THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE POLITICS OF INVASION: NORTHERN MEXICAN PUBLIC HOUSING, LAND

STRUGGLE HISTORY, AND THE TWILIGHT OF AN INFRASTRUCTURE-BUILDING

STATE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

BY

MATTHEW MURPHY FURLONG

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2021

To Kevin, whose story has pushed me to understand my own;
and to Carlo, whose friendship helped make new stories possible.

Hoy miente quien dice conocer la ciudad; más bien la intuimos.

Today, whoever claims to know the city lies; more so, we intuit it.

--Carlos Monsiváis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Preface and Acknowledgements

Sergio Tamai, the Mexicali-based political activist, was the only reason my friend Carlo and I had been let onto this bus. The two of us stand in the center aisle, hanging to a railing attached to the vehicle's roof, while some fifty former residents of an encampment of deportees that had just been closed this morning in downtown Tijuana sit wedged into the seats. The police have temporarily appropriated local taxi buses, themselves recommissioned Blue Bird former school buses from the U.S., for the mission. Today's mass eviction had been long-awaited, occurring as it did nearly five months after hundreds of people had initially invaded and occupied the Plaza Constitución, a cast concrete square raised slightly above street level, which lies just south of the border wall, and just beside the Tijuana offices of the long-dominant, now faltering PRI party.

Today would be the final day of a five day window in the fall of 2013 during which the camp's several hundred residents could choose to be transported to a new government "hostel." The hostel has been the topic of much heated discussion during the final days of the camp, with its occupants making the hostel out as a mysteriously existential threat. Lack of concrete information about the hostel has allowed rumors to multiply. Many of the plaza's occupiers confessed ignorance of where it even was located. Was it even in Tijuana? Out in the hills of the rural town of Tecate? Would people be allowed to leave voluntarily after entering? Or had the police something more sinister in mind than a mere re-location? Hadn't this 'hostel' been originally designed as a state prison, then been left mysteriously unfinished a decade or more ago?

"We are only going to look, to see what the government is offering, with our own eyes," Tamai tells Carlo, myself, and the freshly evicted deportees sitting around us after boarding the

bus. As the bus merges onto a dark highway, escorted by police vehicles, Tamai tries to lighten the mood, laughing with some of his fellow passengers. "This place is not *El Hongo*," Tamai shouts over the radio and potholes, trying to defuse doubt. *El Hongo* (literally 'The Mushroom'), an actually functioning prison built in the neighboring town of Tecate, has been rumored to be the real location of "the hostel." Mention of it hardly seems to reassure the weary faces surrounding me.

Carlo, a friend from Mexico City who has joined me in visiting the encampment in the days leading up to today's eviction, whispers to me what some camp members told him before boarding: we are heading, he says, to a place that both is and is not a prison. "It was left unfinished, half-constructed, en obra negra," Carlo continues, using a phrase that originated in construction industry idioms to indicate a project whose inner structure--its concrete and steel columns, foundation and walls--is (or, more ambiguously, might again one day be) actively under construction.

As though intuiting what Carlo has whispered, Tamayo shouts so that the back of the bus can hear, "Don't get it twisted," Tamai's voice echoes through the bus as a poorly lit highway flickers past phantasmagorically, "this is not a prison we're heading to, it's a hostel!" Earlier in the day, back at Plaza Constitución, the sub-director of Tijuana police had sent his assistant to find out from Carlo and I who exactly we were. I was just beginning my field work in Tijuana, and visiting the encampment as part of a project still in gestation. Relatively quickly we can convince the young police officer that Carlo and I are not undercover DEA. But what were we up to, then? At this point, the dissertation that follows was only starting to be hatched. Witnessing the encampment, speaking with the deportees with Carlo, then following them as they were evicted from Tijuana under an obscure combination of state and civil society authority would

prove the key first stage of this dissertation project. It exposed me for the first time to the kind of unforeseen convergence between public infrastructures of border policing and public housing that was to shape my subsequent research project. Even for Tijuana, this kind of mass encampment's repeated eviction was a novel phenomenon in the 2010s, as were similar shifts in policing in the border region more broadly at this moment.[1] This project, on public housing invasion and public infrastructure as mutually mediating spaces for shifting claims to state and corporate, but also *campesino* and indigenous forms of political authority and territory-making, began in some ways on that bus with dozens of exhausted and fearful--but also politically outspoken--young men, their faces occasionally illuminated by the passing of opposing lane headlights on the highway.

As we speed down *El Bulevar 2000*, a highway through the east of Tijuana inaugurated only in 2006, as a 'detonator' infrastructure expected at the time to encourage hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of new public housing units to be built in this urban periphery, the streets of the public housing developments are not visible, but folded and hidden concrete intestines, with cul de sac upon cul de sac only hinted at by towering entrance arches--frequently these stand at the only entrance and exit to a developments. Security booths, sometimes connected to the arches, sit dark and empty, easily overlooked from a speeding vehicle like this. They were abandoned when the construction company had sold enough housing units to move on, and stop paying for such "luxuries" as private security, graffiti white-washing, and park upkeep. In theory, care for new urban infrastructures--everything from trash collection to schools to police patrols--was supposed to shift from construction companies to city, state, and federal governments.

---

[1] Rosas, Gilberto. *Barrio libre: criminalizing states and delinquent refusals of the new frontier*. Duke University Press, 2012.

Instead, perhaps the majority of post-2000 low-income housing developments remain "unreceived" by cities, who have created legal mazes to limit thereby their and the federal government's own legal and financial responsibilities toward upkeep of these vast new urban infrastructures. Rather than becoming integrated into coherent metropolitan infrastructures, east Tijuana's geography is part of a seemingly permanent, precipitous expansion of a new kind of social abandonment. This brand of abandonment is defined not by refugee "tent cities" like that occupying Plaza Constitución, or even by migrant detention centers (like the unfinished prison complex to which this bus was en route). Yet, as I learned that evening, the two are more deeply entwined than I could have imagined. In Carlo's words, they are both instances of *obra negras* (unfinished structures)--a term whose complex geohistorical conceptualizations across neoliberal Mexico would ultimately come to stand close to the heart of this project and its questions.

When the bus stops, Tamai jumps out, leaving the rest of us to watch him go. In the bus, the one they call *El Greñas* due to his messy hair, and who had served as head of camp security and seemingly as a kind of personal assistant to Tamai, leans over and whispers in my ear: "All this," he gestures toward the scene outside. His boss, the deportees, and the police. "I'll explain all this later." But I do not hold my breath for his explanation to arrive. From previous encounters at the camp, I know he still suspects me to be a DEA agent. Indeed, just as security guards hold vigil outside the bus, the new arrivals also carefully take measure of their new surroundings.

Figure 1. On the threshold of one of the residential tents at Tijuana's post-eviction hostel, 2013. Photos taken my author unless otherwise noted.

They are told to line up and be registered. In the bustle of new arrivees, I notice a camp resident has slipped out of the giant tent erected in the prison's central patio. He is walking towards Carlos and I, apparently unnoticed by camp security. We ask the man what it is like in the hostel. "It is warm enough in there," he reports. "They feed you well. The kitchen is being run by soldiers from the army." He begins then to tell us about the tests that he had been given. "Almost like a job interview," he says, "they asked me about my skills and work experience." In California, he had worked as a train technician. Adjusting pressure gauges fractions of degrees, he says, as he performs such adjustments in the air for us. We nod and stand in silence, unsure what to say next.

As the passengers from our bus are processed for the camp and disappear within it, the police presence outside begins to disperse. A young official from family services (DIF) comes to greet Carlo, myself, and three young women (filmmakers who have been documenting the lives of people now located in the hostel). There are no journalists here: we are the only "civil society" presences. The official is wearing a medical mask, like the sanitary workers who earlier in the day erased the last traces of the deportee camp from the plaza, shoveling tents and blankets into garbage trucks. We cannot be allowed into the hostel, he explains, for sanitary reasons. "There is a holiday posada planned at the hostel for tomorrow, with the governor," we are reminded. "Come then."

I approach a young man with a fluorescent security-style vest on, who appears to be relaxing by the side entrance to the jail's main structure. He turns out to be one of a handful of temporary security workers brought in from Tecate to provide extra hands here. He offers the strangest explanation yet as to why this structure had been abandoned until now. "Cancer," he says, "years ago when this place was being built, all of the construction workers on the project started getting cancer." When I ask why, he goes on that "the army used to use the site to test weapons." Carlo and I look at each other. I ask why the government would want to open the hostel somewhere that causes cancer. "The construction workers were here for two years at least," he replies. "These people will only be here a few days."

Then a woman describing herself as the boss of the earlier masked family service official from a moment ago appears outside the tent again. Apologizing for the confusion, she invites us to take a tour of the compound immediately, no masks necessary. Inside the vast central tents of the not-prison are arrayed perhaps seventy-five cots, with two large heaters in the center. This space is just for men. The meal hall where the military works is on one side of the courtyard, and

rooms for women and couples are located there as well. Offices where interviews and screening take place are in parts of the jail project that were in fact finished.

"Twenty-five percent of residents received thus far to the hostel wish to return to their places of origin elsewhere in Mexico," we are told during a brief question and answer session that we are allowed to record on cell phones. "And seventy-five percent," she tells us, "are victims of alcoholism, addiction, or mental illnesses." Expulsion, a common denominator that binds this population together, is unspoken in this brief encounter.

"But what about those who decided to leave the camp in Tijuana," I ask, "before the eviction, and who decided to stay in the city?"

I receive a non-answer, but afterward one of the filmmakers approaches me and reports that friends of hers who were living at the encampment had gone to invade public housing units abandoned on the far reaches of the city. As I am noting down the names of neighborhoods where she thinks her friends from the camp may have gone, however, I notice Tamayo coming back my way. He's shaking his head, as though disappointed by the camp. What, then, had he expected? What choice had he had?

"We should have occupied some of these Pichonavits," he tells me. "*Pichoneras* rather than plazas, no?" The term Pichonavit, a colloquial mixture of *pichonera*, or birdcage, and Infonavit, the name of the national housing institute, evokes the small dimensions of these housing units, as well as their sub-human security and health conditions, overlapping with their status as literally or figurative *obra negras*. This early evidence that a certain politics of invasion bisecting migration and property practices, and large scale public infrastructures from jails to public housing to borders had livelier interconnections than the at times all-too-siloed disciplinary approaches of migration studies, housing studies, and beyond could account for

would prove the pivotal basic insight on which my coming years of long-term fieldwork (2015-2017) in Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, and Mexico City, and eventually this dissertation project, would be built.

From the first, I was not there alone. In addition to the many largely young, sometimes effectively nationless and recently deported persons whom I would get to know during this early fieldwork at the camp in Plaza Constitucional, as well as through my time volunteering with the Tijuana-based migrant services NGO *Espacio Migrante* as a language instructor in their host institution, the Salesiano Migrant Shelter 'Padre Chava,' and well before my later fieldwork with corporate construction firms pursuing new business/sociological models in order to 'filter' large numbers of invaders from public housing developments, and replace them with paying residents, there were friends like Carlo. Carlo not only took an interest in my unrefined research interests but, at this earliest moment of it, had the gall to accompany me in exploring the unknown. Starting with Carlo, then, but genuinely including friends, professors, and colleagues in Mexico, Chicago, and beyond, the following fact is as simple as it is true: this project simply would not have been possible without all of you.

Thanks first to my Mexico friends, largely living between Mexico City and Baja California, but also including friendships in Oaxaca, Chiapas, Ciudad Juárez, Los Angeles, and several other points in between. Thanks first to Carlo Magaloni, Elena Luciano, Haydeé Jiménez, Gilberto Herrera Solórzano, Francisco 'Benny' Blanco, Daniel López, Rod Villa, Frank 'DJ Bulla' Wild, Alexia Veytia-Rubio, Krystel Rascón, and René Cano. Thanks to academic mentors in Mexico, especially Laura Velasco Ortiz, Antonio Azuela, Alejandra Leal, and Lourdes Romo. In Tijuana, the friendship and intellectual solidarity of Diana Merchant and Francisco 'Pacho' Tamayo, of Mael Vizcarra and Stuart Cardwell, along with (in Oaxaca) of Aileé Salazar and

Investigation Archive, whose collections of early publications from Infonavit and related architectural/territorial planning institutions rendered several important initial insights into this project's eventual historical arguments. At the Municipal Institute for Investigation and Planning (IMIP) in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, my thanks as well to staff and fellow researchers who offered access and guidance with respect to the use of digital regional news databases that helped shed light onto the comparative experience of public housing expansion in another distinct northern Mexican region, in addition to the northwest corner covered by Tijuana and Baja California, during the 1980s-2000s. That comparative insight proved crucial to accumulating confidence in generalizing certain of my insights across regional scales.

Thanks to my friends and colleagues in Chicago at the University of Chicago. Thanks in the first place to Cameron Hu, who I've been lucky to call a friend and co-conspirator in far flung ideas. My thanks to a very supportive and sympathetic writing group, including Meghan Morris and Nate Ella, Alison Feser, Nicholas Carby-Denning, Andrea Ford, and Jeremy Siegman. My thanks as well to Carmine Grimaldi, Ray Noll, Damien Bright, Brian Brown and Ben Schwartz, Karma Frierson, Chloe Blackshear and Chaz Lee, and Isabella Penido.

At the University of Chicago, I am particularly indebted to three groups of instructors: those who helped shape my early training as an anthropologist in the Department of Anthropology, my eventual dissertation committee members, and scholars in Latin American studies and related fields who I met largely post-field, whether serving as their teaching assistants or co-instructors in the same department. Of this last group, I am particularly indebted for expanding my understanding of Latin American studies as a field, and of possible pedagogies within it, to Larissa Brewer-García and Claudia Brittenham, and more interdisciplinarily to Tara Zahra and Margaret Rung (at Roosevelt University). With respect to the faculty whose teaching

would leave an especially enduring mark from the start of my time in the Department of Anthropology, I am particularly indebted to Judith Farquhar, Hussein Agrama, and Joe Masco.

With respect to my dissertation committee members, I consider myself lucky to have found such committed and supportive ones. Shannon Dawdy has been a reliable and even-handed mentor, supporting my writing process, offering perspicacious feedback, all while also imparting critical common sense and pragmatism. William Mazzarella has likewise been an integral part of this project's coming to completion, providing along with Shannon a key model over the years to aspire toward, in terms of what engaged scholarship in our discipline can look like. Rihan Yeh, though a more recent addition to the committee, was thankfully involved in this project's formulation much earlier—starting with a kind invitation (which I was terribly nervous to accept, so early in writing up) to present an early version of the project in Michoacán. My thanks to Rihan for serving as an early model to me for how engaged scholarship like my own might be able to move across Mexico and U.S. academic worlds.

Thanks, additionally, to close friends and family who have helped guide my course since before my time in Chicago. Thanks to Elysia Petras, Joseph Pace, Hannah Cunningham, Harsh Sodi, Hannah Cunningham, and Michelle Chinitz. To my family, Stephen and Margaret Furlong, Bridget and Barrett Roberts and family, Kevin and Kara Furlong, as well as to Meredith and John Young, and the late Carol and Kenneth Young, my thanks for your care and support.

On the U.S. border, I took leave, between fieldwork and 'writing up,' to spend the better part of a winter working with the migrant legal aid association, the *Raices* collective, in San Antonio, Texas. There I not only became more personally familiar with hemispheric dynamics in migration policing that form part of the dissertation's regional background, but more importantly I was able to make a small difference for the better in the lives of people caught in the deepest

ABSTRACT

What does politics look like from the perspective of an emergent population of 'housing invaders' in northern Mexican public housing contexts? How might this seemingly novel phenomenon (of large-scale housing invasion) be tied not only to a certain politics in the present, but to social policies of the recent past, from Agrarian Reform (which land invasions attempted to radicalize or realize) to family planning and demographic policies? Just as this dissertation's reflections on extended fieldwork with Mexican public housing residents, builders, sellers, and regulatory experts, based in Tijuana, attempts to answer the first of these questions by unpacking contemporary perspectives on one infrastructure (public housing) that has proved particularly formative/indicative of mass political sentiments in much of the Global South during our unfinished neoliberal era, the latter of these two questions locates the dissertation's key historical concern: with continuities between shifting forms of invasion politics within an at once materially and temporally unfinished neoliberal era.

Chapter One is set at *El Barzón* Tijuana, the city and state headquarters of what is also a national Mexican debtor aid civil association and social movement. Founded in the 1990s, but with a strong legacy of Agrarian Reform politics, the association was, at the time of my fieldwork, the largest of its kind in both Tijuana and Mexico as a whole. Against this backdrop, as well as the incoming horizon of an ever-closer 2018 national election that would be won by a *Barzón* ally, the 'left' *Morena* party (marking a major shift in national politics) the chapter considers how a new politics of scale was becoming both shaped and interrupted by invaded houses across not only northern Mexico, but the nation and region, post-subprime. Next the dissertation looks at linkages between territory-making and social policy expertise from a more historical context. Chapter Two of the dissertation aims to place the social policy role of

Mexican public housing programs in the context of characteristic forces of social policy

expertise that have characterized the last fifty years, from intra-institutional struggles between

demographic and territorial planning-centered bureaucracies of the political and private sector, to

Cold War tensions between social scientists who disagreed radically (not only in Mexico, but

across the Americas) on the political meanings rural and urban land invasions. How, the chapter

ultimately asks, did shifting forms of expertise attached at once to land invasions and new public

housing programs in the early neoliberal era mediate broader shifts in social policy

expertise? Finally, through a comparative ethnography of two public housing construction firms

and their evolving relationships to residents in developments where these companies operate as

increasingly quasi-governmental institutions, Chapter Three explores how employees and

residents alike in Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez markets sense and model other territorial scales

through collectively perceived facets of the infrastructural landscape. A collectively felt sense of

unfinishedness, most commonly indexed with the phrase '*obra negra*' (literally, black work, but

meaning 'unfinished structure'), my interlocutors in the chapter argue, most expansively and

exactly characterizes this affective infrastructure.

A Chance Meeting

An older man calls me to his door as I walk through a vast, rectilinear concrete and rebar housing development in east Tijuana's *El Florido* delegation at dusk in the summer of 2016, on my way to catch a bus at the end of a day's research in the real estate offices of a new company called Provive. Miguel asks if I am *el investigador*. I tell him yes, I am, while patting a notebook full of the day's scribbled observations from neighborhood committee meetings organized in nearby corporate offices for a real estate firm selling repossessed social interest housing units in his neighborhood. My new acquaintance, after introducing himself, reports having heard of me around the neighborhood. "Don't I work with that Pro-, Pro-?"

"Provive," I respond, nodding reluctantly. From experience, I know this association may cause interest, suspicion, or both among residents here, many of whose sub-renter or mortgage debtor status force them to carry a sense of impending foreclosure, not only over their possession of a property, but over broader cartographies as well.[2]

"The one with offices in the first section of the development?" Miguel asks, as though referring to some place more distant than an office a few streets away. "I don't know much about them," he tells me, "but you hear things. One day you wake up and another house is repossessed by them, no warning, no explanation. It's just like the invaders do." He asks nevertheless if I would like to talk, pulling over a seat to a small kitchen table, as I note a chaos of stacked-up

---

[2] The company, dedicated to rehabilitating and reselling "abandoned" housing units in this zone of several thousand tightly packed two story structures of serialized micro-scaled suburbia is the central focus of this project's third and final core chapter.

cardboard boxes piled up against the back wall.

"The tower of Babel," he jokes, pointing at the arrangement.

"An eviction?" I ask.

He nods. "A neighbor called me one week while I was working—I have a glass cutting workshop a few minutes away, outside the development. And he tells me, 'Your daughter's things are on the street.' As though he's telling me the weather."

