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PLANNING A “MASS CITY”: THE POLITICS OF PLANNING IN MEXICO CITY, 1930-
1960

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El gobierno y los técnicos también han perdido el optimismo. Ya nadie pretende llegar a las soluciones totales. Las declaraciones de los funcionarios están hechas en un tono que recuerda al que heredó al elefante blanco. “Tengan ustedes en cuenta”, parecen decir, “que nuestros antepasados fundaron esta ciudad donde no debían. El águila debió pararse en otro lado. Aquí no se pueden hacer agujeros, ni hay donde tirar la basura, ni hay agua suficiente para beber. Por si fuera poco, nadie imagino ni en sueños que iban a venir once millones a vivir aquí. Nosotros hacemos todo lo humanamente posible pero con sobrevivir dense de santos.”

Jorge Ibarzüengoitia

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Note on Translation and Language

During most of the years covered in this dissertation, Mexico City was officially known as the Distrito Federal and it was governed by an administrative body with the name of the Departamento del Distrito Federal (DDF). I often refer to the Distrito Federal and the DDF, but I also talk of Mexico City, the city government, and municipal engineers and topographers, even if these terms are not always technically accurate. I have opted for them in order not to overburden the reader with acronyms. The importance of these terms, and the differences between them, is explained throughout the text whenever I make relevant arguments.

Except when noted, all translations are my own. I have italicized terms in Spanish following the Chicago Manual of Style. But I have left some key terms—*colonia proletaria*, *vecindad*, *tugurio*, *delegación*—in romans. The meaning of *colonia proletaria* or proletarian neighborhood is an important part of my overall argument so I have explained it early on in the introduction. The rest of the terms appear so many times throughout the dissertation that it would be absurd to italicize them. Finally, government offices are left in Spanish (e.g. Oficinas de Colonias, Oficina del Plano Regulador) except for Dirección de Obras Públicas, which I have translated throughout the text as Public Works.

Long held as a beacon of culture and civilization, Mexico City became the epitome of “explosive” urban growth in the twentieth century. Its transformation from a “City of Palaces”—as Alexander von Humboldt called it in the beginning of the nineteenth-century—to a “mass city” is commonly blamed on corrupt politicians, ambitious developers, and weak or nonexistent urban planners.¹ Mexico’s capital integrated millions of migrants from the countryside through pervasive networks of political patronage, ensuring social peace. This political machine, scholars have argued, defeated efforts by architects, engineers, and urban planners to order urban growth; thus, Mexico City expanded anarchically through settlements that defied master plans and construction codes. Political needs and planned growth, the story goes, were incompatible.

Planning a ‘Mass City’ challenges this narrative of downfall and disorder by arguing that urban planning and the political organizing of Mexico City’s low-income residents were integrated practices. I make two broad arguments about Mexico City’s transformation between 1930 and 1960. First, I argue that much of the “informal” or “popular” city—the self-built and poorly serviced neighborhoods that add up to more than half of Mexico City²—was *planned* with the participation of municipal engineers and architects. Master plans and municipal blueprints,

¹ Metaphors of “mass cities,” “urban explosions,” and “overflowing migrant rivers” defined the contours of the idea of the Latin American city during the 1960s and 1970s. For a classic example, see José Luis Romero, *Latinoamérica: las ciudades y las ideas* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1976), 319.

² “Informal” and “popular” are broad and often imprecise terms that I will define as I make specific arguments. Both are commonly used—particularly the second one, e.g. *urbanización popular*, *habitat popular*—to name vast areas of Mexico City that are lacking in urban services such as drainage, water, electricity, and pavements; incrementally self-built; inhabited by low-income residents; and neglectful of municipal laws, codes, and ordinances. Between half and two thirds of the city originated in such manner, according to different calculations. Priscilla Connolly calculated in the early 1980s that 64% of Mexico City was developed through irregular subdivisions. See “Uncontrolled Settlements and Self-build: What Kind of Solution? The Mexico City Case,” in *Self-help Housing: A Critique*, ed. Peter Ward (London: Mansell, 1982), 141-174.

even when they were not followed, created a playing field where land developers, political brokers, and resident associations negotiated how Mexico City would be built and how rights to it would be allocated. Urban planners also subdivided land, created public spaces, and allocated lots in hundreds of low-income neighborhoods that were often considered unplanned.

My second argument regards the historical illegibility of these activities. Planning low-income neighborhoods—also known as *colonias proletarias*—required surveying and subdividing land, actions undertaken by municipal engineers, architects, and planners. But effective planning also required negotiating with resident associations and political brokers who deftly manipulated municipal codes and blueprints. The neighborhoods borne out of these negotiations in the 1930s and 1940s represented a political success story because they met (to varying degrees) the conflicting needs of the actors involved in the process. Architects and urban planners, however, understood *colonias proletarias* more negatively, as a failure or as a deviation from universal architectural models. Architectural ideas trailed behind reality, and the pragmatism and political ingenuity of the 1940s surpassed the urbanistic imagination of the period. Beginning in the 1950s, experiments in bottom-up planning, community organizing, and self-construction would be popularized by transnational networks of planners, architects, and social scientists. *Colonias proletarias* predated the dissemination of these ideas but would nevertheless be shaped by them. Viewed by 1940s planners as a severe “problem,” a decade later *colonias proletarias* became a possible “solution” to Mexico City’s housing crisis, a potential rubric for building a modern yet popular metropolis.³

³ I am borrowing William Mangin’s famous formulation, “Latin American Squatter Settlements: A Problem and a Solution,” *Latin American Research Review* 2, no. 3 (1967): 65-98. Mangin was not making an argument about Mexico but about all of Latin America (based mostly on his experiences in Peru). Still, his ideas were developed in a Pan-American conversation of which Mexico was part, as I explain in Chapter 4.

Since this is a dissertation about the *planning* of Mexico City's *colonias proletarias*, I should clarify my use of these terms. The discipline of urban planning emerged in response to the perceived ills of the nineteenth-century city: overcrowding, anarchic growth, and unsanitary conditions. As an alternative, urban planners conjured utopian visions—the garden-city, the city beautiful, the city segregated by function inspired by the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM)—that they disseminated across the world in the early decades of the twentieth century.⁴ These visions would come to life, planners hoped, through the use of such tools as master plans, zoning regulations, and construction codes. The visions and the techniques of planners were premised in a new relationship between government and urban space, the modernist, expert, top-down government gaze that James Scott called “seeing like a state.”⁵ Inspired by this genealogy, historians have looked for master plans and towering planners as key forces of urban transformation.

This dissertation reviews a few of these grand urban visions (an entire chapter is consecrated to Mexico City's master plan) but my study of planning largely shifts from the

⁴ Historians of urban planning have traced the current of ideas flowing from Ebenezer Howard's late nineteenth-century “garden city” and modernist planning (whose most famous practitioner was Charles Édouard Jeanneret, better known as Le Corbusier), which had its heyday in the 1950s. See Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, UK; New York, NY, USA: Blackwell, 2002) [1998]; and Robert Fishmann, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

⁵ James Scott's totalizing interpretation of state power has been criticized but extremely influential over the past two decades; see James Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). My reading of Scott has been influenced by Mariana Valverde, “Seeing Like a City: The Dialectic of Modern and Premodern Ways of Seeing in Urban Governance,” *Law and Society Review* 25, no. 2 (2011): 277-312; Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and James Holston, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). Of the limited power of master plans, and the difficulties of finding them in archival holdings I learned in my one research, as well as reading the work of Ananya Roy, *City Requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); and Matthew Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

expert, top-down view analyzed by Scott to a decentralized and local analysis of city management and politics. A similar change in perspective was put forward by planners in the 1950s and 1960s. The “classic CIAM-type of planning,” with its toolkit of “master plans, comprehensive zoning, [and] building and subdivision regulation” is out, wrote an urban planner in 1958. In its place, a new and “dynamic” planning mode was needed, with an “emphasis on the acquisition, reservation, and plotting of land for low-cost housing [and] the provision of public facilities and utilities in the vast fringes of [Latin American] slum areas.”⁶ Accordingly, in the pages that follow, *planning* designates the surveying and subdivision of land, the allocation of lots among residents, and the distribution of urban services to them. Undertaking these actions implied, in practice, allocating duties among government and non-government actors and defining the proper scale (e.g., neighborhood, district, and citywide) at which they intervened in the city.

This “dynamic” planning was put in practice in *colonias proletarias*, of which a few words must now be said. The term “colonias proletaria” (proletarian neighborhood) has an intriguing history and an exceptional polysemy. There are at least three meanings for the word: legal/administrative, architectural/urbanistic, and popular. Sometimes these meanings aligned; more often they departed from each other. In the early 1940s, the government created “colonias proletarias” as an official category. Governed by a special urban code and a set of non-written rules, colonias proletarias were an experiment in the planning and political organizing of Mexico City’s low-income neighborhoods and their residents. They represented, in short, a project to build a popular, progressive, and modern, metropolis. In the late 1940s, there were around 300

⁶ Eric Carlsen, “The Expanding Role of the Inter-American Housing and Planning Center” [1958], Francis Violich Papers (FVP)-Box 14. Carlsen was the Director of the Inter-American Housing and Planning Center in Bogotá, Colombia.

colonias proletarias listed in an official register assembled by the municipal Oficina de Colonias. From a narrow administrative perspective, a neighborhood could only be considered a colonia proletaria if it was one of the 300 neighborhoods listed in this register.

Architects and urban planners did not see colonias proletarias as an administrative category but as an architectural and urbanistic form. Colonias proletarias were usually devoid of potable water, sewage, and paved roads; they were located on the edges of the city, sparsely populated, and dotted with self-constructed houses. Yet, not all colonias proletarias shared these characteristics; some were closer to the city center, many more were extremely overcrowded. But architects and planners developed an ideal-type, from which existing neighborhoods could deviate to varying degrees. Assessments of colonias proletarias changed dramatically between 1930 and 1960. During the 1930s and 1940s, they were seen as a huge burden on the municipal treasury since their peripheral location rendered the provision of urban services extremely expensive. In consequence, planners pushed for their ban and for the passing of a strict urban perimeter. By the 1950s, the futility of these measures became evident. At the same time, planners began viewing colonias proletarias as progressive environments that could be improved through architectural interventions and government support.

Finally, the popular meaning of colonias proletarias shifted dramatically between 1940 and 1960. Initially, colonias proletarias bore the proud mark of their working-class origins. Built by organized employees and workers, many of them carried the names of labor unions, army units, and revolutionary heroes (Emiliano Zapata, Escuadrón 201). The winds of the Mexican Revolution were still blowing in the 1930s and 1940s, as colonias proletarias were hailed by government officials as the building block of a corporatist and worker metropolis, an urban equivalent to the communal *ejidos* distributed by the agrarian reform. Just a decade later,

colonias proletarias began to be seen in a different light. They were no longer viewed as worker neighborhoods but as squatter settlements, whose residents—stigmatized as *paracaidistas* (parachutists)—did not have the right to a foothold in the city. The political project of the 1940s was forgotten and colonias proletarias were denounced as anarchic, dangerous, and unhygienic places, an urban cancer that could potentially destroy Mexico City.

That a government-sponsored colonia proletaria could be considered an illegal squatter settlement by municipal architects is only a paradox if we think that governments are unitary organizations and not schizophrenic hydras. Even though it is possible to distinguish between policies, architectural typologies, and popular images of colonias proletarias, these perspectives are harder to disentangle in practice, when reconstructing the history of an actual neighborhood. It can also cloud our understanding, as colonias proletarias were shaped by ideologies, policies and laws, architectural ideas, and the work of resident associations (sometimes in partnership, sometimes in conflict) with the municipal bureaucracy.

The following photograph represents the settlement of a colonia proletaria [Fig. 0.1]. It was taken in December 1950 or January 1951 by the Mayo Brothers, the exiled Spanish photographers who shot thousands of photographs of colonias proletarias and their residents in the 1940s and 1950s. The photographs of the Mayo Brothers appeared in such as dailies as *El Popular* and *El Universal*, in articles that hailed government efforts to provide housing for the urban poor. But behind their triumphalist intent, these photographs arrest a moment of profound uncertainty about what the future had in store for these places and their residents.



Fig. 0.1. Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán, c. December 1950. AGN. Fondo Hermanos Mayo.

The photograph illustrates the very first days of the colonia proletaria Gabriel Ramos Millán, whose history is reconstructed in a chapter of this dissertation. The front of a military truck is visible at the right side of the image. It was used to move families from the margins of the San Joaquín River, in the northwest of Mexico City, to the land that the government purchased and subdivided at the other end of the city, fourteen kilometers away. Families gathered their belongings and placed them in trucks along with wooden planks and metal plates that would be crucial for building a new home. The makeshift houses that the families constructed anteceded the urbanization of the area by years. But people continued to move in and the neighborhood slowly grew. Schools, roads, clinics, markets, bars, and beauty salons were built, although these improvements did not prevent contemporary observers from describing Gabriel Ramos Millán as a “marginal” neighborhood.

One might think that the blueprint and the photograph have little in common. The small-scale blueprint resembles a figment of a utopian imagination, a project that never materialized. The photograph, on the contrary, appears to capture a moment in history, revealing the toil that building a city from scratch represented. It captures the anonymous men and women who settled and built the edges of Mexico City before anyone imagined that it would become one of the largest cities in the world. But this is not a juxtaposition between utopia and reality, top-down planning and grassroots organizing, “seeing like a state” and digging a ditch.

Despite their differences, both images capture complementary sides of the planning of Mexico City’s sprawling peripheries. *Planning a ‘Mass City’* explores the relationship between both images, interrogates their blind spots, and describes the planning modes that they embody. Colonias proletarias were shaped by master plans and housing projects as, after all, the municipal government purchased the land where Colonia Ramos Millán stands inspired by the plan to turn Mexico City’s southeast into a low-income residential area. At the same time, colonias proletarias were subdivided and settled through clientelistic politicking and machinating of which architects knew nothing. Most contemporary observers would have thought of the families portrayed by the Mayo Brothers as squatters. But they were, in fact, participants in a highly organized process of allocating lots and organizing resident associations; they were in possession of a voucher signed by a municipal official and their names probably appeared in neighborhood blueprints and censuses. Clearly, colonias proletarias could represent different things, depending on the vantage point. On the drawing boards of architects and planners, they were simply low-income neighborhoods in a small-scale master plan. From the position of political brokers and such government offices as the Oficina de Colonias, they represented political goods to be

distributed among resident groups. Planning took place at the interface between both levels; reconciling both visions and integrating them in ways that this dissertation describes.

Historiography

Nobody expected Mexico City to become the “largest city in the world” by 1990. A capital of nations and empires since its foundation in 1325, Mexico City was nevertheless a late bloomer when it came to population and territorial growth in the modern times. It was not until 1930 that it hit the one-million mark. Jorge Ibarguengoitia, the most ironic chronicler of the city’s transformation, recalled how proud he felt as a kid when he found Mexico City “in a Human Geography book, catalogued among the cities with more than a million inhabitants. Much smaller than London, a little smaller than Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro, and little larger than Sidney and Melbourne.”⁷ It seemed at the time a slow-paced place, crisscrossed by canals and surrounded by colonial towns and old Indian *barrios*. Yet, by the 1980s, Mexico City had become the embodiment of the dystopic “mega-city”: chaotic, unequal, ungovernable, and ecologically unsustainable.⁸ Looking back from the end of the twentieth century at the 1940s, the decade that predated Mexico City’s urban explosion, architects and planners expressed nostalgia about a city that was lost to corrupt politicians, greedy developers, and urban growth. In the popular imagination, the PRI—Mexico’s official party—was responsible for the monster city,

⁷ “Esta ciudad (I),” in *La casa de usted y otros viajes* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1991), 96.

⁸ In a representative scholarly article from this period, urban scholar Diane Davis interrogated Mexico’s transformation from “one of Latin America’s most elegant and hospitable cities,” into an unmanageable urban sprawl that resembled (Davis quoted Octavio Paz) “a monstrous inflated head crushing the frail body that holds it up.” “The Social Construction of Mexico City: Political Conflict and Urban Development,” *Journal of Urban History* 24, no. 3 (1998), 364.

which was the material expression of the Mexican political regime: corruption, corporatism, and import-substitution-industrialization.⁹

The irony is that for much of the twentieth century Mexico City was regarded as something of a “political success.” In the decades that followed World War II, Mexico City signified development, social stability, and modernization. Viewed through this prism, it became a cornerstone of the stability and development that buttressed the “Mexican Miracle.”¹⁰ Because it was governed by a regent appointed by the President and because it benefitted from national tariffs and subsidies, Mexico City was seen as the head of a national political project: the import-substitution industrialization model, a version of social and cultural modernization, or the development of intra-class alliances through the work of the official party.¹¹ More to the point, Mexico City was understood as a political machine for control, stability, and social peace. Writing in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, political scientist Wayne Cornelius answered *the* question of the Cold-War era: Why hadn’t the urban poor in “Latin America” risen in arms?¹² Surprisingly, he concluded, poor migrants were overall supportive of the political system, which they viewed as a “benevolent provider of goods and services.”¹³ Like Cornelius, urban scholars

⁹ For an early vision of Mexico City as an architectural disaster see Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, *¿Qué hacer por la ciudad de México?* (Mexico City: B. Costa-Amic, 1957).

¹⁰ Roger D. Hansen, *The Politics of Mexican Development* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971).

¹¹ That the political history of Mexico City can be conflated with the history of the nation-state tout court represents an analytical and archival challenge on which several historians have remarked. For reflections on such difficulty, see Soledad Loaeza, “Perspectivas para una historia política en el Distrito Federal en el siglo XX,” *Historia Mexicana* 45, no. 1 (1996): 99-158; and Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, “Introducción,” in *Historia política de la ciudad de México*, ed. A. Rodríguez Kuri (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2012), 9-18.

¹² The “threat” of Revolution and the “challenge” of urbanization and “explosive” urban growth were, of course, assumptions in line with the broader modernization theory on which the existence of Latin American cities as a category was premised in the first place. In short, Latin American cities were a distinct category because they diverged from a universal model.

¹³ Wayne A. Cornelius, *Politics and the Migrant Poor in Mexico City* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 61.

such as Susan Eckstein and Peter Ward interpreted policies of land distribution, welfare, and provision of urban services as effective government strategies by which the government achieved control over the “urban poor.”¹⁴

Successful in establishing political control over people, these policies made it more difficult for government planners to control urban growth through master plans and zoning ordinances. Planners blamed the failure of these projects on politics *tout court*. Explaining why his project for a roundabout at the intersection of Reforma and Insurgentes avenues—at the heart of the city—failed to take off, Mario Pani simply explained that politicians got in the way as the project was quietly aborted following a change of government, despite the fact that the Planning Commission of Mexico City had already approved it.¹⁵ Architect Teodoro González de León blamed Ernesto P. Uruchurtu, Mexico City’s powerful regent between 1953 and 1966, for the breakdown of the city. During the tenure of Uruchurtu, “a *norteño* whose model was Los Angeles,” Mexico City “did not cope with demographic growth, urban services fell behind, [and] marginal areas appeared.”¹⁶

Historians of architecture and urban planning tacitly confirm that *Realpolitik* defeated planning. Mexico City’s urban crisis, wrote an influential scholar, took place not “because

¹⁴ Susan Eckstein, *The Poverty of Revolution: The State and the Urban Poor in Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977; Peter Ward, *Welfare Politics in Mexico* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986); Alan Gilbert and Peter Ward, *Housing, the State, and the Poor: Policy and Practice in Three Latin American Cities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹⁵ “Entrevista realizada a Mario Pani, realizada por Graciela de Garay, el día 11 de julio de 1990 en la Ciudad de México.” Archivo de la Palabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora

¹⁶ “Esa ciudad estaba integrada en transporte, en servicios, espléndidamente hasta los años cincuenta. En los 50 comienza a deteriorarse. Es decir no resiste el crecimiento demográfico, ya el aumento de servicios no va al mismo ritmo; aparecen las zonas marginales que ya no se les pueden dar servicios [...] el transporte empieza a retrasarse, se tardan en decidir lo del metro por culpa del baboso de Uruchurtu. Ahí la culpa fue de Uruchurtu, porque su modelo eran los Angeles. Un *norteño* que se pasaba los fines de año en Los Angeles.” Entrevista realizada a Teodoro González de León por Graciela de Garay, el día 15 de agosto de 1991 en la Ciudad de México.” Archivo de la Palabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora.

planners had got it wrong” but “because planners didn’t exist as such.”¹⁷ Studied as intellectual history—through the lens of debates between schools, processes of adaptation and dissemination of ideas, and the lives and work of influential professionals—urban planning often appears as a formal endeavor, removed from the tangible reality of the city, removed, at least, from the very vast part of it that seems to have followed no plan, referred to by scholars as the “informal city” or “*hábitat popular*.” Since the period between 1930 and 1960 is considered a time of “paper plans,” we know more about blueprints, projects, and architects than about the government offices and low-level bureaucrats who were tasked with putting these plans into practice.¹⁸ While historians of architecture have studied ambitious federal projects, these are usually seen as isolated successes, refuges of order in an ocean of antennas and cables.¹⁹ But the more

¹⁷ Peter Ward, *Mexico City: The Production and Reproduction of an Urban Environment* (New York: John Wiley, 1998), 114.

¹⁸ Most histories of planning have been written by historians of architecture, who usually center their analyses on the monumental axes that Mauricio Tenorio has described in his “tours” around 1910 Mexico City. For histories of urban planning and architecture that adopt this perspective, from a cultural and intellectual perspective close to art history, see Gerardo Sánchez Ruiz, *Planificación y urbanismo de la Revolución mexicana: los sustentos de una nueva modernidad en la Ciudad de México* (Mexico City: UAM, 2002); Mauricio Tenorio, *I Speak of the City: Mexico City at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), especially chapters One and Two, “On 1910 and City of the Centennial,” 3-42, and “On 1910 Contrasts: Washington and Mexico City,” 43-62; Enrique X. Alanís de Anda, *La arquitectura de la Revolución mexicana: corrientes y estilos en la década de los veinte* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2008); Luis E. Carranza, *Architecture as Revolution: episodes in the forming of modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas University Press, 2010); Alfonso Valenzuela Aguilera, *Urbanistas y visionarios: La planeación de la ciudad de México en la primera mitad del siglo XX* (Cuernavaca: Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos, 2014); Kathryn E. O’Rourke, *Modern Architecture in Mexico City: History, Representation, and the Shaping of a Capital* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2017); Ramón Vargas Salguero, Amaya Larrucea, Carlos Chanfón Olmos, eds., *Arquitectura de la Revolución y Revolución de la Arquitectura*. vol. 4 of *Historia de la arquitectura y el urbanismo mexicanos* (Mexico City: FCE, 2009); Marco Tulio Peraza Guzmán and Lourdes Cruz González Franco, eds., *Segunda modernidad urbano arquitectónica: proyectos y obras* (Mexico City: UAM-CONACYT, 2014).

¹⁹ Enrique Alanís de Anda, *Vivienda colectiva de la modernidad en México: los multifamiliares durante el periodo presidencial de Miguel Alemán (1946-1952)* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2011); Luis Castañeda, *Spectacular Mexico: Design, Propaganda, and the 1968 Olympics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

comprehensive plans aimed at controlling urban growth or building an ideal city—master plans more explicitly—have been regarded as futile endeavors.²⁰

Mexico City was a planning failure, scholars argue, *because* it was a political success. Integration, social peace, and pragmatism were achieved at the cost of rationality and order. In his analysis of Mexican welfare policies, Peter Ward argued that the logic of planning—resorting to technical criteria to make decisions—threatened “traditional forms of political mediation exercised through patronage.”²¹ Politicians derived their power from controlling and distributing resources in a discretionary manner, spinning webs of patron-client relationships. It was not until the 1970s, Ward continues, that planners carved a niche in the government’s urban policy through the passing of the 1976 Human Settlements Law and the creation of a Ministry of Human Settlements and Public Works.²² Historian Ariel Rodríguez Kuri identifies a similar logic, or an “infernal triangle” shaping politics in Mexico City: the official party (PRI), the city government, and the urban poor.²³ While the city government tried to control urbanization

²⁰ For a compiled volume on the history and architecture and planning that includes both the planned and the informal city see Enrique Ayala Alonso and Gerardo Álvarez Montes, eds., *El espacio habitacional en la arquitectura moderna: colonias, fraccionamientos* (Mexico City: UAM-CONACYT, 2013).

²¹ *Social Welfare*, 45. The conflict between politics and technocratic-expert knowledge is key for analyzing the linkages between state, government, and politics. In an influential essay, Octavio Paz identified a modern group of “technocratic administrators” and a political bureaucracy (that was not driven by any project but self-survival) as the factions competing for the control of the Mexican state after 1960: “El ogro filantrópico,” *Vuelta* 21 (August 1978). My views on expert knowledge owe much to Timothy Mitchell’s *Rule of Experts*. For a comparative study of Latin American cities that also deploys the opposition between expertise and politics, see Oscar Calvo Isaza, “Urbanización y revolución: técnica y política en Santiago de Chile, Buenos Aires y Ciudad de México (1950-1980)” (Ph.D. diss., El Colegio de México, 2013).

²² *Ibid.*, 39-54. For an analysis of the 1976 Human Settlements Law, see Antonio Azuela, *La ciudad, la propiedad privada y el derecho* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1991), especially Chapter One, “La propiedad urbana y la planeación,” 23-79.

²³ “Ciudad oficial, 1930-1970,” *Historia política de la Ciudad de México*, ed. Ariel Rodríguez Kuri (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2012), 455. In a less dramatic interpretation of Rodríguez Kuri’s “infernal triangle,” Emilio Duhau describes the conflict between party and government as potential or latent, at least until 1966. *Habitat popular y política urbana* (Mexico City: UAM-Porrúa, 1998).

through planning policies, the PRI sought the support of the city's urban poor, who, in return, demanded land and services. These men and women could not vote for a local government (the regent was appointed by the President) but they had the power of numbers to influence the official party.²⁴ In 1966, both sides finally clashed. When regent Ernesto P. Uruchurtu ordered the razing of two irregular urban settlements south of the city, a decision in line with his growth containment policies, the PRI-controlled Congress ousted him from office. The outcry against the razing had been loud, as resident associations, newspapers, and representatives joined forces against the regent. Thus the party defeated the government. Politicians overpowered planners.

This dissertation explains how planners and politicians managed urban growth in the decades leading up to this confrontation. Their partnership materialized in colonias proletarias, the most important form of low-income housing during Mexico City's urban explosion, between 1930 and 1960.²⁵ As explained above, colonias proletarias were promoted by the government but organized through grassroots participation with the collaboration of government experts. Crucially, colonias proletarias were under the control of two separate government offices—the Oficina de Colonias and Public Works. Whereas the Oficina de Colonias controlled urban residents through networks of patronage, Public Works integrated colonias proletarias into the city by providing them with roads, schools, parks, and connecting their streets with city grid. Whereas the first office sought to increase the number people under its control, Public Works was eager to contain the city, as a large horizontal city was more expensive to serve.

²⁴ Diane Davis, *Urban Leviathan* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

²⁵ For interpretations of colonias proletarias as a government policy see Manuel Perlo Cohen, "Política y vivienda en México, 1910-1952," *Revista Mexicana de sociología* 41, no. 3 (1981): 769-835; Antonio Azuela and María Soledad Cruz, La institucionalización de las colonias populares y la política urbana en la ciudad de México (1940-1946)," *Sociológica* 4, no. 9 (1989): 111-133; Cristina Sánchez Mejorada, *Rezagos de la modernidad: memorias de una ciudad presente* (Mexico City: UAM, 2005).

Coordinating both missions—the control over people and space—was at the heart of the partnership between planners and politicians that this dissertation describes.

In order to think about how planning worked in these seemingly unruly places, I have been inspired by scholars of *urbanización popular* in Mexico and Latin America, theories of law and the state, and intellectual histories of the “Latin American City.”²⁶ Viewing master plans, blueprints, and construction codes through a legal lens is helpful because it moves us beyond the intellectual history of urban planning—the history of ideas, their creation, and dissemination—and brings us closer to the outcomes of this planning (which are often unintended). Planning laws define what is legal and what was illegal. Building codes and zoning ordinances, for instance, are bent, broken, and interpreted in different ways, but they are consequential because they produce the categories of legality and illegality, as well as a spectrum of grey in between.²⁷ Seemingly outside of the law, colonias proletarias were swamped by laws and official

²⁶ I owe to conversations with Mauricio Tenorio and the generosity of Adrián Gorelik, who shared a chapter of a book in progress, the idea that the “Latin American City” is less a historical model than an intellectual creation, of which intellectuals such as Richard Morse, John Turner, José Luis Romero, and Oscar Lewis were part. As Priscilla Conolly has argued, an eclectic group of authors who studied popular urbanization in Latin America between 1970 and 1990 created what she calls a Latin American paradigm of urban studies. “La ciudad y el hábitat popular: paradigma latinoamericano,” in Blanca Rebeca Ramírez Velázquez and Emilio Pradilla Cobos, eds., *Teorías sobre la ciudad en América Latina* (Mexico City: UAM, 2013), 505-562. See also, on the proposition of the idea of the Latin American city (which I will discuss at greater length in chapters Four and Five), Adrián Gorelik, “Miradas sobre Buenos Aires: los itinerarios urbanos del pensamiento social,” in A. Gorelik, *Miradas sobre Buenos Aires: historia cultural y crítica urbana* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2004), 113-139; and Brodwyn Fischer, “A Century in Present Tense: Crisis, Politics, and Intellectual History of Brazil’s Informal Cities,” in *Cities from Scratch: Poverty and Informality in Latin America*, ed. B. Fischer, Javier Auyero, and Bryan McCann (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 9-67. For a broader history of “Latin America” as an intellectual creation see Mauricio Tenorio, *Latin America: The Allure and Power of an Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

²⁷ Different versions of this point have been made by Antonio Azuela, whose work is quoted throughout the dissertation. For the relationship between law and planning, I am also inspired in Brodwyn Fischer’s notion of “tolerated illegality” as put forward in *A Poverty of Rights: Citizenship and Inequality in Twentieth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 38. Another insightful interpretation of the relationship between planning laws and informality is provided by Ananya Roy, “Urban Informality: Towards an Epistemology of Planning,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71, no. 2 (2005), 149.

documentation such as property titles, neighborhood blueprints, and resident censuses. These documents set the playing field for the different groups that were active in colonias proletarias. Land impresarios, for example, claimed to follow the master plan and other municipal zoning guidelines. Lot purchasers stated that they possessed land titles and official alignments. Resident associations asserted their official status, recognized by the Oficina de Colonias.

Historians often think of cadastral maps and master plans as statecraft technologies that render society “legible,” enabling governments to collect taxes and pass zoning ordinances.²⁸ But these technologies also generate confusion, as attested to by the myriad mappings of colonias proletarias—from different scales and perspectives—that government offices produced. The Oficina de Colonias assembled resident censuses and blueprints in order to distribute lots among families. Public Works produced its own blueprints, which did not match those from the Oficina de Colonias. Urban planners surveyed colonias proletarias from afar, assisted by aerial photographs, representing them as low-income residential areas in a small-scale master plan. Because they viewed the city as a system of work, residence, and transportation they were unconcerned with local land conflicts, which were managed by surveyors, topographers, and political brokers. Other government officials were simply incapable of seeing colonias proletarias. Housing officials, for example, neglected colonias proletarias for decades because they were too busy devising schemes for the renewal of the slums (*vecindades*) in the city center.²⁹

²⁸ I am referencing again James Scott’s *Seeing Like a State*. A work inspired in Scott that has influenced my understanding of statecraft technologies, particularly in regard to surveying space, is Raymond Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

²⁹ This paragraph is inspired by suggestive essay by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Law: A Map of Misreading. Toward a Postmodern Conception of Law,” *Journal of Law and Society* 14, no. 3 (1987): 279-302.

These mappings of the city—small and large scale, representing people and space, rendering visible and invisible different city sections—produced a playing board where residents made claims or negotiated their “right to the city.”³⁰ For example, in peripheral areas bereft of official blueprints and outside of the city master plan, political brokers and colonia leaders had more latitude to make claims to land. It was more difficult to make such claims in more central, and thus better surveyed, areas of the city. Sometimes residents demanded and obtained full membership in the city. More often, at stake were *exemptions* from government laws or the “negotiation of disobedience,” in sociologist Fernando Escalante’s phrase.³¹ Negotiations between residents and the government hydra took place in what political scientist Partha Chatterjee calls a “political terrain,” a space “where rules may be bent or stretched, and not on the terrain of established law or administrative procedure.”³² In his analysis of squatter settlements in Calcutta, Chatterjee underscored the precarious nature of this political terrain, which depended on the equilibrium of power between the parties involved.

In Mexico City, the relationship between the government and the governed reached a remarkable degree of regularity, becoming, as urban scholar Emilio Duhau proposed, a non-written “social pact.”³³ Control was at the heart of such a pact, which entrapped the “migrant poor” and the “urban poor” in pervasive networks of clientelism described by such authors as

³⁰ Henri Lefebvre’s *Le droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968) galvanized a scholarly agenda around social justice, citizenship in cities, and the right to the city. See also Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

³¹ *Ciudadanos imaginarios* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1992), 292.

³² *The Politics of the Governed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 60.

³³ “La urbanización popular en América Latina: ¿institucionalización o pactos sociales implícitos?”, in *La urbanización popular y el orden jurídico en América Latina*, ed. Marco A. Michel (Mexico City: UAM, 1988), 19-30.

Wayne Cornelius and Susan Eckstein.³⁴ Broadly speaking, this “system” has a relatively fixed chronology, running from the 1930s to the 1970s, when the PRI lost its control over the urban poor, which splintered into dozens of “independent” groups.³⁵ These decades—the “Mexican Miracle”—are often viewed as a period of political stability and economic growth, a monolith that historians have only begun to challenge over the past two decades.³⁶

From a historian’s perspective, this period remains relatively understudied, even though the social sciences have long targeted Mexico City as an object of study. Following World War II, anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists interpreted Mexico City through broad frameworks such as modernization, dependency, and Marxist structuralism. The work on rural-urban migration, urban marginality, *urbanización popular*, patterns of production and consumption, housing supply and demand, and popular movements, has produced a burgeoning field of urban studies around Mexico City that has informed my work in multiple ways.³⁷ My

³⁴ Most of the literature on popular urbanization between the 1960s and the 1980s is organized around the distinction between state and society, the urban poor more particularly, as the title of several important works suggests. See Susan Eckstein, *The Poverty of Revolution: The State and the Urban Poor in Mexico*; Wayne Cornelius, *Politics and the Migrant Poor in Mexico City*; and Jorge Montaña, *Los pobres de la ciudad en los asentamientos espontáneos* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1975). These works were followed by Marxist analyses that denounced the control and cooptation of urban residents by the State. For representative examples of this position, see Juan Manuel Ramírez Saiz, *El movimiento urbano popular en México* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1986); and Jorge Alonso, ed., *Los movimientos sociales en el Valle de México* (Mexico City: SEP, 1986).

³⁵ The period between 1930 and 1970 is categorized by Rodríguez Kuri as that of the “Official City.” The process by which the PRI lost control over the urban poor is narrated in several works, although we lack a single narrative of this process of apparent disintegration. See the work of Jorge Alonso, Juan Manuel Ramírez Saiz, and Bernardo Navarro and Pedro Moctezuma quoted in the previous footnote.

³⁶ Examples include Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith, *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); and Arthur Schmidt, “Making it Real Compared to What? Reconceptualizing Mexican History Since 1940?” in Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubinstein and Eric Zolov, eds., *Fragments of A Golden Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 23-67.

³⁷ The work of scholars such as Martha Scheingart, Priscilla Connolly, Gustavo Garza, Rene Coulomb, Jorge Alonso, Emilio Duhau and Antonio Azuela—represents an essential and inescapable reference my research. For assessments of this generation of scholars, see Gustavo Garza and Araceli Damián, *Cincuenta años de investigación urbana y regional en México, 1940-1991* (Mexico City: El

dissertation is indebted to this work but adopts a more fine-grained perspective in explaining the relationship between what many authors refer to as “state” and “society.” It is more interested in the mechanics of growth than the larger forces driving it, zooming in on the creation of a city grid through such actions as the subdivision of lots, the organization of resident associations, and the allocation of lots. When the grid is read as a historical text, it reveals an assortment of groups that should not be reduced to categories like “state,” “government,” “society,” or “low-income residents.” Urban planners were a part of this assortment, but they were but one group among many others within government and society who participated and the urbanization and planning of Mexico City.

My claims to view state, government, and party as complex and multi-layered institutions might seem, at this point, trite. But we know surprisingly little about the twentieth-century city government, the Departamento del Distrito Federal (DDF).³⁸ Who controlled the DDF and such offices as Public Works and the Oficina de Colonias? What was the relationship between these offices? What resources did they have? Was there a general government policy towards popular urbanization? What did urban planning accomplish during this period? To explore these questions, I examine sources that have remained largely unutilized. Most historians have drawn from the presidential archives housed at Mexico’s Archivo General de la Nación (AGN).

Colegio de México, 1996); and Priscilla Connolly, “La ciudad y el hábitat popular: paradigma latinoamericano.”

³⁸ Useful starting points include Ma. Cristina Sánchez Mejorada, *Rezagos de la modernidad*; Rachel Kram Villarreal, “Gladiolas for the Children of Sánchez: Ernesto P. Uruchurtu’s Mexico City, 1950-1968.” Ph.D. diss., The University of Arizona, 2008; Michael Lettieri, “Wheels of Government: The Alianza de Camioneros and the Political Culture of the P.R.I. Rule, 1929-1981.” Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 2014; Robert M. Jordan, “Flowers and Iron Fists: Ernesto P. Uruchurtu and the Contested Modernization of Mexico City.” Ph.D. diss., The University of Nebraska, 2013; Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, “Ciudad Oficial;” Ignacio Marván, “De la ciudad del presidente al gobierno propio, 1970-2000;” Diane Davis, *Urban Leviathan*; Armando Cisneros, *La ciudad que construimos: registro de la expansión de la ciudad de México* (Mexico City: UAM, 1993).

Organized by neighborhood (under the heading “colonias urbanas”), these files document the petitions that resident associations sent to the president requesting land titles, urban services, or intervention over landed conflicts. While they provide a bottom-up perspective on the challenges faced by urban residents, these files offer limited guidance on how the government managed these issues because most of the time it was the municipal, not the federal government, that dealt with such matters.

When the presidential files are read against the more chaotic city archive, the Archivo Histórico de la Ciudad de México (AHCM), a more complex picture of the city governance emerges. Significantly, the fractures and miscommunications between the city and federal governments, as well as between different sections of the city government are revealed. The municipal government possessed a limited and partial perspective of the growing metropolis: cadastral maps, censuses, and blueprints were incomplete and unevenly shared. The municipal archive also holds the scattered papers, projects, and minutes of Mexico City’s planning offices: the Oficina del Plano Regulador, the Comisión de Planificación, and the Comisión Reguladora del Crecimiento de la Ciudad de México.³⁹ These documents provide a necessary bureaucratic complement to materials that historians of planning and architecture have used in their studies. Planning was not a failed practice that ended at the drawing boards, as historians sometimes

³⁹ Scattered papers from these committees can be found throughout the Archivo Histórico de la Ciudad de México, particularly the Fondo Obras Públicas of the Departamento del Distrito Federal section of the archive. *El Universal* journalist Adrian García Cortéz recorded the minutes from the Comisión de Planificación of Mexico City, a hidden gem for urban historians, who have used this source; see A. García Cortéz, *La reforma urbana de México* (Mexico City: Bay Gráfica y Ediciones, 1972). For an insightful analysis of the Comisión de Planificación, see Stephanie Ronda and Vicente Ugalde, “Planeación urbana en la ciudad de México en los cincuenta: controversias y debates en la Comisión de Planificación del Distrito Federal,” *Secuencia* 70 (2008): 69-100. In this dissertation, I add information from the Comisión Reguladora del Crecimiento de la Ciudad de México, the Comisión del Plano Regulador, the Comisión de adiciones y reformas al reglamento de construcciones, Comisión Mixta de Planificación, and additional minutes from the Comisión de Planificación, all of which, to the best of my knowledge, have not been used by historians.

posit. It was, instead, a generative force that transformed into bureaucracies that were not powerless and that shaped Mexico City, even areas that are often seen as the epitome of informality and poor planning.

Chapter Outline

“Planning a Mass City” is divided into five chapters. Chapters move in a roughly chronological order, but they also run in parallel tracks, each one focusing on how different groups—urban planners, political brokers, housing officials, and resident associations—viewed, coped with, and shaped Mexico City between 1930 and 1960.

Chapter One, “The Question of Urban Growth, 1860-1930,” serves as a historical introduction to Mexico City. It covers the years between 1860 and 1930, when, after a long period of stasis, Mexico’s capital began a process of rapid growth. Building on the strong historiography of this period, this chapter places urban growth at the center of the analysis, focusing on how this growth was interpreted and how the government attempted to control and shape it. The chapter then describes the beginnings of Mexico City’s first colonias proletarias in the 1920s, understanding them against the backdrop of the Mexican Revolution and the opportunities for political organization that it created. Finally, the chapter studies the emergence of urban planning within this context, analyzing urban planners as a group with new ideas about cities and who claimed a role in the development of urban policies.

The second and third chapters describe urban planning from two perspectives: 1) the bird’s eye view of municipal urban planners that materialized in a master plan; and 2) the large-scale, on-the-ground-process of subdividing colonias proletarias brokered by engineers, resident associations, and political leaders. Both chapters draw on extensive research from the

presidential files at the AGN and from the Public Works Section (*Fondo Obras Públicas*) at the city archive.

Chapter Two, “An Elusive Master Plan, 1920s-1953,” describes the attempt by planners to integrate a master plan for Mexico City. By analyzing Mexico City’s never-completed master plan, this chapter studies how urban planning ideas became municipal offices, policies, and laws. Through these laws and policies, urban planners asserted their authority in specific areas of the city while turning over other urban spaces to political bodies within the city government and independent political brokers. Integrating a Master Plan was a technical impossibility because Mexico City was too large to be rendered in a single blueprint. But the city’s incomplete Master Plan, I argue, defined a political arena, in which planners, politicians, and urban residents participated.

Chapter Three, “The Logic of Land Subdivisions,” complements the previous one by providing a perspective closer to the ground. Instead of examining powerful planning committees, I turn my attention to negotiations and conflicts between topographers, engineers, political brokers, and popular leaders in colonias proletarias. Since these neighborhoods were under the authority of the Oficina de Colonias and governed by a special urban code, they have traditionally been considered outside of Mexico City’s planning regime. This chapter demonstrates that colonias proletarias, long considered the epitome of the informal city, were thoroughly planned through the negotiation and collaboration between the offices of Public Works and the Oficina de Colonias. Therefore, it analyzes how two different forces—one technical, the other political—clashed and adapted to each other.

Chapters Four and Five analyze colonias proletarias in more detail and interrogate the incapacity of public officials and social scientists to understand them as anything other than a

problem. Chapter Four, “The Housing Problem, c. 1952,” explores the growth of Mexico City and how it challenged traditional geographies of poverty. In order to map this seismic shift, I rely on two main archival holdings. First, I look at the Oscar and Ruth Lewis Archive, which contains some of the richest ethnographic data on Mexico City’s low-income neighborhoods, particularly its central *vecindades* in the 1950s. Second, I follow housing policies enacted between the 1930s and the 1960s, centering on the activities of public mortgage banks and housing institutions (especially the Instituto Nacional de la Vivienda (INV), whose archive is guarded at the AGN) in charge of dealing with Mexico City’s endemic housing crisis. Here, I compare two juridical, cultural, and academic representations of the problem of urban poverty: the “*herradura de tugurios*”—horseshoe of inner-city tenements—and “colonias proletarias.” These terms captured old and new patterns as well as understandings of urban poverty. While inner-city slums had a long history of prejudice and attempts at reform, colonias proletarias were a new and disquieting phenomenon. Located at the margins of Mexico City, often far away from the city limits, colonias proletarias threatened to overreach the city’s municipal services. But this notion changed between 1930 and 1955. Initially deemed a potential source of social unrest and violence, urban planners ended up embracing colonias proletarias as a solution to the city’s housing problem, providing a viable model for popular urbanization and housing.

Spanning from the early 1930s to the 1950s, Chapter Five—“Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán”—tells the history of one of Mexico City’s largest urban settlements. The story of Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán is emblematic of many of the ironies and peculiarities of Mexico City’s urban explosion: agrarian lands overcome by urban sprawl; the migration from the countryside to Mexico City’s center, followed by the migration from the city center to the city periphery; and the unintended effects of mass political organization over the urban environment.

During the 1940s, Ramos Millán served as a testing ground for a string of unsuccessful urban experiments, as it failed to become a productive agrarian community, an industrial powerhouse, or a modernist housing unit. Instead, Ramos Millán became the only thing it could realistically be in 1950: a colonia proletaria that integrated thousands of migrants claiming a foothold in a new, unwieldy, urban setting.

While each chapter adopts multiple perspectives, conditioned by the institutions and actors that I follow, two general vantage points emerge from the complete dissertation: an aerial, top-down gaze upon the city and a bottom-up, grassroots engagement with it. This is not an opposition between “state” and “society” but one between representations and theories of the city, on one hand, and the very concrete work that building a city entails, as well as the impact that this work had on the lives of people, on the other. In the pages that follow, this opposition often translates into different writing styles. Some chapters and sections might strike the reader as too conceptual or abstract, as if they could describe many other cities aside from Mexico City. This is not only a consequence of my limitations as a writer. More significantly, it reflects the systematic knowledge of cities that planners had, which could be used to understand cities across the world, regardless of their unique histories and geographies. The small-scale master plans that planners produced, which divided Mexico City in residential, industrial, and commercial zones, exemplify this approach.

A different picture emerges when I adopt a perspective from below. The conflicts between planners, political brokers, and urban residents that I reconstruct are unique, irrefutable as the cement, the brick, and the countless men and women who lived in the colonias proletarias of the city. Planning appears, from this vantage point, as an endless series of conflicts for lots and streets in which engineers, landless families, and architects participated. My goal is for these

histories to become legible when read against master plans and zoning ordinances that have often been considered inconsequential. Then, master plans and colonias proletarias will appear as mirror images of Mexico City, illegible without each other.

CH. 1. THE QUESTION OF URBAN GROWTH, 1860-1930

“Many years ago, we were proud of Mexico City,” wrote Jorge Ibargüengoitia in 1969, “now it’s an incurable disease.”¹ What Ibargüengoitia described with humor others observed in dismay. Reminiscing in 1991 about 1940s Mexico City, architect Teodoro González de León recalled how he swiftly triangulated between his home in Colonia Condesa to the firm where he started his architectural practice to the cafés that surrounded the School of Architecture, still located in the city center. Every morning, at the exact same time, González de León would take a bus that ran from his home to the School of Architecture; every night he would walk back the same seven or eight kilometers in order to ease his mind after the long and eventful day. This routine represented an order soon to be lost. Mexico City was “splendidly” integrated, he noticed, up to the 1950s, a time when it started to decay.² Rather than signaling the dawn of a metropolitan modernity, the 1952 relocation of the National University to its current campus in the Pedregal, south of the city, marked the beginning of the disintegration of Mexico City. Other architects, such as Mario Pani, Reinaldo Pérez Rayón, and Pedro Ramírez Vázquez—the cohort that designed many of the landmarks that embodied the “Mexican Miracle”—shared this assessment of the 1940s, the period that predates Mexico City’s explosion. They all remembered a “charming city,” “whose scale was still urban,” destroyed by urban growth.³

¹ “Esta ciudad (I),” in *La casa de usted y otros viajes*, 96.

² “Entrevista realizada a Teodoro González de León por Graciela de Garay, el día 15 de agosto de 1991 en la Ciudad de México.” Archivo de la Palabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora.

³ Said Pérez Rayón: “[During the 1950s, Mexico City] todavía era una ciudad bonita, una ciudad vivible, todavía era una escala urbana. Sí, estaba dejando de serlo. Nuestra preocupación no era tanto modificar la actual traza de la ciudad como prever el desarrollo caótico de la periferia.” “Entrevista realizada a Reinaldo Pérez Rayón por Graciela de Garay, el día 29 de octubre de 1991 en la ciudad de México.” Likewise, Pedro Ramírez Vázquez lamented the decline of the small plazas that articulated urban life. “[E]l mall está sustituyendo a la plaza, porque era el centro de la actividad. En la plaza estaba el gobierno estaba la iglesia, estaba el paseo, y estaba el comercio, es decir, el corazón de la

A hundred years earlier, the capital of Mexico was also in the midst of a remarkable transformation. There was nostalgia then, as the words of historian Manuel Touissant bear testament: “Between 1957 and our days [1930s], Mexico City has become a new city, losing its personality, stripping away of its main traits, becoming a French city [*afrancesarse*].”⁴ But pride and wonder prevailed. “*¡Pero qué hermoso es nuestro México!*,” read a 1901 city handbook, marveling before the spectacle of a city illuminated by electricity, no longer bound to gaslights or the natural rhythms of day and night:

Centenares de chimeneas vomitan espesas bocanadas de humo de infinidad de fábricas, talleres, laboratorios y hornos; molinos de viento girando ya mansa, ya vertiginosamente, y una extensa y complicada red de alambres, que transmiten la palabra de un confin de la República a otro, o que conectan la electricidad de la luz o de la tracción de los vagones. Por doquier se ven palacetes, parques bien cultivados, monumentos, calles bien alineadas y amplias avenidas.⁵

Change was the only constant one could expect from modern cities. “Between these two epochs [Porfirian and pre-Porfirian], one that has already vanished for good, and ours, which will one day suffer the same fate, what a contrast!”⁶ Momentous as it was, Mexico City’s transformation would be dwarfed by the twentieth century. The handbook’s authors, Adolfo Prantl and José Grosso, were right. By the end of the twentieth century the Porfirian city had not

ciudad, era el corazón del barrio, y eso en distinta escala, chica mediana o grande y era a pie.” “Entrevista realizada a Pedro Ramírez Vazquez por Graciela de Garay, el día 6 de junio de 1994 en la ciudad de México.” Both interviews are located at the Archivo de la Palabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora.

⁴ “Un estudio especial debe hacerse del período comprendido entre 1857 y nuestros días, pues desde entonces viene a ser México casi una nueva ciudad que pierde personalidad al afrancesarse y ayancarse, sin plan definido; al despojarse para siempre de muchas de sus características.” Manuel Touissant, Federico Gómez de Orozco, and Justino Fernández, *Planos de la ciudad de México: siglos XVI y XVII, estudio histórico, urbanístico y bibliográfico* (Mexico City: Editorial Cvltvra, 1938), 16.

⁵ Adolfo Prantl y José Grosso, *La ciudad de México, novísima guía universal de la capital de la república* (Mexico City: Juan Buxó y Compañía y Librería Madrileña, 1901), 687.

⁶ “Entre estas dos épocas, entre la que ha desaparecido para no volver más y la nuestra, que correrá igual suerte, ¡qué contraste!” *Ibid.*, 688.

vanished but it had been subsumed into a larger and different city. It had become itself an object of nostalgia.

Centering on the decades between 1860 and 1930, this chapter serves as a historical introduction to the chapters that follow, which study in more detail the period between 1930 and 1960. Building on the strong historiography of this period, this chapter focuses on growth as both a problem and a challenge, interrogating its causes, meanings, and government responses to it. The chapter is divided into three sections. Section one charts Mexico City's urban expansion between 1860 and 1910. It describes the crystallization of a real-estate market, the segregation of the city by class and land uses, and interrogates the political and cultural responses to growth. The second section zooms in on the 1910s and 1920s, adopting the perspective of the tenant and resident organizations that, taking advantage of the political possibilities opened by the Mexican Revolution, demanded land, housing, and public services. The third section analyzes the emergence of urban planners in the context of fast urban growth, understanding them as a professional/expert group that claimed to have medicine to the ills of the modern city. The section then describes the creation of the Departamento del Distrito Federal (DDF), examining the connections between this government body and the discipline of urban planning. In addition to serving as a historical introduction to the dissertation, this chapter introduces a series of themes that will reappear throughout the dissertation: 1) the relationship between planning, politics, and the law; 2) the role of expert knowledge in governing cities; 3) the relationship between urban planning and history; and 4) the perennial challenge of surveying and representing cities.

Mexico City's Limits, 1860-1910

In a series of essays about the legal, historical, and political foundations of the “Latin American City,” historian Richard Morse identified “social incorporation” and “political control”—or the politics of exclusion and inclusion—as the central conflict traversing Latin American cities.⁷ These “flexible antinomies might be malleable enough to describe any city, Ibero, Anglo, or otherwise. In the case of colonial Mexico City, however, the politics of exclusion and inclusion were firmly anchored in its *traza* (grid) and *mestizaje*, both of which have elicited influential historical interpretations. At the heart of the Renaissance-inspired grid was a project of colonization as well as separation between the *república de españoles* and the *república de indios*, an order soon subverted, however, by the messy and unruly colonial society, of which *mestizaje* became the most powerful expression and metaphor.⁸ The desire for order and control returned in the eighteenth century in the form of the Bourbon reforms, when enlightened reformers launched a project to sanitize, embellish, and restore the classic grandeur of Mexico City, deemed lost to its plebeian vitality. The same aspiration for order returned during Porfirian modernization and then, once again, when twentieth-century urban planners drafted master plans

⁷ Richard Morse, “Cities as People,” in *Rethinking the Latin American City*, ed. R. Morse and Jorge Hardoy (Washington: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press-The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 3-19. Anglo cities, on the other hand, were marked by a conflict between liberty and order. In this and other articles, Morse developed urban matrixes drawing from classic examples (the Greek polis and the Roman civitas), Christian models (the city upon a hill), and interpretations of European medieval cities by authors such as Max Weber and Henri Pirenne. See also Richard Morse, “Recent Research on Latin American Urbanization: A Selective Survey with Commentary,” *Latin American Research Review* 1, no. 1 (1965): 35-74.

⁸ In other words, the irrefutable fact of miscegenation underscores the limits of the project of colonization, embodied in the *traza*. The relationship between urban forms such as the Renaissance grid and colonial society has of course, shaped the field of Latin American urban history, as the work of Richard Morse, Richard Kagan, Ángel Rama, Edmundo O’Gorman, and other writers shows. Richard Morse, “Cities as People”; Richard Kagan, *Urban Images of the Hispanic World, 1493-1794* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Ángel Rama, *La ciudad letrada* (Montevideo: Fundación Internacional Ángel Rama, 1984); Edmundo O’Gorman, “Reflexiones sobre la distribución colonial de la ciudad de México” [1938], in E. O’Gorman, *Seis estudios históricos de tema mexicano* (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1960).

and zoning ordinances with the goal of curbing urban growth.⁹ I am not making an argument about causality but pointing out the power of a series of metaphors—exclusion and inclusion, incorporation and control, the Renaissance grid and the contradictions of the Baroque—that have defined the contours of the historiography of Mexico City.

These oppositions are germane to the question of urban growth. Growth may seem a straightforward phenomenon but it is an elusive and sometimes invisible process. Even satellite photographs, which seem to unequivocally capture sprawling cities, conceal the questions of what a city is and where does it begin and end. This uncertainty is generated by the myriad meanings—architectural, social, cultural, and political—that we can ascribe to the word city, ranging from a “physical unit” to a “human association.”¹⁰ When the Spanish savant Francisco Cervantes de Salazar praised the beauty and order of the City of Mexico in the sixteenth century, a city without “suburbs and [...] beautiful and distinguished on all sides,” he refused to acknowledge the Indian *barrios* that extended beyond the *traza*.¹¹ Neither did he mention the thousands of Indians running their daily affairs in the Spanish city, or the many remnants of Tenochtitlán, the Aztec imperial capital, that were a familiar sight in sixteenth-century Mexico City.¹²

⁹ On the Bourbon reforms see Juan Pedro Viqueira, *¿Relajados o reprimidos?: diversiones públicas y vida social en la ciudad de México durante el siglo de las luces* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987); Esteban Sánchez de Tagle, *Los dueños de la calle: una historia de la vía pública en la época colonial* (Mexico City: INAH-DDF, 1997). On the Porfirian period, see Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ Richard L. Kagan, *Urban Images of the Hispanic World, 1493-1794*, 9.

¹¹ Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, Minnie Lee Barrett Shepard, and Carlos Eduardo Castañeda, *Life in the Imperial and Loyal City of Mexico in New Spain, and the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico: As Described in the Dialogues for the Study of the Latin Language* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1953) [1554], 51.

¹² My understanding of this invisibility of the Indian city for Spanish eyes owes much to Luis Fernando Granados, “Tres *civitates* y una sola *urbs* verdadera: Tenochtitlán, Tlatelolco, y la ciudad de México en el siglo XVI” (paper presented at the XIV Reunión Internacional de Historiadores de México, Chicago, IL, September 19, 2014). See also Barbara E. Mundy, *The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan, the Life of Mexico City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015).

The blindness of Cervantes de Salazar lived on in chronicles and maps that represented Mexico City purely as a Spanish city distributed around an orthogonal grid. Colonial and nineteenth-century maps often reproduce the invisibility of the city outside of the *traza*. This universe of barrios—physical neighborhoods and Indian communities—was of course connected with the city in myriad ways, even though it constituted a social system whose distinct rules would survive until the early twentieth century.¹³ In any event, regardless of the visibility or invisibility of these barrios, city maps display a remarkable continuity between the seventeenth and the early nineteenth centuries, a period when the population and the city limits remained unchanged.¹⁴ According to the calculations of historian María Dolores Morales, Mexico City barely grew in the first half century following Independence. Civil wars marked this period, during which the capital city lost power vis-à-vis regional power brokers. This was a time when the countryside conquered the city, or at least kept it at bay, frozen in its old limits.¹⁵

Following this period of fixed yet porous city limits, Mexico City expanded in unprecedented fashion starting in the 1850s. Such growth took place through the construction of new neighborhoods and the incorporation of old towns, barrios, and ranchos with roads and tramways. Countless streets and neighborhoods carry today the name of the hundreds of ranchos,

¹³ On barrios as physical spaces and human communities, see Luis Fernando Granados, “Cosmopolitan Indians and Mesoamerican barrios in Bourbon Mexico City,” Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2008. The classic work on the Indian communities or parcialidades surrounding the city was written by Andrés Lira, *Comunidades indígenas frente a la ciudad de México: Tenochtitlán y Tlatelolco, sus pueblos y barrios, 1812-1919* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México-El Colegio de Michoacán, 1983). For the long history of an old Indian barrio, which still possesses a unity within the megalopolis of the twentieth century, see Ernesto Aréchiga Córdoba, Aréchiga Córdoba, *Tepito: del antiguo barrio de indios al arrabal* (Mexico City: ¡Ediciones UnioS!, 2003).

¹⁴ María Dolores Morales, “La expansión de la ciudad de México en el siglo XIX: el caso de los fraccionamientos,” in *Ciudad de México: ensayo de construcción de una historia*, ed. Alejandra Moreno Toscano and Carlos Aguirre (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1978), 190-200.

¹⁵ This primacy of the countryside over the city in the first half century following independence is one of the defining traits of José Luis Romero’s “patrician cities.” *Latinoamérica: las ciudades y las ideas*.

haciendas, potreros, Indian *parcialidades*, and towns of all sizes and legal standing that dotted the Valley of Mexico, a legal patchwork that exasperated liberal statesmen, city boosters, and land developers (who were often the same) eager to create a homogenous and taxable real-estate market. Urban expansion also required controlling nature, particularly through engineering projects geared towards the “conquest of water” and the creation of a hygienic environment.¹⁶

While the conditions of possibility for this change were created by national developments—the political stability and economic growth achieved by the government of Porfirio Díaz—urban expansion took place across the world. Pre-nineteenth-century “walking cities,” as historian Kenneth T. Jackson called them, were characterized by their congestion and the short distance separating areas of work and residence, if such distance existed.¹⁷ Walking cities also displayed a mixture of functions in the same block or even in the same building, a condition that urban planners at the turn of the century would describe as anarchic, unhygienic, and most irrational. Walking cities were transformed by railroads and trolleys, which broke loose medieval grids and ramparts and reorganized patterns of production and consumption. Such transformation also changed ideas about the relationship between cities and society, inspiring a generation of urban theorists and planners—figures such as Ildefonso Cerdà, Ebenezer Howard, and Otto Wagner—concerned with the challenge, and enthusiastic upon the possibilities, of urban expansion.¹⁸ Sanitation codes, suburban garden-cities, zoning ordinances, railroad stations

¹⁶ For perspectives on urban growth from an environmental perspective, see Claudia Agostoni, *Monuments of Progress: Modernization and Public Health in Mexico City, 1876-1910* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2003); Matthew Vitz, *A City on a Lake: Urban Political Ecology and the Growth of Mexico City* (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming); Manuel Perló Cohen, *El paradigma porfiriano: historia del desagüe del Valle de México* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1999).

¹⁷ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 14-16.

¹⁸ Françoise Choay, *The Modern City: Planning in the 19th Century* (New York: George Braziller, 1969). For a short essay on how these urban thinkers influenced Latin American cities see Jorge E.

and tramway networks, among many other novelties, were developed during this period with the goal of controlling and shaping urban growth. Inspired in these models, governments and urban developers across the world launched a global urban transformation that still defines what we think cities ought to be.

In Mexico, developers proposed to the city government projects for building modern residential neighborhoods starting in the 1850s.¹⁹ They were following the lead of the government, which was undertaking its own initiatives of urban expansion, beginning with the opening of Reforma Avenue in the 1860s, a diagonal boulevard that broke the orthogonal grid and reoriented the city towards the southwest. Prantl and Grosso's handbook described the entire city as "crisscrossed by rails, where tramways run to modern neighborhoods, or faraway *rumbos*, or neighboring towns."²⁰ Jesús Galindo y Villa—editor of the *Boletín Oficial del Consejo Superior del Distrito Federal* and official city chronicler—wrote:

Nos ha cabido en suerte, a los de mi generación, asistir al resurgimiento, hacia la vida moderna, de la Ciudad de México; palpar su extraordinaria evolución; su ensanche prodigioso; la transformación radical de pocos de sus servicios municipales; en suma: a su progreso, del que sólo nos damos cuenta cabal, quienes lo hemos palpado, encontrándonos también [...] dentro del mecanismo municipal de antaño, que nos proporcionó (como el que estas líneas traza) la oportunidad de ser actor en semejante transformación. Libros enteros merecerían escribirse sobre asunto tan interesante, aunque se suponga tan local.²¹

Hardoy, "Theory and Practice of Urban Planning in Europe, 1850-1930," in *Rethinking the Latin American city*, 20-49.

¹⁹ Jorge H. Jiménez Muñoz, *La traza del poder. Historia de la política y los negocios urbanos en el Distrito Federal: de sus orígenes a la desaparición del Ayuntamiento (1824-1928)* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Cultura del Distrito Federal-UACM, 2012).

²⁰ "Toda la ciudad está surcada de rieles, por donde corren tranvías que se dirigen a las modernas colonias o a los rumbos más apartados, o a los pueblos vecinos." Adolfo Prantl y José Grosso, *La ciudad de México*, 687-88.

²¹ Jesús Galindo y Villa, *Historia sumaria de la ciudad de México* (Mexico City: Editorial Cvltura, 1925), 210.

Galindo y Villa distinguished between the “old,” the “totally new,” and the “modern” Mexico City. The old city was that of his grandparents, haunted by its colonial palaces, suburbs, legends, and traditions. The modern Mexico was served by urban services and animated by the “speed and agitation” of modern life.²² Contrary to Galindo y Villa’s opinion, this transformation was not merely a local affair but the outcome of a series of political, technological, and commercial revolutions that connected the globe. This globalization is a well-studied historical period. In fact, the field of Latin American urban history emerged in order to study precisely this period, when such cities as Buenos Aires and São Paulo embarked in a project of infrastructural modernization that allowed their integration into flows of commerce, investment, and migration.²³ Mexico City was a part of these flows and its resurgence between 1870 and 1930 part of this larger global transformation. Crisscrossed by flows of capital, technology, people, and ideas, Mexico City and other cities from the period materialized the entangled projects of state, nation, and market.²⁴

Mexico City’s transformation between 1860 and 1930 was shaped by several actors and historical processes.²⁵ The passing of the Lerdo Law in 1857, a longstanding liberal project,

²² “Consta México, de tres partes: el *México antiguo*, el de nuestros abuelos, el netamente colonial con sus casas solariegas, sus grandes vecindades, sus arrabales, sus leyendas, sus tradiciones, con su sabor a viejo e indiscutibles encantos; el *México totalmente nuevo*, *alzado ante nosotros*; y el *México moderno* incrustado en el primero, con sus barrios transformados gracias a las obras de Saneamiento, sus grandes y lujosos almacenes y el estruendo de la vida actual, toda agitación, toda nervios, rápida y bulliciosa.” Ibid, 212-213.

²³ Prominent examples of this first wave of histories are James Scobie, *Buenos Aires: Plaza to Suburb, 1870-1910* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); Richard Morse, *From Community to Metropolis: A Biography of São Paulo, Brazil* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1958).

²⁴ Mauricio Tenorio, *I Speak of the City*.

