable motive of seeking shelter for their families and that this represented a very real human problem that had to be resolved by the rules of social justice. It provided then that the state had to adopt measures, as part of its social-welfare policy, to convert squatters on state-owned land into owners if they had built or were building a dwelling. Despite all this, when it came to building housing projects and constructing new roadways, government representatives and construction contractors proceeded to evict occupants from housing on state properties, on the presumption that these houses were illegal and that their occupants were trespassers. This helped to explain the irregular treatment and procedures that occurred in removing these families from homes where they had been living in some cases for years.

The third category — the tenants — represented a group of people who were especially vulnerable in their dealings with the state. Not only were they denied the right to obtain their own homes, they suffered violations of their legally guaranteed rights with respect to their status as renters of dwellings for family use. Tenants were exceptionally successful in securing apartments in the barrio of Guachupita, the result of an organized and intense struggle on their part. Through negotiations and agreements with the state — including an agreement signed with a recently formed committee of priests to regularize procedures — the tenants were able to obtain compensation in terms of building lots, cash, and materials that would have been unheard of in the previous years.
However, normally as soon as the government had arrived at an agreement with the owners, the tenants were allowed only a very short time to get out of their homes and were given a small amount of money to rent shelter elsewhere. In this way, the state ignored its legal duties to protect tenants in family housing. Under the provisions of the *Civil Code* (articles 1742 and 1743), when the state acquired dwellings occupied by tenants, the contract that existed between the previous owner and the tenant remained valid and could not be materially changed. The state simply took the place of the original landlord and acquired thereby his or her rights and obligations.

The evictions violated many valid legal provisions, including

- The legal procedures and formalities for the eviction of persons (articles 258 and 262 of the *Lands Registry Law*);

- The right of domicile (article 8[3] of the Constitution, and article 184 of the *Penal Code*);

- The right to protection from physical and psychological violence, including willful bodily injury (article 8[1] of the Constitution, on the inviolability and physical integrity of the person, and articles 309 ff. of the *Penal Code*); and

- The right to be informed (which was totally overlooked in the process).

**Urban planning**

The laws of the Dominican Republic assigned responsibility for urban planning to municipal governments and the National Planning Office, which fell under the purview of Technical Secretary to the President. Urban planning and management were governed principally by the following laws: Law 6232, of 1963, which established a process for urban planning and created urban planning offices at the municipal level, and Law 675 on Urban Development and Improvement, of 1944. In Santo Domingo, in addition, Law 262, of 1975, created a commission responsible for establishing and recommending to the executive a draft master plan for the city, and decree 339, of 1978, created the Master Plan Office, under the Technical Secretary to the President.

Despite these provisions, the municipal or National District government was a mere onlooker as far as the central government's urban activities were concerned. For the most part, projects were not submitted for prior municipal approval, as required by law. The fact is that given the concentration of power in the
hands of the central government and given the traditional financial fragility of the municipality — which had always been dependent, even for its operating budget, on subsidies from the president — the idea of a “municipal space” was just a figment of the legal imagination when it came to dealing with urban problems.

State organs involved

The programs for urban renewal and their associated eviction policy during the study period were carried out within the following basic institutional framework:

**The Presidency of the Republic** — Most of the projects were carried out under the direct supervision of the president’s office. Between 1987 and 1989, the time of massive evictions and accelerated construction, 92.1% of all government housing expenditure was provided from the presidency (Santana and Rather 1992), and this amount represented in turn 99.8% of the central government’s spending in that area.

To conduct this work, two offices were created in 1986: the Office of Coordination and Supervision of State Works and the Office of Supervisory Engineers for State Works. They operated under the direct orders of the president, in the management style typical of his previous times in government, that is, through a kind of parallel state bureaucracy.

In 1989, the Office of Coordination and Supervision of State Works alone accounted for 262.4 million DOP out of total housing expenditures of 736.8 million DOP. The remaining 474.4 million DOP was presumably spent by the Office of Supervisory Engineers for State Works.

**DGBN** — This agency came under the Ministry of Finance and was the key player in the eviction process. It also provided the venue for negotiations among the engineers, priests, and neighbourhood organizations. From the viewpoint of the various players, the style with which it conducted the processes was heavily influenced by whoever headed the agency at the time. Thus, people spoke of the era of Emma Valois, Minú Torres, Nazir Tejada, and Rincón Martínez. As already noted, paternalism was a hallmark of this country’s institutional management. Two facts — that everything was more or less subordinate to the president’s wishes, and that the engineers in charge of the works wielded great influence over the agency’s decisions and actions — were both fully consistent with such paternalism.

The demolition brigades sent in by NGBN were highly symbolic in the eyes of the *barrio* dwellers. The sight of these brigades, with their power shovels and excavators, struck fear and indignation into people’s hearts. One of the most
notorious features of this agency was how thoroughly corrupt it was. Even state officials and engineers spoke out against this aspect. Influence peddling and conflicts of interest were constant factors throughout the process.

**Policy content and implementation**

In formal terms, *barrio* families affected by any urban-renewal project were supposed to be able to negotiate with the state on various points:

- To establish their status and thus to define whether they were the owners of their buildings or tenants;

- To assess the value of the buildings (the value of a dwelling was supposed to serve as the basis for a down payment to purchase an apartment);

- To develop the provisional agreement (a document recognizing a person as entitled to a dwelling in the new project);

- To obtain the transfer order (the final document legalizing the provisional agreement and thereby formally binding the state); and

- To conduct a socioeconomic assessment of family characteristics to serve as a basis for proper placement of families, as to floor or level, in the new buildings.

The state contracted with construction firms to build the new housing, and these in turn subcontracted the people who were to undertake the work. The construction firm was responsible for completion and quality of the project itself, as well as for providing temporary shelter for people who had been evicted, and it was supposed to negotiate with these people, along with DGBN.

In practice, however — and with only a few exceptions — the most characteristic feature of the evictions carried out in Santo Domingo was violence. Structural violence — expressed in ever greater impoverishment of the *barrio* dwellers — was compounded by physical, verbal, and institutional violence. There were many instances of this:

- Houses were demolished while their inhabitants were still inside, or when the owners were away;
Paramilitary shock troops were used to intimidate and terrorize people and force them to abandon their homes;

Household goods were vandalized or stolen;

Notice of eviction was given only on the very day a family was to be thrown out;

People were kidnapped;

Pregnant women and children were subjected to physical violence;

Public services to the barrios were cut off — a pressure tactic;

Families were insulted and threatened; and

The police acted as judges.

The way the police acted, as if they had judicial powers, was reminiscent of the old ways of wielding political power in the country. During the Twelve Years, military power displaced the judiciary and the police and the army dispensed summary justice in the streets or in the prisons. Also, before that time, the dictatorship of Trujillo had in fact concentrated all power in the army’s hands.

We found in our case studies that the degree and shape of the violence depended on the location of the barrio, the specific purposes of the project, the level of opposition or resistance that people offered, whether or not their response was organized, and the operating style of the engineer in charge of the project. This last factor was a hallmark of the process. The works contracts were usually handed out to construction companies, not through public tendering but through executive discretion on the basis of political, personal, or family connections. But the most important feature concerned the powers wielded by the project engineer, who wielded these powers with complete disregard for the institutional framework. The project engineer was empowered to

Make summary valuations of properties;

Decide which areas were to be demolished;

Assign and distribute housing;
• Call in police and military force;

• Form paramilitary bands;

• Employ verbal and physical violence;

• Set time limits for the eviction of families;

• Set housing-quality standards;

• Construct buildings;

• Decide where and how people would be moved;

• Conduct a census of families;

• Determine the numbering and precedence of units; and

• Deliver cheques to evictees.

We might say that a kind of engineerocracy existed, in which formal channels and mechanisms were largely or totally ignored. DGBN became at times no more than a channel for the decisions and actions of the contractors. It was only through sustained appeals by the people, their organizations, and mediators, that this agency was finally driven to assume its proper duties in the process.

Despite all these common features of the projects — the lack of supervision over the projects, discrimination in the assignment of apartments, the theft and corruption that went on, the undervaluing of properties, the faulty designs, the construction shortcuts, the padding of accounts, and the complete disregard of signed agreements — only one case, that of Sabana Perdida, was ever published in the press, and the story was subsequently ignored.