Up until the eviction, Miguel's daughter occupied the unit next door, he explains. Now all her things are being stored here. After drinking a soda in his kitchen with the boxes, we walk over to his daughter's former residence—a wall of concrete blocks covering the doorframe has been mostly removed. "You see, if a family doesn't take the house," Miguel says from somewhere behind me in the darkened room, "the vagabonds and *cholos* will strip it." He points the flashlight on his cell phone towards a hole in the wall. "Like this. For drug money, is what's most common," Miguel concludes.

"For wire?" I ask, still not quite seeing what in the wall is staring back at me.

"They strip copper wires and the pipe fixtures, to be sold as scrap metal. Nobody from the banks has ever come to check on the house in the four months since the eviction." Miguel continues. "They would never put a watchperson [*velador*, literally candleholder] here. For a house like this?"

Figure 2. Inside Miguel's daughter's former house, recently invaded by local youth gangs, graffiti comingles with evidence of efforts to strip the house for scrap materials.

As Provive public housing rehab specialists in Ciudad Juarez, where the company also operates, have recently explained to me, "the interior is where most of the damage has to be dealt with in our repossessed houses—sometimes we've had to repair an interior two, three times by the point where we actually have resold the house." By comparison, as I'd recently learned in interviews with Provive's Juarez accounting personnel, windows and doors tend to be installed at the very end of the process of rehabbing a repossessed housing unit—substituting for concrete blocks that are supposed to fill up window and door frames in the meantime. Like the "tower of Babel" in Miguel's kitchen, divergent languages meet in this repossessed, yet also invaded, space.

For Miguel, told by his father to follow his brothers and search for work in the central Mexican countryside in the state of Guanajuato as a teenager in the late 1970s, the house offers an exceptional, if still heavily obstructed, vantage onto how Mexican history and his own personal experience of it converge. The housing unit's materiality, in excess of language, both supports and obstructs this vantage. "I soon ended up in Mexico City, where there was work,"

he tells me. "There was a market in Mexico City where the vendors let me sleep inside after everything closed up. But they couldn't promise me wages, enough to stop sleeping on the floor. I didn't know where to turn next," he says. "So I accompanied a friend who was in my same situation at the market to Acapulco, where a *patrón* from his hometown was manager of a new hotel."

As it turned out, however, the manager's boss didn't lack hotel workers, exactly. "They didn't actually want us to stay in the south. They were opening up a hotel in Tijuana soon, and needed workers who would be loyal." As someone with no history in the north, without local ties there, Miguel and his friend could be trusted. "Eventually, I bought a lot in *El Florido*, around '88," he says, referring to the relatively unsettled former *ejido* [i.e., collectively-owned, Agrarian Reform-generated] lands of present day East Tijuana, an alluvial, semi-arid plain moving away from the Pacific Ocean just south of San Diego, on which Miguel's current house also stands. To build a house on it, then sell the lot when a seemingly more secure property title became available—that was the plan, Miguel tells me. "But then Infonavit suddenly grew its housing offer," he reminds me, referring to an offer in the President Vicente Fox years, in which an unprecedented early 2000s public housing construction boom swept the nation, but especially northern Mexico. Here, new sub-developments, like the one we are standing on, wrapped themselves around the *maquila*-scape like exoskeletons.

"If we were in my hometown, in Guanajuato, all this would be covered by trees, *verde, verde, verde*. Where I am from everything is green." Painting the alluvial plain of the Baja Peninsula green with the colors of his hometown, we are momentarily transported, territories set in motion by imagination and memory. But Miguel's story ends as more than a meditation on the impossibility of settling down in an era caught between a short-circuited agrarian reform and the

ballooning of public housing worlds, possessions and dispossession, invasions and evictions.

"Before I left for Mexico [City]," Miguel continues, "I was on the *terreno* that my mother wanted to leave for me. I was just a kid," he says, "but I remember there were these bright blue flames that all of a sudden came out of the ground, just like that." He was confused and asked his best friend at the time what he thought about the scenario. "My friend responded that the flames were the ghosts of the Indians indicating where they had buried their treasures at the time of the conquest. When it happened, I had told my mother about it too, and she had pulled me into our house, telling me it was something from the devil." But following his friend's advice (that the flames were not caused by the devil but by the indigenous) he had dug a small pit on that spot, a few days later, and found figurines. Whatever might happen with the house he now sat in, recounting this tale to me, Miguel said, "I would like to go back to that place when I retire, if only to dig some more, and see what I find."

What is to be made of so unsettled a life history as the one Miguel begins to tell me about here—caught not only between a local politics of indigeneity and of a national, *fin-de-siècle* Mexican welfare state's infrastructure projects, but between regions (Guanajuato and Tijuana), and generations? The blue flames and figurines of Miguel's story, as well as his friend's framing of the find, draws Miguel's attention this evening back to landscapes of personal and collective identity molded by contrary forces. His public housing unit literally and figuratively frames these ruminations, reckoning with a world in which liberal politics and the politics of indigeneity are reducible neither to simply agonistic nor simply assimilative/eliminative relationships. This dissertation argues that such irreducibility is grounded for many Mexicans, including Miguel, in the heterogeneity of invasive practices and identities--particularly as they interact with the products of an infrastructure-building state. "Whether I hold on to my daughter's old house, or

not," as Miguel responds to another of my questions, "I'm afraid I'll always feel something of an invader here."

Indeed, public housing's saturation today with invasive practices and ideas of belonging shaped by them makes this particular public infrastructure particularly iconic for indigenous/*campesino* and liberal models of politics alike, at an exemplary interface of their neoliberal coming together. For U.S. readers unfamiliar with Latin American twentieth century histories of land invasions--on which more momentarily--this phrase, "politics of invasion," might well raise the specter of more familiar topics of U.S.-centric politics; this assertion could use some unpacking, however. U.S.-centric academic social theory production, particularly within anthropology, has been considerably shaped of late by accounts of settler colonialism and de-globalization (including migration in an age of deglobalization), in turn. In such disciplinary frames, Latin American contexts arise as national and regional instances of certain fundamental global patterns rather than others. And yet, as Claudio Lomnitz has ventured, "the categories of temporal location (postcolonial, settler colonial) and of geopolitical location (global South) that are most commonly used in the American academy today do not adequately reflect the stress," and shape of the region's twentieth century crises.[3]

What, then, is to be done? For Lomnitz, the most sensible option would seem to be a re-engagement with recent conceptual frameworks--dependency theory, for instance, which interrogates the limits of national and subnational political autonomies in imperial global contexts--arising from the region's own experience. Dependency theory, however, has its own acknowledged limits as a social theory. Namely, it has proven a tendency toward overly mechanistic, overly-abstract accounts. Abstract may serve fine for certain approaches, but surely

---

[3] Lomnitz, Claudio. "Time and dependency in Latin America today." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111.2 (2012): 347-357.

not for detailed ethnographic studies like the present project.[4] To navigate this conundrum, the

present project draws on the resources of new Latin American histories of the Cold War, the

Global 1960s, and Global Post-war Planning Studies, as well as drawing on (from closer to my

home discipline of anthropology) a materialist-turn[5] and the (related) rise of critical

infrastructure studies. Rather than adopting Lomnitz's call, then, to study the full variety of new

international dependencies in which Latin America is caught today, the dissertation's focus on

one leading historical/contemporary form of dependency (that embodied by state-led

infrastructure building) aims to embed questions of dependency in more concrete ethnographic

approaches.

Such a selection of regional and social theories, meanwhile, as the dissertation does

embrace, should allow the project to locate points of potential dialogue with leading U.S.-centric

theories for the study of what I call contemporary 'politics of invasion' (namely, settler colonial

studies and migration studies). The project's goal, methodologically, is to foreground these

points of dialogue, without collapsing Latin American sites into those Anglo-American-oriented

'theories of invasion' with which I am in dialogue. If all goes according to plan, the project will

model a manner of a *rapprochement* between social theories grounded in U.S.-centric politics of

invasion and Latin American neoliberal histories in which politics of invasion arise from the

folds of international dependency, colonial legacies, and an unprecedented global era of state-led

infrastructure building.

---

[4] Saad-Filho, Alfredo. "The rise and decline of Latin American structuralism and dependency theory." *The origins of development economics: how schools of economic thought have addressed development* (2005): 128-45; Gitlitz, John S., and Henry A. Landsberger. "The Inter-American Political Economy: How Dependable Is Dependency Theory?." *Latin America, the United States, and the Inter-American System*. Routledge, 2019. 45-70.

[5] Though this 'turn' can be dated back all the way to the 1980s, with anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's edited volume, *The Social Life of Things*, a consolidated new attention to materialities across the humanities and parts of the social sciences gained scholarly focus around 2010. Coole, Diana, and Samantha Frost. "Introducing the new materialisms." *New materialisms*. Duke University Press, 2010. 1-44.

In terms of the settler colonial studies conversation, for Patrick Wolfe and certain others in the field, "invasion is a structure."[6] That is, 'invading hordes' really do exist, but are the ethno-nationalists themselves, or more precisely, the 'settler' subjects and institutions that favor whiteness and assimilation to it. Thus, when settler polities maintain the structures of indigenous dispossession by locating 'invasion' in a distant past, presenting it as an "event" (i.e., as 'conquest'), what invasion really is gets misrepresented. The political geography in which this error confronts the challenges made against it remains the remarkably abstract space of 'the settler polity': un-raced, un-located, hardly concrete, and even less sensitive to the particularities of 'post-colony' or 'para-colony,' where distinctions of colonizer and colonized do not fit cleanly into social types, but become blurred[7]. This critique, as well as my counter-emphasis on the plasticity of invasion as a political practice shared across indigenous, settler, and indigenous settler identities, recalls and expands what the Australian social theorist Tim Rowse, in an early critique of Wolfe's work, calls "indigenous heterogeneity."[8] The focus of this dissertation is on the heterogeneity of invasive practices across indigenous/*campesino* and liberal infrastructure-building state models of politics alike.

About the study of migration in an age of de-globalization, for Wendy Brown, conversely, the contemporary "desire for walls" exuded by ethno-nationalisms is located in the errors of particular political subjects[9]. In fact, as Brown contends, construing immigration as "an

---

[6] Wolfe, Patrick. *Traces of history: Elementary structures of race*. Verso Books, 2016.

[7] For an account of how paracoloniality might relate to post-coloniality across global regions, see: Reyes, Alvaro, and Mara Kaufman. "Sovereignty, indigeneity, territory: Zapatista autonomy and the new practices of decolonization." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110, no. 2 (2011): 505-525.

[8] Rowse, Tim. "Indigenous heterogeneity." *Australian Historical Studies* 45.3 (2014): 297-310.

[9] Part of what I take issue within arguments like Brown's is submerged status of structures of feeling, or in a more materialist vein, what Catherine Fennell calls, "materialist sympathies." While Brown's argument is that ethnonationalist nativism is outmoded, it is presumably because she believes invasions no longer "really" exist, but are simply misrecognized mass migrations. As this project aims to show, however, if you go on misrecognizing migration for long enough, it might start to call itself invasion, and adopt more aggressive politics, complicating the

invasion, rather than a global production," precisely confuses spaces for subjects. Discourses of

'invading hordes,' she concludes, articulate "in spatial terms an outmoded sense of nation and

belonging" that in fact belongs to particular subjectivities.[10] While responding to the same basic

social contradictions of identity, place, and belonging, invasion's contradictory presences across

Latin America tend not to raise the same red flags for scholars of this region that they do for

Brown. The fact that Infonavit's own subprime expansion, for instance, constitutes an invasion

(by foreign capital and neoliberal statecraft), or that corporate construction firms imagine

themselves as 'invaders' of new market territories into which they expand only echoes the term's

historical heterogeneities. We need to understand that invasion and its cognates can have positive

connotations from elite/nativist and 'migrant' non-elite/settler perspectives alike. And though

these comments have focused just now on this lesson as one the dissertation aims to help U.S.-

centric social theory to learn, this blind spot also has transnational dimensions whose own

histories the dissertation hopes to help undo.

Indeed, given the complexity that invasion practices and discourses already shared in

Mexican (and Latin American-wide) land struggles of the Global 1960s and the heights of Latin

American Cold War mobilization in the 1970s, it is surprising that, with a few exceptions,

contemporary Latin American social sciences have paid less and less attention to land invasions

since the 1980s.[11] I am referring here not only to ethnographic, but historical studies. In fact, as

---

temporality of 'outmoded' subjectivities that Brown and others discuss. In a chronotope (as Claudio Lomnitz discusses contemporary Latin America to be), what is not partially outmoded? Lomnitz, Claudio. "Chronotopes of a Dystopic Nation: Cultures of Dependency and Border Crossings in Late Porfirian Mexico." *Globalizing American Studies*. University of Chicago Press, 2010. 209-239.

[10] Brown, Wendy. *Walled states, waning sovereignty*. Princeton University Press, 2010.

[11] Brazil offers one key exception within Latin America. There, Brazil's Pastoral Land Commission (*Comissão Pastoral da Terra*) assiduously tracks land invasions from municipal to national scales. In Mexico, no similar database has existed, at least in recent memory. Hidalgo, F. Daniel, et al. "Economic determinants of land invasions." *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 92.3 (2010): 505-523.

the Mexico Cold War historian Elizabeth Henson has recently pointed out, works on this period continue to turn their attentions too little beyond *guerrilla* violence, to "what was potentially revolutionary in the land invasions, the occupations [of government buildings], the confrontations on the patio of the statehouse."[12] This dissertation elaborates on Henson's critical point, sketching a theory of invasive politics during Mexico's neoliberal era--an era in which public housing infrastructure was to take an increasingly central place in social policy and the mediation of private/public forms of territorial authority. Understanding the Mexico-centric continuities and discontinuities of a politics of invasion, I hope, will suggest to social scientists further ways in which both to bridge and de-center interdisciplinary U.S.-centered popular and social theory conversations concerning invasive politics while (in this project's case) highlighting certain of settler colonial and migration studies current/historical theoretical entanglements with Latin American invasion politics in particular .

Even as the Latin American Cold War has been subject of late to some of the most creative and bold studies by historians of the region dealing with any era, the politics of invasion, Henson's work suggests, has found itself continually marginalized as too local, too civil, or perhaps (as this dissertation also proposes) at times as too damn ambiguous in its political meanings to help explain the famously Manichean realities of the Cold War. As a result, ethnographers like myself--largely missing the breadcrumbs never actually left by contemporary studies of early neoliberal era invasion politics, have largely turned a blind eye to the practice's re-emergence in new contexts--for instance, in rapidly expanding Mexican public housing worlds of recent decades.[13] Following Henson, a shift of analysis toward the mundane visibilities and

---

[12] Henson, Elizabeth. Agrarian Revolt in the Sierra of Chihuahua, 1959–1965. University of Arizona Press, 2019. 5.

[13] Equating invaders with "squatters" in Anglo-American parlance, as one recent attempt to respond to Henson's call in the Mexican context does (thereby overlooking what is a far more fundamentally ambiguous and highly politicized term and practice in neoliberal Latin American contexts), underlines even further how far we are from a

invisibilities, silences and vocalizations of 'invasive politics,' might direct a productive new set of attentions for historians of what's sometimes framed as the Latin American 'New Left,' 'Global 1960s,' and the Cold War in Latin America. Perhaps anthropology, in this case, can return the more usual inter-disciplinary favor and help direct historical studies further down an understudied path: the one where infrastructure and politics of invasion intersect at local, national and regional scales.

From Miguel's Story to Regional/Historical Background

Where Miguel lives, in east Tijuana, Provive was born in 2010, establishing Mexico's first start-up real estate company specifically targeting public housing recuperation and rehabilitation. Within Tijuana, the company would use a new national auction system, started by Infonavit in the wake of the subprime housing boom and bust cycle that in Mexico centered on public housing construction, to consolidate under its control blocks of properties repossessed by banks and Infonavit, which it then aimed to sell anew to potential residents armed with a housing credit from Infonavit.

---

serious response to Henson's call, particularly in English language scholarship. See: Lenti, Joseph U. "Invasores: Squatters, Informal Cities, and the Co-Optation of the Urban Poor in Latter Twentieth-Century Mexico." *Journal of Global South Studies* 37.1 (2020): 57-81.

These transnational historiographic trends in recent years have attempted to move beyond 'heroic' national literatures of worker/agrarian struggles produced in individual Latin American nations for domestic audiences, and toward more transnational perspectives. In doing so, however, they have also tended largely to move away from ethnic dimensions of these radical struggles, given that indigenous movements participating in radical politics during the early neoliberal era networked largely on regional or national scales; Marxist *guerrilla* organizations, meanwhile, have left far thicker transnational paper trails. A theory of invasion, by foregrounding a model of political practice employed by both groups of radical actors, may (putting my own anthropological concerns with invasion practices' post-Cold War continuation aside for a moment) offer some part of a solution for the conceptual polemics against which these new historiographic turns appear today to stumble. Cf. Dip, Nicolás. La nueva izquierda en la historia reciente de América Latina. Un diálogo entre Eric Zolov, Rafael Rojas, Elisa Servín, María Cristina Tortti y Aldo Marchesi. *Escripta*, 2020, vol. 2, no 4.

When I begin fieldwork there, as one of this dissertation's four key field sites in 2014 (three of the four are headquartered in northern Mexico, though three of the four also are national scale operations), Provive was struggling to expand beyond Tijuana. Yet, by the time my fieldwork ended in 2016, the company was operating in four northern Mexican cities (Tijuana, Mexicali, Hermosillo and Ciudad Juárez), allowing me to consider how a company dedicated to, as its CEO states, "removing invaders, replacing them with families"[14] and enjoying the financial rewards, navigates the shifting local realities and meanings of invasion across the single region where public housing construction *per capita* has been most concentrated across Mexico's neoliberal era.

Together with this upstart, middle-sized company, however, this dissertation's fieldwork also centers on the operations of a national-scale public housing construction firm, Ruba. Though operationally headquartered in Ciudad Juarez, and with its largest operations in northern Mexico, Ruba found itself during the time of my fieldwork in a moment of dramatic expansion, as it rose from a regional firm to one of Mexico's three largest residential constructors. With operations in twelve states across the republic, plus a corporate apartment rental business in the U.S., Ruba offered me a complementary corporate perspective on the politics of invasion in Mexican public housing worlds and how companies at a national scale of operations (as well as, with Provive, a more local scale) attempt to manage the practices and discourses in which such politics consists. As would happen to be the case, though, while my research with Ruba would include visits to its headquarters and construction sites in Ciudad Juarez and the state of Mexico, the company's largest ever public housing project, a massive experimental project called 'Natura' under construction for a planned forty thousand public housing units on one site (compared to average

---

[14] Navarrete, Fernando. "Invasores e Inseguridad Amenazan Vivienda Abandonada: Provive." *Centro Urbano -*, 9 Aug. 2018, centrourbano.com/2018/08/09/invasores-e-inseguridad-amenazan-vivienda-abandonada-provive/

developments today containing closer to four thousand) was rising during my field work just a few miles south of my research base in Tijuana.

The dissertation research's final two field sites, similarly, allowed me to move between two state-level organizational offices based in Tijuana and these organizations' national headquarters in Mexico City. In the case of the national worker housing institute, Infonavit, which by the time of my fieldwork had grown to the impressive scale of serving as Latin America's largest mortgage bank by volume, my direct interactions with staff proved more limited in Tijuana than in Mexico City, where at the institute's national headquarters academic investigators--especially international researchers--were both a more known quantity during the time of my fieldwork, and seen as having a more defined collaborative role. These geographies of valued expertise would influence the course of my fieldwork--leading me, for instance, to take a nearly two-month trip to central Mexico where my expert status would open different institutional doors than at times proved the case in provincial northern Mexican government offices. They would also, however, influence the course of my research questions' evolution--forcing me to reflect more deeply on the role of different forms of organizational expertise in shaping the local realities of invasive politics in and around public housing worlds.