²⁵ This transformation has been studied by a group of historians who have analyzed the economic, social, and morphological logic of growth. The following paragraphs are heavily indebted to María Dolores Morales, “La expansión de la ciudad de México en el siglo XIX: el caso de los fraccionamientos;” Jorge H. Jiménez Muñoz, *La traza del poder*; Carol McMichael, “The Urban Development of Mexico City, 1850-1930,” in Arturo Almandoz, ed., *Planning Latin America’s Capital Cities* (London: Routledge, 2002), 139-152; Mauricio Tenorio, *I Speak of the City*; John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001);

untied an ancien régime “juridical knot” and made the transfer of communal lands to a real-estate market possible.²⁶ Thousands of properties belonging to the Church and Indian communities were purchased and subdivided by real-estate developers. The construction of railroads, tramways, and boulevards cracked open the old city grid, drove up land prices, and multiplied the connections between the city, its hinterland, and national and international markets.²⁷ Finally, the federal government undertook a project of statecraft, nation-building, and capital accumulation. This project materialized most famously in the environs of Reforma Avenue, where modern neighborhoods and spectacular public monuments were built. But the government also intervened in the poorer and more neglected eastern areas of the city, where a federal prison (Lecumberri) and the main branch of the sewage canal were built.²⁸

Three waves of development drove the expansion of the city between 1858 and 1910, according to María Dolores Morales.²⁹ Between 1858 and 1883 growth concentrated in the north. Subdivided in 1856 by the brothers Joaquín and Estanislao Flores and geared towards merchants and professionals, Santa María de la Ribera was the first modern neighborhood (*colonia*) of Mexico City. A few years later, Colonia Guerrero was developed with a working-class clientele in mind. Rafael Martínez de la Torre bought the land from the Hacienda de Buenavista, the

Erika Berra, “La expansión de la ciudad de México y los conflictos urbanos, 1900-1930,” PhD diss, El Colegio de México, 1983.

²⁶ Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, *La experiencia olvidada. El Ayuntamiento de México: política y gobierno, 1876-1912* (Mexico City: UAM-El Colegio de México, 1996), 92. Not all land was disentailed. Indian parcialidades survived at least until 1919, as Andrés Lira has documented, and one can argue that, with the creation of ejidos beginning in the 1910s a real-estate market never crystallized. See A. Lira, *Comunidades indígenas frente a la ciudad de México*.

²⁷ On tramways and trains see, respectively, Georg Leidenberger, *La historia viaja en tranvía. El transporte público y la cultura política de la Ciudad de México* (Mexico City: UAM Cuajimalpa, 2011); and John Coastworth, *Growth against Development: The Economic Impact of Railroads in Porfirian Mexico* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1981).

²⁸ Mauricio Tenorio, *I Speak of the City*.

²⁹ “La expansión de la ciudad de México en el siglo XIX: el caso de los fraccionamientos.”

Indian village of Los Ángeles, and the convent of San Fernando. *Vecindades* and *jacales* were built in the area by lesser developers and rented to workers from the nearby industries. The area grew fast, reaching a population of 10,000 by 1877, although water and lighting would not be provided until 1900. A different mode of development characterized Colonia de los Arquitectos, developed by Francisco Somera, a wealthy businessman who took advantage of his connections in the city government to acquire the land. Provided with urban services and situated along Reforma Avenue, Colonia de los Arquitectos provided, argues architecture historian Carol McMichael, a rubric for urban development that would take a life of its own during the decades that followed.³⁰

A second wave of growth between 1884 and 1900 was mostly comprised by working-class neighborhoods such as Morelos, La Bolsa, Díaz de León, Peralvillo, and Valle Gómez.³¹ These neighborhoods presented the municipal government with a challenge that it would continue to confront over the twentieth century: while it lacked funds to provide services to these neighborhoods it also lacked the will or capacity to prevent their growth. Popular colonias were a profitable business for their developers as well as a necessity for the city, since they provided low-cost housing for workers unable to purchase a home in a better served, and more expensive, neighborhood. Low-income neighborhoods, moreover, followed patterns of urban development that the government had set in motion. For example, the construction of the Hidalgo train station

³⁰ I am following for the most part Carol McMichael morphological analysis of these neighborhoods. For information on the developers, see Jimenez Muñoz, *La traza del poder*, and Dolores Morales, “La expansión de la ciudad de México en el siglo XIX.”

³¹ Dolores Morales, “La expansión de la ciudad de México en el siglo XIX,” 192. For a history of these northern colonias, see Gilberto Urbina, “Discursos y realidades. Los habitantes de algunas colonias populares al norte de la ciudad de Mexico (1875-1929), Ph.D. diss., El Colegio de Mexico, 2012. On working-class Mexico City, more generally, see also John Lear, *Workers and Citizens*; Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects*.

and the Prison of Lecumberri in the eastern periphery of the city, accelerated the subdivision of the land adjacent to these important sites.

These neighborhoods were not breaking municipal laws—they were not what would later be called informal. Urbanization codes were just being drafted, and still did not target neighborhoods bereft of urban services. But their construction was sanctioned by special permits or exceptions from existing codes and rules. For example, Colonia El Rastro was established in 1897 adjacent to the newly built slaughterhouse. The municipal Public Works Commission pondered denying the permit for the establishment of a colonia that was deemed outside of the “urban perimeter,” in a low-density area where the provision of sewage would be too costly. In the end, rather than forbidding it or extending the sewage system, the government decided to grant a special permission for the construction of Colonia El Rastro while deferring the provision of sewage services until the density of the area made of such provision a necessity.³² This was a remarkable admission by the city government, since it expressed what later governments would continue to do, albeit with less candor: give tacit permission for establishing a neighborhood while refusing to provide it with urban services. During the 1880s and 1890s the government began posting notices in conspicuous sites in order to inform residents which neighborhoods had not been granted permits and, therefore, would not receive urban services. Since “the city government has not authorized the establishment of a colonia in the area [potrero del Cuartelito],” read one of these notices, “it will not provide municipal services which will have to be acquired by the owners.”³³

³² “El Gobierno del Distrito Federal remite ejemplares del contrato celebrado entre la Secretaría de Fomento y el Sr. Carlos David Gheest para establecer una o más colonias al oriente de esta capital. = García Teruel y Pablo Macedo solicitan establecer una Colonia en los terrenos del Rastro,” AHCM-Fondo Ayuntamiento-Colonias. Vol. 519. Exp. 12,

³³ “Hágase saber al público que el Ayuntamiento de la Capital no ha autorizado [...] la creación de una nueva Colonia ni el trazo de las calles en el terreno situado al sur de la ciudad, entre las calzadas

Finally, a third wave of development took place between 1900 and 1910. Pulling the city southwest, along Reforma Avenue, this was the most remarkable wave, and the one that rendered city boosters the proudest. “European-looking” neighborhoods such as Cuauhtémoc and Juárez were fully served with modern urban services and soon became occupied by lavish mansions. As historians have shown, the city’s southwest development was part of a statecraft and nation building project. During the decade that preceded the centennial celebration of Independence in 1910, the government launched an ambitious urban transformation that followed a series of axes where power and history converged. The monuments and buildings built along avenues such as Juárez and Reforma—the Monumento a la Revolución, the Ángel de la Independencia, the Palacio de Bellas Artes, and many others—still constitute the major landmarks of the city, which bears testament to the success of this urban project.³⁴

Social inequalities materialized in the expanding city, a process that contemporaries noticed and that historians have described in detail. Hence Humboldt’s “City of Palaces” became, in the saying of sociologist and urban developer Gonzalo de Murga, a “City of Contrasts,” a phrase that he did not coin and that has become something of a universal urban cliché.³⁵ Two modes of urbanization characterized the city’s two halves. While neighborhoods in the west were provided with urban services and then occupied, their eastern counterparts were

de San Antonio Abad y del Niño Perdido (potreros del Cuartelito y anexos). Por lo mismo, no dará servicio municipal alguno, y los propietarios, para cumplir con las disposiciones del Código Sanitario, tendrán que proveer sus casas de desagües, de agua potable, y demás condiciones, por su cuenta exclusiva; considerando el Ayuntamiento de la Colonia que allí se establezca, como terreno de propiedad particular, sujeto a las disposiciones de sobre acotamiento y demás relativas.” AHCM-Fondo Ayuntamiento-Colonias. Vol 519. Exp. 22.

³⁴ Mauricio Tenorio, *I Speak of the City*; Barbara Tannenbaum, “Streetwise History: The Paseo de la Reforma and the Porfirian State, 1876-1910,” in Beezley, Martin, and French (eds.), *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, 127-50.

³⁵ Gonzalo de Murga, “Atisbos sociológicos,” *Boletín de la Sociedad de Geografía y Estadísticas* 6 (1913): 480.

first occupied and only afterwards provided with urban services, once their residents had petitioned for them from the municipal government.³⁶ Broadly speaking, both modes of urbanization would continue to exist over the twentieth century, leaving an imprint in the east-west division of the city.

Criminologists, sociologists, hygienists, and journalists remarked upon this segregation with fear and fascination. Writing in 1916, engineer Alberto J. Pani lamented that “the poor can no longer have recourse to their rich neighbors; they have been resettled away from us, beyond the city walls, abandoned to despair, brutality, and vice.”³⁷ The statement was only partially true, since it was the rich who abandoned the center, moving beyond the “city walls.” Criminologist Miguel Macedo noticed the feeling of security enjoyed by the “middle and superior classes,” whose lives were totally removed from the spaces where crime was most widespread. “The profound separation of the classes that form the social body,” Macedo wrote, their distinct “material, intellectual, moral [and ethnic] conditions” prevented any contact between them and inhibited the constitution of a community.³⁸ “The lettuce lives in La Merced while the flower lives in San Cosme,” wrote poet Manuel Gutiérrez Najera:

Rumbo a oriente quédanse los pobres, los tristes, los esclavos del trabajo, los que no ven más nubes que las grandes chimeneas. Los ricos, los felices, los desocupados, los favorecidos de la suerte, van camino de occidente.³⁹

There was little precedent for this kind of change because the possibility of cities growing indefinitely was a nineteenth-century phenomenon. Social scientists like Gonzalo de Murga and

³⁶ Erika Berra, “La expansión de la ciudad de México y los conflictos urbanos, 1900-1930,” 106.

³⁷ “Ahora, los pobres no pueden esperar nada de los vecinos ricos; se les ha quitado aun estas últimas migajas, aglomerándolos lejos de nosotros, fuera de los muros de la ciudad, abandonándolos a la desesperación y a la escuela de la brutalidad y del vicio.” Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene en México* (Mexico City: Imprenta de J. Ballezá, 1916), 119.

³⁸ *La criminalidad en Mexico. Medios de combatirla. Discurso pronunciado por el Sr. Licenciado Miguel M. Macedo* (Mexico City: Oficina Tip. de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1897), 7.

³⁹ Quoted in Ernesto Aréchiga Córdoba, “Lucha de clases en la ciudad,” 27.

Miguel Macedo were acquainted with the urban transformation taking place in England, Germany, and the U.S. during this same period, but the theories, models, and categories that made these changes legible were just being developed. These included Ebenezer Howard's "garden city," conceived in Britain in the 1890s and then adapted as an urban model throughout the world; the birth of regional planning, premised on the notion that cities ought to be integrated into larger regions, espoused by urban theorists such as Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford early in the twentieth century; or Ernest W. Burgess' concentric zone model, which posited a dynamic relationship between urban growth, land values, and the movement of social classes, developed in the 1920s amidst the emergence of the Chicago School of Sociology.⁴⁰ Urban growth was not simply interpreted by social science with a ready-made set of theories and categories. Urban growth—the modern city—was the context in which such ideas emerged.⁴¹

Urban Citizenship in Post-Revolutionary Mexico City

Mexico City's rate of growth decreased during the Revolution (1910-20) but by the early 1920s its real-estate market was back in full swing.⁴² Many revolutionary generals reinvented themselves as urban developers, a fact that revisionist historians used to indict the Revolution as

⁴⁰ My views on garden-cities and regionalism have been shaped by Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*; Rosemary Wakeman, *Practicing Utopia: An Intellectual History of the New Town Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); and Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*.

⁴¹ This point has been made by intellectual and cultural historians during the last three decades. My main inspirations are Andrew Abott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982); Wolf Lepennies, *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and conversations with Mauricio Tenorio, who introduced me to these authors.

⁴² According to Jorge H. Jiménez Muñoz's numbers, 20 colonias were established up to 1900; 28 between 1900 and 1910; 15 between 1910 and 1920; and 32 between 1920 and 1930. *La traza del poder*, 320.

capitalist, conservative, and bourgeois.⁴³ Carlos Fuentes' 1958 novel *La región más transparente del aire* mercilessly denounced these ventures. "This is why we made the revolution," reflected a character of the novel, "so we could subdivide Mexico City."⁴⁴ The ideal of a single family home—with a garden, modern kitchen, hall, and separate rooms for parents and children—was publicized by the press and promoted by the government.⁴⁵ The architecture sections that newspapers such as *Excélsior* and *El Universal* began publishing around these years informed their readers about architectural styles, building materials, and the advantages of modern neighborhoods. Government publications also praised single home ownership as a means for reinforcing family values. *Obras Públicas*, an official journal, advised government employees to "make of the home a place that one does not wish nor need to leave."⁴⁶ It also warned them against building their homes in the "*barrios bajos*" of the city. Employees were supposed to live in neighborhoods in line with their social milieu. As in other cities across the world, the growth of the city through modern subdivisions broadly inspired in models such as the city-garden was manifestly segregationist, in its intent and its consequences. And yet, homeownership was an aspiration shared across the social classes, as the multiplication of low-income subdivisions would make clear soon enough.

Ironically, these low-income subdivisions were developed through a different mode of urbanization, based on communitarian languages of politics and collective organization strategies. Beginning in the 1910s, a flurry of cooperatives, unions, improvement boards, and

⁴³ Arnaldo Córdoba, *La ideología de la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico City: ERA, 1973).

⁴⁴ "Para eso se hizo la revolución, para que hubiera fraccionamientos en la ciudad de México." Carlos Fuentes, *La región más transparente del aire* (Mexico City: Alfaguara, 2008 [1958]), 89.

⁴⁵ On the aspirations for individuality and privacy that homeownership materialized see Patrice Elizabeth Olsen, *Artifacts of Revolution: Architecture, Society, and Politics in Mexico City, 1920-1940* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), especially Ch. 6, "A Home for the Revolution: Patterns and Meaning in Residential Development," 199-232.

⁴⁶ "Control arquitectónico del desarrollo urbano," *Obras Públicas* 12 (December 1930), 286.

tenant and resident associations were formed with the goal of financing and petitioning land, housing, credit, and urban services.⁴⁷ A few of these associations had existed for a long time. Improvement boards (*Juntas de Mejoras Materiales*) were organized as early as 1872 to provide urban services to new neighborhoods.⁴⁸ During the 1900s, partnerships between government, employers, and workers were formed with the goal of building housing for workers, without much success.⁴⁹ But associations organized around land, housing, and services exploded during and after the Mexican Revolution, as a response to the expanded political horizons opened by this event.

The notion of a conservative capital removed from the turmoil of the Revolution has been debunked in recent years. As historian John Lear has shown, Mexico City had a vibrant working class culture that expressed itself in unions, mutualist societies, and cooperatives.⁵⁰ And as Ariel Rodríguez Kuri has suggested, the Revolution represented a rupture for the city, transforming in a matter of months long-held notions of what was possible, permissible, and desirable, and creating a fertile ground for political experimentation.⁵¹ In such effervescent context, thousands of low-income workers and employees fought for what we can anachronistically call their “right to the city,” demanding rent-control measures, urban lots, housing, and services such as sewage and roads.⁵²

⁴⁷ Erika Berra, “La expansión de la ciudad de México y los conflictos urbanos, 1900-1930,” 142-160; María Soledad Cruz, *Crecimiento urbano y procesos sociales en el Distrito Federal (1920-28)* (Mexico City: UAM, 1994), 136-147.

⁴⁸ This was the year when the Junta de Mejoras Materiales of Colonia Santa María la Ribera was established, as noted by Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, *La experiencia olvidada*, 97.

⁴⁹ For the history of some of these aborted housing projects, see Erika Berra, “La expansión de la ciudad de México y los conflictos urbanos, 1900-1930,” 101-106.

⁵⁰ *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens*.

⁵¹ *Historia del desasosiego: la Revolución en la ciudad de México, 1911-1922* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2010).

⁵² Or, to quote James Holston writing about twentieth-century Sao Paulo, the city “became the context and substance of urban citizenship.” *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and*

In response to this pressure, the government passed rent control decrees, distributed land, and built housing for workers. More significantly, the 1917 Constitution consecrated housing as a right, ordering that employees “furnish workmen comfortable and hygienic living quarters.”⁵³ These policies had limited effects, but they galvanized patterns of collective action and languages of citizenship and politics. Beginning in the 1920s, thousands of urban residents requested land, housing, and urban services to the government. Thousands of letters and petitions sent to the president and the regent during the 1920s and 1930s reveal the emergence of a new language for making claims, indebted to the progressive rhetoric of the Mexican Revolution and inspired in the standards of hygiene and propriety advanced in urban codes during the previous decades. For example, the Frente Único de Colonos de la Colonia Emiliano Zapata—one of many colonias bearing the name of a Revolutionary hero—informed in a 1939 letter to President Lázaro Cárdenas of their recent formation:

Nos es altamente honroso hacer del superior conocimiento de usted que con fecha 28 de mayo retropróximo ha sido formado por un grupo de ciudadanos en el pleno uso de sus derechos a la vez que compenetrados de la política del Supremo Gobierno de Nación, el “FRENTE UNICO DE COLONOS” de la Colonia Emiliano Zapata ubicada dentro de la jurisdicción del Distrito Federal. Y al hacerlo de su superior conocimiento esperamos de su reconocida justificación que contaremos en todos los casos con el apoyo que siempre han normado sus actos cuando se trata del mejoramiento de la clase trabajadora que, dentro de las normas de la rectitud y de la justicia, buscan a la vez que su mejoramiento económico y moral y beneficio social.⁵⁴

Modernity in Brazil (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 4. See also Brodwyn Fischer, *A Poverty of Rights*. For a review of these political movements organized around urban citizenship see Manuel Perlo Cohen, “Política y vivienda en México, 1910-1952.”

⁵³ Article 123 of the 1917 Constitution also declared that “cooperative societies established for the construction of low-cost and hygienic houses to be purchased on installments by workers shall be considered of social utility.” On the government responses to housing requests, see Moisés González Navarro, *Población y sociedad en México* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1974), 1: 143-214.

⁵⁴ Frente Único de Colonos de la Colonia Emiliano Zapata to Lázaro Cárdenas. June 1, 1939. AGN-LCR-418.2/153.

A couple of years later, in November of 1941, the “Comité Pro-Hogar para los Trabajadores de Salubridad” sent a similar housing petition to President Manuel Ávila Camacho. “Nothing is ever done for the working classes,” complained the committee members, while the powerful try to “annihilate us” by charging exorbitant rents for housing units worse than “pigsties.”⁵⁵ Basing their claims on Article 123 of the 1917 Constitution, the petitioners requested that the government subdivide and urbanize the lands of “La Joya” in addition to providing committee members with credit plans so that they could pay for lots, their urbanization, and the construction of their house in a bi-weekly basis. A similar language was used by developers who, smelling business opportunities requested tax exemptions and land grants from the government with the goal of constructing popular housing. The following request, for example, was sent from a developer to President Lázaro Cárdenas, requesting his support for a housing project:

Dar al pueblo, lo que urgentemente necesita. El Pan de cada día, ¡y el Hogar! Una pequeña Casita, Limpia, Higiénica, para todos los Trabajadores. Para todos los Maestros de nuestras Escuelas. Seguramente señor, que todo el Pueblo en masa, acudirá a contribuir con todo su esfuerzo, a levantar su propio hogar, que la Patria le da. [...] Hay que acabar Señor, con la Holgazanería de los desalmados Rentistas, que exprimen al Trabajador con su insaciable ambición, quitar ese enorme peso, de las espaldas que cargan el enorme peso de la usura, de unos cuantos desalmados, que deje de ser un brillante negocio el alquilar casas, y el Capital se derramará en el Fomento de Cooperativas, en Comercio Netamente Nacional, en la Industria Netamente Nacional.⁵⁶

Similar proposals were at the origin of the first colonias proletarias, which would become the most widespread form of popular urbanization in the 1930s and 1940s. Before becoming a government policy, colonias proletarias began as business deals between government officials,

⁵⁵ Comité Pro-Hogar para los Trabajadores de Salubridad to Manuel Ávila Camacho. November 15, 1941. AGN-MAC-418.2/36.

⁵⁶ Miguel Cardoso y Calderón to Lázaro Cárdenas. February 18, 1936. AGN-LCR-135.2/125.

private developers, and resident associations. Colonia Ex-Hipódromo Peralvillo, founded in 1922, exemplifies these beginnings so it is worth describing it in more detail.⁵⁷

A brainchild of President Álvaro Obregón, Ex-Hipódromo Peralvillo originated as a government proposal to distribute lands that it owned in the old racing grounds of Peralvillo among working class families. As historian Matthew Vitz has argued, the establishment of this colonia should be interpreted in the context of the massive tenant strike that shook Mexico City in the early months of 1922, when more than 45,000 tenants protested against the high rents and poor conditions of tenements in Mexico City.⁵⁸ Several architects, developers, and businessmen answered the government call and submitted different projects. Architect Guillermo Zárraga, an employee of the Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas (SCOP), made a proposal—which included floor plans, costs, and facades images—for low-income worker housing. A developer named Elfego Lugo submitted a financial plan for a neighborhood that would reflect in all its splendor the “social tendencies of the time.”⁵⁹ Describing developers as “exploiting octopuses,” Lugo proposed a joint venture between the government and a cooperative of residents. While the government would provide a land grant, each cooperative member would make monthly payments of \$40 over a 60-month period to amass enough capital to begin building houses. Then, the cooperative would negotiate with the government the provision of urban services for the neighborhood. Many other similar proposals were made during this

⁵⁷ Matt Vitz pointed out to me the significance of this colonia and led me to its file at the AGN. See also Moisés González Navarro, *Población y sociedad en México*, 1:198.

⁵⁸ Matt Vitz, *City on a Lake*, Ch. 2, “We Want Water”: The Politics of Hygienic Housing in the City.” On tenant movements see also John Lear, “Mexico City: Popular Classes and Revolutionary Politics.”

⁵⁹ Elfego Lugo to Fernando Torreblanca [Secretario Particular del Presidente de la Republica]. October 1922. AGN-O/C-711-C-51.

period.⁶⁰ Most of them had in common a progressive political language influenced by the Revolution, the use of legal and financial instruments such as credit for cooperatives, and (less commonly) blueprints and floor plans designed by professional or semi-professional architects.

In December of 1922, following the study of an “expert group of engineers,” the Congress approved a project for a workers neighborhood in the federally-owned lands of the Hipódromo de Peralvillo.⁶¹ An engineer employed by the SCOP subdivided the land, and a man named Jesús H. Abitia brokered the agreement between the government and the purchasers.⁶² Abitia was the key player in the operation and is representative of a local power broker that reigned in this period, halfway between a political leader and a land impresario. In the 1950s and 1960s, scholars identified this kind of agents as “urban caciques,” intermediaries between traditional forms of social domination and the modern urban context. In Wayne Cornelius’ influential work, caciques exerted ruthless control over colonias proletarias. Their power, however, depended on the support of the official party, which could easily abandon them if they became discredited in the eyes of the residents of the colonia and ceased to fulfill their mission as power brokers and guardians of the social peace. This happened often, proving that it was the party and not the man or the woman who held power in last instance.⁶³

A more powerful figure than these later brokers, Abitia did not control land but people. He did not own the land in Peralvillo but he controlled it and the government accepted and

⁶⁰ See, for example, the proposals of Jesús Monserrat and Jesús Cueva. Jesús Monserrat to President. November 30, 1922. AGN-O/C 711-C-51. Jesús Cueva to President. December 12, 1922. AGN-O/C 711-C-51.

⁶¹ *Diario de debates de la Cámara de Diputados*, December 21, 1922.

⁶² AGN-O/C 711-C-51.

⁶³ Wayne Cornelius, *Politics and the Migrant Poor in Mexico City*, 136-154. See also, on this latter period (1970s), Susan Eckstein, “The State and the Urban Poor,” in *Authoritarianism in Mexico*, ed. José Luis Reyna and Richard S. Weinert (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1977), 23-46.

reinforced his authority over the colonia.⁶⁴ Abitia also sponsored residents accused of invading privately owned lots adjacent to the federal lands. He was also invested as Honorary President of the colonia—which even carries his name in a few documents: “Colonia Jesús H. Abitia.”

Abitia controlled the distribution of lots in the colonia, but his role in negotiating urban services was less significant, at least during the early 1920s. Obtaining funds for, and securing the provision of water, sewage, electricity, and pavement—the most critical need for the residents—was the responsibility of Peralvillo’s improvements board or Junta de Mejoras Materiales (renamed as the “Sociedad Urbanizadora y Colonizadora del Ex-Hipódromo de Peralvillo” and then again as the “Sociedad Cooperative Plutarco Elias Calles”). The head of the organization, a man named Ramiro E. Martínez, counted with the support of Abitia, who would replace him in 1927.⁶⁵ To amass funds, the cooperative charged monthly fees from residents and organized events such as boxing matches and dances.⁶⁶

Soon enough, Martínez was accused by a group of residents of mishandling the funds of the colonia, overcharging its residents, and conducting the affairs of the cooperative in a sectarian manner. A rival organization, the “Sindicato de los Colonos del Ex –Hipódromo de Peralvillo,” was thus formed, led by a man named José Arcipresto. Arcipresto accused Martínez of setting an excessive price for sewage works (\$4 per square meter) and argued that he could secure a lower price (\$2.60).⁶⁷ According to Guillermo Zárraga, who authored a report on the conflicts of the colonia, Martínez stole monies from the cooperative in order to fund a political

⁶⁴ “[Secretario Particular of] Plutarco Elías Calles to Jesús Abitia.” January 5, 1925. AGN-O/C 711-C-51.

⁶⁵ Guillermo Zárraga, “Memorandum sobre la Colonia Ex-Hipódromo Peralvillo.” June 17, 1927. AGN-O/C 711-C-51.

⁶⁶ Memorandum a Plutarco Elías Calles. November 30, 1926. AGN-O/C 711-C-51.

⁶⁷ José Arcipresto to Ramiro Martínez, November 5, 1926. Ramiro Martínez to José Arcipresto. November 9, 1926. AGN-O/C 711-C-51.

campaign. On the other hand, Zárraga described Abitia as an honest man but a terrible administrator, as well as the only person who could fix the division within the colonia.⁶⁸ Such assessment does not explain the nature of Abitia's power but it nevertheless confirms it. The success of the residents in improving their colonia was ambivalent. According to a 1930 government report, the *mejoramiento* of the colonia had been supervised but not undertaken by the government, while its sewage had been successfully completed by the residents.⁶⁹

Hundreds of boards, cooperatives, and resident associations similar to that of Ex-Hipódromo Peralvillo were formed during the 1920s and 1930s. Colonia Portales, located southeast of the city and surrounded by agrarian land grants (*ejidos*), offers a well-documented case of the fight for lots and urban services spearheaded by these organizations. Unlike Peralvillo, the land that would become Colonia Portales did not belong to the government but to a private company—the Cía. de Terrenos S.A.—that had purchased it from an American named Herbert Lewis. The sale and subdivision of the land were carried out hurriedly in 1914, following a request made by a nearby peasant community for land grants. Dividing large tracts of agrarian land, subdividing them in individual urban lots, and selling them was a common strategy to prevent expropriations. Ironically, agrarian reform accelerated urbanization in these cases by making it an urgent matter to subdivide land before its expropriation.⁷⁰

Lot purchasers accused the Cía de Terrenos of selling them “*potreros por colonia*,” that is, paddocks or wild fields instead of the fully urbanized neighborhood that had been promised.⁷¹

⁶⁸ “Juzgo que Abitia no tiene ninguna dote como administrador, pero creo que en este momento es un elemento necesario para encauzar las nuevas actividades de la colonia.” Guillermo Zárraga, “Memorandum sobre la Colonia Ex-Hipódromo Peralvillo.” June 17, 1927. AGN-O/C 711-C-51.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Jiménez Muñoz, *La traza del poder*, 246.

⁷⁰ Ann Varley, “¿Propiedad de la revolución? Los ejidos en el crecimiento de la ciudad de México,” *Revista Interamericana de la Planificación* 22 (1989): 125-155.

⁷¹ Sindicato de Colonos y Vecinos de Portales. June 9. AGN-LCR 418.2/1.

Organized in a “Sindicato de Colonos y Vecinos de Portales,” they denounced the developers for subdividing land without authorization and breaking a section of the city Sanitary Code ruling that neighborhoods should be provided with water and sewage. The Co., they claimed, had lured them with promises and false advertisements of a modern and fully serviced neighborhood. Such newspapers advertisements, extremely common in the period, included “photographs of bungalows” and “blueprints that included a tramway station.”⁷² Despite its poor conditions, thousands of people continued to move in and purchase lots—fifteen thousand lived in Colonia Portales by 1935. The company, according to the claims of the “Sindicato,” sold lots numerous times, taking advantage of the absence of land titles, an official cadastral record, and the fact that many residents, discouraged by the conditions of the area, had abandoned their lots. Residents who failed to pay their installments were simply kicked out.

Many other cooperatives and federations were formed during these years. The Sindicato de Colonos y Vecinos de Portales forged an alliance with sister organizations under a wider front called the “Frente Único de Colonos de la República.” This effervescence reached its high mark in the 1930s, before these groups were channeled onto the party and the government through more rigid organizations after 1940. The municipal Oficina de Colonias was created in 1941 (replacing the Oficina de Cooperación) with the goal of streamlining requests for urban services and in 1943 the Popular Sector of the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM) was created in order to integrate urban groups into the party. Per Jorge H. Jiménez Muñoz’s numbers, more than sixty associations of urban residents coexisted in Mexico’s capital, organized under the umbrella

⁷² “La Cia que alucinaba al pueblo con promesas engañosas que hacían los agentes, mostrando fotografías de grandes sembrados con cálculos de utilidad, de bonitas construcciones de Bungalowos que la misma Cía mandaba a edificar, y creció la propaganda a tal grado, que la Cía y sus agentes repartían folletos ilustrativos y planos de la colonia pintando hasta una línea de tranvías eléctricos.” Ángel R. Pérez, Francisco Ochoa, et. al. [Sindicato de Colonos] to President Lázaro Cárdenas. August 25, 1935. AGN-LCR-418.2/1.

of larger federations such as the Federación de Organizaciones del Distrito Federal; Frente Único de Colonos de la República; Confederación Mexicana de Colonos Proletarios; Confederación de Colonos de México.⁷³

One of the accusations that the residents of Portales made against the Cía de Terrenos was its disobedience of the Sanitary Code, which ordered that urban settlements should have water and sewage. Moreover, they demanded that the President pass a law that stipulated the duties of developers towards lot purchasers, particularly in regards to the provision of public services.⁷⁴ The period between 1870 and 1930 witnessed a ceaseless output of codes, ordinances, and laws. This was an extremely contentious issue. Beginning in the 1870s, the departments of Sanitation and Public Works passed a battery of urban codes and ordinances that sought to establish who was in charge of providing urban services, what were the minimal standards for these services, and, more generally, who set the rules for the urbanization of Mexico City.⁷⁵ As historians have shown, the existence of these codes and ordinances, added to the languages of rights and social justice that the revolution made widespread, created spaces for making claims to water, electricity, or roads.⁷⁶

⁷³ Jorge H. Jiménez Muñoz, *La traza del poder*, 255-259. Most organizations were under the umbrella of the following associations: Federación de Organizaciones del Distrito Federal; Frente Único de Colonos de la República; Confederación Mexicana de Colonos Proletarios; Confederación de Colonos de México. On urban politics and resident associations in this period see María Soledad Cruz, *Crecimiento urbano y procesos sociales en el Distrito Federal (1920-1928)*; Erica Berra, “La expansión de la ciudad de México y los conflictos urbanos, 1900-1930;” Manuel Perlo Cohen, “Política y vivienda en México, 1910-1952.” A very useful compendium of primary sources was assorted by Alicia Ziccardi and published in the *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* 6, no. 2 (19) (April-June 1982).

⁷⁴ Manuel Sánchez Cuen to Jefe del Departamento del Distrito Federal. February 24, 1938. AGN-LCR-418.2/21.

⁷⁵ There was historically a tension between Sanitation and Public Works (doctors and engineers) over who set the rules for urbanization. Some of these tensions come to the light in 1940s discussions about the Construction Code for the city. “Actas de la Comisión de adiciones y reformas al Reglamento de Construcciones.” AHCM-Obras Públicas (OP)-Box 274-File 2.

⁷⁶ Rodríguez Kuri, *Historia del desasosiego*; Matthew Vitz, *City on a Lake*; Francisco Javier Delgado Aguilar, “La demanda de alumbrado y la formación de la esfera pública, Aguascalientes en la primera mitad del siglo XX,” in *Ciudades mexicanas del siglo XX: seis estudios históricos*, ed. Ariel

The first municipal ordinances regulating the creation of new neighborhoods were passed in 1875, a time when growth was an aspiration rather than a problem. The “Bases a las que se sujetarán las colonias que se formen dentro del radio de la municipalidad de México” provided fiscal incentives to developers but did not regulate matters such as sewage and pavement.⁷⁷ Increasingly stringent codes were passed over the following decades. In 1903, the city council passed the “Acuerdo que fija las reglas para la admisión de nuevas colonias y calles en la ciudad de Mexico,” which ordered that colonias be provided with sewage and that developers set aside areas for streets and markets.⁷⁸ A stricter code, the “Reglamento de Construcciones,” was passed in 1920. Whereas the 1903 code forced colonias to follow its tenets after their foundation, the “Reglamento de Construcciones” ruled that only previously-authorized colonias could be built. It also ordered that colonias follow municipal alignment blueprints, whenever such blueprints existed.⁷⁹ Starting in 1891, the Superior Sanitation Council passed its own Sanitary Codes, which regulated housing standards, industrial activities, and hygienic standards for public spaces such as theaters and factories.⁸⁰

This multiplicity of regulations—as well as their verbatim language over the years—naturally suggests their limited effects. As the case of Portales shows, developers continued to sell lots that broke construction and sanitary codes. Developers represented a common enemy for

Rodríguez Kuri and Carlos Lira Vásquez (Mexico City: El Colegio de México-UAM-CONACYT, 2009), 217-254.

⁷⁷ María Soledad Cruz, *Crecimiento urbano y procesos sociales en el Distrito Federal (1920-28)*; Gilberto Urbina Martínez, “Discursos y realidades. Los habitantes de algunas colonias populares al norte de la ciudad de Mexico (1875-1929).” On the 1875 Reglamento, see Ernesto Aréchiga Córdoba, *Tepito: del antiguo barrio de indios al arrabal*, 148; Carol McMichael, “The Urban Development of Mexico City, 1850-1930,” 151.

⁷⁸ Erika Berra, “La expansión de la ciudad de México y los conflictos urbanos, 1900-1930,” 188-9.

⁷⁹ Jorge H. Jiménez Muñoz, *La traza del poder*, 203-4. María Soledad Cruz, *Crecimiento urbano y procesos sociales en el Distrito Federal (1920-28)*, 123.

⁸⁰ Claudia Agostoni, *Monuments of Progress*, 57-64.

the government and low-income residents, becoming one of the most hated and despised groups in the city. From their perspective, they provided a necessary city service, increasing the number of property owners.⁸¹ Any further obligations—for instance, increasing the surface that they had to provide to the government or registering land with a notary—would ruin them or force them to increase their prices. By the 1920s, the question of who had broken which code seemed futile.

The question, rather, was who would pay for urban services and under what conditions. A 1924 municipal report offered a straightforward assessment of the problem:

Los problemas que al actual Ayuntamiento se presentan y se seguirán presentando a los que por muchos años lo sucedan, tuvieron su origen en los descuidos y lenidades de administraciones de otros tiempos, las que dejaron situaciones de tal manera complicadas, que su allanamiento sin hipérbole, constituye el desenmañamiento de una madeja, de infracciones municipales y sanitarias, y de intereses creados, que ya no pueden ser atacados ni destruidos. [...] aunque pobladas y llenas de construcciones más o menos sólidas y adecuadas para la vida, [las *colonias*] no han sido autorizadas, ni urbanizadas, ni recibidas por el Ayuntamiento, que se encuentra respecto a ellas en la situación de saber a ciencia cierta que existencia es del todo irregular y aún perjudicial, y no poder ni urbanizarlas por lo enorme del costo que tales obras requerirían, ni obligarlas a regularizarse, porque no existen medios para ello, pues estas colonias habitadas y construídas no están en el caso, por ejemplo, de una casa de comercio a la que por establecida ilegalmente se le cierra.⁸²

In 1929, the Departamento del Distrito Federal (DDF), found itself facing a public works crisis. There were 36 square kilometers without urban services in 1930, which represented an investment of a hundred million pesos.⁸³ The first regent of the DDF, José Manuel Puig Casauranc, lamented that his government had received “the baton from previous administrations which authorized the establishment of numerous subdivisions without municipal services.”⁸⁴ His

⁸¹ “Memorandum de estudio relativo a las condiciones del nuevo Código Civil para las compañías fraccionadores de terrenos,” reproduced in *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* 6, no. 2 (19) (April-June, 1982), 2.

⁸² Quoted in Jiménez Muñoz, *La traza del poder*, 191-192.

⁸³ José Manuel Puig Casauranc, “Por qué y en qué extensión faltan los servicios de urbanización en el Distrito Federal,” *Obras Públicas* 4 (April, 1930), 227.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 225. I quote the report in extenso: “El actual Departamento del Distrito, que solo tiene quince meses de existir, ha tenido que recoger la herencia de todas las pasadas administraciones, que autorizaron una infinidad de fraccionamientos sin exigir a las empresas correspondientes la implantación

diagnosis of the problem resembled that of the 1924 report, but the regent offered an assessment per neighborhood, which revealed the different dealings through which neighborhoods had been subdivided and provided (or failed to be provided) with urban services. For the most part, developers in the cuarteles 9, 10, and 11—outside of the old city limits—had failed to provide the urban services ordered by the law. He thus revealed an array of deals through which his administration had started to fix the problem. The municipal public works office, improvement boards, and unnamed resident associations had accomplished the provision of water, sewage, and roads through different schemes of finance, labor, and expertise. It also included a map, that clearly showed how the peripheries of the city were poorly serviced [Fig. 1.2].

Government officials and city experts agreed that illegal neighborhoods needed to be regulated and that larger government powers were required to take control of urban growth and distribute urban services throughout the city. Neighborhoods unserved by urban services were not new. Ever since the first residential neighborhoods were built in the 1850s, other, less affluent and poorly served colonias were built as well. But the problem was aggravated by the growth of the city in the previous decades, by the awareness of city residents that urban services constituted a right, and by the fact that they were willing to organize and fight for this right.

de ningún servicio municipal [...] Es tal el número de fraccionamientos hechos en esas condiciones que se necesitará de la labor intensa de muchos años y de recursos extraordinarios, ya que no bastarán para el caso los ingresos comunes, para urbanizarlos y ponerlos en pie de igualdad con aquellos distritos urbanos que sí disfrutaban de todos los servicios.”

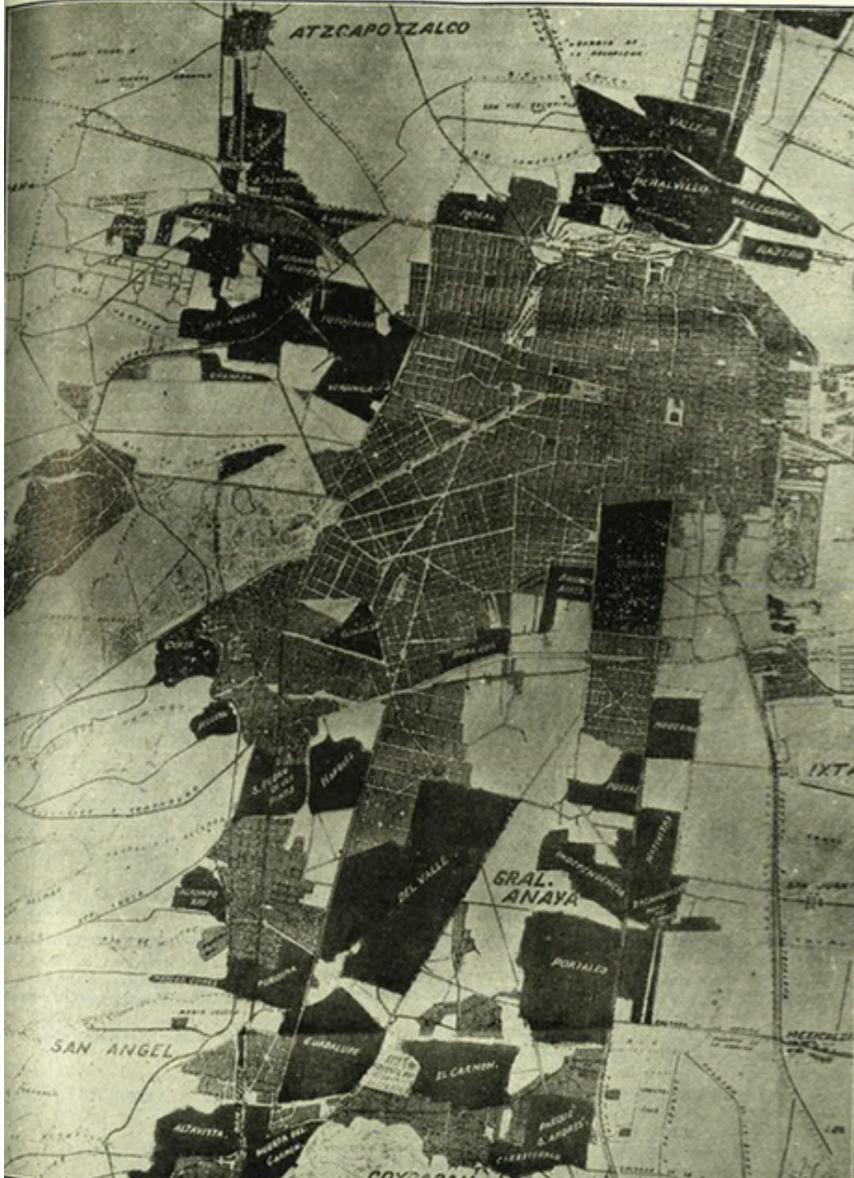


Fig. 1.1 *Obras Públicas* (1930). The areas in darker colors did not have urban services, or were serviced in a very deficient manner. It amounted to 36 square kilometers.

Urban Planning and the Creation of the Departamento del Distrito Federal

Conflicts between developers, government, and residents shaped growth in twentieth-century Mexico City. This section charts the beginnings of urban planning in Mexico in the context of these cleavages, of the urban transformation that produced them, and of the government reforms that sought to control this transformation. Urban planners justified their claims to regulate urbanization by asserting that their expert knowledge represented *the* solution to the problem of

the modern city. This was a complex problem, but it was vividly conjured by the specter of the disorderly nineteenth-century city: overcrowded, unhygienic, and irrational.⁸⁵ Such vision of disorder was produced by the categories through which planners interpreted cities. Rather than adhering to a single vision of an “ideal city,” planners espoused categories through which cities could be read: residential, industrial, and commercial zones; central business district, garden-city, and regionalization; traffic, slums, circulation. Planners won an ambivalent triumph. On the one hand, the language and policy proposals that they put forward—master plans, zoning codes, the idea of planning itself—were consecrated in laws, codes, policies, and offices. But the existence of planning laws did not guarantee that planners could simply use them, and neither did it guarantee that they would have the effects desired by them. In the 1920s, planners discovered that they lacked the comprehensive knowledge of the city that these policies necessitated. Over the following decades they also found out that the broader process of planning encompassed an integration between different levels of government, from high-level planners to municipal engineers, surveyors, and topographers, to the countless resident associations and their leaders that were appearing during this period.

When Puig Casaurac described with the zeal of a newly appointed administrator the conditions of Mexico City’s delegaciones, which had just become part of the Departamento del Distrito Federal, he was justifying the existence of this new administrative body, as well as the utility of his own job as regent. Part of this justification was provided by the discipline of urban

⁸⁵ Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, UK; New York, NY, USA: Blackwell, 2002) [1998], especially Ch. 1, “The City of Dreadful Night,” 13-47. For an insightful essay on how generative the specter of the late nineteenth-century city was for later visions of what a rational city ought to look like see Ananya Roy, “Transnational Trespassings: The Geopolitics of Urban Informality,” in *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia*, ed. A. Roy and Nezar AlSayad (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 289-317.

planning. Wider (regional) and deeper government powers were required to deal with increasing population densities and metropolitan scales: industries required regulation, minimum social welfare was necessary if the city was not to be destroyed by epidemics, the provision of urban services demanded stronger and more integrated municipal powers. This administrative and ideological drive towards centralization and regionalization culminated in the creation of the Departamento del Distrito Federal on January 1, 1929.

Over the nineteenth century Mexico City found itself under a series of overlapping jurisdictions, an ambiguous state of affairs that still persists.⁸⁶ Following Independence it became a national capital as well as part of the Distrito Federal, a rather artificial jurisdiction ruled by a governor appointed by the national president. Without a Constitution, and with the federal government residing in it, the jurisdictional conflicts between the city council (Ayuntamiento) and the federally appointed governor became a contentious issue.⁸⁷ As the capital of empires and nations, Mexico City was always symbolic center, prone to conquest by armies of all colors. But from an administrative perspective, Mexico City was simply another municipality within the Distrito Federal, no different than Tacuba or San Angel.

The creation of DDF followed a political as well as a technical logic, justified by urban planning. Politically, the DDF eliminated the autonomy of the local municipalities, putting the entire Distrito Federal under the grip of a regent appointed by the president.⁸⁸ This national control over the city was not new, as we just saw. In fact, in the exposition of motives for the reform

⁸⁶ As I write (2016), the city is in the process of gaining the same status as the rest of the states in the federation. Its name has been changed from Distrito Federal to Mexico City and a Constitution has just been drafted, for the first time in its history.

⁸⁷ Ariel Rodríguez Kourí, *La experiencia olvidada*; Hira de Gortari and Regina Hernández Franyuti, *La ciudad de México y el Distrito Federal: una historia compartida, vol. 4* (Mexico City: DDF-Instituto de Investigaciones Mora, 1988).

⁸⁸ Ariel Rodríguez Kourí, *La experiencia olvidada*, 21.

proposal, President Álvaro Obregón argued that throughout the nineteenth century the municipal power existed only in “theory,” because the federal government “absorbed” its functions.⁸⁹ Since the national government had de facto ruled over Mexico City over most of the nineteenth century, the taking over of the city administration by the federal government simply normalized a fait accompli.

Along with this political rationale, Obregón offered technical arguments that borrowed ideas put forward by planners during the previous decade. Planners, architects, and engineers had lamented for a long time the weakness of the city council and the absence of a regional governing body. Shortly before Obregón proposed the creation of the DDF, for instance, architect Luis Prieto y Souza argued that the city council was unprepared to guide the growth of the city. Sacrificing such representative body was a small price to pay for “securing the unity of Mexico City and the proper distribution of urban services.”⁹⁰ The government of the Federal District by a set of inchoate city councils made it impossible to manage the expansion of Mexico City and its integration with its neighboring towns, a process that transformed the entire Valley of Mexico in the second half of the nineteenth century. This metropolitan integration could be led more efficiently by a single, expert body.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Cámara de Diputados, *Diario de debates*, May 14, 1928, <http://cronica.diputados.gob.mx/> (accessed October 2016). In 1903 the national government federalized the government of the city, turning the Ayuntamiento of Mexico City into a consulting body for the president, a state of affairs that ran until 1917. Hence, in Obregón's argument, the period between 1903 and 1917 was the only one when the fallacy of the municipio in Mexico City was kept.

⁹⁰ “No merecemos por de pronto más que el severo control del Gobierno del Distrito en la Capital, tendría la ventaja de que bajo su dirección se salvaría la unidad de la Ciudad de México y la eficacia de los servicios públicos, a cambio del famoso Municipio Libre. A fin y al cabo no perdemos un tesoro tan grande si se nos priva del goce de un espectáculo democrático, que hasta como simulacro, resulta cada vez más inverosímil y aburrido.” *El Universal*, January 13, 1928, cited in Gerardo G. Sánchez Ruiz, “El contexto que rodeó a las propuestas de planificación del arquitecto Carlos Contreras,” 21.

⁹¹ *Diario de debates*, May 14, 1928. For a review of the debates see Sergio Miranda Pacheco, *La creación del Departamento del Distrito Federal*, 9-11.

Even Obregón’s opponents agreed with this line of reasoning. For instance, Vicente Lombardo Toledano—at the time a congress representative from the Bloque Laborista—rejected the disappearance of the municipality as an anti-democratic measure but supported the technical arguments in favor of the creation of the DDF, which were close to principles that he cherished.⁹² Lombardo Toledano’s congressional intervention in opposition to the DDF attests, ironically, to the percolating of planning principles across government and society. The labor leader was something of a dilettante planner. In 1925, he had attended the IX International Congress of Housing and Urban Planning in New York as a representative of the city council. His arguments before Congress in 1928 are significant because they suggest how planning ideas and categories permeated a wider public sphere. Full of references to the “science of city planning,” Lombardo Toledano’s long allocution shifted the question of Mexico City’s government from city to region. The municipal life of the valley ought to be solved integrally, he argued: “sociologically, economically, politically, morally, and aesthetically.” His goal was twofold: achieving a regional integration that also respected the uniqueness and autonomy of the many parts that were to be united. As an example of what regional integration and political autonomy might look like, he offered Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City as a model for a regional democratic integration.⁹³

Lombardo Toledano lamented the absence of sociological studies that could lend support to his vision. History and geography, however, could do the job. Lombardo Toledano brandished before Congress a reproduction of the Mendoza Codex as an example of an “*ensayo de zonificación*.” He remarked that the Aztec capital was divided according to economic activities,

⁹² Lombardo Toledano’s intervention can be read at the *Diario de debates*, May 16, 1928, <http://cronica.diputados.gob.mx/> (accessed October 2016).

⁹³ Among the authors mentioned by Lombardo Toledano were August Bruggeman and Jacques Gréber, “Circulaciones y Transportes;” G. L. Pépler, “Caminos arteriales;” Raymond Unwin, “Metodos de descentralización;” Montagu Harris, “Ciudades satélites y gobierno local;” and Ebenezer Howard, “Garden Cities of Tomorrow.”

harmony integrated with its surroundings, and did not suffer from the same ills that plagued the Federal District.

Este plano [...] nos enseña no solamente el que dibujó la estructura de la gran población de nuestros antepasados, el crecimiento de ella misma y su área desde el punto de vista geográfico, sino que también nos demuestra con claridad impecable cuál era el concepto de la vida, en que forma estaba repartida la propiedad, cómo la casa habitación ocupaba un sitio en un lugar perfectamente amplio, a la manera de los solares españoles, con jardín y verdura; lo que se quiere hoy, en suma; una casa habitación rodeada de jardín; y después, obedeciendo el trazo de la ciudad a los grandes ejes que eran las calzadas y los canales que comunicaban con las poblaciones lacustres circunvecinas, viene lo que llamarían los arquitectos contemporáneos “un ensayo de zonificación,” o sea una especie de ordenamiento de la población de la Gran Tenochtitlán por razones de oficios, de profesiones, de producción agrícola, de intercambio comercial, de la ubicación de los edificios de carácter público, etcétera. Al mismo tiempo nos enseña ese plano de la Gran Tenochtitlán como se pensaba desde entonces en un posible crecimiento de la misma urbe, y no obstante que llegó a tener, como saben los compañeros, un millón de habitantes, no se advierte en este plano ninguno de los problemas de la aglomeración de las ciudades contemporáneas.⁹⁴

Lombardo Toledano offered a journey through other maps and epochs, from the seventeenth-century plans of Enrico Martínez and Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora, to Diego García Conde’s neoclassic rendering of the city, to twentieth-century cadastral and sewage plans. The point of this historical evidence was demonstrating the “economic and social significance that the nucleus known as Mexico City had upon the rest of the valley” as well as the “enormous importance, the social, economic, and moral influence that the valley as a social and geographic unit has over the great city.” By using old maps to justify a territorial reorganization of the city government, Lombardo Toledano was giving “historical legitimacy” to a state territorial project.⁹⁵ History and planning united, as they would do in several other instances over the following years. In 1938, for example, Carlos Contreras—Mexico’s most important planner—invited historians such as Manuel Toussaint, Federico Gómez de Orozco, Justino Fernández, and Edmundo

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ In making this argument, I am inspired by Raymond Craib’s insights about the relationship between history, geography, state, and nation. *Cartographic Mexico*, 50.

O’Gorman to contribute to the XVI International Congress on Housing and Planning in Mexico City (more on Contreras and the congress below). The expansion of the city could only be undertaken once planners identified the “basic elements of the urban nucleus,” knowledge that historians were uniquely prepared to offer.⁹⁶

In addition to the ideal of a metropolitan integration commanded by the government, the creation of the DDF was inspired in scientific ideas about the interdependency of society that generated a new public morality. Legal thought and political languages between 1900 and 1960, legal scholar Duncan Kennedy has argued, were premised upon the idea of The Social, that is, the belief that all members of society were interdependent and that society was an irrefutable social fact.⁹⁷ The politics of The Social could take leftwing or rightwing forms, from but its common enemy was classic liberalism, labelled as overly deductive and individualistic.

Mexican positivist reformers such as Justo Sierra and Andrés Molina Enríquez, who did not make claims based upon abstract rights but upon scientific, positivistic, understandings of class, race, or nation, fall within this analytic category.⁹⁸ The Social also informed the thinking of a later cohort of urban reformers. In 1921, a manifest for an authoritarian and enlightened city government was written by one of these reformers, a municipal engineer named Modesto T. Rolland.⁹⁹ At the heart of Rolland’s argument was an indictment of the market as a means for

⁹⁶ “Conociendo la ciudad y contando con documentación estadística precisa, [el urbanista] podrá con mayor justeza aquilatar los diversos valores que constituyen los elementos básicos de un núcleo urbano y, conociéndolos, más obligado se sentirá a realzarlos y naturalmente a respetarlos.” Carlos Contreras, “Prólogo,” in *Planos de la ciudad de México*, Manuel Toussaint, Federico Gómez de Orozco, and Justino Fernández (Mexico City: UNAM-XVI Congreso Internacional de Planificación y de la Habitación, 1938), 9.

⁹⁷ Duncan Kennedy, “Two Globalizations of Law & Legal Thought: 1850-1968,” *Suffolk University Law Review* 36, no. 3 (2003): 631-679; see also Daniel T. Rodgers, “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 (1982): 113-123.

⁹⁸ Charles Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

⁹⁹ *El desastre municipal en la República mexicana* (Mexico City, 1939) [1921].

organizing society. Overcrowding in slums, for example, did not result from racial and cultural atavisms—a commonsensical notion at the time—but the selfish interests of landlords, which could be curbed through fiscal regulations. Alberto J. Pani had made the same point in 1916, explaining that *vecindades* were not (only) a cultural phenomenon but (mostly) a manifestation of unharnessed capitalism.¹⁰⁰

For Pani and Rolland, the interests of the individual and the needs of Society were antagonistic, and there was no question as to which should be favored. Only the state could protect society from the tyranny of private interests. Rolland proposed, for example, a progressive real estate tax. Land in the city center, he argued, was more expensive because it was used by the most people; since the value of this land resulted from its use by the collectivity, its owners should be taxed more highly.¹⁰¹ These ideas were not political but scientific, demonstrated by the science of urban planning. According to the *ciencia de planificación de las ciudades*:

la urbe debe construirse por expertos en agricultura, jardinería, perspectiva en ingeniería, sanidad, transportes, aguas, luz, etc. Esta ciencia enseña la manera de considerar la vida de miles o millones de individuos como el arquitecto común considera las necesidades y los gustos de una familia particular. ESTA NUEVA CIENCIA HA DISMINUIDO EL COSTO DE LA VIDA, TIENDE A RESOLVER EL PROBLEMA DE LA HABITACION, ASEGURA EL CONFORT, Y NO SOLAMENTE SE PREOCUPA POR LA HERMOSURA DE LAS CIUDADES, PUESTO QUE ESTA ES SOLO UN ACCIDENTE, SINO QUE SU RAZON FUNDAMENTAL ES EL BIENESTAR DE LA COMUNIDAD.¹⁰²

Carlos Contreras was the undisputed leader of Mexico's planning crusade. Contreras studied architecture at Columbia University in the early 1920s and was influenced by the Burnham Plan of Chicago (1909) and the Regional Plan of New York and its Environs (1928).

¹⁰⁰ Pani, *La higiene en México*, 90.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 68.

He was part of a young cohort of architects and planners who attended American rather than European universities.¹⁰³ Contreras, “has done more to push planning than any single person,” wrote Francis Violich, an American planner who spun long-lasting webs of friendship and partnership during his travels across Latin America in 1939-40. Contreras, he added, was “trained in the United States, knows our methods, and is in constant touch with us through the American Society of Planning Officials and other agencies.”¹⁰⁴ In March of 1925, he published an article in *El Universal* entitled “La planificación de la República Mexicana,” a call to arms to plan cities, regions, and the country as a whole. Later that year a translated and slightly edited version of his article—“National Planning Project for the Republic of Mexico”—was published in the first number of *City Planning*, the journal of the American City Planning Institute.¹⁰⁵ As Violich pointed out, Contreras was fluent in both languages. The English version of his piece promoted the need to draft zoning legislations “in regard to racial characteristics,” a reference to race not included in the *El Universal* version.¹⁰⁶ Regardless of such differences, zoning—and planning more generally—was everywhere “socially exclusionary in its purpose and its

¹⁰³ On the connection between Latin American and U.S. planners and institutions, see Adrián Gorelik, “Pan-American Routes: A Continental Planning Journey Between Reformism and the Cultural Cold War,” *Planning Perspectives* 32, no. 1 (2017): 47-66; and Arturo Almandoz, “Urbanization and Urbanism in Latin America: From Haussman to CIAM,” in *Planning Latin America’s Capital Cities*, Arturo Almandoz, ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 21. The shift from Europe to the U.S. was not absolute. Mario Pani, younger than Contreras, studied in Paris.

¹⁰⁴ Francis Violich, *Cities of Latin America: Housing and Planning to the South* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1944), 162.

¹⁰⁵ *City Planning* 1, no. 1 (1925): 97-109; “La planificación de la República Mexicana,” *El Universal*, March 15, 1925.

¹⁰⁶ “Proper legislation must be carefully prepared by competent attorneys and city planning advisers, and presented to all legislatures throughout the Republic of Mexico, for approval and enforcement. Sight must not be lost of all matters pertaining to Social organization and its problems, and to Zoning in regard to racial characteristics, as well as in regard to the kind of natural products of the region.” “National Planning Project for the Republic of Mexico,” 97.

impact.”¹⁰⁷ In Washington, Rio de Janeiro, or Mexico City, zoning sought to protect the value of certain zones by excluding undesirable industries, commerce, and people.

Contreras was nothing if not a booster. He was everywhere during the 1920s and 1930s: writing opinion pieces, drafting laws, organizing committees and conferences, editing journals, and preparing master plans.¹⁰⁸ Professionalizing urban planning—forming professional networks, systematizing knowledge, claiming an expert field—was the goal of these actions.¹⁰⁹ In 1927, the Asociación Nacional para la Planificación de la República Mexicana (APRM) was founded with the objective of disseminating the “national and regional problems of city planning as well as housing.”¹¹⁰ The association, of which Contreras was president, brought together planners, architects, engineers, and a wider assortment of industrialists, businessmen, environmentalists, and artists.¹¹¹ *Planificación*, the association journal, published the genealogy, priorities, and obsessions of Mexican urban planners. For the most part, it served as a platform for disseminating planning ideas as well as successful examples of the practice of planning,

¹⁰⁷ Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 39.

¹⁰⁸ For a sample Contreras’ writings, introduced by a series of essays putting the planner in historical context, see Gerardo Sánchez Ruiz, ed. *Planificación y urbanismo visionarios de Carlos Contreras, escritos de 1925 a 1938* (Mexico City: UNAM-UAM-Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí, 2003). On Contreras, see also Gerardo Sánchez Ruiz, *Planificación y urbanismo de la Revolución Mexicana: los sustentos de una nueva modernidad en la Ciudad de México* (Mexico City: UAM, 2002); Alejandrina Escudero, “La ciudad posrevolucionaria en tres planos,” *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 30, no. 93 (2008): 103-136.

¹⁰⁹ My understanding of professionalization as the claiming of an expert field is inspired by Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). According to Abbot, “professions are exclusive occupational groups applying somewhat abstract knowledge to particular cases.” (8) In his argument, professions emerge into a system and compete with each other to claim expertise over a subjective field. The urban problem, I propose here, was claimed by a number of professions (including architects, hygienists, and engineers), planners most explicitly.

¹¹⁰ Contreras, “Asociación Nacional para la Panificación de la República Mexicana,” 58.

¹¹¹ Other members included: Ing. Francisco Antunez Echegaray, Lic. Eduardo Mestre Ghigliazza, Gerardo Murilla (Dr. Atl), Luis Sánchez Pontón, Arq. Manuel Amábilis, Fernando Galván, and Miguel Ángel de Quevedo. Edward H. Bennet and Jacques Lambert (American and French) were designated external consultants. See *Planificación* 1, no. 7 (1928).

within Mexico and throughout the world (although the journal leaned more heavily towards the United States). Since justifying the enterprise of city planning was *Planificación*'s main mission, the journal regularly included articles with titles such as “¿Qué cosa es la planificación de ciudades y regiones?,” “¿Qué cosa es la zonificación?,” and so on.¹¹²

While *Planificación* was the association's main dissemination channel, its members were active spreading the gospel, teaching university courses, organizing conferences, writing newspaper articles, pamphlets, and laws, working hard to gain an influence in the government.¹¹³ In 1930, the Association organized a National Planning Congress with the support of the Ministry of Communications and Public Works. The conference goal, stated Minister Javier Sánchez Mejorada, was bringing together inchoate territories and forces into a common national project, “planning a united, homogenous, kind, beautiful, and smiling Mexico for all Mexicans.”¹¹⁴

In 1938, the Association organized the XVI International Congress on Housing and Planning, perhaps its biggest coup. Celebrated for the first time outside of the United States and Europe, the Congress served to put Mexico on the urban planning international map. Planners from across the world came to Mexico City with the goal of discussing housing and planning. Thousands of visitors also flocked to the event, which featured a planning exhibit in Bellas Artes where a “marvelous scale model of Mexico City” proved the most popular attraction. Visitors stared admiringly at the 10x7m scale model built by more than thirty persons with the help of

¹¹² *Planificación* 2 (October 1927), 3.

¹¹³ Rafael López Rangel, “Carlos Contreras en la historia de la planificación urbana,” in Gerardo G. Sánchez Ruiz, *Planificación y urbanismo visionarios de Carlos Contreras*, 25-34.

¹¹⁴ Javier Sánchez Mejorada, “Discurso leído por el Señor Ingeniero Javier Sánchez Mejorada, Secretario de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas, en la sesión de apertura del Primer Congreso Nacional de Planificación,” *Obras Públicas* 2 (February 1930), 77.

aerial photographs, a technology that was transforming urban planning.¹¹⁵ A cadastral map of the city also merited careful attention. It showed in different colors “areas destined to different kinds of housing: the real silhouette of the city can be noticed inside its legal perimeter, revealing the idle land that is considered urban. The commercial center, unique in the city, where its business life and therefore its traffic are concentrated, is clearly marked.”¹¹⁶ The scale model and the cadastral map represented, both for urban planners and the public, appealing representations of Mexico City as an ordered and legible object, all the more compelling at a time of anarchic growth and elusive city limits.

During the early 1930s, Contreras also drafted several city projects that he envisaged as part of a much more ambitious Master Plan (to be described in the next chapter). Such Master Plan, in turn, would serve as a template for a national plan. Contreras also drafted the “Ley General de Planeación,” signed by President Pascual Ortiz Rubio on July 12, 1930.¹¹⁷ The law expanded Contreras’ ideas about urban planning and translated them to a national plane. It served as a template for local laws like the Federal District’s Planning and Zoning Law, passed in 1933. More broadly, it marked the beginning of a process of dissemination by which urban planning ideas became a part of a multi-headed regime of institutions and laws.

The DDF’s ambitions for regional integration had mixed results. The DDF divided its functions between the Departamento Central or Mexico City proper—which encompassed the

¹¹⁵ “Maravillosa maqueta de la Ciudad de México,” *El Universal*, August 16, 1938. Architect Miguel Ángel de Quevedo led the enterprise. “Entrevista con el arquitecto Miguel Angel de Quevedo el día 11 de septiembre de 1979,” in Lilia Gomez and Miguel Angel de Quevedo, *Testimonios vivos: 20 arquitectos*. (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, INBA, 1981), 155-6. On aerial photography, see Antonio Antúnez Echegaray, *La Foto-Topografía Aérea y sus Aplicaciones Prácticas*. *Planificación* 5 (January 1928): 18-20.

¹¹⁶ Finally, the map noticed the contrast between “modern residential zones” and the city’s clustered *vecindades*. “Una brillante exposición en Bellas Artes,” *El Universal*, August 17, 1938.

¹¹⁷ The law was co-drafted with engineers Enrique Schulz, another member of the APRM. Sánchez Ruiz, *Panificación y urbanismo de la Revolución Mexicana*, 222.

municipalities of Mexico, Tacuba, Tacubaya, and Mixcoac—and the surrounding thirteen delegaciones, which had separate administrations and were governed by more lenient urban codes.¹¹⁸ Guadalupe Hidalgo, Azcapotzalco, Iztacalco, General Anaya, Coyoacán, San Ángel, Madgalena Contreras, Cuajimalpa, Tlalpan, Iztapalapa, Xochimilco, Milpa Alta, and Tláhuac. This administrative organization was rooted in history and geography. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries delegaciones were sparsely populated, mostly rural, and widely imagined as bucolic spaces distinct from the city. Three-fourths of the Federal District were consecrated to agrarian uses in 1906, an agrarian sector that existed in a symbiotic relationship with Mexico City.¹¹⁹ Later official publications from the period attest to this perceived separation. The building censuses included in the DDF's yearly *Memorias*, for example, display a clear industrial iconography whereas those from the delegaciones are decorated by rural or suburban motifs such as rivers, churches, and single-story houses. A nostalgic chronicler referred to delegaciones as “paradises” of “chinampas and emerald pastures” that served the purpose of feeding the city before migrants settled there and destroyed the “natural order of urban development.”¹²⁰

By 1940, however, many delegaciones were in a silent process of urbanization and demographic growth. In fact, as the table below shows, they surpassed Mexico City's population

¹¹⁸ For example, land in the delegaciones could be developed as “fraccionamientos rurales,” thereby circumventing the stricter regulations of Mexico City. Luis Barragán and Carlos Contreras, developers of the wealthy neighborhood of El Pedregal, negotiated with the DDF to acquire this status for their residential project. See Alfonso Pérez Méndez, “Advertising Suburbanization in Mexico City: El Pedregal Press Campaign (1948-65) and Television Programme (1953-54),” *Planning Perspectives* 24, no. 3 (2009): 367-379.