Types of eviction

The evictions could be classified as follows:

• Evictions to make way for road-building projects in the central parts of the city, with housing complexes ("screens") built along them in front of middle-class and poor residential areas (Villa Juana-Villa Consuelo, San Carlos–Villa Francisca, Guachupita);
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- Evictions for extensions of the outer ring road around the city (Sabana Perdida);

- Evictions for the sake of upgrading the downtown area and redefining land uses for business, tourist, and recreational purposes (Colonial Zone, Port of Santo Domingo, La Cienaga);

- Evictions to allow construction of monuments and ornamental projects (Maquiteria, Columbus Lighthouse); and

- Evictions for environmental-improvement projects (sewage-treatment plants) in neighbourhoods near the Ozama and Isabela rivers (La Zurza, La Ciénaga).

The state carried out evictions of all these types — by compulsion in most instances — in working-class and poor settlements all over the city. The evictions affected owners (of both land and house, of the house only, or of improvements to state property), as well as tenants.

Various types of compensation were offered:

- Payment to owners on the basis of an evaluation of the housing demolished;

- A credit for the cost of the demolished building as a down payment for a house or apartment in one of the government housing projects being built either within the same place or elsewhere; and

- The offer of a building lot, a sum of money, and recycled materials for evicted tenants to build their own dwelling (this was a recently won concession).

Official government statements, including those of the president himself and those of officials and experts involved in urban-planning policy and operations, set out various arguments in favour of urban renewal over the years. Two types of argument predominated: there were those based on the need to stimulate the economy through construction activity and the related objective of creating employment, and there were others based on the need to overcome urban-congestion problems by laying out new communication routes, the need for housing programs to reduce instances of marginalization, and the objectives of slum
clearance, beautifying the city, and creating poles of development. The first point to stress, of course, is that none of these undertakings had anything to do with an integrated plan for the city but were simply developed in response to the political needs of the moment. The ideas for some of these projects (particularly in connection with the roadway network) had been around for 40 years. The second point to be made is that the projects had no single, clearly defined motivation. A whole range of intentions came into play, depending on the diverse natures of the projects. For example, in Guachupita, the underlying purpose seemed to be a military one, with the idea of disrupting centres of popular mobilization. In Maquiteria, the idea was to build a monument (the Columbus Lighthouse) and to beautify its surroundings. In Sabana Perdida, the intent had more to do with road-building (the outer ring road) and accommodating the future growth of the city. In Los Alcarrizos, the purpose was to relocate the work force for industries in the free zone.

In sum, urban renewal in these years seemed to have a multiplicity of motives, in which the following dimensions converged:

- **The macroeconomic dimension** — Construction policy was intended to promote economic recovery (but a disorderly one, as it turned out) to help in the short run to raise employment levels, encourage investment, and increase business turnover. This policy was consistent with the Keynesian approach that the government had followed.

- **The urban-planning dimension** — The basic objectives of urban-planning policy were to relocate working-class and poor neighbourhoods, more sharply segregate social spaces, upgrade and recover land, change land use, improve traffic flows, and satisfy the dominant monumentalist vision of urban amenities.

- **The social-policy dimension** — The state was trying to assert the legitimacy of its power over the middle and working classes by disrupting centres of political opposition within the city and thus perpetuating its rule.

**Social actors and their strategies**

In this section, we try to analyze the strategies that the key actors on the people's side adopted to deal with the eviction programs. These actors included the inhabitants themselves, the barrio organizations, the Church, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).
The inhabitants

One of the outstanding features of these events was that despite their disruptive impact on life in the barrios, the evictions also stimulated neighbourhood solidarity and creativity in the face of an external threat. Our case studies showed how people were led to build consensus within their communities, despite the great diversity of their social makeup, which made it possible to find common objectives around which people could unite to take joint action.

We found that the staying power of any organization formed to confront a given eviction seemed to depend on whether the barrio had some history of organizational experience, as well as on the scope of people's demands: preserving and defending their territory, fighting eviction in principle, objecting to some particular form of eviction, securing a house or apartment, seeking some other form of compensation, etc. The extent and manner of people's reactions seemed to be influenced by their experience with past community campaigns, any previous history of successes they might have had in pressing demands, and what they might have learned about organizational methods and participatory democracy through other involvements, such as the grass-roots church communities launched in the 1970s in some of the city's barrios. The experience of Guachupita in this regard was significantly different from those of Maquiteria and Sabana Perdida.

The following were some of the responses in the communities we studied:

- The Church launched campaigns against the threat of eviction and in this way served as a symbol of resistance and community unity, as well as providing a useful channel for information;

- The neighbours of a family faced with eviction would band together for mutual protection and in a show of solidarity with the family under threat;

- People maintained vigils, with singing and prayers, awaiting an eviction announced for the next day (they would exchange food, as an expression of solidarity with their neighbours next door or elsewhere in the barrio);

- They made up slogans and composed poems and songs about the eviction;

- They used the streets as places where they could assemble and take part freely in mass demonstrations;
• They would insinuate themselves, one by one, into state offices, under some ruse or another, until there were enough of them to demand negotiations;

• Tenants occupied churches to press their demands (in Guachupita);

• They marched in pickets in front of the DGBN Office, which was in charge of the evictions, and in front of the embassies of countries whose institutions were involved in the state’s plans (the Indicative Plan);

• They held mass marches on the presidential palace;

• They held large gatherings of evicted persons in various parts of the city;

• They held community religious services (stations of the cross) and made bonfires in protest;

• They lit candles in the threatened barrios, as a symbolic form of protest; and

• They made use of the community media to hold press conferences, issue statements, give interviews to reporters, etc.

The people in fact showed great resourcefulness — the types and locations of their actions were constantly changing.

Two converging trends could be observed in the barrios over the years, trends that may seem contradictory but that reflected the complexity of the situation. On the one hand, the crisis that barrio residents were going through had the kind of atomizing and disintegrating effect on them that could generally be seen in Dominican society. This induced a sauve-qui-peut attitude, with people tending to act on their own to save themselves and their property, which represented a real obstacle to attempts at collective action. But, on the other hand, the lack of any effective channels of communication with the state, either at the central or local levels, the decline or withdrawal of basic services, the failure of traditional political authorities to represent and articulate people’s interests, the constantly frustrated expectations of people who had taken to heart the government’s ideology of change, and the glaring fact that people had to do something to protect their
quality of life all led to the emergence of new organizational forms for coping with the immediate, everyday needs of inhabitants.

These organizational nuclei appeared at the barrio level. They were still waiting for full social and institutional recognition but were already trying to act as intermediaries, not only to press their claims and demands before the state but also to engage in self-help activities. This may have been the greatest strength of the barrios — and yet, it was exactly the area that was most vulnerable to the impact of the eviction programs, as these had the effect not only of disrupting a way of life but also of crushing this nascent organizing force.

In all this, the women played the key role in taking decisions and actions to solve local problems. This was due to the daily contact they had with the reality of their neighbourhoods, their fundamental part in developing survival strategies (often as the only adult in the home), their significance in the integration and management of the family unit, and their experience in handling the effects of a crisis. For these women and for the working class in general, housing had a very special significance. In the logic of the barrios, the first thing had to be to set up and equip a home and then through various means procure services. A home was the minimum space in which a person could survive and have a family life. It had therefore to be defended at all costs. The women, as visible heads of the households, were crucial players in direct confrontations with the construction engineers, the demolition brigades, the intimidating and aggressive thug squads, as well as in actions to denounce, protest, and resist eviction.

Another aspect to be noted in the behaviour of the inhabitants was the religious point of departure for their political response. In many cases, this grew from people's religious experience, in which they had discovered the power of organization and been able to see horizontal relationships and compromise at work in a social context. Thus, political action did not always derive from politics itself but sometimes from experience in some other dimension (Villamán 1992).

**Barrio organizations**

Before we turn to the role played by neighbourhood organizations, we need to distinguish among three different groups that have been involved in the evictions and have brought with them different ideas and strategies:

- *Political organizations* — Political parties were most notable for their absence. Their goals had not included the inhabitants of the barrios. Their only interest in getting involved in resistance movements and negotiations was to look for ways to manipulate, control, and take advantage of the process, and they were completely unaware of its diverse
and multifaceted nature. This led the church communities, the priests, the neighbourhood organizations, and the residents themselves to reject any involvement by political parties, as these were seen as having interests and motives opposed to those of the communities.