While engaged in my most prolonged Mexico City visit during this dissertation research, I was able to hit two birds with one stone, spending time not only with Infonavit employees and experts at related state housing institutions, but also at the Mexico City offices of what today is Mexico's most prominent national debtor aid association, *El Barzón.* Unbeknownst to the Infonavit crowd, whose opinion of this latter group might have, I felt, prejudiced staff against me should they have known where I was headed many days after leaving the institute, *Barzón* staff at the office's national headquarters helped offer me complementary perspectives on the

organization's operations in different regional contexts--connecting me for interviews at *Barzón* events with prominent members of the organization's central Mexican state-level offices. In contrast to my research at *Infonavit*, the bulk of my fieldwork with *El Barzón* would take place at the local level, at the state-level satellite offices of *El Barzón Tijuana,* in the Marua neighborhood of the city located symbolically between the sprawling public housing developments of the city's *maquila*-scale in the east, and the older urban environment filled with taller buildings, including major bank branches and Infonavit's municipal offices, to the west.

This work with *El Barzón Tijuana's* nearly two thousand affiliates, forming the largest public housing debtor aid law office in the city, served as a hub for my fieldwork in many ways. There I would meet everyday residents of public housing worlds like Miguel (in fact a sometime member of the office himself, though we meet in Provive's backyard) and immediately find myself learning from their perspectives. Here was a social context where--unlike in residential social organizations organized by Infonavit, Ruba, or Provive, say--a sense of anti-capitalist solidarity could be more safely assumed. In addition to researching *El Barzón* in Tijuana*,* then, the legal aid office also allowed me to meet local Tijuana residents with perspectives on Ruba, Provive, and Infonavit that they would not likely have had the confidence to utter in a strange U.S. anthropologist's presence had we not met in that specific context. Given the dissertation's underlying thesis is essentially about complexity (i.e., that liberal politics and the politics of indigeneity, as well as public infrastructure-building states and neoliberal ones, are *not reducible to simple antagonisms*) a multi-sited study that could allow me to integrate diverse perspectives would prove key.

Equally essential, however, would be archival research, accomplished primarily in Mexico City, Ciudad Juárez, Tijuana, and back in Chicago, where these field work sites could be

historically contextualized. In the remainder of this section, I aim to offer an introductory historical-regional background that touches on the dissertation's historical approach to its periodization (1972-2020), which not coincidentally begins with the founding of Infonavit. The background begins with a sort of prehistory of neoliberal invasive politics in Mexico, by unpacking perhaps the first highly nationally and internationally prominent *campesino/*indigenous-led land invasion to occur in coordination across multiple states -- a show of extra-local strength--to occur in mid-century Mexico. These events are critical to the project background in multiple ways. First, in addition to serving as a direct model for increasingly common *campesino/*indigenous-led land invasions across the nation in coming decades, the organization at the heart of these 1958 land invasions in the states of Sonora, Baja California and Nayarit would itself give life to various splinter groups, frequently more radical than the original organization, in the years immediately following the events discussed here. These organizations, in turn, would give rise to *El Barzón* and the world of housing invasion that has largely displaced land invasions as the legal borderlands most shaping much contemporary Mexican (especially periurban) life on a local scale.

Second, the prominence of northern Mexican states in this 1958 history--the same region where, fifty years later, growing public housing worlds would be the most concentrated per capita of any part of the nation--helps set the stage with rich social detail for questions of what continuity between invasive politics in the past and present might exist between one generation, one era and set of local realities, and another. In response to this question, but more to round out the historical background, I will shift from 1958 to 1998 at the end of this section, in order to begin to track--through a television ad from that year for the Mexican government's National Population Council-- how Infonavit's establishment in the 1970s, alongside a broader

realignment of social policies and welfare state visions, contributed to Infonavit's and public housing's later ability/tendency to take on a level of saturating prominence in everyday Mexican life that was unthinkable during the 1970s, when land invasion struggles--spreading across rural and urban contexts, seemed likely to overshadow public housing's reach well into the future.

Even in Spanish language scholarship, a similar trend over recent decades toward the historical oversimplification of Cold War invasion politics has required scholars with an exceptional grasp of, and often exceptional personal attachments to, that era to labor anew against the grain of historical forgetting. In a remarkable 2011 essay in the Sonoran (northwest Mexican) newspaper *Crónica*, for instance, the sociologist Ana María López Rodríguez—also the daughter of a by-then deceased land struggle legend, Maximiliano '*El Machi*' Lopez—would discuss the complexities of land invasions during the 1950s and 1960s with a micro-sociological level of detail rarely found in Mexican social science journals since the 1980s.

Drawing on insider and scholarly perspectives alike, Lopez would highlight several details unavailable to even the most well-researched histories of the union (the national-scale UGOCM, or General Union of Mexican Workers and *Campesinos*), to which her father contributed as a state-level leader. During the late 1920s, immediately after Mexico's bloody quasi-communist revolution-cum-civil war, *El Machi* returned to the area of Sonora where he had grown up as one of the area's few non-indigenous *campesinos*.[15] On *El Machi*'s return to his home area to help the people there unionize as a fellow worker (though armed with some legal training), he and several other union organizers would be "received in a ceremony of the tribe,

---

[15] "His social sentiment came from the liberal ideology of his proletarian family," López Rodríguez affirms. But that sentiment also evolved, as she notes, during the Mexican Revolution—coming to include anarchist sympathies with the Flores Magon faction, which aimed to invade Sonora and help the Yaqui during this period to "drive out the whites." His family, according to his daughter, had always been friendly with the Yaquis, even though during *El Machi*'s childhood the state government and army waged a war of extermination and deportation against the group.

and considered to be adopted members of the same."[16]

Years later, as the UGOCM in 1958 organized coordinated land invasions in Sonora, Sinaloa, Baja California, and Nayarit, the specific forms these invasions were to take, subject to debate among the union's respective state-level leaders, would appear influenced by the varied linkages, gaps, and overlaps between indigenous and liberal political models, and the way different members or areas of the organization embodied these linkages, distances, etc. Yet just as the union's novel aggregate of political models complicated the union's identity (a topic I return to momentarily), it also enacted a blurring of liberal politics and political practices proper to specific indigenous groups that would prove essential to the model that the 1958 invasions left behind for future groups.[17]

Historian Julio Miguel describes the scene unfolding across traditional Yaqui territories in Sinaloa at this time (between *El Machi* and his close ally Jacinto Lopez, on the one hand, and UGOCM members allied more closely with Mexican communist parties of the period on the other) as follows:

> The opinions were divided. People close to the Union and to Jacinto Lopez supported the taking of the lands, while people close to the Popular Party, i.e., Lazaro Rubio Felix, opposed [invasions], asking for patience since the government had promised to effect….[land redistributions in the area]. After long debates, the majority position was to

---

[16] López Rodríguez, Ana María. "'Machi' Lopez: Lucha Por Los Desposeídos." *Crónica*, 31 Mar. 2011. *Http://revistacronica10.Blogspot.com*, revistacronica10.blogspot.com/2011/03/edicion-106.html.

[17] As Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano would delineate the matter at the time, in his 1967 essay *Contemporary Latin American Campesino Movements*, an indigenous politics led by land invasion and oriented toward autonomous control of lands was crucially distinct from union-based struggles for economic inclusion, in that one was more capable of challenging capitalism than the other. Land invasions, like the Third World decolonial moment alongside which they were conjuncturally located, were self-consciously world historical performances of the people anthropologist of Mesoamerica Eric Wolf would critically theorize as those Europe had declared, "without histories." As Quijano would point out, land invasion movements were both based primarily around indigenous communities and, without contradiction, were cosmopolitan movements that negotiated with nation-states, considered global political economy, and recast histories of colonial dispossession that pervaded the present and crossed borders.

seize the lands pacifically. [...] The order was not to resist the police, who would inevitably come to evict them, but to return to the invaded lands as many times as possible. This was a symbolic movement aimed to move public opinion [...].

Yet more violent invasions would also follow. While the army fought to dislodge the invaders, all the aspects of recent issues seemed to come together in a cacophonous clash of forces in the Sonoran fields. [...After the winter, renewing their invasion] finally, in a scene reminiscent of the nineteenth century wars pitting Indians against Porfirian latifundistas, the Mayos began on October 31 to beat their drums continuously, as a warning that land invasions would intensify if no agrarian action took place before November 10. [...] On November 10, the ultimatum expired and the FCI [a new aggregation of *campesino* groups including initially the UGOCM] invaded six plots [...]. Meanwhile partisans of the Pact of Ocampo [an agreement to form new state-mediated indigenous organizations] merely carried out symbolic invasions, marching to the margin of the great estate and camping in front of it. On November 13, six more estates fell to the FCI.[18]

As Miguel's classic account highlights here, not only were opinions divided: political models and tactics were divided, too. For some groups, invasion tactics were strictly pacific, and organizational politics borrowed from union struggles with which they overlapped--meaning, often, pressure the state informally, but do not violate property laws. For others, invasion tactics were shifting in their forms and meanings right along with (and at times against) the shifting forms and meanings attributed to the state and its power. Just as the midcentury Latin American state stretched between models, while attempting to assert its coherence--often through simultaneous domestic durability and internationalist values indexed by durable infrastructure-building at that time--so too did *campesino/*indigenous Mexican groups engaged in land struggle stretch between land invasion tactics and more traditionally state-sanctioned Agrarian Reform-era legalistic models of land petitioning.

Returning to that "state side" of the equation, state police and federal troops made use of

---

[18] De Grammont, Hubert C., and Julio Moguel. "La Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México." *Historia de la cuestión agraria mexicana: Política estatal y conflictos agrarios, 1950-1970* 8 (1988): 222.

newly constructed highway infrastructures and radio communication systems in 1958 to mobilize

police forces rapidly (limiting invasions when they could not prevent them), allowing swiftness

to substitute for some fraction of the state violence that mass evictions tended to involve. They

mobilized increasingly around anti-communist fantasies, as well, that offered (borrowing from

U.S. Cold War politics and the partially autochthonous political brand of Mexican

conservativism) a particularly Manichean model of the state and its enemies. This model (at

times more confined to police and army institutions, while at other times voiced by one or more

political party leaders during the twentieth century) tended to identify all land invaders with

revolutionary anti-state ideologies--most prominently those of the Cuban Revolution, though

also of other recent leftist *guerrilla* uprisings (domestic and foreign).

Flipping back again to the perspective of land struggle participants, however, it's equally

notable how material infrastructures were salient, to *El Machi* and the UGOCM, mixing with

more abstract elements of political models --from union law expertise to the explicitly ethnicity-

crossing anarchism of the early twentieth century revolutionary Flores Magon brothers, and to

the ethnopolitical models of Yaqui kinship and Mayo war-making. Land struggle participants on

the ground also drew on new infrastructural realities--those same telephones, mass-media

attention to such overtly political events, and highways that the state security forces leveraged,

albeit in alignment with quite different ends. Given how new industrial infrastructures allowed

for things like UGOCM's timely deliberation over and coordination of invasions and related

tactics across sites separated by hundreds of kilometers and by highly varied *local* governmental

sympathies toward the invasion practices--tactics that would prove crucial even a half century

later at *El Barzón Tijuana* (as I discuss in chapter two)--it's fair to assert, as this dissertation

does, that Latin American land invasion tactics of the neoliberal era co-emerged with an era of

durable infrastructure building across the region.

Indeed, if the technological superiority of steel and horses was fundamental to the possibilities for a European colonial age beginning in the sixteenth century, for Latin American social movements of the twentieth century, *campesino*/indigenous groups' relatively equitable (in their power as compared to other social actors) claims to possess public infrastructures was equally fundamental for the emerging possibilities and limits of neoliberal era governance in the region. To invasion groups, infrastructure represented key technological means and ends alike. In short, globally diverse politics of invasion and equally globally diverse collective social significances for infrastructural materialities have long been historically shaped by one another.

The social theory tools with which this co-production is interrogated today, however, remain limited by subdisciplinary approaches (again, I highlight settler colonial theory and migration studies), leaving key questions unasked. How precisely, for instance, are invasion tactics in post-subprime public housing worlds invested with historical continuities from land invasions of the recent past? What are the genealogical relations between the post-subprime public housing world and Mexico's long history of agrarian reform? To what extent do the tropes, conflicts, and players that emerge replay earlier dramas? To what extent do they reflect distinct neoliberal geopolitics and emergent geo-histories of the early twenty-first century?[19]

Consider, in Figure 2, the 1995 advertisement from Mexico's 1970s origin National Population Council (Conapo), in which a young couple talks to the viewer about taking their time before having children to be more established and have an extra room before a child's arrival. The conversation fades into a shot of the couple and a neighbor or relative building a

---

[19] I borrow this term from Fernando Coronil, who uses it to raise questions about the historical investments of different geopolitical concepts in/against imperialism. Cf. Coronil, Fernando. "Beyond occidentalism: toward nonimperial geohistorical categories." *Cultural anthropology* 11.1 (1996): 51-87.

brick wall. The notion of timing the growth of one's family in relation to the growth of one's

house here fits together two prongs of social policy as a single model of growth. Such tethering

of economic and demographic growth is part of a longer story in neoliberal-era Mexico.[20]

Figure 3. "Planning: It's a question of Caring." An advertisement from Mexico's
National Population Council (Conapo), 1995.[21]

The notion of harmony between housing construction and family planning had already,

twenty years prior, fed seamlessly into the early 'big ideas' era of Presidents Luis Echeveria and

Jose Portillo regarding the social benefits of economic development. Echeverria founded

Infonavit in 1972 as a radical departure from the scattered federal housing programs of the past.

Portillo declared sweeping 'regional and urban planning' policies to redirect foreign investment

and domestic populations toward a more 'balanced' distribution across the nation. At the height

of a global infrastructure-building boom, moreover, during which time state building projects

offered a material medium across which critical foreign credit lines between the 'First World'

and 'Third World' tended to pass, social policy coherence served as site of genuine coherence

---

[20] As Rosemblatt's work on the history of the Mexican *indigenista* state finds, this was precisely where this model seemed to lose its footing as a mediator between liberalism's faith in a transparent translatability between scientific expertise and state policy. Rosemblatt, 176.

[21] "Comerciales Mexicanos: CONAPO 1995-1996 III." *YouTube*, Conapo (Consejo Nacional De Población), 29 Aug. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfG7uc8fbwc.

between foreign and domestic policy for some nations, including Mexico. That said, this relative

coherence was nevertheless always in fact more partial, ephemeral, and filled with silenced

social critiques than its official governance idioms would acknowledge. Coherence was in the

eyes of state policy-makers, and expressed itself not only in utopian visions of the future, but at

times also through undercurrents of vigilance, fear, and frustration toward the present.

"The explosive, spontaneous and disorderly growth, due to an unavoidable and natural

migration to the cities," President Portillo would declare in one of his early national addresses in

1977, "has accentuated regional economic and social disparities."[22] In response, President

Portillo promised "to reverse the process of population concentration in the highlands [of central

Mexico, i.e. Mexico City] and in the large congested cities, to lower it [i.e. population] to the

coast in industrial ports and distribute them, further, to the areas of greater potential of our

territory."[23] Was such a muscular state social policy—fundamentally and unilaterally

transforming how population, economy, and land were related, and designed to enact what the

president called "the most important reversal of demographic and economic behavior in our

history"—even possible?[24] The answer was and is, in some ways, ambiguous.[25] Yet that

---

[22] López Portillo y Pacheco, José. "Primer Informe De Gobierno Del Presidente Constitucional De Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos José López Portillo y Pacheco 1° De Septiembre De 1977." Annual Mexican Presidential Briefings. First Annual Presidential Briefing by José López Portillo y Pacheco, 1 Sept. 1977, Mexico City, *Website of the Mexican Congress (Cámara De Diputados Del Congreso De Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos)*, www.diputados.gob.mx/sedia/sia/re/RE-ISS-09-06-15.pdf.

[23] As chapter three discusses, Lopez Portillo's predecessor, Luis Echeverria, had reignited Agrarian Reform institutions to a degree, as part of a populist social politics.

[24] In such a narrative, the growing U.S tendency toward outsourcing manufacture to Mexican border cities was merely complimentary of what were development plans--not (as early critics of the *maquila* factories accused) sub-development plans, locking the nation into a dependent position in emerging global supply chains. Further underlining the challenge of, as the president put it, "reversing" territory's role in Mexican national political life--from a sort of natural medium of development to be cared for and defended, to an intentionally planned technology whose clogs and malfunctions had to be addressed with an engineer or architect's eye.

[25] Even if the nation was in that period becoming framed as *overpopulated*--as in the pages of a 1974 federally commissioned publication *La Explosion Humana,* whose editors included the eminent economist and rector of the politically influential *Colegio de Mexico,* Victor Urquidi--and the rhythm of housing/national infrastructure

ambiguous answer is, I claim, not, as Bob Dylan had it, 'blowing in the wind'. Rather, it is cemented to the ground. Public housing was framed from the first by the Portillo government as a key tool for enacting this 'historic reversal' of Mexico's disorderly development toward a more coherent national destiny. Yet as this vision began to fade during the 1980s and 1990s, as a rapidly inflating national debt (the revenge of those infrastructure loans of the 1970s!) dialed back the grandeur of 1970s governance vision, something remarkable also happened. Public housing, formerly a key plank of *politica social* (social/welfare policy), would become even more prominent—filling in at least temporarily, as it were, for the shortcomings of policy coherence in other areas.

The reasons for this are multiple, and this dissertation takes pains to unpack them across the project's three central chapters. Yet the core reason is, in itself, uncomplicated. Like land redistribution before it, and for which it served as an alternate tool of social control, housing provision programs began in the 1970s and served, as Joseph Lenti has recently put it, "to drive a wedge between" landless *campesinos*/indigenous Mexicans and land invasion organizations like the UGOCM.[26] Here was an open secret: a more muscular/coherentist Mexican social policy at the start of the neoliberal era in fact served not only to negotiate across liberal-indigenous political divides, but to fragment liberal-indigenous solidarities built through land invasion-centered struggles of the recent past. Here was a constitutive blind spot of Mexican public housing, where what was speakable and unspeakable converged.

Given the intense limits of political discourse in this contested space, it would seem

---

construction was frequently critiqued/lamented by liberals and their (socialist, *campesino,* or indigenous) critics alike *deficient* (*rezago,* or backlog, remains the common term in Spanish speaking nations) for the needs of local populations, human reproduction and standard cultural models of the home remained for many Mexicans (as for many humans globally) prototypes of internal and external harmony.

[26] Lenti, Joseph U. "Invasores: Squatters, Informal Cities, and the Co-Optation of the Urban Poor in Latter Twentieth-Century Mexico." *Journal of Global South Studies* 37.1 (2020): 57-81.

entirely reasonable that housing's extra-discursive reality—its enduring, and in fact rapidly spreading, concrete presence across periurban Mexico as the neoliberal era stretched— would come to serve as a sort of extra-discursive archive indexing the historical limits (and promises) of political speech and action. In this respect, this project identifies an elective affinity between the politics of invasion across late liberal Latin American worlds and the materialities composing a key site of that world-making project—public housing.[27] By tracking historically in these ways how academic knowledge and state knowledge models concerning migration, demography, urbanization, economic development, and indigenous/*campesino* acculturation all vied with the nature of land invasions during the 1970s, then progressively came to reframe these practices as historical remainders, disappearing in the face of national economic development, the dissertation claims to unsettle the marginality of invasion as a coherent theme of study in Latin American studies. Prior to this project's intervention in region-specific debates and their relation to more trans-regional academic debates, however, some reframing is in order.