¹¹⁹ Hira de Gortari and Regina Hernández Franyuti, *La ciudad de México y el Distrito Federal: una historia compartida*, 4: 73-96. The relationship between Mexico City and its hinterland became an object of study for economists, geographers, and demographers starting in the 1960s. The classic studies in this regards are Claude Bataillon, *La ciudad y el campo en el México central*, (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1972); and Edmundo Flores, *Tratado de economía agrícola* (Mexico City: FCE, 1961).

¹²⁰ Manuel Magaña Contreras, *Ciudad abierta* (Mexico City: Excélsior, 1996), 202.

by the mid-1960s. As a response to this shift, the DDF extended its control over this area until, in 1970, the distinction between the Departamento Central and the delegaciones was terminated and the current sixteen delegaciones were reorganized under a single homogenous Distrito Federal. This administrative change officially acknowledged the existence of a metropolitan area larger than Mexico City. The reorganization, however, was born outdated, since as early as the 1950s, Mexico City’s urban sprawl extended *past* the delegaciones, reaching the neighboring State of Mexico as well. The political and imaginary limits of the city were always catching up with the real and irrefutable city that apparently never ceased to grow.

Year	Distrito Federal population	Mexico City population	Percentage of Mexico City in total population	Delegaciones population	Percentage of delegaciones in total population
1930	1,229,068	1,029,068	83.69%	200,508	16.31%
1940	1,757,530	1,448,422	82.41%	309,108	17.59%
1950	3,050,442	2,234,795	73.26%	815,647	26.74%
1960	4,870,876	2,832,133	58.14%	2,038,743	41.86%
1970	6,874,165	2,902,969	42.22%	3,937,499	57.28%

Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, “Ciudad oficial, 1930-1970,” in *Historia política de la ciudad de México*, ed. A. Rodríguez Kuri (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2012), 430.

Table 1.1 Population in Mexico City and the Federal District, 1930-1970

Long disregarded as entities outside of the lettered city, delegaciones won political muscle in a time of populist politics, gaining representatives as their population rose.¹²¹ Nonetheless, from the perspective of planners and other government experts who concentrated their efforts in city center projects, delegaciones remained largely invisible. A survey of the 1920s and 1930s press proves revealing in this regard, as most planning projects dealt with the city center and a few key arteries such as San Juan de Letrán. This tunnel vision was compounded by a frustrating lack of blueprints and statistics on the delegaciones, which were not

¹²¹ Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, “Ciudad oficial, 1930-1970.”

included in the cadastral map of Mexico City.¹²² Neither did Public Works have blueprints of them, making the provision of public services much more difficult.¹²³ Similarly, health officials designing a public health policy for Mexico City often failed to acknowledge the needs of, or existence, delegaciones. Many of the maps and graphic materials that city's health office (*Salubridad y asistencia*) used to locate its clinics represented Mexico City as bounded by its old limits up to the mid 1940s, a perimeter that left out many colonias proletarias and other low-income settlements located in the delegaciones.¹²⁴

Since the “problems of urbanization encompass the entire Valley of Mexico” argued Public Works Director Vicente G. Almada, a single office ought to be in charge with public works throughout the entire Federal District.¹²⁵ This dissonance between Mexico City, the Federal District, and the metropolitan area, can be detected in several materials. In 1930, the DDF published a lavish two-volume *Atlas General del Distrito Federal*—an instrument of promotion and territorial control. Through its description, photographing, enumerating, and historicizing of the built environment, population, and geography of the Distrito Federal it attempted to match a government body with a legible territory. The *Atlas* counted, for example, how many houses and industrial establishments the Distrito Federal had, and assessed the state of

¹²² The cadaster was not only used to tax property but also served as a more general survey, defining, for instance, limits of lots and streets. “Decreto que fija normas a que deberán sujetarse las traslaciones de dominio de bienes inmuebles en el Distrito Federal,” *Gaceta Oficial del Departamento del Distrito Federal* 2, no. 59, February 10, 1943.

¹²³ In 1953, for example, the Junta de Mejoras Materiales of Tepepan, in delegación Xochimilco, requested from Public Works a blueprint of its main road, which the Junta was in the process of repairing. Public Works responded that it lacked such blueprint, adding that it would send engineers to complete it as soon as this was possible. Angela Alessio Robles to Junta de Mejoras Materiales del pueblo de Tepepan, Xochimilco. June 22, 1953. AHCM-OP-173-File-1.

¹²⁴ See the maps in Manuel B. Márquez Escobedo, “La mortalidad en la ciudad de México y en las delegaciones del Distrito Federal 1938-1941,” *Asistencia* 9, no. 27-8 (1943): 33-79. Beginning in this decade, however, health offices increased their efforts to serve peripheral colonias proletarias, an effort that I describe in Chapters Four and Five.

¹²⁵ Vicente G. Almada, “Ideas sobre la Organización Conveniente de la Dirección de Obras Públicas del Distrito Federal,” *Obras Públicas* 1 (January 1930), 2.

its infrastructure and public services. It also provided a history of Mexico City and its delegaciones, proudly reproducing the coats of arms of each of them.

Unsurprisingly, the *Atlas* reveals both a statecraft project as well as its limits. Its maps, for example, were based on the survey that the Oficina del Catastro had undertaken in previous decades [Fig. 1.2]. They were therefore limited to blocks already surveyed and purveyed, for the most part, with paved streets and street lighting. Some of its maps offer the curious image of a few blocks and roads surrounded by empty spaces, as if such non-urbanized territory was not worthy of inclusion in the atlas. Some of the largest delegaciones in the Distrito Federal thus appeared as small entities because the *Atlas* only surveyed areas registered in the cadastral plan. The *Atlas* also described delegaciones such as Iztacalco and Ixtapalapa as agrarian while failing to acknowledge the irregular urbanization that characterized these places.¹²⁶ Mexico City extended beyond the city represented in official documents such as cadastral plans, master plans, and city atlases. This was no novelty, as we have seen. Mexico's capital had always been surrounded by Indian parcialidades and all sorts of improvised human settlements but such indeterminate spaces were ignored by the city's *letrados*, from Francisco Cervantes de Salazar in the sixteenth-century to the municipal surveyors from the 1930s.

¹²⁶ Departamento del Distrito Federal, *Atlas General del Distrito Federal* (1930; repr., Mexico City: CONDUMEX, 1992).



Fig. 1.2. “Plano de la Ciudad de Mexico. Formado por la Dirección del Catastro del Departamento del Distrito Federal. 1929.” *Atlas General del Distrito Federal, 1929*. The cadastral plan was always catching up with the built area. The gap between city and plan was significant because the cadastral plan was used for much more than taxing land, serving as a general city survey for planning purposes.

In this uncertain context, defining an “urban unit” became an obsession. Drawing this perimeter represented a descriptive as well as a prescriptive challenge as it pertained to the knowledge that planners had of Mexico City as much as their plans for it. The questions about the city’s limits were ontological, political, architectural, and financial. Should Mexico be an extended city, urban planners asked, or should it grow instead in density and elevation? What was the frontier between city and countryside? Should delegaciones serve as an agrarian sanitary cordon or become industrial centers? How far could water, electricity, and roads be extended? Where exactly did Mexico City end?

Planners discussed these matters at length. In a 1938 presentation at the International Congress on Housing and Planning, Adolfo Zamora, an employee at the Banco Nacional

Hipotecario y de Obras Públicas who would become the mastermind of Mexico's housing policy, underscored the advantages of collective over individual housing because it contributed to making of Mexico a compact and dense city. Collective housing limited horizontal growth, facilitated the creation of parks and gardens, as well as planning and zoning practices, and augmented the ratio between taxpayers and provision of city services. Single housing had the opposite, and more nefarious effects, from an urban, financial, and social perspective. Single housing augmented the urban area and placed a higher burden on municipal finances. It also increased traffic to and from the city center, made planning and zoning more complicated, and could even isolate individuals.¹²⁷ Architect Manuel Ortiz Monasterio made similar arguments a year later, when the Comisión del Plano Regulador (an advisory body to the DDF) consecrated one of its sessions to the definition of an urban perimeter. As most of his contemporaries, Ortiz Monasterio favored urban concentration over urban dispersion, which could be promoted by the pertinent codes and bans on urban development.¹²⁸ Most commission members and planners favored concentration because an overextended city required wider nets of public works and was thus more expensive. Water, most seriously, was difficult and costly to provide, particularly past a certain altitude. Engineer José Angel Cuevas pushed for a tighter urban perimeter that did not extend beyond the Pedregal, a "region [that] could never become a part of Mexico City."¹²⁹ He was of course wrong, and a few years later architect Enrique del Moral would praise the

¹²⁷ Adolfo Zamora, *Discursos, discusiones e informes habidos en las sesiones*, 34-37. See also, for a similar perspective, Sealtiel Alatríste, "Apuntes para la solución de la habitación proletaria en la Ciudad de México [1936]," Centro de Estudios de Historia de México (CEHM)-Fondo Luis Montes de Oca (LMO)-Folder 343-File 32004. I return to these debates about urban density in Chapter 4.

¹²⁸ Acta de la sesión celebrada por la Comisión del Plano Regulador el día 31 de marzo de 1939." AHCM-OP-161-1.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

construction of Mexico's new university over the Pedregal, described as an "embedded volcanic tumor."¹³⁰

In February of 1940 Public Works began working on the definition of a city perimeter.¹³¹ By resorting to topographic data, demographic statistics and previsions, as well as data on the city's infrastructure, crucially regarding water and drainage, Public Works would try to figure out how far the city extended and how far it should extend. By November, the city limits were finally defined.¹³² The urban unit was defined as "the part of the basin of the Valley of Mexico that is already served or that can be served by the water and sewage system of the city." This definition was extremely important because Mexico City's zoning regulations would only be applied within the urban unit whereas urban settlements outside of it would be considered as independent from Mexico City.¹³³ Therefore, the DDF would not have the same obligations towards these peripheral areas as it did towards Mexico City proper.

The limits of the urban unit were defined using rivers and the natural landscapes as markers. The city's northern edge followed the Río de los Remedios while the barren Pedregal stood as the southern border. The Río Hondo represented the western edge and was followed by an imaginary altitude line. The city's eastern limit, finally, was marked by the city's main

¹³⁰ "Razones del crecimiento de la ciudad hacia el sur," *El Popular*, May 13, 1955.

¹³¹ DDF, *Memoria del Departamento del Distrito Federal, del 1 de septiembre de 1939 al 31 de agosto de 1940* (Mexico City: DDF, 1940), 100.

¹³² These limits became official upon their inclusion in a presidential decree. "Reglamento de las fracciones I, V, y VII del artículo 3° de la Ley de Planificación y Zonificación del Distrito Federal," *Gaceta Oficial del Departamento del Distrito Federal* 1, no. 1, March 31, 1941.

¹³³ Article 2: "Las disposiciones de este Reglamento se aplican a la parte de la Unidad Urbana que queda comprendida dentro de los límites del Distrito Federal. Los núcleos de población del propio Distrito que queden fuera de dicha unidad urbana constituyen, en cuanto a sus servicios públicos, sistemas independientes del de la ciudad de México. A estos núcleos se aplicarán las disposiciones de este Reglamento en lo que sea procedente."

sewage line.¹³⁴ The western and eastern limits of the city are significant. Whereas the western border made a turn in order to include the very exclusive *fraccionamiento* of Lomas de Chapultepec, using the Gran Canal de Desagüe as the eastern border left several popular settlements outside of the urban unit. These limits were a result of the class assumptions and prejudices shared by planners. But they were also the consequence of the invisibility of some of these popular settlements, at least from the perspective of planners.

The urban unit was outdated from its inception and, as soon as September of 1941, exceptions from it were granted.¹³⁵ Furthermore, in December of 1941 the city government passed an urban code—the “Reglamento sobre fraccionamiento de terrenos en el Distrito Federal”—that stipulated the obligations that developers would have to meet to subdivide land. The “Reglamento sobre fraccionamientos de terrenos” stipulated that land developers would have to provide urban services to new neighborhoods. It also ordered that land divisions would have to follow guidelines set by the Master Plan, which made the urban limits ordinance less relevant. However, since the Master Plan was not completed during this period, the question of new subdivisions and their location was not settled. Therefore, Public Works would bear the responsibility of granting fractioning permits, which it would do in a piecemeal manner.

The passing of the 1941 Reglamento de Fraccionamientos reinforced the dual pattern of growth described for the nineteenth century, demoting numerous neighborhoods to a condition of informality that rendered the provision of urban services less likely. The code also pushed the construction of new neighborhoods to the State of Mexico, where similar laws were not passed

¹³⁴ Article 1. “Reglamento de las fracciones I, V, y VII del artículo 3° de la Ley de Planificación y Zonificación del Distrito Federal.”

¹³⁵ “Excepción al Reglamento de las Fracciones I, V, y VII del artículo 3° de la Ley de Planificación y Zonificación del D.F.,” *Gaceta Oficial del Departamento del Distrito Federal* 1, no. 12, September 15, 1941.

until the late 1950s. But this movement from one entity to the other was not straightforward because the limits between the Federal District and the State of Mexico also remained undefined.

In 1963, for example, more than twenty years after the passing of the 1941 Reglamento de Fraccionamientos, a group of landless families settled in land that would become Colonia Cuchillo del Tesoro.¹³⁶ The leaders of the invasion, the men who negotiated the purchase, subdivided the land, and led the settler families, heirs of earlier leaders such as Jesús Abitia, claimed that Cuchillo del Tesoro was in the State of Mexico, in a triangle adjacent to the Federal District, northeast of the city airport. This location eluded the 1941 Reglamento de Fraccionamientos and a series of ordinances that regent Ernesto P. Uruchurtu passed against the establishment of colonias proletarias in the Federal District during the 1950s. The problem was that Colonia Cuchillo del Tesoro was not in the State of Mexico but the Federal District, or so claimed the DDF. After accusing the developers of breaking municipal ordinances, the government proceeded to remove the “squatters” and imprisoned their leaders. The barracks in the area were also destroyed, as well as the posts and markers used to demarcate the streets and lots in the neighborhood.

The leaders of Colonia Cuchillo del Tesoro, Lic. Benigno Prado and “Profesor” Samuel Yáñez, fought back. Urban growth could not be banned by decree, they argued, as “thirst cannot be quelled by prohibiting water or the sight of an empty glass.” Colonia Cuchillo del Tesoro represented a “battlefield, where the inextinguishable and only too human [desire] for a plot of land” would triumph.¹³⁷ Prado and Yáñez also won an amparo from a judge in the State of

¹³⁶ The following paragraph is based on the documents pertaining Colonia Cuchilla del Tesoro located in AHCM-Gobernación-Box 325-Comisión de Límites.

¹³⁷ “La colonia Cuchilla del Tesoro, Edo. de México, es uno de los campos de batalla donde el instinto demasiado humano e inextinguible de apropiación de un terreno, habrá de triunfar por ser un estado definido de la ley de la evolución y el progreso, sobre el maltusianismo que cabalga en desatino y

Mexico, prompting the arrival of a larger group of settlers. In response, the DDF sent a battalion of planners, engineers, and topographers to survey the area. Afterwards, to clarify matters for good, both governments formed a commission to define the limits between the Federal District and the State of Mexico.

The matter of the city limits between both states remained nonetheless unresolved. Even if a clear line was defined, other problems would emerge, such as transportation and water provision. For example, Mexico City's water reserve was threatened by artesian wells perforated in the State of Mexico. Such perforations, prohibited in Mexico City, constituted a grave threat to Mexico City in the opinion of the Secretario de Recursos Hidráulicos, who requested regent Uruchurtu's help to stop the construction of new neighborhoods in the area adjacent to the Federal District.¹³⁸ Planners had advocated for a regional integration and a strong government precisely to address this type of conflicts. But it was easier to identify the problem than to fix it. The master plan, the most ambitious attempt by planners to survey and control urbanization and growth in Mexico City and the entire Valley of Mexico, is the subject of the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced urban growth as a historical problem. It has adopted different perspectives and introduced actors and problems that will reappear throughout the rest of the dissertation. In the first section, I have described Mexico City's transformation between 1860 and 1930. The expansion of the city that began in the 1860s was buttressed by a real-estate market boosted by the Laws of Reforma. Large and small fortunes were made as developers

tiranía.” Lic. Benigno Prado Valencia, Profesor Samuel Suárez Yañez. *La cuchilla del tesoro. Ante la Ley y la Razón*. 1965 [in AHCM-Gobernación-Box 325-Comisión de Límites].

¹³⁸ C. Secretario de Recursos Hidráulicos to Ernesto P. Uruchurtu, June 16, 1959. AHCM-OP-493-2.

subdivided high and low-income neighborhoods. Two general patterns of urbanization emerged. While wealthier and fully urbanized neighborhoods were developed in the southwest, lower-income neighborhoods and tenement houses were built in the eastern and northern fringes of the city. The west-east division was reinforced by the passing of urban codes that pushed unserved neighborhoods to a position of extra-legality—of which much more will be said.

Mexico City's transformation represented a novelty and a historical break. However, this change was interpreted with a transnational script of urban modernity. When the city transformed again between 1930 and 1960, changing from a *ciudad burguesa* to a *ciudad de masas*, the plot was not nearly as clear, as historian José Luis Romero's term implies.¹³⁹ The models that urban planners used to survey the mass city, the expectations and claims of citizenship that its residents would make, and the political arrangements that buttressed Mexico City after the Revolution did not match. Accordingly, the second section shifted perspectives and centered on the political and social urban forces unleashed by the Mexican Revolution. The Revolution created a political field, introduced laws and political languages, and mobilized rural and urban populations. The government responded to these pressure by experimenting new modes of popular urbanization, as exemplified by Colonia Ex-Hipódromo Peralvillo. The surveying, the subdivision, and the provision of urban services in these places was not accomplished mainly by municipal planning bodies but by residents, organized by brokers such as Jesús Abitia. Over the following decades, these modes of urbanization became more institutionalized, as illustrated by colonias proletarias. While the initial drive for colonias proletarias came out of the grassroots movements of the 1920s, with time they became a model shaped by explicit policies, albeit one that changed dramatically over the decades.

¹³⁹ José Luis Romero, *Latinoamérica: las ciudades y las ideas*.

Finally, I have contrasted the political changes brought by the Revolution with the visions of municipal planners. Planners drafted laws and ordinances with the goal of advancing a regional integration (rational, technocratic, led-from-above), but these tools had little power without the cadastral maps, blueprints, and myriad surveys that planners needed. The repeated attempts to define an urban perimeter reveal the magnitude of urban growth, its threatening nature, and the limited means that planners had to survey and control growth. At risk of being schematic, I argue that characters such as Jesús Abitia controlled the spaces that urban planners, the DDF, and the master plan could not reach. As I will explain in the following chapters, these places developed in the interface between the surveying of space undertaken by urban planners and the political organization of, and control over, people achieved by such political brokers.

CH. 2. AN ELUSIVE MASTER PLAN, 1920S-1953

In the summer of 1938, Mexico City hosted the XVI International Congress on Housing and Planning (ICHP). Celebrated in Mexico through the promotion of a group of planners led by Carlos Contreras, the congress looked to the future and the urban challenges that it had in store: building housing for the working classes, organizing the circulation of millions of motorized vehicles, and scientifically separating activities—residence, work, movement, leisure—in the city. In the midst of this enthusiasm, however, planners turned back and looked to the past as well. They were aware that even though Mexico City required transformations, its history had to be preserved. Art historians Manuel Toussaint, Justino Fernández, and Federico Gómez de Orozco participated at the conference, sharing with urban planners their studies of Mexico City’s historical maps.¹ Another historian, Edmundo O’Gorman, also presented an influential paper on Mexico City, its historic grid (*traza*), and the implications of this grid for the history of the city and the nation.

For O’Gorman, the *traza* materialized the spirit of colonization and evangelization. An “eloquent historical symptom,” it expressed a “way of being, a powerful and passionate will.”² Tellingly, O’Gorman described the *traza* as a *plano regulador*, the Spanish translation for master plan and a word that, more than any other, captured the imagination of twentieth-century

¹ *Planos de la ciudad de México: siglos XVI y XVII, estudio histórico, urbanístico y bibliográfico*. On the relationship between urban planning and art history, see Alejandrina Escudero, “La ciudad posrevolucionaria en tres planos,” and Arturo Almandoz, “Urban Planning and Historiography in Latin America,” *Progress in Planning* 65, no. 2 (2006): 81-123.

² “Nos habla de un modo peculiar de pensar, de una poderosa y apasionada voluntad, de un “querer”; lo que superficialmente parece una simple, casual y curiosa distribución urbana, cobra un sentido trascendental que la explica y sitúa como una de tantas formas en que encarnó el espíritu de la colonización española en América.” Edmundo O’Gorman, “Reflexiones sobre la distribución colonial de la ciudad de México” [1938], in E. O’Gorman, *Seis estudios históricos de tema mexicano* (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1960), 23.

planners. At the time, planners were unsuccessfully trying to catch up with Mexico City's unforeseen and relentless growth; codes, ordinances, and laws were passed, usually in a reactive fashion. Master plans changed the sense of space and time, allowing planners to think big, from afar and from above. Instead of fixing sections of the city, master plans offered a regional approach to it. In the case of Mexico City, the entire valley of Mexico became the unit of analysis. Rather than catching up with growth, master plans promised to predict and guide it—up to 50 years, in the vision of Carlos Contreras.³ O'Gorman's 1938 mention to a *plano regulador* is significant because it reveals how widespread and powerful the neologism had become, as a historical category, a public policy tool, and a lens through which to see cities.⁴

These were only words, or so scholars have argued. In reality, planners were weak and ineffectual during the 1940s, a decade when Mexico City spiraled out of control, becoming unrecognizable. Not until the 1980s did the city government put together a master plan supported by “an institutionalized apparatus [exerting control] over city growth and building activity,” finally moving from “paper plans to a process of planning.”⁵ According to Mexico City's 1936 Planning Law, the Master Plan was supposed to regulate and justify actions such as opening streets, establishing urban settlements, and restricting land uses. But in spite of their formal importance, master plans proved to be elusive tools. First of all, as Antonio Azuela has noted, the legal significance of master plans remained uncertain.⁶ The master plan only gained “legal teeth”

³ Carlos Contreras, “Plan of development of Mexico City,” in Esther Born, *The New Architecture in Mexico* (New York: The Architectural Record-William Morrow & Company, 1937), 4-5.

⁴ There are other examples of historians explaining colonial urban policies with recourse to a master plan. In 1954, art historian Francisco de la Maza defined Ignacio Castera's city plan as Mexico City's first ever “Plano Regulador.” Francisco de la Maza, “El urbanismo neoclásico de Ignacio Castera,” *Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 6 no. 22 (1954): 93-101. As the previous chapter explained, representative Vicente Lombardo Toledano described the Mendoza Codex as an “ensayo de zonificación.”

⁵ Peter Ward, *Welfare Politics in Mexico City*, 47.

⁶ Antonio Azuela, *La ciudad, la propiedad privada y el derecho*, 57-62.

once it was backed up by a presidential decree. In the absence of such a decree, it represented little more than a set of guidelines for public works. Naturally, there is nothing surprising about a plan that never fulfilled its goals. More intriguing, however, is the uncertainty regarding the scale, legal meaning, and timeline for the master plan. Although planners worked on it for years, its completion remained a perennial aspiration.

This chapter analyzes this period of futile “paper plans,” when planners were drafting urban codes, passing zoning ordinances, and, most importantly, assembling a Master Plan. It addresses the irony of an “unplanned” city that was in fact full of planners and plans. The chapter moves chronologically, describing efforts to integrate a master plan between the mid 1920s and 1953, asking why was the plan never completed and what effects did the incomplete master plan have. The first section describes the efforts of Carlos Contreras and other planners in creating a master plan in the 1920s and 1930s. The second section describes the transformation of the master plan into a bureaucratic black hole: an invisible object around which a series of offices and committees gravitated. The third section details the process by which the grand design of assembling a master plan was fragmented into smaller projects or a “planning mosaic.” By analyzing Mexico City’s understudied Public Works bureaucracy, I offer a history of planning that goes beyond laws and decrees and explains their results and outcomes.

Survey and Master Plan

“Survey before plan.” The aphorism captures the belief—first expressed by Scottish biologist, geographer, and city planner Patrick Geddes—that urban planning required comprehensive knowledge of the natural region in which a city was located. Viewing geography as such “an essential basis of planning” in 1915 was, as historian Peter Hall notes, nothing short than

“revolutionary.”⁷ Planners across the world jumped at the challenge, conducting regional surveys and integrating master plans with the data gathered. Master plans represented, in the first place, a research program to study city and region, a call to assemble maps, blueprints, and all sorts of statistics. According to Carlos Contreras, the formation of a master plan required the following:

Buenos levantamientos de planos, nivelaciones, etc. Planos precisos y bien dibujados. Buenos datos estadísticos sobre historia de ciudades y regiones, en cuanto a nacimiento, crecimiento de población, carácter de la población y de la región, incluyendo su topografía; condiciones climatológicas, vientos dominantes, cantidad de lluvia, etc; vías de comunicación por tierra, por agua y por aire; el tipo de ciudad o región, residencial o de placer, industrial, comercial, sede gubernativa, puerto, agrícola, etc.; reglamentación y legislación en cuanto a organización, facultades gubernativas, derechos ciudadanos, etc. los recursos financieros de la comunidad o de la región expresados en su producción, en su eficiencia, en el tipo y clase de sus ciudadanos, en el tipo de ciudad o región, el crédito financiero de la ciudad o la región.⁸

There was nothing unique in any item in this list. Demographic, construction, and industrial censuses, as well as official publications of laws, codes, and ordinance multiplied during these years, produced by different government offices. But the aspiration to amalgamate all this information in a single document expressing, as Carlos Contreras wrote, the entire “functional life” of the city, amounted to a radical paradigm change in the way in which government experts approached cities.⁹

Carlos Lazo’s archive—a true time capsule of the mid-century planning imagination—captures this aspiration. As Mexico’s most powerful planner, Lazo served as national Minister of Public Works during the presidency of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952) and spent much of the 1940s working on the assembly of a master plan for Mexico City. To this end, Lazo gathered a huge array of statistics, including aerial photographs, reports on welfare and health, statistics from

⁷ *Cities of Tomorrow*, 154.

⁸ “Asociación Nacional para la Planificación de la República Mexicana,” in Gerardo Sánchez Ruiz, *Planificación y urbanismo visionarios de Carlos Contreras, escritos de 1925 a 1938*, 61.

⁹ *Ibid.*

demographic, agrarian, and industrial censuses, anthologies of laws and codes, reports on housing and transportation, and endless miscellaneous materials. Nothing stood outside of his field of vision. “The problem with Lazo,” his colleague Reinaldo Pérez Rayón joked, “is that he is not planning the country but the universe.”¹⁰

“Planning,” one of Lazo’s materials read, is “the useful knowledge of the environment, its proper use and development by means of a short or long-term plan, through common cooperation and geared towards the common good, reached by means of an integral and technical government program.”¹¹ Development, technical program, and planning were terms that appeared repeatedly in political discourses, government pamphlets, and bureaucratic memos produced in the 1940s. There is little remarkable about them. But read together with the materials that Lazo gathered the words acquire a new depth, conveyed in Lazo’s government programs [Fig. 2.1, Fig. 2.2]. These materials included studies of density, demographic projections, industrial censuses, land values, which he organized under three broad subheadings: political, economic, and human.

¹⁰ “Entrevista realizada a Reinaldo Pérez Rayón, realizada por Graciela de Garay, el día 5 de noviembre de 1991 en la ciudad de México.” Archivo de la Palabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora. See also Elisa Drago Quaglia, “Doctrina Lazo: Política de planificación integral,” in Enrique Ayala Alonso, ed., *Segunda modernidad urbano arquitectónica*, 95-115.

¹¹ “Planificación es el conocimiento útil del medio en que se vive, su buen uso, mejoramiento y desarrollo por medio de un plan de trabajo realizado a corto o largo plaza con la cooperación y usufructo común y a través de un programa de gobierno integral previsto y realizado técnicamente.” AGN-Fondo Carlos Lazo (CL)-Box 48-File 205. Similar materials can be found in Box 49-files 222-224.

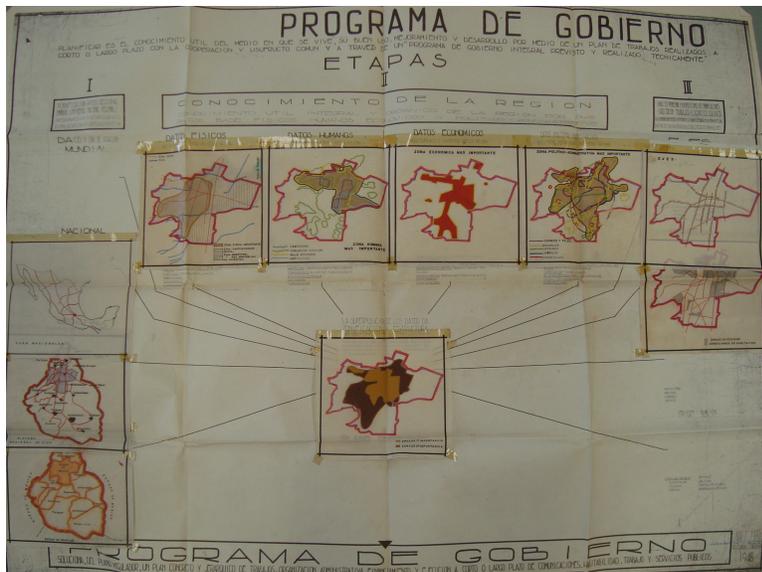


Fig. 2.1 “Programa de Gobierno: Etapas, 1948.” Carlos Lazo Archive.

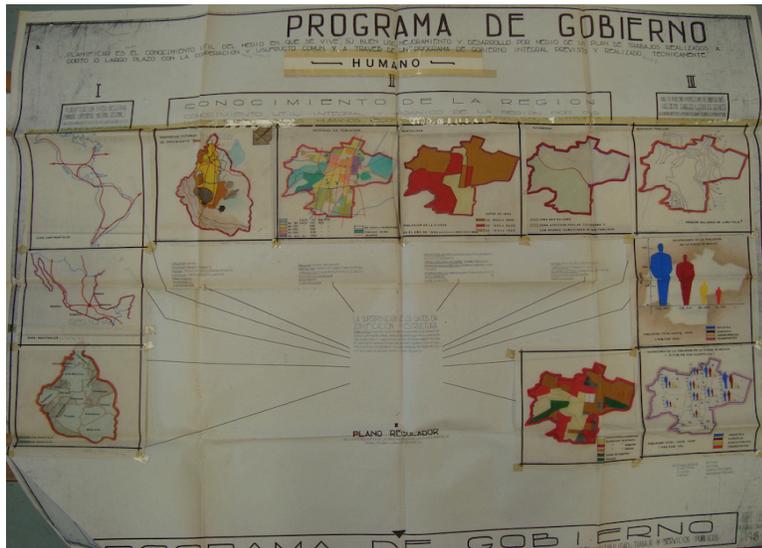


Fig. 2.2. “Programa de Gobierno: Humano, 1948.” Carlos Lazo Archive.

As these images reveal, city planning would integrate regional, national, and hemispheric territorial units. Ironically, however, these grand visions underscore the very limited resources at the disposal of planners. Notice that most of the data is organized by *cuarteles* and does not include the external and rapidly growing *delegaciones*, for which cadastral and census data was sorely lacking. One quarter of the population of the Federal District lived in the *delegaciones* in

1950 and by 1970 their population had surpassed that of Mexico City proper. They are, in these maps and figures, a striking omission.

Similar materials had been assembled by Carlos Contreras and the Mexican Planning Association. Setting its sights on a master plan, the Association created the “Comité del Plano Regional de la Ciudad de México y sus Alrededores” in 1928. Conceived as an advisory body to the city council, the committee would gather data, assess and propose urban projects, advise the city government, and, most importantly, formulate a regional master plan.¹² The Committee was composed by architects, engineers, doctors, lawyers, business leaders, and Dr. Atl, most famous as a painter but a man of many hats.¹³ It was divided in three working groups. The first group investigated the topography and climate of the valley of Mexico, the distribution of its population, its roads, waterways, sewage systems, and its industrial, residential, commercial, and recreational zones. The second group, “Industrial and economic studies,” interrogated Mexico City’s role as a center of government, commerce, education, and industry. The third group, “Studies on the social character and the living conditions of the city,” surveyed the living conditions of Mexico City’s population. It was, in turn, divided into several sub-commissions, including housing, health, schools, recreation, and legal affairs.¹⁴

Myriad regional master plans were integrated for cities in Europe and the United States in the 1920s, but the most powerful inspiration for Carlos Contreras and his colleagues came, undoubtedly, from the 1929 Regional Plan of New York and its Environs.¹⁵ The New York plan

¹² “Formular el Plano Regulador del crecimiento de la Ciudad y el Valle de México. Editorial,” *Planificación* 7 (March, 1928): 2-4.

¹³ “Editorial,” *Planificación* 7 (March, 1928): 4.

¹⁴ “Comité del Plano Regional de la Ciudad de México y sus Alrededores,” *Planificación* 7 (March, 1928): 21-3.

¹⁵ Mentions to the New York plan in newspaper articles and sessions of planning committees abound during the 1920s and 1930s; see, for example, Gilberto Loyo, “Una oficina municipal de estadística e investigación,” *Planificación*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1934): 24-29. On the early twentieth century

surveyed the metropolitan region with categories similar to those used by Mexican planners, becoming the model of what a regional plan was supposed to be. Contreras proudly acknowledged this influence, borne out of his time studying architecture at Columbia University and the relationships that he established there.¹⁶ Edward Bassett, head of the New York Zoning Commission and author of books and articles on zoning, was invited by Contreras as an external consultant for the Mexican committee. French architect Jacques H. Lambert was a second consultant. As Donat-Alfred Agache and Jean-Claude Nicholas Forastier, fellow representatives of the prestigious École Française d'Urbanisme, Lambert toured several Latin American cities in the 1920s and 1930s, invited to provide counsel on such matters as the drafting of master plans and urban codes.¹⁷ In Mexico, he would prepare a project for the city center and draft a set of guidelines for an urbanization code.¹⁸

The Regional Plan of New York had limited effects. Created as an independent, advisory body, it had little power over the different governments that administered the metropolitan region of New York, at best advancing an agenda within the public sphere.¹⁹ The effects of the Regional Planning Committee for Mexico City were even more limited since the committee failed to even produce a master plan, let alone put it in practice. Mexican planners were hindered by the lack of

craze for regional plans, see Rosemary Wakeman, *Practicing Utopia*, especially Ch. 1, "The Origins of the New Town Movement," 20-46.

¹⁶ "National Planning Project for the Republic of Mexico," 97.

¹⁷ Agache and Forastier worked, respectively, as advisors to the governments of Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. On the influence of this school in Latin America, see Arturo Almandoz, "Urbanization and Urbanism in Latin America: From Haussman to CIAM."

¹⁸ See Jacques Lambert, "Rapport du 24 juin 1932 sur la nécessité et les bases d'un Règlement d'urbanisation pour Mexico [1932]," and "Premier rapport sur l'aménagement du Zocalo "Plaza de la Constitucion [1932]," in AGN-Fondo Gonzalo Robles (GR)-Box 36-File 23.

¹⁹ David Johnson, *Planning the Great Metropolis: The 1929 Regional Plan of New York and its Environs* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1996), 202-203.

an institutional framework that could support such an ambitious project, as neither the city nor the federal government were fully behind the project.

If the “Comité del Plano Regional de la Ciudad de México y sus Alrededores” failed to produce a master plan, its organization, the categories that it adopted, and the urban ideals that it embraced, exerted an influence difficult to assess. It contributed to the crystallization of professional networks that would develop a close relationship with the federal and the city government. Carlos Contreras, in particular, cemented his position as Mexico City’s planner, the person who was best positioned to integrate a master plan for Mexico’s capital. Over the following years, Contreras would push for the integration of a master plan as an employee of different government offices and as a member of several planning committees, as well as on his own, when government patronage subsided. Following the passing of the National Planning Law in 1930, Contreras was appointed by the Comisión de Programa of the Ministry of Communications and Public Works to develop a master plan for the Federal District. The commission conducted several studies before its disappearance in 1932.²⁰ Be it as it may, in 1933 Contreras published, with the support of the Mexican Planning Association, his own unofficial master plan: *El Plano Regulador del Distrito Federal*.²¹

The publication in 1933 of Contreras’ *El Plano Regulador del Distrito Federal* synthesized projects, studies, and ideas that he and others had advanced in the previous years. Still, since Contreras had little institutional and financial backing, his 1933 master plan lacked sufficient data and read, in a way, as a plan proposal or a work in progress.²² Contreras divided

²⁰ Gerardo Sánchez Ruiz, “El contexto que rodeó a las propuestas de planificación del arquitecto Carlos Contreras,” in G. Sánchez Ruiz, *Planificación y urbanismo visionarios de Carlos Contreras, escritos de 1925 a 1938*, 9-24.

²¹ Carlos Contreras, *El Plano Regulador* (Mexico City: 1933).

²² Alejandrina Escudero, “La ciudad posrevolucionaria en tres planos,” 130.

Mexico City into ten zones according to their function: residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, educational, military, “zones of unlimited use,” forest reserves, archeological and architectural, and civic center.²³ Defining these zones was simple enough but matching them with the actual city was a different matter, since most of Mexico City was not surveyed and, more crucially, lacked the spatial homogeneity that the plan projected onto it. High-income residential zones were easy enough to define.²⁴ Locating industrial zones was more difficult, for small shops such as bakeries and tailors were “disseminated all throughout the city.”²⁵ Translating the city into abstract planning categories was a delicate task that resulted in a partly fictional document. But transforming the city to fit the map was impossible, so the plan found a middle ground, acknowledging certain trends that is sought to freeze at the same time. It was, at once, a descriptive and a prescriptive document, an ambiguity from which later plans would also suffer.

Following Contreras’ 1933 plan, other offices and committees were tasked with integrating a master plan. While the lives of these organs were short, many of the architects and engineers who participated in them gained bureaucratic experience, becoming over the years seasoned and loyal planning bureaucrats who climbed the ladder at the municipal office of Public Works. This was the case, for example, of Salvador Arroyo, an engineer who worked at most of Mexico City’s planning committees and headed, during the 1940s, the municipal Oficina del Plano Regulador. Or Fernando Ríos Venegas, another experienced bureaucrat who drafted in 1953 Ernesto P. Uruchurtu’s Planning Law. With time, these planners developed an identity as Public Works bureaucrats who were often in conflict with more prestigious professionals such as

²³ *El Plano Regulador*, 15.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

Carlos Contreras. Arroyo and Ríos Venegas were not guided by a grand urban vision but committed to keeping the Public Works bureaucratic machine well-oiled and running.

Following the disappearance of the Program Commission in the early 1930s, the Comité del Plano Regulador del Distrito Federal was created in 1935. Headed by Contreras, its objective was conducting the studies that would allow the integration of a master plan as well as city planning and zoning codes.²⁶ A year after its formation the Comité del Plano Regulador was disbanded and shortly afterwards replaced by the Comisión del Plano Regulador.²⁷ In the hopeful words of a 1939 newspaper, the commission “would fixate the urban zones [residential, industrial, commercial, parks and gardens] in order to end the architectural anarchy of the city.”²⁸ According to the city government, the long-term goal of the master plan was to provide a program to “develop harmonically the city for the next twenty years.”²⁹

What exactly did integrating a master plan entail? We know very little about the activities of these commissions but a few surviving minutes from the Comisión del Plano Regulador from 1939 and 1940 provide a window into how planning bureaucrats understood this mission.³⁰ The Commission did not produce grand city or regional projects in the mold of the Plan of Chicago or the Regional Plan of New York and its Environs. Neither did it emulate the modernist ideals

²⁶ “Informe que rinde el Comité del Plano Regulador integrado por el arquitecto Carlos Contreras, ingeniero José A. Cuevas y arquitecto Carlos Tarditi, a la Comisión de Planificación del Distrito Federal,” *Planificación* 3, no. 3-6 (March-December 1935): 59.

²⁷ The Comisión del Plano Regulador was probably established in 1937. There is little and conflicting information on these short-lived offices but there is a clear continuity between the Comité del Plano Regulador and the Comisión del Plano Regulador, which were largely conformed by the same group of planners. I am basing this chronology on dates mentioned by the members of the Comisión del Plano Regulador in minutes from 1939 and 1940. “Acta de la sesión celebrada por la Comisión del Plano Regulador el día 3 de marzo de 1939.” AHCM-OP-161-1.

²⁸ *El Universal*, March 30, 1939.

²⁹ DDF, *Memoria del Departamento del Distrito Federal, del 1 de septiembre de 1939 al 31 de agosto de 1940* (Mexico City: DDF, 1940), 100.

³⁰ These are, to the best of my knowledge, the only available minutes on this committee, running from February 1939 to October 1940. AHCM-OP-161-1.

beginning to coalesce at the time around figures such as Le Corbusier. Nothing here foreshadows the modernist neighborhood units that architects such as Mario Pani or Pedro Ramírez Vázquez would attempt to build beginning in the 1950s. Instead, the Commission found itself bombarded by industrialists requesting building permissions, local municipal projects such as street alignments and extensions that required studies, and the endemic problem of neighborhoods that continued to be built without urban services and permits. In response to such pressures, the commission focused on urban codes, zoning restrictions, street extensions, and construction bans, all of which sought to contain what seemed like an urban explosion. Order, not utopia, was the guiding principle of the day. Planners understood their task in negative rather than in positive terms: surveying the city rather than remodeling it. But drafting codes and projects required studies, statistics, blueprints, most of which the commission lacked. The Commission hence faced the same dual mission that planners like Contreras had encountered earlier: studying the city and making plans for it. This ambiguity marked its work throughout the 1930s.

Planners had to process a wealth of information compiled by different offices for different ends. It included industrial surveys conducted by the Ministry of the Economy, statistics on schools and students compiled by Ministry of Education, census records, cadastral maps, and so on. This data also included street opening and neighborhood subdivision projects by private architects. But all this information was haphazard and unsystematic, ranging from neighborhood blueprints to general studies about railroads and demographic growth. As an example, here is a partial listing of the studies that the Commission was using for integrating the master plan in March 1939.

- I. Problema urbano ferrocarrilero.
- II. Planificación de una zona de la parte urbana de Xochimilco.
- III. Estudio concreto respecto al crecimiento de la ciudad en varias épocas.

- IV. Consideraciones del ingeniero Cuevas sobre zonas de reserva para usos no especificados en la ciudad de México.
- V. Estudio del arquitecto Ortiz Monasterio sobre la conveniencia de seguir una política de concentración en lugar de la dispersión.
- VI. Programa para labores de la Comisión y para los de acción inmediata, elaborado respectivamente por los ingenieros Ríos Venegas y Arroyo.
- VII. Estudios de zonificación actual y anteproyecto de zonificación industrial.
- VIII. Fijación del perímetro urbano de la ciudad.
- IX. Estudios de trámite.
- X. Estudio concreto de ampliación Arcos de Belem y antiguas calles de San Miguel.³¹

Because planning could encompass so many actions, the concept was at risk of losing all meaning. Nonetheless, all of these studies were framed by three interrelated questions: 1) the population, extension, and density of the city; 2) the question of zoning; and 3) the industrialization of Mexico City.

Population growth fueled excitement and anxiety, particularly in the months leading to the 1940 census results.³² In 1936, Gilberto Loyo—Mexico’s first demographer and organizer of the 1940 census—alerted attention to the “urban elephantiasis” threatening Mexico City as peasants abandoned the countryside lured by promises of “comfort and frivolity” as embodied in American movies.³³ Such warnings became widespread after 1950, but it is worth remembering that it was a dearth of population, and not overpopulation, that rendered nineteenth-century Mexican statesmen apprehensive. At a national level, Loyo was convinced of the urgency of increasing Mexico’s population. Inspired in Italian “pronatalist” ideas, the General Population Laws of 1936 and 1947 that he drafted included plans to promote early marriages, large families,

³¹ “Acta de la sesión celebrada por la Comisión del Plano Regulador el día 3 de marzo de 1939.” AHCM-OP-161-1.

³² *Memoria del Departamento del Distrito Federal, del 1 de septiembre de 1938 al 31 de agosto de 1939* (Mexico City: Talleres Gráficos de la Penitenciaría, 1939).

³³ Gilberto Loyo, *Notas sobre la evolución demográfica de la Ciudad de México* (Mexico City, 1936).

and prohibit contraceptives.³⁴ The haunting image that began to take shape in the 1940s was that of a gigantic capital city standing atop a rickety national body.

Predicting population growth was a necessary condition for integrating a master plan. In 1937, Carlos Contreras calculated a population of 2 million inhabitants by the year of 1985.³⁵ In 1940, commission members Federico O'Reilly and Juan Antonio Lainé made a series of growth projection for the Federal District. They argued that the construction of railroads in the country would decentralize production, integrate remote areas of the country, and reduce the relative weight of the capital. According to their calculations, Mexico City's growth rates would decrease and by 1990 the Federal District would have between 4 and 5 million inhabitants (in a country of 30 million).³⁶ These were reassuring conclusions but other projections offered nightmarish scenarios. According to Geo D. Camp, an engineer quoted by O'Reilly and Lainé, the city would have a population of 20,000,000 in 2030... in a country of only 40 million! Because of peasant migration, the population of the rest of country would in fact decrease, as the city ballooned until its final implosion. Camp's numbers were dismissed, but overpopulation was a pervasive fear among planners, economists, and demographers that sought, since these early dates, to contain the growth of Mexico's capital.³⁷ The following decade, architect Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, presaged that the city would swallow the whole country, which would then face starvation.³⁸

³⁴ On Loyo and Mexico's population policy see Sergio Silva, "Forking Paths: Authoritarianism, Population Growth and Economic Performance in Mexico and Spain, 1934-2000," PhD diss., Harvard University, 2009, 135-145.

³⁵ "Carlos Contreras, "Plan of development of Mexico City," 4-5.

³⁶ Federico O'Reilly and Juan Antonio Lainé, "Estudio para formular previsiones sobre el probable crecimiento futuro de la población del Distrito Federal" [August 1940], AGN-CL-49-222.

³⁷ Figures quoted in Federico O'Reilly and Juan Antonio Lainé, "Estudio para formular previsiones sobre el probable crecimiento futuro de la población del Distrito Federal."

³⁸ *¿Qué hacer por la ciudad de México?* (Bruno Costa Amic, 1958), 21-22.

The census rendered population density figures that varied between different *cuarteles* and *delegaciones*. While neighborhoods north and east of the city center such as Peralvillo and the Merced suffered from extremely high overcrowding, wealthier and more modern areas such

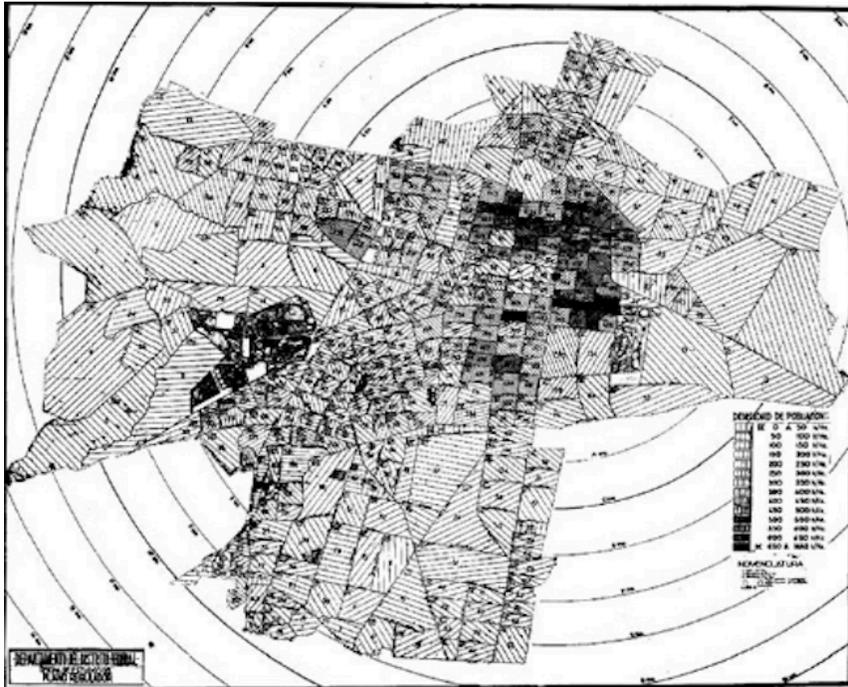


Fig. 2.3. Hannes Meyer, "La Ciudad de México. Fragmentos de un estudio urbanístico." *Arquitectura/México* 12 (1943).

as Lomas de Chapultepec enjoyed a very low population density.³⁹

Planners derived two conclusions from this disparity. First, peripheral areas of the city needed a higher density. Secondly, the center necessitated clearing, achievable by

opening wide streets that

would cut through the crowded popular tenements of the city, a policy that amounted, so to speak, to the "Haussmanization" of Mexico City. Most commission members favored concentration because an overextended city required wider nets of public works and was thus more expensive.⁴⁰ While architects and planners favored regionalization and decentralization in theory, they were much more concerned on the short-term with containing the growth of city.

Industrialization was another major concern for the Comisión del Plano Regulador.

Commission members felt that Mexico City was at the brink of an economic change that would

³⁹ Hannes Meyer, "La ciudad de México. Fragmentos de un estudio urbanístico," *Arquitectura/México* 12 (1942): 99.

⁴⁰ "Acta de la sesión celebrada por la Comisión del Plano Regulador el día 31 de marzo de 1939." AHCM-OP-161-1.

transform it from a “bureaucratic” to an “industrial” city.⁴¹ This assessment was partially true. While the majority of Mexico City’s working classes did not hold industrial jobs, the city did become the industrial engine of Mexico beginning in the 1940s. During this decade, the number of industrial establishments in the city rose from 4,920 to 12,704—measured as a share of the national industrial output, this represented a spike from an 8.7% to a 20%.⁴² The Commission received hundreds of license requests from industrialists between 1937 and 1940, which it “granted” in an ad hoc basis. In actuality, the Commission was only an advisory body, so permission to establish industries was outside of its control. Its goal, instead, was defining an industrial policy for the city.

Although the Commission lacked an articulate vision for Mexico City as an industrial powerhouse, planners agreed on a few broad policy guidelines. Industrialization was viewed as a positive transformation that planners encouraged by granting permits and pushing for the provision of services to industrial areas. At the same time, the ideal city of planners had a clear separation between industrial activities and residential areas, particularly those occupied by the higher and the middle classes. This meant, in practice, encouraging the creation of industries in the northeast, close to the railroad lines, the city’s main sewage line, and where most low-income neighborhoods were located. The Commission had a limited impact over these matters. It oscillated between recommending particular industrial projects that were submitted to her and proposing industrial areas. In 1940, the Committee decided on 11 industrial zones for the city that were turned into law by a presidential decree on January 1941.⁴³

⁴¹ “Acta de la sesión celebrada por la Comisión del Plano Regulador el día 17 de marzo de 1939.” AHCM-OP-161-1.

⁴² Susan Gauss, *Made in Mexico: Regions, Nation, and the State in the Rise of Mexican Industrialism* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 99.

⁴³ “Reglamento de las fracciones I, V, y VII del artículo 3° de la Ley de Planificación y Zonificación del Distrito Federal,” *Gaceta Oficial del Distrito Federal*, January 3, 1941.

After months of dealing with industrialization, the Comité del Plano Regulador re-started working on the master plan in February 1940. The work was projected to be over before the end of the year.⁴⁴ The “plan” was to dedicate eight months to discuss and define the city limits, zoning guidelines, and main avenues, but this proved more difficult than expected.⁴⁵ Completion of a municipal blueprint, the basic first step towards the integration of a master plan, could not be accomplished due to an insufficiency of draftsmen and basic office supplies.⁴⁶ The problem, however, ran deeper than this lack of materials or manpower; it had to do with the uncertainty of the whole master plan project. The minutes from the 1939-40 Comité del Plano Regulador suggest that nobody knew exactly what the master plan would look like or how detailed it was supposed to be. Blueprints and projects from the period included partial and detailed sections of the city, or larger areas including main avenues and zoning guidelines, but a complete comprehensive master plan was nowhere to be found.

The daily business of Public Works would, of course, continue despite the absence of a master plan, but it is significant that in early 1940 planners and government officials thought otherwise. For planners, the need of a master plan was so urgent that all government actions needed to come to a halt until its completion. Numerous bans were passed with the purpose of controlling or directing growth before a comprehensive master plan was finished. In January 1940, the President decreed a ban on further subdivisions until the master plan was assembled.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ The exact dates are unclear. According to the municipal *Memoria*, official sessions began in February 14; see *Memoria del Departamento del Distrito Federal, del 1 de septiembre de 1939 al 31 de agosto de 1940*, 99. However, in the previous months the matter had already been discussed, probably in informal meetings.

⁴⁵ “Labor de la Oficina de Estudios del Plan Regulador de la Ciudad de México,” *El Nacional*, October 1, 1940.

⁴⁶ “Acta de la sesión celebrada por la Comisión del Plano Regulador el 28 de marzo de 1940.” AHCM-OP-161-1.

⁴⁷ *Diario Oficial*, February 8, 1940.

In addition, the Comité del Plano Regulador requested the city government suspend permits for new bus routes until traffic guidelines had been reached.⁴⁸ Putting the city on pause until the completion of the master plan represented a pipe dream, but it reveals the powerful appeal that master plans had. Instead of a mere catching up with the never-ending expansion of cities, master plans offered the illusion of predicting and directing growth. A few months of respite were all that was needed, in order to conduct a few surveys, make a plan, and figure the city out.

The Planning Commission and the Master Plan

The master plan was not completed due to lack of effort. Countless planners, architects, engineers, and other professionals worked towards this end. They surveyed the city and drafted thousands of planning projects (*estudios de planificación*) that were approved by the Oficina del Plano Regulador and that became, in theory, integrated into a city master plan. Together, these projects amounted to a fragmented and incomplete master plan that was nevertheless consequential.

Even though different offices and individuals participated in the effort, approving the master plan was the responsibility of the Planning Commission. Created in 1933, the Planning Commission was, in the letter of the law, Mexico City's highest planning body. In order to define a general urban policy, the Planning Commission had command over the office of Public Works, the Oficina del Plano Regulador, and other committees.⁴⁹ The Planning Commission was

⁴⁸ “Acta de la sesión celebrada por la Comisión del Plano Regulador el 28 de marzo de 1940.” AHCM-OP-161-1.

⁴⁹ The 5th article of the 1936 Planning Law regulated the tasks and obligations (*facultades y obligaciones*) of the Planning Commission. “1. Promover y estimular el interés público por medio de una constante y sistemática labor de publicación en favor de las obras necesarias para la realización del “Plano Regulador” del Distrito Federal. 2. Requerir los datos, informes, documentos, etc., que obren en los archivos públicos y que sean necesarios para el desempeño de su cometido. 3. Ordenar a la Dirección de Obras Públicas del Departamento del Distrito Federal la realización de los estudios y proyectos que sean

comprised of two groups: on the one hand, planning bureaucrats from Public Works and, on the other, representatives from commercial chambers and professional associations (architects, bankers, and industrialists among others). In virtue of this composition, the commission was supposed to fulfill a dual role. It was, to a large extent, a technical body, controlled by architects and engineers who held the highest positions within Mexico City's planning bureaucracy. But it was also, if not a democratic, at least a representative organ, where powerful groups could decide upon the direction in which the city was headed.⁵⁰

Supposedly Mexico City's most powerful planning body, in actuality the Planning Commission was rendered ineffectual by a multiplication of sister offices that ended up obstructing and overpowering it. These offices included the Comisión Mixta de Planificación and the ad hoc Comités Ejecutivos, tasked with assisting the Planning Commission by reviewing projects from an economic and technical perspective.⁵¹ Additionally, a 1941 presidential decree created the Comisión Reguladora del Crecimiento de la Ciudad, an advisory body staffed by additional Public Works experts and members of professional associations.⁵² Finally, the Planning Commission had an ambiguous and conflictive relationship with Public Works.

necesarios para formar el plano regulador del mencionado Distrito Federal, que estará constituido por los documentos gráficos en que se expresen todos los aspectos, estudios, proyectos y programas que tengan por objeto regular el desarrollo armónico y ordenado [del DF].” “Ley de Planificación y Zonificación para el Distrito Federal.” The 1933 and 1936 laws are reproduced in Antonio Ortiz Mena, *La legislación sobre planificación en la república mexicana* (Mexico City: DDF-Congreso Internacional de Planificación, 1938).

⁵⁰ The commission served, in Antonio Azuela's words, as a “field of confrontation” where different interests and projects for the city could be discussed. Antonio Azuela, “Mexico City: the city and its law in eight episodes, 1940-2005,” in *Law and the City*, ed. Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (New York: Routledge-Cavendish, 2007), 156.

⁵¹ The introduction to the 1936 Planning Law read: “... se considera necesario dar a la Comisión de Planificación un auxiliar indispensable que se ocupe del estudio y revision de los proyectos de obras de planificación desde los puntos de vista técnico y económico.” “Ley de Planificación y Zonificación para el Distrito Federal.”

⁵² *Gaceta Oficial del Distrito Federal*, May 20, 1941.

Equipped with different tools, and looking at the city from different scales and perspectives, both offices competed for control over urban planning.

The picture seems confusing, and contemporaries agreed. Upon his visit to Mexico City in 1939, American planner Francis Violich identified 13 offices tasked with planning.⁵³ Architect Enrique Guerrero enumerated ten bodies dealing with urban planning, all of which had different functions and a distinct place within Mexico City's baroque government.⁵⁴ The problem was not the number but the fact that no one knew exactly what each office did and how they were supposed to work together. Head of the Oficina del Plano Regulador Salvador Arroyo noted the same problem in a 1945 report he prepared for the Head of Public Works. Planning laws, he pointed out, "ought to specify the functions of each of the city's planning organs in order to avoid their interference, or the undue absorption of attributions of some organs by others."⁵⁵ The problem was not a scarcity of planners but the confusion that reigned amongst them. This impression is confirmed by reading the minutes of different planning committees, largely consecrated to discussing what exactly the responsibilities of each committee and office were.

The competition between Public Works and the Planning Commission was evident since the creation of the commission in 1933. At the time, architect Luis Prieto y Souza, wrote that "the Planning Commission could not and should not be subordinate to Public Works but, on the contrary, Public Works, as an executive office, should subordinate its actions to a PLAN defined by the Planning Commission."⁵⁶ The tension between both offices remained latent over the

⁵³ Francis Violich, *Cities of Latin America*, 90.

⁵⁴ Enrique Guerrero, "Urbanismo Oficial," *Arquitectura y lo demás* 1 (1945), 16-22.

⁵⁵ Salvador Arroyo to Guillermo Aguilar Alvarez. October 13, 1945. AHCM-OP-254-1.

⁵⁶ "Más concretamente hablando, la Comisión de Planificación no puede ni debe ser una dependencia de la Dirección de Obras Públicas, sino inversamente, esta oficina, como ejecutora, debe subordinar sus actividades al PLAN previamente definido por la Comisión de Planificación." ("La ley de Planificación." L. Prieto y Souza, *Planificación* 2, no. 2 (1934), 5.

1930s, a matter of frequent bureaucratic skirmishes. In 1941, a presidential decree explicitly addressed the problem.⁵⁷ The Planning Commission was to serve as a venue where *large* city projects that encompassed conflicting political and urban visions for the city would be decided; on the other hand, *smaller*, discrete technical problems would be left in the hands of lesser standing ad hoc committees within Public Works. This ruling did not fix the problem because the difference between large and small projects was never clear. In 1945, Salvador Arroyo proposed that Public Works should handle “local or partial” planning projects in order to prevent them from reaching the Planning Commission. The 1941 decree should have made this arrangement clear, however, Arroyo’s proposal only reveals the reigning confusion.⁵⁸

The conflict between both offices owed to the fact that the line between local and general projects, and between technical and political decisions, was impossible to draw. Under such uncertainty, Public Works gained control of daily public works while the Planning Commission lost influence. A revealing example of this trend occurred in 1949, when the Head of Public Works, Manuel Moreno Torres, unilaterally decided to conduct renewal works in Reforma Avenue, the city’s most symbolic avenue. This action sparked a confrontation with the Planning Commission, whose members felt affronted because they had not been consulted on the renewal. Newspaper reports stated that Moreno Torres responded, in existentialist fashion, that while the Planning Commission discussed, he simply *did*.⁵⁹ He claimed that the renewal was not a planning but an urbanization project, outside of the commission’s authority.

⁵⁷ “Decreto por el cual se demarcan las atribuciones que, en material de planificación y zonificación, competen a la Comisión del ramo y a la Dirección General de Obras Públicas,” *Diario Oficial*, October 14, 1941. On the significance of the decree see Stéphanie Ronda and Vicente Ugalde, “Planeación urbana en la ciudad de México en los cincuenta.”

⁵⁸ Salvador Arroyo to Guillermo Aguilar Alvarez. October 13, 1945. AHCM-OP-254-1.

⁵⁹ “Mientras discuten yo hago. La ciudad. Post-Nopal,” *El Universal*, August 21, 1949.

The conflict regarding the renewal of Reforma Avenue underscores the diminishing importance of the Planning Commission. A member of the Growth Commission, engineer José Antonio Cuevas, described how the relationship between the different planning organs ought to work. Firstly, the Oficina de Estudios del Plano Regulador was supposed to undertake technical studies or projects that would then be submitted to the Growth Commission, where Public Works technocrats, as well as members of professional associations, would discuss their merits. Finally, projects already discussed and criticized could reach the Planning Commission, where their “general convenience for the city” would be evaluated. The logic was to begin with technical discussions and end with the general ones. Therefore, as projects reached the higher levels of Mexico City’s planning regime they would be considered by a wider set of opinions and interests, until their final inclusion into the master plan.⁶⁰ However, this position at the apex of the city’s planning regime rendered the Planning Commission increasingly futile. Projects very rarely reached the Planning Commission because Public Works decided on them beforehand. At the same time, the Planning Commission consistently got lost in endless technical discussions.

The movement of blueprints and projects across Public Works offices and planning commissions is significant because, according to the law, projects approved by the Planning Commission became part of the master plan. In practice, however, conflicting blueprints were approved by different offices all the time, and it was often not clear which actually were part of the master plan.⁶¹ Expressing a widespread frustration, architect Vicente Urquiaga lamented that the Growth Commission undertook several studies that were afterwards disregarded by the

⁶⁰ “Comisión Reguladora del Crecimiento de la Ciudad,” September 4, 1946. AHCM- Planoteca-258-4.

⁶¹ In 1947, for example, the Oficina del Plano Regulador was juggling with projects approved by Public Works, the Planning Commission, the Growth Commission, older Public Works projects, and unapproved projects. All of them were drafted in different scales and sizes. Engineer Luis Guzmán Castillo to Salvador Arroyo. November 2, 1947. AHCM-OP-161-1.

Planning Commission. He also pointed out that several commissions and committees did identical projects that were then lost in the maze of Public Works.⁶² In theory, the Planning Commission approved general city projects whereas Public Works drafted local blueprints. These local projects were supposed to follow the guidelines set by general projects, but the opposite process also occurred: local blueprints approved by Public Works were incorporated into larger projects that could—but did not always—reach the Planning Commission.

At the heart of the matter were different visions of what planners understood by master plan. Planners sometimes viewed the master plan as small-scale plan in which a few main axes and zoning areas were defined. But planners also understood by master plan large-scale plans that described, in much more detail, the alignment of particular streets and specific regulations for industrial neighborhoods. The master plan could be assembled in two opposing ways. The first possibility was for the Planning Commission to approve a general plan and, subsequently, for lower committees to put together smaller projects that followed the general plan. This top-bottom approach represented something of a fantasy, since a general plan that was not supported by cadastral maps, blueprints, and statistics (which were largely inexistent) was almost useless. A second possibility was integrating the master plan from the bottom to the top, by slowly patching together detailed planning projects. This option, closer to what actually happened, turned planning from a grand mission into a petty business that dealt with street alignments, intersections, and little more.

The question as to whether the Plano Regulator was assembled either from the top (general) or the bottom (specific) can also be understood as one of scale or, in other words, of how detailed the plan should be. A small-scale master plan (representing more territory in a

⁶² “Comisión Reguladora del Crecimiento de la Ciudad,” September 4, 1946. AHCM-Planoteca-258-4.

given blueprint, hence less detail) could be approved by the Planning Commission, while large-scale, more detailed sections of the master plan were approved by ad-hoc committees within Public Works. In 1947, for example, the Oficina del Plano Regulador sent a blueprint of the city's main street system (*sistema vial principal*) for approval to the Planning Commission. Before reaching the Planning Commission, however, the blueprint passed through the Growth Commission, which discussed its merits. The question, in particular, was about the scale of the blueprint: how detailed it should be and if it should include the city's lesser streets. Fernando Ríos Venegas opposed sending a detailed plan, arguing that a small-scale blueprint—a “planning skeleton”—should be sent to the Planning Commission for approval. He added that afterwards the spaces in between the main avenues could be filled (*después viene el relleno*), thus completing the master plan.⁶³

In 1948, architect Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, probably the most pessimistic observer of Mexico City, described the city plan as the original *traza* surrounded by a “wide and confusing [...] cancerous tissue.”