This was just one more example of the limitations of political parties as a way to involve the popular majority in democracy. Their vertical structure, the gulf between the leaders and the led, and their addiction to political patronage all led them to view popular struggles as a chance to manipulate, with the most important consideration seeming to be who would control the various party factions, rather than how they could help people achieve their goals and demands.

• **Opportunistic groups** — These were formed by inhabitants who had been caught up in the culture of patronage. They claimed to have the kind of influence needed to get a government job or sinecure, and they were in turn manipulated and used by the authorities and the project engineers as shock troops in the barrio. They occasionally presented themselves to the media as representatives of community feeling, with the result that they created a distorted view among the general public of what the inhabitants were demanding. They were in fact one of the main stumbling blocks to mounting effective opposition to the evictions. But attacks by priests and neighbourhood organizations to some extent weakened their credibility. One of their favourite tricks was to collect money from evictees to bargain agreements with the state, but these agreements generally failed to materialize.

• **The Christian-community groups and residents' organizations** — The inhabitants looked on these groups as a real force for progress in pressing their demands and representing their interests. These groups operated through democratic participatory channels, and their programs promoted human rights and solidarity.

Only two residents' organizations were present and active throughout the eviction process. These were the COPADEBA and Consejo de Unidad Popular (CUP, popular unity council). Both aimed at redressing grievances and encouraging local autonomy.

COPADEBA had its roots in the barrios of the city's northern zone in 1979 and made a central point of defending the territorial integrity of the neighbourhoods. Although it certainly had a leading role in the protest campaigns
against evictions, its broader goals tended toward promoting ideas of autonomy and self-help among barrio dwellers through building a set of economic, social, and political networks with a clearly defined territorial base. This approach implied the democratization of Dominican society through the decentralization of power and increased community participation in municipal affairs.

In trying to put these ideas into effect, COPADEBA developed a territorial organizational strategy, with committees at the block, zone, barrio, and interbarrio levels in different parts of the city (the northern barrios, Sabana Perdida, Los Alcarrizos), based on the following activities:

- Territorial defence;
- Social and cultural work;
- Economic self-help projects (savings, people's shops, eliminating intermediaries, and ideas and analyses about the cost of living); and
- Programs of community improvement that would attract state assistance.

COPADEBA's strategy was thus based on building power from the bottom up, starting with the everyday concerns of the inhabitants.

The group developed a training program at various levels:

- New recruits were taught about its history, its by-laws, its rules, and standards and given a straightforward appreciation of its political tasks;
- Sociopolitical training was offered, through education in the country's history and discussions about democracy and power relationships;
- More pointed discussion was conducted of specific problems facing the organization; and
- Broadly based community training was given.

With respect to the organization's policy on evictions, it undertook the following actions:

- Protests were conducted, nationally and internationally, with a view to creating a current of public opinion critical of the government's policy,
its failure to respond to people’s interests, and its role in aggravating
the housing problem (by destroying three houses for every new one it
built, exacerbating marginalization by shunting people to even worse
conditions on the outskirts, ignoring people’s views, poor treatment of
tenants, etc.).

As a result of COPADEBA’s work, the United Nations Human
Rights Commission, in a decision that represented a historic break-
through for that body, issued an international condemnation of the
Dominican government in December 1990, pointing to its violations of
international law on housing rights through its eviction program. This
condemnation was reiterated at the end of 1991, when the government
decreed the evacuation of families from the barrios of La Ciénaga, Los
Guandules, and La Zurza, along the western bank of the Ozama river.

- Resistance was built through a process of coordinating popular move-
ments and barrio organizations to confront the eviction policy. An ex-
ample was the demonstration of 1 May 1990, mentioned above.

- Proposals were made for involving people in urban-improvement plan-
ing, as an alternative to evictions.

In 1987, the organization issued a protest against the previously unknown
Indicative Plan, thereby launching a public debate about the city’s renewal of the
plan, and the group presented the People’s Proposal concerning evictions. Later,
in 1989, COPADEBA set up a team of experts and created the Alternative City.

The organization had to face several obstacles in its campaign against evic-
tions. First, despite the links it had built up with other groups concerned with
evictions (neighbourhood councils, committees of evictees, church groups, activist
priests, etc.) and with the people’s movement in general, coordination was often
very ad hoc, without any overall strategy for confronting the larger problem. The
eviction programs were themselves haphazard, disorganized, and ad hoc. The gov-
ernment never had a master plan — its schematic presentations varied from one
barrio to the next, depending partly on the personality and style of the project en-
gineer. Consequently, the evictions had different impacts in each neighbourhood,
which contributed to lack of an overall plan of response to the government’s
policy.

Second, some of the traditional popular groups and the political parties as
well (of both left and right) were completely disconnected from the process and
failed in their duty to the people. Although some of the opposition parties were
approached to help out with the problem, they never made any commitments. The labour unions also took the attitude that these problems were for the *barrios*, not for the workers, to solve.

This lack of support, coupled with the weakness of the people's movement itself, which was unable to come up with the type of organized response that the situation demanded, meant that certain sectors of the Church, above all the parish priests, were left to fill the leadership vacuum and try to mediate in the process. We were told that a priest played a key role in defending every single part of the city under eviction notice.

Third, after it became clear that the process was irreversible, people's demands began to change, as evident from their slogans:

- "Respect for the dignity of the family, no more evictions;"
- "Proper housing;"
- "*Barrio* clean-up yes, evictions no;"
- "Homes for tenants;"
- "Housing for all;"
- "A house for a house;"
- "Fair price;" etc.

This meant that the organization had to adjust its demands to the thinking of the people. On the one hand, it had to fight against the form and content of the eviction policy, with a conviction that that policy was wrong for the city and for the lives of the inhabitants. But, on the other hand, it had to respect the expectations, motives, and interests of the inhabitants as the process developed.

Fourth, the diverse nature and levels of the organizations made it relatively easy for the authorities to manipulate things from outside. Some self-styled community leaders behaved in ways that weakened people's confidence in the organizations.

For its part, CUP, which had sprung up during the time of the People's Resistance Committees (Comités de Lucha Popular), in 1982 and 1983, developed a set of strategies against the eviction policy, which was highlighted by the following features:
• It put up resistance to evictions by creating a joint committee in the Los Mameyes sector, based on a progressive, global view of the process throughout the city.

• It helped to organize the struggle to win better treatment for evictees (valuation criteria for demolished houses, negotiation of agreements with the state, the manner of eviction, etc.).

• It was a member of the Urban Forum (Foro Urbano), a discussion group for analyzing urban problems and the eviction policy and became a member of the Conference of People’s Organizations, in 1988, a coalition for articulating proposals to the state and drawing up negotiating strategies. These proposals were essentially intended to ensure that communities would have a part in the process and to secure a state commitment to work to improve conditions in some of the barrios through less costly measures.

• It held “think-ins,” like the 500 Years Eviction Forum (Foro 500 Años de Desalojo), where evicted families gave testimony of their plight.

• It searched for international solidarity, using the Dominican community in North America as its channel.

Getting involved in this way in the struggle against evictions allowed CUP to broaden its vision and redefine its activities. Through its work with other organizations (cultural clubs, women’s groups, neighbourhood councils, youth groups), it came to the conclusion that the kind of coordination attempted to date among the various organizations was insufficient to deal with the eviction process. It therefore set up an evictees unit, with victims of the evictions, an autonomous body with its own rules and a mandate to work across a broader spectrum.

The new challenges posed by the evictions led CUP to change its operating style. It began to work with children (almost 1000 children were organized); it set up a barrio health network (with social workers and health education activities); and it experimented with shopping cooperatives (to protect family purchasing power in the face of inflation), a school for artistic creativity, etc. Thus, CUP’s approach began to shift from a focus on bureaucratic organization to a new vision of work, which took the daily life of the barrio as its point of departure. This allowed its leaders to become involved in problem areas that the group had previously left aside, including the following: housing; services; the cultural aspect; the
role of the family and the individual; the independent, informal economy; and gender issues. From being a simple coordinating mechanism, CUP thus became a true organization of *barrio* dwellers. In this way, many of its initiatives originated in the *barrio* itself, rather than from within the organization as such.