Regional or Global?: Urban Studies and Social Theories of Infrastructure and Invasion

Both land and housing, as iconically enduring physical realities, raise the question of what associations with *durability* persist--the durability of public housing, of state projects, of residents' occupancy in such housing, and of historical memories associated with land struggles occurring just prior to public housing's spread across former agricultural lands-- even amid contradictions between these multiple meanings today. To do so, the project's three central

---

[27] This affinity is not unlike that examined by E.P. Thompson's classic moral economy essay, in which he discusses how the eighteenth century rise of a British cash economy occurred alongside the growing prominence of a 'bread nexus' in that same economy (i.e., the price of bread as a point of equilibrium mediating urban-rural political relations, and the use of cash in that mediation). Just as financial debt markets displace 'cash,' in the twenty-first century contexts I consider here, so houses displace foodstuff as finance capital's crucial moral-material counterpart.

chapters (discussed in detail later) approach from three distinct perspectives the question of how the infrastructure-building state and social movements centered around a politics of invasion have converged and mutually shaped one another since the early neoliberal era.[28] Foregrounding in different ways and to different degrees the role of expert knowledges, institutional histories, the materialities of territorial models, and structures of feeling (or affective infrastructures, if you prefer) on this space of convergence, the project offers an intervention into social theory at large, and Latin American urban/critical infrastructure studies debates in particular, where material culture, infrastructure-building, and social movement politics come together.[29]

Today, too much anthropological writing on infrastructure verges on, or openly embraces, a monotheistic global framing of the topic. Durable infrastructure's global extension, in a sense, is what makes it appealing as a topic and object for social theory. It's as if infrastructure's role as, according to David Harvey, a "spatial fix" for what ails capitalism in certain moments, has become the "infrastructure fix," for forms of global academic discussion that otherwise would seem today to lack grounding in physical reality.[30] A certain once fine

---

[28] I draw inspiration for this key term of the project, which indexes the centrality of infrastructure-building to Mexican statecraft in the mid-twentieth century, from the work on nineteenth century British politics by Joanna Guldi: Guldi, Joanna. *Roads to power: Britain invents the infrastructure state*. Vol. 19. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012. For a recent study of infrastructure and state formation in Latin America, see: Egan, Nancy Elizabeth. *Infrastructure, State Formation, and Social Change in Bolivia at the Start of the Twentieth Century*. eScholarship, University of California, 2019.

[29] Throughout much of the neoliberal era, these concerns were framed less in terms of critical infrastructure studies than in terms of "the neoliberal city," a term this dissertation avoids (limiting neoliberalism to a periodizing category associated with the rise of finance capital and the end of the Cold War, globally). Scholars of the neoliberal city have tended to focus on placemaking as a social process in which expert knowledges, including corporate ones, were still largely uncritically incorporated seen as somewhat transparent. Thus, we have ethnographic studies of the neoliberal Latin American mall, but not of the mall's holding company; of urban debtfare from the perspectives of the poor, but not from that of the bank officers; and of urban insecurity and violence, but not from the perspective of the private security company. Dávila, Arlene. *El mall: The spatial and class politics of shopping malls in Latin America*. Univ of California Press, 2016. ; Han, Clara. *Life in debt: Times of care and violence in neoliberal Chile*. Univ of California Press, 2012; Zeiderman, Austin. Endangered City: The Politics of Security and Risk in Bogotá. United Kingdom: Duke University Press, 2016.

[30] Harvey, David. The Urbanization of Capital. United Kingdom: Blackwell, 1985.

balance of social theory may need a reset here.

What we need, this dissertation proposes, are accounts better capable of reckoning more deeply with a meta-object like infrastructure's divergent global realities. As Kenny Cupers has noted, such a universalizing concept as 'neoliberalism' "does little " for instance, "to explain why public housing became almost universally contested in North America and Western Europe, but continues to flourish in East and Southeast Asian cities," [31] and, if not flourish, to expand and endure in Latin American ones as well. Similarly, and with overlapping consequences, the use of infrastructure as a universalizing horizon in social theory has of late led all too often to the reification of finance capitalism's own terms. Consider conclusions like that of Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox, to the effect that "in development settings infrastructures are aspirational and carry great promise; yet they also carry great threats of unwelcome change, destabilization, and increased vulnerability." After all, where isn't today a "development setting" or a "finance setting," at least potentially?[32] Yes, infrastructure may be a saturating global presence, but that doesn't mean that its affective or techno-political entanglements with people embody any single set of global norms.

By raising the question of how the "solidity" of public infrastructure interacts with this polysemy of political models in late liberalism through heterogeneous practices of 'invasion,' we can approach infrastructure, the dissertation claims, in new ways. Our poles of analysis can shift, to more open-ended models of infrastructure as a global force not fully controlled by any

---

[31] Cupers, Kenny. "Human territoriality and the downfall of public housing." *Public Culture* 29.1 (81) (2017): 165-190.

[32] While Harvey and Knox admit that the homogeneity of building materials is a scientific fiction, and propose (from their observation of Peruvian road-building engineers) a count-narrative of engineers' more "limited control," over a project's final social reality, the infrastructure in question's overall coherence as a social value remains couched in their project within a generic epistemology of danger and hope that certainly remains compatible with today's self-described possibilities and limits of finance capital. C.f. Knox, Hannah., Harvey, Penny. Roads: An Anthropology of Infrastructure and Expertise. Cornell University Press, 2015.

sovereignty or expertise--because embodying and reinforcing the runaway reality of a contemporary capitalism that is similarly uncontrolled at global scales.[33] What deserves more attention today, perhaps, than neoliberalism's enduring social models themselves, are the divergent global perceptual conditions in which a sense of infrastructural unfinishedness, or of infrastructure alternatively as unjustly overburdened by migrant 'invaders,' comes to form as a collective structure of feeling in one place, rather than another.[34] If Cupers call for new explanations as to why infrastructures like public housing systems have followed incompatible regional trajectories during the neoliberal era, I ask here the more subjective/affective version of that same question. How has the popular promise of infrastructure building as a tool of national development and political convergence held together during the neoliberal era in some parts of the world--despite ambivalent outcomes, and doubts about the activity's economic future soundness--while in others, like parts of contemporary Latin American and the former Soviet world,[35] infrastructure-building has come to index substantially distinct affective and political registers? If popular folk-explanations like 'corruption,' or overly expansive ones like 'the end of the Cold War,' will not do, we ought to look for accounts that better serve us.[36]

---

[33] As Nicholas Hildyard observes, post-subprime crisis, much of the growth of infrastructure-focused public-private partnerships as a vehicle for international investment "has been captured by middle-income countries (MICs) and in two regions, Latin America and the Caribbean and East Asia and Pacific." Hildyard, Nicholas. "Public-Private Partnerships, Financial Extraction and the Growing Wealth Gap: Exploring the connections." *Sturminster Newton: Cornerhouse* (2014). This uptick in investment, however, appears temporary and has largely not been matched by growth in public investment.

[34] I borrow the term 'structure of feeling,' of course, from cultural historian Raymond Williams. Longhurst, B. "Raymond Williams and local cultures." *Environment and Planning A* 23.2 (1991): 229-238.

[35] Fehérváry, Krisztina. *Politics in color and concrete: socialist materialities and the middle class in Hungary*. Indiana University Press, 2013; Orlova, Vasilina. "Malfunctioning Affective Infrastructures: How the "Broken" Road Becomes a Site of Belonging in Postindustrial Eastern Siberia." *Sibirica* 20.1 (2021): 28-57.

[36] Indeed, Ashley Carse and David Kneas have recently made an overlapping call for greater attention to unfinished architecture, although their intervention remains ultimately within existing social theory debates about the materiality of capitalism's ruins. Whereas ruins reflect a liberal epistemology of landscape-based power, as Gaston Gordillo has memorably contended, however, the forms of unfinishedness adhering to invasive politics in Mexican public housing worlds are (as chapter three explores) autochthonous to Latin American construction worker cultures

In responding to this question, the dissertation's intervention into debates among social science scholars of *contemporary* infrastructure, materiality, and public/private politics, but also into debates among historians of twentieth century state-expert social planning knowledges, the Latin American Cold War, and social movement politics, aims to foreground questions of historical as well as spatial scale.[37] Moving between the scales means foregrounding, at times, public infrastructure as a medium for a politics of invasion (chapter one), and at other times locating that infrastructure as emerging historically in a specific time and place together with that politics (chapter two), or reckoning with their coming together in hybrid models (chapter three's *obra negra*) to index that complicated history itself. Infrastructure has served, especially in the neoliberal era, as an ideal bridge between A) growing materialist empiricism in social sciences (often evident in data gathering practices) and B) the privileged role of large scale infrastructure

and, in Mexico's neoliberal-era twilight of indigenista governance models, exemplary of ambiguously indexical indigenous/ethnic claims to space and territorial possession.

   Specifying such local models of infrastructural unfinishedness and drawing them to the theoretical center of this project's interventions distinguishes this dissertation from geo-historically unspecific concepts of unfinishedness (with not only ruins but also more ostensibly technical concepts like "splintering infrastructure," at times, falling into this unspecified use case). Cf. Carse, Ashley, and David Kneas. "Unbuilt and unfinished: The temporalities of infrastructure." *Environment and Society* 10.1 (2019): 9-28; Coutard, Olivier. "Placing splintering urbanism: Introduction." *Geoforum* 39.6 (2008): 1815-1820.

[37] In showing key contexts in which 'internal migrations' were emerged and consolidating as a key cross-disciplinary site for making a social science of 'The Americas,' in a time that has also been highlighted as "critical for the consolidation of Latin American social science" in recent work by Fernanda Beigel, Diego Pereyra and Juan Jesús Morales among others, my aim is far from claiming that the ways in which scholars of 'internal migrations' conceptually limited, erased, and indeed, made 'gaps' out of 'the rural,' (particularly in relation to new depictions of Latin American 'national political systems') somehow caused or singularly 'secured' the limited social visibilities of agrarian land struggles in Mexico in particular, and in the region more broadly, during the 'long cultural 1960s.' C.f. Beigel, Fernanda. "La Flacso chilena y la regionalización de las ciencias sociales en América Latina (1957-1973)." *Revista mexicana de sociología* 71.2 (2009): 319-349; Pereyra, Diego, et al. "Tradiciones, actores e instituciones en el desarrollo de las ciencias sociales en Argentina, Chile, México y América Central. Una mirada histórica y regional." *Serie Cuadernos de Ciencias Sociales, San José de Costa Rica, FLACSO* (2010); Morales Martín, Juan Jesús. "Dominación filantrópica y gobernabilidad democrática: el caso de la Fundación Ford y CIEPLAN en Chile (1976-1990)." *Historia (Santiago)* 51.1 (2018): 141-163.

building in mediating credit relations during this era between much of the First and Third

Worlds, public housing has served multiple epistemic and institutional masters. As a result, the

project's chapters aim to reflect this complexity, while also offering a critical perspective

regarding how these varied claims have harmonized/conflicted. Public housing could serve as a

'natural' tool of counter-Agrarian Reform, on one hand, yet equally naturally serve as a

muscularly welfare-statist project, on the other. When national elites aimed to modify--but not

overturn--a national system under increasing pressure from disobedient *campesinos/*indigenous

groups, public housing became the path of least policy resistance--perceptually legible as

neoliberal and anti-neoliberal in its tendencies depending on one's vantage.

This is a critical point, so deserving of restating in a more economic tenor as well.

Economic relations between the First and Third Worlds were, due to reasons that draw into

consideration both political struggles and the shifting global structure of capital during the late

industrial and into the post-industrial periods, overdetermined in certain ways toward

infrastructure building. In economic-centered social policy expertise, knowledge forms came to

resemble electrical diagrams or internal combustion motors, even as--in economics proper--the

difference between financial and durable concrete infrastructures increasingly blurred. Thus U.S.

economist David Felix, for instance, who counseled tight monetary policy and austerity to

combat Latin American inflation during the 1960s, explained his policy perspective through the

figure of highway driving:

> It is possible that by taking this dangerous, long, and tortuous detour, the turnpike to
> rapid economic growth can be reached. I doubt that Latin Americans, who are
> notoriously wild drivers, are capable of managing the difficult detour. [...] If one prefers a
> less distant payoff [...] then one had better choose an easier, if perhaps ultimately slower,
> road to travel. But even on this road it is possible to break down from the weight of
> excess baggage, or to tip over from a badly unbalanced load.[38]

---

[38] Felix, David. "Monetarists. Structuralists and Import-Substituting Industrialization:" in W. Baer and I.

With reference to a region literally in the middle of an epochal highway building revolution, the emphasis on Latin American finance ministers as 'poor drivers' rather than as co-engineers of the 'road to development,' is certainly telling. The invocations of prototypical engineering feats of the Keynesian era could cut both ways, however. Brazilian economist Celso Furtado would retort to North Atlantic monetarists of his day, chiming in on Latin America's inflation troubles, with his own infrastructural model. "When the increase in monetary income is *dammed up* in the internal sector," Fertado considered, pressure exerted on the price of goods, food and services eventually passes into disequilibrium, with "one group against the action of the others" and domestic strife, regardless of what banks say.[39]

What sounded, in the mid-twentieth century, like infrastructural metaphors used poetically by economists, sounds in retrospect a bit different today. With the global economy's overall preference for certain ratios of physical to financial capital tending over the past forty years of the neoliberal era toward the greater weighting of financial capital, arguments like Fertado's and Felix's reflected a worldview in which infrastructure building was economic development incarnate--not only metaphor, but medium. Today, by contrast, in a world where factors like the limits of bureaucratic-technical control over infrastructure, the intentional privatization of infrastructure, and the rise of AI and immaterial infrastructures have become increasingly central to capitalism as a whole, political and historical trajectories of public infrastructure consolidated during the twentieth century are becoming increasingly unsettled.

Kerstenetzky (eds.), Inflation and Growth in Latin America (Homewood, Illinois: Irwin, 1964), 384.

[39] Furtado, Celsio. 1954. A economia brasileira. Rio: A Noite. 254-255. Cited in, Boianovsky, Mauro. "Celso Furtado and the structuralist-monetarist debate on economic stabilization in Latin America." *history of political economy* 44.2 (2012): 277-330.

Considering these "overweight" materialities that belong to invasive politics in certain parts of the world, where global-infrastructure building was/remains more central to access to international financial markets for the state/elites than in others, should not rest with Latin American studies as an end in itself, respectable as this end may be. Rather, we should theorize the materialities of invasive politics as they emerge continuously and discontinuously, in politicized or depoliticized forms, across places and times. In the case of Mexican public housing, these materialities concern investments of historical memory and present-day potentialities--specifically with respect to potential re-orderings of infrastructure-building/infrastructural governance and a politics of invasion. If successful, this dissertation attempts to fill in one blank spot on this geohistorical map, in the process affirming invasive politics as a more complexly enunciated geopolitical reality for social theory.

In addition to the project's work of constellating a Mexican invasive politics' historical continuities and local-to-regional specificities through public housing materialities, the project also steps back from those materialities to consider institutional knowledge production of the infrastructure-building and its territorial, demographic, and political effects. In constructing a *political social* (social policy) of the infrastructure-building state--Mexican state, corporate and academic experts attempted to manage state-building and economic development, but also to use infrastructure for more specific key political ends (like repressing land invasions, socialist politics, and *guerilla* movements). At its heights, this nebula of state-centered social policy expertise brought together in converging ways: a) a racial-ethnic governance model whose traces contemporary public housing continues to embody (though no longer in governance discourses); b) a family planning/demographic governance whose spectacular 1970s emergence would have equally long-lasting effects; and c) key forms of "development expertise" whose global

circulation mediated access to global capital markets, at a time such connections were the object of growing international competition.

Building on the discussions of family planning and infrastructure's relation to global capitalism in earlier sections of the introduction, respectively, I turn here to bring into greater focus the basic context of Mexican neoliberal-era transformations in Mexican racial-ethnic governance that, particularly as they emerge at the intersection of public housing and land struggles' convergent histories. First, *indigenista* governance and multicultural governance models have both been explicitly embedded in Mexican social policy thought within economic governance models--combining anti-poverty thinking with theories of ethno-cultural evolution. In the case of *indigenismo*, that theory was one of economically necessary assimilation into another culture. As the anthropologist Manuel Gamio, arguably the father of Mexican *indigenista* governance, wrote, to work "in favor of the advancement of the total population as well as the constitution of an integral nationality, it is urgent not only to seek the economic improvement of the groups that we are discussing, but also to teach them to replace the defective cultural elements that today continue to make their existence so poor and difficult."[40] Replacing hoes with tractors, replacing sandals with work boots, or replacing corn with wheat consumption, served for Gamio, and future administrators of a Mexican *indigenista* state, as material indexes of economic development equally or more powerful to an *indigenista* governance imagination than spectacular development projects like skyscrapers or international highways[41]. Given the Mexican *indigenista* and infrastructure-building state's overlapping investments in making material culture conspicuously model governance projects, not to mention its growing appetite

---

[40] Gamio, Manuel. Forjando Patria, Ed. Porrua, 2a. Edición, Mexico, 1960, p. 94

[41] Rosemblatt, Karin Alejandra. The Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States, 1910–1950. University of North Carolina Press, 2018.

(see section two of this introduction) for harmony--or at least the appearance thereof--between social and economic policies in early neoliberal Mexico, it should be little surprise that Mexico's leading sociologist of the era, González Casanova, could articulate these overlapping state projects as virtually the same.

As an example of this idiom, consider a passage from the sociologist González Casanova's widely discussed and translated *Democracy in Mexico* (1965), which served as a key text of the period for affirming Mexico's status in the eyes of U.S. foreign policy as a fellow democracy (in a region at the time more typically characterized in U.S. eyes by "stable dictatorships"). In it, the author could still very explicitly use material conditions in cities as an index of racial development toward a *mestizo* horizon (in which indigenous people would become "culturally *mestizo*," by substituting rural for urban lifeways, and often Spanish for an indigenous language). This biologistic horizon of racial acculturation is mapped, moreover, onto a south-to-north and rural-to-urban migration trajectory:

> The indigenous who live in valleys have had greater opportunity to mix with white and mestizo populations, not only from a biological perspective, but also from the cultural perspective. The more quickly that road projects and trains, schools, and newspapers, arrive in a given [indigenous territory], the quicker the transformation of the *indio* into the *mestizo*, and the greater their incorporation into a definitive national Mexican culture.[42]

The notion that indigenous cultures could be transformed into primary materials for a more durable national "*mestizo*" culture was neither entirely new (historians date the ideological mix's origins to the Porfiriato, when the public infrastructure *par excellence* was the railroad) nor fully developed until the heights of the Mexican infrastructure-building state during the mid-twentieth century--when older national infrastructures (railroads, dams, school, hospitals) and

---

[42] González Casanova, Pablo. La democracia en México. México: Ediciones ERA, 1965.

newer ones (highway systems, electrification and sewage systems, public housing) overlapped

with newfound, expanded domestic oil resources. The expected value of what oil wealth, or

infrastructure-building investment for that matter, could promise for a "middle income" nation

like Mexico, however, was beginning to shift.[43]

As became clear during my fieldwork in 2015-17, the boom and bust subprime public

housing cycle of building and social abandonment created more governance headaches than it

solved. The days of a muscular *politica social,* with infrastructure-building its spectacular

leading edge, was decisively fading. At the same time, the durabilities of existing infrastructures,

institutions, and forms of expertise has meant that the present also remains 'stuck' in certain

supposedly outmoded Mexican political practices, including practices of invasion now centered

in peri-urban housing, more than land.[44] With a neoliberal shift from a peak to post-peak

infrastructure-building states underway in much of the world (whether popularly perceptible or

still imperceptibly), what will come next is far from clear. How certain geographies of

---

[43] Finance scholar Joao Gomes has recently argued that post-subprime global markets have seen a remarkable, and remarkably underappreciated, decline in private investment. As a broader global deceleration in infrastructure investment can be tracked going back all the way to the 1980s (with China's trajectory more outlier than rule), Gomes claims that a shift from hard durable assets to human capital in a global economy fueled by increasingly ephemeral, or "fast transitioning" forms of technology, may explain the trend. Other economists have offered other trends. Cf. Gomes, Joao F., "Summary: The Decline of U.S. Corporate Investment" (2019).Wharton PPI B-School for Public Policy Seminar Summaries. 9.https://repository.upenn.edu/pennwhartonppi_bschool/

[44] The infrastructure-building heights of the *indigenista* project, in which indigenous/*campesino* migration to cities was seen to pose radical short-term challenges (the need to '*acculturate'* through employment, education, and welfare services) but long-term solutions to the grand national problems of economic inequality and poverty, would become unsettled by shifting global and regional macroeconomic realities across Mexico during the 1980s and 1990s. As such, *indigenismo's* early influence in shaping the 1970s' muscularly coherentist social policies would fade, at least in 'official' discourses. Yet given the state's growing economic crisis, the urban welfare state that Presidents Echeverria and Portillo imagined would substitute for earlier agrarian populist state forms (1920s-40s), remained at times all too speculative, intangible. Indeed, by the 1980s-2000s an ascendant right wing political movement centered on the PAN (National Action Party) would claim that the *indigenista* state had been a welfare state, and what was in fact needed was a national pivot toward the post-welfarist promotion of individual entrepreneurs and placing social policy (including public housing policy) more heavily in the hands of private industry, thereby compounding the social contradictions embedded in Infonavit's founding. From these contradictions, this dissertation aims to glean a theory of invader politics.

infrastructure, invasion, and their entanglements may provide affordances for certain possible

futures and re-alignments of these political forces, however, is a question that the study of affect

and sensibilities of every experience can help us address, particularly in anthropology. By

constellating insights from the study of techno-politics, knowledge production practices, and

structures of feeling, however, the dissertation aims to hold open a structured opening onto other

unfinished struggles and discussions, particularly *vis* contemporary U.S.-centered popular and

academic discussions of invasion, infrastructure, and their intersection--most spectacularly today

in places like the U.S.-Mexico border, the lands of the Standing Rock Sioux, or the Capitol

building on January 6, 2021.