Vea usted en el plano la primitiva, aceptable traza de la ciudad [...] y observe en qué forma, muy recientemente, la inepticia urbanística de los mercaderes de terrenos en complicidad con la falta de vigilancia de las autoridades, ha rodeado esa traza española primordial de un confuso y ancho cinturón de desorden; de un tejido canceroso y exorbitado que no obedece a propósito ni a destino urbano de ninguna especie. [...] en virtud del crecimiento de la capital y de la ausencia de un Plano Regulador, que debió producirse hace muchos años, los intersticios dejados por las accidentales prolongaciones de la traza, así como los espacios vacíos que existían entre la primitiva ciudad y las poblaciones circunvecinas, se fueron llenando de un anormal tejido conectivo sin orden y sin ley: múltiplemente fragmentado, con soluciones diferentes en cada lugar; estrechamente rodeado de ciudad y sin liga con ella; formado por múltiples parches; por formas aisladas con pretensiones de autonomía: por el capricho individual de los urbanistas de ocasión que fraccionaron con criterio de comerciantes de terreno, la carne urbana en potencia que aquí y allá cayó bajo sus manos.⁶⁴

⁶³ “...después viene el relleno que formará el conjunto del plano regulador.” “Comisión Reguladora del Crecimiento de la Ciudad,” March 18, 1947. AHCM-OP-598-2.

⁶⁴ Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, “El plano de la ciudad,” *Arquitectura y lo demás* 11 (1947-48), 16.

The spaces that Gómez Mayorga deemed lawless and disorderly were in fact planned by local actors. Planning at this neighborhood level—the planning of “*el relleno*”—was conducted by municipal engineers and topographers as well as by political brokers and resident associations. These neighborhoods were not lawless, but they were fragmented, disjointed, and autonomous, as Gómez Mayorga pointed out. The problem was that the subdivision of these neighborhoods reduced the possibilities of integrating a larger master plan. Neighborhoods were built much faster than such long-term projects as the *sistema vial principal*, and they often disregarded the lines where streets and avenues were yet to be built. Planners constantly complained that land was subdivided and houses constructed *before* blocks and avenues had been fixed. The Planning Commission could not integrate a general, small-scale master plan because hundreds of neighborhood projects had already been built by local actors and fixated through official blueprints. These neighborhoods did not always follow the ideals of planners; they were ad hoc and pragmatic solutions (stigmatized by Gómez Mayorga and other architects as a cancerous tissue) to the challenge of subdividing land and distributing it to residents. This patchwork embodied landed conflicts between planners, political brokers, and resident associations. But these conflicts were illegible for architects and planners. However, as the next chapter will show, there was a logic that dictated who subdivided land, how it was subdivided, and who won and lost through such operations.

A Planning Mosaic

In 1949, Public Works divided Mexico City into nineteen planning zones [Fig. 2.4]. Such reorganization sought to strike a middle ground between small and large-scale planning in order to complete the master plan. Architect Reinaldo Pérez Rayón, Director of the Oficina del Plano

Regulador in the early 1950s, explained that dividing the city in large planning zones had the purpose of facilitating the approval of projects by the Planning Commission.⁶⁵ The new division would end the piecemeal, street-by-street planning that had burdened planning efforts until that date. Dividing the city into a “planning mosaic” would allow the integration of small projects such as street opening within the larger metropolitan system.⁶⁶



Fig. 2.4. “Planning Mosaic,” *Semanario Hispanoamericano de la vida y la verdad*, 1950

⁶⁵ “Entrevista realizada a Reinaldo Pérez Rayón, realizada por Graciela de Garay, el día 29 de octubre de 1991 en la ciudad de México.” Archivo de la Palabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora.

⁶⁶ See the explanation given by Engineer Luis Rivero de Val at a session of the Planning Commission: “Comisión de Planificación,” Acta número 1 de 1952, AGN-CL-48-212. The expression planning mosaic was used by Manuel Moreno Torres, head of Public Works, also at a Planning Commission session: “Comisión de Planificación,” Acta 6, June 26 of 1950, AGN-CL-49-233.

Each of these 19 planning zones worked in a different way, depending on the area in question and the agenda of its technical advisor.⁶⁷ Mario Pani was the technical advisor of the Iztacalco zone southeast of the city. Pani used the area as a testing ground for the planning vision he was developing: low-income, autonomous urban neighborhoods, a model that he would put in practice (for the middle classes) in the housing projects Juárez, Miguel Alemán, and Nonoalco-Tlatelolco. Iztacalco was ideally suited for the endeavor of building housing units for the urban poor, at least in theory. It was close to the city, had a low population density, and its numerous agrarian (*ejido*) lands had protected it from fast urbanization.

In Pani's vision, Iztacalco constituted an urban land reserve where the urban poor—both peasant migrants and families living in the *vecindades* of the city—could be resettled.⁶⁸ Pani projected twenty-one *unidades vecinales* in Iztacalco, that is, low-income, low-density, and autonomous neighborhood. Pani referred to this endeavor as “making city outside of the city” (*hacer ciudad fuera de la ciudad*).⁶⁹ The counterpart of this action Pani called “making city within the city,” an policy exemplified by the housing project of Nonoalco-Tlatelolco, built after the renewal of Mexico City's decaying central tenements.⁷⁰ Urban renewal and urban expansion—making city within the city and outside of the city—were two sides of the same coin,

⁶⁷ The 19 zones, and their technical advisors, were the following: 1, Azcapotzalco: Ing. Enrique M. Soto; 2, Insurgentes Norte: Jorge Fernández Flores; 3, Villa Madero: Manuel Ortiz Monasterio; 4, Rastro: Ing. Héctor López Puga; 5, Centro: Ing. Luis Ángeles; 6, Estaciones: Ing. Fernando Ríos Venegas; 7, Tacuba: Arturo Marín Pérez; 8, Tacubaya: Antonio Cornejo Romero; 9, Hospitales: Ing. Luis Cabrera Jr.; 10, 20 de noviembre: Ing. Juan Díaz Bonilla; 11, Iztacalco: Arq. Mario Pani; 12, Portales: Salvador Arroyo; 13, Colonia del Valle Norte: Ing. Jesús Gallardo; 14, Colonia del Valle Sur: Leandro Roviroso Wade; 15, Mixcoac: Ing. Francisco Borbolla; 16, San Angel: Arq. José Luis Cuevas; 17, Viveros: Angela Alessio Robles; 18, Coyoacán: Arq. Carlos Pulido; 19, Pedregal: Ing. Alberto J. Flores. “La ciudad de México. La Orbe Futura,” *Semanario hispanoamericano de la vida y la verdad*, 15.

⁶⁸ The most important resettlement project, colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán, is the matter of chapter 5. More of Pani's projects and visions for the city are explained in chapter 4.

⁶⁹ “Entrevista realizada a Mario Pani, realizada por Graciela de Garay, el día 11 de julio de 1990 en la Ciudad de México.” Archivo de la Palabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora.

⁷⁰ On the Tlatelolco project, see *Arquitectura/México* 94-95 (June-September 1966).

two complementary planning modes that Pani expected would guide the growth Mexico's capital.

Other technical advisors had less ambitious plans. Engineer Ángela Alessio Robles was in charge of a southern zone, which included such neighborhoods as Tecoyotitla, Viveros, and Chimalistac. The daughter of General Vito Alessio Robles, Ángela was the only woman in the group and one of the first women to study engineering in Mexico's National University. After completing her degree, Alessio Robles studied planning at Columbia University and upon her return to Mexico began working in the Office of Public Works.⁷¹ On March 29, 1950, she presented to the Planning Commission a planning and zoning project that was rapidly approved.⁷² Alessio Robles' project integrated several street opening projects that the Oficina del Plano Regulador and the Growth Commission previously undertook. This was, to a certain degree, planning made from the bottom to the top. Rather than trying to transform her area radically, Alessio Robles attempted to integrate a set of previously scattered projects into a more cohesive one.

The Viveros project also relied on original research. Bereft of a cadastral map, Alessio Robles conducted surveys that concluded that Viveros was a residential area, peppered with a few scattered shacks. Surveyors conducted a building census where they gathered data on the area's function (residential, industrial, commercial, offices); construction materials (adobe, wood, concrete); conditions (good or bad); and population.⁷³ Alessio Robles proposed a minimum lot size (600 square meters) in order to prevent the "anarchical subdivision" that

⁷¹ Biographical information in Mireya Pérez Estañol, "La dama de la ciudad" *Construcción y tecnología en concreto*, October 2002, <http://www.imcyc.com/cyt/octubre02/dama.htm> (accessed on April 1, 2017).

⁷² "Comisión de Planificación," Acta 4, AGN-CL-49-233.

⁷³ The spreadsheets of the 1949 survey can be found in OP- Box 161-File 1.

plagued Mexico City. For the most part, she attempted to maintain the character of the zone, freezing it through zoning ordinances. Her project was met with approval and praise.

If Pani advanced a top-down and prescriptive approach to planning and Angela Alessio followed a descriptive, bottom-up approach, sometimes planners had to get their hands dirty and negotiate with residents matters such as street alignments and lot limits. Scattered archival sources regarding the work of architect Jorge Fernández Flores—technical advisor of the “Insurgentes Norte” zone—reveal this facet of planning that was more intimately connected with local politics. In 1951, Fernández Flores negotiated with residents of colonia proletaria Panamericana their relocation, and compensation for their lots, that would follow a number of street openings across the Zona Norte. North of the city, close to industrial areas and crisscrossed by some of the city’s most important avenues, Colonia Panamericana was described by planners as an anarchic maze formed by irregular blocks, lacking alignments, and in a general condition of disarray.⁷⁴

In 1961, when Public Works began working in the extension of San Juan de Letrán Avenue—known today as Eje Central—the negotiations undertaken by Fernández Flores a decade earlier came to the light. Many residents were living in lots that did not exist in the official neighborhood blueprints. The nature of the negotiations that ensued is not clear, but the challenge of Public Works was deal with possession claims for an area with multiple blueprints but not a clear record that would allow the authorities to compensate residents affected by the public works. Seen from the vantage point of 1961, Colonia Panamericana could only be accessed through a successive reading of the many blueprints and contracts that several offices had signed over the previous two decades. Initially, developers and residents subdivided the area,

⁷⁴ “Comisión Reguladora del Crecimiento de la Ciudad,” July 29, 1947, AHCM-Planoteca-258-4.

drafting a blueprint that was signed in 1941 by Public Works. This blueprint had the purpose of distributing lots among residents but it could not be used to integrate Colonia Panamericana with the avenues and neighborhoods that surrounded it. This initial



Fig. 2.5. Luis Ángeles. *Semanario Hispanoamericano de la vida y la verdad*.

subdivision would be challenged by Public Works over the following decades, as planners undertook this integration of the neighborhood with the larger city.

As a final example, I will now describe the Zona Centro project—the most important fragment of Mexico City’s planning mosaic—presented by engineer Luis Ángeles [Fig. 2.5] to the Planning Commission in 1950.⁷⁵ This project for the heart of the city was also the most controversial of all, as it was the only one where technical matters were left aside and a broader idea of Mexico City was debated. “No other project ever presented to the Planning Commission was so thoroughly discussed,” wrote *El Universal* journalist Adrián García Cortés.⁷⁶ More than two years of acrimonious debates that delineated an arena where different visions and interests

⁷⁵ “Comisión de Planificación.” Acta 6. June 26, 1950. AGN-CL-49-233.

⁷⁶ Adrián García Cortés, *La reforma urbana de México* (Mexico City: Bay Gráfica y Ediciones, 1972), 107. García Cortés reported extensively on the long discussions in chronicles published in *El Universal*—chronicles compiled in *La reforma urbana de México*, a book from which historians have profited enormously. In addition to García Cortés’ book I have also read the official minutes from the Planning Commission, which I have found scattered in Carlos Lazo’s archive.

clashed spectacularly. A response to the “physical and social bankruptcy” towards which Mexico City’s historical core was headed, Ángeles’ project was bold and ambitious. Vehicle circulation was its inspiring ideal, an aspiration that threatened the city’s historic grid, some of its finest colonial buildings, and, not least, its decaying *tugurios* where thousands of poor families lived. The objective of the plan was preventing the death of Mexico City, particularly its old center, clogged to traffic circulation, densely populated, and unhygienic, still bearing the imprint of its colonial grid.

A critical component of the project was the housing problem or *problema de la vivienda*. Since poor housing bred crime, epidemics, and immorality, demolishing old tenements and replacing them with modern housing projects or relocating families to colonias proletarias in the periphery of the city was deemed a plausible solution to the *problema de la vivienda*. Rent in these modern housing projects would be higher than in old tenements, of course, but at least their residents would live “like persons” and the move would provide “them with the education that they lacked.”⁷⁷ Therefore, without hint of irony, Ángeles proposed to tear down thousands of overcrowded tenements in order to fix the housing problem.⁷⁸

To deal with the problem of traffic, Ángeles proposed opening axes that would improve circulation, raise real-estate values, and create magnificent vistas. The cornerstone of the project was extending Reforma Avenue eastward, which would raise land values and tear down old and crowded slums described as “an island of insalubrity and misery.” The project would also widen Guatemala Street, a “sacrifice of catalogued buildings” that was justified by the monumentality of the resultant east-west axis. The northbound continuation of 20 de Noviembre Avenue shared the same goal. In this case, the destruction would be balanced “by the grandiosity of the resultant

⁷⁷ *La reforma urbana de México*, 76.

⁷⁸ “Préambulo de la memoria descriptiva,” AGN-CLA-49-233.

avenue” and the vista it would open towards the Cathedral, “Latin America’s most important monument.”⁷⁹

Approving the Zona Centro project posed enormous difficulties, many of which resembled those of integrating a master plan. In the first place, the project lacked detail and data. Although Ángeles explained his plan over several sessions of the Planning Commission, his critics requested more detailed information, especially regarding costs, and demanded that the project were not approved until these matters were clarified.⁸⁰ Critics also demanded that the project was discussed and approved section by section, and not in its totality. Ángeles rejected these pleas, and asked for the project to be discussed in its generality, instead of endlessly debating the costs and merits of every street corner. He argued that planning—both the planning of the Zona Centro and the larger integration of the master plan—had to go on regardless of immediate obstacles or budgetary constraints because once zoning guidelines and a street system were approved by the Planning Commission they would, eventually, have to be built. Even if construction did not happen right away, approval by the Planning Commission would safeguard the future of the area.⁸¹ In fact, the project would not be completed until 1980, a timetable that provoked the derision of critics such as García Cortés, who wrote that the project was so

⁷⁹ Luis Angeles, “Proyecto de Planificación Zona Centro,” AGN-CLA-49-233.

⁸⁰ “Comisión de Planificación,” Acta 10, September 13, 1950, AGN-CLA-49-233.

⁸¹ “Se refiere por último [Ángeles] a que si como lo ha querido el Sr. Valdés, primero se busquen los recursos económicos antes de aprobar el proyecto, se llegaría a la suspensión de toda actividad en materia de planificación, tendría que clausurarse la Oficina del Plano Regulador y se harían estériles los estudios de las grandes zonas en que el Distrito Federal se ha dividido para integrar ese Plano Regulador, mediante los estudios de los asesores técnicos, con lo cual el desarrollo de la ciudad seguiría siendo tan caótico como hasta ahora, precisamente por la carencia de un plano regulador y sin que esto impidiera el que en épocas posteriores, por necesidades imperiosas e inaplazables que no podrían dejarse de satisfacer, se tuviera que llevar a cabo un costo infinitamente más alto en esas obras de planificación.” “Comisión de Planificación,” Acta 10, AGN-CL-49-233.

“practical that it would keep the city in works for half a century; so essential that it would leave thousands without a roof.”⁸²

On October 18, 1950, the commission approved the Zona Centro’s street system and proceeded to discuss zoning.⁸³ But voices of dissent had cracked the project’s initial impulse, and discussions spiraled into fierce confrontations. The main issue at stake was the destruction of the city’s colonial past. Invited to the Planning Commission as a representative from the Dirección de Monumentos Coloniales, historian Manuel Toussaint rejected the project because it entailed the destruction of protected buildings and the city’s colonial grid.⁸⁴ Toussaint’s passionate stance contributed to the coalescence of a conservationist front in defense of the city. In July 1951, the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia [INAH] rejected the project and offered a counterproposal—authored by architect José Gorbea—that abandoned the proposal to extend avenues Reforma and 20 de Noviembre and shielded the city’s old core from being crossed by new avenues.⁸⁵ The extension of both avenues represented the heart of the Zona Centro project so Gorbea’s proposal amounted to burying Ángeles’ vision for the city.

The crux of the matter was not only the future of the *traza* but that of the city as a whole. Whereas in 1939 the members of the Comité del Plano Regulador were trying to define an urban unit still anchored in the old city—in Mexico City proper but not the *delegaciones*—the 1950 Planning Commission had already witnessed the emergence of a new city. In ten years the

⁸² *La reforma urbana en México*, 69.

⁸³ This decision was not unanimous. For a dissenting view, see Carlos Contreras, “El Paseo de la Reforma,” *El Novedades*, October 28, 1951; reproduced in Carlos Contreras, *Planos Reguladores 1946-1953* (Mexico City: UAM-UNAM, 2008).

⁸⁴ “México es todavía una ciudad que conserva el abolengo de su fundación en la traza. Esa traza que empleó el arquitecto de Hernán Cortés, Alonso García Bravo, y sobre la cual, durante los tres siglos de la colonia, se levantaron templos y casas de primer orden, como no se encuentran en ninguna otra ciudad de América...” Quoted by Adrián García Cortés, *La reforma urbana en México*, 180.

⁸⁵ Adrián García Cortés, *La reforma urbana en México*, 212-231.

ground beneath their feet had shifted. Mexico City was no longer a typical Spanish city where the political, religious, commercial, and cultural powers converged at the center, noted Luis Rivero del Val, but one where those activities had migrated outwards. This centrifugal movement—signaled most clearly by the construction of the National University in 1952—was unstoppable, but different groups disagreed about how desirable it was and how to best channel it.

The long debates around the Zona Centro project reveal numerous cleavages within the Planning Commission. The most visible conflict is that between modernist planners close to the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), like Luis Ángeles and Mario Pani, and a more traditional camp represented by Carlos Contreras and Manuel Toussaint, the old friends who in 1938 had advocated for an ideal of planning that was grounded in history. Ángeles presented his project cautiously in order to assuage the fears of this camp, emphasizing that it represented simply one section of a larger city master plan, whose completion, moreover, was an aspiration that everyone shared. But his emphasis on traffic circulation and urban renewal made him an obvious follower of a more radical understanding of planning, epitomized by Le Corbusier and the CIAM. Ángeles quoted Le Corbusier during the presentation of his project, arguing that Mexican planners “should not be conservative [in limiting themselves] to a rickety and mediocre project” that would only cure the city’s immediate ills.⁸⁶ Only big plans would save Mexico City.

Its critics interpreted the Zona Centro project as an authoritarian fantasy that would destroy Mexico’s historic capital and ruin the lives of its most vulnerable families. Manuel Toussaint, who one decade earlier lamented the *afrancesamiento* of Mexico City, now decried

⁸⁶ Luis Angeles, “Proyecto de Planificación Zona Centro: Preámbulo a la memoria descriptiva,” AGN-CL-49-233.

that Mexico's capital would lose its personality and become just another "Texan city."⁸⁷ García Cortéz denounced that Ángeles' project would destroy the homes of thousands of poor families who would then be unable to purchase a new house. He described Ángeles and his ilk as "technical Atilas" and "scientific destroyers" of unimportant things such as the houses of the urban poor, renaming the Zona Centro project as Project-H, "deadlier than an atomic bomb."⁸⁸

A more hidden conflict emerges from García Cortéz's account of the project debates. This conflict, institutional in nature, divided "technicians" working at Public Works from the "representatives" of the city, clustered in powerful groups such as the Confederación de Cámaras Industriales (represented by Carlos Contreras) or the Liga de Defensa de Propietarios de Casas (represented by Luis Rivero de Val). These representatives were not Public Works bureaucrats; they were deeply suspicious of a technocratic and authoritarian city government. When analyzed through this institutional lens, the planning debates of the 1950s are not about urban ideas but about the jurisdiction and power of the Planning Commission as well as the legal meaning of the master plan.

Despite its partial approval by the Planning Commission, Ángeles' Zona Centro project never materialized in its entirety. In 1952, Mexico City's new mayor, Ernesto P. Uruchurtu, quietly aborted the Zona Centro project, which had been debilitated by the long and acrimonious discussions at the Planning Commission.⁸⁹ Sections of the project, however, were completed in the long run. In the 1960s, the extension of Reforma Avenue was finally completed, after

⁸⁷ "Todo ese ambiente, que es lo que le da personalidad a nuestra ciudad, desaparece de golpe para convertirla en una ciudad texana." Quoted by Adrián García Cortéz, *La reforma urbana en México*, 180.

⁸⁸ "La ciudad. El atómico," *El Universal*, August 20, 1950.

⁸⁹ Diane Davis, *Urban Leviathan*, 124-5; Stephanie Ronda and Vicente Ugalde, "Planeación urbana en la ciudad de México en los cincuenta: controversias y debates en la Comisión de Planificación del Distrito Federal," 88.

decades of failed attempts. First proposed by engineer Emilio Dondé in 1905, the Planning Commission had pushed for this extension for years.⁹⁰ In fact, Carlos Contreras made the same proposal in 1926, enticed by “the magnetic attraction of connecting Mexico City’s two traditional mounts [Tepeyac and Chapultepec].”⁹¹ These ideas and projects inspired Ángeles’ own proposal. Ángeles praised the master plan of Contreras, his fiercest critic, stating “that [it] should have been approved at the time,” and claiming it as a forerunner of his own project.⁹² The Zona Centro project appropriated many other unfinished city plans; for instance, it integrated several street openings that had been approved by the Planning Commission during the early 1940s.⁹³ When seen under this light, the Zona Centro Project reveals the continuities between two apparently opposed generations of planners: that of Carlos Contreras and that of Luis Ángeles.

Both planners and their critics failed to recognize the limited power that the guiding visions of planners had, as well as the nature of such power. The newspapers cartoons by Audiffred that complemented García Cortéz’s *El Universal* articles capture this misguided view. Andrés Audiffred was a sharp observer of Mexico City’s transformation into a mega-city, which he described in cartoons published in newspapers and architecture magazines.⁹⁴ “Planificación de trilladora” [Fig. 2.5], depicts an urban planner wearing a doctor coat that covers a group of

⁹⁰ Angel Alcántara Pastor, “El Proyecto para la Ampliación del Paseo de la Reforma es Importante,” *El Universal*, March 2, 1946.

⁹¹ Carlos Contreras, *Planos Reguladores 1946-1953*, 62.

⁹² “Comisión de Planificación.” Acta 9. September 13, 1950. AGN-CL-49-233.

⁹³ “Comisión de Planificación.” Acta 9. September 13, 1950. AGN-CL-49-233.

⁹⁴ For a sample of his cartoons, see “Audiffred urbanista,” *Arquitectura y lo demás* 4 (1945): 15-17. The editors described Audiffred’s urban critique as focusing on the following themes: “La falta de agua; las rentas por los cielos; el ruido enloquecedor de toda la ciudad; las lindas casitas coloniales desbaratadas por los pretenciosos edificios de departamentos; los sucios, congestionados, meteóricos y homicidas camiones; los carísimos, laberínticos y minúsculos departamentos estilo campo de concentración...”

Lilliputian contractors. The planner is using a thresher to widen Tacuba Street, an action observed by a stoic group of poor urbanites—a blind man, and a couple whose attire conveys a recent move to the city from the countryside—the losers of the destruction of the city’s central neighborhoods. The scene is highly legible, echoing older and contemporary scripts of urban renewal and destruction, from Baron Georges-Eugène Haussman transformation of nineteenth-century Paris to Robert Moses’ twentieth-century renovation of New York.⁹⁵ It conveys a powerful and corrupt government razing slums in the name of progress and business. The image is misleading because the government was not that powerful. Tacuba was not widened, partly due to the resistance of Audiffred and García Cortéz. It is also misleading because the street opening and extensions that did take place were not simply undertaken by a powerful city government but negotiated on the ground, as the next chapter will show.

⁹⁵ Classic essays about these modernist scripts include Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982) and David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003).



Fig. 2.6. “Planificación de trilladora,” in Adrián García Cortéz, *La reforma urbana de México*.

If Audiffred and García Cortéz denounced the power of the Planning Commission, most observers deplored the opposite problem: the weakness of planners, most embarrassingly and painfully visible in their incapacity to integrate a master plan.⁹⁶ “There is not a master plan nor urban planners in the city government,” lamented the Sociedad de Arquitectos Mexicanos in

⁹⁶ Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, “El plano de la ciudad,” *Arquitectura y lo demás* 11(1947-48), 16.

1945: “There is politics, practical solutions, and engineering instead of architecture.”⁹⁷ Fifteen years later, a journalist made the same complaint. “The city has become a shapeless monster because there is not a Master Plan executed by intelligent and sound experts.”⁹⁸

Following the fiasco of the Zona Centro project, the passing of Mexico City’s new planning law in December 1953 brought, once again, the problem of the master plan to the fore.⁹⁹ The law defined planning as the “organization and coordination, through a master plan, of urban life.”¹⁰⁰ But what exactly this meant remained unclear. Different drafts of the law evidenced a shifting role for the master plan. In one version, the planning law was “subjected to a master plan” (*con sujeción a un plano regulador*). Alternatively, the law would “tend to form a master plan” (*tendencia a la formación*). The earliest project that I have found—submitted to Congress in December 1951—stipulated that the Planning Commission (which, significantly, was renamed as the Comisión del Plano Regulador) would request from Public Works the

⁹⁷ “No hay Plano Regulador ni urbanistas en el Departamento del Distrito: allí hay política, soluciones prácticas e ingeniería tomando el lugar de la arquitectura. Pero cuando se presente la quiebra de la ciudad por exceso de área en relación con el número de habitantes, será ya demasiado tarde para aplicar remedios, y los actuales políticos del Departamento descansarán entre honores y riquezas.” “Demoliciones gratis por el enemigo público,” *Arquitectura y lo demás* 1, no. 1 (1945), 22.

⁹⁸ “La ciudad ha crecido monstruosamente, sin organización ni sentido, debido a la falta de un Plano Regulador ejecutado por personas competentes y con inteligencia.” Arturo Sotomayor, *Los bárbaros sobre la ciudad de México* (Mexico City: B. Costa-Amic, 1960), 32.

⁹⁹ Different versions of the new law were sent to Congress by the President between 1951 and 1953—a period that spans the administrations of two mayors, Fernando Casas Alemán and Ernesto P. Uruchurtu, and two presidents, Miguel Alemán and Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez. The law that was finally passed in 1953 was drafted by Luis Coudurier, Uruchurtu’s secretary, and Fernando Ríos Venegas, a Public Works veteran. Additionally, other members of the office such as Luis Ángeles offered their advice and expertise. It is Luis Ángeles who mentions Coudurier and Ríos Venegas as the authors of the law in a report regarding the law that he sent to the Head of Public Works in November 16, 1953. “En relación con el proyecto de Ley de Planificación.” AHDF-Gobernación-175.

¹⁰⁰ Art. 2. “Para los efectos de esta ley se entiende por planificación la organización y coordinación, mediante un Plano Regulador, de las funciones de la vida urbana—población, habitación, medios de comunicación, fuentes de trabajo, centros culturales, deportivos, recreativos, médicos, asistenciales, de comercio—...”

necessary data, reports, and documents needed to form the master plan.¹⁰¹ However, a different version of the law inverted this relationship between the commission and Public Works, dictating that the commission would *provide* the necessary information to Public Works. In the end, the law ordered that public works should be planned according to the master plan but how such a thing would be completed was left unresolved.

Semantics notwithstanding, the fact that a master plan did not exist made its mention in the law problematic, or downright absurd, as Adrián García Cortéz acidly remarked:

Para los efectos de esta ley... se entiende por planificación la organización y coordinación, mediante un Plano Regulador, de las funciones de la vida urbana... En otras palabras, planificación es la organización de la vida urbana conforme a algo que no existe... La Ley supone que existe un Plano Regulador. Y esta suposición es completamente falsa.¹⁰²

Conclusion

The regional master plan embraced by Carlos Contreras in the 1920s became, in practice, replaced by a humbler and more disjointed mission: a mosaic of projects designed by different offices and planners. The resulting master plan was fragmented, uneven, and incomplete. It is tempting to agree with García Cortéz and view the master plan as a failed project. Indeed, this chapter has described some reasons for this failure: the city was not surveyed in its totality, municipal offices were divided by rivalries, and different camps held conflicting visions of what Mexico City should become.

¹⁰¹ *Diario de los Debates de la Cámara de Senadores del Congreso de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, December 31, 1951, 34-40.

¹⁰² “Plani-Destrucción”, *El Universal*, January 17, 1954. The article continued: “Quienes la redactaron lo saben. Y saben también que únicamente existen algunos estudios de zonas dentro de la ciudad, totalmente desvinculados unos de otros, y hechos al capricho de los técnicos que en ocasiones anteriores tuvieron a su cargo esos estudios únicamente por amistad con los políticos en turno....”

But the master plan was more than a failed project. Because of its uneven and incomplete character, the master plan reveals—as a photograph negative—how different offices surveyed Mexico City from different scales, perspectives, and with different goals in mind. The small-scale *sistema vial principal* was a typical statecraft tool that the Planning Commission used to advance its goal of communicating efficiently a rapidly growing metropolis. On the other hand, the blurry areas in these small-scale plans—spaces described by Mauricio Gómez Mayorga as a “cancerous tissue”—were outside of the field of vision of planners working for the Planning Commission. These neighborhoods were not figments of the hubris of planners but arenas where municipal engineers, topographers, political brokers, and resident associations opened streets and subdivided neighborhoods, often after fierce negotiations. These were not informal neighborhoods, since their residents often held coveted official blueprints signed by the Oficina del Plano Regulador. But these blueprints, as I will explain below, were not simply drafted by Public Works experts; rather, they fixated a grid that had been negotiated at a local level.

What were the implications of having a fragmented master plan of uncertain juridical status? Each of the partial city projects that were supposed to be integrated into a master plan became a small battlefield where planners, judges, political brokers, and resident associations fought for their interests and visions. Luis Ángeles’ Zona Centro project, for example, fostered the consolidation of a conservationist camp in the city. Likewise, such projects as the *sistema vial principal* drew the fault lines where ambitious projects clashed with neighborhoods that had been subdivided by local actors. Sometimes planners won these battles and sometimes they lost—and the next chapter will explore these confrontations between top-down planning projects and grassroots planning in more depth. But the master plan, with its blank spaces, unfinished sections, and ambiguous legal status, defined the landscape where these conflicts took place.

CH. 3. THE LOGIC OF LAND SUBDIVISIONS

Streets are contested spaces. People use them in conflicting ways, challenging rigid definitions of public and private space and fixed uses such as vehicle circulation, pedestrian strolling, or street hawking.¹ But streets are also contested spaces before they become “official” streets, before they are drawn in municipal blueprints, and before the construction of buildings around them makes them seem like a natural feature of the landscape. This chapter describes the process by which colonias proletarias were subdivided—one in which streets were opened, lots demarcated, and limits between lots and streets defined. State agents played different roles in this effort. Some colonias proletarias were subdivided by municipal engineers. Others were subdivided by private developers and only afterwards, once residents were living there, sanctioned by Public Works. Most of the time, however, the surveying, subdivision, occupation, and official recognition of colonias proletarias did not follow a clear sequence. Therefore, this fraught process defies common understandings of what urban planning is. But it also demonstrates the power that urban planners had, precisely in the spaces where they were supposed to be powerless.

The planning of Capultitlán, an old Indian barrio close to the northern city limits, exemplifies this process. In December 1946, the Delegate of Gustavo A. Madero requested from Public Works a “planning study” for Capultitlán. Mexico City’s northern delegaciones had become the country’s industrial engine during the 1940s.² Factories, industrial plants, and

¹ In thinking about Mexican streets, I am inspired by essays by Fernando Escalante, “Una fantasía gigantesca,” in *Estampas de Liliput: Bosquejos para una sociología de México* (Mexico City: FCE, 2004), and Alejandro Rossi, “Casas y calles,” in *Obras reunidas* (Mexico City: FCE, 2005).

² For a general analysis of the industrialization of the Federal District, see Gustavo Garza, *El proceso de industrialización en la ciudad de México, 1821-1970*. A more fine-grained description of the working-class culture of the area is provided in Steven J. Bachelor, “The Edge of Miracles: Postrevolutionary Mexico City and the Remaking of the Industrial Working Class, 1925-1982,” Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2003.

working-class neighborhoods rose where agricultural fields, canals, and scattered barrios used to stand. Migrants had settled in the area since the late nineteenth century, but the trend had increased exponentially over the previous decade, driven by the state-led industrialization of the area. It was in response to such demographic pressure that the delegate requested a planning study for Capultitlán.³ After sending personnel to the area, Public Works drafted a blueprint that modified the neighborhood grid but threatened to dispossess a group of residents. Two years earlier, Capultitlán had been recognized as an official colonia proletaria; accordingly, an official resident association—Asociación Pro-Mejoramiento de la Colonia Capultitlán—represented it before the city government. Capultitlán’s resident association accepted the project. A rival group, however, rejected the proposal, and demanded that Capultitlán remain unaltered.

Both groups presented their cases to the Comisión Reguladora del Crecimiento de la Ciudad de México in the summer of 1947. This was an unusual occasion, since commission sessions were usually attended by planners, engineers, and architects, who discussed city problems in a passionate yet rather technical manner (street alignments being a recurrent topic). Internal affairs of colonias proletarias—usually pertaining to disagreements over lot limits or neighborhood leaderships—were usually resolved by the Oficina de Colonias, the municipal office tasked with managing colonias proletarias. On this occasion, however, the commission offered a venue to the many “persons who felt threatened by the planning of colonia Capultitlán.”⁴ Thus planners, often insulated from local conflicts over access to land, housing, and services, got a chance to observe these conflicts from a close distance.

³ AHCM-OP-254-1.

⁴ “...porque se encuentran varias personas presentes que se sienten afectadas con la planificación de la colonia Capultitlán y quieren exponer sus puntos de vista.” “Comisión Reguladora del Crecimiento de la Ciudad,” July 29, 1947. AHCM-OP-598-2.

At the heart of the matter were two blueprints, each favored by a different group of residents. The session minutes are hard to follow without the blueprints under discussion, but this much is clear. The official resident association of Capultitlán accepted the new blueprints, which were drafted by Public Works. Members of this group carried credentials provided by the Oficina de Colonias. They were also supported by an unnamed representative who attended the session as well. The opposing group—referred to as *los inconformes*—claimed that the previous blueprints were also legitimate, had been drafted by the Oficina del Plano Regulador, and followed the guidelines of the city master plan. It is difficult, however, to distinguish legitimate residents from squatters because everyone claimed rightful possession of their lots, possession that was recognized by a different blueprint. The quarrel between both groups lasted years, adopting different forms over time. In 1950, for example, the Asociación Pro-Mejoramiento accused the leaders of the *inconformes* of “destroying the planning” of the colonia, “defaming several residents,” and sowing discord in Capultitlán.⁵ In turn, the *inconformes* denounced the squatters who, supported by the Oficina de Colonias, had invaded their lots and contested the subdivision of the neighborhood.⁶

A key aspect of the conflict between planners and residents was the fact that the latter were *already* living in Capultitlán. The blueprints under discussion would not lay the grounds for settlement but confirm rightful possession for some residents while leaving others in more uncertain terrain, outside of the official blueprint—outside the law. A seasoned member of the Comisión Reguladora del Crecimiento, engineer Salvador Arroyo, frustratingly expressed that “people built their houses wherever they wish and then conflicts ensue. If it is hard to plan a

⁵ Asociación Pro-Mejoramiento de la Colonia Capultitlán to Miguel Alemán Valdés, January 28, 1950. AGN-MAV-418.2/144.

⁶ “Piden se desaloje a paracaidistas del Capultitlán,” *El Nacional*, August 28, 1952; “Protestan por la invasión de terrenos,” *El Nacional*, October 4, 1952.

colonia it is even harder to adjust this planning.”⁷ Planners were not really planning, Arroyo lamented, but fixing a deficient system of streets, lots, and blocks, merely catching up with the construction in colonias proletarias. And catching up became something of a Sisyphean ordeal because Mexico City continued to grow and the Oficina de Colonias continued to certify hundreds of colonias proletarias. Since these neighborhoods were entitled to planning and public services, planners found themselves increasingly overburdened. Facing the political muscle that residents of colonias proletarias could muster, Luis Ángeles, another commission member, complained that

Nos hemos encontrado una cantidad de colonias que han surgido recientemente y que están construyendo donde quieren y que piden al propio licenciado [regent Fernando Casas Alemán], servicios de agua y saneamiento sin tomar en consideración las dificultades para llevarlo a cabo y nos pide se haga la planificación rápida; quizás se logre el aumento de personal para poder resolver estos casos dentro del Distrito Federal lo que es preferible a la anarquía que reina.⁸

Luis Ángeles was the author of the ambitious 1950 project to transform Mexico City’s historic center, only to flounder amidst internecine rivalries between planners and government authorities. Here, Ángeles confronted a different type of political arena, where popular urban groups requested public works from the municipal authorities. This chapter studies the conflict but also the collaboration between residents, political brokers, and urban planners that the complaints of Arroyo and Ángeles capture. It uncovers the relationship between Public Works and the Oficina de Colonias, offices commonly viewed as antithetical to each other. The fact that planners were dealing with colonias proletarias such as Capultitlán, notwithstanding how

⁷ “Esa es una situación que todos conocemos en el Departamento, las gentes no hacen caso pues construyen en donde quieren y como quieren y después vienen los conflictos; si es difícil planear una colonia, más difícil es ajustar esa planeación, por eso se hizo un esfuerzo de coordinar estas construcciones de Capultitlán.” Comisión Reguladora del Crecimiento de la Ciudad. July 29, 1947. AHCM-OP-598-2.

⁸ Comisión Reguladora del Crecimiento de la Ciudad. July 29, 1947. AHCM-OP-598-2.

grudgingly, is extremely significant, since these neighborhoods are usually considered outside of the purview of urban planners.

Instead of following a chronological arc, this chapter draws on the histories of different colonias proletarias in order to explain how different government offices and social groups brokered the subdivision and occupation of Mexico City's peripheral colonias proletarias during the 1940s and 1950s. In the first section, I situate colonias proletarias within a larger literature on squatter settlements, popular urbanization, and informality. Then, I describe colonias proletarias as a government project, contextualize the origins of this project, and analyze its working in practice. Finally, I analyze the interplay between the different groups that planned colonias proletarias: urban planners, political brokers, and resident associations.

Planning and the Law

Scholars sustain that a dual regime of public works and urban planning crystallized in the 1940s.⁹ On the one hand, a cohort of architects, engineers, and urban planners—the latest link in a long chain of expert modernizers—asserted their professional expertise over Mexico City. Working principally from the Office of Public Works, this group integrated master plans, joined planning committees such as the Comisión Reguladora del Crecimiento and the Comisión de Planificación del Distrito Federal, and drafted urban codes with the goal of guiding Mexico City's expansion. The 1941 Reglamento de Fraccionamientos, soon emulated in other Mexican cities, was the most important of these codes.¹⁰ The Reglamento de Fraccionamientos restricted land uses, building types and, most importantly, regulated who was responsible for providing

⁹ Antonio Azuela and María Soledad Cruz, “La institucionalización de las colonias populares y la política urbana en la ciudad de México (1940-1946),” *Sociológica* 4, no. 9 (1989): 111-133.

¹⁰ On the significance of the “reglamentos de fraccionamientos,” see Antonio Azuela, *La ciudad, la propiedad privada y el derecho*, 89-97.

neighborhoods with services such as water and pavements. Its main goal was preventing developers from subdividing and selling land without services, an endemic source of conflict between developers, lot purchasers, and the municipal government. Although similar codes had been passed in previous decades, the 1941 Reglamento was hailed as a breakthrough, an act through which “the Revolution ended the fraud committed by land developers [selling] lots at high prices and lacking sewage, water, pavements, and electricity.”¹¹

While urban planners drafted codes such as the Reglamento de Fraccionamientos, private developers subdivided hundreds of colonias proletarias that defied them. The relationship between colonias proletarias, the federal and local governments, and municipal laws remains understudied. We know that colonias proletarias were partially exempted from following the Reglamento de Fraccionamientos and were regulated instead by a special code, the “Reglamento de las Asociaciones Pro-Mejoramiento de Colonias en el Distrito Federal” (Reglamento de Colonias hereafter).¹² As its name intimates, the Reglamento de Colonias did not order the built environment but men and women, grouping them in resident associations sanctioned by the Oficina de Colonias. It was a political code of corporatist inspiration that linked together resident associations with territorial units. Urban scholars Antonio Azuela and María Soledad Cruz have argued that it established a *sui generis* legal framework for colonias proletarias whose logic diverged from the logic of planning.¹³ While planners sought to control urban growth and build a rational and orderly metropolis, politicians “incorporated” resident associations into the political system through political patronage. Fittingly, both the Reglamento de Colonias and the

¹¹ “Toma de posesión de las directivas de las sociedades de colonos del Distrito Federal, en Bellas Artes,” in *Historia Documental de la CNOP, 1943-1959*, ed. PRI-CNOP (Mexico City: PRI, 1984), 147.

¹² Manuel Perlo Cohen, “Política y vivienda en México, 1910-1952”; María Cristina Sánchez Mejorada, *Rezagos de la modernidad*.

¹³ “La institucionalización de las colonias populares y la política urbana en la ciudad de México (1940-1946).”

Reglamento de Fraccionamientos were passed in 1941. This year can thus be seen as marking the birth of two cities: a planned city, following transnational ideas and practices, and a corporatist city, whose *raison d'être* was incorporating groups of urban poor into state institutions.

The government sponsorship of colonias proletarias represented a departure from previous policies banning similar neighborhoods. Between 1870 and 1930, urban reformers across the world—planners, hygienists, architects, engineers—passed myriad laws with the goal of making cities safer, cleaner, and more aesthetically pleasing. As historians have described, the passing of sanitary codes and municipal plans placed numerous neighborhoods and their residents in a space of illegality.¹⁴ Improvised and poorly serviced neighborhoods had always existed in Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, or Bombay, but these neighborhoods only became illegal after the passing of municipal urban codes—inspired in transnational principles of planning, sanitation, and construction—that set unrealistically high standards, making them impossible to apply. Mostly unenforced, these codes were significant because they placed thousands in a position of “tolerated illegality.” Such precarious position, in turn, set the terms for the negotiation between the government and urban residents who fought for a foothold in the city. The originality of the 1941 Reglamento de Colonias was that instead of pushing low-income settlements outside the law it sought to dictate different terms for their integration into the city, both as political organizations and territorial units.

Analogous policies were devised by governments throughout the world, most commonly and explicitly after 1950. The Latin American experiments in low-income urban governance are among the best-known, due in part to the fact that the Cold War fueled numerous studies on urbanization in the region. Lima, for example, studied by such authors as John F. C. Turner, José

¹⁴ For descriptions of this logic, see Brodwyn Fischer, *A Poverty of Rights*, and Antonio Azuela, *La ciudad, la propiedad privada y el derecho*.

Matos Mar, William Mangin, and Hernando de Soto, might be the most studied site of government-sponsored low-income urbanization. Beginning with the 13517 Law of 1961, the Peruvian government reduced planning standards with the goal of legalizing informal settlements.¹⁵ The 13517 Law recognized informal settlements in a widespread manner, making of it, arguably, the most ambitious urban reform in the continent.

Other Latin American governments followed suit, lowering urbanization standards and forging partnerships with low-income residents in order to subdivide and build popular neighborhoods. During the 1960s, these experiments in urban governance were broadly inspired in ideas of self-construction and bottom-up community organization, principles that became highly compelling around the world and were consecrated by the United Nations in 1978 through the creation of its Human Settlements Program. Myriad communal juntas and associations were sponsored by municipal governments—from which they enjoyed varying degrees of independence—with the goal of building and organizing neighborhoods from the grassroots.¹⁶ When no formal system was devised by the government, low-income neighborhoods developed non-written rules for organization, tacitly accepted by the government.¹⁷ In their account of Caracas' *juntas vecinales*, legal scholars Rogelio Pérez Perdomo and Pedro Nikken describe

¹⁵ On informal urbanization in Lima, see David Collier, *Squatters and Oligarchs: Authoritarian Rule and Policy Change in Peru* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Helen Gyger, "The Informal as a Project: Self-Help Housing in Peru," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2013; and Julio Calderón Cockburn, *La ciudad ilegal: Lima en el siglo XX* (Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales UNMSM, 2005).

¹⁶ Gilbert and Ward, *Housing, the state, and the poor*, 185; Rogelio Pérez Perdomo and Pedro Nikken, *Derechos y propiedad de la vivienda en los barrios de Caracas* (Caracas: FCE-Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1979). For a broader intellectual history of this history of community planning in this period, see Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

¹⁷ This is how I read Boaventura de Sousa Santos' classic distinction between the "law of the asphalt" of the state and the "law of the oppressed" of the community. While the "law of the oppressed" was not a creation of the government, it tacitly accepted it because it served its larger political and economic goals. "The Law of the Oppressed: The Construction and Reproduction of Legality in Pasagarda," *Law & Society Review* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1977): 5-126.

these rules as an “official informal order of the barrios” (*ordenamiento oficial informal de los barrios*). In regards to Caracas’ *juntas vecinales*, Pérez Perdomo and Nikken write:

La junta está autorizando a levantar un rancho, es decir, una vivienda que carece de los requisitos de habitabilidad que ha fijado el propio municipio. Sería, sin embargo, muy poco probable que la oficina de ingeniería municipal interviniera en el barrio y ordenara demoler las viviendas levantadas sin su permiso y supervisión. Es claro que la junta comunal y la ingeniería municipal entienden que su competencia varía según el área urbana. La junta no autorizaría a nadie a levantar un rancho en la parte regularmente urbanizada de la parroquia.¹⁸

The oxymoron of an “informal official order” resembles urban planner Ananya Roy’s proposal of thinking of “informal planning” as the selective non-application of laws.¹⁹ In all of these instances, as in Mexico City’s colonias proletarias, oppositions such as formal and informal, planning and politics, rule of law and patronage, lose meaning. The government approach towards colonias proletarias oscillated between assertive engagement and profound neglect and ignorance. Together, in partnership and confrontation, planners (Public Works) and political brokers (Oficina de Colonias) subdivided and allotted lots, opened streets, organized the distribution of urban services, and carved out public spaces where schools, markets, and parks were built. This was an uneasy relationship because planners and politicians viewed the city with different lenses, possessed different toolkits, and pursued different goals. In a nutshell, while the Oficina de Colonias established colonias proletarias politically, Public Works subdivided and provided them with urban services.²⁰ Whereas the first office controlled people, the latter was in

¹⁸ *Derechos y propiedad de la vivienda en los barrios de Caracas*, 58.

¹⁹ “Urban Informality: The Production of Space and the Practice of Planning,” in Rachel Weber and Randall Crane, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Urban Planning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 691-705.

²⁰ From the viewpoint of the municipal government, this arrangement was anomalous since it gave the Oficina de Colonias, nominally a part of the Secretaría de Gobernación, an important role in handling urbanization. In its *Memorias*, the DDF acknowledged the oddity in a revealing explanation. “Aún cuando administrativamente la Oficina de Colonias es una dependencia de la Dirección General de Gobernación, y de ella recibe instrucciones para el desarrollo de sus actividades, se juzgó conveniente incorporar su informe al Capítulo de Funciones de Urbanización, puesto que realmente la creación de

charge of regulating space—the limits between public and private space, the provision of infrastructure, and the use of public spaces. Planners and politicians needed each other. Only the first group could subdivide a city grid and provide it with urban services and only the second group could ensure that lots in the grid were distributed among city residents. Nonetheless, this division of labor was fraught with bureaucratic confusions, political conflicts, and challenged by other groups.

My analysis of the planning of colonias proletarias draws from seldom analyzed records: the city register of colonias proletarias, the resident censuses of colonias proletarias, and official blueprints. Possession claims revolved around the information in these records and around who controlled them. The Oficina de Colonias had the authority to decide who had a place in a colonia proletaria and which neighborhoods were colonias proletarias, a coveted status that materialized in important privileges, most importantly the provision of public services. Official blueprints, on the other hand, were sanctioned (but not always drafted) by Public Works officials. Blueprints solidified the place of colonias proletarias within the city and the existence of lots within colonias proletarias. Without official blueprints, anyone could claim a lot in colonias proletarias, as the case of Capultitlán illustrated. As the case of Capultitlán also suggested, blueprints cemented the existence of lots in the first place. Absent blueprints, the system of blocks, streets, and lots in colonias proletarias was profoundly uncertain, and could be challenged by public works or landless groups seeking a spot in the neighborhood.

The government expected censuses and blueprints to serve as statecraft technologies that would allow the counting, measuring, classifying, and controlling of the city and its population. However, the multiplicity of bureaucracies and records and the short-circuits that plagued the

colonias proletarias forma parte del desarrollo de la Ciudad de México.” DDF, *Memoria del Departamento del Distrito Federal, 1940-1946*, 29.

communications between them bred confusion and disorder. Moreover, several political brokers, independent of the government, participated in the subdivision and settlement of colonias. Scholars have often considered this multiplication of laws and bureaucracies, and the confusion that it produced, as a method of domination: “divide, confuse, and rule,” as Paul Gillingham summed the strategy of domination of the Mexican ruling class.²¹ But this method of domination was not deliberate. Confusion was not a plan but a condition that permitted both the government and the governed to pursue their own and conflicting goals.

A Corporatist City

Colonias proletarias were created in 1941 as a political and urbanistic model for “a modern yet humble, healthy yet austere” metropolis.²² Twenty years later, they were widely regarded as “overcrowded, anarchic, settlements [...] bereft of urbanization and planning.”²³ The Instituto Nacional de la Vivienda (INV), an agency that conducted some of the most complete housing surveys of Mexico City during the 1950s and 1960s, reproduced these views, describing colonias proletarias as squatter settlements created by land invasions. “Beginnings of colonias are obscure,” the investigation read; a “natural leader assembled not less than 75 families,” located a

²¹ “Preface,” *Dictablenda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1938* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), X. Other authors have identified this dictum in specific urban contexts. See, for example, Antonio Azuela, *La ciudad, la propiedad privada y el derecho*, 143; Jorge Montaña, *Los pobres de la ciudad*, 93; Ward and Gilbert, *Housing, the State, and the Poor*, 193. This confusion, however, also created opportunities for deft brokers to pursue their goals and challenge general policy designs. On these political brokers see, David Schers, “The Popular Sector of the Mexican PRI,” Ph.D. diss., The University of New Mexico, 1972; Cornelius Wayne, *Politics and the Migrant Poor in Mexico City*.

²² David Cymet, *El problema de las colonias proletarias, Ciudad de México* (Mexico City: Escuela Superior de Ingeniería y Arquitectura-IPN, 1955), 65.

²³ “Grandes conglomerados faltos de urbanización y planeamiento [...] no son más que hacinamientos sin ordenamiento alguno, de grupos de familias de bajos recursos económicos, sin cultura alguna, y por ende sin ambiciones para tratar de mejorar su nivel de vida.” Jorge Neme David, “Reestructuración de una colonia proletaria”, UNAM, Architecture Thesis, 1963, 4.

vacant lot that was not surveyed by the police, and invaded it on a set night. The following morning offered the “spectacle of hundreds of persons marking off their lots, improvising sidewalks and pathways, carrying metal sheets, cartons, bricks, auto parts, and all sorts of construction materials.”²⁴ These nightly invasions were the exception rather than the norm. However, by the 1960s this understanding of colonias proletarias had become a pervasive belief with important political consequences as it construed colonias proletarias as squatter settlements disconnected from the government.

Characterizing colonias proletarias as “unplanned” and “informal” missed several of their defining traits. Colonias proletarias failed to meet the markers of what a neighborhood *ought* to look like. They were poor, lacking urban services, and their residents were not the industrial workers that intellectuals imagined as the population of working-class neighborhoods.²⁵ But they were also under state tutelage: ordered by the Reglamento de Colonias, recognized by the Oficina de Colonias, and planned by Public Works. As a policy and an urban vision, colonias proletarias went from a promising formula to a failed experiment. David Cymet, a young architect employed by the INV in the 1950s who was the most reputed expert in the matter, wrote that “what could have been a great *urban reform* degenerated into a tragic cartoon, drawn with human misery and political demagoguery. An urbanism of topographers and an architecture of *maistros* and amateurs were pursued in order to plan areas that are now lost for generations.”²⁶

²⁴ INV, *Una ciudad perdida*, 9-10.

²⁵ For examples of contemporary analyses of colonias proletarias, see Martha Regina Jiménez y Castilla, “Bramadero: un caso ilustrativo de población marginal,” B.A. Thesis, UNAM, 1963; Francisco Acosta and Antonio López Bermúdez, “La ciudad, sus áreas representativas y un programa de bienestar social urbano,” *Estudios sociológicos* 2 (1956): 151-165; Ezequiel Cornejo Cabrera, “La colonia proletaria Escuadrón 201,” *Estudios sociológicos* 2 (1956): 170-173.

²⁶ “Lo que podría haber sido una gran REFORMA URBANA degeneró en una trágica caricatura, trazada con la miseria humana y la demagogia política. Se realizó urbanismo de topógrafos, arquitectura

The DDF created the Oficina de Colonias in 1942 in order to streamline thousands of housing requests made to the government after the Revolution.²⁷ These requests were framed in a revolutionary language that followed the model of worker and peasant organizations; they reached a high mark during the Lázaro Cárdenas administration (1934-1940) when, according to historian Jorge H. Jiménez Muñoz, more than sixty associations of urban residents coexisted in Mexico's capital.²⁸ The Oficina de Colonias sought to channel this mobilization by establishing new colonias and acting as a mediator in conflicts between owners and possessors of land. The Oficina de Colonias also acted as a broker between colonias proletarias and Public Works personnel. It was a key provider of information, notifying Public Works on the population, history, conflicts, and needs of colonias proletarias and their residents. Crucially, the Oficina de Colonias also informed Public Works if a particular neighborhood was indeed a colonia proletaria.²⁹

The DDF recognized hundreds of colonias proletarias during the tenures of regents Javier Rojo Gómez (1940-1946) and Fernando Casas Alemán (1946-1952).³⁰ This was the Golden Age of colonias proletarias, a period marked by progressive languages in politics that praised them as the homes of proletarian families and the building blocks for a working-class metropolis. In

de “maistros” y aficionados, para configurar zonas que generaciones enteras no podrán regenerar posiblemente.” *El problema de las colonias proletarias, Ciudad de México*, 66. A *maistro* (maestro) is the head of a unit of bricklayers or masons. A skilled worker but clearly underneath of the architect in the hierarchy within a construction site.

²⁷ It replaced the previous Oficina de Cooperación.

²⁸ *La traza del poder*, 255-259. Most organizations were under the umbrella of the following associations: Federación de Organizaciones del Distrito Federal; Frente Único de Colonos de la República; Confederación Mexicana de Colonos Proletarios; Confederación de Colonos de México.

²⁹ Oficina de Planeación (fraccionamientos). “Relaciones, relativas a la correspondencia recibida de enero de 1941 hasta el 30 de abril de 1945.” AHCM. Planoteca-194-1.

³⁰ According to the numbers of Cristina Sánchez Mejorada, 157 colonias were established during the administrations of Rojo Gómez and Casas Alemán, 67% during the former administration and 33% during the latter. *Rezagos de la modernidad*, 448.

1945, for instance, the Oficina de Colonias organized a “Premio de Colonias Proletarias,” by which it would provide urban services to the colonias that had made the biggest efforts towards “improving their housing.”³¹ In 1951 a group of representatives objected to descriptions of colonos as squatters, describing colonias proletarias instead as an “effective means for the enlargement and the progress of the city” and as evidence of the “economic potential of the people.”³² Colonias proletarias were also discussed during the backdoor negotiations of Mexico City’s 1953 Planning Law. An early version of the law, drafted around 1952, included “the formation of colonias proletarias and the enlargement of the already existing ones” as one of the many planning actions responsibility of the government.³³ This was an extremely significant point, as colonias proletarias were normally outside of the urban planning regime. It represented, in fact, a rare occasion in which colonias proletarias found a space in urban planning codes. Tellingly, this section was not included in the law that was finally passed. Instead, subdivision regulations, the “largest lacunae” left by the previous law, became the most important feature of the 1953 Planning Law.³⁴ Regent Ernest P. Uruchurtu (1952-1966) would combat illegal subdivisions with unparalleled vigor and zeal. The 1953 Planning Law became one of the most important tools to achieve this end.

³¹ AHCM-OP-248-1.

³² “La pervivencia de dichas colonias es un medio eficaz para el ensanchamiento y progresos de la ciudad, y la comunidad que la constituye; es un signo de potencialidad económica del pueblo, un sistema para alejar al proletariado de los vicios, una medida propicia para elevar la cultura y el concepto de responsabilidad del individuo ante la familia y una barrera a las prédicas demagógicas destructivas tan socorridas en los tiempos actuales. En una palabra, una positiva necesidad social, que debe ser satisfecha por el Estado mediante legislación adecuada y oportuna.” *Diario de debates de la Cámara de Diputados*. December 30, 1951.

³³ Different versions of the law are found in AHCM-Gobernacion-175. This box contains several files with annotated versions of the law. Files are not numbered and the Gobernación section is in the process of being catalogued and closed to the public, so I will quote the box and provide as much information as possible.

³⁴ The law project read that “en la misma iniciativa se contienen disposiciones que vienen a colmar una laguna legal y que se refieren a fraccionamientos de terrenos...” This statement is not found in one of the earlier versions of the law that I have read, from October 1952. AHCM-Gobernacion-175.

Mexico's "official" party—the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM), soon to become the PRI—sought to integrate resident associations of colonias proletarias into its popular sector, the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares (CNOP). In January 1944, the partnership between the party, the municipal government, and colonias proletarias was celebrated at the lavish Palacio de Bellas Artes, where the presidents of 150 colonias took possession of their positions.³⁵ "The unity of the colonos," argued Lauro Ortega, President of the Federación de Ligas del Sector Popular del Distrito Federal, was "a necessary condition for the solution of their problems." Ortega accused land developers of selling overpriced lots without water, sewage, electricity, and pavement, a racket that "ended when the Revolution proclaimed the Ley de Fraccionamientos."³⁶ The Secretary of the PRM, Florencio Padilla, made an equally triumphalist discourse.

El Partido de la Revolución Mexicana [...] atento a las necesidades y aspiraciones legítimas de sus elementos constitutivos, reitera hoy por mi conducto a los colonos del Distrito Federal—rama del Sector Popular de nuestro Instituto Político—su ofrecimiento de impartirles apoyo a fin de que resuelvan satisfactoriamente sus problemas específicos. Esta promesa la hacemos extensiva a todos los colonos ciudadanos y rurales de la República, con objeto de acelerar el ritmo de la construcción material del Nuevo México.³⁷

This was a period marked by a corporatist imagination, inspired by international models and shaped by the Second World War. War justified the formation of local militias, the declaration of the state of exception, and the passing of extraordinary measures such as the rent-control decree of 1942.³⁸ As elsewhere in the world, production was coordinated between unions,

³⁵ This group formed the Comité Directivo de la Federación de Colonias Proletarias. See "Toma de posesión de las directivas de las sociedades de colonos del Distrito Federal, en Bellas Artes," in *Historia Documental de la CNOP, 1943-1959*, 147.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁸ Cristina Sánchez Mejorada, *Rezagos de la modernidad*, 216-225; Stephen Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1999), 115-124.

industrialists, and government.³⁹ This mindset is exemplified by a municipal reform proposed in December 1947 by José Ángel Espinoza, a leader of the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores del DDF. The problem of urban growth was at the center of Espinoza's argument, as well as the question of how could a metropolis of millions have a communal government. Only unions, he argued, could face the challenge of "urban elephantiasis" and the concomitant chaos produced by rural migrants, described as "indifferent, suspended [*flotante*], and newly arrived migrants." Conformed by 15,000 members, the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores constituted a "clan:" "the communal force more powerfully linked to the life of the great metropolis."⁴⁰ Only unions could coordinate the relentless expansion of the city, as well as the provision of public services that it needed. The DDF aspired for resident associations tightly linked to territorial units to become the building blocks for this corporatist metropolis.

A corporatist code if ever there was one, the 1941 Reglamento de Colonias was the most important law ordering colonias proletarias. The code aimed at striking an equilibrium between protecting and controlling the urban poor.⁴¹ It shielded lots in colonias proletarias from market forces through the figure of "patrimonio familiar," which prohibited speculation and restricted the selling of lots to middle and upper-class residents.⁴² This restriction, the government stated, was geared to "securing a home for low-income families, limiting the [market] use of the real-

³⁹ Steven J. Bachelor, "The Edge of Miracles," Susan M. Gauss, *Made in Mexico: Regions, Nation, and the State in the Rise of Mexican Industrialism*.

⁴⁰ José Ángel Espinoza, "Ponencia en pro de un régimen de gobierno integral para la Ciudad de México," December 26, 1947. AGN-CL-49-224.

⁴¹ Susan Eckstein, "The State and the Urban Poor," 26; Manuel Perló Cohen, "Política y vivienda en México, 1910-1952," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 41, no. 3 (1979), 800. I use the latter verb "controlling" deliberately, as it was often used by the Oficina de Colonias to describe its relationship with colonias proletarias "under its control."

⁴² Antonio Azuela, "El marco jurídico de la vivienda," in Marco A. Michel, coord., *Procesos habitacionales de la ciudad de México* (Mexico City: UAM, 1988), 43.

estate to protect those under the care of the head of the household.”⁴³ The Reglamento bears resemblance with the property laws regulating ejido lands. Although I have not found direct connections between the drafting of both codes, their similarities were remarked by contemporaries. David Cymet, for instance, described the creation of colonias proletarias as a “true urban reform, equivalent to the agrarian reform.”⁴⁴ The Agrarian Code and the Reglamento de Colonias were inspired by a similar matrix of ideas. Both were corporatist, illiberal, and premised in the existence of “The Social.”⁴⁵ Both were, lastly, passed amidst war crises (albeit of different magnitude): the first agrarian reform was passed in 1915, in the midst of the Mexican Revolution while the 1941 Reglamento was drafted during World War II.

The most important provision of the code was the creation of resident associations through which residents negotiated with the government the provision of urban services and land titles. These associations replaced previous groups whose leaders, “lacking juridical personality,” regularly “exploited and committed fraud” against residents.⁴⁶ Only one association would be allowed to exist in each colonia, a regulation aimed at preventing conflicts between resident groups and creating a single intermediary between residents and the Oficina de Colonias.

⁴³ “... la finalidad perseguida con tal disposición [patrimonio familiar] es la de asegurar un hogar intocable a las familias de escasos recursos económicos, limitando, en beneficio de los que están bajo la dependencia del jefe de familia, la libre disposición por parte de éste, del inmueble afecto a la constitución del patrimonio al cual se rodea de protección contra los procedimientos de los acreedores, haciéndolo inembargable e inafectable. “Un Hogar Intocable para la familia,” *Gaceta Oficial del Departamento del Distrito Federal*, June 16, 1941.

⁴⁴ Cymet, *El problema de las colonias proletarias*, Ciudad de México, 63.

⁴⁵ Duncan Kennedy, “Two Globalizations of Law & Legal Thought: 1850-1968.”

⁴⁶ “Hasta antes de ahora habían venido actuando en el ramo de colonias urbanas ciertas agrupaciones que, además de carecer de personalidad jurídica, de ningún modo prestaban garantía para los intereses de los adquirentes de lotes agremiados dentro de dichas organizaciones, quienes en numerosos casos han sido víctimas de explotaciones y de fraudes.” Cymet, *El problema de las colonias proletarias*, Ciudad de México, 63.

These goals were not accomplished. Colonia authorities sanctioned by the government continued to enjoy a power that was often abused. In a typical complaint, the residents of Capultitlán accused Ángel Cornejo, president of the colonia, of using his position “as a dictatorship [and] favoring a group of *incondicionales* while dispossessing and treating [the plaintiffs] worse than foreigners.”⁴⁷ Allowing only one official association in each colonia produced a familiar pattern of conflict marked by the competition for recognition between leaders and resident associations. Virtually every popular neighborhood in Mexico City features a similar story, which includes a rift between two associations: an established, authentic, or official association against a group impostors, outsiders, or squatters. Clearly, conflicts within colonias were not structured by class or ideology but by possession claims.

The Coalición de Colonos

Restrictions against the proliferation of resident associations clearly failed. Hundreds of associations that were not recognized by the Oficina de Colonias were formed during the 1940s and 1950s. One of the most important of these groups was the Coalición de Colonos, founded in 1942 and headed by Salvador Flores. The Coalición de Colonos was affiliated to the CNOP but it should not be seen as subservient to the CNOP or the PRI—organizations that it preceded in time.⁴⁸ The Coalición de Colonos represented and defended thousands of homeless families, a

⁴⁷ “El señor Angel Cornejo, dirigente de dicha colonia, ha tomado su puesto como una dictadura y para cometer arbitrariedades favoreciendo a un grupo de sus incondicionales, y despojándonos a los que no estamos de su parte, y tratándonos peor que si fuéramos extranjeros.” David Paz Hernández to President Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez. May 14, 1954. AGN-ARC-418.2/126.