It had, however, a number of difficulties to deal with:

- The old habits of paternalism and dependency, still deeply rooted in the collective consciousness, stood in conflict with the new strategy whereby residents were to take decisions and action into their own hands. People generally tended to rely on their leaders to make decisions, a reflection of the prevailing messianic concept that permeated the organizations. This often led to disappointment but encouraged people to seek out people with real power to help them.

- Despite the occasional expression of unity, such as the mass demonstration of October 1990, involving more than 1,000 families at the Columbus Lighthouse, the state refused to recognize or negotiate with the organization ("the State has never paid any attention to us"). Instead, it continued to deal simultaneously with separate groups, in ways that tended to undermine the movement’s effectiveness. Favours handed out by the state in this way were a constant source of frustration to collective action.

- Once people had obtained new housing, they tended to give up the struggle and to withdraw from the organization. This had the effect of disrupting the existing groups — people stopped coming to meetings, and their ideals of unity and continuity faded away.

We can say, generally, that the main roadblocks to expanding the scope and work of these *barrio* dwellers’ organizations lay in the state’s refusal to recognize their movement and in the various organizational problems they encountered in trying to go beyond mere ad hoc activities. The movement betrayed weaknesses in its negotiating abilities and tended to divorce social and political issues in ways that made it difficult to find counterpart interlocutors on the government side. At the same time, the hands-off attitude of political organizations with respect to the eviction problem meant that politics as such was irrelevant to the daily conduct of the struggle.
The Church
The Church emerged as a key actor in mediating social and political issues in the Dominican Republic. The Church became involved in worker–boss conflicts, in interparty understandings, in movements for political reform, in organizing work stoppages, etc. More than any other player, the Church became an independent source of power in the political arena.

The eviction issue provided an opportunity for the Church to demonstrate its influence, situated as it was in the middle between two opposing sides of unequal strength. Yet, by casting its support on one side, the Church became personalized, and the way it used its power depended on how it saw its commitment to the inhabitants. Thus, although church leaders intervened with the state more than once to demand special treatment or compensation for people affected by the evictions, to propose policies with regard to human settlements through communiques of the Dominican Conference of Bishops, or to intercede with the state when there was a crisis at the barricades, the Church as a whole never broke its close ties with the state to take a clear stand on the eviction issue.

The Church’s position was further compromised by its acceptance of donations for some of the public works that the state built during this period, and also by its publicly identification with monument-building projects that implied the eviction of thousands of families (the Columbus Lighthouse, for example). Such a stance meant that the Church as an institution was constrained in its ability to speak out freely, and this damaged its credibility with the people. It was thus left up to the local parish to fulfil the Church’s role as mediator, and so it was that the parish priest became the leading player. The inspiration for this role came mainly from the experience of the movement of grass-roots church communities that grew up among the urban poor in the 1970s (Madruga 1987), based on principles that had been enunciated by the bishops’ conference of Medellin in 1971.

The local priest thus found himself in a situation in which he was expected to fill a quite unconventional role. He was to go suddenly from managing a parish and promoting the values of community cohesion to organizing the struggle for housing and fair treatment of the people evicted. The attention accorded to the priest in all this was due, primarily, to the image of power that he presented: “People see us [the Church] as a second government,” said one priest.2

An important element in this activity was the fact that despite whatever internal tensions might exist in the Church concerning its views on urban renewal

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2 The quotes and information in what follows derive from discussion notes, fellowship sessions, pastoral visits, youth groups, chats, courses, exchanges with other neighbourhoods, etc.
and evictions, there never was any open sign of conflict, and the senior church au-
thorities never tried to restrain the priests who were working so closely with the
victims. This created the presumption that the local priest enjoyed the moral sup-
port of the hierarchy and that he thus spoke with the power of the Church in his
dealings with both the state and society. And yet, many of the parish priests in the
barrios must surely have felt rather lonely. They attempted to overcome this isola-
tion by forming a common front of priests working with eviction victims all over
the city.

Recognizing the power that the priest represented, the state tended in most
cases to deal with him as its only interlocutor, as the only one who could dampen
the flames of social conflict. But at the same time, the priests were expected to
organize that resistance, and this sometimes led to conflict in their relations with
the state. Indeed, some priests were subjected to intimidation and threatened with
deportation or were severely criticized through the press.

The priests represented a new kind of rationality in dealing with the evic-
tion problem:

I am discouraged by the lack of access to state structures that are totally
corrupt … they only move when it is in their interest to do so. … I am
appalled at the contractors' lack of professionalism … they have neither
creativity nor common sense … they have no professional ethics … they
have no respect for the people and no concept of the nation.

These statements raise profound questions about the validity of state power. De-
spite the conflict that such questioning presupposed, the institutional position of
the priest was key to his ability to influence the process: “We are quite sure nev-
ertheless that the people look to us, and that if it were not for us, the community
would have achieved very little.” This is perhaps an exaggeration that tends to
downplay the long history of organized effort and struggle and the role of NGOs
and other groups, but there is no doubt that in most cases the priest played a fun-
damental role.

A second factor that placed the priest in the position of mediator between
the state and the inhabitants was the respect that people had for him: “priests are
the only ones we can trust.” The priests were obviously thinking of this respect
when they stated, “people welcome the priest, because they know he will not de-
ceive them, he will not let them down” or, “if the priest is not there, many people
will not come to a meeting. If they see the priest, they will gather around.”

A third factor strengthening the priest’s position as a key player in the
eviction issue was his constant presence among the people: “the priest is always
there with us” or “the priest has always taken our side.” We can add to these fac-
tors the public image that the press created of the priest, the length of time he
may have worked in the same area (sometimes as long as 10–20 years), and the fact that he was recognized by the neighbourhood organizations.

From a social viewpoint and in the opinion of the priests themselves, all this posed a double risk:

- It may have served to reaffirm the powers of the establishment and to devalue the powers of the people and their community organizations. Both the attitude of the people and that of the government tended to confirm this and to discourage the rise of popular leaders in their own right. This recognition led some priests to limit their role to a supportive one.

- From the Church's viewpoint, there was a risk that the priests' activism would diminish respect for religion, if people came to see their work merely as opportunistic religious proselytizing.

There was clearly some tension in the role of the priest, who found himself at once the focus of the diverse expectations of the people, their organizations, and the state and, through his action, suddenly a popular figure.

As we have seen, the Church was trying to balance many claims and interests, and the priesthood took varying views and approaches. The way a priest approached the issue was probably influenced by the degree of his experience with the eviction controversy. Some priests had already become involved in this process during the Twelve Years and were thus fully aware of the impact it had been having on the people displaced. Their professional training (as anthropologists, sociologists, historians) may have had some influence, too, on the way they perceived the problem. Those priests who only got into the fray later on in the process and in places where there was no existing social organization limited their activities to the fight for housing (as in Maquiteria). They rejected any idea that their action had a political element: “I have told the community that I am not a politician, and they must be very clear about that.” Yet, both groups of priests — the old and the new activists — had the same ultimate goal: to fight for human rights.

Strengthening people's self-image and their abilities to organize and to take an active part in fighting for their rights were thus basic objectives of their actions: “when we campaign for human rights, we are not just putting the Church up as a counterbalance to the power of the State, we are using the process to involve people in educating and organizing themselves for the future.” We were obviously dealing here with a view of the city and of the community that was quite different from that held by the state and that was based on the concept of
an outward-looking Church that embraced the contradictions of power relationships.

This view was based on a current in Church thinking that saw the Church as a community, replete with the complexities of life, including its political dimension. Thus, the initial goals of the campaign against evictions included both a denunciation of the state’s urban meddling (its Indicative Plan, for example) and the strengthening of the people’s ability to mount longer term resistance, with the idea that popular organizations with the priests playing an integral role would become more powerful through such resistance. This current gave rise to new forms of democratic organizational structures that gradually achieved the capacity for local action, which included not only making protests and proposals, but also developing negotiating strategies. Indeed, many of the members and leaders of the most active organizations in the barrios got their first experience within the grass-roots church communities and in service institutions linked to the Church.

This was the basis for negotiating agreements with the state: through (1) confrontation, which was understood as a means of marking out one’s space, “drawing a line,” and fortifying oneself for negotiation; and (2) the negotiations, which were intended to accomplish one’s objectives. Without the latter, the confrontation would lose its meaning. The state could see that it would have to negotiate: because it had used excessive force at the outset of the eviction process, it could lose its legitimacy if it did not negotiate, and because it needed to win political capital, it had to show a degree of openness.