Framing indigenous Mexicans' relationships to contemporary public infrastructure as

tidily and sinisterly organized around logics of "indigenous removal and erasure," as do works

that continue to ignore infrastructures' more heterogeneous social valuations by their local users,

is to homogenize the place of Latin American sites in late liberal capitalism--all while imagining

Latin American multicultural social governance in the neoliberal era as a matter of "de-

indigenization."[45] This contrasts, again, to the present dissertation project, where a rather more

messy constellation of material, social, and epistemic realities converge in which ethnicity/race is

at times erased, at other times euphemistically or even openly politicized –

for instance, as 'cultural' forms like 'social capital,' or through the equation of racialized trans-

regional migrants in northern Mexico as "invaders." "Viewing the deliberate production of

[class, color, gender, race, and ethnicity] as extensions of settler colonialism's long reach" may

shed some light on historical continuities between colonial and contemporary Latin America, as

---

[45] Cf. Castellanos, M. Bianet. Indigenous Dispossession: Housing and Maya Indebtedness in Mexico. Stanford University Press, 2020; Castellanos, M. Bianet. "Introduction: settler colonialism in Latin America." *American Quarterly* 69.4 (2017): 777-781.

one recent study on twentieth century Mexico has contended.[46] Yet in overstating both the deliberateness/coherence of how social categories are produced and understating the participation of a variety of overlapping governance models (including but hardly reducible settler colonialism), it's not clear that this approach *on its own* sheds more light on historical continuities or emergent futures than it obscures.

The historical contingencies of global capitalism, social governance/resistance models, and popular epistemologies of recent political history, economic wellbeing and race/ethnicity challenge scholars aiming to place settler-colonial theories, global migration policing, or others leveraging internally homogenous logics of 'invasion,' to reimagine the worlds in which those logics are said to be situated.

Conclusion: Chapter Introductions

So far, this introduction has aimed to set the stage for the chapters to come. This next section will more formally introduce their arguments. Mexican public housing has served as an exemplary, yet undertheorized, interface for some liberal welfarist politics and politics of indigeneity in the neoliberal era, as well as between these abstract political models and their most concretely valued territorial expressions--as large scale durable infrastructure projects from hospital and public school systems to prison and public housing systems. By navigating this argument through geohistorical narratives like nation-building (from the neocolonial to neoliberal), Agrarian Reform era land struggles, Cold War hysteria about communism and democracy, each chapter considers how interlocutors in one of my major field sites model, mask and remake a politics of invasion--one engaging both Mexican realities and global forces.

---

[46] Varner, Natasha. La Raza Cosmética: Beauty, Identity, and Settler Colonialism in Postrevolutionary Mexico. Estados Unidos: University of Arizona Press, 2020.

With a scene of a public housing eviction interrupted by a crowd of lawyers, Chapter One introduces the Tijuana office of the Mexican debtor legal aid association, *El Barzón,* at the crux of this project's concerns: that is, in a moment of housing invasion. The group's internally controversial invasion of actual houses raises questions pursued throughout the chapter as to how so controversial a practice has come to saturate the politics of one of Mexican post--subprime public housing worlds' most relevant civil society allies.[47] Specifically, I ask, two interrelated questions, one for regional audiences and one for a social theory audience more broadly. In the first instance, are contemporary Mexican politics of invasion based more in local, regional, or national scales of territory and territorial imagination?[48] And second, how might an object like an invaded public housing unit push us to rethink how territorial scales are themselves generated?

Building on and responding to this account, Chapter Two shifts focus from the popular/populist politics of *El Barzón* to the politics and history of expert knowledge production around invasive politics in Mexican public housing worlds. How, the chapter asks, have continuities of Mexican invasive politics survived not only as political *practices* within groups (like *El Barzón*) directly growing out of land invasion organizations, but as objects of expertise giving a certain continuity of legitimate authority to otherwise radically shifting models of neoliberal state authority? Given the paradoxical fact, laid out genealogically in this chapter, that public housing's role would (during the 1970s-80s) involve redirecting land invasion

---

[47] Emerging out of 1990s debt crises as a national organization of mortgage debtors seeking state protection from creditors, *El Barzón,* as chapter two reviews, continue the older land invasion organization mold by invading not only government offices in temporary protests, but also by invading dispossessed houses placed on the auction block, in order to forestall their fire sale. Moving through more than two years of field work at the Tijuana offices of *El Barzón*, which was at that point the largest debtor-aid organization in the state, the chapter considers how, amid the organization's successful bid to support the upstart leftist *Morena* party and its presidential candidate, long-time *Barzón* sympathizer (current Mexican president) Andres Manuel Lopez Obredor, affiliates and lawyers both drew upon and distanced themselves from 'invasive politics' discourses and strategies.

[48] Fennell, 2010.

practitioners toward less transgressive politics, the politics of invasion across Mexican public

housing worlds certainly begs this question. To answer it, the chapter turns toward a mini-

ethnography of Infonavit's central offices. It begins with a discussion of the Infonavit Housing

Laboratory, a novel project at the time of my fieldwork, designed by a New York architectural

firm and built in the town of Apan in the state of Hidalgo. From an initial unpacking of this lab's

brief life (it was already closed by 2020), the chapter shifts to a history of the recent past. The

chapter claims to trace contradictions of expert knowledge that appear symptomatic in the

Housing Lab back to their origins in the 1970s--when Infonavit was founded, against a backdrop

of an infrastructure-preoccupied Mexican state.

Moving backward from historiographic questions raised by the imperceptibility of

invasion in The Housing Laboratory's vision of Mexican public housing, the chapter unpacks a

genealogy of Mexican social policy expertise--corporate, academic, and state forms--as they vied

for political influence, and claimed to know best how to manage 'the Mexican system,' during

the days of Infonavit's 1970s inception, at the height of hemispheric land invasion politics in late

Cold War Latin America.[49] What happened to social policy expertise? This question, asked by

---

[49] Notable recent qualitative comparative works on this topic include work on Peru's land reform by Enrique Mayer and Javier Puente. Important recent work on the Bolivian case, includes texts by Carmen Soliz and Jeffrey Webber. For the Chilean experience, see recent work by Daniel Carter, Claudio Robles-Ortiz, Carl Fischer, and Heidi Tinnsman. With respect to Central American experiences, notable recent work includes texts by Catalina Quiroga Manrique and Diana Vallejo Bernal, Eloisa Berman Arévalo, Sarah Foss, Nicholas Copeland and Peter Rosset. See other citations, regarding both the Mexican case and regional references, throughout the dissertation. Cf., Berman Arévalo, Eloisa. "El "fracaso ruinoso" de la reforma agraria en clave de negridad: comunidades afrocampesinas y reconocimiento liberal en Montes de María, Colombia." *Memorias: Revista Digital de Historia y Arqueología desde el Caribe* 37 (2019): 117-149; Carter, Daniel. "Violence, Ideology and Counterrevolution: Landowners and Agrarian Reform in Cautín Province, Chile, 1967–73." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 51.1 (2019): 109-135; Copeland, Nicholas. "Greening the Counterinsurgency: The Deceptive Effects of Guatemala's Rural Development Plan of 1970." *Development and Change* 43.4 (2012): 975-998; Fischer, Carl. "José Donoso and the Monstrous Masculinities of Chile's Agrarian Reform." *Hispanic review* (2015): 253-273; Foss, Sarah. "Land and Labor Relations in Guatemala's 1952 Agrarian Reform: Rethinking Rural Identities." *Historia Agraria de América Latina* 1.01 (2020): 1-21; Mayer, Enrique. *Ugly stories of the Peruvian agrarian reform*. Duke University Press, 2009; Puente, Javier. "De comunero a campesino: el «corto siglo veinte» en el campo peruano, 1920-1969." *Investigaciones Históricas* 40 (2020): 9; Quiroga Manrique, Catalina, and Diana Vallejo Bernal. "Territories of Water: Agricultural Infrastructure, Agrarian Reform, and Palm Oil in The Marialabaja Municipality, Bolívar." *Revista Colombiana de Antropología* 55.1 (2019): 59-89; Robles-Ortiz, Claudio. "Revolution from below in

the architect whose Housing Lab project precipitates the chapter's historical reflections comes back full circle at the chapter's end. As the chapter contends, the consolidation of a new kind of urban infrastructure-centered social policy expertise in an emerging neoliberal Mexico (and in Latin American regional academic/state knowledge production as well!) had a distinct cost. Namely, it turned land struggles and the politics of land invasions into a space of social forgetting. Because experts now claimed that housing--not land redistribution--could solve Mexico's demographic problems, the very question of Agrarian Reform could be depoliticized.

Chapter Three shifts toward micro-ethnographies of two public housing-oriented, northern Mexico-based real estate corporations, Ruba and Provive. Both of these housing companies favor commitments to 'new models' of social politics[50], believing they will help the company but at the same time helping Infonavit (a key ally and market-maker for all public housing construction companies) transcend *its* increasingly fragile public image in the wake of a never fully-finished wave of subprime mortgage evictions. At first glance, then, both companies seem to enact what anthropologist of neoliberalism have frequently described as this version of capitalism's core dynamic: the interplay of speculative promise and risk calculation. In fact, however, in this chapter I tell a different story.

By slowing down physical construction at its new Natura mega-development in southeast Tijuana, experts at the major Mexican construction company Ruba assert, the company's

---

Panguipulli: Agrarian reform and political conflict under the Popular Unity in Chile." *Journal of Agrarian Change* 18.3 (2018): 606-631; Rosset, Peter. "Re-thinking agrarian reform, land and territory in La Via Campesina." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 40.4 (2013): 721-775; Soliz, Carmen. ""Land to the Original Owners": Rethinking the Indigenous Politics of the Bolivian Agrarian Reform." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 97.2 (2017): 259-296; Tinsman, Heidi. *Partners in conflict*. Duke University Press, 2002; Webber, Jeffery R. "Evo Morales, transformismo, and the consolidation of agrarian capitalism in Bolivia." *Journal of Agrarian Change* 17.2 (2017): 330-347.

[50] *Politica social,* as opposed to 'economic policy'--a liberal distinction in policy-making powers that has informed neoliberal era governance in Mexico and elsewhere in the region. The distinction carved out space for welfarist spending to be presented as separated but equal from 'pure' economic policy, while allowing economists to consolidate power around the hegemonic 'half' of the policy divide--a fact whose implications Babb discusses.

ongoing presence serves as a kind of security force, installing the company moreover as de-facto government--able, in the relative absence of local state security, to better manage property damage and housing invasion in this way. Rather than simply managing financial and human security, however, a common infrastructure of feeling, indexed by the material infrastructure's palpable unfinishedness, also emerges. This feeling is indexed by a key term for the chapter, *obra negra,* meaning 'unfinished structure.' Converting the unfinished histories of invasion politics that I track in the project's prior chapters, and which hang ambiguously between Latin American experiences of Agrarian Reform and finance capital, into a collective affect, the *obra negra* shows how materiality, history, and political affects hang together in/as a particular place and time.

The Invaded House: From Boundary Object to Borderlands at Mexico's Largest Mortgage Legal Aid Association

> I don't even have a skirt,
> You have neither pants nor shirt!
> But I continued with the doubt
> Why did I throw the landlord out?[51]

> [By the founding of *El Barzón* in 1994...] the peasant movement was once again without organic unity because [...] the problem of underwater mortgages transcended agriculture and encompassed all economic sectors.[52]

Introduction: Interrupting an Eviction, Constructing the Invaded House

"Don't open that door!" A blur rushes toward the gate of the southwest Tijuana public-housing development. The police hesitate, looking from one another, to the bank representatives, to a half-filled moving truck with two sweating figures perched on the open rear pulling off their gloves, and back to the blur, now taking some sharper contours: a pair of heels clatter against asphalt, a loose-fitting pant suit floats against the background. To an outsider, walking by this *cul de sac* inattentively, listening to music on headphones, this might appear like an ordinary moving scene. In fact, it is an eviction.

"The trucks stay where they are! The street is private! Don't open that door!" I take a picture. The pants and heels and voice combine, amid police onlookers. The police officers take deep breaths and seem to stiffen as Vicenta Espinoza, the director of the city's largest anti-

---

[51] From the song "*El Barzón,*" by Miguel Muñiz (1925). English Version by Fidel Rodriguez, edited by author. Rodriguez, Fidel. "El Barzón Lyrics Translated in English and the Mexican Hacienda System." *Huarachesol*, 3 June 2019, www.huarachesol.com/el-Barzón-lyrics-translated-in-english-and-the-mexican-hacienda-system.

[52] Jiménez, Alfonso Serna. "El movimiento campesino en México: una identidad fragmentada." *ESTUDIOS AGRARIOS*: 40.

eviction legal aid office in this moment (summer of 2016) floats nearer. Sensing the bank

lawyers' stares slowly tightening, one grudgingly responds, seemingly holding back a grin, "This

is a public street, we have access."

"Then what is this gate here for?[53] Why is there a lock on it to which only residents are

permitted copies?"
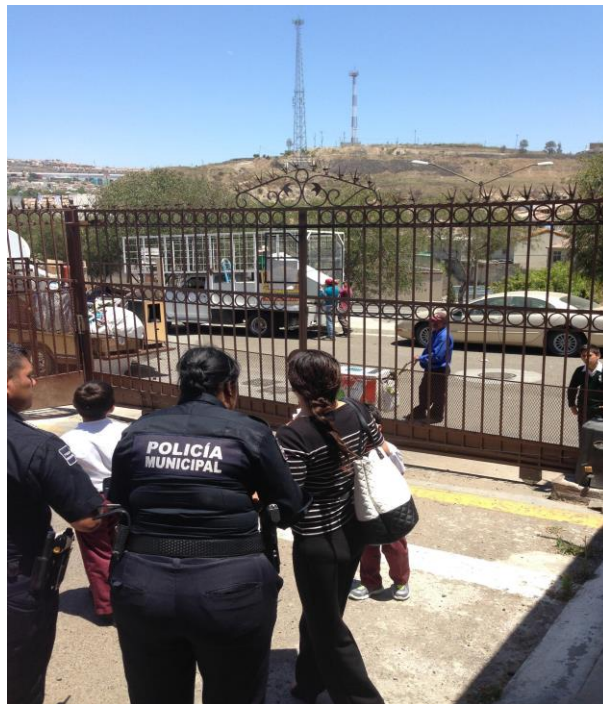
Figure 4. Vicenta and Municipal Police survey the eviction crew loading items onto trucks through the locked street gate.

As the officers listen to Vicenta, she smiles more and more widely as the question lingers

in the air, like the afterimage of a weapon flashed from under a coat—or a heel from a polyester

---

[53] On the state scale, Vicenta is aware (as she raises her doubts to her counterparts across the street gate) that legal precedents around street gates have recently shifted. Just a year prior, a court case in the state had decided that residents could not be excluded from access through privately installed street gates, even if they refuse to contribute to the project's costs (the gates most typically are installed through self-organized neighborhood governance committees). Police, as Vicenta also well knows, must be granted access by law to the interior of *privadas*, a fact that ultimately would override her legal questioning. But by highlighting the bank reps' lack of gate keys, she indexes a grey zone of bank authority.

pant leg. "Let's not miss the point," responds the bank's representative, a watch face flashing in the sun from under the sleeve of her own wrinkle-absorbent black blazer. "In terms of who has rightful possession to this property, there's no confusion. The act is written, the eviction is already in process, and," she pauses for effect, taking pleasure in a long leisurely breath, spinning a keychain around her index finger, "we have the keys."

From somewhere behind us, the same neighbor who had contacted *El Barzón* to begin with, hurls a comment of her own. "I saw you break in, you liar!" Snickers come from the *Barzón* lawyers distributed behind Vicenta around the street. With a flash of anger, the representative stuffs the keys back into her pocket.

"Sorry, but I'm the *propietario empoderada,* [i.e., the bank's legal representative in this repossession]" she says. Vicenta takes that sarcastic 'sorry,' as a challenge, particularly on her own 'home turf.' Vicenta, her kids and husband Jorge live just a few blocks from where we stand. Now, however, confronted with an eviction in progress, there is no sign of a key actor--if Vicenta and *El Barzón* are to have any hope of halting the eviction in the short term. Where is the house's mortgage-holder (a woman named Lori, whose neighbor on the street, a *Barzón* member, called the office on her behalf) herself? Rather than investigating herself, however, the office's president stays on the offensive.

"Let's see your papers before anyone opens this gate," Vicenta responds.

Suddenly it's *El Barzón* that is policing the bank. This request to see her counterpart's papers may be only that (a request and not an order), but it feels weighty enough that, for a heartbeat or two, nobody moves, police included.[54] For a moment, Vicenta's authority seems to

---

[54] While evictions in Tijuana rarely occur without police accompaniment at present, this is not uniformly true at a national, or even regional scale. In Ciudad Juarez, police at the time of my fieldwork frequently refused to accompany construction firm representatives with whom I worked (Provive and Ruba) to evictions, reportedly on cartel orders. Vicenta's stalling evokes this palpably proximate counterfactual—part of a shared regional geographic

grow, indexing stakes and geographies beyond this cul-de-sac that entangle *El Barzón,* banks, and municipal authorities not only as adversaries, but as fellow insiders—Mexican public housing insiders. As one senior lawyer, Alberto Medina, whispers to me at one point at the eviction scene, "we don't necessarily expect to repossess the house. At least we can remind them, though, that we *could.*"

For such a concrete action—claiming to possess concrete infrastructures by physically occupying them—Medina's framing strikes me as remarkably conditional, abstract, ambivalent. It's as though this very *ambivalence*, in contrast to all the striking aesthetics of line-drawing seen today at the eviction, is equally at stake today. This is most evident, perhaps, in how the scene ends, some twenty minutes later.

The negotiations continue—though Vicenta has now given in to the police command. She and other *Barzón* lawyers continue debating their legal counterparts on the inside of the gate. A hand taps me on the shoulder. I'm in the middle of deciding whether to listen to a police officer who is telling me to stop recording with my phone (technically legal in Mexico). It's Vicenta's college-age son.

"They may try to take possession," I think he tells me.

"Don't they already have it?" I ask, thinking of the keys spinning in slow motion on the bank representative's index finger.

"No," he responds, "*we* may invade the house, take it."