⁴⁸ Historians disagree in regards to the relationship between the Coalición de Colonos and the PRI. While Cristina Sánchez Mejorada has written that the Coalición belonged to the PRI (*Rezagos de la modernidad*, 245), Armando Cisneros had claimed the opposite; see *La ciudad que construimos: registro de la expansión de la ciudad de México* (Mexico City: UAM, 1993). Some of the Coalición’s official documents mark its membership in the CNOP, but the significance of this membership is dubious, and I

mission that often confronted it with the DDF, particularly the Oficina de Colonias. Flores was often accused by the government of organizing land invasions, stirring politically landless people, and dispossessing legitimate owners. Flores, in return, presented himself as something of a Robin Hood defending Mexico City's homeless poor against abuses from the Oficina de Colonias, which engaged in "continuous maneuvers, abuses, dispossession of lots, and all sorts of frauds and rackets."⁴⁹ The Coalición de Colonos also engaged in wider city conflicts. When Mexico City's Planning Commission debated the extension of Reforma Avenue in 1950, the Coalición de Colonos protested because the public works would destroy the homes of thousands of poor families.⁵⁰ When Flores died, in 1953, thousands of residents of colonias proletarias attended the funeral, which was allegedly paid by the president.⁵¹

The conflictive relationship between the Coalición de Colonos and the Oficina de Colonias can be better understood by zooming in on the history of colonia proletaria Américas Unidas, where both organizations battled. Located in Delegación General Anaya, southeast of the city, in a "marshy" and "barren" land that was partially used as a landfill, Colonia Américas Unidas was settled in 1942.⁵² Together with the industrial north, during the 1940s Mexico City's southeast—closer to Lake Texcoco and covered by ejido grants—was ground zero for the establishment of colonias proletarias.

have found no evidence of the Coalición following any party line. PRI representatives sometimes supported the Coalición de Colonos, but these alliances ought to be explored in a case-by-case basis.

⁴⁹ This is how Salvador Flores described in 1945 the actions of José Garibay (head of the Oficina de Colonias) in Colonia Gertrudis Sánchez: "una continua serie de maniobras, atropellos, despojos de lotes, negocios fraudulentos y pillerías de todo género, que tienen en continua agitación y descontento a la colonia, en la que ya ha corrido sangre por las pugnas provocadas por el mismo Garibay." AGN/MAC 418.2/97, "Colonia Gertrudis Sánchez".

⁵⁰ "La ciudad," *El Universal*, August 20, 1950. I discuss these debates in chapter 2.

⁵¹ "Fue sepultado el Srío General de la Coalición de Colonos," *El Nacional*, December 23, 1953.

⁵² "Carta abierta de los colonos de Américas Unidas." AGN-ARC-418.2/84.

Colonia Américas Unidas was divided in two groups that claimed rightful possession of their homes. The official Asociación de Colonos was recognized and supported by the municipal government (both the Oficina de Colonias and Public Works). Its rivals—targeted as squatters—claimed that they bought their lots and improved the colonia through years of hard toil. These claims were supported by the Coalición de Colonos as well as lawyers and representatives from the PRI. Such conflicts were quite common. While some details are hard to disentangle, a rough chronology can be strung together. Colonia Américas Unidas was established by a group of settlers supported by Fernando Casas Alemán. The owner of the land was Julio Hoth, a German going through financial troubles and whom rumors placed in a “concentration camp” in Veracruz because of his nationality.⁵³ Hoth sold his land to the settlers with the mediation of the Oficina de Colonias, which set a price of \$8.50 per square meter. Upon his death shortly afterwards, his widow, Concepción de Hoth, would deal with the legal and political struggles that followed.

The deal with Concepción de Hoth was at the heart of the conflict between the two groups of settlers. The official resident association of Américas Unidas, led by Adalberto Pliego and Mario Chávez, agreed with the price and with the subdivision of the colonia made by the Oficina de Colonias.⁵⁴ But in 1944, Pliego and Chávez accused Salvador Flores of looking for “uneducated settlers, making them false promises, and rejecting the *approved blueprints* and divisions” agreed by the legitimate residents and the Oficina de Colonias.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Adalberto Pliego and Mario Chávez to President Manuel Avila Camacho, February 3, 1944. AGN-MAC-418.2/167.

⁵⁵ “El señor Flores y socios buscando adictos que no sabemos con qué fines hace falsas promesas a compañeros faltos de preparación y niega el PLANO que siendo aprobado fue entregado a las directivas de Américas Unidas y amp. Niños Héroes y no acepta las diferentes representaciones de la Oficina de Colonias ha enviado en diferentes ocasiones a fin de hacer la lotificación respectiva, lotificación que no ha podido efectuarse porque dicho sujeto en unión de sus socios éstos que conviven en terrenos propiedad de los señores Fertezen y Alcazar se opone a que sean aceptadas las medidas que marca el plano,

The Coalición de Colonos confirmed parts of the story, in particular the mediation of the Oficina de Colonias and the sale agreement reached between Hoth and the settlers.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, it accused Concepción de Hoth of altering the neighborhood blueprints and increasing lot prices once residents had opened streets and begun the urbanization. The Coalición also denounced the Hoths for failing to provide the urban services ordered by the Reglamento de Fraccionamientos. According to the Coalición, the Hoths had “stirred” the residents of Américas Unidas against Flores and his “*compañeros*,” who had been living in the area “for five or six years.”⁵⁷ The purchasers had land titles, but Flores and his followers had been dispossessed of their homes through legal ruses. Adding political muscle to their cause, the Coalición won the support of representative Gabriel García Rojas and the municipal Dirección de Servicios Legales.

The clash between the Coalición de Colonos and the Oficina de Colonias demonstrates that government control over colonias proletarias was contested. But a degree of control did exist and in the case of Américas Unidas it was manifest in the fact that the Oficina de Colonias had subdivided the land and set a price for lots. This arrangement could be later contested, but it is important not to forget that it existed in the first place. One of the most habitual requests of Flores was transparency in regards to blueprints of colonias and the censuses of their residents. Calculating that there were at least 3,000 empty lots in colonias proletarias that could be occupied by the landless families that he represented, Flores demanded that the government

haciendo hincapié en el hecho de que en el momento de invadir dichos terrenos se posesionaron de 9 y 10 metros de frente.” Ibid.

⁵⁶ “Carta abierta de los colonos de Américas Unidas.” ARC 418.2/84.

⁵⁷ “[Concepción Hoth] ha azuzado a las personas que tienen escrituras en sus manos, facilitándoles abogados para que acusen a nuestros compañeros ante los tribunales por despojo y daños cuyos perjuicios no hemos cometido, porque a nadie hemos sacada a la fuerza de sus lotes y estas personas que tienen escrituras compraron sus lotes a sabiendas que nosotros teníamos posesión cinco o seis años atrás.” Ibid.

compile a public census of residents, which could prevent abuses from the leaders of colonias.⁵⁸ At the time, the Oficina de Colonias was assembling such a census (the Padrón General de Colonos del D.F.) but this kind of information was jealously controlled by the office, so it is unlikely that the Oficina de Colonias would have made it public.⁵⁹ Information was crucial, and government offices and the Coalición de Colonos jockeyed for it in order to pursue their goals. But ignorance and confusion, as we will see, were equally significant, as they created the conditions in which different groups could defend their interests and, sometimes, reconcile them.

The Administration of Colonias Proletarias

The competition for a foothold in colonias proletarias was fierce because they enjoyed significant privileges and exemptions from municipal obligations. These privileges were granted by virtue of an official status as a colonia proletaria, which was, as mentioned above, determined by the Oficina de Colonias. According to a 1943 decree, the municipal government would consider the formation of colonias proletarias of public utility. It would also provide residents of colonias proletarias with alignments, construction licenses, and other municipal taxes without a cost. These rules, however, were unevenly enforced and subject to changes. For example, the 1946 “Ley de Ingresos” ordered that colonias proletarias would pay a lower property tax, defined

⁵⁸ “La Coalición Popular de Colonos insiste en que debe hacerse el censo de colonos, porque dice que no hay razón de que haya más de tres mil lotes vacíos en las colonias proletarias sin que nadie se preocupe por construir en ellos. En realidad es que los líderes, presidentes de las colonias, etc., tienen muchos lotes a su nombre o bien con “colonos de paja”. Con el censo se evitarían esas inmoralidades, Salvador Flores Rodríguez, Presidente de la Coalición, acude todos los días a las antecámaras del regente de la ciudad. Persigue una entrevista con el licenciado Fernando Casas Alemán. Y por ahora, hasta aquí.” Mr. Trapp E. Ador, “Escoba y Recogedor,” *El Nacional*, February 22, 1950. The citation comes from an article of *trascendidos*, the kind of encrypted, unsigned messages that abounds in the Mexican press to date.

⁵⁹ On the compilation of the census, see DDF, *Resumen de actividades* (Mexico City, 1949), 198.

through negotiations between their representatives and the Oficina de Colonias.⁶⁰ The government also passed ordinances that reduced water payments to colonias proletarias (an action that carries a cruel irony since many neighborhoods did not have access to water).⁶¹ Crucially, the provision of urban services in colonias proletarias was the responsibility of the government and not the developer.⁶² Afterwards, residents would pay for these services according to the Ley de Cooperación and other municipal laws.

This administrative, legal, and financial regime for colonias proletarias was continuously renegotiated, but it is certain that a special regime did exist and that developers and residents doggedly fought for inclusion in it. Because of the existence of this regime, contemporaries and scholars have commonly assumed that colonias proletarias did not need to follow the regulations ordered in the Reglamento de Fraccionamientos. A newspaper article from the period expressed this belief in the following manner:

Los fraccionamientos tenían que cumplir con una larga serie de requisitos para que fueran reconocidos por las autoridades; los títulos debidamente inscritos en el registro público de la propiedad y las pruebas que acrediten la posesión; el deslinde catastral del terreno; el proyecto de planificación; un depósito por concepto del costo de los proyectos de las obras de urbanización... haciendo depósito efectivo en institución bancaria; la ejecución por cuenta del fraccionador de la obra de urbanización, dentro de un plazo de dos años, etc. En cambio, de acuerdo al reglamento de colonias populares, no se obliga al fraccionador a ejecutar ninguna obra de urbanización y no se impone el requisito de efectuar depósitos y garantías. Una colonia popular podrá formarse con la venta de un gran predio, la lotificación de algún terreno baldío, o la expropiación de una superficie que amerite la ocupación para fines residenciales. *En cualesquiera de esos casos será del Departamento del Distrito, a través de la Dirección de Obras Públicas, el que determinará la planificación y los servicios públicos que se harán en cooperación con los colonos.* En otras palabras, es el Departamento el indicado o el obligado a ejecutar las

⁶⁰ “Ley de Ingresos del Distrito Federal para el ejercicio fiscal de 1946.” Art. 30. *Gaceta Oficial del Departamento del Distrito Federal*, 6, 167, 10 de febrero de 1946. See also Oliver Oldman, Aron, Bird and Kaas, *Financing Urban Development in Mexico: A Case Study of Property Tax, Land Use, Housing, and Urban Planning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 51; and Cristina Sánchez Mejorada, *Rezagos de la modernidad*, 116-117.

⁶¹ *Gaceta Oficial*, tomo IX, num. 461. April 1954.

⁶² Decree quoted in Cymet, *El problema de las colonias proletarias, Ciudad de México*, 64-5. See also INV, *Colonias proletarias: problemas y soluciones*, 9.

obras de urbanización. Por esta razón, las colonias proletarias son eximidas de los requisitos impuestos a los otros fraccionamientos.⁶³

This claim provides an illusion of clarity to what was an extremely confusing and contested administrative regime. Privileges to colonias proletarias were granted mostly in a piecemeal fashion, through ad hoc actions, and normally through the intermediation of representatives and political brokers such as Salvador Flores.⁶⁴ And while the municipal government was tasked with providing public services to colonias proletarias, it was residents who paid for these services. How much was paid, under what conditions, and for what services was always a matter to be negotiated, and some places fared better than others.⁶⁵ Most of the time, this provision took years, and colonias proletarias established in the 1940s did not receive urban services until at least a decade later.

The DDF recognized hundreds of colonias proletarias during the 1940s, a decade characterized by territorial expansion—the city as a whole became less dense over this decade. The following decade was one of “consolidation,” as scholars refer to the process through which neighborhoods are integrated into the municipal system.⁶⁶ Despite the fact that Ernesto P. Uruchurtu put in practice policies of growth restriction that attained a measure of success, his

⁶³ *El Universal*, February 25, 1951, quoted by Manuel Perlo Cohen, “Política y vivienda en México, 1910-1952,” 796. Emphasis on Perlo Cohen’s version.

⁶⁴ As an example of this special regime see the following decree passed by the municipal government: “El C. Jefe del Departamento tuvo a bien expedir un acuerdo por medio del cual da toda clase de facilidades a los habitantes de las colonias proletarias, para hacer sus casas, permitiendo que las construyan sin licencia y una vez terminadas se expidan las mismas, cobrándose un derecho mínimo por el otorgamiento de ellas, cancelando todas las multas que con anterioridad se hubieran impuesto en estas colonias.” See DDF, *Resumen de actividades* (Mexico City, 1947).

⁶⁵ When the DDF created colonias proletarias it ordered that buyers of lots would contribute to “obras de urbanización” following the fraction 10 of the Ley de Hacienda del Distrito Federal. Remember as well the “Premio de las Colonias Proletarias,” which granted through a special prize what could be considered a right.

⁶⁶ These changes were partly caused by increasing real-estate prices, as shown by Priscilla Conolly, “Uncontrolled settlements and self-build: what kind of solution? The Mexico City Case.” On the dynamic between expansion and consolidation see Emilio Duhau, *Habitat popular y política urbana*, 136-7.

administration also worked to provide already existing colonias proletarias with urban services. Between 1952 and 1964 the DDF built markets, schools, and provided water and sewage to 227 “colonias populares” and “pueblos.”⁶⁷ Such actions were accomplished with the help of the Oficina de Colonias, which informed the DDF of which neighborhoods were recognized as colonias proletarias.⁶⁸ Still, in 1968 there were still 85 colonias proletarias (out of 350) that did not have public services.⁶⁹

While a special government regime for colonias proletarias did exist, drawing a clear line between colonias proletarias and the numerous popular neighborhoods that claimed such status was impossible because there was a wide grey specter between different low-income neighborhoods. In order to receive “special treatment,” dozens of neighborhoods were in the process of becoming colonias proletarias, or claimed to be in such process, or followed the rules of organization set forth in the Reglamento de Colonias without actually gaining recognition by the Oficina de Colonias. This indeterminacy was a means of controlling populations. It also opened opportunities for political brokers, astute businessmen, and racketeers. Unsurprisingly, the lines between all of them were also hard to draw.

Ernesto P. Uruchurtu’s appointment as regent in 1953 offers a window into this maneuvering. More than any of his predecessors, Uruchurtu—who is known as the “Iron Regent”—attempted to curb Mexico City’s unruly expansion. He increased the real estate tax, stringently enforced the 1941 Reglamento de Fraccionamientos, and modified Mexico City’s

⁶⁷ The whole list can be found in DDF, *La ciudad de México. Departamento del Distrito Federal, 1952-1964*, 339-344. On the Uruchurtu administration see Robert Jordan, “Flowers and Iron Fists: Ernesto P. Uruchurtu and the Contested Modernization of Mexico City,” and Rachel Kram Villarreal, *Gladiolas for the Children of Sánchez: Ernesto P. Uruchurtu’s Mexico City, 1950-1968*.”

⁶⁸ “Programa de obras de agua potable y alcantarillado para desarrollar de agosto de 1960 a julio de 1961 en colonias proletarias.” AHCM-OP-86-1.

⁶⁹ INV, *Una ciudad perdida*.

Planning Law in order to address the problem of illegal subdivisions.⁷⁰ Upon his arrival to office, Uruchurtu suspended land divisions that did not abide with these regulations; lots in these neighborhoods could not be sold, provided with alignment and construction licenses, and connected with the water and sewage system until their status was regularized. Uruchurtu targeted neighborhoods across the social and economic scale, ordering, for instance, a suspension in the sale of lots in the exclusive fraccionamiento of El Pedregal because its developers (who included, ironically, the dean of urban planners Carlos Contreras) were breaking a number of construction codes.⁷¹

In order to regularize their status, irregular developers had to fulfill the requirements set in the 1941 Reglamento de Fraccionamientos and pay a battery of new taxes set forth in the 1953 Planning Law. In addition, a special clause ordered that developers pay an additional tax to be connected to the water and sewage system.⁷² During these years, the Water Department became the most important gatekeeper for urbanization. Its director, Eduardo Molina rejected dozens of petitions for the formation of new colonias because his office was incapable of providing them with water.

Developers and residents claimed status as colonias proletarias in order to circumvent these rules. In July of 1955, for example, residents of Colonia El Rosedal requested an exemption from the 15% land donation owed to the government and the recently set water tax. The residents, teachers who bought their lots with a government loan, claimed that they lived in a

⁷⁰ On Uruchurtu's tax regime see Robert Jordan, "Flowers and Iron Fists," 67.

⁷¹ AHCM-Gobernación-217. Before this suspension, Luis Barragán and Carlos Contreras, developers of El Pedregal, had negotiated with Fernando Casas Alemán in order to develop El Pedregal as a "fraccionamiento rural," thus circumventing the stricter regulations from the Reglamento de Fraccionamientos. See Alfonso Pérez Méndez, "Advertising Suburbanization in Mexico City: El Pedregal Press Campaign (1948-65) and Television Programme (1953-54):" 367-379.

⁷² "Bases para la celebración de convenios que se encuentran suspendidos," May 11, 1954. AHCM-OP-258-1.

colonia recognized as proletaria whose subdivision was approved by the DDF. The teachers claimed that despite having paid for the “urbanization, electrification, etc.,” of the colonia, Public Works refused to grant them recognition.⁷³ It is not clear if El Rosedal, located in Coyoacán, south of the city, was actually a colonia proletaria so we cannot state straightforwardly that it was entitled to the tax exemptions that it requested. According to the records of the Oficina de Colonias, El Rosedal was indeed a colonia proletaria, but Public Works did not have blueprints for it. El Rosedal was therefore nonexistent for the municipal office tasked with planning and urbanizing Mexico City.

The Oficina de Colonias was in charge of informing Public Works if a neighborhood was a colonia proletaria, notifying if its personnel had subdivided the land, and requesting official blueprints for colonias.⁷⁴ Paperwork in Mexico City’s municipal archive carried a seal indicating if the construction in question was located in a colonia proletaria.⁷⁵ These documents confirm the existence of a dual municipal regime. But miscommunications between the Oficina de Colonias, Public Works, and other offices were extremely common, and information was unevenly shared. In September 1949, for example, the president of the Centro Mexicano de Productores y Comerciantes del Pan del D.F. requested a license from Public Works on behalf of one of his associates who wanted to open a bakery in Sector Popular, a colonia proletaria located in Ixtapalapa. Before writing to Public Works, Cervantes Martínez had addressed the Oficina de Colonias, which answered that Sector Popular was neither “planned nor controlled” by it. Public Works, in turn, responded in an oblique and frustratingly bureaucratic language that Sector

⁷³ “Sociedad Civil Fraternidad y Cooperación “FyC” Pro-Habitación del Maestro” to Ernesto P. Uruchurtu. July 22, 1955. AHCM-OP-258-1.

⁷⁴ A list of the correspondence between Public Works and the Oficina de Colonias can be found in “Relaciones, relativas a la correspondencia recibida de enero de 1941 hasta el 30 de abril de 1945.” AHCM-Planoteca-194-1.

⁷⁵ AHCM-OP-244-1.

Popular did not have authorization to “undertake works of urbanization, distribute lots, or expedite construction licenses.”⁷⁶ Sector Popular was recognized as an official colonia proletaria by the Oficina de Colonias but it lacked official blueprints (it was in the same situation as El Rosedal). Depending on whom one asked, it could be considered either a formal or an informal neighborhood, to use terms that would become more common over the following decades.

Recognition as an official colonia proletaria was oftentimes achieved slowly, after following a long and burdensome series of steps. This was the case of Colonia Ajusco, located south of the city, in the rocky hills of El Pedregal. The beginnings of Colonia Ajusco were rough. Settlers occupied the caves in the area and built shacks in the crevices of volcanic rock. Despite these hardships, the colonia slowly gained population, growing from 16 families in 1952 to 165 in 1955. In 1952, colonia leader Juan Toledo commenced a long bureaucratic procedure in order to receive legal recognition from the Oficina de Colonias; requirements included electing an executive committee, drafting an official blueprint (which required hiring an engineer), lifting a census, and establishing an official resident association. Only when this process was completed, in 1956, the urbanization of the colonia began, not to be fully accomplished until 1960, more than 10 years after its initial settlement.⁷⁷ Once a pathway to official recognition had been opened, leaders such as Juan Toledo could cement their leadership and the Oficina de Colonias could collect a series of fees from its residents, who were now placed under its control.⁷⁸

Because of this uncertainty about the official status of colonias proletarias, the exact number of colonias proletarias is hard to determine. Different listings of colonias proletarias,

⁷⁶ AHCM-OP-169-3.

⁷⁷ Colonia Ajusco was the subject of a lengthy investigation led by Jorge Alonso. Jorge Alonso, ed., *Lucha urbana y acumulación de capital* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones Superiores del INAH, 1980), 303-321.

⁷⁸ For another example of a colonia that was in the process of becoming an official colonia proletarias during the 1950s, see the the case of colonia Juventino Rosas. AHCM-OP-471-2.

therefore, show slightly different figures. Most scholars have collected their numbers from the theses by architects David Cymet and Guillermo Ortiz—conducted with the support of the Oficina del Plano Regulador and the Banco Nacional Hipotecario y de Obras Públicas and published together in 1955.⁷⁹ Here, I have also relied on an undated listing compiled a little afterwards (around 1955) by the Oficina de Gobernación and held in the Government Section of the municipal archive. Public Works, however, had its own register, which included colonias that do not appear in the previous reports. Public Works also counted several colonias as not recognized (*no reconocida*). The Ministry of Health had its own listing. As already seen, different offices could disagree on whether a colonia was or was not a colonia proletaria. But the Oficina de Colonias was in charge of providing recognition, so this office remained the key actor for residents making government requests.⁸⁰

	Number (year)
Oficinas de Colonias	304 (c.1955)
Public Works	304 (c. 1955) [29 non-recognized]
David Cymet & Guillermo Ortiz	244 (c. 1955) [35 non-recognized]
Ministry of Health	259 (January, 1955)

Table 3.1. Number of colonias proletarias. Archivo Histórico de la Ciudad de México

⁷⁹ David Cymet Lerer and Guillermo Ortiz, *El problema de las colonias proletarias, Ciudad de México* (Mexico City: Escuela Superior de Ingeniería y Arquitectura-IPN, 1955).

⁸⁰ David Cymet Lerer and Guillermo Ortiz, *El problema de las colonias proletarias*; for the Ministry of Government numbers, see AHCM-Gobernación-Caja 217; for those from the Ministry of Health, see Archivo de la Secretaría de Salubridad, SSA-SubSyA-51-5.

Subdivisions and Blueprints in Colonias Proletarias

The legal uncertainty surrounding colonias proletarias was a natural outcome of the very limited knowledge and control that the city government had over the territory of the Federal District, particularly peripheral delegaciones. This weakness hit several government offices. The Oficina de Colonias possessed information on the lots and residents in most colonias proletarias, but its records did not cover the entire city. Likewise, the municipal cadaster did not encompass the entire city.⁸¹ The effects of this limitation went beyond the fiscal arena because the cadaster was not only used to tax property but also served as a more general survey, used for instance to define boundaries between lots.⁸² Official blueprints and alignments were inexistent for several neighborhoods of the city and, as the previous chapter showed, the master plan remained incomplete. When it came to dealing with colonias proletarias and other low-income neighborhoods in the fringes of the city, municipal officials were working in the dark.

Planners and architects felt disheartened by the tenuous control that they exerted over Mexico City' "wide and confusing" periphery, described as an "exorbitant cancerous tissue."⁸³ But descriptions of anarchy, disorder, and illegibility obscured the many connections between this seemingly "lawless tissue" and the municipal government. The fact that urban settlements in these fringes remained unmapped by municipal planners does not imply that developers and residents were independent from the government. Although colonias proletarias could be settled without the participation of municipal authorities, eventually they needed official sanction from Public Works. Thus, in the same way that the Oficina de Colonias claimed to "establish"

⁸¹ The city cadaster was completed in 1945 but it did not encompass delegaciones, where most colonias proletarias were located. Cristina Sánchez Mejorada, *Rezagos de la modernidad*, 118-19.

⁸² "Decreto que fija normas a que deberán sujetarse las traslaciones de dominio de bienes inmuebles en el Distrito Federal," *Gaceta Oficial del Departamento del Distrito Federal* 2, no. 59 (February 10), 1943.

⁸³ Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, "El plano de la ciudad," *Arquitectura y lo demás* 11 (1947-48), 16.

colonias that already existed by a stroke of the pen, Public Works “planned” neighborhoods that had already been subdivided and settled. Therefore, Public Works distributed basic urban infrastructure to spaces that had already been distributed among residents. This sequence is significant because it hints at an urban order created by developers and residents and not the state power.⁸⁴

Such a relationship between planning authorities and private actors is sometimes seen as evidence of “weak states” or, in the best of cases, of “pragmatic” governments that, incapable of controlling irregular urbanization, opt instead for acknowledging its existence and open a pathway for regularization, creating in the process political clientele: *Realpolitik* thus trumped the rule of law.⁸⁵ Regardless of their political leanings, governments across the world have negotiated with urban residents the disobedience of the law, discretionally applying planning laws, codes, and ordinances. This selective application of the law has always been a powerful weapon, not only in Mexico but everywhere.

Scholars have explained how recognition by the Oficina de Colonias determined the legitimacy, resources, and power of resident associations.⁸⁶ However, the specific influence that urban planners exerted over the colonias proletarias is usually assumed to be weak (if not non-existent). Colonias proletarias varied widely in how they were planned, who planned them, and

⁸⁴ Therefore, write Emilio Duhau and Ángela Giglia, “the creation of public space is the outcome of the initial settlement, and not the other way round, as in modern urbanism.” *Las reglas del desorden*, 347.

⁸⁵ Emilio Duhau has categorized Mexico’s approach to informal settlements as a “pragmatic” one. See “The Informal City: An Enduring Slum or a Progressive Habitat,” in Brodwyn Fischer, Brian McCann and Javier Auyero, eds., *Cities from Scratch: Poverty and Informality in Urban Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 151. A general interpretation on the weakness of the state during this period is provided by Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith, “The Paradoxes of Revolution,” in Gillingham and Smith, eds., *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

⁸⁶ Antonio Azuela, *La ciudad, la propiedad privada, y el derecho*, 99-113.

to what degree Public Works participated in their planning. Surveying land, subdividing it, and opening streets; distributing and occupying lots, building houses and fences; fighting for property titles, building licenses, and public services: all of these actions followed unique sequence in each colonia, depending on factors such as land ownership, proximity to the city center, and the political connections enjoyed by the colonia authorities. But urban planners could be influential as well, a fact that has not been taken into consideration by scholars.

Observers described colonias proletarias as the outcome of “overnight invasions” but the surveying, division, and selling of land was a carefully organized business. A 1953 government report described the illegal fractioning of the pueblo of Santa Úrsula de Coapa, south of the city, in Delegación Coyoacán, as follows. The venture was led by the “Sociedad Civil Esfuerzo Obrero y Campesino Santa Úrsula Coyoacán,” an organization headed by Elías Sesma, Irabien Rosado, and Esther Villaliz, all of whom were members of the agrarian community and therefore entitled to a share of the communal lands. With the help of two draftsmen, one topographer, and three peons, engineer Ricardo Rodríguez y Soriano divided 61 blocks, each with 30 lots measuring 250m². Lots were sold on Sundays at an improvised stall for amounts that could range between \$100 and \$500. Rodríguez y Soriano charged a \$50 fee for his work dividing the land and drafting a blueprint. Purchasers were told that the “Sociedad” was registered with the authorities and that procedures for land titles were being undertaken; no mention of any particular authority is made but normally initial contacts were directed to the Oficina de Colonias. Residents were given a receipt with a lot number that read “Cooperación en Pro Defensa de los Bienes Comunales de Santa Úrsula Coyoacán, D.F.” The Delegate of Coyoacán

requested that Public Works stop “the anomalous constructions and anarchy.” But it proved unsuccessful, and after a series of “serious incidents” its personnel withdrew.⁸⁷

The fact that Santa Úrsula de Coapa’s lands were communal is less significant than their distance from the city center and the fact that they were not surveyed by the government. Distance is a relative matter, not measureable in kilometers but by the sparse surveying tools in possession of the municipal government. At the time there were twelve colonias proletarias in Coyoacán but only one of them was included in the city cadastral survey. The Oficina de Colonias held information on the number of lots for only seven of them, and only three possessed blueprints signed by Public Works. Table 3.2 shows the partial control that the DDF had over Coyoacán in the 1950s. Santa Úrsula de Coapa is not included, suggesting that its efforts for recognition had been so far unsuccessful. Colonias like Emiliano Zapata or Ajusco were practically terra incognita. The Oficina de Colonias ignored their area and number of lots, and Public Works had not surveyed them, as the absence of official blueprints signals. Nonetheless, their mere inclusion in this list is extremely significant, as it reveals that a pathway for legal recognition and urbanization had already been opened.

⁸⁷ Alfonso Nava to Antonio M. Quirasco, January 28, 1955; Ingeniero Campuzano and Arturo Barcena Betana, “De los trabajos de fraccionamiento que se están ejecutando en el poblado de Santa Ursula de Coapa Coyoacán, D.F.,” September 30, 1953. AHCM-OP-85-1. A similar enterprise is described by Bernardo Navarro and Pedro Moctezuma, *La urbanización popular en la ciudad de México*, 179.

Colonia	Cadastral Value	Lots	Ownership	Surface (m2)	Official Blueprints
Atlántida	\$1.50	125	Particular	26,000	Yes
Ciudad Jardín			Burócrata		
Copilco		436	Particular	200,000	Yes
Copilco El Alto		300	Particular	80,000	
Copilco El Bajo		250	Particular	15,000	
Cuadrante de S. Fco.		150	Particular	20,000	Yes
El Ajusco			Particular		
El Reloj			Burócrata		
El Rosedal			Particular		
Emiliano Zapata			Particular		
Espartaco		225	Oficial	125,000	
Villa Lázaro Cárdenas		275	Particular	120,000	

Table 3.2. Colonias Proletarias in Coyoacán. AHCM.

Planners were overburdened by the construction of new neighborhoods and by the fact that the Oficina de Colonias continued to sanction them. As Mexico City expanded, Public Works was forced to intervene in these places, connecting them with the city grid.

“Neighborhood blueprints must follow the master plan,” Public Works official complained time and again. “Public Works must be consulted before neighborhoods are established in federal lands, as providing services to these places can become an impossible load for this office.”⁸⁸

In order to exemplify the interplay between resident associations, the Oficina de Colonias, and Public Works, I now turn to the story of Colonia Gertrudis G. Sánchez. This

⁸⁸ “El plano de [Colonia Ex-Escuela de Tiro] debe de estar en conformidad con los lineamientos generales del Plano Regulador, y con los proyectos de planificación o zonificación del Distrito Federal. [...] Por esta razón es necesario que siempre que se establezca una colonia en terrenos de la Federación o en terrenos ejidales o comunales, se haga de acuerdo con el DDF, consultando previamente sus puntos de vista, a través de sus órganos competentes [...], tanto más cuanto que la falta de previsión acerca de los servicios públicos de agua, drenaje, pavimentos, banquetas y alumbrado, pueden constituir después una carga o un problema insoluble para el DDF.” For the complete report, see “Ex-Escuela de Tiro,” AHCM-OP-658-1.

neighborhood was founded in 1939 in the northeast of the city, close the main sewage line of the city, where several colonias proletarias were built in the 1940s.⁸⁹ As many other popular neighborhoods, its early years were marked by a conflict between the Oficina de Colonias, the neighborhood residents, and the alleged owner of the land, Macario Navarro, a revolutionary general accused of being a member of the fascist “Golden Shirts” organization. Navarro was the contested owner of large swaths of land in the northeast of the city (including the lands of Colonia Ex-Hipódromo Peralvillo, reviewed in Chapter One). He was a landowner as well as a political organizer, who had already founded two housing cooperatives, Macario Navarro and Patria Nueva.⁹⁰

In 1940, Juan Guzmán, president the resident association of Gertrudis Sánchez, accused Teodoro Ponce, secretary and treasurer, and the Oficina de Colonias of selling lots belonging to Navarro, described as an “honest man, an old revolutionary, and a true patriot.”⁹¹ Guzmán claimed that Ponce tricked him into signing fraudulent sale contracts where Navarro’s ownership was not recognized. Hence, residents were paying their monthly installments to the Oficina de Colonias (or possibly to Ponce and his cronies) and not the legitimate owner of the land. At the time, the DDF listed Gertrudis G. Sánchez as a privately owned colonia where the Oficina de Colonias acted as an intermediary between the owner and the residents (charging fees from the

⁸⁹ Guillermo Boils, “Urbanización popular en la ciudad de México de los años cuarenta (Colonias proletarias en los márgenes del Gran Canal del Desagüe),” in *Aproximaciones a la historia del urbanismo popular*, 209-235.

⁹⁰ Navarro’s activities as a land invader are mentioned in passing in Gilberto Urbina, “De discursos y realidades. Los habitantes de algunas colonias populares al norte de la Ciudad de México (1875-1929),” Ph.D. diss., El Colegio de México, 2012, 289-290. For accusations against Macario Navarro see Miguel Jiménez C. to President Abelardo Rodríguez, August 18, 1934, AGN-O/C 711-C-51, “Colonia Ex-Hipódromo de Peralvillo.”

⁹¹ Juan Guzmán to Fernando Ramírez, sub-jefe de la Oficina de Colonias. AGN-MAC-418.2/97.

latter and paying them to the owner).⁹² Nonetheless, it is not clear if the DDF acknowledged Navarro as the owner or if it was indeed paying him the fees that it was charging to the residents.

The trace of the conflict is vague but it is certain that in response to it the DDF expropriated the colonia in 1945.⁹³ This was a common course of action over the 1940s when the government expropriated land to establish colonias proletarias or, as in this case, to fix a problem between owners and residents. A group of residents—represented by the Comité Regional de Colonias Proletarias de la Delegación de “Gustavo A. Madero”—supported the expropriation, which they viewed as a way of securing their possession in the midst of “chaotic” conflicts over ownership.⁹⁴ But another group, supported by Salvador Flores’ Coalición de Colonos, rejected the expropriation because it would leave residents, once again, at the mercy of the Oficina de Colonias, despite the fact that many of them had completed their lot payments and were thus entitled to property titles.⁹⁵

Guzmán detailed Ponce’s abuses in letters sent to the President and the Oficina de Colonias. According to Guzmán, Ponce was demanding undue fees from residents and threatening them with dispossession of their lots (for example, he had collected \$7,000 for a bridge that apparently had only cost \$600). Such abuses were common in colonias proletarias, whose residents were randomly charged for public services, licensing fees, and association dues, as well as more capricious payments to support events such as beauty pageants or boxing fights. Afterwards, this money was used to establish México Nuevo, another colonia proletaria where

⁹² *Memoria del Departamento del Distrito Federal, del 1 de septiembre de 1939 al 31 de agosto de 1940*, 80.

⁹³ *Diario Oficial*, March 15, 1945.

⁹⁴ Comité Regional de Colonias Proletarias de la Delegación “Gustavo A. Madero” to Manuel Avila Camacho, January 8, 1945. AGN-MAC-418.2/97.

⁹⁵ Coalición de Colonos del D.F. to Manuel Avila Camacho, May 10, 1945. AGN-MAC-418.2/97.

the business venture could be replicated. Guzmán described Gertrudis Sánchez as a “public market” where municipal employees profited from poor residents.⁹⁶ Ponce was not only in charge of handling the finances of the Gertrudis Sánchez—collecting fees and granting contracts—but had also been tasked by the Oficina de Colonias with subdividing the colonia. This position obviously gave him much power and opportunities to make a profit. The accusations against Ponce and, indirectly, the Oficina de Colonias, are hard to investigate. But the conflict thus far described appears to involve a public officer (Guzmán) using his authority to engage in a business venture, taking advantage of the uncertain regime of property rights.

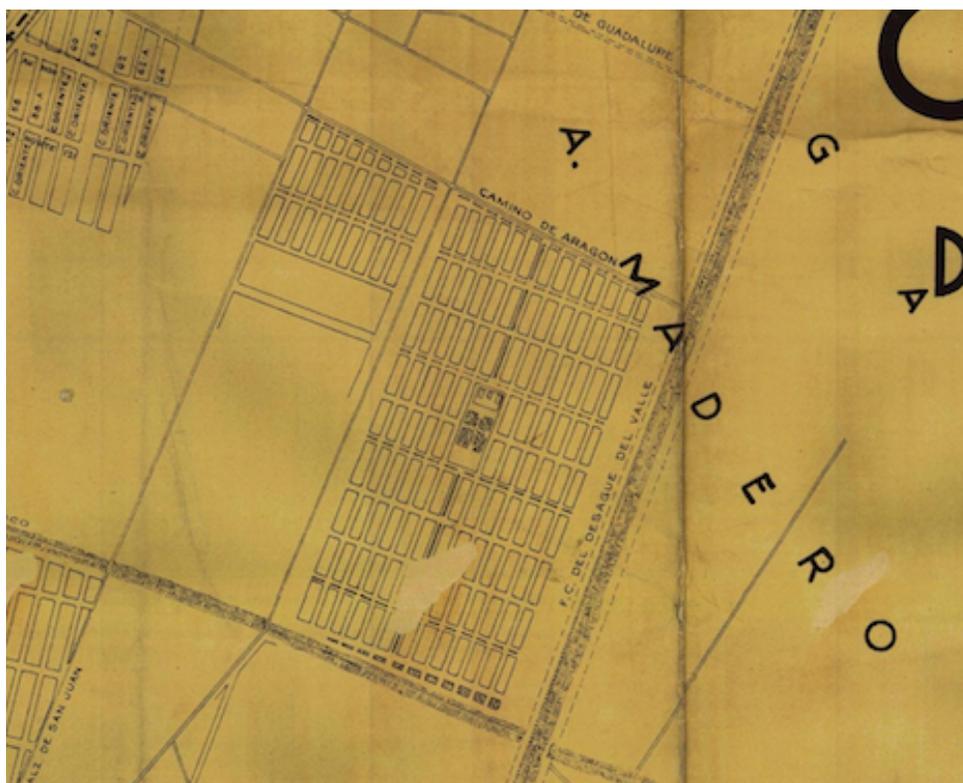


Fig. 3.1. Colonia Gertrudis G. Sánchez, 1942. Mapoteca Orozco y Berra.

The plot thickened when Public Works entered stage. Initially, Ponce had fractioned Gertrudis Sánchez around 1940, a subdivision that Guzmán would criticize rabidly. A municipal

⁹⁶ Juan Guzmán to Fernando Ramírez, sub-jefe de la Oficina de Colonias, AGN-Fondo Manuel Ávila Camacho, 418.2/97. The reference to a “public market” can be found in Juan Guzmán to Manuel Ávila Camacho, August 18, 1941, AGN-Fondo Manuel Ávila Camacho. 418.2/97.

plan from 1942 already included the neighborhood but it failed to provide further information such as street names or even the name of the neighborhood [Fig. 3.1].⁹⁷ That year, Public Works tasked special brigades of topographers to deal with the “multiple planning problems that arose” in several colonias proletarias north of the city, Gertrudis Sánchez among them.⁹⁸ According to Guzmán, Ponce’s original layout was a complete disaster, “*hecho con las patas*,” as engineer Borbolla, Jefe de Planificación, graphically put it. Ponce’s division, reproduced below [Fig. 3.2], includes his signature as well as Guzmán’s (in the bottom-right of the plan). The signatures of the president and the secretary/treasurer of the colonia gave legitimacy to what was, in essence, a real estate plan: a document defining a system of blocks and lots to be sold. The new blueprint, approved officially in June of 1943, followed the original one but it expropriated a number of blocks that were designated for public areas—a decision in line with municipal guidelines.⁹⁹ Its larger tendency was chipping land away from developers and claiming it as public space.

⁹⁷ Mapoteca Orozco y Berra, 21165-CGE.

⁹⁸ *Memoria del Departamento del Distrito Federal, del 1 de septiembre de 1942 al 31 de agosto de 1943*, 84.

⁹⁹ The date of approval of the official blueprint can be found in Coalición de Colonos del D.F. to Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN-MAC-418.2/97.

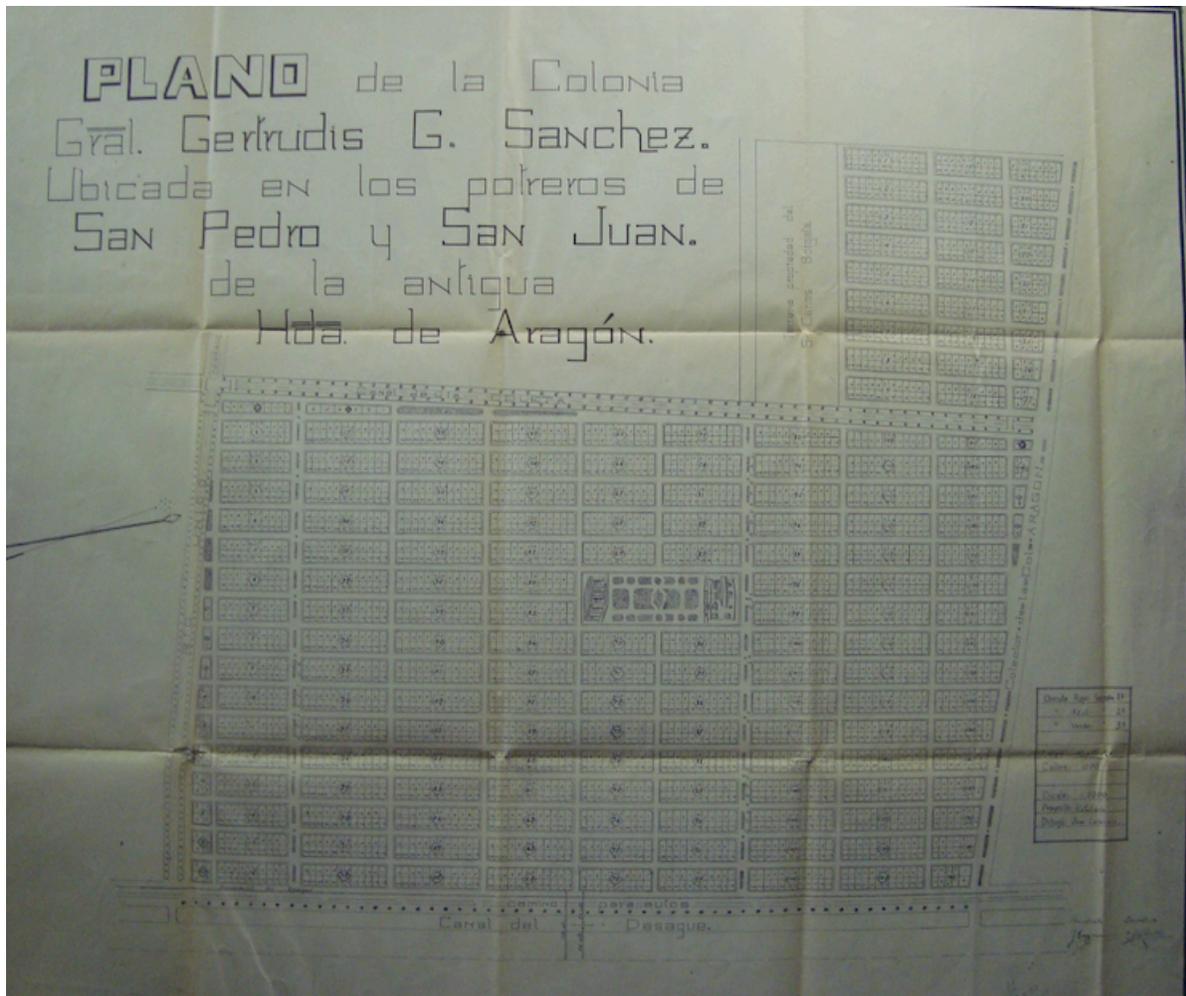


Fig. 3.2. Colonia Gertrudis G. Sánchez, 1943. AHCM. Planos y Proyectos 121-14

This claiming of space for public use represented a mixed blessing. On the one hand, schools, markets, and parks were much needed, so residents fought for them fervently. However, public spaces were won at the expense of residents who lived there against the rubric of official blueprints and who were left facing eviction. In the summer of 1944, a group of such residents protested against their removal from Gertrudis G. Sánchez because of public works to be undertaken in their lots (sources don't specify the nature of the public works). Led by Alberto Villa and Oscar Villegas, these residents asserted their condition as proletarians, recognized by

José Garibay Centeno, head of the Oficina de Colonias.¹⁰⁰ In a letter to President Manuel Ávila Camacho, they demanded a fair compensation for their loss, one that included the improvements in the area that they had achieved.¹⁰¹

The Head of Public Works, engineer Guillermo Aguilar Álvarez, was unmoved. In the battle between planners and residents that ensued, Aguilar Álvarez contended that Public Works had studied the planning and zoning of Gertrudis Sánchez, concluding—after consulting the case with the Comisión Reguladora de Crecimiento—that the land claimed by Villa and Villegas was marked for public services. Adding insult to injury, Aguilar Álvarez stated that the residents’ homes had been built without receiving the necessary permits; while acknowledging their “category as proletarians,” he explained that residents still had to follow the 1942 Reglamento de Construcciones.¹⁰² By framing his attack in terms of the planning legislation, Aguilar Álvarez sought to overpower both the association of residents as well as the Oficina de Colonias. Yet, he confirmed the regent’s offer of compensation for their lots.

The residents of Gertrudis G. Sánchez pleaded ignorance, explaining that the engineer who sold them their lot commended them to build their homes as soon as possible. They were particularly appalled by Public Works’ offer of compensation after works had been terminated and not before abandoning their homes. “It is a shame that despite the victory of the Revolution” the weak continue to be oppressed, they expressed in a letter to the president, particularly considering that it was a “public functionary who testified to their condition as such.”¹⁰³ What

¹⁰⁰ Oscar Villegas, Alberto Villa, et al to Manuel Avila Camacho. AGN-MAC-418.2/97.

¹⁰¹ Enriqueta Vera, Alberto Villa, et. al. to Manuel Avila Camacho. September 9, 1944. AGN-MAC. 418.2/97.

¹⁰² Guillermo Aguilar Álvarez to Alberto Villa, Oscar Villegas et. al., September 26, 1944. MAC. 418.2/97.

¹⁰³ “Si no hubiésemos estado presentes todos los interesados, seguramente que hubiéramos pensado que nos habíamos equivocado o que se trataba de una pesadilla, soñando estar en la época pretoriana del Profirismo en que transcurrieron nuestros años de niñez y parte de juventud; pero es una

happened to Villa, Villegas, and the rest of the claimants is not certain but in the end Public Works did win a number of blocks that are consecrated for public spaces—a park, a school, and a market—to this day [Fig. 3.3].



Fig. 3.3. Parque Gertrudis Sánchez. Google Maps.

This happened in many other colonias.¹⁰⁴ Across the city, the construction of schools, markets, and parks required the dispossession of residents who were often defended by Salvador Flores and the Coalición de Colonos. As migrants continued arriving in Mexico City, public spaces in colonias proletarias came under increasing pressure from developers, residents, and thousands of homeless families. Conversely, planners and residents who enjoyed from secure

triste realidad que a pesar del triunfo definitivo de los ideales de la Revolución, todavía se piense en hollar el derecho de los débiles, de los oprimidos, porque, no somos nosotros los que nos calificamos proletarios, sino un funcionario público quien, por oficio, rindió dictamen en este sentido.” Enriqueta Vera, Alberto Villa, et. al. to Manuel Ávila Camacho, September 9, 1944, “Colonia Gertrudis G. Sánchez,” AGN-MAC, 418.2/97.

¹⁰⁴ For another example, involving the building of a school in Colonia Atlampa, see “Abusos de los líderes de los colonos,” *El Nacional*, June 26, 1947. See also the case of Colonia Tres Estrellas: AGN-MAV-418.2/28. Chapter Five tells in more detail the history of Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán, where a similar fighting over public spaces took place.

possession pushed for these spaces to become neighborhood facilities. The existence of such spaces in Gertrudis G. Sánchez and similar colonias bears testament to the power of Public Works—the power to remove residents or to prevent them from settling in public areas.

Neighborhoods such as Gertrudis Sánchez were the product of a matchup between groups with different goals and strategies: Public Works' officials, leaders supported by the Oficina de Colonias, independent brokers such as Salvador Flores and, of course, residents themselves. Selling and developing neighborhoods could also be a business from which these groups could make handsome profits. While I have argued that Public Works was overburdened, overlooking its influence over colonias such as Gertrudis Sánchez is clearly incorrect. In this case, the intervention of Public Works formed part of a larger overhaul to fix the infrastructure and communications of Mexico City's industrial north, an area of critical importance for the city and the country. On many other occasions, however, Public Works was less influential. Many colonias proletarias were subdivided exclusively by the Oficina de Colonias, without further intervention by Public Works. Still others were subdivided privately, without oversight from government authorities.¹⁰⁵

Notwithstanding who subdivided them, sooner or later colonias proletarias sought sanction from Public Works, a process that required possession of an official blueprint.

¹⁰⁵ For examples of colonias in which Public Works' planners did not intervene (albeit in a later period), see Daniel Hiernaux Nicolas, "Ocupación del suelo y producción del espacio construido en el valle de Chalco, 1978-1991," in Martha Scheingart, coord., *Espacio y vivienda en la ciudad de México*; Bernardo Navarro and Pedro Moctezuma, "La urbanización popular en la ciudad de México." Navarro and Moctezuma write: "Es importante señalar que la incipiente urbanización existente en SMT es particularmente caótica y desordenada debido a que el proceso de conformación de la colonia ha surgido de la sucesiva venta de diferentes parcelas rurales en forma discontinua, heterogénea y en suma no planificada. La anterior, aunado a la rivalidad entre muchos de los fraccionadores, nulifica las posibilidades de una mínima planeación del área, presentando, por tanto, las distintas secciones de la colonia, gran irracionalidad en su trazado y conformación (situación ésta que se observa también al interior de las propias secciones obstaculizando la comunicación y el acceso entre las diferentes zonas, en términos de prolongación de calles, encuadramiento y tamaño de manzanas, etc."

Blueprints were crucial because they were a condition for receiving alignments, construction licenses, property titles, and public services. “Residents of colonias proletarias,” explained a member of the Comisión Reguladora del Crecimiento, exerted an “intense pressure over Public Works in order to get blueprints of their colonias signed.”¹⁰⁶

Blueprints also offered residents protection from government encroachment through public works such as the construction of parks, health clinics, and schools. They defined who was an invader and who was a legitimate owner. These matters were not necessarily a problem when neighborhoods were established, but the lines between private and public space, and between legitimate resident and invader, could become fault lines as colonias proletarias became denser through the division of old lots, better integrated into the city, and more valuable by virtue of moving from the outskirts to the center as the city continued to grow.

The residents of Colonia Ricardo Flores Magón southeast of the city described this development in a plea that they made to the President. “When we took possession, these lands were a landfill,” they claimed, “but due to the growth of the city we are closer to the center, sparking the greed of developers who threaten to kick us out of our homes and lots so they can make fabulous fortunes.”¹⁰⁷ Colonias proletarias were commonly established in large and relatively empty swaths of land. But as conditions improved and land became more valuable, conflicts over possession and lot limits became more consequential. It was at this moment when the importance of an official blueprint became paramount, an instrument that acted as an

¹⁰⁶ August 21, 1946. “Comisión Reguladora del Crecimiento de la Ciudad.” AHCM-Planoteca-258-4. For more examples of resident associations requesting official blueprints, see the cases of “Colonia Urbana Marte,” AHCM-OP-471-2, and “Olivar del Conde,” AHCM-OP-658-1.

¹⁰⁷ “Cuando tomamos posesión con el carácter de colonos [...] los terrenos eran unos basureros; pero a hoy con el ensanchamiento de la ciudad, vamos quedando en el centro. Esta posición ha despertado la codicia de muchos individuos, quienes dándose cuenta de nuestra pobreza han creído muy fácil arrojarnos de nuestros hogares y lotes, para hacer ellos fabulosos negocios con el sistema de fraccionamientos.” AHCM-OP-471-2.

insurance against these changes, freezing a distribution of land. For large numbers of residents, blueprints offered a promise of definite possession and urban services. But blueprints also threatened other residents, turning their possession over a strip of land illegal, if this strip happened to be, for example, where a park was supposed to stand. In this context, the approval of official blueprints was severely threatening.

Colonia Américas Unidas offers further evidence of this dynamic. As mentioned above, Julio Hoth's lands were occupied by two groups of settlers: an official resident association (who claimed to have bought their lots from the Hoth marriage) and a group of settlers—or squatters, if claims from the first group should be believed—defended by the *Coalición de Colonos*. This seminal conflict never disappeared, taking different forms over time and reemerging in 1952, when Public Works decided to open a street over a stretch of land where residents lived. These residents were accused of squatting over public land, as well as blocking and partly occupying the lots belonging to another group. The situation had become muddled since the foundation of the colonia a decade earlier. The *Coalición de Colonos* was still active in the area and possession claims were bitterly contested. This situation was worsened by the fact that no one knew for sure what the “official” system of streets and lots was. Without this information distinguishing between legitimate residents and squatters was impossible.

The municipal Legal Office requested the intervention of Public Works in order to clarify matters, find out who the squatters were, and determine where Virgilio Uribe Street would run.¹⁰⁸ Its petition circulated for months among engineers and draftsmen until the official

¹⁰⁸ “Con objeto de ejecutar la referida resolución, he de merecer a usted sea servido en designar dos ingenieros a efecto de que procedan a deslindar los lotes de terreno de la colonia de que se trata y se levante un plano en que se haga constar las invasiones que sufren los lotes de terreno que resultan del plano que se aprobó para dicha colonia, indicándose en el mismo, la clase de construcciones que existen sobre las superficies afectadas. Así mismo, en el plano deberá hacerse constar, las superficies destinadas a

blueprints were sent to the Legal Office in November 1952. The existence of an official blueprint did little to solve the conflicts and Salvador Flores and his Coalición de Colonos continued to pressure the government. In September 1953 Flores requested the expropriation of lands adjacent to Américas Unidas so his affiliates could build their homes (he would die in December so this was one of his last battles). He mentioned a Tripartite Commission composed of the Oficina de Colonias, Public Works, and the Dirección General de Servicios Legales.¹⁰⁹

The conflict remained unresolved and over the following years the “legitimate” owners continued to push for the removal of the squatters. In a 1954 letter addressed to the president, the regent, and the Oficina de Colonias, they explained that squatters refused to move, threatening them and sabotaging efforts from Public Works to demarcate Virgilio Uribe Street.

Ese citado grupo de paracaidistas están invadiendo toda la faja de terrenos en donde debe abrirse la citada calle de Virgilio Uribe conforme al plano aprobado ya por el Departamento del Distrito Federal, y esos invasores nos molestan diariamente y a cada momento que nos encontramos con ellos, con insultos y palabrería soez, insultos y amenazas que hemos estado soportando por varios años, y como la mayoría de nosotros debemos recorrer nuestras construcciones a la línea marcada por los Ingenieros de la Dirección de Obras Públicas de conformidad con el plano aprobado, esos paracaidistas azuzados por los líderes que enumeramos, nos han impedido hacerlo destruyendo las marcas que se han hecho señalando la línea en que debe abrirse la calle amenazándonos hasta de muerte si es que pretendemos movilizarnos al lugar que se nos ha señalado, pues el día 12 de abril ppdo el Ingeniero Cervantes de la Dirección de Obras Públicas se presentó en esta calle para hacer la rectificación del trazo de ella poniendo el estacado correspondiente, y al día siguiente esos paracaidistas azuzados como decimos por los agitadores Daniel Cerón (que se hace llamar presidente de la colonia), Alfredo Rodríguez, Filiberto León, Santos Rojas, Margarita Pérez de Rodríguez y otros más quitaron todo el estacado y procedieron a levantar bardas sobre la línea en que se habían puesto las estacas.¹¹⁰

calles que resulten afectadas por particulares.” Javier Piña y Palacios [Dirección de Servicios Legales. Oficina Jurídica] to Director de Obras Públicas, July 2, 1952. AHCM-OP-359-1.

¹⁰⁹ Salvador Flores to Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez, September 3, 1953. AGN-ARC-418.2/84.

¹¹⁰ Laura Díaz Soto et. al. to President Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez, May 8, 1954. AGN-ARC-418.2/84.

Notwithstanding these troubles, by the following year Rafael Suárez Ocaña considered the “general problem” of the colonia fixed.¹¹¹ In March 1955, Suárez Ocaña communicated to Roque Plata Belmont—the new leader of the Coalición de Colonos, after Flores’ death—that the DDF had expropriated a section of the colonia and sold the lots in these sections to a group of residents who were already in the process of receiving property titles. As to the section of the colonia that had not been expropriated, Public Works and the Oficina de Colonias would ensure that the “interests of its residents would be protected.”¹¹² The archive becomes frustratingly sparse at this point but Suárez Ocaña’s words suggest that Public Works and the Oficina de Colonias continued to share the power to define a system of lots and streets and to distribute residents across this layout.

Conclusion

This chapter has made three arguments about the relationship between the government and Mexico City’s colonias proletarias. Firstly, understanding colonias proletarias—or practically any other popular settlement—as informal or formal, planned or unplanned, is a futile enterprise. The division, construction, and settlement of colonias proletarias was usually a highly organized endeavor that was always justified by state categories. Residents invoked the Reglamento de Colonias and the Reglamento de Fraccionamientos when they requested public services or petitioned for tax exemptions. They also held property titles, or sales vouchers signed by developers, engineers, and association leaders who claimed to be public officials or acting on behalf of them. Residents also fought to acquire official blueprints, documents that protected their possession of lots and opened a pathway for receiving land titles and public services. At the

¹¹¹ Rafael Suárez Ocaña to José Ángel Quiroga, May 17, 1955. AGN-ARC-111/3879.

¹¹² Rafael Suárez Ocaña to Roque Plata Belmont, March 3, 1955. AGN-ARC-111/3879.

same time, different offices disagreed on whether colonias were formal or informal, planned or unplanned, proletarias or clandestine.

Secondly, Public Works had a much more important role in colonias proletarias than has been conceded. Particularly in the industrial north—an area of strategic importance for the entire nation during the 1940s and 1950s—Public Works planned some colonias proletarias, fixed the layout of others, and eventually integrated all of them into the city grid. This influence is manifest in the public areas—markets, schools, and parks—that many colonias proletarias still have. In other areas, closer to the southeast and southwest, developers had more freedom in subdividing land and the intervention of Public Works was less consequential. But this intervention always came, sooner or later.

Finally, the municipal policy towards colonias proletarias was partly proactive, partly reactive, and always piecemeal, inchoate, schizophrenic perhaps. In his seminal work on government housing policy, Manuel Perló Cohen asked if the “state” acknowledged the existence of colonias proletarias—recognizing them *after* their creation—or if it actively “promoted urban growth” through them.¹¹³ Both things are true. Colonias proletarias were imagined during the 1940s as the corporatist solution to the problem of urban growth. In 1941 the DDF passed the Reglamento de Colonias and over the following decade it bought and expropriated land in order to establish colonias proletarias. As I will show in the next chapters, this government vision fell short. Colonias proletarias were, at best, subdivided by municipal engineers and only slowly received urban services. Many urban settlements that had been divided by private developers took advantage of this policy and requested status as colonias proletarias, something that became much more difficult after Ernesto P. Uruchurtu inaugurated a

¹¹³ “Política y vivienda en México, 1910-1952,” 795.

policy of restrictive growth in 1953. Nonetheless, colonias recognized as proletarias over the previous decade gained entry (or at least a foot in the door) into the “formal” city, and would receive public services and land titles over time.

By examining the actions of the Oficina de Colonias and Public Works I have shown that government policy towards colonias proletarias not only varied over time but also across different offices. The task of subdividing and distributing lots among urban popular sectors was undertaken jointly by planners and politicians, whose collaboration was marked by miscommunications, different skillsets, and different goals. Planners divided land guided by a notion of public good that found expression in planning codes and laws. The Oficina de Colonias negotiated with leaders of colonias, allocated land to petitioners, and served as a broker between them and Public Works. One office had power over space, the other ruled over people. The city that was built in the 1940s cannot be understood without this collaboration.

“In Mexico City most of the poor live in slumlike housing settlements known as *vecindades*.”¹

So wrote American anthropologist Oscar Lewis in 1958, an undoubtedly false claim. Still, it rang true when uttered at the Congreso de Americanistas in San José, Costa Rica, whose attendants were familiar with *vecindades* and their hemispheric cousins: slums, *conventillos* and *cortiços*. Neither would Lewis be challenged in Mexico, as *vecindades* were, and still are, keystone in the cultural construction of urban poverty. Lewis plays a prominent role in this intellectual history, as is well known. Most of the action in his Mexico City books—*Five Families* and *The Children of Sánchez*—takes place in the *vecindades* of Colonia Morelos. “The Culture of *Vecindad* in Mexico City” represents Lewis’ most explicit intervention on the matter of popular housing:

Usually, *vecindades* consist of one or more rows of single story dwellings with one or two rooms, facing a common patio or courtyard. The dwellings are constructed of cement, brick or adobe, and form a well-defined unit with some of the characteristics of a small community. The size and type of *vecindades* vary enormously. Some consist of only a few dwellings, others of a few hundred. Some are found in the commercial heart of the city, in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century two- and three-story Spanish-Colonial buildings which have become rundown, while others, on the outskirts of the city, consist of wooden shacks or *jacales* and look like semi-tropical Hoovervilles which were so common in the United States during the Depression.²

Lewis understood *vecindades* as self-enclosed communities, similar in many ways to the “traditional” non-urban communities that he had previously studied. That such communities could exist in a booming metropolis was one of his first insights.³ But Lewis’ work also hints at a deeper uncertainty regarding the geography of Mexico City. Over the previous three decades Mexico’s capital had exploded, dislocating the geography of urban poverty. Lewis did not

¹ Oscar Lewis, “The Culture of *Vecindades* in Mexico City,” in *Anthropological Essays* (New York: Random House, 1970), 440.

² *Ibid.*

³ “Urbanization Without Breakdown,” in *Anthropological Essays*.

address this change, but his writings often capture Mexico City's shifting axes and scales. Colonia Morelos, the neighborhood where Lewis conducted most of his fieldwork, exemplifies this instability. Its origins go back to the 1880s, when Mexico City began growing rapidly after a stagnation that lasted more than half a century.⁴ By the 1950s, when Lewis conducted his research, Colonia Morelos was a relatively central neighborhood, since Mexico City had expanded all the way out to towns such as Ixtapalapa and Tlalpan, reaching as far as the State of Mexico. Colonia Morelos did not fit neatly in either the "commercial heart of the city" or its outskirts. It was, in the long history of the city, a young but decaying neighborhood, increasingly thought of as old.

Vecindades remained the most widespread image of urban poverty by the 1950s, despite the fact that their relative importance was decreasing. In 1955, the Instituto Nacional de la Vivienda (INV) calculated that only 15% of Mexico City's population lived in *tugurios*, a category roughly translatable as *vecindad*. At the same time, almost half of the population (46%) lived in *colonias proletarias*, a new urban form located in the periphery of Mexico City that was, in several ways, the opposite of the *vecindad*: *colonias proletarias* were low-density peripheral urban settlements dotted with single houses.⁵ These neighborhoods also featured in Lewis' oeuvre, albeit less prominently than *vecindades*. Jesús, the patriarch of the Sánchez family, is first introduced in *Five Families* while living in "Colonia El Dorado"—in reality, *colonia proletaria Casas Alemán* or *La Esmeralda*. Later, in *The Children of Sánchez*, Lewis mentions a

⁴ The origins of the neighborhood are told in Ernesto Aréchiga Córdoba, *Tepito: del antiguo barrio de indios al arrabal*, 154-158.

⁵ "El problema de la habitación obrera." AGN-Instituto Nacional de la Vivienda (INV)-Box 1. This report is an outlier, but it is indicative of the growing importance of *colonias proletarias*.

second house that Sánchez was building during the early 1960s, probably in a colonia proletaria southwest of the city, although a precise location is not provided.⁶

This chapter interrogates the question of urban growth from the perspective of the housing problem—or *problema de la vivienda*—in Mexico City. It is not a survey of housing policies but an examination of these policies in order to uncover how Mexico City grew and how this growth was understood.⁷ Growth is never straightforward, nor smooth, as it changes not only the size but the character of cities as well.⁸ I thus describe colonias proletarias not as an administrative unit (the focus of Chapter 3), but as a cultural and architectural challenge to Mexico City: its shape, its physiognomy, and its promise. By 1950, colonias proletarias had become Mexico City's largest form of housing. Still, they remained largely invisible. This chapter describes the reasons for their invisibility, their subsequent discovery, and their construction as an urban problem. It follows a cohort of architects, housing officials, urban planners, and social scientists unable to realize that the ground beneath their feet was shifting. Full of hubris and ideas about what a city ought to be, these housing experts aspired to change

⁶ Lewis' books do not provide the real names of the characters and the neighborhoods where they lived, but his transcripts do contain this information. El Dorado, the site of Sánchez' first house if identified as La Esmeralda or Casas Alemán (neighboring colonias); both Ixtapalapa and Iztacalco (delegaciones adjacent to each other) are mentioned as the location of the second house. Oscar Lewis Archive (OLA)-Box 53-Santos Hernández Story—Spanish.

⁷ For a histories of housing policies in Mexico see, Bernard J. Frieden, "The Search for Housing Policy in Mexico City," *The Town Planning Review* 36, no. 2 (July 1965): 75-94; Martha Schteingart, *Los productores del espacio habitable: estado, empresa y sociedad en la ciudad de México* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1989); Manuel Perlo Cohen, "Política y vivienda en México, 1910-1952;" Peter Ward and Alan Gilbert, *Housing, the state and the poor: Policy and practice in three Latin American cities*.