The priests would have to ensure that their involvement did not compromise their image. They made conscientious preparations for the negotiations through previous discussion of the main position points in their parish councils and the evictee committees, where all these problems were subjected to open debate and decisions were taken by vote. Before any negotiating session, they would meet with their parishioners, explain any doubts, draw up lists of petitions, etc. These petitions were negotiated with state officials, usually in the presence of representatives of the victims, who then reported back to the residents about what had been negotiated, what concessions had been won, and what problem areas remained. In this sense, negotiations could be looked at as a kind of apprenticeship exercise in civic participation.

It must be stressed that in contrast to the earlier evictions, which were sprung on people without notice, the later ones were conducted with public involvement and discussion. Information was provided and options were considered. The state itself admitted that the results were much better. Instead of the forced evictions of 1987 and 1988, with their attendant disinformation and violence, the
people to be displaced and the organizations representing them had a degree of influence in guiding and managing the process.

It is important also to note the preparatory and training strategy used by the priests within the communities. We found significant differences in the style and scope of the training programs. These differences depended on the ideas and outlook of the priests, the type of negotiations — individual or collective — the number and status of the residents involved, the degree of organization in the community, etc. Thus, we found training programs that ranged from a basic mass-education approach with a long-term, comprehensive, and critical focus to ones strictly limited to the promotion of human and religious values.

In the Guachupita case, a strikingly broad training program was undertaken among different parish groups. They worked constantly and on their own to promote discussion of such themes as “using words to shed light on our lives” and the move from “a Church that is silent to one that raises its voice.” Other mechanisms included the community news sheet Encuentro (“Encounter”), acts of solidarity with other barrios, encouraging people to listen to the news, and research on the history of the barrio and its Christian community (collective memory), all of this undertaken on a rotating basis by different groups, contributing to the multiplier effect. This helped to explain the sustained nature of the struggle mounted against the evictions and the success that people had in pressing their demands. Although the people in Sabana Perdida suffered from the lack of any training program to provide a comprehensive overview of their objectives, the parish used artistic and recreational activities to train people to put up resistance. In Maquiteria, activities were conducted in three fields: a group of women worked in the areas of health and handicrafts; a groceries dispensary was set up to respond to the problem of food self-sufficiency; and grass-roots church communities held discussions and promoted cooperative work. In all three cases, the weekly Sunday Mass was turned into an opportunity to exchange information about the evictions. This meant that Christian groups were better informed than the barrio as a whole and were looked to by the rest of the people as reliable advisors.

**Intellectuals and NGOs**

Intellectuals and NGOs made their presence felt in the eviction processes in two different periods: during the first years of resistance and struggle; and later, when alternative proposals about urban housing were being developed.

In the first instance, some intellectuals displayed their commitment to the residents’ cause in an important way, and often under threat from officialdom, by issuing critiques of the state’s urban-development program, undertaking research
and training, and taking part in the resistance mounted by the neighbourhood organizations and the priests. Some subsequently became members of the technical advisory teams that helped develop proposals against the evictions. Their participation in debates, seminars, through the media and at international events, helped to give depth and scope to the proposals put forward by the residents themselves.

At this stage, CEDAIL, an institution sponsored by the Dominican Conference of Bishops, began to play an important role. With a view to providing training, research, and support for people on their rights and legal prerogatives as citizens, it helped communities to formulate their demands and proposals. Its activities through courses, discussion groups, educational law publications, legal advisory services, systematic information gathering, and international protests made it one of the key actors. In 1989, together with COPADEBA, it formed the Alternative City, as a technical advisory centre for developing neighbourhood improvement proposals, and from then on it was a member of the governing council of that body.

Other institutions, like the Centro Poveda (for training), and the People’s Publishing House (Ediciones Populares) made significant contributions to public understanding of the issues. Universities also served as forums for discussion, protest, and debate about the government’s plans. The communications media thus provided a useful link for dissemination and analysis of public opinion about the issues, although some media representatives were later compromised to some extent by their receipt of state jobs and contributions.

In the Alternative City, the neighbourhood organizers had available for the first time a real technical-support centre to help them formulate and develop proposals for comprehensive improvement in housing and the quality of life and to strengthen their sense of cultural identity and creativity. Using an approach that saw improvement in mediating the process of social change (Morel 1991), the Alternative City worked closely with residents of the barrios. It sought alternative solutions to barrio problems (the urban-improvement project for La Ciénaga and Los Guandules, later interrupted by the evictions decreed in September 1991; the build-your-own housing project in Pantojas; small and medium-scale assistance projects in various barrios). However, it also took part in negotiations with the state over the latest round of evictions. Its strategy was to promote the coordinated, decentralized, and participatory management of urban problems and to encourage state participation in the proposed solutions.
Fallout from the evictions: building and rebuilding identities

In this section, we examine the extent to which people’s self-identity was affected by the evictions and the potential for empowerment this represented for people in terms of democratic participation.

By identity, we mean those features of any group or person by which they recognize themselves. This is, of course, a complex matter. According to Biagini (1989), it involves community or individual self-affirmation implanted from various cognitive experiences. This identity makes us look beyond the diverse perspectives of our daily lives. It comes to us in diffused ways and thus brings us successive moments of contentment and disappointment in the face of an event like the evictions, depending on factors that may concomitantly converge. These include historical and cultural factors, which indeed make the process complex. In methodological terms, we are always rebuilding our identity from a constellation of our modes of doing, thinking, and feeling. Social status, work, religion, and family make-up are thus all part of this identity, together with our physical space and territory.

Identity and poverty among the eviction victims

One of the features we found among the displaced residents was the ability to recognize their social status in relation to political and ethical factors. The evictees knew that they were poor and socially excluded. They attributed this condition essentially to political causes. Life was lived in the midst of suffering and disappointment, which are common characteristics among the poor majority of our times:

- “We poor people are treated badly.”
- “They don’t listen to us.”
- “The National Properties came along, made a list of our houses, and said nothing to us.”
- “If they would only listen to us poor people, things would be different.”

In this way, the evictees suffered their problems with annoyance, indifference, or disgust. As poor people, they knew that they were living in social relationships of inequality that tended to blot out parts of their identity. For example, they saw that they were denied the right to communicate their preferences about types of housing and forms of settlement. Life was seen as tragedy, and political power was
seen as an alien force acting on them at the margin of their subjugated condition and rejecting any attempt to reach consensus.

The residents had developed a social awareness, or folk memory, in which their current state of poverty was inextricably linked to a series of landmark political moves, stretching from the Trujillo dictatorship to the era of the present government. Many of the evictees were migrants who came originally from the countryside. They vividly recalled the forced seizures of their lands by Trujillo’s relatives and henchmen, which the state started back in 1920, and which became worse from the 1930s on (Báez 1978; Cassa 1985).

The combined effects of those land seizures and the ongoing mechanization of agriculture led to a land-distribution regime polarized between large-scale landholdings (*latifundio*) and small holdings (*minifundio*); thousands of families were reduced to supporting themselves from their own tiny plots or as day-labourers — frequently, indeed, they combined the conditions of small farmers with those of day-labourers or semiproletarians:

- “Our economic situation used to be normal. We were able to prosper from farming and raising livestock. But then, along came one of Trujillo’s feudal bosses and forced us to sell all our lands, including my father’s land.”

- “They forced my father to sign an agreement of sale, and since he couldn’t write, he signed an X. That was in 1955. After that, he moved here (to the capital) and simply pined away. We knew that he was dying of grief, because they had taken away his land — he had never been sick a day in his life.”

- “My mother had to give up her own land to Trujillo in 1948. After that, she worked as a hired hand on someone else’s land. She also made charcoal, and used to ride into town on an old nag, to sell it.”

The *barrio* dwellers also felt that government policies, especially those having to do with urban redevelopment, were factors contributing to their poverty. They pointed to irrational government priorities in undertaking projects that had little social use, the destruction of housing that people had built for themselves, their exclusion from new housing developments, the ejection of families from buildings that the state had assigned to them after previous evictions, and the shunting of residents to outlying districts where they had trouble finding work:
• “I think everyone realizes that the government’s development policy has been a complete mistake .... They have invested almost 900 million pesos [DOP] in building projects, when agriculture is on its knees, and there is so much need for investment in industry and in education — in other words, in the sectors that are vital to our national life.”