As I process the words' meaning, the voices of the bank representatives, as well as of Vicenta and several other Barzón staff lawyers, draw closer. "We are not debating ownership," I

---

imaginary and legal landscape—that if *Barzónistas* at the eviction scene were faced with a bank rep alone, the private gate would take on a whole different substance. The invocation, then, shifts the lay of the land for a moment, reframing power relations across the gate by evoking power relations just beyond this local context.

hear Vicenta say, as the resident and I step out of the house. The *Barzónista* neighbor, Clara, comes and guides the resident to her kitchen table across the street. "What we're questioning," Vicenta goes on, "is whether this young lady has legal possession."

Someone yells, "Come on Matthew!" and I am being pulled back toward the house, the door slamming shut behind me. *Barzón* lawyers have dragged boxes and bags—already removed by the eviction crew when we had arrived—back inside with us.

"Go ahead and trespass! Smell the place for yourselves! You like this *cochinero* [pigsty]?" The bank representative laughs, though her victorious tone is dampened by the papers she covers her face with, shielding it from the cell phone cameras held out by lawyers through the windows toward her, as though from garret positions.
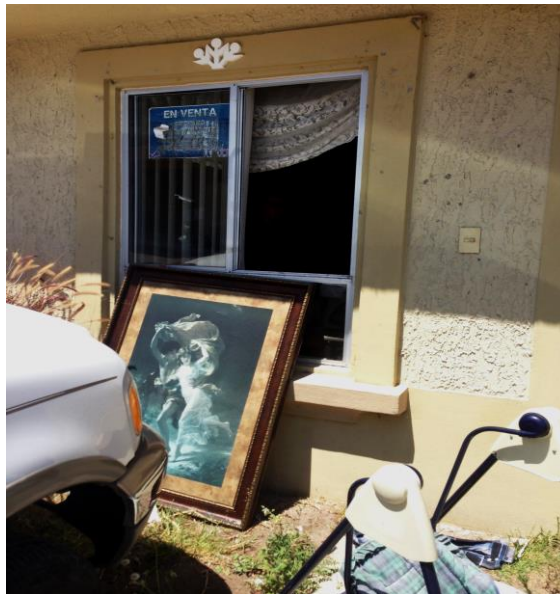
Figure 5. The eviction scene. A scene from mythology and a baby rocker lean against the outside of the house.

The property, as some rapid and hushed comments from behind the front door suggest, is in a shameful state. Lawyers begin to cover their own mouths and noses with their shirts, making it difficult to aim their phones convincingly. Vicenta goes to confer with the woman and her

neighbor, then walks over to us. The young woman, Vicenta reports, doesn't seem to want to fight for the house by repossessing it, concluding, "she's not in the right state of mind." While claiming the moral-legal high ground initially led *Barzón* officials to invade the physical property as a show of power and seriousness, the briefness of this occupation also seems to reflect *Barzónistas'* simultaneous caution in the face of accusations of invasion. Both parties leave the eviction scene shortly thereafter, in a huff, amid mutual incriminations. Only the eviction crew, who look on seemingly unphased after the initial shock of our arrival, continue their work.

"We merely wanted to ensure that this woman's property was not being stolen!" Vicenta declares from across the street to her bank counterparts, as a final comment before turning toward her own car and leaving the scene. To judge by the responses from our bank antagonists, however, they couldn't agree less. "We know these *Barzón* tactics, you can't get enough of invading houses!" one lawyer calls back from across the street while ducking behind a car door himself. If this was a housing invasion, however, it raises plenty of questions as to what constitutes 'invasion,' in these parts.

Were this day's events simply the briefest property invasion in history, an exception and outlier--so much so that the bank reps' police escorts were shocked into inaction? Or, alternatively, is a more serious (i.e., long-term, and clandestine) housing invasion so commonplace in the city/region that, conversely, police are hardly moved by such theatrics as one law office attempting to intimidate another? Over the coming weeks and months of my fieldwork in the debtor legal aid offices, this question stays with me. Vicenta offers one explanation, Alberto another, and other office affiliates and staff whose voices populate the coming pages of this chapter still others. Amid this very cacophony, however, a realization

eventually dawns on me: while invasion often appears in moments and sites of intense antagonism and struggles over property possession in neoliberal Mexico—giving rise to an appearance of Manichean struggle—invasion is in fact, as this chapter claims, a hyper-polysemous political act and discourse here, in northern Mexican public housing worlds, though in ways with implications for this practice's under-considered dimensions across contemporary diverge Latin American sites.

With this polysemiousness not fully under any social group's control or authority—certainly not the police's in this opening scene—however, its epistemic productiveness for groups like an *El Barzón*, intent on *building* such authority through legal struggles over property, immediately raises broader questions for social theory. Specifically, how do we track inherently multi-scalar politics--in the chapter combining specific properties, office materialities, transnational populist national politics and infrastructural realities, and transnationally politicized discourses of invasion--through the tools of disciplinary social science knowledges that tend to silo these as discrete scales, separating out geographies of public housing infrastructure, for instance from geographies of migration (more associated with 'invasion' as a transnational political discourse) such that a politics of invasion does not fall between the cracks? This chapter's conclusion returns to this question, claiming that its application to this chapter's ethnographic narrative can help model in more concrete terms a debate that in social theory has remained all too abstract to this point.[55] In this way, the chapter claims to intervene into debates between scholars who claim to study "cross-scalar phenomena," (a commonplace position in much contemporary social science) and those who might be called 'scale-skeptical,' and believe that scales are continually produced by the interactions of things. In reflecting on these debates,

---

[55] Manson, Steven M. "Does scale exist? An epistemological scale continuum for complex human–environment systems." *Geoforum* 39.2 (2008): 776-788.

as well as the regional geohistorical and political realities addressed ethnographically here, the chapter's conclusion follows Marleen Buizer et. al's call to overcome this realist-constructionist dualism of spatial scale "by advocating a dialogue between them" on the basis of tracking and analyzing "different knowledge claims in transdisciplinary arenas."[56] First, however, the chapter uses one of those limited-in-scale concepts of critical infrastructure studies, and the ways in which a politics of invasion at *El Barzón* exceeds it, to both unpack this politics and empirically locate the limits of a concept in my particular field sites.

What comes into focus initially in the chapter is the invaded house as, in the term championed for infrastructure studies by Susan Leigh Star' now decades ago, a 'boundary object' at *Barzón*. For Leigh, boundary objects are particular to institutional knowledge production, where their epistemic coherence for certain groups, and their tolerated incoherence across other groups (or across other, linked institutions) come together to form an (often implicit) epistemic boundary in that object. With the help of ideas like Leigh Star's, this chapter unpacks my fieldwork as a participant-observer at the legal aid office, as I would come to grasp it: through commonalities between the foregoing scene's hyper-public and hyper-ephemeral forms of invasion, on one hand, and more mundane discourses and acts of invasion--or, that is, what at least some at the office (and sometimes, all in the office) would consider invasion--on the other.

How do spectacular and mundane aspects of a boundary object,[57] in Star's conception,

---

[56] Buizer, Marleen, Bas Arts, and Kasper Kok. "Governance, scale and the environment: the importance of recognizing knowledge claims in transdisciplinary arenas." *Ecology and society* 16.1 (2011).

[57] Star discusses these facets of boundary objects as part of a list of what she considers their three basic conditions: the object "resides between social worlds (or communities of practice) where it is ill structured"; "when necessary, the object is worked on by local groups who maintain its vaguer identity as a common object, while making it more specific, more tailored to local use within a social world, and therefore useful for work that is NOT interdisciplinary,"; and "groups that are cooperating without consensus tack back-and-forth between both [ill and well-structured] forms of the object" Leigh Star, Susan. "This is not a boundary object: Reflections on the origin of a concept." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 35.5 (2010): 601-617.

emerge in practice at Tijuana's largest housing legal aid office? How does the invaded house embody Star's notion of the same object as, in different institutional contexts, generative of productive incoherences, as well as coherences?[58] And how is such *epistemic murk,* or polysemiousness, related through the invaded house to a politics of invasion's distinctly cross-scalar dimension in this chapter's *Barzónista* contexts? Section one of this chapter dives into a week-long *Barzón* protest in front of Infonavit's (the national housing institute's) local headquarters to unpack these questions ethnographically. Not only does the protest highlight the overlapping of local and national scale politics in *Barzón* practice, but the scene takes places, as the chapter reveals, in a political conjuncture where *El Barzón's* political stakes are shifting scale in unusually explicit ways. That is because, during my fieldwork in 2015-17, the organization is not only struggling against waves of public housing eviction sweeping northern Mexico, but at a more national scale is in the process of formally allying itself to a national political party (the *Morena* party led by Andres Manuel Lopez Obredor) for the first time. Before returning to this national political story, however, there are rich local epistemologies, often involving epistemologies of local claims to place, belonging, and possession, to unpack.

Tracking the "Ill-Structured" Invaded House in Barzónista Protest Tactics

Before diving into the scene of *Barzón* protests in front of Infonavit's offices in Tijuana circa 2016, a further brief historical framing of this event's specific institutional precedents is in order. During *El Barzón*'s initial emergence in the 1990s, mass marches to Mexico City from surrounding states were of the first central tactics, drawn seamlessly from the playbooks of

---

[58] *Ibid*, 2010. 13-14. Star calls these "the ill-structured and well-structured aspects of the particular boundary object."

1960s-70s land struggle protest movement politics—land struggles in which some *Barzón* affiliates themselves had participated personally. These movements, in turn, had drawn on the tactics' legitimacy as used by Mexican worker unions dating back to the early twentieth century and earlier, while applying them at a scale only imaginable in a national space increasingly connected by highways, mass transport, and new financial infrastructures of credit and debt, alike. By the arrival of the 1990s, while the pace and vigor of Mexico's infrastructure-building state was decelerating overall,[59] a growing portion of this infrastructure building state debt burden was being redirected, through personal credit markets and a growing availability of mortgage loans that promised Mexican inclusion in welfare institutions, further onto individual everyday Mexicans' shoulders.

In this context of emergent new relationships between Mexicans and public housing infrastructures, however, old tactics could be adapted to both familiar and innovative purposes. Flexing their muscles at that time, for newly christened *Barzónistas* in the state of Veracruz, meant breaking through barricades at the state offices of the Commission for Irrigation. It meant, in the state of Michoacán, *Barzónistas* delaying bank auctions of properties from which they had been evicted by physically 'invading' them, i.e., physically re-possessing the properties under embargo. And it meant, on June 27th 1994, in an event that put *El Barzón* on the map domestically and internationally, employing a caravan of *Barzónistas* from various central Mexican states to realize a '*macroplantón*' (macro-sit-in) in the nation's capital, in front of the federal Office of the Interior (*Secretaría de Gobernación*).

As journalist Ana Cristina Samparo recorded at the time, the offices "were sieged for

---

[59] Jensen, Nathan M., and Guillermo Rosas. "Foreign direct investment and income inequality in Mexico, 1990-2000." *International Organization* (2007): 467-487.

twenty six straight hours, including by a human chain of three thousand *Barzónistas* preventing

entrance or exit from the offices. [...] The Office of the Interior shook. It was the first time that it

had been occupied by a civil society organization in opposition to government policy."[60] It was

amid these events, and as the growth of public housing construction was building toward a

crescendo of household debt, that *El Barzón*'s reputation, as an organization carrying forward a

politics of invasion that seemed increasingly to belong to another age, became established. With

the Agrarian Reform legally declared a dead letter just a couple of years prior, and the ink still

drying on the NAFTA agreement (signed in January of 1994), which would launch Mexico more

radically into U.S. corporation-controlled supply chains than ever before, *El Barzón's*

employment of invasion tactics from another time (the early neoliberal era) insisted that the past

was not past, and that the neoliberal era could not claim all of Mexico as its prize.

This potent historicity of *El Barzón*'s acts was not merely a matter of timing. Like the

invasion of [Infonavit's] whole third floor that week in Tijuana in 2016, *Barzónistas*' 1994 extra-

legal acts relied extensively on the politics of space and materiality. While in Veracruz and

Michoacan this meant occupying actual houses (a practice whose continuation two decades later

by Vicenta and *El Barzón Tijuana,* as the project's next chapter discusses, would be subject to

intense internal debates at the office), in the Mexico City *plantón,* in an act later to be repeated in

other key moments in the organization's history, it meant materializing the Agrarian Reform's

refusal to die a respectable death: hundreds of tractors from central Mexico stopped highways

and central city streets as *Barzónista* farmers descended on the capitol.

Invasion tactics served at this time to effectively blur the distance between peaceful

---

[60] Samperio, Ana Cristina. Se nos reventó El Barzón: radiografía del movimiento Barzónista. México: BPR Publishers, 1996.

protests[61] and *guerrilla* organizations—groups that the Mexican state would increasingly criminalize as terrorists during the late Cold War. As practitioners of invasive tactics, *El Barzón* would also open itself up at times to accusations of 'social terrorism'. In a nation plagued since the 1970s with decades of national debt and currency devaluation crises, however, many Mexicans would also come to sympathize with movements that loaded the 'debt problem' back onto the government's plate.

Figure 6. A printed digital image from Sidonio's office archive of the association's protest, dating to 2012, in front of a local bank branch. Affiliate signs read "No More UDIs," referring to the characteristic pricing mechanism running through many of these affiliates' particular subprime mortgages.

Such tactics, while ambivalent in many ways, have certainly proved effective across shifting decade-on-decade geopolitical conditions, if only in their very ability to endure (in *El Barzón*'s case, for thirty years). Yet as the neoliberal era has worn on, and as across Mexico resurgent ethno-regionalisms have come to substitute more and more for prior governance

---

[61] Protests for access to land under the Agrarian Reform, in effect until the 1990s in Mexico, dominated Mexican social movement politics until the 80s.

discourses (outmoded *indigenista* nationalist political discourses, in particular), practices and discourses of 'invasion' have come to index forms of animus that assert their own historical continuities, albeit without the legitimation of 'official' *indigenista* state discourses of the past[62]. This is especially the case in and around the nation's expanding public housing worlds. While the questions of how a politics of invasion has been preserved among *Barzónistas* raises questions of temporal scale, and the relationship between micro-social practices and history-making political movements, these must be placed on pause for the moment, until getting further consideration later in the chapter. First, however, my topic--following Leigh Star and the notion of a boundary object, will be that of epistemic coherence (both for *Barzónista* and in situations where their confrontational tactics place such coherence to the test). While such concerns would get raised for me in a newly pressing way after the 'interrupted eviction,' with which the chapter began, it was in seeing the more 'ill-ordered' realities of invasion as a practice productive embodied in a week-long *plantón*--the most intensive I observed in two years of field work--relatively late in my field work at *El Barzón* that Star's concept began to click as vital for unpacking a politics of invasion as mediated by Mexico's largest debtor legal aid association.

---

[62] Referring to President Vicente Fox's closure of the National Indigenous Institute, a major source of *indigenista* policy, in 2003, Analisa Taylor observes that "the debt crisis, combined with the internal conflicts brewing within the INI, has left the *indigenista* project of appropriation and assimilation of indigenous culture into national culture with severely weakened institutional mechanisms and with an even less clear purpose. The closing of the INI can thus be seen as a last nail hammered into a coffin that has been sitting around for at least two decades." Cf. Pérez, Maya Lorena, Luisa Paré, and Maya Lorena Pérez. "Los límites del discurso intercultural: cuestionamientos desde el post-indigenismo y desde la sustentabilidad." *LS Mateos Cortés, Los estudios interculturales en Veracruz: perspectivas regionales en contextos globales* (2009): 167-190; Taylor, Analisa. "The ends of indigenismo in Mexico." *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 14.1 (2005): 75-86.

Figure 7. Irma's picket sign: "Infonavit: Cemetery of Family Patrimony"

It's the Fall of 2016. I'm at a week-long protest in front of the Tijuana offices of Mexico's national worker housing institute, Infonavit (*Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores*), speaking with Irma, an older working woman waiting with her husband, and a crowd of affiliates and lawyers from *El Barzón,* Mexico's largest mortgage debtor aid association. Irma waits for her turn to get into the building and pressure Infonavit's low-level accounting staff. These are staff who have, Irma points out as we talk, pressured her in the past, and who will today attempt once more to change her mind—and the terms of her mortgage.

"They've pressured me before to sign new contracts that are not in my best interest," Irma remarks, "but thank God we've always said no." Her reference here to new contracts concerns the domestically notorious refinancing contracts that Infonavit began pushing on some of its millions of mortgage-holders during the 1990s,[63] an approach that continued more covertly

---

[63] For a triumphalist account of these mortgage, written just before the subprime crisis, see: Lipscomb, Joseph, John

during the time of my fieldwork in Mexican public housing worlds during the mid-2010s. Basically, when a mortgage-holder became far enough behind on their payments, Infonavit would pressure the resident to accept new contracts offering temporarily lower payments, while reordering the mortgage debt in ways that increased the overall load. Such maneuvers conveniently allowed the institute to relist the mortgage as "up to date," in its own financial reports, thus improving the institute's credit standing. This was music to the ears of Infonavit's international financiers (like the IMF) and investors, while for Irma, knowledge of these global connections helps her place her struggle in solidarity, sympathy, and historical standing alongside other subjects of late liberalism.[64]

This sense of organizational messiness, moreover, also operates within single organizations—often appearing among affiliates or consumers and staff who have attempted to collaborate in a common project, as at *El Barzón*. These blurred boundaries tell us both about the present and—for a national scale organization with a two-decade track record of struggling to forestall Mexican public housing's progressive neoliberalization—about how the past lives on in the present. Having served as a key critic of Infonavit not only in the streets, but in spaces of power from courts, to city halls, to *las oficinas de Infonavit* for years, *El Barzón*'s postures and public actions serve as a geohistorical point of reference well beyond its tens of thousands of national affiliates. Signs like the one Irma held toward the passing traffic as she stood picketing,

---

Harvey, and Harold Hunt. "Exchange-rate risk mitigation with price-level-adjusting mortgages: the case of the Mexican UDI." *Journal of Real Estate Research* 25.1 (2003): 23-42.

[64] With Infonavit changing its financial rules in the 1990s, the institute began to bundle mortgages for sale as mortgage securities, launching what was already becoming Latin America's largest mortgage bank into overdrive. Infonavit went from financing tens of thousands of new mortgages per year to hundreds of thousands, with much of the expanded cash flow making its way to private constructors and developers tasked by law with building the structures to be mortgaged. Thus, while for U.S. and North Atlantic readers unfamiliar with Latin American housing policy, the global subprime mortgage crisis of 2007 is a distant memory of a global crisis of private banks being bailed out by state banks, for Irma and the rest of us on the sidewalk in front of Infonavit's offices that day, the story is far more geohistorically messy

reading, "Infonavit: Cemetery of Family Patrimony," which receive honks of approval all week from passing cars, suggest as much (see Figure 5).

After protesting, Irma went into the institute and be 'attended' by Infonavit representatives, accompanied by her *Barzón* lawyer, with neither side expecting the meeting to end in an agreement. At the same time, however, this meeting is not mere posturing. To be sure, the week of protests and marathon of meetings between *El Barzón* and Infonavit—a process that has occurred in any number of Mexican cities at some point since the 90s—is an opportunity for both sides to perform for their constituencies, both local and national. For Infonavit, it's the chance to make a show of goodwill in negotiating mortgage debt solutions at a time when a cresting wave of public housing abandonment nationally has placed the institute's reputation in unprecedented levels of disrepute. For *Barzónistas,* the week is a chance to demonstrate that the group—accused by some of their opponents of practicing vigilante land and housing invasions still in the 2010s as a tactic for gaining power—can be good, earnest liberals. With national elections for a new congress and president looming, moreover, and *Barzón* leadership leaning toward an unprecedented decision to throw its weight behind a party (the newly-formed *Morena* party) and candidate for high office (Andres Manuel Lopez Obredor), the performance even draws a brief bit of national media attention, which would be unthinkable for a non-election season.