⁸ In thinking about the relationship between growth and the personality of cities, I am inspired in Thomas Bender's insightful analysis of New York and its "icons of transformation:" "certain spaces and structures [that] seem to represent a moment when the city becomes something else (or failed to become an expected something else)." Thomas Bender, *The Unfinished City: New York and the Metropolitan Idea* (New York: New Press, 2002). I am also indebted to Adrián Gorelik's history of growth in fin-de-siècle Buenos Aires, *La grilla y el parque*.

Mexico City; instead, their ideas about housing, poverty, community, and, indeed, what a city was, ended up being changed by it.

The first section describes the housing problem during the 1930s and 1940s, focusing on tugurios and vecindades. The second section analyzes the emergence of colonias proletarias, explaining how they challenged entrenched notions of urban poverty. These first sections compare two housing surveys conducted by the Banco Nacional Hipotecario y de Obras Públicas (BNHOP) in 1947 and 1952. Since only the second survey included colonias proletarias, I identify an important transformation between both years. The third section analyzing how public officials and scholars construed both urban forms as mirror images of each other during the 1950s. Finally, my concluding section reframes the counterpoint between tugurios and colonias proletarias within a larger hemispheric debate about urbanization, social change, and the Latin American city.

The War Against Tugurios

Starting in the late nineteenth century and up until the 1950s, Mexico City's housing problem was, tout court, the problem of tugurios or vecindades. While Mexico City changed dramatically between 1880 and 1940, the *ideas* of urban poverty and the housing of the poor barely did. Geographically, these ideas were circumscribed to a chain of blocks north and east of the city center, an area that housing experts would come to call the horseshoe of slums (*herradura de tugurios*). Morphologically, urban poverty crystallized in the vecindad: a group of one or two-room dwellings distributed around a patio.

This simple description, however, evoked myriad ills: disease, overcrowding, drunkenness, incest, low-morality, crime, and vice. These fears were universal—yet colored in

different shades across the globe. Mexican architects, engineers, doctors and social workers regarded housing as a multifaceted problem: cultural, biological, architectural, and economical. In his 1913 “Atisbos sociológicos,” Gonzalo de Murga explained that large industrial cities triggered “the physical and moral degeneration of people raised without light, air, proper nourishment, and constantly falling prey to morbid impulses.”⁹ De Murga’s words are rich in ironies because he was a sociologist as well as a land developer, eager to partake in the profitable business that Mexico City had become. Descriptions of the houses of the poor as pigsties, caves, and dens abound throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, reaffirming the belief that poor housing conditions were cause and consequence of savagery, backwardness, and racial decay. At the turn of the century, Porfirian criminologist Julio Guerrero posited a relationship between housing conditions in Mexico City, the atmospheric qualities of the valley of Mexico, and the criminal tendencies of the Mexican population.¹⁰ The relationship between race, culture, and housing conditions continued to be made after the Revolution. “Racial negligence produced the *cuarto redondo* [another name for the *vecindad*]—read a newspaper editorial in 1938—where families were born, grew, and died at the margins of civilization.”¹¹

⁹ “En suma: las grandes aglomeraciones urbanas han iniciado la rápida degeneración física y moral de los pueblos criados sin luz, ni aire, ni alimentación adecuada y sucumbiendo constantemente a todas las atenciones morbosas.” “Atisbos sociológicos. El fraccionamiento de tierras. Las habitaciones baratas,” 485.

¹⁰ Julio Guerrero, *La génesis del crimen en México* (Mexico City: Librería de la V. de Ch. Bouret, 1901), 137.

¹¹ “Hay que remover el obstáculo de la negligencia racial para que se modifique un tanto el hábito del cuarto ‘redondo’ que no puede ser más perjudicial e inconveniente desde cualquier punto de vista que se le estudie. [...] La mayor parte de nuestros albañiles, por ejemplo, prefiere todavía el hacinamiento [...] en el barrio sórdido a ocupar una vivienda ‘decente.’ Nada le interesa el *confort* que todos los días instala en las obras que trabaja. Eso queda para los rotos (se dice ahora ‘burgueses’) y él se siente a sus anchas en el cuarto redondo, pagado a veces entre dos o tres familias, y en donde nacen, crecen, y mueren al margen de la civilización (emphasis on the original),” “El Instituto Internacional de Urbanismo,” *Excelsiór*, August 19, 1938. The name *cuarto redonde* alluded to the fact that furniture and utensils in these dwellings were stored in the walls of the room, around the center. *Enrique Valencia, La Merced: estudio ecológico y social de una zona de la ciudad de México* (Mexico City: INAH, 1965).

The scarcity and conditions of the housing stock elicited changing responses from government and society. Before the Revolution, workers, patrons, and government began negotiating partnerships with the goal of building housing for workers and employees. In 1906, for example, the developers of Colonia Romero Rubio requested a government subsidy to build a *colonia para trabajadores*. The colonia was built, but in the end the government failed to provide the promised support.¹² Most initiatives from this period fell apart in a similar way. The Mexican Revolution brought the fight for housing in Mexico City to center stage, not only because it mobilized workers and radicalized the political rhetoric but because the arrival of migrants from the warring countryside increased the housing deficit. During the 1910s, thousands of tenants protested against abuses from landlords. Tenants were supported by progressive representatives who sought to add rent-control measures to the rambunctious article 123 of the Constitution—which ordered that “employers shall be obliged to furnish workmen comfortable and hygienic living quarters.” These efforts failed, and a rent-control decree would not be passed until 1942, in the midst of World War II. In 1917, President Venustiano Carranza distributed lots to workers in what would become the barrios of Atlampa and San Simón Tolnáhuac. This was, according to historian Erika Berra, the first time such distributions were undertaken.¹³ It would not be the last. As explained above, President Álvaro Obregón, ordered the subdivision of the ex-Hipódromo de Peralvillo in 1923 in order to build a colonia for workers and employees. It was one of the first colonias proletarias built, although it would not be known by such a name until much later.

¹² Erika Berra, “La expansión de la ciudad de México y los conflictos urbanos, 1900-1930,” 1983, 103-105. Other unexecuted projects are mentioned in Moisés González Navarro, *Población y sociedad en México (1900-1970)*, 197-99.

¹³ Erika Berra, “La expansión de la ciudad de México y los conflictos urbanos, 1900-1930,” 212.

A more assertive government policy took shape in the 1930s. In 1933, the DDF began the construction of housing projects for employees and workers (*empleados y obreros*). Three projects were completed during the following three years: Colonia Balbuena, San Jacinto, and La Vaquita.¹⁴ The 600 houses built represent a minuscule number if we consider the needs of the city. But these were highly symbolic actions, bringing together a progressive and revolutionary political rhetoric with radical new ideas about architecture and urban planning. And they were widely publicized by the government, which announced in brochures and newspapers the distribution of houses to drivers, mechanics, printers, and other workers (all of whom were government employees or members of powerful unions). At the ceremony where he officially distributed the houses in San Jacinto, regent Aaron Sáenz expressed that “the Revolution was not only providing workers with the means for fulfilling their material needs—comfort and hygiene—but their moral ones as well.”¹⁵ Sáenz also emphasized that the houses fit into a new rational city; located around Mexico City’s growing industrial area, they would constitute a “model urbanization zone” equipped with modern urban services.¹⁶ The houses, partially subsidized by the government, would therefore emancipate workers from “the pigsties where they lived, [vecindades] that resembled jail cells and death chambers [...] where the bodies and souls [of tenants] were infamously exploited by owners.”¹⁷

¹⁴ For a history of these projects, see Claudia C. Zamorano Villarreal, *Vivienda mínima obrera en el México posrevolucionario: aportaciones de una utopía urbana (1932-2004)* (Mexico City: CIESAS: Publicaciones de la Casa Chata, 2013).

¹⁵ “De esta manera, la Revolución no sólo proporciona a nuestras clases laborantes los medios de llenar sus necesidades de habitación en su forma material, por lo que se refiere a la higiene y la comodidad del individuo, sino también en lo moral, por lo que toca a los principios universales de mejoramiento de las clases trabajadoras.” DDF, *El Departamento del Distrito Federal y la Habitación para Obreros y Empleados* (Mexico City: Imprenta Mundial, 1934), 14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16-7. Claudia Zamorano Villarreal stresses the relationship between government housing and the planning guidelines proposed by Carlos Contreras in 1933. *Vivienda mínima obrera en el México posrevolucionario*, 113-114.

¹⁷ Cited in Moisés González Navarro, *Población y sociedad en México*, 199.

New political and architectural ideas and sensibilities came together in the government housing vision of the 1930s. A young cohort of architects aligned with functionalist and socialist ideas came of age during this decade, finding in the revolutionary government an enthusiastic patron. In 1933, the DDF commissioned Juan Legarreta to build the housing unit of Colonia Balbuena. Legarreta was an iconoclast and a radical. Historian of architecture Israel Katzman described him as “blinded by a single idea: providing housing to the dispossessed masses.”¹⁸ Along with his colleagues Juan O’Gorman and Álvaro Aburto, Legarreta challenged with nerve the Mexican conservative architectural establishment. Memorably, during a debate organized by the Sociedad de Arquitectos in 1933, Legarreta reduced his participation to a single proclamation: “A people [*pueblo*] that lives in *jacales* and *cuartos redondos* cannot TALK architecture. We shall build houses for the People. Aesthetes and rhetoricians—who will hopefully perish—will then discuss.”

The 1933 debates are a favorite topic of historians of architecture.¹⁹ But their importance outside the realm of ideas is less obvious, since only a few hundred houses were built by the government during the 1920s and 1930s. Access to these houses, moreover, as to other pieces of Mexico’s emerging and segmented welfare network, was limited to a few privileged public employees. Summarizing this view, historian Patrice Elizabeth Olsen has dismissed the housing policy from these years as a political gesture, geared towards providing “public evidence of the government’s commitment to social justice.”²⁰

¹⁸ Israel Katzman, *Arquitectura contemporánea mexicana* (Mexico City: INAH/SEP, 1963), 151.

¹⁹ Georg Leidenberger, “Las “pláticas” de los arquitectos de 1933 y el giro racionalista y social en el México posrevolucionario,” in Carlos Ilades and Georg Leidenberger, eds., *Polémicas intelectuales del México moderno* (Mexico City: CONACULTA-UAM, 2008); Luis Carranza, *Architecture as Revolution: Episodes in the History of Modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

²⁰ *Artifacts of Revolution*, 90.

But symbols matter, and the progressive rhetoric that framed the construction of houses for workers was deeply consequential, if difficult to ascertain straightforwardly. In addition to the provision for employers to “furnish workmen [...] quarters,” article 123 of the 1917 Constitution also declared that “cooperative societies established for the construction of low-cost and hygienic houses to be purchased on installments by workers shall be considered of social utility.” Although these laws remained for the most part dead letter, their existence encouraged a flurry of associations and requests for housing. Likewise, the rhetoric of Aarón Sáenz and other progressive political figures, propagated through mass media, reached millions. Starting in the 1920s, workers organized in cooperatives and requested land, houses, and credit.²¹ These requests reproduced the revolutionary language used by public officials, architects, and political leaders. They often made reference to newspapers stories about the construction of neighborhoods for workers and the distribution of lots. Even when unfulfilled, these promises changed ideas about citizenship and its content in an urban context. At the same time, jockeying for business opportunities and government largesse, developers proposed to the government the construction of housing projects and requested public land and tax exemptions. Many of these neighborhoods become colonias proletarias, business deals made between government officials, private developers, and resident associations. Thus a language of rights, a horizon of expectations, and a pattern of association between public officials, private developers, and resident associations emerged during this period.

The beginnings of a comprehensive housing policy for Mexico City were inauspicious. Several housing and credit institutions were created during the 1920s and 1930s, but they were

²¹ Erika Berra, 142 -150; María Soledad Cruz, *Crecimiento urbano y procesos sociales en el Distrito Federal (1920-28)*, 136-147.

weak and fragmented.²² Created in 1933, the BNHOP led the effort for studying the housing problem, financing housing, and building housing for workers and employees over the following decades. Starting in the mid-1940s, the activities of the BNHOP boosted.²³ Architect Félix Sánchez calculated that less than 2,000 houses had been built or financed before 1947, when there was “no serious efforts to fix the problem of popular housing.”²⁴ But 12,000 units were built between 1947 and 1952: a six-fold increase. As important as the number was the spectacular nature of some of these constructions. The Juárez and Miguel Alemán housing projects, built by Mario Pani in 1949 and 1952, were instantly hailed as modernist landmarks and remain symbols of the mid-century Mexican Miracle.²⁵ Nonoalco-Tlatelolco, inaugurated in 1964, was even more spectacular, although its memory is more fraught since the housing project became indelibly associated with student massacre of 1968 and the 1985 earthquake.

It was amidst such optimism that President Miguel Alemán Valdés ordered that the BNHOP organize a conference on popular housing in 1950. The “Mesa Redonda de Habitación Popular” brought together planners, architects, engineers, and economists.²⁶ Adolfo Zamora,

²² The most important institutions were Pensiones Civiles (later Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado, ISSSTE), established in 1925; Pensiones Militares; the Banco Nacional Hipotecario y de Obras Públicas (BNHOP), created in 1933 (later BANOBRAS); and the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social. In 1954, the newly created Instituto Nacional de la Vivienda calculated that streamlining housing policies into a single organ would entail revising more than twenty laws and codes, from article 123 of the Constitution to myriad municipal codes. “Memorandum,” December 31, 1954. AGN-INV-Box 1.

²³ Manuel Sánchez Cuen, *El crédito a largo plazo en México: El Banco Nacional Hipotecario y de Obras Públicas, S.A. 25 años de vida* (Mexico City: Gráfica Panamericana, 1958), 194.

²⁴ “La realidad mexicana y las nuevas concepciones arquitectónicas urbanísticas en material de habitación popular,” *Estudios* 1 (1952), 48.

²⁵ Enrique Alanís de Anda, *Vivienda colectiva de la modernidad en México: Los multifamiliares durante el periodo presidencial de Miguel Alemán (1946-1952)* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2011); Luis Castañeda, *Spectacular Mexico: Design, Propaganda, and the 1968 Olympics* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Pablo Landa, *Mario Pani: arquitectura en proceso* (Monterrey: MARCO-CONACULTA, 2014).

²⁶ BNHOP, *Memoria de las conferencias sobre habitación popular organizadas por el BNHOP* (Mexico City, 1950), 7; “Banco Hipotecario. La Vivienda Popular,” *Hispanoamericano. Semanario de la Vida y la Verdad*, n. 437, September 16, 1950.

Director of the BNHOP, confidently claimed at the conference inauguration that the war against the tugurio had begun.²⁷ Zamora was trained as a lawyer at the National University. The title of his thesis, “Birth and Death of the Bourgeois State,” captures perfectly the technocratic and progressive values of policymakers from the period: a belief in the interdependence of society and a political thinking built on corporations and not individuals. After a stint in Paris in the late 1920s, Zamora joined the Department of Labor and Social Welfare. In 1933, he became a lawyer for the BNHOP, whose ranks it would climb until becoming General Director in 1947. Zamora considered himself an adoptive son of Mexico’s capital (he was born in Nicaragua).²⁸ He was something of a *flâneur* as well, someone who for thirty years wandered around the streets of Mexico City, discovering “its perspectives one by one, and read[ing] full of emotion the Braille of its palaces and tugurios.”²⁹

If the war against the tugurio began in 1950, preparations commenced much earlier, as demonstrated by Zamora’s extensive research over the previous years. In 1935, 1946, and 1952, Zamora organized or participated in three housing surveys centered on the problem of the tugurio. The 1935 “Study of Mexico City” focused on low-income housing from an “urban, architectural, and social” perspective. The survey identified 100,000 overcrowded and insalubrious tugurios where half a million people lived. Zamora proposed replacing these houses with hygienic units in order to protect its residents from “tuberculosis, rickets, typhus, and all the vileness, depravity, and disease that are incubated in [these] pigsties.”³⁰ The number stuck. Over

²⁷ BNHOP, *Memoria de las conferencias sobre habitación popular organizadas por el BNHOP*, 19.

²⁸ Biographic information from Roderic Ai Camp, *Mexican Political Biographies, 1935-1993* (3d ed.) (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 746.

²⁹ “Hijo adoptivo de esta ciudad, durante más de treinta años por amor y profesionalmente por casi veinte he recorrido palmo a palmo sus caminos, he descubierto una a una sus perspectivas, he leído emocionado el Braille de sus palacios y de sus tugurios.” *Estudios* 6 (1952), III.

³⁰ *Estudios* 6 (1952), 4.

the following years references to a hundred thousand tugurios—half a million families—abound, an irrefutable piece of evidence. The solution to this problem, razing down slums and replacing them with modern housing (urban renewal, in short), became an unquestioned policy recipe, developed by emulators of Baron Haussmann and Le Corbusier and tested in cities throughout the world.

The second survey, the 1947 “Investigation about the housing problem in Mexico City,” reproduced this approach. Directed by architect Félix Sánchez, the survey understood the housing problem, essentially, as the problem of tugurios—a dirty word that evoked vivid images of overcrowded and unhygienic vecindades. The survey added two transitional categories: “*jacales*” and “*zonas decadentes*.” Located in the outskirts of the city and lacking public services, “*tugurios de tipo jacal*” were provisional homes built with improvised materials. The unstated assumption was that, with time, *jacales* would become tugurios. “*Zonas de habitación decadente*” lacked public services and were located in areas with old and new vecindades but they had a lower density than overcrowded tugurios. They were for the most part better-off areas that deteriorated and became tugurios.³¹ Most of these neighborhoods were located east and north of the historic city center, delineating a horseshoe of slums. Although this moniker became widespread in the 1930s, it encapsulated a long cultural construction of urban poverty in Mexico City.

American social scientists understood tugurios as the Mexican version of the slum. Sociologist Norman S. Hayner, a follower of anthropologist Robert Redfield, conducted fieldwork in Oaxaca and Mexico City in order to study social change in traditional societies.³² In

³¹ “Investigación sobre el problema de la habitación en la Cd. de México, D.F.” in BNHOP, *Memoria de las conferencias sobre habitación popular organizadas por el BNHOP*, 139.

³² Hayner studied Sociology at the University of Chicago in the early 1920s, where he worked under the guidance of Robert Park and Ernest W. Burgess. His dissertation, “The Hotel: Sociology of the

1945, Hayner used the word *vecindades* to describe Mexico's slums, which he located north, east, and south of the city center, following Adolfo Zamora's mapping of poverty.³³ In a longer, revised version of his findings published in his 1966, Hayner adopted the formulation of the *herradura de tugurios*, translated as horseshoe of slums. Citing architect Félix Sánchez, whom he recognized as his guide through the Mexican underworld, Hayner explained that this "hodgepodge of jacales" had its origins in "the huts of the Indians built [...] outside the boundaries of the Spanish city." Old patterns of poverty, he implied, thus persisted in modern Mexico, even in its hectic metropolitan capital.

Surprisingly, *colonias proletarias* were not included in the housing surveys of 1935 and 1947, although Hayner made a passing reference to them in his 1966 *New Patterns in Old Mexico*, describing them as slums "peripheral to established communities[,] initiated by so-called 'parachutists,' squatters who just 'fall' into these open spaces."³⁴ But *colonias proletarias* were less important than *tugurios*, and did not feature in a map included in the book, a remarkable omission given the fact that they were by then the most widespread housing option for the city's popular classes. *Tugurios*, on the other hand, were clearly marked. Even more astonishingly, *colonias proletarias* were also absent from the map in (yet another) version of Hayner's article, published in Spanish in 1964, almost twenty years after its original publishing in 1945 [Fig.

Hotel Life," is typical of the Chicago School of Sociology. Hayner first contacted Robert Redfield in 1941, when he began working on the Mexican family. He travelled to Mexico over the 1940s sporadically, where he was in contact with Adolfo Zamora and Félix B. Sánchez. Robert Redfield's papers contain letters from Hayner as well as a draft of the research proposal that earned him an SSRC grant to travel to Mexico for a year in 1948: "New Patterns in Old Mexico: Differential Changes in the Social Institutions of Village, Town, and Metropolis." Robert Redfield Papers (RRP)-Box 13-Folder 10.

³³ "Mexico City: Its Growth and Configuration," *The American Journal of Sociology* 50, no. 4 (1945): 295-304.

³⁴ *New Patterns in Old Mexico*, 61-2.

4.1].³⁵ Thus tugurios lived on in the imagination of readers, even at a time when Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl—a poor neighborhood east of the city, considered the mother of all colonias proletarias—already had hundreds of thousands of residents.

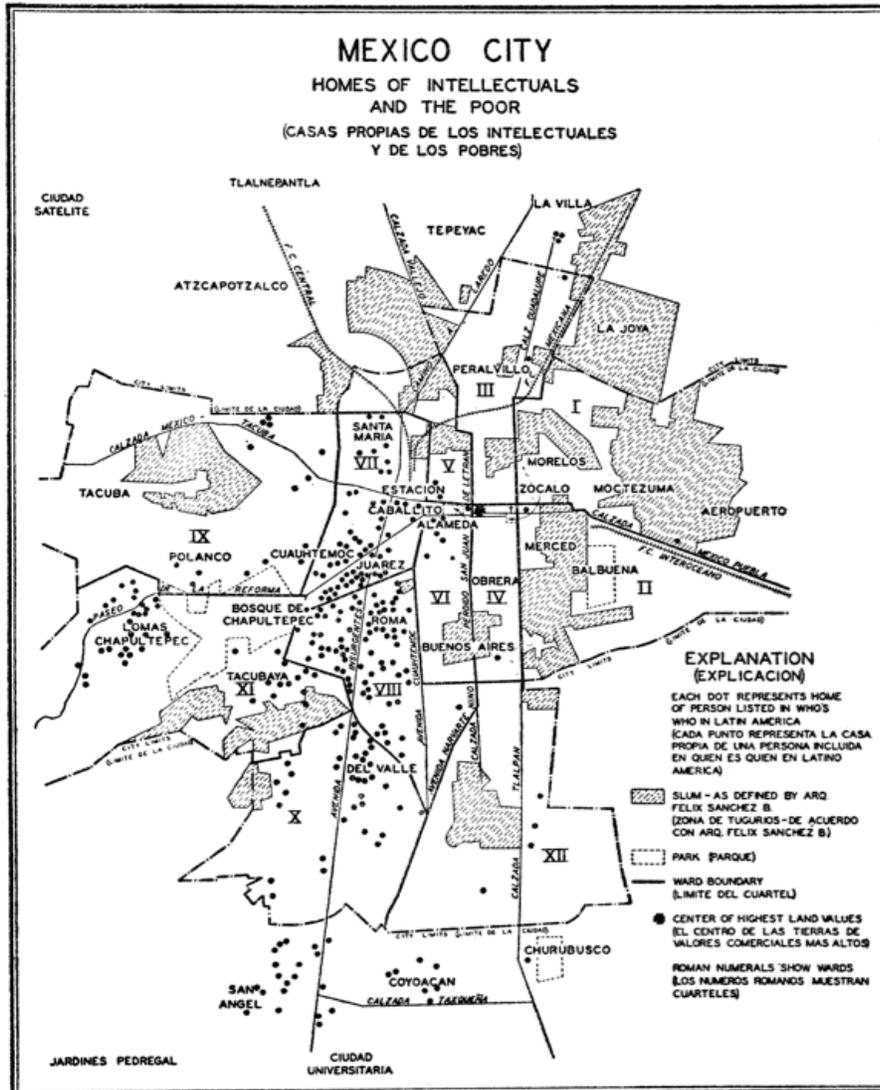


Fig. 4.1. “Mexico City: Homes of the Intellectuals and the Poor.” Reprinted in 1964, this map reproduced the social geography of the city circa 1935-1940. The city is still divided in *cuarteles*, an increasingly anachronistic division that would be abandoned in 1970. The slums, in grey, left out of the picture dozens of colonias proletarias further east and north. The “intellectuals” were listed in *Who’s Who in Latin America*, a publishing that included architects, artists, authors, and “public men.” Carlos Contreras, Gerardo Murillo “Dr. Atl,” Alberto Pani, Jesús Galindo y Villa, mentioned in this dissertation were included in the list.

³⁵ “La ciudad de México: su estructura ecológica latinoamericana,” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 26, no. 1 (1964): 221-230.

If American sociologists recognized tugurios as a version of the slum, Mexican housing experts read them as familiar forms in the universal script of urbanization and industrialization that London—as the world’s largest nineteenth-century city—first synthesized. Following the ideas of Lewis Mumford, economist Ramón Ramírez—another participant in the 1947 survey—argued that overcrowded tugurios were the result of housing shortages produced by the industrial city. Full of nostalgia for a Golden Age, Ramírez deplored the “divorce between city and countryside” as well the overcrowding and promiscuity of the modern city.³⁶ This vision of industrialization and urban growth, written by a Mexican economist in 1952, was slightly off mark. Industrialization, rural-urban migration, and overcrowding existed in Mexico City, but not in the same degree as in North Atlantic industrial cities, and neither as the result of the same causal relationships. Mexico City was not becoming Manchester or Chicago. While it had become the industrial powerhouse of the country, only a small segment of its residents were industrial workers. And while *vecindades* were undoubtedly overcrowded and unhygienic, the hundreds of *colonias proletarias* recently established in the peripheries of the city were different: sparsely populated, its one-story houses scattered haphazardly, and sometimes provisioned with corrals where domestic animals such as pigs and chickens were kept. Country and city were not divorced but entangled in myriad ways (they were also entangled in Chicago and Manchester, just in different ways).

Nightmarish visions of overcrowded slums notwithstanding, Mexico City was a flat and low-density city. Or at least much of it was. According to urban planner Hannes Meyer, Mexico City had one of the lowest densities in the world: its 1,464,556 residents were spread across 134 square kilometers, amounting to an average of 109 residents per hectare. The horseshoe of slums,

³⁶ Ramón Ramírez, “El problema de la habitación y sus aspectos generales y en la Ciudad de México,” *Estudios* 1 (1952), 62.

however, was a different story, peopled by an average 691 residents per hectare.³⁷ While the 1947 survey zoomed in on overcrowded tugurios as the urban problem par excellence, it also remarked on the extension and low-density of the city. This hinted at an unexpected pairing that would become more evident in the next decade: an overcrowded horseshoe of slums in the center and scattered squatter settlements in the outskirts. It was a threatening pattern of growth. Since Mexico City had developed in a “disorderly manner,” large empty spaces lay between the city and some of its peripheral settlements, rendering the distribution of public services expensive and technically daunting.³⁸ With such financial considerations in mind, Zamora pushed for a policy of urban concentration that avoided urban growth at all costs. Therefore, he opposed financing new neighborhoods outside the city limits.³⁹

Zamora made a counterpoint between collective housing for rent, deemed as the best housing option for the city, and single houses for sale, viewed in the opposite light. Low-cost single housing was responsible for the “spontaneous, anarchic growth” of the city. The preference for this housing option was a consequence of the “peasant origins” of Mexican workers, who longed for “patios and corrals, absence of stairways, and isolated houses” (this was an ironic and dubious argument, considering that government agents had praised for a long time the bourgeois propriety of the single house).⁴⁰ Furthermore, since owners felt the right to build, decorate, and paint their houses in any way they wished, single houses, were “aesthetically

³⁷ “La Ciudad de México. Fragmentos de un estudio urbanístico,” *Arquitectura/México* 12 (1943). Meyer came to Mexico in 1939, invited to direct the Instituto de Planificación y Urbanismo at the Instituto Politécnico Nacional. His stay was not a resounding successful (his tenure at the IPN lasting only two years), as historian Georg Leindenberger has shown: “Todo aquí es *Vulkanisch*.” El arquitecto Hannes Meyer en México, 1938 a 1949,” in *México a la luz de sus revoluciones*, vol. 2, ed. Laura Rojas and Susan Deeds (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2014), 499-540.

³⁸ Adolfo Zamora, “Informe sobre las labores desarrolladas por la Oficina de Estudios Municipales, del 1936 al de 1941.” AGN-CL-89-8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

inconvenient,” and ruined the “harmony” of the city. Switching to a citywide perspective, Zamora considered that single houses increased the need for vehicles, forced workers to undertake longer commutes, and created an “architecturally mediocre” city, characterized by vast, empty spaces, whose streets could not even be considered suburban. Most import of all, a horizontal city was financially absurd, both from the municipal and the individual viewpoint.

Zamora considered that workers fell prey to the mirage of home ownership and consecrated to



Fig. 4.2. BNHOP, *Memoria de las conferencias sobre habitación popular organizadas por el BNHOP*, 1947.

mortgage payments an income that ought to have been directed to “food, dress, education and culture, and doctors and medicines.”⁴¹

The findings of the 1947 survey were represented in a series of plates that integrated maps, charts, and photographs of urban poverty [Fig. 4.2]. Most images reproduced a familiar visual language that had been used to portray conditions in slums and tenements across the

⁴¹ Ibid.

world.⁴² Photographs often featured children playing amidst the rubble and garbage that plagued overcrowded *vecindades*. Often shot from the rooftop of *vecindades*, some of these photographs provide the viewer with a sense of intimacy, fulfilling the voyeuristic urge of middle classes. Images of urban poverty were juxtaposed with maps and blueprints that reproduced a familiar geography of urban poverty, one that went back to the late nineteenth-century. Most images featured the official boundaries of Mexico City while failing to display its peripheral districts (*delegaciones*). Charts, photographs and blueprints focused on the *herradura de tugurios*, particularly the ten neighborhoods suffering from the worst conditions: Merced, Moctezuma, Tepito-Lagunilla, Atlampa Pro-Hogar, Tacubaya, Buenos Aires, Romita, Pensil, Independencia, and Villa Madero.⁴³ As explained in Chapter One, *delegaciones* were not officially part of Mexico City but the Distrito Federal. Sometimes ordered by different codes and laws, they were often imagined as bucolic and rural spaces. This pretense became increasingly absurd because these areas were urbanizing at a dramatic rate. For the most part, this urbanization took the form of *colonias proletarias*.

The failure to include *colonias proletarias* in the 1947 “Investigation” opens several questions about the relationship between representation, invisibility, marginality, and power. For the architects and planners who authored the 1947 survey, *colonias proletarias* were largely invisible, impossible to represent. It seems natural to posit a relationship between urban invisibility and powerlessness. But the invisibility of Mexico City’s *colonias proletarias* did not make them politically irrelevant. At the margins of housing surveys, cadastral maps, and the purview of architects and urban planners, *colonias proletarias* flexed strong political muscles and were far from marginal: they were steadily growing and successfully acquiring public services.

⁴² Ibid., 152.

⁴³ Ibid.

In fact, as explained in the previous chapter, they were regulated by a special urban code (the 1941 Reglamento de Colonias) and their residents also established political alliances with the city government and the PRI. The cognitive dissonance between housing experts and political brokers demonstrates that the latter were much quicker and more flexible than planners or sociologists in understanding and grasping Mexico City's urban transformation. Even before architects discovered colonias proletarias as an urban problem, politicians and political brokers had commenced their management and integration into the political structures of the city.

The Migration from Tugurios to Colonias Proletarias

Even though hundreds of thousands moved from tugurios to colonias proletarias during the 1940s, colonias proletarias remained invisible for housing experts. This movement was momentous yet mute. While it transformed Mexico City, it did not produce large or violent political conflicts. Land was subdivided, thousands and thousands of one-story houses slowly built by their future occupiers. And since most policymakers felt acutely threatened by migration from the countryside, they were less receptive to the thousands of families who moved within the city and decided to acquire a lot and build a house. Such is perhaps the forgetful legacy of cities, as novelist James Salter wrote in his autobiography. "Families of no importance—so much is lost, entire histories, there is no room for it all. There are only generations surging forward like the tide, the years filled with sound and froth, then being washed over by the rest."⁴⁴

The BNHOP did not acknowledge the existence of colonias proletarias until 1952, when they were finally included as a housing category in its landmark survey: "The Housing Problem in Mexico City."⁴⁵ Adolfo Zamora led the seven-month research project, in which Félix Sánchez,

⁴⁴ James Salter, *Burning the Days* (New York: Random House, 2007), 8.

⁴⁵ The survey was published as a special number of *Estudios*, the journal of the BNHOP.

Ramón Ramírez, and Fernando Carmona also collaborated. The surveying was conducted by architecture and economics students who distributed questionnaires, conducted interviews, and analyzed blueprints, cadastral maps, and aerial photographs.⁴⁶ The survey had a twofold goal: providing a diagnosis of Mexico City's *problema de la vivienda* and proposing a plan to fix. While it did not, of course, fix the housing problem, it did reframe it, and its categories become a fixture for decades to come.⁴⁷

Zamora and his team faced several challenges but it is worth remarking on three of them. First, they attempted to freeze what was an extremely dynamic landscape marked by national, regional, and intra-urban movements of people: they shot a photograph rather than a film. Secondly, in mapping housing conditions throughout large sectors of the city, the survey did not capture inequalities within neighborhoods or city blocks. Finally, in considering colonias proletarias essentially as an urban form—by analyzing their density, location, and physical conditions—the survey did not consider the fact that they were also a legal, administrative, and political unit. Each of these challenges—change, scale, and perspective—merits further revision.

Let us start with the issue of change. Different groups within Mexico City were on the move, pushing an urban expansion through different patterns of growth. Growth began around 1860, when the wealthier groups abandoned the old colonial city center and moved southwest, first to colonias such as Arquitectos, later to Juárez, Hipódromo Condesa, and Chapultepec Heights. These were modern neighborhoods, furnished with urban services and unrestrained by the colonial orthogonal grid. At the same time, working-class neighborhoods such as Morelos,

⁴⁶ “Proyecto de estudio de la Ciudad de México,” *Estudios* 6 (1952): 101-104; “El problema de la habitación en la Ciudad de México,” *Estudios* 6 (1952): 15-26; “Proyecto de estudio de la Ciudad de México,” *Estudios* 2 (1952): 101-104.

⁴⁷ The Instituto Nacional de la Vivienda used the study as a model for subsequent studies. Oscar Lewis, Norman Hayner, Edmundo Flores, Bernard J. Frieden, and many others praised the study.

La Bolsa, and Rastro were established north and east of the city center between 1880 and 1930 in less desirable lands facing Lake Texcoco and the main branch of the open city sewage.⁴⁸

Whereas the wealthier colonias were subdivided by well-known investors and provided with urban services, contractors who developed low-income colonias often disregarded municipal codes and sold lots without urban services. At the time of their foundation, these neighborhoods represented a popular *and* modern urban form. Popular and modern would have been an oxymoron for the modernizing elite of the period, as the popular colonias suffered from lack of urban services, poor building materials, and disregard of urban codes, all of them signifiers of non-modern. With time, these colonias would become the *herradura de tugurios*.⁴⁹

The establishment of colonias proletarias after 1930 followed these earlier patterns and reinforced the social division between east and west. Their multiplication over the next decades, however, would soon dislocate such traditional coordinates. While most colonias proletarias were established north and east, many others were settled in the west and south, beyond middle-class neighborhoods. The differences between tugurios and colonias proletarias were hence historical and geographical. Tugurios were described in the 1952 survey as old, decaying, and unhygienic remnants of the old Mexico City, geographically circumscribed to the horseshoe of slums around the city center. Colonias proletarias were a more recent creation: a product of

⁴⁸ On the geographical and temporal unity of these colonias, see Priscilla Connolly, René Coulomb, and Emilio Duhau, *Cambiar de casa pero no de barrio: estudios sobre la reconstrucción habitacional en la ciudad de México* (Mexico City: UAM, 1991), 35-6.

⁴⁹ See Chapter One.

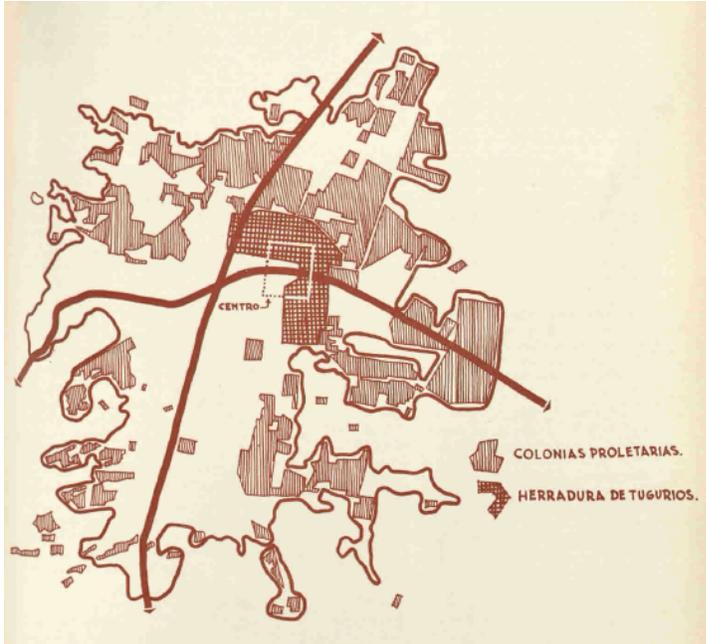


Fig. 4.3. Guillermo Otiz, “La vivienda popular,” 1963. This image reproduces the simple binary between tugurios and colonias proletarias. As most maps from the period, it was based on data from the 1952 survey.

industrialization that went back ten or twelve years.⁵⁰ They were located at the outskirts of the city, beyond tugurios, constituting a belt of poor neighborhoods, as observers would later refer to them. Instead of concentrating in the old city center, the urban poor were moving, encircling the entire city [Fig. 4.3].

In the second place, the survey mapped Mexico City according to rigid

understandings of how cities worked and developed. Roughly following the tenets of the Congrès International d’Architecture Modern (CIAM), it divided Mexico City in four functions: housing, work, social services, and circulation. In regards to housing, the survey set a benchmark in which social classes, housing forms, and city neighborhoods matched into one another. In reality, however, these categories did not match, and Mexico City suffered from a condition of “intense social capillarity.” Porous boundaries between social classes and housing forms abounded. This porosity increased among the lower rungs of society, who lived in tugurios, jacales, and colonias proletarias. For example, the survey disapprovingly noted that “small peddlers, bums, prostitutes, beggars, and [other] *lumpen* sectors were intermingled with industrial workers and the lower petit bourgeoisie.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ “El problema de la habitación en la ciudad de México,” 187.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

An implicit benchmark for assessing this condition was the human ecology approach developed by the Chicago School of Sociology. In 1925, Ernest W. Burgess proposed that cities grew through concentric circles, expanding as land values increased and as wealthier sectors moved to external zones while lower-income migrant groups occupied the decaying areas they left behind.⁵² Burgess' theory would be challenged as reflecting the experience of Chicago, on which it was based. But it still provided a methodology that posited a dynamic relationship between urban growth as well as social and cultural differences between social classes. Many

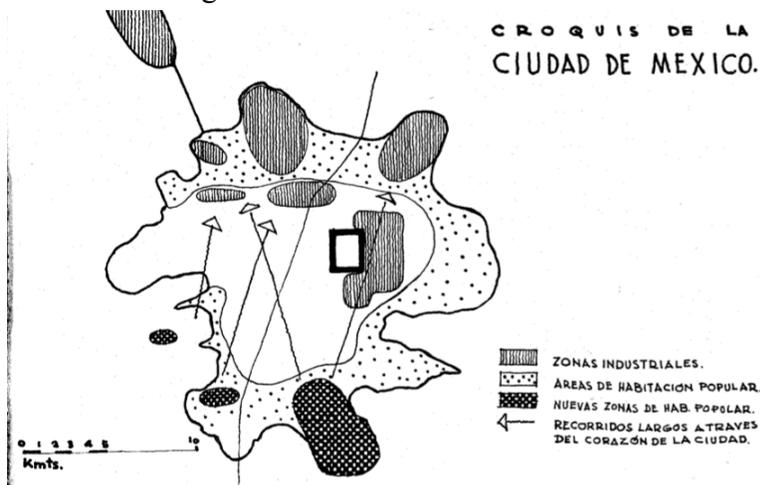


Fig. 4.4. José María Gutiérrez, Guillermo Ortiz, and Carlos Villaseñor, "Desarrollo de las colonias proletarias en la ciudad de México," 1963. As Fig. 4.4., this sketch was based on the 1952 survey. It exemplifies the formatting of complex urban realities into simple zoning categories.

scholars suggested Latin American cities followed a different logic of growth.⁵³ Anchored to a central plaza where the commercial, political, and religious powers met, their lower-income sectors were pushed to poor suburbs while the elites stayed in the streets around

the central plaza. However, during the 1940s and 1950s sociologists and geographers noticed that Mexican cities were in many ways adopting American models. While this is not the place to assess these debates, it is important to notice the common assumption that Burgess and his

⁵² The influence of the Chicago School of Sociology over researchers of Mexico City has been noted and quantified by Gustavo Garza, *Cincuenta años de investigación urbana y regional en México* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1989), 37-55.

⁵³ Norman S. Hayner, "Mexico City: Its Growth and Configuration;" Enrique Valencia, *La Merced: estudio ecológico y social de una zona de la ciudad de México*. (Mexico City: INAH, 1965); Floyd and Lilian Ota Dotson, "La estructura ecológica de las ciudades mexicanas," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 19, no. 1 (1957).

challengers would share: that territorial units had a single function and were occupied primarily by a social class. As the sketch shows, housing officials and planners were eager to format complex urban configurations under such headings as “industrial zones” and “low-income housing” (*áreas de habitación popular*).⁵⁴

Clearly this was not the case for Mexico City, where multiple uses and housing forms coexisted in a single block. According to the BNHOP, this coexistence had been produced by the recent transformations of the city, which had not reached the “rigid forms” of more advanced cities.⁵⁵ In order to deal with the fact that “different residential areas did not have a single housing form,” surveyors analyzed each city block as “homogenous” from the viewpoint of housing, based on the housing form that predominated.⁵⁶ Such decision was partly the outcome of the research tools at the disposal of surveyors—sample surveys and questionnaires distributed by a small team—as well as the shortcomings that they faced (incomplete municipal cadastral plans for example). Such methodological choices reveal not only insufficient surveying tools but also the power of models diffused by organizations such as the CIAM and the sociologists assembled at the University of Chicago.

Finally, “The Housing Problem in Mexico City” did not analyze colonias proletarias as a political, legal, and administrative unit but an architectural/urbanistic form. The survey made only a passing reference to the government actions that created colonias proletarias.⁵⁷ Furthermore, it made no reference to the many codes that ordered them, or to the fact that the government recognized them as such. Instead, the survey examined their infrastructure, the

⁵⁴ Guillermo Ortiz and Carlos Vilaseñor, Carlos Villaseñor, “Desarrollo de las colonias proletarias de la ciudad de México,” *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Urbanismo* 2 (1962): 23-27.

⁵⁵ “El problema de la habitación en la ciudad de México,” 49.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

condition of their houses, and their relationship with the rest of the city. Were colonias proletarias communicated with the city center? Did they have access to schools and markets? How densely populated were they? In asking such questions, the survey construed colonias proletarias as an urban pathology. It also made of them a discrete problem, one that could be circumscribed to a number of territorial units.

In conclusion, while colonias proletarias were invisible before 1952, they became soon afterwards the largest and most remarkable manifestation of housing problem. However, the political structures that supported colonias proletarias, as well as their internal organization, remained largely hidden from the sight of architects, planners, and economists. These experts displayed a surprising historical blindness towards the corporatist political project in which colonias proletarias were embedded the previous decade, as well as to the links between their residents and the city government.

Mirror Conundrums: Tugurios and Colonias Proletarias

Although starting in the 1950s colonias proletarias became the urban problem par excellence, tugurios did not go away, and their specter continued to haunt housing experts as well. Tugurios and colonias proletarias became mirror problems, in the construction of which architects, sociologists, anthropologists, planners, and social workers participated. Many of these experts worked at the INV, created in 1954 with the goal of streamlining the inchoate housing policies of the previous two decades. The INV concentrated its energies on tugurios and colonias proletarias, to each of which it consecrated a research team.⁵⁸ This binary crystallized a vast,

⁵⁸ These studies include *Colonias proletarias: problemas y soluciones* (INV: Mexico City, 1958); *Herradura de tugurios: problemas y soluciones* (INV: Mexico City, 1958); *Una ciudad perdida* (INV: Mexico City, 1968).

confusing, and shifting landscape. It became a powerful and generative opposition that addressed larger questions about the relationship between society and urban forms. While tugurios were old, colonias proletarias were new. While tugurios were in, or close to, the city center, proletarias were located in the peripheries of the city. While residents of tugurios paid rent, inhabitants of proletarias owned their own lots (or were buying them through monthly payments). Tugurios were overcrowded and close to markets, schools, and other urban facilities. Colonias proletarias were sparsely populated and lacked urban services. While overcrowded tugurios bred incest, crime, and corruption, residents of proletarias suffered from social anomie because they lacked spaces of sociability.

We owe to Oscar Lewis the best descriptions of Mexico City's tugurios. Lewis spent most of the 1950s conducting research in Mexico City, where he travelled looking for migrants from the nearby town of Tepoztlán that he was studying before.⁵⁹ Once in Mexico City, his research evolved from the study of rural migrants and their acculturation to the city to that of the broader "culture of poverty" of the city's low-income residents. Lewis was helped by Ruth, his wife, a psychologist who gained entrance into domestic spheres within the vecindades, and by students from Mexico, the U.S., and South America. The team conducted fieldwork throughout the city, from the wealthy Lomas de Chapultepec, where the "*nouveau riche*" Castro Family from *Five Families* lived, to the middle-class Juárez housing project, built by Mario Pani in 1949. But most of the research was conducted northeast of the city, in Colonia Morelos, which Lewis documented in unparalleled detail.

⁵⁹ For thoughtful readings of Lewis' transition from Tepoztlán to Mexico City, see Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, "Urbanización y secularización en México: temas y problemas historiográficos;" and Adrián Gorelik, "La aldea en la ciudad: ecos urbanos de un debate antropológico," *Revista del Museo de Antropología* 1, no. 1 (2008): 73-96.

played a crucial role in binding these communities together, as generations of urban anthropologists would confirm. “Relationships of kinship,” wrote one of Lewis’ research assistants, “reveal the powerful cohesive force of the neighborhood; this complex web of interpersonal ties loses strength and closeness as it is pulled away from the center.”⁶⁴ Lewis’ attention to kinship led him to overemphasize the autonomous nature of these communities. Although many of the people that he met in Colonia Morelos led peripatetic and adventurous lives—migrating from Tepoztlán to Mexico City, from Mexico City to the U.S., or from Colonia Morelos to a colonia proletaria in Mexico City—reading Lewis one senses that they always came back to the streets of Colonia Morelos.

Lewis described a typical household living in the vecindad of Panaderos as follows. The man, who came to Mexico City from Toluca, the capital of the adjacent State of Mexico, had been employed in a series of “unskilled jobs such as delivering telegrams, sorting mail, assembling boxes, and helper in print shops of three of Mexico City’s principal newspapers.” At the time of the interview he worked repairing bicycles and making toys. The man’s father was a “farmer, miner, wood cutter, carpenter, and watchman.” His wife, born in Mexico City, had worked as a “washer women and vendor.”⁶⁵ Other residents worked as street vendors, shoemakers, mechanics, tinsmiths, store clerks, food sellers, waiters, etc. Lewis and his students felt ambivalent about the relationship between residents of Colonia Morelos and their labor. Lewis wrote that the “inhabitants of the vecindad have not yet been assimilated into the urban proletariat masses of Mexico City.” However, this marginality provided them with a degree of social autonomy and protection.

patchwork of ethnic mosaics. See Ulf Hannerz, *Exploring the City: Enquiries Towards an Urban Anthropology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), especially Ch. 2 and Ch. 3.

⁶⁴ OLA-Box 124-Enrique Valenzuela, “Relaciones Sociales, Peluqueros,” 66.

⁶⁵ OLA-Box 127-Peluqueros Write Up. “Occupations of the Vecindad.”

In Mexico City migrants found a “community”—albeit one that was violent and incestuous—but they were also trapped in a self-perpetuating cycle of poverty and marginalization. The existence of a strong community in the *vecindad* was obliterated by the popularity of the “culture of poverty” thesis, as well as by the outrage that the book provoked in Mexico. Furthermore, Lewis was deeply critical of exotic or romantic approaches to poverty. And yet, amid the poverty that struck Lewis and so many of his readers, there was richness in the *tugurio*, certain exuberance close to what sociologists would later call social capital. These positive features were captured, less than a decade after Lewis, by chroniclers such as Carlos Monsiváis. In his 1967 essay, “Tepito como leyenda,” Monsiváis described Tepito (a neighborhood adjacent to Colonia Morelos) as a place where solidarity and misery coexisted.⁶⁶ In his baroque prose, Monsiváis evoked layers and layers of the legend of the *barrio*. This richness contrasted with the “anonymous” and “impersonal” “megalopolis” that emerged following WWII, a place bereft of a recognizable profile.

In order to convey these traits, I reproduce the description of a single block, a world of shops, houses, *vecindades*, workshops, offices, and inns registered by two of Lewis’ students: Onésimo Ríos Hernández and Lube Sara Roitman. From the perspective of an urban planner or a sociologist, the neighborhood could be described as a mixed-function one. One can almost imagine that Jane Jacobs, whose *Life and Death of the Great American City* was published on the same year as *The Children of Sánchez* (both books shared Random House’s Jason Epstein as their editor), would have appreciated the place:

Partimos de Pintores, sobre Alfarería, rumbo al Norte./Hay una pulquería que lleva el nombre de “La Guerrillera, Lic. 25840, un solo piso, tabique, tres puertas, una hacia Pintores y dos a Alfarería. Puerta madera. Esta pintada de blanco y rosado./Sigue la barda de una *vecindad*, tabique, tiene enfrente un poste de luz, abertura sin puerta y sin

⁶⁶ *Días de guardar* (Mexico City: ERA, 1970), 288.

número./Sigue un edificio de tres pisos de apartamentos, con una puerta pequeña y una grande, número 47, con diez ventanas en total hacia la calle./Sigue otro edificio también de tres pisos, una puerta chica, esta marcado con el número 49 y una puerta grande metálica de enrollar./Está pintado de amarillo. Es una ferretería./Un edificio de un piso, puerta pequeña y dos accesorias, en el frente un letrero que dice: Peletería, pintado de verde azulado, marcado con el número 51./Sigue un edificio de dos pisos, con una puerta marcada con el número 55 bis, verde una ventana abajo dos arriba. Hay un letrero: “María Guadalupe García S. UNAM. Registro de Salubridad 2396, cédula 35710, Doctora en Partos”./Sigue el número 53, edificio de tres pisos, pintado de rojo, puerta pequeña. Hay un letrero “Servicio Radiotécnico William reparación de Radio, instalación antena TV, y construcción de equipo sonoro”. En la accesoria hay una Agencia de bicicletas, pero antes hay una ventana./Otra accesoria también con el número 55 es una frutería y luego sigue una accesoria donde se expenden jugos./Hay luego una tocinería, con puertas metálicas de enrollar, cerrada. “La Chiquita” es su nombre./Sobre la refresquería marcada con el número 55 hay un escudo del PRI. Estas accesorias son de un solo piso. En la esquina hay una puerta que da a una vivienda pero continúa una pulquería, “La Playa”, lic. 20469, dos puertas. La pared recubierta de mosaicos. [...] Sigue un pequeño lote que reúne posiblemente viviendas adentro sin puerta en la entrada./Sigue un edificio de dos pisos, apartamentos, tabique amarillo, seis ventanas en cada piso./Hay un ángulo truncado sobre Circunvalación, en el cual se localiza una puerta con dos ventanas de cada lado. Todas las ventanas con cristales, marco de madera./Damos la vuelta sobre Carpintería hacia el sur./En el mismo edificio mencionado anteriormente, con dos ventanas en el primer piso y dos en el segundo, no decorado. Sigue otro edificio de dos pisos, tabique, pintado color gris, con cuatro accesorias y una puerta de entrada a los apartamentos. Las cuatro Accesorias son: una refresquería, una panadería, una puerta sin número, luego una tortillería y otro expendio de refrescos embotellados./Sigue otro edificio de 3 accesorias, una miscelánea, las otras dos cerradas, marcada con el número 72, de dos pisos, tabique su accesoria 72 A es una sastrería “Escandón”, pintada de Verde./El 70 Bis es de tabique, de un solo piso, dos ventanas, una puerta de hierro, dos hojas. [...] ⁶⁷

Writing in the 1970s, two decades after Lewis conducted his research, sociologist Susan Eckstein described Tepito and Colonia Morelos in a not altogether negative light. Bustling with activity, its “buildings, streets, small shops, and local markets [were] filled with people selling a wide array of goods to customers from diverse parts of the city.” Eckstein characterized this “inner-city slum” as a stable community with traditions, local heroes, and “a core of residents who were born and raised locally” and who did “not wish to leave.”⁶⁸ Echoing Lewis, Eckstein

⁶⁷ OLA-124-(105).

⁶⁸ *Poverty of Revolution*, 52-3.

remarked on the women at the “entryway of their living quarters selling *tacos, tortillas, frijoles, enchiladas*, and other flavorful Mexican favorites.”⁶⁹ By highlighting the colonial origins of the area (even though the neighborhood had been subdivided in the late nineteenth-century), Eckstein created an illusion of stability and community, as if Colonia Morelos was shielded from the larger forces transforming Mexico City.

The difference between tugurios and colonias proletarias, the counterpoint of Eckstein’s argument, was stark. Eckstein described colonias proletarias as lacking the associative life and energy of tugurios.⁷⁰ Peopled by migrants from the countryside—another equivocal assessment—colonias proletarias were considered more “rural” than tugurios, the Mexican version of the “cities of peasants” that haunted public officials throughout Latin America after World War II.⁷¹ Colonias proletarias were sparsely populated, lacking urban services, and rich in images commonly associated with the countryside: wild dogs, pigsties, dusty bucolic streets. Visual tropes for colonias proletarias were scarce in the 1950s. It was a “landscape,” lamented architect Guillermo Ortiz, “devoid of water and trees, resembling a desert.”⁷² Neither urban nor rural, the vast fringes of Mexico City were something of a cultural conundrum, an invisible space. “The first impression that one has upon arriving to Mexico City is that it doesn’t exist,” wrote Jorge Ibargüngoitia in the late 1960s. “It takes a while before we notice that it is houses that we glimpse by the side of the road [...] after a few kilometers we recognize the first

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 62-3.

⁷¹ Bryan Roberts, *Cities of Peasants: The Political Economy of Urbanization in the Third World* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1978); José Luis Romero, *Latinoamérica: las ciudades y las ideas*, 349-363.

⁷² Guillermo Ortiz Flores, “La vivienda popular,” AGN-INV-12.

loncherías, taco stands, and *vulcanizadoras*. We finally understand that we have arrived to Mexico City.”⁷³

In *Five Families*, Lewis described colonia proletaria “El Dorado,” where Jesús Sánchez was living with his young wife. El Dorado was located in the industrial northeast of the Federal District, close to the main sewage branch. It was communicated with the city by a single unpaved road, traversed by hourly buses. Travelling was difficult, particularly during the rainy season. Sánchez’s wife oftentimes felt lonely, far from friends and family. El Dorado lacked water, sewage, and electricity, although it would receive these services shortly afterwards.⁷⁴ Water (most probably brought by water trucks) was barely enough to feed the animals. Houses lay scattered amid the barren soil. No street grid is discernible. The area was often hit by *tolvaneras*, sandstorms formed in dry season from the lakebed of Lake Texcoco. Lewis photographed the horizon from the rooftop of Sánchez’s house: large empty spaces interrupted by a few man-made structures.⁷⁵ A humble brick chapel, painted in white lime and decorated with flowers at its entrance, stood nearby, surrounded by rocks and dirt. Wrote Lewis:

The Sánchez house stood on the open, treeless flats some distance from the dirt road in a close cluster of five or six houses. It was by far the largest and the most solidly built and was the only house with a short stretch of sidewalk in front of it. From the exterior it looked like a grey, rectangular block, a kind of fortress, the four walls of which presented an unbroken stretch of cement except for the door in the narrow front end of the building. The original plans had provided for windows on the outside, but Jesús Sánchez had finally decided to set windows only in the inside walls that gave onto the enclosed patio.

⁷³ “La primera impresión que uno tiene al llegar a la ciudad de México, es que no existe. Quiero decir, que pasa un tiempo antes de que uno se dé cuenta de que lo que ha estado viendo a las orillas de la carretera son casas. Aunque el resultado es el mismo, la impresión varía según el punto cardinal por el que uno está aproximándose a la ciudad. Si llega uno por el sur, parece que lo que está viendo son formaciones geológicas; si es por el poniente, parece que son objetos ornamentales, parecidos a unas casas, que han sido puestos allí con la intención de engañar a un posible invasor y hacerle creer que ahí hay casas; por el norte, las casas parecen montones de salitre. Pero esa es una impresión momentánea. Al cabo de unos cuantos kilómetros, empiezan a aparecer las primeras loncherías, los puestos de tacos y las vulcanizadoras; entonces comprende uno que ha llegado a la ciudad de México.” Ibid, 99.

⁷⁴ On the state of the area see, AHCM-OP-658-1.

⁷⁵ The photographs, which cannot be reproduced, can be see in OLA-Box 136.

Some day, he thought, he might like to add a second story to the house, and with this in mind he had embedded steel cables in the walls to re-inforce the cement. These cables projected up into the air and made the house look unfinished. Yet even as it was, Jesús' house was much higher than those around it. When he stood on his roof leaning against the parapet which had been formed by extending the walls higher than the roof, he could look down on the roofs of his neighbors and into his own patio where the women might be working. He could also look far out across the flat, dusty wastes to the mountains in the distance.⁷⁶

Lewis described the home (or fortress) of Jesús Sánchez as a work in progress, pregnant with promise, a perspective that earlier observers had failed to capture. This short passage, then, captures the more positive light through which colonias proletarias—as well as other “squatter settlements” around the world—would be seen from the 1960s onwards: as cities of hope, progressive environments that improved with time.

It is important to note that Lewis' much criticized “culture of poverty”—a self-defeatist attitude towards life that generated a never-ending cycle of poverty—was conceived with (quite literally) the *children* of Sánchez in mind. But Sánchez thought of himself as a self-made man and critics of the book in fact denounced him as a bourgeois *comerciante* with low moral standards.⁷⁷ This character materialized in his house in El Dorado. Sánchez paid for his lot with the gains he made after winning a small sum (MX\$ 2,500) in the national lottery and adding a “valuable stud pig” (a cross-breed of Chester White and Jersey) to the deal. The negotiation is described in Lewis' transcripts as a “*traspaso*,” a word that denotes the informal real-estate market that existed in colonias proletarias. Sánchez received twenty receipts upon the signature

⁷⁶ *Five Families*, 214.

⁷⁷ “Jesús Sánchez vive con su familia en una humilde casa de vecindad; pero es propietario de una confortable casa, construida en una de las colonias de esta capital; no es obrero ni proletario con salario insuficiente, sino COMERCIANTE (burgés).” Luis Cataño Morlet, “Cataño Morlet vuelve a la carga contra los ‘Sanchistas’,” *Siempre*, March 31, 1965, 4.

of the contract (probably the vouchers that possessors used a proof of installment payments). “*Y así se hizo, todo derecho y todo legal y limpio.*”⁷⁸

A savvy breeder, Sánchez continued raising pigs in order to build a second home in a large lot that he hoped to divide among his children and grandchildren. Such divisions were forbidden in colonias proletarias but they were nevertheless extremely common. According to one study, the density in colonias proletarias more than doubled between 1948 and 1958, from ninety to 200 inhabitants per hectare.⁷⁹ This second house was also photographed by Lewis. It was most probably located in Iztacalco or Ixtapalapa; both *delegaciones* are southeast of the city center, adjacent to each other, and mentioned in Lewis’ transcripts. Piggens and chicken coops bordered the lot. Cement, bricks, and other construction materials are also visible, hinting at the project to add another story or build another room. Sánchez’s “second home in a Mexican suburb,” scribbled Lewis in the back of a picture that showed Sánchez’ wife, mother-in-law, and grandchildren. “1961-1963,” Lewis added.⁸⁰

The real-estate dealings of Jesús Sánchez are representative of general patterns of growth. Mexico City’s industrial north was the engine of this expansion during the 1930s and 1940s. Eager to industrialize city and nation, the federal government granted tax incentives for industries in the Federal District and communicated them with roads and railroad tracks. Sánchez’s first house in El Dorado lay surrounded by this industrializing frenzy. It was located close to the industrial city “D. M. Nacional,” a modern industrial plant praised by the Minister of National Economy Antonio Ruiz Galindo as “the realization [...] of the Mexican Revolution’s

⁷⁸ *Five Families*, 220; OLA-53-“Santos Hernández Story—Spanish.”

⁷⁹ Guillermo Ortiz Flores, José María Gutiérrez and Carlos Villaseñor, “Desarrollo de las colonias proletarias en la ciudad de México,” *Boletín 2* (1962), 24.

⁸⁰ OLA-136.

ideals of improvement,” furnished with modern facilities for workers and their families.⁸¹ Most colonias proletarias in the 1950s were built in Iztacalco and Ixtapalapa, farther away from the industrial heart of the city. This southeast movement would then set the path for the construction of Ciudad Netzahualcoyotl in the State of Mexico, the monster settlement that epitomized patterns of popular urbanization in the 1960s and 1970s. In his 1976 *Las ciudades y las ideas*, Argentinean historian José Luis Romero’s identified Ciudad Netzahualcoyotl as the district where Sánchez built his house. It was not, but the mistake was understandable. If Lewis had conducted his research two decades later he probably would have found an informant building a house in Netzahualcoyotl, at the time Mexico City’s latest urban frontier.⁸²

Integrating colonias proletarias into the city was a momentous challenge. Different levels of government, as well as non-government agencies, participated in it, usually in a decentralized manner. This integration became more difficult as one moved away from the city center, towards peripheral areas where it required building a city from scratch. The problem was not only an infrastructural one, but one that pertained to notions of what a city and a community were. Therefore, whereas the 1952 survey saw colonias proletarias as a discrete housing problem, plans for them became increasingly embedded within broader sociological frameworks.

Two young architects from the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN), David Cymet and Guillermo Ortiz, spearheaded the study of colonias proletarias. The Escuela Nacional de Arquitectura e Ingeniería at the IPN combined the practices of architecture and engineering, producing a pragmatic and politically progressive approach to the housing question. Founded by

⁸¹ Antonio Ruiz Galindo, “The Basic Ideas of the Industrial City “D. M. Nacional,” *The Social Sciences in Mexico* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1947), 40.

⁸² José Luis Romero, *Latinoamérica: las ciudades y las ideas*. For the history of Ciudad Netzahualcoyotl, see Carlos G. Vélez-Ibañez, *Rituals of Marginality: Politics, Process, and Culture Change in Urban Central Mexico, 1969-1974* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

the radical architects from the 1930s—Juan O’Gorman, Juan Legarreta, José Luis Cuevas, among others—it became a key institution that “promoted a strong concern for the problems of society.” Ricardo Pérez Rayón—a student of the IPN who built its modernist campus in the late 1950s—explained that the school “democratized the career of architecture.”⁸³ In the early 1950s Pérez Rayón started working in the Oficina del Plano Regulador of the DDF. Upon becoming the head of the office, he invited Cymet and Ortiz to join him at the municipal government in order to deal with colonias proletarias.

Cymet and Ortiz counted 279 colonias proletarias in 1955, where approximately a quarter of the population of Mexico City lived (736,035) [Fig 4.5].⁸⁴ As other housing experts, they considered that the main problem of colonias proletarias was their insufficient urban infrastructure. Their calculations offered a bleak and urgent picture: 85% of colonias proletarias lacked paved streets; 57% lacked schools; 72% did not have a market; 80% did not have parks and gardens; 45% lacked sewage; and 35% lacked water. Rather than tearing them down—alas, there was little to bring down—the way to fix colonias proletarias was providing them with urban services and helping residents improve their homes.

⁸³ Entrevista realizada a Reinaldo Pérez Rayón, realizada por Graciela de Garay, el día 2 de octubre de 1991 en la ciudad de México. Archivo de la Palabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora.

⁸⁴ *El problema de las colonias proletarias en la ciudad de México* (Mexico City: IPN, 1955), 66.



Fig. 4.5. Colonias proletarias in Mexico City. INV Archive. AGN.

After graduating from the IPN, Cymet and Ortiz continued their engagement with colonias proletarias at the INV.⁸⁵ Over time, they reached the conclusion that colonias proletarias were not only lacking urban services but also the vital organs of a community: “work centers, markets, schools, churches, parks, community centers, and an adequate street system: the

⁸⁵ The colonias proletarias team was led by Cymet, Ortiz, and José María Gutiérrez Trujillo. It included economists, anthropologists, sociologists, and social workers. INV, *Colonias proletarias: problemas y soluciones* (INV: Mexico City, 1958).

facilities necessary for the enjoyment of ‘a normal life’.”⁸⁶ Ironically, experts found colonias proletarias in want of community, precisely what tugurios, for better or worse, already had. This lack led to a meditation on what exactly an urban community was and how it could be built. “Creating community hearts where communal life would take place was the most important condition for regenerating [colonias proletarias],” read another INV report.⁸⁷ This question was often posed in numerical terms, as a matter of scale. The INV calculated that 3,000 residents conformed a neighborhood (*vecindario*), whose communal organs included a residential zone, a commercial zone for daily shopping, a daycare, and an area for infant games. Four neighborhoods—or 12,000 residents—added up to the next scale of “communal grouping,” which required a market, an elementary school, a church, and artisanal shops. Finally, the largest grouping was a 60,000 resident barrio, to be provided with a larger market, a secondary school, a sports park, an industrial zone, and a wide avenue.⁸⁸

Another version of this urban mecano was developed by Guillermo Ortiz in 1962. Ortiz advocated that “rational planning [through] the organization of different communal scales” would integrate residents with their surroundings, achieving “social solidarity.”⁸⁹ At the bottom level of this organizing was a small “urban nucleus”—with a population between 375 and 750 residents—that would be served by two small shops and a *tortillería*. The next scale, ranging from 1,500 to 3,000 residents, would have a *tienda de abarrotes*, a *molino de nixtamal*, a dry-cleaner, a woodworking shop, a blacksmith’s, and a kinder-garden. The third nucleus would be served by a small market, three bakeries, two butchers, two dairy shops, three hardware shops, two drugstores, three clinics, two shoe shops, two auto repairs, two *pulquerías*, and one or two

⁸⁶ INV-Box 1-Equipo técnico: “Colonias proletarias.”