• “How can a government come to power and look at the mess we are in, without setting priorities for major areas like health, the economy, education? The entire approach of the government has been wrong.”

Solidarity with the residents

Family solidarity

We can appreciate the great solidarity that permeates people’s approach to life when we look at the gestures of cooperation and involvement people showed the evicted residents. Over time, a whole series of common endeavours were undertaken that had a special impact on the evictees’ lives. The two most frequent expressions of solidarity were through the family and through neighbours. These in turn would lead to a sense of solidarity throughout the barrio. The residents were fully aware that through various actions in their lives they had built up interpersonal relationships between family members and neighbours that served as focal points for joint action and unity, directed mainly at their very survival, although other forms of solidarity helped to meet different needs.

Our examination of people’s case histories allowed us to determine that most of the evicted families were of rural origin, and this went a long way to explaining why mutual assistance was so important to them. We found these same values, albeit with variations, in the urban setting. A constant focus of the respondents’ remarks was solidarity for survival:

• “All the money we made we gave to my mother. After I got married, I rented a little house, but right away they asked me for it, and so I moved back into my mother’s house. Later, my brother-in-law lent us a vacant house that he had.”

• “When I got married, I lived at first in my mother’s house. Then I went out on my own, and built a little place on my mother’s land. Later, when I moved to the city, my brother found me a lot here in Guachupita. There I built a house out of wood and palm leaves.”
This propensity for solidarity and mutual help cannot be looked at in isolation from the class situation of these residents. The resources they had to help each other and the character of their relationships were typical of people living in poverty.

The role of the mother stands front and centre in such relationships. She represented the nucleus around which the extended family was formed. This form of family solidarity played a key role in the demographic make-up of the city and in the employment situation in certain areas — migrants followed their families, and once they were settled in the city, they in turn started to prepare things so that they could receive other family members in town. Solidarity could also be seen in many cases through people’s keeping typically rural traditions and customs. For example, grandparents might adopt the first-born grandchild and take responsibility for raising the child; people would take care of the children of a brother or sister who had emigrated abroad; people would look after their aged parents, either by having their parents move in with them for the rest of their lives or by sending their children to look after the grandparents in their own homes.

Neighbourly solidarity

Neighbourhood unity was one of the outstanding values we saw demonstrated by residents during our study. This phenomenon was very widespread, both in the countryside and in the barrios in town (García and Mejía 1987). Neighbourhood unity, like family unity, was a value that often boiled down to a strategy for survival, because changes in physical and social surroundings could have a significant influence on people’s ways of life.

The physical restructuring of a barrio affected levels of integration and forms of organization:

My work in the community is now becoming very difficult ... . I have been trying to organize group meetings within our parish. When we all lived in our own little homes, everyone would tell his neighbour next door about a meeting, and then the neighbours would come to it, whether [or not] they thought it would do some good, or because they were just being considerate. But now, neighbours don’t really know each other anymore, and so only three or four people will show up at a meeting.

The way evicted families restructured their neighbourhood life in their new surroundings meant to some extent falling back on their private resources, and community ties became less important:

In the old days, people who had been here a long time would treat each other as equals, and they knew what bothered somebody, and what didn’t.
But now, the neighbours just say, "This is my house, and I can do what I like."

Of course, attitudes to new neighbours were not always so rigid. There were various degrees of openness, which we might classify as follows:

- A closed attitude toward former neighbours who were relocated and an openness to new neighbours;

- A closed attitude toward new neighbours, through a desire to keep territorial control or because of political ideology; and

- A closed attitude toward new neighbours because of their cultural practices.

The first category was a sign of the evictees’ breaking with the past, or a redefining of their identity, in which physical and natural surroundings seemed to influence their behaviour. We found this phenomenon among the residents who were relocated to the Los Coquitos area in Los Mameyes, after being evicted from the barrio of Maquiteria a short distance away. When the evictions began, people kept up an attitude of solidarity in their struggle, without making any distinction as to social standing. But when they were relocated, these people felt that they had achieved a different social status, and they looked on their new surroundings as a sign of upward mobility, not only in economic but also in social or cultural terms.

This imagined change led them to take on a different lifestyle, with new social relationships and a new social ethos. Former residents of the barrio who had not been able to find new apartments were stigmatized and became socially undesirable. The new lifestyle extended to language, social organization, sporting and recreational relations, etc. People seemed to feel that they were living a different life:

- "The difference here is that we live much better than we did back there. After all, you know, people who live in those slums do not have much culture."

- "People there had no manners or morals. Here it is not like that — everything is different."
• “Here, at least people realize that they are living in an apartment, and that we have to change our living habits and express ourselves with a new vocabulary. In that sense, we are a thousand times better off.”
• “Life here is really different. The children are even a different colour here.”

And yet, these residents still defended the right of their former neighbours to find an apartment, even if it wouldn’t be as good as the ones they themselves had, and they admitted that those people had been mistreated and restricted in their mobility.

This group was living the “contentment” of eviction. When we asked them how they would compare the first and the last stages of the eviction process, they described the first stage, with what we would have to call expressions of pain, for example, “Let’s compare it to being sick.” But in talking about the final stage, their expressions betrayed feelings of pleasure, for example, “We compare it with the joy of having finally made something of our lives.” This change, however, did not mean that the group had broken with the kind of neighbourly solidarity that was such a feature of the country’s urban barrios. Although their lives had become more private, it had not become individualized. As time went by, residents began to interact in multifamily blocs, which made it more difficult to have the kind of daily, face-to-face encounter that was so easy when they all lived at the same level. That was one of the defining concepts of neighbourliness in the barrios.

Nevertheless, the privatization of relationships made it more difficult to feel a part of a neighbourhood. Indeed, people no longer carried on the struggle for justice from an overall social perspective but in terms of the interests of one’s own particular group. And yet, in the end, what this amounted to was just a different form of neighbourhood behaviour, and the kind of solidarity that prevailed depended on common needs, often determined by the physical nature of people’s housing and their surroundings.

This new spirit of solidarity within a building showed up in the demands that residents addressed to the city or central governments:

Now that we are living in this building, we are doing very well. We keep our green spaces tidy, we send delegations to the government and city hall to demand street improvements, or better garbage collection. We insist that they build us a supermarket, a post office, a hospital, or a medical dispensary.
These demands had no underlying basis in ideology or politics. They bespoke a kind of solidarity that responded to very localized interests and that was intended to meet needs arising from the relocation process itself. In this sense, the struggle was a spontaneous one, inspired by the experience gained in the old parish committee that used to lead the fight for the right to housing. We were unable to define the scope of this struggle, but we could detect a new element in it: groups were upgrading their physical and territorial space and recognizing the value of neighbourhood cohesion.

These groups could be said to follow a certain sequence: many of them began without any organizational experience; they came together only through the work of the parish committees that for the first time, provided leadership in asserting the rights of the evictees; and in the end, their neighbourhood grouping had no real structure or program, and they undertook ad hoc actions directed mainly to upgrading their own lands and housing.

On the other hand, the residents of Guachupita formed a closed group that excluded new residents. This reflected a sense of duty toward residents, especially the tenants, who were evicted from the barrio and who were not relocated within the area when it was rebuilt. For the people of Guachupita, to exclude their former neighbours from the barrio would have seemed to be a real loss of power, as every one of them was tied to the place with a feeling of territorial belonging. The barrio had a collective memory of its constant struggle to shape its surroundings in opposition to state edicts. The state, after all, built only two streets. The houses, the school, the church, the clubs, and the medial dispensary were built through the independent initiative of these residents. The residents thus came to look on their surroundings as their own property.

To let new residents into the place would have seemed to be an injustice and a usurpation of the right to this heritage. This exclusivist view was conditioned by cultural factors. The Gauchupiteros saw that the new residents felt themselves socially distinct in their actions and gestures toward the older residents, which often betrayed a racist attitude:

• “These people are very stuck-up. Nobody had a car around here. Now these people come with their cars, and they like to drive them around and show off.”

• “They don’t want to have anything to do with us, because we are black. You always hear them talking about ‘these blacks’.”
The attitude of the new neighbours revived the pain people felt over being rejected by persons from outside the barrio. The barrio had been settled by people from all over the country. It had also been one of Trujillo’s favourite places for recruiting — and murdering — thugs. The layout of the area also made it a haven for victims of political persecution, especially during the government of the Twelve Years — the narrow passages and alleyways offered ideal defence for such refugees.