But performativity is not all that's afoot here. These performances also index more than a war for public sympathies. Behind Infonavit's *puerta abierta* are a series of further bureaucratic doors that remain closed. At the heart of the matter, *El Barzón Tijuana*'s president, Vicenta Espinoza, hopes to achieve during that protest week what she's spent the prior three years trying but failing to do: that is, to make Infonavit's state office "really" negotiate.

This means no more predatory individual mortgage refinancing agreements, and instead a shift to a collective debt solution for local *Barzón* members. The latter path, one which *Barzón* offices across Mexico had already successfully used to engage state financiers during the nation's 1990s monetary crisis, and more recently with private banks that often co-financed Infonavit-backed public housing mortgages during the early 2000s, would allow affiliates to liquidate their mortgages and become owners of their mortgaged property, in exchange for a lump sum payment by the mortgage-holder of some negotiated fraction of the outstanding debt. Despite Infonavit's performance of a *puerta abierta* (open door) policy in its public-facing interactions with the protesters that week, the institute's refusal of collective negotiations of *this* kind evinces an ongoing stonewalling that is largely invisible to the public. With respect to a politics of invasion, can the invaded house, *qua* boundary object, bridge this boundary between groups? Or are its meanings too contained to a certain in-group (in this case, *El Barzón*) that its associations with the legal aid association merely solidify such walls? The evidence from this week's *plantón*—again the largest and longest of its kind I observed and participated in during fieldwork—offers a decisive if modest 'no,' to this question. Invasion in fact brings the groups that week (however modestly) nearer together, around an 'ill-structured' account of the practice---one that neither group, thereby can fully convince the other they claim to control.

For most of the week, the returns appear—both to myself and legal staff—disappointing. In the end, it takes most of the week for Vicenta and the rest of the office's leadership to secure even a single high-level meeting between Vicenta and the group's lead lawyers. One of the stipulations is that the meeting will be closed door, off the record. Without going into the meeting's details, then, I will merely cut to the outcome: no negotiations. *Barzón* lawyers, disappointed with this result, nevertheless speak during the week of protests—they also

frequently refer to it as a *plantón* (roughly translated as a 'sit-in' protest)—as a multifaceted struggle.

Yes, a public-facing performance of legality is at stake; yes, there is a push to gain access to direct backroom negotiating arrangements; but overlapping with both fronts, as the group's attempts that week to achieve high level meetings suggests, is a struggle of attrition. This test of wills is one in which antagonism can bleed into a grudging respect that fertilizes the ground, potentially, for a more successful future negotiation.

As Vicenta puts it to me at one point that week: "Before they will really negotiate with us, we have to show them our strength. We do that by *invading* [emphasis added] their whole third floor, [i.e., where consults with mortgage holders typically occur]. The idea is that they can't attend to anyone else until we say so." This multi-level strategy, as I well know by this point in my fieldwork, is nothing new for *El Barzón,* or for that matter, for the early neoliberal era Latin American social movement firmament from which it emerged. Yet its enduring plausibility speaks to Vicenta's sense that such tactics incite the housing institute's own staff to more than mere antagonism.

But is Vicenta's sense here backed up by Infonavit bureaucrats themselves? Getting someone on the record about the week's protests is initially challenging. As someone whose field work is based with the group protesting its offices, I understand the reticence. Luckily, however, it doesn't last. A few weeks after the protests, Infonavit Baja California state sub-delegate Armando Hoeflich, an early-career bureaucrat with (like his counterpart at *El Barzón*) political aspirations for his future, addresses the matter one with me over coffee at a local Starbucks whose finicky electric wiring leaves the whole interview now with a flickering aura about it, in memory. "The invasion of our offices," Hoeflich explains to me with a wry smile, "is something

the politicians actually worry about more than us [at Infonavit]." He goes on:

> We more or less understand where we stand in relation to a group like *El Barzón.* For local politicians, who've never encountered them before [Vicenta's state-level office only opened in 2012, recall], this is more of a learning curve. But I will tell you exactly what I tell the local politicians when they come asking for us to make a 'count,' of uninhabited houses in the city--'invaded,' houses, abandoned houses, call it what you will. These numbers are constantly shifting. And that's what I tell them. I say, 'I could tell you today that there are so many abandoned houses, but tomorrow how many of those will become invaded, and vice-versa?' What is worth knowing is that there has always been room for the invader in cities like this, and there will always be room for the invader.

By shifting during his explanation from the subject of *Barzónista* protest practices specifically to non-symbolic housing invasion as it goes on, Hoeflich's comments evince a sense of the invaded house as a productively 'ill-structured' boundary object in two ways. On one hand, these comments' merge symbolic/literal invasion practices together; and they do so in ways that Vicenta and her staff are often more careful not to, out of concerns with this performing their own legality. The mixture of symbolic and literal meanings demonstrates, in an at once economical and typical fashion, just how a loose definition of invasion can cast agonist groups in a morally suspect light--implying here that *Barzón* operations make a big deal out of legal distinctions that in practice blur together. On the other hand, Hoeflich's comments also draw into focus a sense of invasion that, while even more radically distinct from those notions circulating at the legal aid office than this first sense, also exhibits a more radical ambiguity about the il/legal nature of the act. An urban landscape, after all, wherein "there has always been...there will always be" room for invaders, implies an identification of 'invasion,' simply with surplus labor armies. Given that surplus labor is a social reality defined less by questions of property legality than by questions of mass political marginalization, Hoeflich's emphasis on invasion's plastic character thus deflated 'invasion tactics,' as political tactics at all, after a

moment prior deflating them in terms of their illegality (a political charge). At once penetrating and weak on coherence, Hoeflich's response to the *Barzón* sit-in [65] affirms the chapter's hypothesis of the invaded house as a specific sort of 'epistemic thing,' that is, as a boundary object. This, however, is a local insight--interrogated here at a local scale--albeit through two institutions whose national scales also loom and help mold such 'ill-structured' encounters as the Infonavit *plantón*. What of the invaded house, however, as an object of political attentions at broader territorial scales?

"Bringing it down to size": Materializing Scale from Boundary Object to Borderland

Diana and Hector shake hands with Sidonio and me. I sit to the side of Sidonio's desk, having been granted permission to take notes at *consultas* like this one. This being an initial meeting, prior to any agreement that *El Barzón*'s lawyers will represent Diana and Hector legally, both sides ease into the encounter. "First of all, we're tired of the calls from the debt recovery agencies," Hector begins, setting a baseball cap on the desk before him. Sidonio and my coffee cups sit beside the front and side of the ballcap, giving off steam.

"It's not even Infonavit," Diana interjects, "they have other offices, even less scrupulous, doing their dirty work for them. Calling us at all hours, knocking on our door when only I am home. My husband works in the Samsung factory. And that is on top of our abusive neighbors, they say we're invaders—"

---

[65] Note that Hoeflich is careful not to say that the politicians are becoming any more convinced of his institution's take on regional housing abandonment, despite his enthusiasm in pitching it. Hoeflich's notion of invaded houses as 'excess space' that, though unfortunate, serve the purpose of giving the state both distance from and a limited handle on a flow of 'excess populations' traditionally drawn to the region by accessible *maquila* labor, in fact squares with Vicenta's notion that *El Barzón* is a necessary evil because excess population means that if paying residents are not permitted to remain in their houses, non-paying 'invaders' will occupy them.

Figure 8. Sidonio shows a potential affiliate an image of a Barzón protest from his personal office archive.

"First things first," Sidonio interjects now, following the phrase with a long, demonstrative inhale and exhale. "We can get to your neighbors, and definitely talk about what to do with the calls to make them stop. But the elephant in the room is the debt itself. How much are we talking? With what bank is the mortgage? How long have you had the house? And how long since the last payment?" Sensing reticence, Sidonio keeps speaking, both to fill the silence and to contextualize his questions. "With those kinds of facts, we can start putting together a file, a case, and a strategy. Because we don't ask the banks politely here. We negotiate."

Hector leans down, opening a large manila folder. He supplies their monthly payment receipts, documents left at the house by collection agencies, and the house title. They sit stiff and tense as Sidonio praises their preparation. "Without these documents we are already losing ground to the banks. It's a matter of controlling time. Now, if you do become an affiliate, we will ask for a copy of the mortgage contract itself. Every mortgage is different, Infonavit has dozens of mortgages—something like seventy eight—and can mix and match them together practically infinitely. Many times, Infonavit itself doesn't know exactly what kind of mortgage they have

given, so our lawyers will need to look at exactly what is outlined there, in case it gives us any advantage, see?"

The couple nod. They seem to be processing all that Sidonio is saying, weighing it and digesting it. Then I and the couple watch as Sidonio jots down the original cost of the house, the length of the contract, the interest rates, and begins a well-practiced discourse. I am not present for the next few minutes of the meeting, as I go to retrieve some printouts downstairs, but after a year and a half I know the basic strategies, even the postures, such that with apologies to Sidonio for any inaccuracy, here is (roughly) what happens next.

First, he will have established a few working notions around the place of the mortgage in this whole *Barzón* world. As my notes paraphrasing another client meeting read:

> Our aim is not to take the house for nothing. We are not trying to trick anyone. Rather, we want to pay. But not that inflated quantity that it says on our bills, engorged on predatory loans that are no longer legal in the country anyway. We negotiate with banks to get that inflated number back down to size, from two or three times the stated value of the asset, to *lo justo* [what is just]. That takes time, but time is on our side! In a sense, our job is to delay the legal process to give you time to save. We can do that by questioning things in the contracts, by sending the case to another court, by requesting further evidence. We make the contract your weapon, not theirs.

Next, if they do not ask for an expansion on some aspect or element of predatory contracts, Sidonio will have moved on to the central part that affiliates themselves play in making that negotiation possible. Again, as per my notes from another affiliate's visit:

> Remember, while we are working for you, guiding you through the legal minutiae of whatever action the bank may or may not take while you are a *Barzón* affiliate, your responsibility is just as crucial: to save. Because when Bancomer [for instance] calls Vicenta and says, "We are tired of fighting in the courts, we want to negotiate," and Vicenta says, "Great, how much can we expect to pay per house, what fraction of outstanding debt or portion of an appraised house value (or whatever combination of standards is agreed on) are you asking for to begin the negotiation?" The bank will say back to her, "Well, how many houses are ready to negotiate *en paquete* (together)?" And to be included in that *paquete* means you have saved the amount that we end up

negotiating for.

This message, that residents should save, but not pay, is their sell, their strategy. and their act of solidarity with the association. It's understandably, then, one of the most critical considerations in deciding to be a member of this association for many associates. Take Hector and Diana: they've already by this point in the interview alluded to a sense of being taunted over their current state of indebtedness and/or non-payment by neighbors. Will this lead them to seek solidarity in the association, or fear committing to what may seem a strategy condemning them to further social disrepute, stigma in the eyes of a neighbor or even in one's own sight.

When I come back with the original documents, Sidonio is flipping through a desk drawer until the right news clipping comes out. In one clipping he shares, a Tijuana newspaper describes the successful negotiations between *Barzón Tijuana* and the mortgage bank, Tercius, to whose inventory the couple's house also pertains. After sharing the clipping with the couple, Sidonio moves to another drawer, from which he pulls an Excel chart full of marginal annotations, highlights, and the hints of a coffee stain, in keeping with the office's perpetual, though very watery, coffee flow, from a pot always hot in the makeshift office kitchen cubicled off at the back of the first floor. Moving a finger over the names at one extreme of the sheet, Sidonio stops on a name and slides across the row to the original value of that affiliate's house. It is almost exactly the cost of the couple's, and in a development in the same section of east Tijuana.[66]

---

[66] Local geography may enter the fold of legal strategy here through the office archive, but it starts with the office's location. Located some twenty minutes' distance southeast of downtown down the *Via Rapida* highway, in a neighborhood dating from the 1980s (i.e., before the 'housing boom,'), the *Barzón* offices sit on a quiet residential street, in a former glass-cutting workshop, in a neighborhood where many homes and businesses reflect self-built or semi-formally built (i.e., with the help of an engineer, but no architect) construction. The neighborhood, in turn, fits snugly up against the Infonavit-funded developments of serialized mini-houses and condos of the city's eastern peripheries.

Diana and Hector lean forward, nodding, suddenly quite engrossed. "Negotiated for…" the finger continues to slide, slide, slide to the end of the row. "One hundred and twenty five thousand pesos." That is just less than half what the couple's house originally cost, and only a third of their outstanding debt. The couple stares and stares for a few seconds, though it feels longer, until the husband nods and says, "*está bien*." It's good, it is compelling even, but it is still not their house, quite. Still, the archive has touched their imaginations of their own mortgage, house, situation. Hector leans back as he continues to nod, as though reminding himself to consider these things from an objective distance.

"What is important to understand," Sidonio marches on, trying to hold onto the new intensity of Hector and Diana's attentions, "what is most important here is that we do this by negotiating in groups. So all these names, of one, two, three, four...thirty-eight houses, were negotiated in a single *paquete* [group, packet]. Because our strength is in bringing a large number of houses to the bank at once and saying, "We can turn these into cash for you, but we want to pay *lo justo* (what is fair)."

Diana seems like she could cry. "When *los jornaleros* [agricultural day laborers] in San Quintin block the highway for higher wages, they do that with a force of hundreds—the police can't arrest all of them," she says, referring to the striking ongoing that summer, in the agro-industry sector of San Quintin, located some three hours south on the peninsular highway. The strikes were national and international news.

All the above signposts help locate *El Barzón* at the interface of the 'old money' neighborhoods (most with roots in the 1940s-1970s, in a city little over one hundred years old) surrounding downtown Tijuana to the west, and to the east the newer, poorer, and more 'transregional transplant'-occupied 'New Tijuana' (where urbanization *begins* during the 1970s and from which zone most affiliates derive). *El Barzón*'s office is also aptly located—symbolically and for purposes of convenience alike—between its affiliates' homes and the main Tijuana offices of banks and Infonavit, as well as the civil court district.

"So they are forced to negotiate, and from there they get treated a bit more as humans deserving dignity. No?" Sidonio responds to her invocation of the strikes. "Well, that is more or less the relationship we have forged with the banks, you see?" he then adds, tethering it back to *Barzón,* to this meeting in this office. "Of course, with Infonavit," he laughs, with a wry smile, "we're still working on it."

After a bit of further political small talk about the strikes, exchanging rumors and news, the scale of this office where we sit, and of the invaded house, again return. "You know, earlier this week," Sidonio recalls, "a group of three or four people from San Quintin came in asking for a consultation. They were asking, essentially, are there any houses we could give them to occupy, well, to invade. I told them we cannot, as *El Barzón,* promote seizing houses. But then, I also tell them that there is nothing to say I cannot write down a list of neighborhoods," he takes up a pen and pantomimes writing (without pen touching paper). The list he is pretending to write in the anecdote is, to be clear, one in which invading unoccupied public housing units is readily possible. "There's nothing to say I can't list those and give it to you. Because here, to do the work we do, to maintain the trust of Infonavit and the banks even as we fight them, we must remain within the law."

Figure 9. "Raise the Tomato [Harvesting Wage]." Striking worker sign at a Summer 2016 binational protest in Tijuana/San Diego of San Quintin agrobusiness.

The couple nod at this story of discreteness. "*Yo sé lo que es trabajar en campo, en la fresa, en la jamaica, en el cacahuate,*" Diana responds. Her voice, previously holding so much back, now quivers with anger, sadness, dignity. "I know what it means to work the fields," she says, "the strawberry, the hibiscus, the peanut fields. And yes, they're asking for three hundred [pesos] per day, rather than the two hundred the bosses offer, but that's because they are working *doble jornadas* [double workdays], fourteen hours."[67] The scale of rural Mexico, where this organization has both its historical origins and ideological ones (in land struggles of the Agrarian

---

[67] In referencing *la fresa*, whose Mexican production is predominantly concentrated in the Valley of San Quintin, just a short drive away, but also *la jamaica*, whose national production is largely concentrated in the southern states of Guerrero and Oaxaca, as well as *el cacahuate,* in whose production the northwestern state of Sinaloa has recently increased its share, taking ground from more traditional centers of cultivations like Oaxaca and Chiapas, Diana is speaking from an invasive geography that bisects and evades regional divisions through the metonymy of crop names. Yet even here, a certain distancing from indigenous worlds can be heard in Diana's claim that San Quintin's workers deserve the pay they are striking for, roughly twenty dollars per day, not because of the minimum wage laws or the value their labor generates in corporate profits, but because of an almost inhuman sacrifice (the brutal *doble jornada)*.

Reform era), emerges here, constellating strike, negotiation, and invasion among other political

tactics invoked. Meanwhile, the office archive of news clippings, excel files of past bank

negotiation records, entwined with these broader territorial imaginings conversationally, grounds

these broader territories and personal identities in the space of an office. Given that the office is

located in an unsafe and polluted industrial city of two million that, especially for the indebted

and economically immobilized, can feel more like forty hours from rural space, making this

connection between geopolitical scales is remarkable. What's becoming less remarkable, by this

point in the chapter, however, may be that the invaded house (now not in Hector of Diana's

neighbors' eyes, but in those of striking workers, and a limited solidarity with that perspective)

remains part of what mediates these scales.

   Moments and exchanges like this one are partly programmed, of course; Sidonio relies on

habitual script-like sequencing of themes, ideas, even specific terms and turns of phrase. And

they're also partly spontaneous, drawing on personal connections, and discovering solidarities by

tacking back and forth between the local scales of one's own legal situation, of Tijuana, and the

office, and more macro-territorial scales. To do this, staff members like Sidonio invoke and draw

on objects of several scales--from office archives, to discussion of the physical houses that they

invoke. At both these scales, staff lawyers contend, these materialities of the archive and house

overlap in how they strategically exceed their legal limits (as in the case of striking workers

looking to invade)--suggesting a sharp attention to how their own politics of invasion gets

inserted into local and national landscapes. This office scene invokes both these scales here, in

fact.

   In the first place, the idea early in the meeting of "making the contract into your

weapon," inverts the negative self-image mediated for Hector and Diana by the invaded house

that they invoke themselves at the beginning of the meeting. Whereas in the invaded house framing they are not poor people looking to defend themselves legally, but 'invaders' transgressing property, Sidonio's invocation of mortgage contracts as cross-scalar objects help reverse that narrative. Through the mortgage's, and office archive's ready to hand dimension that can inflate and deflate their dimensions through the law, and its material limits, the towering weight of debt has become slightly more manageable, and the moral irritation of being named 'invaders' along with it. In fact, as the invaded house reduces in psychological dimensions and the mortgage regains some positive concreteness for the couple, these two scales are also being epistemically linked in new ways (a new legal strategy, at a new social organization, connected to new experiences of solidarity, etc.).

When discussing the office's legal 'delay' strategy ("questioning things in the contracts," "sending the case to another court, and "making the contract your weapon"), Sidonio and other office lawyers' emphasize the materiality of contracts, their status as things that move around in territorial space. Vicenta's monthly speeches, for instance, would regularly include detailed information for affiliates on such tidbits of legal arcania as how long it typically took for the civil courts in Tijuana to send files to Mexicali (the state capital) round trip on the precarious cliff-ridden highway that unites them, or how for residents that establish residency at another location prior to an eviction should legally be served at the new residence and not at the property at risk of repossession. "Eluding the banks" as Vicenta put it, in this way, residents would be encouraged to unilaterally w*eaponize the materiality of the eviction notice,* the necessity of a physical delivery to the mortgage-holder's residence, to delay and disrupt the bank's own legal strategy. It was as if Vicenta and staff had discovered a series of strategies for clearly occupying a 'legal grey zone' (as some dissenting lawyers at the office would critique the strategies

privately) without, however, stepping into one of that space's most iconic practice in Mexico's twentieth century--invading property.