⁸⁷ INV, *Colonias proletarias: problemas y soluciones*, 20.

⁸⁸ INV, *Colonias proletarias: problemas y soluciones*, 10.

⁸⁹ “Desarrollo de las colonias proletarias,” 27.

elementary schools. Finally, the fourth nucleus would have a small market, a bread distributor, a CEIMSA store (government subsidized supermarket), several specialized shops (selling wood, charcoal, furniture, etc.) as well as government offices such as police station, post office, one church, and three evangelical temples.⁹⁰ The postwar period is often thought of as a time when utopian cities and housing projects—Brasilia, Islamabad, or Tlatelolco—were built by planners and architects full of hubris. However, as historian Rosemary Wakeman has shown, neighborhoods were the object of a different kind of utopic imagining, articulated around everyday life and facilities such as schools, community centers, and health clinics. Around the world, the neighborhood became the “basic building block” of ideal cities.⁹¹ Colonias proletarias were a version of this building block.

The utopia of the neighborhood was embraced by networks of “reformist” pan-American planners who proposed a new approach to urban planning.⁹² In the words of one of its champions—Eric Carlson, Director of the Inter-American Housing and Planning Center in Bogotá, Colombia—the “classic CIAM-type of planning,” with its toolkit of “master plans, comprehensive zoning, [and] building and subdivision regulation” was out. In place, a new and “dynamic” planning mode was needed, with an “emphasis on the acquisition, reservation, and plotting of land for low-cost housing [and] the provision of public facilities and utilities in the vast fringes of slum areas” surrounding Latin American cities.⁹³

In the same year, 1958, the INV proposed a 4-point program for colonias proletarias: demolishing houses beyond repair; improving conditions of houses that could still be saved;

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ *Practicing Utopia*, 51-2.

⁹² On the reformism of these networks see Adrian Gorelik, “Pan-American Routes.”

⁹³ Eric Carlsen, “The Expanding Role of the Inter-American Housing and Planning Center,” [1958]. FVP-14.

increasing population density; and providing households with technical and credit assistance for improving and building their homes.⁹⁴ The first point—demolition—was reminiscent of earlier projects to replace tugurios. For decades, planners had proposed renewal plans for the congested city center with the goal of increasing real-estate values and improving traffic circulation.⁹⁵ But the novelties of the program outweighed past inertias and are significant because they represent a transition to a new housing policy. In the first place, the plan to increase population density in colonias proletarias constituted a radical and counterintuitive idea since the *problema de la vivienda* had been, for decades, inextricably linked with overcrowding. Secondly, the INV began to recognize the impossibility of demolishing deficient houses and the futility of pushing them outside of the law. Instead, it recognized the existence of colonias proletarias as well as the work that residents had already invested in them, which the INV viewed as a foundation for further improvements. The INV sought to establish a partnership with residents of colonias proletarias in order to build structurally sound, inexpensive houses.⁹⁶ It also distributed building manuals among residents that included information on materials and construction techniques.⁹⁷ These actions represented a departure from decade-long position of passing ever more stringent building codes that established “artificially high [housing] standards.” While these codes were almost never followed, they had the effect of placing thousands of houses and neighborhoods outside of the law, in a position of informality.⁹⁸

Underlying the provision of urban services and the improvement of the housing stock in colonias proletarias was a more ambitious drive to develop communities in a seemingly lifeless

⁹⁴ INV, *Colonias proletarias: problemas y soluciones*, 13.

⁹⁵ For a typical example of this approach, see INV, *Herradura de tugurios: problemas y soluciones*.

⁹⁶ INV, *Colonias proletarias: problemas y soluciones*, 11.

⁹⁷ Bernard Frieden, “The Search for Housing Policy in Mexico City,” 91.

⁹⁸ Alan Gilbert and Peter Ward, *Housing, the State, and the Urban Poor*, 12-3.

environment. The “integral improvement” program for Colonia Agrícola Oriental, one of the largest colonias proletarias, was developed by the INV as a “possible model” for other colonias.⁹⁹ The plan was for the INV to coordinate the project, build 1,000 houses, and provide counseling and subsidized materials so that residents could improve their houses. But many other government and private organizations would participate in the community-building effort as well. The city government was tasked with providing water, sewage, pavement, electricity, and a market. Public banks would provide credit for mortgages. University students—architects, engineers, social workers, and social scientists—would add their professional toolkit. The Education Ministry was tasked with building a school while the Health Ministry was in charge of building a clinic and a social center. The Ministry of Health also organized sanitary brigades that distributed food, medicines, and vaccines, and conducted *razzias* to exterminate the dogs that roamed in some colonias proletarias.¹⁰⁰

The most tangible accomplishment of the INV was the construction of around 1,600 houses in colonias proletarias Gabriel Ramos Millán, Agrícola Oriental, and San Juan de Aragón.¹⁰¹ Most of these houses were occupied by families who had been removed from the city

⁹⁹ INV-Box 5-“Plan de Mejoramiento Integral de la Colonia Agrícola Oriental.” A similar plan, for colonia Gertrudis Sánchez, can be found in INV-Box 1. Additionally, *Colonias proletarias: problemas y soluciones* includes programs for three colonias: Gertrudis G. Sánchez, Atzacolco, and Panamericana.

¹⁰⁰ On the sanitary brigades, see Archivo de la Secretaría de Salud-Fondo Salubridad y Asistencia (SSA-Spr)-Box 50-File 3, “Proyecto para la realización inmediata de jornadas sanitarias aplicativas del Partido Revolucionario Institucional.” Reports from social workers in colonias proletarias (including the mentions to *razzias*) can be found in INV-Box 10.

¹⁰¹ Most of them (around 1,000) were built in San Juan de Aragón, a number that would be increased by ten when the DDF built a unit there. See Alejandrina Escudero, “Conjunto urbano San Juan de Aragón,” in Enrique Ayala Alonso and Gerardo Álvarez Montes, eds., *El espacio habitacional en la arquitectura moderna: colonias, fraccionamientos, unidades habitacionales, equipamiento urbano y protagonistas* (Mexico City: UAM-CONACY, 2013), 187-202; Fernando Minaya Hernández, “La vivienda popular a mediados del siglo XX: Unidad habitacional Santa Cruz Mayehualco,” in Enrique Ayala Alonso and Gerardo Álvarez Montes, eds., *El espacio habitacional en la arquitectura moderna*, 177-186.

center following projects of slum demolition, street widening, and the piping of rivers. As elsewhere in the world, the modernization of Mexico City entailed the expulsion of thousands of families from the central tenements of the city (although the majority stayed). In 1950, for example, hundreds of families living in the banks of River San Joaquín were transferred to colonia proletaria Gabriel Ramos Millán. Ten years later, when the extension of Reforma Avenue was completed, families removed from the razed blocks were provided apartments in San Juan de Aragón.¹⁰² Finally, the 1964 construction of Nonoalco-Tlatelolco—Mario Pani’s most ambitious housing project—offers the clearest example of this movement of people from center to periphery. Tlatelolco was the culmination of a long project of urban renewal and slum regeneration.¹⁰³ Its construction entailed the razing of dozens of city blocks and the removal of thousands of families. These families were provided homes in colonias proletarias while middle-class families moved to the lavish housing project.¹⁰⁴

Building houses was one thing. Distributing them was a different matter that needed a different toolkit. The INV could accomplish the first thing, but it had to resort to the Ministry of Government, Mexico’s official political party (the PRI), and other political brokers in order to distribute houses. The Oficina de Colonias controlled the most detailed information on who resided in colonias proletarias and on the availability of lots in them.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, party representatives were active in several neighborhoods in the central horseshoe of slums (there was, for instance, a party office in Colonia Morelos, studied by Lewis), negotiating with the

¹⁰² Armando López Cisneros, *La ciudad que construimos: registro de la expansión de la Ciudad de México, 1920-1970* (Mexico City: UAM, 1993), 164-169; Robert Jordan, “Flowers and Iron Fists: Ernesto P. Uruchurtu and the Contested Modernization of Mexico City,” 120-7. Houses in San Juan de Aragón were sold under the regime of “patrimonio familiar” (also used in colonias proletarias), which restricted selling or renting parts of the house. Contracts can be found in OP-96-3.

¹⁰³ Mario Pani, *Nonoalco Tlatelolco Urban Development Scheme*.

¹⁰⁴ Armando López Cisneros, *La ciudad que construimos*, 164-169.

¹⁰⁵ “De las barracas a la habitación popular,” *Excelsior*, November 6, 1958.

INV, the city government, and the Oficina de Colonias lots and houses for their clients.¹⁰⁶

Finally, independent political brokers who cannot be directly linked with a political office also participated in the distribution of people across lots and houses. From the viewpoint of housing experts such as Adolfo Zamora, David Cymet, Guillermo Ortiz, and Mario Pani, the destruction of tugurios and the improvement and consolidation of colonias proletarias were integrated policies that provided housing for families in need, directed urban growth, and distributed more evenly the population over the territory of the city. But these experts relied on political brokers—of whom they were largely unaware—to move people across the city and prevent larger conflicts.

The housing problem was, in conclusion, circumscribed to decaying and overcrowded central slums known as tugurios for more than fifty years—up to 1950. But it transformed dramatically between 1947 and the late 1950s, when urban planners “discovered” urban growth in the form of colonias proletarias. Whereas tugurios constituted a corrupt space, colonias proletarias became the promise of a new type of urban community. In ten years, they went from an invisible phenomenon, to a massive problem—the housing problem par excellence—to the only plausible (however imperfect) solution to the housing problem of Mexico City.

Slums, Squatters, and the “Latin American City”

The counterpoint between vecindades and colonias proletarias was part of a broader hemispheric conversation about housing, social change, and the Latin American City. The transformation of Latin American cities into an academic problem was partly a matter of scale. Mexico City, Sao

¹⁰⁶ In December of 1959, for example, Rodolfo González, regional director of the PRI, sent to the head of the INV a list of “very humble members of the party” who were about to lose their homes due to public works around the city center. INV-5- Rodolfo González to Luis Quintanilla, December 10, 1959.

Paulo, or Buenos Aires grew immensely during the first half of the twentieth century, becoming among the largest cities in the world. But these cities were also intriguing because they seemed to deviate from theories of urban growth based upon North Atlantic experiences and models. How exactly Latin American cities deviated from, and what exactly this North Atlantic model was, remains a matter of debate. In 1959, Philip Hauser—the American sociologist who chaired the United Nations sponsored seminar “Urbanization in Latin America”—described Latin American cities as standing halfway between the North Atlantic and Asian models.¹⁰⁷

Finally, Latin American cities were rife with uncertainty, danger, and hope. Shaped by Cold War specters of social revolt and communism, such feelings were projected with a singular intensity onto squatter settlements, “the most spectacular visible hallmark of the social composition of a Latin American city,” as historian Richard Morse wrote in 1965.¹⁰⁸ Seen through this lens, Mexican *colonias proletarias* were part of a larger category of squatter communities, including “*barriadas bruja* in Panama, *ranchos* in Venezuela, *barriadas* in Peru, *callampas* in Chile, *cantegriles* in Uruguay, *favelas* in Brazil and, in other places, marginal areas, clandestine urbanizations, *barrios* of invasion, parachutists, phantom towns, etc.”¹⁰⁹ It did not

¹⁰⁷ *Urbanization in Latin America*, 20. The Santiago seminar was particularly memorable for bringing together a cohort of social scientists studying urbanization in Latin America, among them Gino Germani, José Matos Mar, etc. The intellectual history of cities, housing, urban planning, and poverty between 1940 and 1970 is growing. See, for instance, Leandro Benmergui, “Housing Development: Housing Policy, Slums, and Squatter Settlements in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, 1948-1973;” Priscilla Conolly, “Vaivenes tempranos del urbanismo popular en América Latina,” in *Aproximaciones a la historia del urbanismo popular*, ed. Héctor Quiroz Rothe (Mexico City: UNAM, 2014); Brodwyn Fischer, “A Century in Present Tense: Crisis, Politics, and Intellectual History of Brazil’s Informal Cities,” in *Cities from Scratch: Poverty and Informality in Latin America*, ed. B. Fischer, Javier Auyero, and Bryan McCann (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, “Secretos de la idiosincrasia,” in *Ciudades mexicanas del siglo XX: Siete estudios históricos*, ed. A. Rodríguez Kuri and Carlos Lira Vázquez (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2009); Licia Valladares, *A invenção da favela: do mito de origem a favela.com* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV, 2005).

¹⁰⁸ “Recent Research on Latin American Urbanization: A Selective Survey with Commentary,” 48.

¹⁰⁹ “Latin American Squatter Settlements: A Problem and a Solution,” *Latin American Research Review* 2, no. 3 (1967): 65.

really matter that colonias proletarias were recognized by the Mexican government, or that their residents had purchased their lots. From this bird's-eye, Pan-American view, they were squatter settlements: not only a local nuisance but also a profound problem, perhaps *the* problem, of the region as a whole.

Before 1950, most social scientists and political observers referred indistinctly to central slums and squatter settlements, both of which they understood as spaces of economic deprivation, cultural backwardness, and moral vice.¹¹⁰ However, such sweeping analyses of urban poverty would be replaced by more detailed and dynamic studies that recognized urban growth and the existence of different urban forms. In the 1960s, squatter settlements began to be seen in a more positive light and as different from early twentieth-century central slums. In 1967, anthropologist William Mangin identified a number of myths about squatter settlements. Firstly, squatter settlements were formed by rural (or indigenous) people who “reconstituted” their social organization in the city. Secondly, settlements were chaotic and disorganized, breeding ground for crime, family breakdown, and political radicalism. Finally, settlements did not participate in city life; they were, in fact, an “economic drain on the nation:” unproductive, unemployed, and diverting work from the agricultural sector.¹¹¹ Mangin viewed squatter settlements more positively. He considered their residents as “less alienated from the national state and more involved with each other than residents of central city slums,” partly because they could look around and see “a major accomplishment of their own, i.e., the seizure of land and the creation of a community.”¹¹² As Mexican colonias proletarias, he concluded, squatter settlements were less a problem than “solution” for the city: a rubric for community organization and urban growth.

¹¹⁰ This point was made by William Mangin, “Latin American Squatter Settlements.” But the problem did not end after 1950, as Brodwyn Fischer has demonstrated; see “A Century in Present Tense.”

¹¹¹ Mangin, “Latin American Squatter Settlements,” 66.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 74.

These views became increasingly common, at least among a transnational circle of policymakers and social scientists. The shift is attested by the prominence gained by British architect John Turner.¹¹³ Turner spent the decade between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s in Peru, where he travelled with the goal of providing professional expertise to low-income migrants building their homes and organizing their neighborhoods. He had been profoundly influenced by Patrick Geddes' belief in a gradualist and organic urban planning that took advantage of the self-knowledge that communities possessed of their needs and capabilities. He observed admiringly the hard, communal work and local knowledge of the migrants who developed the *barriadas* of Lima. The path by which migrants moved from the countryside to the central slums of Lima to peripheral squatter settlements was, for Turner, a successful and upwardly mobile one. For scholars from this period (c. 1950-1970), peripheral squatter settlements represented an urban version of the frontier in U.S. history: an empty space to be colonized through the hard toil of settlers/squatters. But just as the myth of the frontier in American history erased Indian histories, the idea of the urban periphery as an empty space transformed by industrious squatters (small capitalist entrepreneurs in Hernando de Soto's influential interpretation) was often blind to the political and juridical entanglements that shaped *colonias proletarias* and similar settlements. This interpretation was also blind to the fact that these spaces were defined by "territorial exclusions" and "lack of space" as much as by collaboration and entrepreneurship.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ On John F. Turner see Helen Elizabeth Gyger, "The Informal as a Project: Self-Help Housing in Peru." Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2013; Ray Bromley, "How Time and Place Influenced John Turner's Ideas on Housing Policy," *Habitat International* 27, no. 2 (2003): 185-215; Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), especially Ch. 8, "The City of Sweat Equity."

¹¹⁴ Ananya Roy, "Transnational Trespassings: The Geopolitics of Urban Informality," in *Urban Informality*, 308. In addition to Roy's illuminating essay, my thinking about the myth of the urban frontier and its empty space is informed by Susan Eckstein, "'Urbanization Revisited: Inner-City Slum of hope and Squatter Settlement of Despair,'" *World Development* 18, no. 2 (1990): 165-181;

Similarly, in a 1965 survey on the Mexican housing policy, American planner Bernard J. Frieden could describe colonias proletarias as “the most significant step in solving the housing problem of Mexico City.”¹¹⁵ By the time that Wayne Cornelius published his influential *Politics and the Migrant Poor*—researched in the early 1970s and published in 1975—the vindication of colonias proletarias was definitive. Their residents were pragmatic, risk-averse, and working along with the municipal government in order to improve their homes and their neighborhoods. On the other hand, Cornelius assessed that “central-city slums” were, “by any standard, the worst-low income dwelling environments in the city.” Reviewing the Latin American literature, he added that

residents of central-city tenement slums have often been found to exhibit significantly higher levels of social and political alienation, a higher incidence of alcoholism and drug addiction, more unstable family relationship, a great deal less socioeconomic mobility, and a weaker sense of community than residents of peripheral squatter settlements and other types of low-income neighborhoods.¹¹⁶

By the early 1980s the optimism had waned, and the dominant view of the squatter settlements as progressive spaces of hope received a backlash. Authors noticed that not all squatters were able to consolidate their position as Jesús Sánchez had done. Many were renters and many had been bought-off by wealthier residents. Other authors pointed out that self-construction was inefficient and still others argued that Turner and others had romanticized settlements and their residents, much as an earlier cohort of social scientists had romanticized

and Kate Brown, “Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana are Nearly the Same Place,” in *Dispatches from Dystopia: Histories of Places Not Yet Forgotten* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 81. See also Richard Morse, “Latin American Cities: Aspects of Function and Structure,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1962). Morse states straightforwardly that the proletariat and rural migrants in Latin American cities do not live in the center of the city—as Burgess would have predicted—but in the peripheral, interstitial areas (285).

¹¹⁶ 28. Note 11.

traditional communities.¹¹⁷ When ethnographers such as Janice Perlman and Susan Eckstein returned to the field in the 1990s, they found out that the communities that they studied twenty or thirty years earlier had deteriorated, in part because of the economic crises that hit Brazil and Mexico in the 1980s. Flipping once again the orthodoxy, Eckstein entitled her revision of her earlier work as “Inner-City Slum of Hope and Squatter Settlement of Despair.”¹¹⁸

Conclusion

The change by which squatter settlements went from problem to solution was not an exceptional Mexican story. Everywhere the tide changed. But the Mexican case differs from that of other Latin American countries because colonias proletarias had been hailed as a solution, *by the government*, much earlier, as early as 1941, when the Reglamento de Colonias was passed. Therefore, in the span of twenty years they went from 1) a political solution to the housing problem to 2) an invisible urban form to 3) an urban problem (neighborhoods of alienated peasants that threatened to overreach the municipal finances) to 4) a solution, imperfect but plausible, to the challenge of popular urban expansion.

Colonias proletarias were invisible to architects and planners while intimately entangled with municipal laws and political brokers. It was as if they existed in myriad universes: administrative, political, architectural, and popular culture. The difficulty—for the historian if not necessarily for the historical actor—is that these universes and their chronologies do not

¹¹⁷ For a review of these critiques, see Peter Ward, ed., *Self-Help Housing: A Critique* (London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1982).

¹¹⁸ “Urbanization Revisited: Inner-City Slum of Hope and Squatter Settlement of Despair;” Janice Perlman, “Marginality: From Myth to Reality in the *Favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, 1969-2002,” in Ananya Roy and Nezar Alsayyad, eds. *Urban Informality*. For an account of this shift, see Mercedes González de la Rocha, Janice Perlman, Helen Safa, Elizabeth Jelin, Bryan R. Roberts, and Peter M. Ward, “From the Marginality of the 1960s to the “New Poverty” of Today: A LARR Research Forum”. *Latin American Research Review* 39, no. 1 (2004): 183–203.

align with each other neatly. When David Cymet and Guillermo Ortiz discovered the hidden potential of colonias proletarias in the 1950s, they were part of a transnational architectural dialogue that embraced the ideals of self-help, community building and bottom-up planning. For them, colonias proletarias offered a template for decentralizing the city and creating a popular metropolis through self-built neighborhoods. But architects and planners were often oblivious of the earlier government policy towards colonias proletarias (1940s). This policy (described only tangentially throughout this chapter) was all about dividing land, distributing people across lots, and providing urban services to these lots. Its main protagonists were not architects and housing experts but offices such as the Oficina de Colonias, whose *raison d'être* was controlling urban populations, not building an ideal city.

There are two ironies in the transformation of the housing problem charted by this chapter. Early twentieth-century housing experts aspired to reform a community—living in *vecindades* and *tugurios*—that was deemed corrupt. Their solution to the housing problem was destroying slums and replacing them with modern housing projects. This was too costly, politically and financially. In the meanwhile, Mexico City continued its expansion, indifferent to such concerns. In the early 1950s, housing experts finally discovered a new housing form that had developed beyond their control and purview. This form posed the opposite problem of early twentieth-century slums. Colonias proletarias resembled a *tabula rasa* where planners and architects could try to build a community, taking advantage of the energies of residents and developers.

The second irony is that the 1940s, the period when colonias proletarias were invisible for housing officials, was also the decade when they were most powerful politically. As the case of Jesús Sánchez exemplifies, colonias proletarias thrived during this decade, when their

residents pushed the expansion of the city through negotiations with political brokers and party representatives. The failure of architects to recognize this process did not undermine its success. It simply underscores the importance that international models—modernist planning, Chicago School human ecology, urban renewal plans—had for reading or misreading what was happening in Mexico City at the time. Colonias proletarias were invisible because they were not part of a master narrative of growth and urban modernity. But their magnitude and importance is undeniable.

In December 1955, Colonia Ramos Millán celebrated its 5th anniversary. Those invited to the weeklong festivities included Mexico's president, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, the regent of Mexico City, Ernesto P. Uruchurtu, and party representatives. Rafael Suárez Ocaña and Carlos Zapata Vela, the current and former heads of the Oficina de Colonias, the municipal office tasked with managing such colonias proletarias as Ramos Millán, were also present. The celebrations included horseraces, cockfights, a soccer match, singing competitions, fireworks, and a performance by the famous comedian Jesús Martínez, "Palillo."¹ Up to this point, the history of Ramos Millán was extremely successful, if uneven and contested. Five years before the anniversary, in December 1950, Ramos Millán resembled a refugee settlement, dotted by tents and shacks built with canvas, asbestos, and wood boards in a matter of days. There were no houses, no roads, and no sidewalks, only trees, paddocks, and ditches.

Created from scratch, Ramos Millán's population skyrocketed from zero to 70,000 in five years, a number that made it the largest neighborhood in Mexico City.² The neighborhood was still a work in progress in 1955. Crisscrossed by canals and a branch of the main sewage line, it lacked a regular system of streets, sidewalks, and houses. It was, as many other colonias

¹ The program of the celebrations is located in "Ramos Millán," AHCM-OP-471-2. It is highly unlikely that the higher figures attended the event, which went unreported by the press. But they all are included in the program.

² Such populations were increasingly common. According to the Oficina de Colonias, 38 colonias had more than one thousand lots, which could add up to 10,000 inhabitants. While exact figures for the population of colonias are hard to determine, census results—segmented by delegación—offer a start. Iztacalco, where Colonia Ramos Millán is located, increased its population from 11,212 in 1940, to 33,945 in 1950, to an astonishing 198,204 in 1960. The Oficina de Colonias calculated that Colonia Ramos Millán was, with 5,907, the colonia with the largest number of lots in Mexico City. Since residents further subdivided, rented, and sold their lots, the figure of 70,000 noted in the register is by no means implausible. See "Relación de colonias proletarias," AHCM-Fondo Gobernación-323. A different source, the daily *El Nacional*, calculated a population of 50,000 in October 1951. "Bello acto de solidaridad humana y social de colonos de la "Gabriel Ramos Millán," *El Nacional*, October 24, 1951.

proletarias, “a flat land, with large barren spaces between streets that could not even be considered suburban.”³ Today, mid-century colonias proletarias have been integrated into Mexico City and appear as unremarkable neighborhoods. But their future was shrouded in uncertainty during the 1940s and 1950s, when urbanization was not an unchallenged historical horizon and when, at least in the realm of ideas, Mexico’s “socioeconomic profile [...] was still at stake.”⁴

In 1950, the same year Colonia Ramos Millán was established, populist American historian Frank Tannenbaum argued against the plausibility and desirability of an urban path for Mexico. “The Mexican village,” he claimed, “is infinitely more desirable as a basis for a culture than an industrial proletariat.”⁵ Tannenbaum’s defense of small agrarian communities echoed President Lázaro Cárdenas’ “small is beautiful” project.⁶ The power and lasting appeal of these ideas explains the heated response from Mexican intellectuals who championed industrialization and were pushing for it from government institutions. Manuel Germán Parra, economist, modernization ideologue, and presidential advisor, argued that Mexico was not an ontologically agrarian nation but simply a backward one (as the United States were a century earlier), on the road to a higher civilizational phase, adding that factory and city were transforming the mentality of the Mexican peasant from feudal to modern. As other ideologues of modernization, Parra

³ Adolfo Zamora, “Memorandum,” April 23, 1936, AGN-CL-89-8.

⁴ Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, “Secretos de la idiosincrasia: urbanización y cambio cultural en México, 1950-1970,” in Carlos Illades and Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, eds., *Ciudades mexicanas del siglo XX*, 21.

⁵ “La pequeña comunidad y la economía mexicana: réplica,” *El Trimestre económico* 17 no. 3 (1950), 482. These words were written in response to Edmundo Flores’ critical review of Tannenbaum’s *Mexico: The Struggle for bread and peace* (New York: Knopf, 1950). The debate spilled to the pages of *Problemas agrícolas e industriales de México* 3 (October-December 1951). For an enlightening review of the debate, see Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, “Urbanización y secularización en México: temas y problemas historiográficos,” *México en tres momentos: 1810-1910-2010*, ed. Alicia Mayer (Mexico City: UNAM, 2007), 107-120.

⁶ I am borrowing the “small is beautiful” phrase from historian Lance Simonian, *Defending the Land of the Jaguar: A History of Conservation in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 77.

equated history with geography: the countryside represented the past whereas the future materialized in the city.

The history of Colonia Ramos Millán challenges these teleological views and captures the multiple futures embodied in colonias proletarias circa 1950. As I have explained, these neighborhoods occupied a “grey zone” between government oversight and organizing by non-government agents. Most of the time, the DDF recognized colonias proletarias and distributed urban services to them only *after* developers and settlers had taken possession and distributed lots. But unlike most colonias proletarias, Ramos Millán was a deliberate state project and not a direct response to pressures from landless families, greedy developers, and political brokers. Its population and size are less noteworthy than the fact that the municipal government used it as a testing site for a model of popular planning. The history of Ramos Millán illustrates an array of state projects and aspirations as well as the obstacles faced by such projects and the shortsightedness of those aspirations. During the late 1930s, the Ministry of Agriculture divided Ramos Millán and distributed it among neighboring peasant communities who requested land. Only a decade later, the DDF decreed the area an industrial zone. It afterwards bought the land, and considered building a housing project designed by modernist architect Mario Pani. The city government sought to make of colonias proletarias such as Ramos Millán the building blocks for an industrial and corporatist metropolis. But what emerged was something different, an understanding of which calls for new categories of politics and planning.

This chapter traces the history of Ramos Millán through a succession of state projects. The fact that these plans did not materialize—or “failed”—bears witness to the gulf between state imaginings and conditions on the ground. Measured against the agrarian, industrial, corporatist, and modernist aspirations of the 1930s and 1940s, Ramos Millán failed. However,

when analyzed from the perspective of the municipal offices, political brokers, and resident associations that managed it, Ramos Millán appears to be a more successful experiment. Despite lacking a blueprint, or a script, it somehow worked; in this sense, it was not exceptional but representative of the municipal management of popular urbanization. Finally, I review how 1960s social scientists deemed Ramos Millán an aberration of the modernization to which they aspired. The history of Ramos Millán and the promises that it captured in previous decades would be forgotten by these observers, incapable of thinking of these places as anything other than urban pathologies.

Visions of Agriculture, Industry, and Housing

Iztacalco, the delegación where Ramos Millán was founded, experienced dramatic changes over the first half of the twentieth century.⁷ The general process could be summarized as one of urbanization, but the concept obscures a series of competing ideas of the city vis-à-vis the countryside, agriculture, industry, and modernization. The 1930 *Atlas General del Distrito Federal* described Iztacalco as an area of “little historical importance,” a dismissive view that glossed over this community’s long history, which stretched all the way back to the fourteenth century.⁸ “Very little is left of the grandeur and importance [held by Iztacalco] in the time of the

⁷ Spelling for Iztacalco changed over the past century; it used to be Ixtacalco but Iztacalco has replaced it. In this chapter I use the contemporary usage, Iztacalco, and write Ixtacalco when referring to the town with the same name within the delegación.

⁸ Departamento del Distrito Federal, *Atlas General del Distrito Federal*, 297. On Iztacalco’s history, see Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, *Catálogo Nacional. Monumentos Históricos: Inmuebles y Muebles, Iztacalco D.F.* (Mexico City: INAH, 1992).

mexican kings and emperors,” wrote a chronicler from the period. “Most of its residents are Indians who cultivate small agrarian lots and chinampas.”⁹ These descriptions reflected the

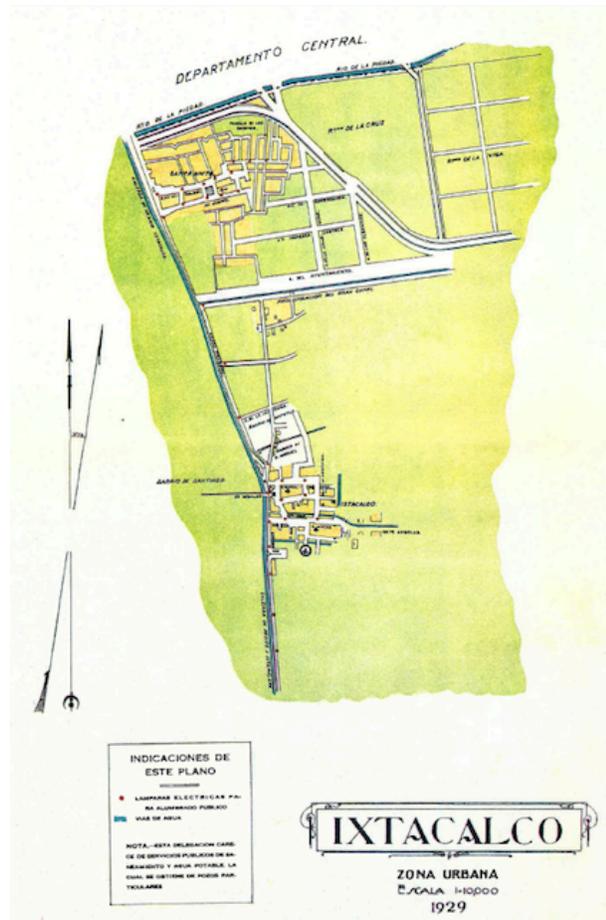


Fig. 5.1. Atlas General del Distrito Federal, 1929.

condition of Iztacalco at the start of the century. During the 1930s, Iztacalco was (and remains) the smallest delegación of the Federal District, both in area and population; its four thousand inhabitants concentrated in the small towns of Ixtacalco—the ancient *cabecera* of the area—and Santa Anita. Both towns were located on the western fringe of the delegación, closer to Mexico City. The ranches, paddocks, and haciendas that constituted its remaining area were left unnamed and unmapped by the *Atlas* [Fig. 5.1]. In fact, the whole eastern half of

Iztacalco was omitted from it, confirming the

little importance that the city government gave to the area.

Iztacalco, however, had experienced a significant transformation over the Porfirian period. The towns of Ixtacalco and Santa Anita, for example, were communicated to Mexico City by a tramway line. They lacked water and sewage services but were interconnected by roads and illuminated with electrical lampposts. Bordering Santa Anita, to the east, lay the Rancho de la Viga, which would later become Colonia Independencia, and which already bore signs of

⁹ Roberto J. Álvarez, “Tercer Circuito Pro-Turismo,” *Obras Públicas* 2, no. 10-11 (October-November 1930), 209.

urbanization in the shape of a partial grid. Such omissions in an official publication that sought to offer encyclopedic cataloguing (the *Atlas*, for example, enumerated the number of buildings in each delegación) reveal the government's limited recognition of the processes and actors that were transforming the Federal District. Under the radar of the state purview, a quiet demographic explosion was taking place, fueled by land developers who were subdividing Mexico City's edges.

Iztacalco was an amphibian and essentially agrarian area, crisscrossed by canals and rivers and covered for the most part by floating gardens or *chinampas* where cereals, alfalfa, and flowers were grown. During the colonial period and the nineteenth century these products were boated to Mexico City through the Canal de la Viga, which ran all the way from Chalco to La Merced, the central market of the city. But this aquatic universe was changing fast, as rivers, canals, and lakes suffered from a long process of desiccation. When the Sanitation Council closed the Canal de la Viga in 1915, its halcyon days were clearly behind, as its omission from the *Atlas General* insinuates. Instead, tramway lines communicated Iztacalco to Mexico City, and producers relied on trucks to transport their produce to the capital.

Porfirian and post-Revolutionary governments regarded bodies of water as health hazards and obstacles to progress. Engineers, health officials, and urban planners drained lakes and piped canals in order to create a sanitary and modern urban environment and accomplish the "conquest of water."¹⁰ Today, nostalgic voices lament the disappearance of the *chinampas*, canals, and rivers that characterized the southeast of the Federal District, but the transformation of this environment into a dry and urban one was seen at the time as the ineluctable face of progress. "Cultural advancement and the needs of mankind," wrote a medical student investigating

¹⁰ Claudia Agostoni, *Monuments of Progress*; Matthew Vitz, *City on a Lake*.

parasitic diseases in Santa Anita during the 1940s, “have transformed the *pueblo* and its residents.” She concluded in an in an impassioned, mater-of-fact manner: “Santa Anita has transformed into a colonia, *chinampas* have disappeared, and the old canals have become roads.”¹¹

But the “conquest of water” did not pave the way towards the urban modernization aspired by liberal reformers. “Whatever a city in the North Atlantic economy might be,” wrote historian Daniel Rodgers, “it was everywhere a great, churning, legally sustained market in land and shelter.”¹² This is only partially true for Mexico City, whose land and housing markets were undoubtedly great and churning, but also complex, segmented, and far from legally sustained. When seen through the prism of its legal conflicts over land tenure, zoning, and ownership, the story of Iztacalco becomes extremely inchoate. Several government offices and private actors surveyed the land, divided and distributed it, regulated its uses, and passed sentences regarding its ownership. The outcome was not the legibility that James Scott identified as the driving goal of state action over territory but its opposite—confusion.¹³ Resorting to such concepts as *state* or *market* as either agents of change or historical outcomes, therefore, makes little sense when explaining the emergence of Mexico City’s largest colonia proletaria.

The land where Colonia Ramos Millán was founded in December 1950 belonged to the ranches of Tlacotal and Bramaderos, an assortment of paddocks and fields divided by several canals and ditches. During the 1930s, Tlacotal and Bramaderos lay surrounded by agrarian patches and human settlements, attesting to the uneven processes of urbanization in this area.

¹¹ Longinos González Castillo, “Los parásitos intestinales en Santa Anita, Distrito Federal,” B.A. Thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1947.

¹² Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 162.

¹³ James Scott, *Seeing Like A State*.

The following map arrests a moment in the transformation of Mexico City's southeast quadrant from "agrarian" to "urban" [Fig. 5.2].¹⁴ Undated, it was probably drawn in the late 1930s by surveyors employed by the Agrarian Department. Haciendas, *ejidos*, paddocks, chinampas, old towns and large swaths of land subdivided in a grid pattern coexist side by side in what seems a delicate balance. The city did not "invade the *ejido*," as anthropologists posited in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁵ One could almost argue that the opposite process took place in this area, where agrarian grants were distributed in the environs of lands that were in the process of residential subdivision, which triggered a competition for land between agrarian communities and urban developers. Many landowners divided their estates and sold them to developers in order to prevent expropriation.¹⁶ And many lands expropriated by the government and distributed as agrarian grants in the 1920s were, less than two decades later, expropriated again, this time to promote industrialization and the construction of urban neighborhoods.¹⁷ Finally, many *ejidatarios* subdivided and sold their property to low-income purchasers, a sale that was prohibited by the agrarian law. Because of the illegal character of such transactions, purchasers were unable to petition urban services from the government.¹⁸ The larger point is that *ejidos* and urban subdivisions coexisted with each other, shaping each other, and creating unique patterns of urbanization.

¹⁴ Archivo General Agrario (AGA)-Ixtacalco-23-910-7. Undated, probably drawn in late 1930s.

¹⁵ Jorge Durand, *La ciudad invade al ejido: proletarización, urbanización y lucha política en el Cerro del Judío, D.F.* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 1983).

¹⁶ This was the case of Colonia Portales, reviewed in Chapter One.

¹⁷ Antonio Azuela and Camilo Saavedra, "Uso, desgaste y reuso de la expropiación en la ciudad de México," in Antonio Azuela, ed., *Expropiación y conflicto social en cinco metrópolis latinoamericanas* (Mexico City: UNAM-Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2013), 409-454.

¹⁸ Ann Varley, "Urbanization and Agrarian Law: The Case of Mexico City," *Bulletin of Latin American Research Review* 4, no. 1 (1988): 1-16; Antonio Azuela, *La ciudad, la propiedad privada y el derecho*.



Fig. 5.2. Map of Ixtacalco, including Tlacotal and Bramaderos (fragment). Archivo General Agrario

A branch of Mexico City’s main sewage line—the Gran Canal del Desagüe—bordered Tlacotal and Bramaderos northern limits, and past this canal and the railroad line running parallel to it lay Colonia Independencia, subdivided late in the 1930s but only bearing a few houses in 1945, according to aerial photographs taken this year by the Compañía Mexicana de Aeroaviación. Southwards, Tlacotal and Bramaderos were encircled by the *ejido* lands of Ixtacalco. A branch of the Churubusco River delimited the ranches’ eastern side, and further east the Colonia Agrícola Oriental and the Colonia Federal could be found, two of the largest and earliest urban settlements in the area.¹⁹ These settlements concerned public officials because

¹⁹ Cristina Montañó, *La tierra de Ixtapalapa: luchas sociales desde las chinampas hasta la transformación urbana* (Mexico City: UAM, 1984). On the early settlement in Agrícola Oriental, see “Rindiendo informe de los trabajos efectuados en el poblado de Ixtacalco,” January 29, 1937, AGA-Ixtacalco-23-910-3.

their distance from the city rendered the provision of urban services very expensive. Unlike them, Tlacotal and Bramaderos was still uninhabited. Its only physical structures were the old hacienda building and a few barns, water tanks, and a warehouse.

According to historian Andrés Lira, the ranch was purchased by the town of Ixtacalco in 1856, following the proclamation of the Lerdo Law. Lira mentions this purchase as an example of a community that bought its land—using some of its most reputed members as proxies—in order to reinforce its corporate control over it, thus defeating the law’s purpose of ending communal control of land.²⁰ In 1923 the estate belonged to Ángel García Lascuráin who divided it with his wife Luz Calderón de García Lascuráin. Upon his death, in 1934, she inherited the whole estate, which she divided again and sold.²¹ The partitions and sales of the landholding hint at the common strategy of dividing land in order to prevent its expropriation and distribution among landless pueblos.²² But this defensive tactic proved ineffectual in Tlacotal and Bramaderos, as the legal battles with a group of neighboring pueblos would show.

Luz Calderón’s estate came under siege by several communities requesting land grants. Ixtacalco led the charge by requesting an *ejido* restitution in 1918. As neighboring *pueblos* and communities followed suit, the Agrarian Commission proposed to distribute Tlacotal and Bramadero among them. In 1935, the land was divided between four communities: Ixtacalco (which received the largest grant), Mexicaltzingo, Colonia Independencia, and San Juanico

²⁰ Andrés Lira, *Comunidades indígenas frente a la ciudad de México: Tenochtitlán y Tlatelolco, sus pueblos y barrios, 1812-1919* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México-El Colegio de Michoacán, 1983), 254.

²¹ AGA-Ixtacalco-23-910-3, “Certificado del Registro Público de la Propiedad: Ranchos de Tlacotal y Bramaderos,” April 27, 1936.

²² See Ann Varley, “¿Propiedad de la revolución? Los ejidos en el crecimiento de la ciudad de México,” 87-88.

Mextipa.²³ In 1941, Calderón filed an *amparo* suit against the expropriation. The judge ruled in her favor, granting an *amparo* in March 1942. The land, however, continued to be under possession of the *ejidatorios*, so in December 1944 the judge sentenced that they be returned to Calderón. The *ejidatorios* counterattacked by requesting a restitution from the local Agrarian Commission. The Commission approved the restitution, which was backed up by a decree signed by the regent of the DDF on April 25, 1945.²⁴ Such a bundle of legal claims, counterclaims, and sentences was far from unusual. Land was expropriated to grant lands to communities but the original owners requested *amparos*, which they usually won. However, more often than not, *ejidatorios* stayed in the land. These confrontations have sometimes been explained in clear-cut ways; for instance, as conflicts between peasant communities and large landholders, or between agrarian communities and the national government, pushing for an industrialization agenda. But these narratives are challenged by the many different legal resolutions passed by various government bodies with apparently little consequence.

At the same time that Calderón and the peasant communities fought for the estate, more powerful groups entertained their own designs for the area. As we have seen, in April 1945 the regent of the DDF signed a decree that returned the land to the *pueblos*. However, in November 1944, five months *before* the passing of this decree, a presidential decree had made of “Tlacotal and other contiguous ranches” an industrial area. This decree was clearly in line with the vision

²³ Oficina Jurídica to C. Jefe del Departamento Agrario, “Se informa sobre la situación legal de los poblados de Colonia Independencia, Ixtacalco, San Juanico Mextipa, y Mexicaltzingo,” April 3, 1945, AGA-Ixtacalco-23-910-5.

²⁴ Oficina Jurídica to C. Jefe del Departamento Agrario, “Se informa sobre la situación legal de los poblados: Col. Independencia, Ixtacalco, San Juanico Mextipa y Mexicaltzingo,” April 3, 1945, AGA-Ixtacalco-23-910-5. Ing. Joaquín Madrazo, Delegada Agrario en el D.F. to C. Jefe del Departamento Agrario, July 25, 1945, AGA-Ixtacalco-29-910-13.

of Public Works, the municipal office that drafted it.²⁵ During the 1940s, Public Works designated several industrial zones for Mexico City as part of a larger national industrializing drive. Close to the city but sufficiently distanced from its more exclusive areas, Iztacalco was an ideal location.²⁶ On March 9, 1945, following the municipal industrialization decree but *before* the federal decree that restored the land to *ejidatarios*, an industrial association bought Tlacotal and Bramadero. In the dispute between the Sociedad de Fraccionamientos Industriales and the pueblos that followed the purchase, the representative of the industrialists argued that the decree of November 1944 represented a “frank invitation from the government to the entrepreneurs of the country to [...] industrialize the area.”²⁷ He claimed that Public Works had approved his clients’ industrial project and maintained that the 1944 industrialization decree provided legal certainty to their purchase. A final presidential decree attempted to settle the matter for good. Published on January 31, 1946, it stated that the claims from the *pueblos* were not *procedentes*. This decree marked the end of any further claims from pueblos.²⁸

But Tlacotal and Bramadero would not become an industrial plant. The estate was surrounded by lots that, regardless of their agrarian or industrial zoning, were frantically being

²⁵ “Decreto que declara zona industrial la comprendida al oriente de la ciudad de México, dentro de la Delegación de Ixtacalco, D.F.,” *Diario Oficial*, November 24, 1944. This decree was sent to the President by Public Works, as seen in “Relación de asuntos que hoy entregó la Dirección General de Obras Públicas a la Jefatura del Departamento para el acuerdo presidencial de esta fecha [October 6, 1944],” AHCM-OP-248-1.

²⁶ In September of 1942, for instance, architect Enrique Guerrero proposed an “industrial fractioning in the ranch of Tlacotal.” AHCM-OP-161-1. Mexico City’s municipal archive holds an unsigned and undated blueprint that could be Guerrero’s. See “Fraccionamiento Tlacotal,” AHCM-Planoteca-Planos y Proyectos-78-4.

²⁷ “Que por decreto presidencial se declaró zona industrial la comprendida al Oriente de la Ciudad de México, dentro de la Delegación de Ixtacalco, formada por los terrenos del rancho “Tlacotal y Bramaderos”... Que constituyendo el decreto de referencia una franca invitación por parte del Gobierno a los hombres de empresa para contribuir a la industrialización...”: “Dictamen que presenta la consultoría #4, a cargo del C. Ing. Jesús Molina Urquidez, en el expediente de restitución de ejidos al poblado de Ixtacalco, delegación de Ixtacalco, del Distrito Federal,” AGA-Ixtacalco-24-910-15.

²⁸ At least the paper trail at the agrarian archive is lost here. In 1951, the *ejidatarios* received new lands elsewhere. “Ejidatarios que se muestran,” *El Universal*, March 6, 1951.

sold lots in installments to low-income families. Thousands of self-built houses are visible in aerial photographs of the area, one-story structures aligned along unpaved streets.²⁹ Tlacotal and Bramadero was empty, making it highly desirable as a real-estate business opportunity. Seizing the chance, the municipal government bought the land from the Compañía de Fraccionamientos Industriales de México in May 1948 with the explicit goal of building a colonia proletaria.³⁰

The decision to purchase land in order to build low-income housing demonstrates the growing involvement of the DDF in dealing with Mexico City's housing crisis. Urban migration had put immense demographic pressure over the central city neighborhoods, where the urban poor lived in overcrowded *vecindades*. Since peripheral delegaciones were relatively depopulated, thousands moved to them with the goal of purchasing a lot and building a home. While the wealthier groups of the city moved south and west, where developers build middle and high-class neighborhoods, low-income families settled in the north and east, in such delegaciones as Azcapotzalco, Gustavo A. Madero, Iztacalco, and Ixtapalapa. The creation of a colonia proletaria in Iztacalco followed these trends and attempted to meet the increasing need for affordable housing. But the supply of housing offered by the government could not match the demand, so the DDF faced the challenge of distributing a limited number of lots to an overwhelming number of people.

Urban planners observed with concern the multiplication of *ejido* grants in this area. Since 1933, Carlos Contreras had noticed the agrarian character of the southwest of the city, an area that he considered should become residential. The multiplication of *ejidos* represented a

²⁹ The photographs only reveal a road, some canals, and remains of the hacienda. AGN-“Compañía Mexicana de Aerofotografía.”

³⁰ The total value of the 1,300,000 square meters was \$4,330,725.75 (\$3.25 per square meter), which the government planned to recover after selling the land to proletarian families in need. AHCM-OP-247-2, “Libro de Registro de Acuerdos y Decretos Presidenciales años 1941-1950.” The details of the sale can be read in ACHM-OP-248-2.

“delicate problem,” so Contreras recommended that the government only create *ejidos* outside of the “present and future residential urban zone.”³¹ For Mario Pani, the existence of urban *ejidos* represented an absurdity but also a wonderful planning opportunity. As the metropolitan area expanded, *ejido* lands became increasingly incongruous; they were also unjust, because peasants benefited from the increase in the land value driven by urbanization, thus becoming “small capitalistic multimillionaires.”³² Pani had a point. *Ejidatarios* did not make fortunes but they did make a profit from selling their lands to purchasers who, because the sale was outside of the law, could not demand the urban services to which they would have been entitled had the sale been legal. As scholars have argued, these buyers would not be entitled to urban services because their purchase was, according to the law, nonexistent.³³ Pani considered that since *ejido* lands were outside of the land market, the government could acquire them at a fair prize for their owners, selling them afterwards to poor families at an affordable prize. The direct acquisition of *ejido* lands by the government and its subsequent sale to poor families would cut out the middlemen—the developers who bought land from peasants, divided and sold it, aggravating the anarchic development of the city. As a result of this intervention, the municipal government would be able to broker an urban, architectural, and financial deal that was beneficial for poor families and conducive to the orderly development of Mexico City.³⁴

In an interview given to *El Universal* in May 1949, regent Fernando Casas Alemán announced that his government had acquired a 1.5 million square meters terrain in order to sell

³¹ *El plano regulador*, 1933.

³² Mario Pani, “El problema de la habitación en la ciudad de México,” 3. AHCM-OP-658-1.

³³ Azuela, *La ciudad, la propiedad privada y el derecho*, 117; Ann Varley and Clara Salazar, “La urbanización del ejido: de los asentamientos irregulares a los conjuntos urbanos” (paper presented at the international conference “El Siglo del ejido: una revisión, Chicago, IL, October 24, 2015).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

lots to families in need.³⁵ During the previous decade, the most important government policy regarding popular housing had been the expropriation of land that settlers had bought from illegal developers.³⁶ In order to solve the ensuing legal conflict, the government intervened politically, expropriated the land, and then distributed it to its settlers, who thus gained a path to ownership by accepting the government's political and financial conditions. Casas Alemán's plan for Ramos Millán was more assertive. Rather than sanctioning irregular possession through expropriation, it sought to build a colonia proletaria from scratch—purchasing the land, dividing it, providing it with urban services, and building houses.

The interview also illustrates Casas Alemán's political ploy. It exemplifies the regent's *glissement à gauche* at a time when he meditated a run for the presidency (a position for which he was briefly considered the frontrunner) with the support of associations of poor urbanites.³⁷ Casas Alemán was also pushing for a more progressive planning law that would make of the creation of colonias proletarias a government duty. In the end, Casas Alemán would lose the PRI candidacy to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines. And his successor as regent, Ernesto P. Uruchurtu, would abort these progressive measures and pass instead a stricter law that he used to limit Mexico City's expansion.³⁸

El Universal responded to Casas Alemán in an editorial that voiced the more conservative interests and positions that Uruchurtu would come to represent. The daily deplored the government plan to use public resources to provide squatters with urbanized lots. It also

³⁵ "Solución al problema de las habitaciones," *El Universal*, May 10, 1949.

³⁶ Manuel Perló, "Política y vivienda en México, 1910-1952;" Antonio Azuela and Camilo Saavedra, "Uso, desgaste y reuso de la expropiación en la ciudad de México."

³⁷ Cristina Sánchez Mejorada, *Rezagos de la modernidad*, 72- 82; Manuel Perló, "Política y vivienda en México, 1910-1952."

³⁸ On Uruchurtu's growth containment policies see Diane Davis, *Urban Leviathan*; Robert Jordan, "Flowers and Iron Fists: Ernesto P. Uruchurtu and the Contested Modernization of Mexico City," Ph.D. diss., The University of Nebraska, 2013.

asked who would pay for the houses in Ramos Millán. If the government was incapable of doing so, which seemed obvious, the burden would fall upon the squatters themselves, who would certainly build unhygienic shacks. Despite such financial considerations, *El Universal* did not deem housing an economic problem, but pointed out to the “administrative, sanitary, and cultural” aspects of urbanization that would remain unresolved by Casas Alemán’s project.³⁹

In his 1949 newspaper interview, Casas Alemán specifically mentioned a group of families living on the banks of the San Joaquín River as the prospective residents of the still unnamed colonia proletaria. The move from San Joaquín to Iztacalco had been considered by the DDF for at least a year, as evidenced by a petition from early 1949 made by a group of families living in the river banks.⁴⁰ The availability of lands in Iztacalco triggered dozens of similar petitions, mostly from people living in areas threatened by public works. The modernization of the city during Miguel Alemán’s tenure disrupted the lives of thousands of its poor residents.⁴¹ The creation of colonias proletarias in the periphery of the city represented the flipside of the transformation of areas such as Atlampa—an industrial neighborhood where the housing project of Tlatelolco would eventually be built—or of the piping of rivers in order for the capital to continue its expansion. For the DDF, Ramos Millán represented an escape valve where the displaced could be relocated.

In the same way that the purchase of Tlacotal and Bramadero created a housing opportunity for thousands of families in need, the availability of municipal land generated prospects for business and patronage for agents close to the government. At this point, the story

³⁹ “El problema de la habitación,” *El Universal*, May 11, 1949.

⁴⁰ “Relación que manifiesta los puntos petitorios de los colonos de la zona federal del Río San Joaquín en Tacuba Distrito Federal, que se presentan al C. Presidente de la República para su resolución,” February 29, 1949, AGN-MAV-418.2/23.

⁴¹ This disruption is mentioned obliquely in the yearly *Memorias* of the period. See, for instance, DDF, *Resúmenes de actividades, periodo Miguel Alemán Véldez 1948* (Mexico City: DDF, 1948).

of Ramos Millán intersects with that of Mexico's urban planners and architects described above. In September 1949, Mario Pani presented to the Planning Commission a housing project for Tlacotal and Bramadero.⁴² The project was designed in collaboration with architect José Luis Cuevas, who together with Pani headed the Taller de Urbanismo del Banco Internacional Inmobiliario. Pani was also the Technical Advisor of Iztacalco, one of the planning sections in which Mexico City had been divided in order to integrate a Master Plan. Therefore, his engagement with the project was dual, both as its author and as the government advisor in charge of the area where it was located.

Pani's project was swiftly approved by the Planning Commission and newspapers reported on its prospective construction.⁴³ The "Unidad de Vivienda Tlacotal and Bramadero," however, was never built. Still, the project offers a glimpse at the architectural, urban, and political imagination of the period. At the time, Pani was contemplating different solutions for overcoming the eighteenth-century city and developing a metropolis for the "automobile era."⁴⁴ Eventually, he would identify two solutions for fulfilling this aspiration. Firstly, he proposed tearing down decaying tenements and replacing them with modern housing projects; this strategy, which he called "building city within the city" (*hacer ciudad dentro de la ciudad*), is best exemplified by his 1964 project of Nonoalco-Tlatelolco. The second option Pani described as "building city outside of the city" (*hacer ciudad fuera de la ciudad*), an effort that he identified with the project of Ciudad Satélite.⁴⁵

⁴² AGN-CL-49-233; BNHOP, *Memoria de las Conferencias de Habitación Popular organizadas por el BNHOP* (Mexico City, 1950), 175-6.

⁴³ "Habitación Popular," *El Universal*, June 25, 1950.

⁴⁴ Mario Pani, "Mexico: un problema, una solución," *Arquitectura/México* 60 (1957): 198-226.

⁴⁵ For a first person account of this mission, see "Entrevista realizada a Mario Pani por Graciela de Garay, el día 11 de julio de 1990 en la Ciudad de México." Archivo de la Palabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora; and Banco Nacional Hipotecario y de Obras Públicas, *The Urban Regeneration of Mexico City: Nonoalco-Tlatelolco, Urban Development Scheme* (Mexico City:

Pani referred to his housing projects as urban cells, autonomous units connected by highways that together integrated a modern metropolis.⁴⁶ Beginning in 1949, he designed several versions of these urban cells. Between 1949 and 1950 Pani designed the Unidad Habitacional Presidente Alemán and the Unidad Modelo 9, as well as several *unidades vecinales* that were never built, among them Tlacotal and Bramadero.⁴⁷ However, Tlacotal and Bramadero was different since it was not developed with workers or bureaucrats in mind but geared towards “squatters who really lacked the means to pay rent.”⁴⁸

El Universal described the project as an architectural “essay” that would include public spaces with sports fields, schools, market, daycare center, and churches [Fig. 5.3].⁴⁹ The project did not feature the high-rises and ratio between construction and green spaces that Pani had famously introduced in the Unidad Habitacional Miguel Alemán. It was composed of several groupings, each with 36 houses. The small houses would have two rooms, an area to work, eat, and spend free time, and a patio, where animals, flower-pots, and an area for drying clothes were located. Surprisingly, bathrooms and laundry facilities would be communal, an unusual decision that reinforces the experimental nature of the project, as well as the fact that it was envisaged for

BNHOP, 1961). Useful introductions to Pani’s work include Alfonso Valenzuela Aguilera, *Urbanistas y visionarios: La planeación de la Ciudad de México en la primera mitad del siglo XX* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos-Porrúa, 2014); Enrique Alanís de Anda, *Vivienda colectiva de la modernidad en México: Los multifamiliares durante el periodo presidencial de Miguel Alemán (1946-1952)* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2011).

⁴⁶ Entrevista realizada a Mario Pani por Graciela de Garay, el día 11 de julio de 1990 en la Ciudad de México. Archivo de la Palabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora.

⁴⁷ The rest of the *unidades vecinales* were Centinela, Guadalajara, Avante, Hogar y Seguridad, and Ejército Mexicano, all of them in collaboration with José Luis Cuevas and Domingo García Ramos. List in Louise Noelle, comp., *Mario Pani* (UNAM-Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Mexico City: 2008), 385.

⁴⁸ *Memoria de las Conferencias de Habitación Popular organizadas por el BNHOP* (Mexico City, 1950), 174.

⁴⁹ “Habitación Popular,” *El Universal*, June 25, 1950.

families of the lowest standing, “who lived, if once could call such a thing living, in misery and abandonment.”⁵⁰

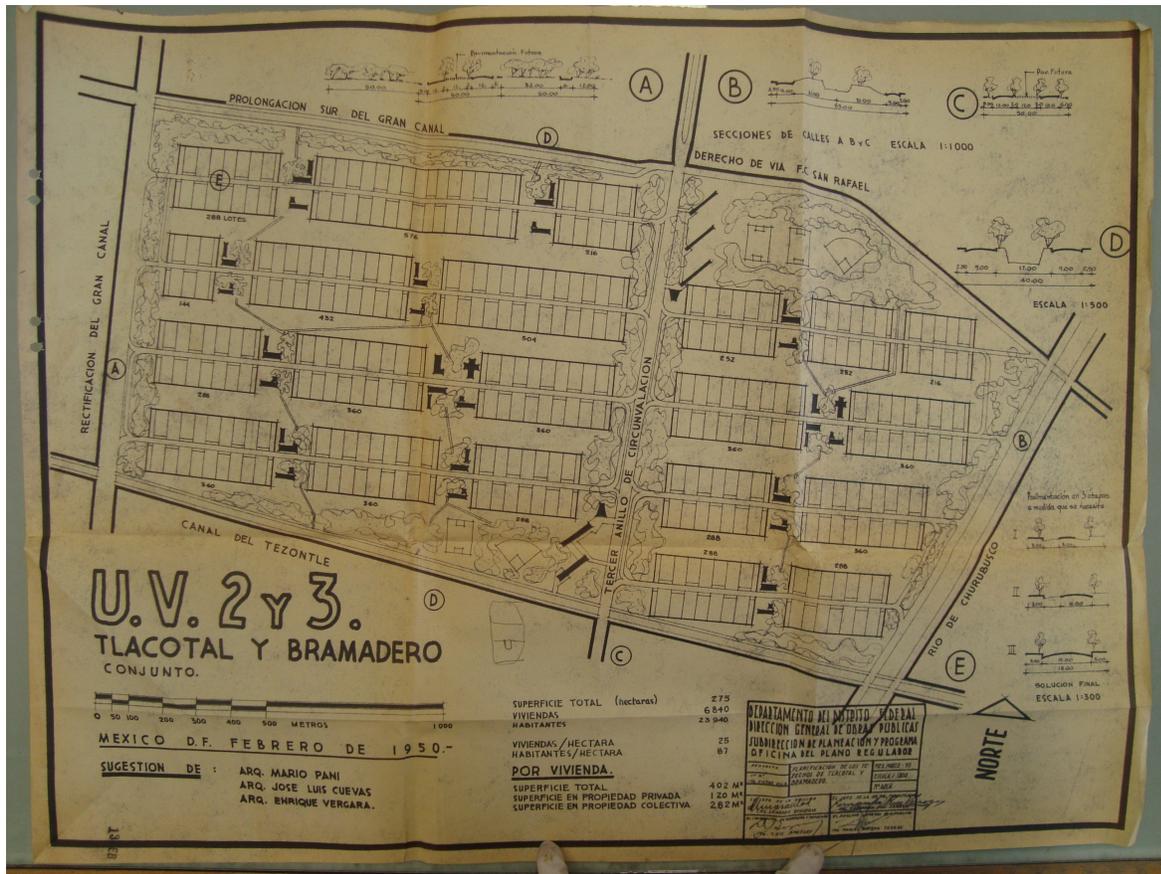


Fig. 5.3. Unidades Vecinales 2 y 3. Tlacotal y Bramadero. Carlos Lazo Archive

Unlike Unidad Habitacional Presidente Alemán, Tlacotal and Bramaderos was a municipal project that lacked federal patronage. The DDF purchased the land and helped the new residents relocate to Ramos Millán, but that was the end of its support. Whereas Unidad Habitacional Presidente Alemán was built with a bureaucrat middle-class in mind and financed by federal credit institutions, Tlacotal and Bramadero was envisioned for low-income families. This was partly by design and partly the result of economic, social, and ecological forces beyond government control. Since the wealthier groups had moved towards the southwest, the southeast

⁵⁰ *Memoria de las Conferencias de Habitación Popular organizadas por el BNHOP* (Mexico City, 1950), 174.

quadrant—hit by sandstorms and closer to Lake Texcoco—became, almost by default, a low-income residential zone.

In Pani's grand vision, twenty-one *unidades vecinales* in the mold of Tlacotal and Bramadero would transform the southeast of the city from an agrarian into a residential area.⁵¹ In November 1952, Pani collaborated with José Bonilla Méndez in devising a plan for Mexico's colonias proletarias.⁵² Although their efforts bore little reward, they exemplify how experts understood the relationship between low-income housing, zoning, and Mexico City's complex patchwork of land tenure regimes. Pani and Bonilla Méndez counted 195 colonias proletarias where 700,000 people lived (the area added to 2,500 hectares, approximately 20% of the city). Instead of having colonias proletarias haphazardly mushroom across the Federal District, they proposed locating them in the southeast, where the existence of ejidos had created a land reserve outside of the market. To locate all colonias proletarias in a single city section had been a government aspiration since the early 1940s, but the idea was doomed to failure because most colonias proletarias were not planned by the government but founded by developers and granted official recognition *ex post facto*.⁵³ Nonetheless, the ambition of gathering together all colonias proletarias exemplifies the formatting of extremely complex political, economic, and legal realities into straightforward categories set by zoning codes. In the vision of planners, Mexico City's southeast quadrant would be immediately legible as a "low-income" residential zone.

⁵¹ Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, "El problema de la habitación en la ciudad de México: una conversación con el arquitecto Mario Pani," *Arquitectura/México*, 27 (April 1949). See also Enrique Ayala Alonso, "Las unidades vecinales en México, un proyecto inacabado de la Segunda Modernidad," in E. Ayala Alonso and Gerardo Alvarez Montes, eds., *El espacio habitacional en la arquitectura moderna: colonias, fraccionamientos, unidades habitacionales, equipamiento urbano y protagonistas* (Mexico City: UAM-CONACYT, 2013).

⁵² "Comité impulsor de las colonias proletarias," AHCM-OP-658-1.

⁵³ March 19, 1942. "Memo 00201 de la Dirección de Obras Públicas de fecha 10 de marzo pidiendo se formule estudio de planificación para agrupar en una sola zona las "Colonias Proletarias,"" AHCM-OP-161-1.

In addition to projecting Tlacotal and Bramadero/Ramos Millán onto a broader metropolitan vision, the DDF faced the more prosaic challenge of distributing a finite number of lots in among a seemingly endless number of families. In December 1950, after more than two years of negotiations, the Oficina de Colonias began moving families from the San Joaquín River to Ramos Millán, at the other end of the city, fourteen kilometers away. On December 17, 1950, the first 120 families were moved.⁵⁴ Many others followed, aided by several government offices. The army helped in bringing down the residents' old shacks and setting provisional tents. The DDF provided trucks for transportation and Carlos Zapata Vela, head of the Oficina de Colonias, supervised the move, along with party representatives [Fig. 5.4].⁵⁵



Fig. 5.4 Carlos Zapata Vela in River San Joaquín, c. December 1950. Fondo Hermanos Mayo.

⁵⁴ “Traslado de los colonos del Rancho del Charro,” *El Nacional*, December 18, 1950.

⁵⁵ “La Ciudad Perdida Desapareció y sus Moradores Tienen Nuevo Hogar”, *El Nacional*, December 26, 1950.

Colonia Proletaria Gabriel Ramos Millán

It was around this time when Tlacotal and Bramadero officially became Colonia Proletaria Ramos Millán. I have found no official explanation for this name change but it obviously honored Gabriel Ramos Millán, who died in a plane accident in September 1949 and was a close friend of president Miguel Alemán. The name is rich in ironies since, along with his well-known history as a state senator and Mexico's "Apostol del Maíz," Ramos Millán was also a real-estate developer in the 1930s, along with Miguel Alemán and Ezequiel Padilla (both of whom competed for the presidential nomination in 1946). The partnership was not lacking in ambition. Years later, Alemán recalled that Ramos Millán bragged about not being "afraid of six-digit [businesses]." ⁵⁶ Polanco, their most important enterprise, became one of Mexico City's wealthiest neighborhoods. Colonia Ramos Millán would end up becoming a slightly different kind of business.

The Mayo Brothers captured the move to Ramos Millán in a series of stunning photographs [Fig. 5.5]. ⁵⁷ The five "brothers" (from two families) fled from Spain after the Civil War and reached Mexico in 1939, where they worked as freelance photojournalists. Their pictures were used by the government to promote its actions, as the laudatory content and tone of the newspaper articles that featured them makes clear: "The 'Lost City' is Gone and its Inhabitants have a New Home;" "Installment of 120 proletarian families in Tlacotal." The privileged access enjoyed by the photographers also attests to the fact that the DDF used the transfer to Ramos Millán to publicize its efforts in fixing the city's housing problem.