This stigmatization then would seem to have had its origins in those conflicts. The police were largely to blame for this, according to the residents. But there was very clearly a political reason to react against the newcomers, as political patronage and party favouritism meant that the best housing was built and given to supporters of the party in power, right in the midst of an area that had been historically opposed to that party.

Whatever the underlying reasons, this was a problem of the breakdown of social networks and the loss of territorial control:

What we really don’t like about this barrio now is that there are people here who have been brought in from other areas .... Every time a new house is unveiled, we see a lot of new faces that were never part of Guachupita before .... So what really worries us is that every time a project is finished, the contractor lets in 10, 12, or 15 people who are not from here at all.

Similarly, when new residents arrived, this not only broke down the existing social networks, it also brought in new values and habits harmful to people’s mental health: the plague of drug addiction. Residents were then engaged in a battle to keep out drug traffickers among the newcomers: “Some of these people who have been brought in from elsewhere have taken it on themselves to push those little drug cigarettes on the people of the barrio.”

Enough has been said to show that the Gauchupiteros kept up a solidly united mentality among family and neighbours and that their feeling of neighbourhood was closely linked to their social sense. Everyone remembered the names of the people who had already died during the evictions and those who were then dying as a result. They all felt the pain of many of the elderly who were unable to get out of their high-rise buildings and the frustration of being unable to offer them any protection:

The government never gave any thought to older people when it built these high-rises. We have a lot of elderly invalids who have been stuck on the fifth floor, and who can only get out if they can find someone to
bring them down. This is one of the things that has caused the death of many people.

Keeping people shut away like this broke down the culture in which people got together and helped each other. The high-rise apartment building had in fact unleashed a wave of disappointment: “We were not against relocation, just against the way we were treated. They did not build the kind of low houses we wanted.”

The sense of unity in the barrio about the value of life was threatened by these changes. Ways of living still retained many of the features and customs that predominated in the barrio before its physical aspect was destroyed. For example, people left the doors of their houses open during the day, in contrast to the inhabitants of Los Coquitos in Los Mameyes, who kept their doors locked at all times. And people still took advantage of the streets as meeting places.

Yet, some people’s ideas and values about their social condition were changing. They felt that their status had been lowered from the point of view of their housing — they found themselves downwardly mobile in a social sense. Nevertheless, for most people the social value of their surroundings had increased, and their housing had improved. In this area, as in Guachupita, people interacted in blocs. Despite the fact that interaction was more extensive and there was still a sense of territorial wholeness, these relocations and shifts meant that people were losing the chance to exchange goods and services among themselves as neighbours and thus losing their survival space as well:

We have lost many of the friends we had before, and even if they live here they don’t visit us anymore, because they live away up there somewhere, and they don’t come downstairs for visits on the first floor. We used to be so close — if we were sick, they would be at our side, they would fill the house with visitors, and now we have to send someone out to look for help and say, “Hey, so-and-so is sick, please come, even though we don’t know you.” If we didn’t have any coffee, we knew that someone would bring some — but who would do that for us now?

The uncertainties and upheavals of eviction and relocation did not, however, interfere with neighbourhood organization. In fact, the process seemed to strengthen such organization. Every block committee had its leadership and members. This represented the most promising seeds for creating a real district movement, not only in the sense of a means of pressing neighbourhood demands, but also in the broader sense of collective unity and outlook.

The third group we defined — the one of people who tended to be closed to new residents, on cultural grounds — could be found in Sabana Perdida. This attitude stemmed from the collision of values and standards: some of the new inhabitants brought with them a culture of noise, alcohol, gambling, and drugs: “It's
so noisy we can't get any sleep .... The streets are full of drunkards .... There's a lot of crowding .... Many of these people are complete strangers to us. We don't have the sense of unity we used to have." It was very hard for these people to adjust to their new environment. They lived in a kind of transition zone between the rural and urban milieus, where peace and quiet and neighbourliness were the two hallmarks of survival. The values of mutual assistance, cooperation, comradeship, and so on had all been part of their daily lives.

Yet, this group felt the breakdown of family and neighbourhood life less strongly that did those in Guachupita, as they lived in single-storey houses and they nearly all managed to be relocated to the same place. They were thus able to keep a certain degree of closeness among themselves, even if they no longer had any contact with residents of neighbouring barrios near where they used to live.

The value that suffered the most was perhaps the typically rural sense of living space — and, along with that, the value of ample housing. A home and its surroundings used to be a means of survival — people could plant fruit trees, raise chickens, and so on. Also, the house itself offered enough bedrooms for every member of the family (six, on average) and enough space both for doing daily chores and enjoying leisure time.

Three features stood out in the self-identity of these residents:

- A high degree of awareness of the social value of urban space;
- Organizational unity among members of the old barrio; and
- The leading role of women in the battle against evictions.

Just as with the evictions and relocations in the Los Coquitos area of Los Mameyes, these residents had begun to campaign with the central and municipal governments to improve their surroundings. They had formed a very clear idea of the amenities that urban living required. They had risen to the challenge of their ideals by forming neighbourhood councils that were then in the process of being formally recognized by the government. These councils had close ties with the grassroots church communities of the parish of Our Lady of Latin America. The organizational role of women had been significant. Women had led the campaign for adequate housing and services, both during and after the eviction. The same thing happened in the Los Coquitos area of Los Mameyes.

These aspects of self-identity had different results among the new residents of Sabana Perdida and among the evictees in Guachupita and in Los Mameyes in
terms of political identity. Here we found a combination of contentment and disappointment about very specific features of the environment. The contentment came from the concept of urbanization that the residents entertained. Few of these people spoke of living in a barrio, and this led many of these people to believe they had bettered their social standing. Others felt that their status had remained about the same, whereas a few believed that they had lost ground socially.

These views were reflected in their political preferences. The government, the president in particular, had emerged from the project with their legitimacy intact, despite significant criticism of the methods of eviction employed by public officials. We posed the question, “Do you think the president of the republic might win the next elections, given all these evictions?,,” which was intended to help us discover whether the evictions had had an effect on people’s political identity. The answers tended to be less favourable to the president than those we were given in Los Coquitos, but more favourable than those in Guachupita, where the evictions served to strengthen opposition to the president.

We interpreted these results using the hypothesis that the political views of the residents had changed very little and that they regarded their local struggles as quite distinct from national problems. This could be blamed above all on the failure of social and political organizations to provide political education and make people understand the link between the macro- and the microlevels of social and political events.

Identity and work
Generally speaking, the evictees represented a class of workers who identified themselves with the informal economy. They were typically engaged as small merchants, peddlers, domestic workers (cleaning and laundry), temporary or part-time workers, etc. The generic term for such people was “independent” workers, or as they frequently referred to themselves, chiriperos (moonlighters). The independent workers identified themselves by this concept, in contrast to the “formal” workers, who only worked as wage earners. Historical and structural factors have helped to shape this identity. Our analysis of the work history of the evictees showed that informal work represented, in a sense, the working culture of the neighbourhood and that this had a significant influence on these people’s psychological make-up.

We compared the labour status of the three neighbourhoods studied as follows:

- In the Los Coquitos barrio of Los Mameyes, most people were engaged as dependent employees, as workers in small businesses, as owners of
small shops, as beauty-parlour or rooming-house operators, or as lottery-ticket vendors. Some also lived on pensions.

- In the barrio of Guachupita, work patterns were more varied: sales people in places like grocery stores, shops, beauty parlours, and street-vending operations (selling meat or pastries, running fruit stands, selling charcoal). Most were itinerant workers: delivery-cart owners, lottery-ticket or boiled-egg vendors, or taxi drivers. Some were engaged as domestic servants or took in laundry and ironing. Some were salaried employees in the public or private sectors, including those in the construction industry.

- In Sabana Perdida, informal workers were of many varieties: sales people in fixed establishments, itinerant vendors of lottery tickets or cosmetics, working on the street or door-to-door, and even employees of beauty parlours.

This demarcation by type of work could be related to a specific attitude toward salaried employment. For these residents, to work for a public- or private-sector employer meant putting up with a much lower standard of living than that enjoyed by informal workers. A person's self-identity as an independent worker could be related to the fact that one could earn more that way than as a formal worker and also to their recognition that these workers' low-level qualifications would prevent them from entering the formal labour market. In any case, the fact that a given group identified itself with informal work was based on structural elements and, to a lesser extent, on personal preferences.