⁵⁶ "Reseña de Miguel Alemán al no haber conseguido la diputación, su regreso al D.F. y su inicio en el negocio de bienes raíces junto con Gabriel Ramos Millán, sin dejar a un lado la política y su amistad con Lázaro Cárdenas," Fundación Miguel Alemán Valdés (AMAV)-Box 14-File 343-Foja 8.

⁵⁷ Carlos Monsiváis has written an illuminating essay on the Mayo Brothers work and times. "Los hermanos Mayo: las variedades de la experiencia histórica," in *Maravillas que son, sombras que fueron: la fotografía en México* (Mexico City: CONACULTA, ERA, Museo del Estanquillo, 2012), 91-100.



Fig. 5.5. Tlacotal and Bramadero, c. early 1950. AGN. Fondo Hermanos Mayo

But more than propaganda is at play here. The Mayo Brothers were commissioned to cover all sorts of events and their photographs were often used to promote government efforts, as in the case of colonias proletarias. But the Mayo Brothers, Spanish republican exiles after all, considered themselves men of the left, “always on the worker’s side.”⁵⁸ The Mayo kept millions of negatives in their possession, an archive acquired by the Archivo General de la Nación in 1982. These negatives document the enormous feat that the move represented. They offer a feeling of what it was to build a city from scratch, and of how such a place would look like. Families gathered their belongings—bed frames and mattresses, suitcases, boxes, and domestic animals—and placed them in trucks, along with wooden planks and metal plates that would be

⁵⁸ John Mraz, “Close-up: An interview with the Hermanos Mayo [May Day Brothers], Spanish-American Photojournalists (1930s-present),” *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 11 (1992): 195-218.

crucial for building a new home. The army set tents, distributed wooden planks and asbestos sheets, and aided in the construction of improvised shacks. Families lined to receive water from distributing trucks. Containers and buckets were essential. Ramos Millán offers an eerie sensation, away from roads, walls, light posts or any sign of urbanization. No traces of Mexico City are visible.

It is easy to forget how much of Mexico City resembled a refugee camp over the 1940s and early 1950s, a period when its growth in extension outpaced its population increase.⁵⁹ Perhaps the most famous painting of Mexico City from these years, Juan O’Gorman’s “Paisaje de la ciudad de México,” [Fig. 5.7] captures a highly legible modern city, with its workers, street traffic, effervescent activity, and rapid urban transformation as viewed from the rooftop of the Monumento a la Revolución. “Paisaje de la ciudad de México” received the first-prize in a competition organized by the DDF and the newspaper *Excelsiór* in 1949 under the heading of “Mexico City as Interpreted by its Artists.”⁶⁰ The second-prize winner, “La tolvanera,” [Fig. 5.6] by Guillermo Meza, is not as iconic as O’Gorman’s “Paisaje de la ciudad de México,” probably because in this painting the city and its markers are strikingly absent.⁶¹ Meza portrayed a group of children playing around a section of a huge water pipe amidst a dusty and barren landscape. Geographical markers are scant, but the painting was probably set east of the city, where

⁵⁹ Emilio Duhau, *Habitat popular y política urbana*, 136-7.

⁶⁰ On the painting competition see Ana Isabel Pérez Gavilán, “Chávez Morado, destructor de mitos: silencios y aniquilaciones de *La Ciudad* (1949),” *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 27, no. 87 (2005): 67-116; “La ciudad de México interpretada por sus artistas,” *Arquitectura/México* 30 (February 1930): 298-300.

⁶¹ La Tolvanera and Meza are today relatively unknown. In fact, the whereabouts of the painting are today unknown. Tellingly, in his autobiography, O’Gorman fails to remember the winners of the second and third prize in the contest. “Tuve la suerte de obtener el primer premio con un paisaje de la ciudad de México vista desde la parte más elevada de la cúpula del Monumento a la Revolución. No recuerdo los nombres de los otros pintores a quienes se otorgaron los premios.” Juan O’Gorman, *Autobiografía* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2007).

neighborhoods were hit hard by sandstorms or *tolvaneras*. Born close by, in Ixtapalapa, Meza had an intimate knowledge of the poorer margins of Mexico City, which he depicted throughout his work. In paintings such as “La Tolvanera,” “Las Lavanderas,” or “Alrededores de la ciudad,” Mexico City is seen from afar, from the perspective of the garbage pickers or washerwomen who were part of the urban economy but occupied a liminal space between the city and its hinterland. Meza’s paintings juxtapose bucolic objects such as magueys with signs of a poor and still incomplete urbanization like low cardboard houses and open sewers.⁶²



Fig. 5.6. Gustavo Meza, “La tolvanera.” *Excelsiór*.

⁶² Raúl Flores Guerrero, *Cinco pintores mexicanos* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1957).



Fig. 5.7. Juan O’Gorman, “Paisaje de la ciudad de México.” Colección Museo de Arte Moderno

Juan O’Gorman’s “Paisaje de la ciudad de México” offered a legible urban vision in line with the projects of post-revolutionary Mexico: nationalism, industrialization, and modernization. By juxtaposing the modern city of the 1940s with Alonso de Santa Cruz’s 1540 “Plano de la Ciudad de México” at the foreground of the painting—in the same way that Vicente Lombardo de Toledano brandished the Mendoza Codex in 1928 as an example of a city master plan—O’Gorman suggested a reassuring continuity between the past, the present, and the future of Mexico City. This harmony, reasoned the judges, together with the presence of an “anonymous worker [and] effective builder of the city,” gave the painting a “positive meaning.” Gustavo Meza could not or did not want to offer the same reassurance. “La tolvanera,” considered the jury, expressed “an aspect of the city environs difficult to treat with success and dramatic meaning.”⁶³ Meza did not evoke a traditional past or a Golden Age and neither did he offer a desirable future. There was not, in 1949, a plot for colonias proletarias.

⁶³ “Exposición de motivos,” *Excelsior*, December 18, 1949. The members of the jury were Jorge Enciso, Fernando Gamboa, Manuel Touissant, and Justino Fernández.

Over the early 1940s Helen Levitt had photographed a similar landscape: the western fringes of Mexico City, close to the town of Tacubaya. There, she photographed women doing laundry in small streams amidst a dusty soil. Clothes are hanging from magueys while electric cables or railroad tracks announce the viewer that the city is nearby. Levitt also photographed sand mines where families lived in caves. One of her pictures portrays a girl looking at the outside from within one of these gravel caves. Unlike in other pictures, there is absolutely no trace of the city here; if it weren't for the medium of photography it would be impossible to know in what decade or century the girl lived. The paintings of Meza and the photographs of Levitt change in meaning depending on the position of the viewer in relationship to the city. The perspective from the margin to the center revealed the multiple ways in which these “marginal” places were connected to the city. But a perspective from the center outwards suggested that colonias proletarias and similar peripheral urban settlements were disconnected from the city, constituting a different universe that was usually understood as agrarian, Indian, or backward.⁶⁴ This is what the “ceaseless growth of the marginal” looked like, in Carlos Monsiváis reading of the photographs of the Mayo Brothers.⁶⁵ The challenge that living in a place such as Ramos Millán represented, at least during the initial years of settlement, was not dealing with what sociologists thought of as the hardships of the city—overcrowding or anonymity—but of nature in its “most negative aspect.”⁶⁶

We must, however, be careful when reading these powerful images, for they aestheticize colonias proletarias and obscure the complex political negotiations and technical operations—

⁶⁴ A different take on Levitt, underscoring her capacity to see Mexico City with urban eyes, not as an exotic or picturesque place, is offered by Mauricio Tenorio, *I Speak of the City*, 178-9. See also James Oles, “Helen Levitt’s Other City,” in Helen Levitt, *Mexico City, with an essay by James Oles* (New York: A Doubletake Book, 1997), 7-35; and Mauricio Tenorio, *I Speak of the City*.

⁶⁵ “Los hermanos Mayo: las variedades de la experiencia histórica,” 92.

⁶⁶ Guillermo Ortiz Flores, “La vivienda popular,” AGN-INV-12.

surveying land, dividing it, preparing a census of residents—that undergirded their creation.

Those who arrived to Ramos Millán in army trucks in the cold winter of 1950-51 were intimately aware of these procedures. Competition for a place in Ramos Millán was fierce. The first cohort that moved there in December 1950 carried a voucher signed by Carlos Zapata Vela securing a spot in a government truck and a lot in the colonia [Fig. 5.8]. For every person in possession of a voucher there were thousands others requesting a lot. The petitioners came from all around the

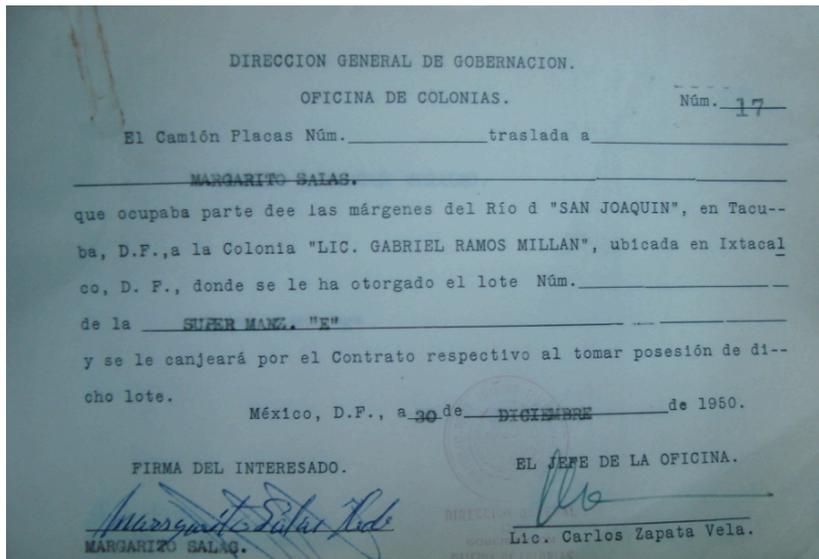


Fig. 5.8. Archivo Histórico de la Ciudad de México

city and the country, belonged to different social classes, and found out about the availability of lots through different means. Many worked in the municipal or federal government, including cleaning workers, teachers, and federal workers from the

Ministry of Agriculture.⁶⁷ Those who ended up staying came from the neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, Atlampa, Escuadrón 201, Peralvillo, Nonoalco, and Guerrero after suffering from floods and the collapse of their homes (all of these neighborhoods were central tenements, relatively close to the city center).⁶⁸ Many came originally from other states in Mexico, but for the most part their previous place of residence was Mexico City.⁶⁹ Therefore, they were already

⁶⁷ “Fraccionamientos: Gabriel Ramos Millán,” AHCM-OP-471-2.

⁶⁸ “Monografía de la Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán. Sección Bramadero,” AHCM-OP-471-2, On the places of origins of settlers, see also “Bello acto de solidaridad humana y social de colonos de la “Gabriel Ramos Millán,” *El Nacional*, October 24, 1951.

⁶⁹ On the birthplace of the residents, see Martha Regina Jiménez y Castilla, “Bramadero: un caso ilustrativo de población marginal.” B.A. Thesis, UNAM, 1963.

acquainted with broker politics and connected with some of the city's patronage networks. In the end, efficiently streamlining this flow of people would prove an impossible task for the government.

In 1951 the residents of Ramos Millán elected Conrado Mercado as their first president.⁷⁰ Following the rules set in the Reglamento de Colonias, colonias proletarias had to elect a resident association, government board, and president. As explained above, the Reglamento de Colonias aimed at striking an equilibrium between protecting and controlling the urban poor. It shielded lots in colonias proletarias from market forces through the legal figure of "patrimonio familiar," which prohibited speculation and restricted the selling of lots to middle and upper-class residents. By recognizing a single official resident association in each colonia proletaria, the code also sought to define a single intermediary between the city government and urban populations.⁷¹ Since the DDF owned the land in Ramos Millán, the Oficina de Colonias had the power to distribute lots as it pleased. As the intermediary between the municipal government and the residents, Conrado Mercado was a key actor in this distribution.

Much of the control that the Oficina de Colonias held over colonias proletarias was the result of widespread legal uncertainty, a condition that enabled several abuses. A common conflict arose when a single lot was assigned to more than one person. In a representative case, a woman named Vicenta González denounced Mercado for selling her a lot that belonged to someone else. González had paid \$400 for her lot but did not receive a receipt for her purchase. After forty-five days of residence, during which she built a house, a man named Aurelio García Sierra identified himself as the owner of the lot. González thus demanded that her payment be

⁷⁰ *El Nacional*, September 21, 1951

⁷¹ Antonio Azuela and María Soledad Cruz, "La institucionalización de las colonias populares y la política urbana en la ciudad de México (1940-1946)," Susan Eckstein, *The Poverty of Revolution*; Manuel Perló Cohen, "Política y vivienda en México, 1910-1952."

returned or a new lot provided.⁷² In a similar case, a man called Erasto Castillo claimed to have purchased two lots from Mercado for a down payment of \$1,200. Like González, Castillo did not get a receipt; liker González, he was confronted, “while working on his lots on a Sunday,” by a man claiming to be the “legitimate owner” of the land. Castillo denounced Mercado with Rafael Suárez Ocaña (the replacement of Carlos Zapata Vela as head of the Oficina de Colonias). Mercado and his cronies, Castillo claimed, “run this place at will, harass its residents, and use the earnings from their business rackets to keep out of trouble and the arms of the justice.”⁷³

Similar conflicts proliferated in a setting where practically everyone had some kind of voucher signed by the Oficina de Colonias, Conrado Mercado, or other political brokers. Residents also accused Mercado for charging undue fees for the provision of water and electricity. Although these chicaneries were a daily occurrence, public acknowledgement of such mishandlings could put pressure on the authorities of colonias. In the summer of 1954 *La Prensa* published a story that portrayed Mercado as a swindler; later that year it ran another story about an Italian engineer named Ambrosi who bought a large amount of land and illegally rented houses and rooms to tenants. The following spring *El Popular* reported that engineers in Ramos Millán were charging undue fees for the installation of water pipes.⁷⁴ In response to these accusations, Rafael Suárez Ocaña announced that Mercado would be removed but no action was taken and in December 1955 Mercado would be running again for the presidency of the

⁷² Vicenta Martínez de González to Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez, September 21, 1954, AGN-ARC-418.2/13.

⁷³ “En fin, son amos y señores en dichas colonias en perjuicio de todos los colonos, y lo que es más, cuando les entablan alguna demanda con el dinero que obtienen de sus trampas, arreglan fácilmente sus sucios negocios o van a la cárcel 8 o 10 días, después de los cuales quedan en libertad bajo fianza.” Erasto Castillo to Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez, AGN-ARC-418.2/13.

⁷⁴ “Atropello de un lider de colonos,” *La Prensa*, July 30, 1954; “Ciudades perdidas a granel,” *La Prensa*, December 16, 1954; “Esquilman a los colonos pobres, cinco liderzuelos,” *El Popular*, April 15, 1955.

colonia.⁷⁵ Such unfulfilled promises were the norm, and Suárez Ocaña would acquire an infamous reputation.

The lack of property titles in Ramos Millán gave Mercado and Suárez Ocaña large powers, but the municipal government attained control over colonias proletarias through other means as well. Crucially, it relied on records that were indispensable for distributing people over space: a register of official colonias proletarias, lot censuses within colonias, and blueprints of colonias. Since there was not a cadastral map of Ramos Millán and since settlers did not possess property titles, Mercado and Suárez Ocaña had the power to assign lots, manipulate their boundaries, and decide when public works such as street paving and drainage would be undertaken. The Oficina de Colonias jealously guarded this information. Whenever the regent or even the president wished to distribute lots they still had to resort to the Oficina de Colonias, which remained the main institution in command.⁷⁶

Government oversight was challenged, however, by the continual arrival of thousands of residents to Ramos Millán. This streaming of people presented the residents and authorities of the colonia with business opportunities and practical challenges. Prohibitions from the Reglamento de Colonias notwithstanding, residents fractioned, sold, and rented lots, business ventures that often spiraled into occupancy right conflicts. The existence of real-estate markets in popular neighborhoods based on illegal subdivisions of land has been well documented by

⁷⁵ “Fraccionamientos: Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán,” AHCM-OP-471-2.

⁷⁶ For instance, in July 1954 the Coalición de Colonos requested to the DDF a number of lots in Ramos Millán. This request was then sent to Rafael Suárez Ocaña, who answered that the census of lots of the colonia was being revised. “Me permito comunicar a usted que se está haciendo una depuración de los lotes contratados en la Colonia Ramos Millán, para saber que posibilidades tiene la Oficina de disponer de algunos para los fines solicitados.” “Fraccionamientos: Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán,” AHCM-OP-471-2.

historians and is confirmed in the case of Ramos Millán. According to a 1963 survey, over half of its residents were owners while the other half rented.⁷⁷

Whereas the subdividing and sale of lots in colonias proletarias represented an economic opportunity for some, the “densification of lots” and population increase that ensued affected everyone. A common complaint arose when lots that were originally planned as public areas such as parks or schools were subdivided and settled. In the case of Ramos Millán, this dynamic crystallized in a conflict around the neighborhood park. In June 1953, Mercado requested the Oficina de Colonias and the police department for help in dealing with a group of invaders who had settled in the park.⁷⁸ These invaders were led by Salvador Flores, the leader of the Coalición de Colonos del Distrito Federal, whose activities were described in Chapter Three. According to Mercado, the invaders—Flores, Jesús Chávez, and Estanislao Padilla, all members of the Coalición de Colonos del Distrito Federal—were trying to undermine his authority and create a rift within the colonia. These men, outsiders who were not from Ramos Millán, had taken advantage of the colonia’s lack of public services in order to “put the residents against him.”⁷⁹

Mercado continued to protest against the subdivision of the park over the ensuing months. But the following summer, in a reversal of roles, it was Mercado who was accused of subdividing the park.⁸⁰ Acting in Mercado’s defense, Suárez Ocaña denied that there was an

⁷⁷ Martha Regina Jiménez y Castilla, “Bramadero: un caso ilustrativo de población marginal.”

⁷⁸ Conrado Mercado to Lic. Enrique Rodríguez Cano, secretario del Presidente de la República, June 23, 1953, AGN-ARC-418.2/13.

⁷⁹ “Estos elementos [...] pretenden dividir la colonia con fines personales aprovechando la falta de servicios municipales que el Departamento hasta la fecha no ha podido instalar por falta de presupuesto, esto no considero que sea culpa mía, pero lo aprovechan para agitar a los colonos en mi contra, esta labor la considero en mi perjuicio ya que sus versiones han tenido la audacia de hacerlas llegar hasta las autoridades, tratando de crear un mal ambiente en mi contra, ya que mi criterio ha sido siempre el de mantener a toda costa la unidad de la colonia.” Ibid.

⁸⁰ Conrado Mercado to Enrique Rodríguez Cano, secretario del Presidente de la República. August 4, 1953, AGN-ARC-418.2/13

invasion. He explained that although the Oficina de Colonias had distributed lots among new families, they were not located in the park but in a strip adjacent to it, following the official blueprints of the colonia.⁸¹ It is hard to tell who was squatting in the park and subdividing it. But knowing where the “park” is proves equally hard because at the time Ramos Millán was still halfway urbanized, so its “park” was nothing more than a strip of land, described by social workers as “a large lot... bereft of any green areas.”⁸² In such conditions, the existence of official blueprints demarcating the actual location of the park became crucial for making claims. Possession of official blueprints thus gave the Oficina de Colonias and Rafael Suárez Ocaña an authority that other groups could not match.

The conflict between Conrado Mercado and the invasion leaders reproduces a common pattern by which the Coalición de Colonos del Distrito Federal challenged the authority that the Oficina de Colonias had over colonias proletarias. It is therefore unsurprising to find Flores in the business of organizing families in Ramos Millán. In 1952, an associate of Flores and secretary of the Coalición, Roque Plata Belmont, began negotiating the transfer of 200 families from Atlampa to Ramos Millán. Atlampa was located northeast of the city, close to the railroad tracks where Luis Buñuel shot *Los Olvidados*, a fact that Plata Belmont did not fail to mention in his petitions to authorities.⁸³ The houses inhabited by the families were at the brink of collapse and suffered from continuous floods; the Red Cross described them as “pigsties” dwelled by miserable people living in the utmost promiscuity.⁸⁴ Suárez Ocaña surveyed Atlampa and ascertained its dire conditions; after factoring in his decision the fact that Public Works had

⁸¹ “Fraccionamientos: Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán,” AHCM-OP-471-2.

⁸² “Monografía de la Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán. Sección Bramadero,” AHCM-OP-471-2.

⁸³ Roque Plata Belmont to President Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez, AGN-ARC-418.2/232.

⁸⁴ Asociación Mexicana de la Cruz Roja to Ernesto P. Uruchurtu, August 8, 1954, “Fraccionamientos: Atlampa,” AHCM-OP-471-2.

declared the area industrial, he approved the petition of Plata Belmont and designated a number of lots to the families represented by the Coalición de Colonos.⁸⁵

Notwithstanding this pledge, the move to Ramos Millán stalled and the next summer the Oficina de Colonias communicated Plata Belmont that there were no available lots. Plata Belmont accused Suárez Ocaña of playing dirty tricks against his clients, adding that an engineer from the Oficina de Colonias had divided 241 lots specifically for the families from Atlampa that he represented.⁸⁶ Despite these obstacles, he continued pressuring the Oficina de Colonias and writing to the president and the regent, almost certainly gaining his followers a foothold in the colonia. Thus over the following years a cleavage between “original” residents—holding paperwork signed by the Oficina de Colonias—and squatters represented by the Coalición de Colonos emerged in the area. This division was made evident in a 1955 monograph on Ramos Millán prepared by social workers from the Ministry of Education. The monograph mentioned a group of squatters (*paracaidistas*) from colonias Atlampa and Escuadrón 201 living in Ramos Millán, most probably the families defended by Flores and Plata Belmont.⁸⁷

By the 1950s, the Coalición de Colonos had developed a style of political organizing visible across years of invasions. It had an office in downtown Mexico City, the capacity to mobilize hundreds of families, and channels of communication with the municipal government and the CNOP. The presence of the Coalición de Colonias in Ramos Millán, *of all places*—an area that belonged to the government and where the regent very publicly announced the creation

⁸⁵ Rafael Suárez Ocaña to Ernesto P. Uruchurtu, December 18, 1953, “Fraccionamientos: Atlampa,” AHCM-OP-471-2.

⁸⁶ Roque Plata Belmont to Presidencia, June 14, 1954, “Fraccionamientos: Atlampa,” AHCM-OP-471-2.

⁸⁷ “Monografía de la Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán. Sección Bramadero,” AHCM-OP-471-2. This short monograph was sent to the president in January of 1955; it included information on the infrastructure and population of the colonia. Its existence, in my interpretation, supports the claim that Ramos Millán was a model colonia proletaria, or a testing site for this type of popular urbanization.

of a colonia proletaria—highlights the power of this organization and the relative weakness of the municipal government. But it also highlights the very porous boundaries that existed between the government and these organizations. Salvador Flores and Roque Plata Belmont challenged these boundaries by operating in a “grey zone” between the municipal government, party politics, and “grassroots” political organizations.⁸⁸ They were a nuisance for the city government but they were, at the same time, necessary for running the city.

The Invisibility of Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán

In the 1950s, “urbanization” in the “developing world” turned into a scholarly field. As their Latin American counterparts, Mexican colonias proletarias became not only a local nuisance but also a profound problem, perhaps *the* problem, of the region as a whole. In 1963, Ramos Millán became the object of this kind of scholarly enquiry in the shape of a B.A. thesis written by Martha Regina Jiménez y Castilla, a student from the Escuela Nacional de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales of the UNAM. “Bramadero: un caso ilustrativo de población marginal” offers a radiograph of Ramos Millán a decade after its foundation, as seen by the social sciences of the period. At the time, Mexican sociologists were moving away from the German anthropological and hermeneutic tradition and were adopting instead quantitative methods such as the sample survey for dealing with big numbers.⁸⁹ These methods required large research teams and pools of funding, as exemplified by the 1950s housing surveys undertaken by the BNHOP and the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS). Likewise, Jiménez y Castilla’s thesis was part of a

⁸⁸ I borrow the concept of the “grey zone” from Javier Auyero’s analysis of violence and food riots in contemporary Argentina—Auyero, in turn, was inspired in Primo Levi’s descriptions of the concentration camp, where boundaries between victims and persecutors were fast blurred. Javier Auyero, *Routine Politics and Violence in Argentina: The Gray Zone of State Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁸⁹ Rodríguez Kuri, “Secretos de la idiosincrasia,” 23.

much larger research project led by Mexico's premier demographer Raúl Benítez Zenteno, and supported by the Escuela Nacional de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales of the National University of Mexico and the NY based Population Council, Inc.

“Bramadero: un caso ilustrativo de una población marginal” was framed by the sister theories of modernization and marginality, intimately linked in Latin America with the lives of millions of rural migrants who were considered unprepared for urban life.⁹⁰ Thus, migrants living in places such as Ramos Millán faced a dramatic “cultural conflict” upon their arrival to the city, whose social, cultural, and economic values were the opposite as those from the countryside. Jiménez y Castilla categorized three-fourths of the colonia's population as migrants, a group with less schooling than natives and maladapted to city life. Although Mexico City offered work opportunities and living conditions inexistent in the countryside, she argued that “not all peasants achieved their goals,” in part because they had to compete with urbanites that were better prepared to undertake “technical activities.”⁹¹

A closer look at Jiménez y Castilla's statistics suggests that she overemphasized the difficulties faced by rural migrants. Regardless of their gender, education, or place origin, residents in Ramos Millán followed the Mexican press and owned a radio, proving far from alienated.⁹² The thesis suffers from other significant blind spots. It did not describe or even mention the networks of political patronage that linked the residents of Ramos Millán with the Oficina de Colonias and the Coalición de Colonos. Local politics are absent from it, an unsurprising omission given the fact that sociologists and political scientists would not study

⁹⁰ For a reckoning and a reflection on urban marginality spanning the second half of the century see de la Rocha, Mercedes González, Janice Perlman, Helen Safa, Elizabeth Jelin, Bryan R. Roberts, and Peter M. Ward, “From the Marginality of the 1960s to the “New Poverty” of Today: A LARR Research Forum,” *Latin American Research Review* 39, no. 1 (2004): 183–203.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 33–40, 96

⁹² *Ibid.*, 47.

broker politics until the 1970s.⁹³ Pointing out at these omissions and logical inconsistencies today is as unfair as it is futile. Marginality, modernization, and the folk-urban continuum were criticized by William Mangin, Janice Perlman, and other social scientists in the 1960s and 1970s. There is little worthy in beating that dead horse. But the fact that Jiménez y Castilla did not mention that Ramos Millán was created by the government is much more significant and intriguing. This omission is particularly striking since Ramos Millán was, arguably, the most important government experiment in popular urbanization and had been founded only a decade earlier.

Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán was monitored, surveyed, and (slowly) provisioned with services, only to be labelled as marginal afterwards. In 1955, a team of social workers surveyed the neighborhood, which highlights its importance from the perspective of the government. The surveyors registered the lacks and overall poor condition of Ramos Millán but also documented its “progress” since its foundation five years earlier.⁹⁴ According to the “Monografía de la Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán: Sección Bramadero,” the subdivision of the neighborhood had been well made (*bien trazada*) but it lacked water, pavement, sewage, and public lighting. The residents of the colonia lived in houses of varying degrees of quality, from solid brick and adobe constructions to shacks built with wood, carton, and metal sheet. Most residents worked as bricklayers, gardeners, laundrywomen, servants, gardeners, and factory workers. The neighborhood also had a rich variety of businesses, which challenged the notion of colonias

⁹³ Wayne Cornelius published his influential *Politics and the Migrant Poor in Mexico City* in 1975. Two years later Susan Eckstein published *Poverty of Revolution*. The Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana’s program of urban sociology was launched in the 1970s, as the area of urban studies at El Colegio de México. Gustavo Garza, *Cincuenta años de investigación urbana y regional en México, 1940-1991* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1996), 78. And yet, some authors such as Ezequiel Cornejo had described this kind of local politics with a sharp sociological and journalistic eye in the 1950s.

⁹⁴ “Monografía de la Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán. Sección Bramadero,” AHCM-OP-471-2.

proletarias as cultural deserts. There were 35 stores, hairdressers, beauty parlors, woodworking shops, numerous *tortillerías* and *molinós de nixtamal*, and 18 *cantinas* and *pulquerías* or “centers of vice” where the gambling and the heavy drinking gave the police excuse to conduct raids.⁹⁵ The colonia did not have many spaces for amusement, but a movie theater was being built and children entertained themselves attending screenings organized in homes with televisions.

Things got better over the following years. Colonia Ramos Millán had received water, sewage, and electricity by the early 1960s.⁹⁶ The government built two schools and a market where a state-owned CEIMSA store sold produce at subsidized prices. The Ministry of Health undertook pest controls, provided medical care and sanitary and maternity training for children and mothers, and conducted surveys on the conditions of the colonia and its population.⁹⁷ Starting in 1956, it also sponsored a community center that provided daily meals and courses on “domestic economy,” “beauty culture,” bakery, and decoration.⁹⁸ By the time Jiménez y Castilla surveyed it, the INV had also built a small housing unit in Ramos Millán (36 houses) as part of its program towards colonias proletarias.⁹⁹ Ramos Millán was chosen because of its “good conditions” and because it was not hit by tenure conflicts regarding ejido lands.¹⁰⁰ In short, Colonia Ramos Millán had been integrated into an uneven and imperfect, yet tangible and consequential, welfare state. As a contemporary lawyer stated, through “colonias proletarias,

⁹⁵ Ibid. Police reports can be seen in DDF-Gobernación-Box 162-Policía Ixtacalco 1955.

⁹⁶ DDF, *La Ciudad de México. DDF, 1952-1964* (Mexico City: DDF, 1964).

⁹⁷ Dirección de Salubridad en el D.F.: “Informe narrativo de las labores desarrolladas por las diversas dependencias de la Dirección de Salubridad en el D.F., del día 1º de septiembre al 31 de diciembre de 1953,” SSA-SubSyA-45-1. See also David Schers, “The Popular Sector of the Mexican PRI,” 82-90.

⁹⁸ “Informe de María Luisa Flores sobre el 6º Centro de Bienestar Social Urbano Benito Juárez,” SSA-SubSyA-32-4.

⁹⁹ Enrique Villa Michel to Raul Salinas Lozano, “Proyecto de programa de inversiones en las colonias proletarias,” July 17, 1957, AGN-INV-Box 1.

¹⁰⁰ José María Gutiérrez to Enrique Villa Michel, July 30, 1957, AGN-INV-Box 1; José María Gutiérrez to Enrique Villa Michel, August 10, 1957. AGN-INV-Box 1.

housing projects, daycares, hospitals, and schools,” the Revolution had created a new and urban, “eloquent and mestizo,” nation.¹⁰¹

The fact that a model colonia proletaria—one featured in newspaper articles and official reports, discussed at the Planning Commission, and where the DDF built schools, markets, and clinics—was described as marginal a decade after its foundation opens several historical questions: Did the government project fail? What categories did different actors use to assess colonias proletarias? What historical perspective is needed to think about such places?

The history of Colonia Ramos Millán cannot be told apart from that of the political projects, social theories, and possible futures projected onto neighborhoods like it. The government expropriated land, passed industrial zoning ordinances, and drafted corporatist urban codes. It purchased land, distributed lots, and moved people across the city. Industrialists planned industrial parks while architects designed housing projects. But these visions did not materialize in the paddocks and fields of Tlacotal and Bramadero. When measured against them, Colonia Ramos Millán appears to be a failure. The same can be said about similar neighborhoods in Mexico City and what was once called the developing world, whose history is always found to be in want of something: planning, democracy, citizenship, order... It is not easy to chart a straight line between these pasts and the present of Colonia Ramos Millán in the 1950s. Words suddenly fail.

¹⁰¹ “México ha crecido en forma “cancerosa” (no encuentro otro término para objetivar nuestro reciente fenómeno de aglomeración); y, de modo natural, se enfrenta a la carencia de elementos vitales capitalinos y a la necesidad de estimularlos y de enriquecerlos; con un sentido muy peculiar (el de la Revolución), que es tónica de la vida nacional (colonias proletarias, multifamiliares, guarderías, hospitales, escuelas, etc., etc.), y, además, con un color mestizo cada vez más afinado y elocuente.” Fernando Anaya Monroy was a historian and a lawyer. He was also, significantly, speaking in Monterrey in 1956 at Mexico’s first congress of urban sociology. Fernando Anaya Monroy, “El ministerio público y su función social en el medio urbano,” *Estudios sociológicos* 2 (1956), 403-4.

What *did* crystallize in Colonia Ramos Millán emerged in an inauspicious manner, as the Mayo Brothers photographs of tents and water trucks scattered throughout a ditch-ridden land bear witness. The division and allocation of land, the first tasks that the government set to accomplish, were undertaken by characters such as Conrado Mercado, Rafael Suárez Ocaña, and Salvador Flores, whose affiliation as government officials, community leaders, and party members was blurry and contested. While access to lots was first granted through membership in a resident association, with time a land market developed, and competition for a lot became fiercely individualistic. With time Ramos Millán also received schools, parks, and markets, an urban infrastructure whose existence was ordered in urban codes and for which both urban planners and resident associations fought. But the existence of these public spaces reduced the lots available for thousands of homeless families. These peoples continued to fight for a foothold in Ramos Millán as squatters. Many of them would remain as squatters for years. Thus Ramos Millán developed, at the interface between government oversight and bottom-up organizing, city codes and extra-legal politics, progressive political languages and narrow and segmented interests. The end result was not pretty, although it somehow worked for all those involved. For social scientists, however, the picture was bleak.

A lot changed between 1940 and 1960, not the least of which was the semantic shift suffered by the word “proletarian.” In the 1941 Reglamento de Colonias, the word evoked the progressive ideology of the 1930s as well as a corporatist political imagination. By the 1960s “proletarian” had turned into a negative term, closely linked to notions of poverty and marginality. Colonias proletarias shifted in meaning as well. They went from an invisible phenomenon—invisible and impossible to imagine—to the “solution” for the problem of popular housing in Mexico City. Transnational ideas about bottom-up planning, community organizing,

and self-construction inspired government efforts to improve colonias proletarias, as visible in Ramos Millán in the building of housing, schools, clinics and, in broader terms, the construction of a “community” were none was deemed to exist. Nonetheless, as the 1963 thesis “Bramadero: un caso ilustrativo de población marginal” suggests, despite this shift on ideas about urbanism and architecture, colonias proletarias continued to be regarded as marginal settlements, as well as an urban blight decried by public officials and intellectuals, their previous history forgotten.

CONCLUSION: A BLUEPRINT FOR A MASS CITY?

Mexico City transformed between 1930 and 1960. It was a change in scale, character, and position vis-à-vis Mexico and the world; from a bourgeois city into a proletarian megalopolis, a regional, national, and international melting pot, and a “*ciudad de masas*,” as historian José Luis Romero labeled Latin America’s shapeless immigrant cities.¹ We sometimes think of this transformation as unexpected and unintelligible, but it was, in reality, shaped by architectural, political, and cultural guiding visions (and disagreements) about what Mexico City was becoming, and projects for what it *ought* to become.

This dissertation has argued that the master plan and colonias proletarias represented meaningful blueprints that shaped the mass city. Before explaining what they accomplished, however, two common assumptions about urban planning in Latin America must be dispelled. First, Mexico City was not planned by experts imposing foreign models on society. Historians of urban planning in Latin America stress the authoritarian nature of the discipline, its dependence on North Atlantic models, and the inequalities that it created and reproduces. Even though scholars argue that planners were incapable of controlling Mexico City’s growth, the notion that they had a vertical and authoritarian relationship with society still pervades our thinking about the discipline. As historians we are, quite often, “seeing like a state.” This perspective was also held by contemporary critics of the “technical Atilas” and “scientific destroyers” who pushed Mexico City to the most “absurd and merciless expansion.”² Mexican planners were not so

¹ José Luis Romero, *Latinamérica: Las ciudades y las ideas*, 336.

² “Technical Atilas” and “scientific destroyers” in Adrián García Cortéz, “La ciudad. El atómico,” *El Universal*, August 20, 1950.” “Absurd and merciless expansion in Adrián García Cortéz, “La nueva ley de planificación,” *El Universal*, January 3, 1954.

powerful. As I have argued, they were constantly trying to catch up with Mexico City, a task that surpassed their capacities. Furthermore, they were divided along horizontal and vertical lines. The Planning Commission was enmeshed in jurisdictional conflicts with Public Works. Both technocratic offices were, in turn, embattled with the more politically-oriented Ministry of Government and the lines between the municipal and the federal government were blurry as well. Studying planners as experts implementing their urban visions clearly fails to acknowledge what was going in Mexico City at the time.

The second assumption, and the flipside of the first, is that Mexico City's "urban explosion" was a consequence of the weakness of planners and, more broadly, the ineffectual city government. The development of Mexico City, the story goes, followed the logic of political clientelism. Political brokers overpowered planning experts. The distribution of urban services and the recognition of neighborhoods and resident associations were subservient to political goals, namely, controlling urban populations and gaining legitimacy and political support for the government. This understanding of Mexico City as a political machine is supported by classical studies on the Mexican political system.³ But this perspective impedes us from seeing the planning regime put together by the city government. As legal historians have shown, planning laws defined spaces of legality, illegality, and extra-legality, creating political arenas where different groups advanced their interests. But there is more. Municipal planners, engineers, and topographers successfully carved out spaces for schools, clinics, and parks in neighborhoods where competition over land was extremely high. Planners were not all-powerful, but they were strong enough to ensure that colonias proletarias followed a set of urbanistic guidelines. To date,

³ For instance, Susan Eckstein, "The State and the Urban Poor."

colonias proletarias established in the 1940s and 1950s enjoy access to urban facilities and are relatively well integrated into the city grid.

Was there, then, a blueprint for the mass city? And, if there was one, what did it achieve? Although Mexico City's incomplete and disjointed master plan did not succeed in guiding urban growth, it drew the fault lines around which city planners, political brokers, and urban residents negotiated their interests. Projects such as Luis Ángeles' Zona Centro project articulated a "field of confrontation" where urbanistic visions and professional loyalties coalesced.⁴ But the master plan articulated political and urbanistic conflicts in more surreptitious ways. The uneven and multi-scale master plan created different planning fields where distinctive groups engaged. In other words, the master plan defined who oversaw the planning of different city sections. Colonias proletarias—commonly viewed as the epitome of urban informality and disorder—appeared in the master plan as blurry, unmapped spots. But they were planned by an assortment of surveyors, brokers, and resident associations, key actors who controlled the subdivision and distribution of land. At risk of simplifying a more complex story, while Public Works officials subdivided lots in colonias proletarias, political brokers and government officials controlled access to these lots.

The master plan and colonias proletarias were not coordinated policies. The blueprints, censuses, and codes in which both programs materialized surveyed the city from different perspectives and with different goals—controlling people and regulating space—that could, and often did, clash. But they represented blueprints for urban growth, both in the literal and the

⁴ Antonio Azuela, "Mexico City: the city and its law in eight episodes, 1940-2005," 156. For similar arguments, see Cristina Sánchez Mejorada, *Rezagos de la modernidad*; and Stephanie Ronda and Vicente Ugalde, "Planeación urbana en la ciudad de México en los cincuenta."

metaphorical sense of the term. While they did not anticipate or singlehandedly create the megalopolis that Mexico City became, they did shape this creation.

As I have argued, the master plan and colonias proletarias are often regarded as failed projects. But if they fell short of the vision of their architects, these visions, in turn, failed to anticipate how messy and unexpected a process urbanization turned out to be. No one foresaw Mexico City turning into one of the largest cities in the world by the end of the twentieth century. Mexico City had five million residents in 1960, 15 million in 1990, and more than 20 million today. These numbers were, in the first decades of the century, beyond the realm of the imaginable.⁵ Even more significantly, it was inconceivable that Mexico City—or any city—could achieve such a size without imploding. “By the time the city breaks, it will be too late to fix,” warned the Sociedad de Arquitectos Mexicanos in 1945.⁶ “The future twenty years from now, wrote Jorge Ibargüengoitia in 1976, is a vision that very few are willing to face.”⁷

When Mexico City is read against these apocalyptic visions it becomes something different, something of a success story. Mexico City did not break—or perhaps it did, it is just that we did not notice, as Carlos Monsiváis quipped.⁸ It was successful, as sociologists, geographers, political scientists, and anthropologists argued, in giving migrants like Jesús Sánchez the opportunity to make a living and build a house, at least before the Mexican economy stagnated in the 1980s. Mexico City also managed to maintain peace—a relative peace that seems all the more remarkable today when entire regions in Mexico have been devastated by

⁵ In 1937, Carlos Contreras had predicted a 2-million population by 1985, “Plan of development of Mexico City.”

⁶ *Arquitectura y lo demás* 1, no. 1 (1945), 22.

⁷ “Desde luego, nadie, que yo conozca, cree que esta ciudad va a estar mejor nomás pasen veinte años. El futuro de aquí a veinte años es una visión que muy pocos se atreven a contemplar.” *La casa de usted y otros viajes*, 94.

⁸ *Los rituales del caos* (Mexico City: ERA, 1995).

violence and death. Historians are still ill-prepared to interrogate this all too recent destruction; but, it is, today, our ineluctable vantage point.

Historians often argue that Mexico City was, and still is, lacking in social justice, democracy, citizenship, equality, and planning. They argue that the master plan failed to regulate growth while colonias proletarias did not fulfill their promise to a “right to the city.” However, due to their failings—by virtue of their legal ambiguity, their flexibility, and the confusion that they bred—the master plan and colonias proletarias reconciled contradictory urban visions and interests and created patterns of political organization, public works provision, and urban growth. They accomplished this not because they worked as expected but because they acquired a logic of their own that could fit the needs of different urban groups.

At the same time that Mario Pani designed the *unidad vecinal* Tlacotal y Bramadero, municipal topographers surveyed the same land, which would become Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán. At the same time that the Oficina de Colonias distributed lots among a cohort of chosen families in Ramos Millán, Salvador Flores and Roque Plata Belmont, the leaders of the Coalición de Colonos, were jockeying to win the exact same lots for their followers. Ramos Millán was owned by the government, but it was widely regarded as a squatter settlement, despite the fact that an array of state agents worked hard to bring it into the fold of Mexico City’s fragile and segmented welfare institutions. Regardless of how we choose to name or define places like Colonia Gabriel Ramos Millán, they were not spontaneous creations but the product of urbanistic visions—architectural and political—in conjunction with a history of political organizing and collective action.

Mexico City’s built environment, its population, and the legal, political, and symbolic structures that mediated them were always out of sync between 1930 and 1960. Colonias

proletarias capture this incongruity between urbanistic visions and political needs. Envisioned in the 1940s by government officials as the building block for a corporatist, working-class metropolis, colonias proletarias were seen by planners and architects as a terrible idea, harbingers of the death of the city. Times changed and two decades later planners reassessed colonias proletarias as a possible solution to the housing problem, as progressive environments produced by the ingenuity, solidarity, and hard-work of the urban poor. By this time, ironically, the political winds were blowing in new directions. In the 1950s, the government of Ernesto P. Uruchurtu reverted the progressive policies of the 1940s and tried to halt the construction of new colonias proletarias. Nevertheless, the modes of political organization and the networks of brokers that undergirded colonias proletarias would continue to exist and shape growth. Their meaning, however, changed. Starting in the 1970s, these networks would be described as mechanisms of social and political control, which they undoubtedly were. Scholars analyzing the relationship between the city government and the “urban poor” discovered a complex system of party and government brokers who distributed and withheld public goods, pitting residents and brokers against each other in order to control the urban poor. But understanding colonias proletarias solely as components of a highly effective political machine—the city as a metonym of the Mexican political system—obscures the fact that they were also embedded in ideas about what planning, politics, and cities could be.

APPENDIX

Colonias Proletarias, c. 1955

Source: AHCM-Secretaría de Gobernación-Box-323. Data on “official blueprints” added from AHCM-OP.

	Name of Colonia	Location (delegación or cuartel)	Value per square meter*	Ownership (government or private)	Official blueprint*
1	Aaron Sáenz	2a	\$3.00	Oficial	
2	Abraham González			Particular	
3	Acueducto	Villa Obregón	\$2.50	Particular	Sí
4	Agrícola Oriental	Ixtapalapa	\$8.00 a \$20.00	Particular	
5	Agrícola Pantitlán	Ixtacalco	\$2.75	Particular	
6	Aguileña (Aguilera, OP)	14a Azcapotzalco	\$2.50	Particular	Sí
7	Albert	12a General Anaya		Particular	
8	Aldana	14a Azcapotzalco	\$0.70	Particular	Sí
9	Altamirano	9a Tacuba	\$8.00 a \$12.00	Particular	
10	Alvaro Obregón	2a	\$0.35	Oficial	
11	América	11a Tacubaya		Mixta	Sí
12	Américas Unidas	12a General Anaya	\$4.50 a \$8.00	Oficial	Sí
13	Anahuác	9a Tacuba	\$4.00 a \$20.00	Oficial	No
14	Anahuác Ahuehuetes	9a Tacuba	\$5.00	Oficial	
15	Anahuac Peralitos	9a Tacuba	\$3.00	Oficial	
16	Antigua Flores Magón	Ixtacalco	\$6.50	Particular	
17	Aquiles Serdán	1a	\$1.73	Particular	
18	Arenal	14a Azcapotzalco	\$3.00	Particular	Sí
19	Arenal de Netzahualcoyotl	Ixtacalco	\$6.00	Particular	
20	Argentina	9a Tacuba	\$3.00	Particular	
21	Argentina Poniente	9a Tacuba	\$9.00 a \$13.00	Particular	
22	Arturo M. Martínez	Villa Obregón		Particular	

* Value in this column indicates inclusion in the cadastral plan. In other words, absence of value reveals areas not surveyed by the municipal government.

* Yes/No indicates if there is an official blueprint signed by Public Works or if there is not. Lack of value does not indicate the absence of an official blueprint.

23	Atzacolco	13a V.G.A.Madero		Particular	
24	Atlantida	Coyoacán	\$1.50	Particular	Sí
25	Aviación Civil	1a	\$12.00	Particular	
26	Aztecas	1a	\$1.00	Oficial	
27	Banjidal	Ixtapalapa		Particular	
28	Barranca Seca	Contreras		Particular	
29	Barrio Norte	Villa Obregón		Particular	
30	Batan Viejo	Contreras		Particular	Sí
31	Belizario Dominguez	13a G.A.Madero	\$0.25	Oficial	Sí
32	Bella Vista	11a Tacubaya	\$3.00	Particular	Sí
33	Bella Vista Ampliación	11a Tacubaya	\$3.00	Particular	Sí
34	Benito Juárez	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	Sí
35	Bandojito	13a G.A.Madero	\$1.90	Oficial	Sí
36	Buenos Aires	6a	\$2.00 a \$6.00	Mixta	
37	Cacama o Vergel	Ixtapalapa	\$3.50	Particular	Sí
38	Capultitlán	13a G.A.Madero		Particular	No
39	Casas Alemán (Esmeralda)	13a G.A.Madero	\$6.50 a \$8.50	Particular	Sí
40	Casas Alemán Ampliación	13a G.A.Madero	\$8.00 a \$16.00	Particular	Sí
41	Cinco de Mayo (Negritos)	9a Tacuba	\$6.00	Oficial	
42	Ciudad Jardín	Coyoacán		Burócrata	
43	Constitución de la Rep.	13a G.A.Madero	\$4.20	Oficial	
44	Copilco	Coyoacán		Particular	Sí
45	Copilco el Alto	Coyoacán		Particular	
46	Copilco el Bajo	Coyoacán		Particular	
47	Cosmopolita	14a Azcapotzalco	\$1.25	Mixta	Sí
48	Cove	11a Tacubaya	\$1.50	Particular	Sí
49	Cuadrante de San Fco.	Coyoacán		Particular	Sí
50	Cuauhtemoc Pensil	9a Tacuba	\$5.00	Particular	
51	Cuatro Árboles	1a	\$4.00 a \$12.00	Particular	
52	Cuchilla Valle Gómez	1a	\$2.69	Oficial	
53	Cuevitas	Villa Obregón		Particular	
54	Cuitlahuac	5a		Particular	Sí
55	Cristo Rey	11a Tacubaya		Particular	Sí
56	Damián Carmona	1a	\$1.00	Oficial	
57	Daniel Garza	11a Tacubaya	\$2.50 a \$5.75	Oficial	

58	Daniel Garza Ampliación	11a Tacubaya	\$2.50 a \$5.75	Oficial	Sí
59	Defensores de la Rep.	13a G.A.Madero	\$5.00 a \$8.00	Particular	Sí
60	Deportiva Pensil	9a Tacuba	\$3.00	Oficial	
61	Dieciocho de marzo	1a	\$1.75	Particular	
62	Dieciseis de septiembre	11a Tacubaya	\$2.00	Particular	Sí
63	Diez de abril	9a Tacuba	\$3.00	Particular	No
64	Diez de mayo	1a	\$3.00	Oficial	
65	Dos Lagos	9a Tacuba	\$9.15	Particular	Sí
66	Emilio Carranza	1a	\$3.00	Particular	
67	El Ajusco	Coyoacán		Particular	
68	El Capulín	Villa Obregón		Particular	No
69	El Caracol	1a	\$3.00	Particular	
70	El Gas	14a Azcapotzalco	\$2.00	Oficial	Sí
71	El Gas Ampliación	14a Azcapotzalco	\$1.25	Oficial	Sí
72	El Maestro	Villa Obregón	\$3.00	Particular	
73	El Mirador	Ixtapalapa		Particular	
74	El Obrero	13a G.A.Madero		Particular	
75	El Paraíso	Villa Obregón		Particular	Sí
76	El Parque	2a	\$12.00	Oficial	
77	El Porvenir	14a Azcapotzalco	\$1.25	Particular	Sí
78	El Recreo	14a Azcapotzalco	\$0.60	Particular	Sí
79	El Reloj	Coyoacán		Burócrata	
80	El Retoño	Ixtacalco	\$5.00	Particular	Sí
81	El Rodeo	Ixtapalapa		Particular	
82	El Rosedal	Coyoacán		Particular	
83	El Triunfo	Ixtapalapa		Particular	Sí
84	Emiliano Zapata	Coyoacán		Particular	
85	Emiliano Zapata	13a G.A.Madero	\$1.90	Oficial	Sí
86	Emiliano Zapata Ampliación	13a G.A.Madero	\$1.90	Oficial	Sí
87	Ermita	12a General Anaya	\$2.50	Particular	Sí
88	Ermita	Villa Obregón	\$2.50	Oficial	Sí
89	Escuadrón 201	Ixtapalapa	\$3.00	Oficial	Sí
90	Espartaco	Coyoacán		Oficial	
91	Esperanza	2a	\$2.50	Particular	
92	Estado de Hidalgo	Villa Obregón	\$7.00	Particular	
93	Euzkadi	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	Sí

94	Ex - Hipódromo de Peralvillo	3a	\$3.00	Particular	
95	Faja de Oro	13a G.A.Madero	\$1.90	Oficial	Sí
96	Federal	1a	\$12.00	Mixta	
97	Felipe Angeles	1a	\$2.40	Oficial	
98	Felipe Pescador	1a	\$15.00	Oficial	
99	Fernando Casas Alemán	11a Tacubaya	\$3.00	Particular	
100	Fdo. Casas Alemán (C. Prieto)	13a G.A.Madero	\$8.50	Oficial	
101	Ferrocarrilera	Ixtapalapa	\$9.35	Particular	Sí
102	Francisco I Madero	1a	\$4.00	Oficial	
103	Fco. I Madero	9a Tacuba	\$8.00	Oficial	
104	Fraternidad	12a General Anaya		Particular	
105	Gral. Gabriel Hernández	13a G.A.Madero	\$2.00 a \$8.00	Mixta	Sí
106	Gabriel Hernández Ampliación	13a G.A.Madero		Particular	
107	Gabriel Ramos Millán	Ixtacalco	\$4.00 a \$4.50	Oficial	Sí
108	Gabriel Ramos Millán Ampliación	Ixtacalco		Particular	No
109	Gertrudis G. Sánchez	13a G.A.Madero	\$1.35	Oficial	Sí
110	Gómez Farías	2a	\$4.14	Particular	
111	Granada	9a Tacuba		Oficial	
112	Granada Ampliación	9a Tacuba	\$4.00	Oficial	
113	Granjas México	Ixtacalco	\$9.00 a \$20.00	Particular	
114	Granjas Modernas	13a G.A.Madero	\$1.00 a \$2.00	Particular	Sí
115	Guadalupe Contreras	Contreras		Particular	Sí
116	Gudalupe Victoria	13a G.A.Madero		Particular	Sí
117	Héroes de Chapultepec	13a G.A.Madero	\$6.25	Particular	No
118	Héroes de Churubusco	13a G.A.Madero	\$30.00	Particular	Sí
119	Héroes de Churubusco	Ixtapalapa	\$16.00	Particular	Sí
120	Héeros de Nacoziari	13a G.A.Madero	\$5.00 a \$8.00	Particular	Sí
121	Héroes de Padierna	Contreras		Particular	
122	Hidalgo	Tlalpan		Particular	
123	Huichapan	9a Tacuba	\$8.00 a \$12.00	Particular	Sí
124	Huichapan	Xochimilco	\$0.50	Oficial	No
125	Hogar y Redención	Villa Obregón		Particular	Sí
126	Ignacio Allende	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	Sí

127	Ignacio Zaragoza	2a	\$9.00	Particular	
128	Independencia	12a General Anaya	\$3.00	Particular	Sí
129	Janitzio	1a	\$3.00	Particular	
130	Jardín Azpeitia	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	Sí
131	J. Del Río	Contreras		Particular	
132	Josefa O. De Domínguez	12a General Anaya	\$3.50	Particular	Sí
133	Juan Escutia	Ixtapalapa	\$12.00	Particular	
134	Juan González Romero	13a G.A.Madero	\$6.00 a \$8.00	Particular	No
135	Juan Polainas	1a	\$1.00		
136	Justo Sierra	Ixtapalapa		Particular	
137	Juventino Rosas	Ixtacalco		Particular	
138	La Cascada	Villa Obregón		Oficial	No
139	La Concepción	Contreras		Particular	
140	La Cruz	Ixtacalco		Particular	
141	La Cruz	Contreras		Particular	
142	Lagos Norte	9a Tacuba	\$4.90	Oficial	Sí
143	Lagos Sur	9a Tacuba	\$20.00	Oficial	Sí
144	La Joya	13a G.A.Madero	\$3.50	Particular	Sí
145	La Joyita	13a G.A.Madero	\$0.25	Oficial	Sí
146	La Lonja	Tlalpan		Particular	
147	La Malinche	13a G.A.Madero	\$2.45	Particular	Sí
148	La Maza	1a		Particular	
149	La Preciosa	14a Azcapotzalco	\$0.50	Particular	Sí
150	La Providencia	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	No
151	La Raza (Fco. Villa, OP)	14a Azcapotzalco	\$2.22	Particular	Sí
152	Las Aguilas	Villa Obregón		Particular	Sí
153	Las Aguilas Ampliación	Villa Obregón		Particular	No
154	Las Colonias	Contreras		Particular	
155	Las Palmas	Villa Obregón		Particular	
156	Las Palmas	10a	\$6.00	Particular	
157	Las Palmas	11a Tacubaya		Particular	Sí
158	Las Palmas Ampliación	11a Tacubaya		Particular	
159	Legaria Ampliación	9a Tacuba	\$6.00	Particular	No
160	Liberación	14a Azcapotzalco	\$11.00 a \$20.00	Particular	Sí
161	Libertad	14a Azcapotzalco	\$2.75	Particular	Sí
162	Lic. Miguel Alemán	12a General Anaya	\$4.00	Particular	Sí

163	Lomas Quebradas	Contreras		Particular	
164	Los Alpes	Villa Obregón		Particular	No
165	Los Cipreses	Ixtapalapa	\$8.00 a \$9.50	Particular	Sí
166	Los Manzanos	9a Tacuba	\$2.00	Oficial	Sí
167	Maestros de Ixtacalco	Ixtacalco		Particular	Sí
168	Magdalena Contreras	Contreras		Particular	
169	Magdalena de las Salinas	13a G.A.Madero	\$6.00 a \$10.00	Particular	Sí
170	Magdalena Mixhuca	2a		Particular	
171	María G. De García Ruiz	Villa Obregón	\$2.50	Oficial	Sí
172	Mariano Escobedo	9a Tacuba	\$60.00	Mixta	No
173	Martín Carrera (Estanzuela)	13a G.A.Madero		Particular	Sí
174	Mártires del Río Blanco	13a G.A.Madero	\$1.00	Oficial	Sí
175	Mártires de Tacubaya	11a Tacubaya	\$4.00	Particular	Sí
176	Materiales de Guerra	1a		Oficial	
177	Maximino Avila Camacho	13a G.A.Madero	\$7.00	Particular	Sí
178	Merced Gómez	Villa Obregón		Particular	No
179	México Nuevo	9a Tacuba	\$3.00	Particular	
180	Michoacán	1a	\$3.00	Oficial	
181	Michoacán Ampliación	1a	\$3.00	Oficial	
182	Miguel Hidalgo (Penitenciaria)	1a	\$1.48	Particular	
183	Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla	Tlahuac	\$5.00 a \$50.00	Particular	
184	Modelo	9a Tacuba	\$6.00	Particular	No
185	Moderna	12a General Anaya	\$1.00 a \$10.00	Oficial	Sí
186	Molino de Rosas	Villa Obregón	\$1.25	Particular	Sí
187	Molino del Rey	11a Tacubaya	\$3.00	Oficial	Sí
188	Monte Alto	14a Azcapotzalco	\$4.30	Particular	Sí
189	Nativitas	12a General Anaya	\$2.00 a \$3.00	Particular	
190	Nicolas Bravo	1a	\$5.97	Oficial	
191	Niños Héroes	12a General Anaya	\$12.00	Particular	Sí
192	Nueva Atzacualco	13a G.A.Madero		Oficial	
193	Nueva Flores Magón	Ixtapalapa		Particular	Sí
194	Nueva Tenochtitlán	13a G.A.Madero	\$2.45	Particular	Sí
195	Observatorio	11a Tacubaya	\$10.00	Particular	Sí

196	Obrero Popular (Obrera Popular, OP)	14a Azcapotzalco	\$8.00 a \$26.00	Particular	Sí
197	Ocho de agosto	11a Tacubaya	\$0.85	Oficial	Sí
198	Olivar del Conde	Villa Obregón	\$2.50 a \$5.00	Particular	No
199	Olivar de los Padres	Villa Obregón		Mixta	Sí
200	Palmas	Villa Obregón		Particular	Sí
201	Panamericana	13a G.A.Madero	\$5.00 a \$8.00	Particular	Sí
202	Patrimonio Familiar	14a Azcapotzalco	\$1.80 a \$6.00	Particular	Sí
203	Paulino Navarro	2a	\$7.00	Oficial	
204	Penitenciaria Sur	1a		Oficial	
205	Pensador Mexicano	1a	\$6.00	Particular	
206	Pensil Norte	9a Tacuba	\$1.50 a \$3.50	Particular	
207	Pensil Sur	9a Tacuba	\$7.00	Particular	
208	Peñon de los Baños	1a	\$0.50	Particular	
209	Peralvillo	3a	\$3.00	Particular	
210	Pino Suárez	11a Tacubaya	\$10.00	Particular	No
211	Plazuela del Pedregal	Contreras		Particular	
212	Plenitud	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	Sí
213	Plutarco Elías Calles	9a Tacuba	\$25.00	Oficial	Sí
214	Pólvara	Villa Obregón		Particular	Sí
215	Popo	9a Tacuba	\$6.00 a \$8.00	Particular	
216	Popo Ampliación	9a Tacuba	\$15 a \$20.00	Particular	
217	Popular Rastro	1a	\$5.00	Oficial	
218	Portales	12a General Anaya	\$8.00 a \$12.00	Particular	Sí
219	Postal	12a General Anaya	\$8.00	Particular	Sí
220	Potrero del Llano	14a Azcapotzalco	\$1.25	Oficial	Sí
221	Primero de Mayo	1a	\$1.49	Oficial	
222	Progresista	1a	\$1.00	Oficial	
223	Progreso	Villa Obregón		Particular	Sí
224	Progreso del Sur	Ixtapalapa		Particular	Sí
225	Progreso Nacional	13a G.A.Madero		Particular	No
226	Pro- Hogar	14a Azcapotzalco	\$0.45	Particular	Sí
227	Providencia	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	
228	Puebla	2a (Ixtacalco tachado)	\$13.74	Oficial	

229	Puente Colorado	Villa Obregón	\$7.00	Particular	No
230	Puente de Sierra	Contreras		Particular	
231	Quince de agosto	13a G.A.Madero		Particular	Sí
232	Reforma Pensil	9a Tacuba	\$5.30	Oficial	
233	Revolución	1a	\$1.00	Oficial	
234	Reynosa Tamaulipas	14a Azcapotzalco	\$4.00	Particular	Sí
235	Río del Consulado	3a	\$1.25	Mixta	Sí
236	Río Blanco Ampliación	13a G.A.Madero	\$1.90	Oficial	
237	Salvador Díaz Mirón	13a G.A.Madero		Particular	Sí
238	San Andrés Tetepilco	Ixtapalapa	\$0.40	Particular	Sí
239	San Clemente	Villa Obregón		Particular	
240	San Diego	9a Tacuba	\$12.00	Particular	
241	San Francisco	Contreras		Particular	
242	San Francisco Xocotitla	14a Azcapotzalco	\$3.00	Particular	
243	San Gregorio	Ixtapalapa		Particular	Sí
244	San José de la Escalera	13a G.A.Madero	\$15.00 a 18.00	Particular	Sí
245	San José del Olivar	Villa Obregón		Particular	No
246	San Juan de Aragón	13a G.A.Madero	\$3.00	Particular	Sí
247	San Nicolás	Contreras		Particular	
248	San Rafael	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	Sí
249	San Salvador Xochimanca	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	Sí
250	San Sebastián	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	No
251	San Simón Ticoman	12a General Anaya	\$0.80	Particular	No
252	San Simón Tolnahuac	9a Tacuba (5a)		Particular	
253	Santa Apolonia	14a Azcapotzalco	\$20.00	Particular	Sí
254	Santa Apolonia Ampliación	14a Azcapotzalco	\$8.00 a \$9.00	Particular	Sí
255	Santa Cruz Acalpixca	Xochimilco		Oficial	
256	Santa Cruz Acayucan	14a Azcapotzalco	\$6.00	Particular	Sí
257	Santa Lucía	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	Sí
258	Santa María Malinalco	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	
259	Santa María Nativitas	12a General Anaya	\$5.00	Oficial	Sí
260	Santa Rosa	13a G.A.Madero	\$15.00 a 18.00	Particular	Sí
261	Santa Teresa	Contreras		Particular	
262	Santo Domingo	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	No
263	Sector Popular	Ixtapalapa	\$8.00 a \$10.00	Oficial	No

264	Siete de julio	1a	\$7.50 a \$37.99	Oficial	
265	Siete de julio Ampliación	1a		Oficial	
266	Siete de noviembre	13a G.A.Madero	\$1.00	Particular	Sí
267	Simón Bolívar	1a	\$1.25 a \$1.50	Oficial	
268	Simón Bolívar Ampliación	1a	\$7.00	Oficial	
269	Sinatel	Ixtapalapa		Particular	
270	Sind. Mex. De Electricistas	14a Azcapotzalco	\$7.50	Particular	No
271	Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz	13a G.A.Madero		Particular	
272	Tabla de San Agustín	13a G.A.Madero	\$2.00	Oficial	Sí
273	Tetelpan	Villa Obregón		Particular	
274	Tlacoligia	Tlalpan		Particular	
275	Tlacoquemaca	10a	\$4.00	Particular	No
276	Tlatilco	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	Sí
277	Trabajadores del Hierro	14a Azcapotzalco	\$0.40	Particular	Sí
278	Tránsito	2a	\$1.50	Oficial	
279	Trece de julio	10a	\$4.00	Oficial	Sí
280	Tres Estrellas	13a G.A.Madero	\$3.00	Particular	Sí
281	Tres Mosqueteros	1a	\$10.00	Particular	
282	Tolteca	Villa obregón (10a tachada)		Particular	
283	Torre Blanca	9a Tacuba	\$12.00	Particular	
284	Torre Blanca Ampliación	9a Tacuba	\$20.00	Particular	
285	Tula	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	Sí
286	Unidad Modelo	Ixtapalapa		Particular	
287	Valle Gómez	1a	\$2.60	Particular	
288	Vallejo	3a	\$0.50	Mixta	Sí
289	Vasco de Quiroga	13a G.A.Madero	\$12.50	Particular	Sí
290	Vasco de Quiroga Ampliación	13a G.A.Madero	\$15.00	Particular	
291	Veinte de noviembre 5 tramos	1a		Oficial	
292	Veinte de noviembre Ampliación	1a		Oficial	
293	Veinticuatro de abril	2a	\$0.20	Oficial	
294	Ventura Pérez de Alba	9a Tacuba		Particular	No
295	Venustiano Carranza	1a	\$3.00	Oficial	
296	Venustiano Carranza Ampliación	1a	\$3.00 a \$3.50	Oficial	

297	Venustiano Carranza Prolog.	1a		Oficial	
298	Victoria de las democracias	14a Azcapotzalco	\$1.25	Oficial	Sí
299	Villa del Sur	Ixtapalapa		Particular	Sí
300	Villa Hermosa	13a G.A.Madero	\$8.00	Particular	Sí
301	Villa Lázaro Cárdenas	Coyoacán		Particular	
302	Villita de Cortes	12a General Anaya	\$0.20	Particular	Sí
303	Zacahuisco	12a General Anaya	\$1.00	Particular	Sí
304	Zermeño	14a Azcapotzalco		Particular	Sí

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