What kind of impact did the evictions have on this identity? We detected two direct factors in these repercussions:

- *Removal to the outskirts* — This factor was felt especially by residents of Guachupita, who were relocated in other zones. They found themselves living in swampy areas like Guaricano, far removed from the labour market of the central city. The government in this case completely overlooked the importance of streets in the informal economy, as locales where itinerant vendors could offer their wares for sale to passersby. These people depended for their livelihood on their work as itinerant vendors, and to remove them to sparsely populated zones or to areas where most people had very little income simply meant condemning them to poverty.
• *High-rise housing construction* — This factor had a major impact both in Los Coquitos and in Guachupita. The multiple high-rise units destroyed the support structure for small-business establishments and for itinerant vendors. This economic structure was geared to the single-level house, which served as the basis for commercial activities like grocery stores, beauty parlours, barbershops, and butcher shops. It also provided a place to keep the tools of one’s trade, such as a bicycle, a cart, or a motorcycle, which were real necessities for survival. The environment of these large apartment blocks, particularly the very high buildings, was not at all conducive to the kind of close, day-to-day relationships that we found in the horizontal, open layout of the *barrio*. Few residents had the opportunity to live on the ground floor, and if their livelihood required street-level housing, they had to move away. Former neighbours found themselves split up among different blocks and streets in an entirely different pattern from the one they were used to. Thus, a worker who, for example, made a living selling clothing materials and could vouch for the quality of this merchandise would then lose much of the old, loyal neighbourhood clientele. The same would happen to people who relied on loans for their living. This factor was particularly noticeable in Sabana Perdida. A compounding factor there was the removal of facilities affected by the clearance, without any substitute to provide regular employment for the inhabitants. In fact, one of the main elements behind the wave of disappointment caused by the evictions was the fact that the state assumed no social commitment to provide employment security in the course of planning and building new settlements. As a result, the state was responsible for reducing the living standards of a large number of evictees.

**Conclusions**

**General interpretation of the process**

The following points of general interpretation can be made about the eviction process in Santo Domingo as it took place during the period under study:

- The evictions carried out by the state over the previous 5 years in Santo Domingo were influenced by many factors, including those related to macroeconomics, politics, city planning, and culture, and this may explain why the process was so complex.
The clearance projects were highly conditioned by the authoritarian style with which they were conducted, the centralization of decision-making and action, and the weakness of the country’s social institutions.

The process of evictions had to be seen in a broader social context characterized by a resurgence of economic acquisitiveness, an increase in poverty among the urban population, the collapse of institutions, shrinking social spending by the state, and a rising level of public protest. In the cases examined, the evictions had two very different kinds of effect. On the one hand, to the extent the process achieved its objectives, it resulted in the disruption or redefinition of the social networks on which the affected residents depended for their protection, their collective and individual identities, and their very survival. On the other hand, they also gave rise to significant degrees of integration within the communities, with an intensity that went far beyond the concerns of the moment and that seemed to be conditioned by the traditions of resistance, the training programs, the organizational experiences, and the steadfastness of the leadership that existed in the communities of the evictees before the evictions.

To the extent that the victims won compensation (the right to remain in the same place, the state provision of housing, fair procedural treatment, the demands of tenants, etc.), this was more a result of their capacity to offer resistance and opposition, negotiate, and propose alternatives and of the way they organized themselves and sought help than a reflection of any original state planning or intent. In fact, despite its rhetoric to the contrary, the state adopted programs mainly on the basis of simply evicting people from homes that they themselves had built, without making any provision for their relocation.

Although the evictees and the organizations for their support had occasional victories, these were at least partially vitiated by popular movements’ being so localized, so ephemeral, so lacking in coordination and strategic objectives, and so completely removed from organized politics that they were too weak to properly fulfil their role, and this opened the way for traditional power centres to step in as mediators.

Although the state resorted to violence (verbal, physical, and institutional) as a fundamental feature of its interventions in the city’s poor
districts, the mechanisms used by the residents to press their demands were quite different—they drew on a philosophy of resistance and perseverance and popular wellsprings of creativity, tradition, and custom as their source of strength. In this connection, the religious dimension of everyday life determined the process to a great degree and became a key point of departure for shaping identities and marking out political and organizational spaces within the communities.

- The perceptions, opinions, and stances that people adopted in response to the nature and implications of urban redevelopment seemed to vary, depending on their stage in the eviction process. Thus, when the evictions were actually taking place—and given the way they were carried out—we found a greater emphasis on opposing the form and content of the evictions through mounting resistance and making demands. Then, as people were resettled in their newly built surroundings, they tended to give themselves over to feelings of contentment with their new situation and to grant a certain degree of legitimacy to the state’s actions. These different stances seemed to depend mainly on the people’s degree of organization, ideological and political viewpoints, feelings of identity and belonging to a social space, the extent to which the community constituted a social and territorial unit, and the cultural and historical reference points of these communities at the time. Other aspects included the geographic location of the settlements, the vertical or horizontal nature of the housing projects, and the degree of permanence of the group in its new locale.

- From the viewpoint of the residents, building and maintaining an identity proved very difficult because of their lack of any legal recourse (in the normative sense particularly) to help them preserve their way of life, their living space, etc. This weakness did not, however, prevent the assertion of another kind of right, one that was rooted in people’s traditions and customs and that their resistance to violations of their legal rights reinforced. The evictions thus helped to demonstrate that identities can essentially survive while being altered or redefined as people’s environments changed.

An assessment of the changes observed in the eviction process

The following changes occurred in the eviction process during the period under study:
• From an initial stage of resistance and demands to the progressive elaboration of alternative proposals in the face of the evictions;

• From the massive, forceable evictions of 1987 and 1988 to greater and more successful use of negotiations;

• From evictions carried out without any information, or with distorted or manipulated information, to evictions conducted on the basis of information supplied by the residents, their organizations, and the mediation bodies involved;

• From varied and inconsistent procedures to standardized ones, based on agreements between the state and groups of parish priests;

• From the victim's passive suffering of the evictions to discussion and coordination among the state, the residents, their organizations, and expert advisors with respect to the plans for moving the inhabitants;

• From the state's refusal to recognize and deal with neighbourhood organizations to its progressive acceptance of them in the later round of clearance projects (the cases of La Ciénaga, Morgan, etc.);

• From the preeminence of the construction companies in conducting all aspects of evictions to a reduction of their leading role in defining and managing the clearance projects; and

• From the isolation of the evictees in their struggle to the inclusion of other players from society at large (universities, professionals, discussion forums, etc.) in considering possible solutions to the problems of housing and resettlement.

These changes suggested that real progress was achieved between the earlier and later stages. And yet, the residents continued to be expelled from the inner city, and the make-shift settlements for them around the periphery burgeoned. The pressures to open the city up to investment, the segregation of social spaces, and the progressive deterioration of living conditions for the mass of urban dwellers still seemed to be the fundamental determinants of life in the city.

This situation suggested the following recommendations:
• An alternative concept of the rule of law was needed for the city, one that took into consideration both historical and current circumstances defining urban life and that also gave due weight to the rights of citizens.

• Neighbourhood organizations and technical advisory centres needed to be progressively involved in preparing and discussing proposals that affected the city as a whole, and proposals needed to be developed that transcended but did not ignore those problems that related solely to specific neighbourhoods or specific aspects of urban life.

• Strategies needed to be developed that both recognized the vested interests of the inhabitants of the central areas of the city and promoted the organizational activities of residents relocated in the city’s outskirts.

• A coordinated and democratic system of management needed to be organized for the city, based on the values of decentralization, popular participation, autonomy, strengthened local government, recognition of community organizations, fulfilment of the state’s commitments to the residents, and institutionalization of action at the local level through organization, management, and training.

• Research was needed to deepen our understanding of relationships within the process of urbanization, using concepts of development but also giving special attention to the protection of human rights (to living space and housing) and the potential for recognition of alternative rights.

• Stricter attention needed to be given to human-rights violations within the city, and a greater degree of dialogue and interaction needed to be encouraged between the citizens and their local governments.

• New forms of popular education that recognized the richness of the city’s social and organizational fabric, encouraged people to form their own identities and to relate openly to one another, and took into account the specific experiences of each local community needed to be developed and promoted.