Naming the Invader: Between Place-Making and Subject Formation

In the Fall of 2016, I was invited for only the second time to accompany *Barzón* staff to the office's weekly television spot. Knowing that the television network is owned and run by Jaime Bonilla, a bi-national businessman who is now transitioning to become the leading *Morena* politician in northwest Mexico at this early point in the party's formation, I happily agreed to come along. With the national *Barzón* association now fully backing *Morena,* and the growing importance of Bonilla, thereby, for Vicenta's future political life, the television show had become impossible not to see in a party-politics light. On the one hand, the association gave a lifelong businessman like Bonilla some contact with authentic currents of Mexican progressive/left politics, as he geared up to represent a party claiming such a progressive mantle for itself. For Vicenta, on the other hand, the show served as vehicle for her own dawning name recognition and clout among the local 'popular' classes. As a call-in show, the exchanges between Vicenta, Sidonio, etc. and callers took much of the same shape as the meeting with Hector and Diana sketched above--projecting the atmosphere of the local office across the city.

Rather than focusing on the show itself, however, this scene recounts a conversation I have off-camera at the show with Jorge, Vicenta's husband and the office's resident IT officer, who invited me to the show this particular day. As a lifelong northerner, like Vicenta, with a career behind him as a *maquila* supervisor (and consequently, with years of IT experience), Jorge role at *El Barzón*, was not a lawyer so much as the office 'fixer,' jokester, and resident know-it-all. He was also an involved father, shipping children around in the family minivan before pit-

stopping back at the law office. Often in transit, both physically and career-wise, the one immovable fact about Jorge was his relationship with Vicenta, his partner. That relationship meant his influence exceeded the typical clout of a law office's IT coordinator. It meant, moreover, that his opinions and those of Vicenta on serious matters were usually in lockstep, even as his apolitical position and joking personality meant that this 'informal spokesperson' status of Jorge's at the office was itself ambiguous enough as to be rarely highlighted or questioned directly by other staff.

As we ride up the hillside of the *Colonia Independencia,* our backs turned to a San Diego looming hazily in the rear view mirror, Jorge is schooling me on that odd unit of value known as the UDI (an acronym for the equally undescriptive full name, 'unit of investment') which Irma and other protestors at the *plantón* discuss in the chapter's introduction. Used in Mexico almost exclusively for calculating interest on Infonavit mortgages during the subprime, between roughly 2000 and 2015, the UDI had by my fieldwork become a kind of shorthand for 'manipulative mortgage.' At first, Jorge is breaking down for me the history of this invented financial 'unit,' in 1990s Chile. He explains how initially there were probably good-intentioned state economists in Mexico City who wanted to try it out in mortgages, not banking on how it would distort mortgage costs over time in the Mexican context.

As we talk, communications satellite dishes, telephone and television antennas flicker by us, passing between *Independencia's* apartment buildings and self-built concrete homes from the 1970s, as our vehicle ascends toward Bonilla's station, 'PSN.' The abodes become more luxurious higher up the hillside, then the station appears. As we park and head in, to meet Sidonio, however, the UDIs conversation suddenly turns from the impersonal to the personal, from the national to the local, and from an analytical to a more speculative register. First, Jorge

recalls how "on one of Vicenta and my first trips to meet with *Barzón* folks in Mexico City about a potential alliance, we discovered that the local Infonavit offices [there, in the capital] had stopped denominating mortgages in UDIs over a year prior," while in *El Norte* those same contracts were still being used.

Figure 10. Sidonio (left) and Jorge (right) man the phone lines at the office's front desk. Note the file cabinets just to Sidonio's left.

"Why do you think that was the case?" I ask, knowing that here in the north there were still (in 2016) isolated cases of new mortgages being originated in UDIs despite promises to discontinue to the practice, and even the introduction of programs allowing people to re-sign their contracts in a version denominated in *pesos* rather than the more inflation-prone UDI.

"You ask me why they kept selling the UDI in the north?" says Jorge, his wry smile in this moment seemingly building up some anticipation before answering as we stand in a well-lit lobby, waiting for an elevator door to sound. "That's a very good question. well, it's because out there [i.e., beyond the north] the people get bold [*se ponen bravos*]. They say to Infonavit, 'go

ahead and sue me, take my house away—just see what happens!'"

"But why is that?" I ask. The elevator arrives, we step in.

"Over there they burn police cars, you know, and just take the apartment back again,"
Jorge responds, after checking (it seems) that no one else would get on the elevator.

"You think that those things happen in central Mexico, but not here?" I ask.[53] Playing
devil's advocate, I go on to remind Jorge that Sidonio and some other lawyers around the office
can be heard at times praising extra-legal resistance.

"They're just joking," Jorge replies.[68] He reminds me (also in jest?) that Sidonio himself
was born and raised in Mexico City before coming north as a young man.

"Sidonio says it's because people here lack 'Aztec blood,'" I remind Jorge. He chuckles
as we enter the studio waiting room, check in with a secretary, and take seats.

"It's not even Mexico City where you see that sort of thing the most," continues Jorge.
"It's in Michoacán, Jalisco, Veracruz, and south from there," he says. "In that region they're
more experienced *invadiendo.* They're like 'let me enter this [disoccupied house] and if they
kick me out alright, but if they don't—it's mine.'"

When Jorge equates the history of *invasiones* with people who have been willing to "burn
police cars," he elides more complex histories. Land invasions and housing invasions are not
necessarily bloody or destructive, after all, either historically (see chapter two) or
contemporarily. Historically, in fact, in terms of the Cold War-era Mexican agrarian struggles,
the kind in whose legacy *El Barzón* is situated at a national scale, the vast majority of violence
associated with invasions was perpetrated not by land-seekers, but by police and army forces.[69]

---

[68] I admit that Jorge does have a point here; a lot of these jokes around the office do hold as the punchline that
residents in border cities like Tijuana are not very *bravo*, [courageous, bold] i.e., not as willing to collectively
challenge evictions, given the risk of violence.

[69] At the same time, however, the Mexican sociologist Eduardo Aguado López and his colleagues would note, in

Northern Mexican land invasions, moreover, (see project introduction) played a crucial role sparking, in the late 1950s, this mid-twentieth-century growth of land invasion practices nationally. For Jorge, however, as I am discovering in this conversation, such historical geographies are far from the final word in locating the politics of invasion in Mexico circa 2016.

"Look," says Jorge. "This is inside info, alright?" I nod. "Ok," he continues, "if you really crack the numbers, you find that for every hundred affiliates we have, only seventeen percent are actually saving their money while we are fighting the court process on their behalf, see?"

At first, I am not sure that I do see. Jorge is saying that only a fraction of affiliates are following the office's recommended financial 'delay tactics,' whereby affiliates are advised (among other secondary tactics, some mentioned earlier in this section) to redirect mortgage payments to a financial reserve in preparations for a one-off negotiated liquidation of the mortgage from the bank for a lump sum.[54] So the office has trouble convincing the majority of affiliates to save their rent payments, rather than redirecting those moneys to food, other bills, transportation, etc. 'So what?' I find myself wondering, as we begin to watch on a monitor in the waiting room while Sidonio and a news anchor 'moderator' from PSN answer call-in mortgage questions in the studio across the hall. Rather than focus on the show, I find myself pondering Jorge's comments. What, after all, does the difficulty of getting affiliates to save, to follow the office's legal strategies, have to do with housing invasions at a regional and national scale?

When I ask Jorge precisely this, his initial response is not particularly revealing: "well," he responds, "a lot of those people don't even pay us [for legal work, filing fees, association

_____

their 1980s study of Mexican *movimientos campesinos e indígenas,* that among the most forcefully repressed—because the most dynamic and indeed "combative" land struggle groups—of this period were indeed a plurality of southern groups like the *Frente Campesino Independiente* (Independent *Campesino* Front) of Oaxaca and indigenous groups from Venustiano Carranza, Chiapas.

dues] anyway."

"That part I know," I point out. "But debt is one thing, invasion is another. That's what Vicenta always says," I respond.

"And for some people that's how it really is. But we can't get all affiliates to think that way. Some people," Jorge goes on, though lowering his voice slightly, "use the association to stay in their houses without paying, you know."

"Sure," I respond, "like the proverbial affiliate who has some mysterious illness and returns a couple years after disappearing with barely a word of explanation. And you all are too polite to ask for a doctor's note. But does that mean they're not just staying in their houses, but invading other houses?" I ask.

"It sure looks like that," Jorge responds more shortly now, as though he's said too much. Of course, there are no archive-based statistics from the office to back up this part of Jorge's speculation. It may be that only seventeen percent of affiliates regularly follow the office's legal-financial strategies. But the idea that the others are not doing so because they have accepted another strategy altogether (invading houses) doesn't seem to me any better grounded in the office archives than in Jorge's initial insights about UDIs at the beginning of the conversation.

"And these folks are all from Veracruz, Michoacán, Guerrero? The ones invading" I ask again. Jorge simply shrugs and looks up at the ceiling panels, as though to say, "Would that be so strange?"

Figure 11. Sidonio co-hosting the call-in show, as seen from the studio's waiting room.

Certainly, the coherence of Jorge's posture here is questionable. While drawing the micro-scale of the office archive together with macro-territorial scales of region and nation in much the same general pattern as Sidonio in his meeting with Diana and Hector, the emphasis for Jorge here on drawing in-group/out-group distinctions among the office's affiliates also would seem to work against the grain of how a 'well-ordered' boundary object should operate within an institution like *El Barzón*. Conversely, while what coherence Jorge seems to set in motion here emerges by positively identifying the bulk of affiliates as *invaders* at the office-level*,* it's Jorge's investment in an ethnoregional territorial imagination (in which the "migrant," typically a *maquiladora* worker or agro-industry worker like those in San Quintin, is codified as a prototypical 'invader') that really orders such connections. Such ethno-regionalism, as an important ingredient in northern Mexican party politics (increasingly across party) since the 1980s derives from broader geopolitical forces, notably set into their present nativist order by northern Mexican capitalists who enacted a semi-hostile takeover of the PAN party around that time (the time in which Vicenta and Jorge were coming themselves to political consciousness as

young PANistas). However, coherence and incoherence here is a secondary concern for the chapter's analysis.

With this story, rather, I aim to center the role of scale--historical, as well as territorial scales--in constituting the invaded house as a mediator of a polysemous politics of invasion, with multiple regional, national, local and institutional faces.

To grasp how the invaded house can serve as a key boundary object not simply for a local legal aid office, or even at a decentralized national civil society association like *El Barzón,* but as something closer to the scale of what Star calls a 'boundary infrastructure,' for mediating regional-versus-national geopolitical fault lines (a critical boundary to navigate as Vicenta and Jorge contemplate launching new careers with *Morena* at this time), however, we need, first, to introduce at least a couple more brush-strokes to this picture. Because while Sidonio connects with Hector and Diana in the scene with which this section begins through shared experiences of labor, of rural life, and of recent local political events, Jorge's 'inside info,' appears less grounded in these concretely shared realities than in shared political mythologies spilling from the early neoliberal era's unfinished land-based political struggles. To contextualize how Jorge tracks a politics of invasion from local to national scales and back, we must step back in time to how land invasion politics of the 1970s continues to shape the connections Jorge makes across the scales. Where to begin? In the chapter's conclusion (there is also a brief 'afterward' further discussing *El Barzón's* closure and Vicenta's ongoing political career after that), I turn to respond to this question and, moreover, to the question of the scalar mobilities of a politics of invasion evident in Jorge's story--contextualizing these in the unfinishedness of Cold War and early neoliberal Mexican political historical projects.

Conclusion: The Invaded House: A Revived Boundary Object After the 2018 Elections?

By manner of conclusion, I want to turn to one final brief sketch of the politics of the invaded house on a more national scale. It's the story of Vicenta's former boss, the former national director of *El Barzón,* Alfonso Ramírez Cuéllar, at the time immediately after *Morena's* sweeping election victory in 2018.[70] And the central episode of this brief sketch, moreover, directly echoes and invokes the Echeverrian politics of rumor that, at its former heights of power and promise in the 1970s, animated an anxious Mexican infrastructure-building state.

Both at the end of his term as national director of the *Morena* party (2018-2020) and subsequently as the chair of the Mexican congress' influential new committee on tax reform, Ramírez Cuéllar would attempt to reframe debates about poverty and inequality back slightly toward the historical forms of land invasions familiarized through the twentieth century Agrarian Reforms to which they ran adjacent, pushing and at times exceeding legality (paradoxically, it's

---

[70] Occupying a newly created cabinet position approaching that of a shadow attorney general (The Secretary of Honesty and Public Administration) in Baja California's new *Morena*-led state government after the same election cycle, Vicenta would find herself in the headlines early in new governor Jaime Bonilla's term, as the administration came under fire for alleged corruption in the management of the border state's customs bureaucracy. In an ostensible ploy to pivot from defense to offense in front of growing federal scrutiny (including from President López Obredor) of the accusations against Bonilla, in June of 2020 Vicenta would help direct an employee of the state environmental protection agency to survey reports of illegal waste-water practices by GAP (Grupo Aeroportuario del Pacífico), the nation's largest private airport operator.

Given the deep financial relationship between GAP and the federal state, this surprise investigation of one of the federal state's key local proxies served as an indirect challenge to growing customs scrutiny. When a GAP-employed private security guard prevented the environmental officer from entering the airport's waste-water facilities, placing the local official under arrest for "terrorism and invasion of international communication channels," Vicenta and Bonilla would then punch back, leveraging once more the ambiguity of authority between GAP and the federal state, to decry the National Guard (who apparently approved of the arrest) for "receiving orders from a security company." Invasion politics here found another critical cross-scalar boundary object: the airport. Heras, Antonio. "Gobierno De BC Denuncia a Grupo Aeroportuario." *La Jornada*, La Jornada, 20 June 2020, www.jornada.com.mx/2020/06/20/estados/027n4est; Delgado, Jaime. "Red De Peralta Protegida Por Jaime Bonilla, Fueron Cesados Por SAT y Salvados Por El Gobernador De BC." *Periodismo Negro*, 24 Jan. 2021, www.periodismonegro.mx/2021/01/23/red-de-peralta-protegida-por-jaime-bonilla-fueron-cesados-por-sat-y-salvados-por-el-gobernador-de-bc/.

been observed, in the spirit of the law). As the prominent Mexican journalist Julio Astillero

would note in an opinion piece on the former *Barzónista's* effort in *The Washington Post,*

"Alfonso Ramírez Cuéllar, who took leave as a federal legislator and president of the strategic

Budget Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, stated that in Mexico there are "billions of

dollars that constitute a totally unobserved wealth," for which "now it is demanded, urgently, for

this inequality and concentration of wealth [to] be measured." To enable the formulation of new

tax and budget laws, Astillero notes, Cuéllar in 2020 initially proposed a very strategic legal

reform: the National Institute of Geography and Statistics (INEGI), according to the most

scandalous of these early reforms, would be mandated to "enter, without any legal impediment,

to review the real estate and financial assets of all people. Every two years it must give an

account of the results of all the assets that each Mexican claims." "Above all," Astillero would

remark regarding the early response to Cuéllar's proposal, what set Mexicans off was "the use of

the verb "*entrar,*" i.e., "enter"[71]. The term, according to the *Post* article, invoked fears of "the

irruption of inspectors into houses to verify data." But just as Astillero's article would carefully

avoid the term invasion, so would it avoid specifying which subset of Mexicans—namely, elite

Mexicans—historically feared this simple verb most in the twentieth century.

Cuéllar, in his response, would seek to limit this accusation by avoiding the accusation

of 'invasion' in name. "I want to see that the rich pay more taxes," the politician stated simply in

one interview on the matter, "I don't wish to enter their houses."[72] The fear of invasion, standing

---

[71] Astillero, Julio. "Medir y Gravar La Riqueza Extrema Puede Ayudar a La Paz Social En México." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 26 May 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/es/post-opinion/2020/05/25/medir-y-gravar-la-riqueza-extrema-puede-ayudar-la-paz-social-en-mexico/.

[72] "El Exlíder De Morena Insiste En Que México Adopte Un 'Impuesto a La Riqueza.'" *Expansión Política*, Expansión, 23 Feb. 2021, politica.expansion.mx/congreso/2021/02/23/el-exlider-de-morena-insiste-en-que-mexico-adopte-un-impuesto-a-la-riqueza.

just behind euphemisms of 'experts entering' private properties would become even more direct

as critics directed the public to recall Cuéllar's personal political file. As the commentator

Eduardo Ruiz-Healy would write in *El Economista,* the major national financial newspaper:

> Why did I want to remember the [1970s Mexican *guerrilla* organization] the Communist
> League September 23 today? For one reason: some of its members founded the
> Revolutionary Patriotic Party (PPR) in 1982, which in 1988 joined forces with other
> organizations to create the National Democratic Front (FDN), which that year nominated
> Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas as its candidate for the Presidency. From the FDN the PRD would
> be born and many of its militants would later found *Morena*.
>   Alfonso Ramírez Cuéllar, the current president of *Morena*, in some way must
> have communed at some time with the ideals of the ex-guerrillas who created the PPR,
> being himself a former member of the PPR. If this were not the case, why was he a
> member of that party? With this background, should we be surprised that Ramírez
> Cuéllar proposes a constitutional reform that allows INEGI to enter the homes of citizens
> to review their real estate assets, in order to measure the concentration of wealth; and that
> INEGI be authorized to review people's financial assets, in coordination with the SAT
> [the secretary of taxation]?[73]

Ruiz-Healy's selective biography of Ramírez Cuéllar's career, serving in this passage to

set up a parallel between a Morena-led government and the *guerrilla* organizations of the 1970s,

known for organizing and participating in land invasion, evinces the ongoing vitality of these

historical parallels between the 1970s and Mexican politics now in the 2020s. Placing

uncomfortably unfinished histories (for both the Mexican political right and left) on the table, as

the *Economista* article does, however, may not be so far from Ramírez Cuéllar's own intentions

with this mapping proposal. Might forcing these sorts of difficult discussions, across historical

moments, ensure some ideological content within a fragile new *Morena* governing coalition that

remains highly dependent on political opportunism for its allies? If so, the invaded house once

---

[73] Ruiz-Healy, Eduardo. "¿Comulga Ramírez Cuéllar Con Los Ideales De La Liga Comunista 23 De Septiembre?"
El Economista, El Economista, 19 May 2020, www.eleconomista.com.mx/opinion/Comulga-Ramirez-Cuellar-con-
los-ideales-de-la-Liga-Comunista-23-de-Septiembre-20200518-0165.html.

again pops up here in another moment of national politics' major realignment. "It's good," the former *Barzón* director would quip on the subject during an interview with the nation's leading investigative journalist in 2020, "it's good that [the initiative] has brought this polemic into the open." [74]

Figure 12. A 2016 meeting, with lawyer Alberto Medina in the foreground, in the garage of a group of affiliates from the same public housing development.

What, though, has this chapter brought out into the open? Even accepting the *Morena* leader's suggestion that his party was clearing the political air nationally in some way, I have aimed in this chapter to show how invasion politics' cross-scalar mobility (neither principally a transnational, transregional, or translocal phenomenon) is itself the 'essence' of invasion politics--crucial to both its functionality and its elusiveness in political debates whose limits tend to be bounded by national, regional, or local scales and actors. The consequences of this insight for social theory are considerable. Take migration studies and critical infrastructure studies, for example.

Each of these disciplines centers around a meta-object (population in the first case, large scale infrastructural systems in the second) in relation to which Mexican politics of invasion, not

---

[74] Aristegui, Carmen. "'Que Bueno Que Se Abrió La Polémica': Ramírez Cuéllar Sobre Su Iniciativa." *Aristegui Noticias*, 19 May 2020, aristeguinoticias.com/undefined/kiosko/que-bueno-que-se-abrio-la-polemica-ramirez-cuellar-sobre-su-iniciativa-video/.

unlike its function as an (at times) 'ill-structured' or 'well-structured' conceptual object in this chapter's institutional ethnography, would serve as a boundary object. At once legible as disciplinarily significant (see studies of ethnonationalist 'invasion' discourses in migration studies, and of infrastructure-'squatting' in infrastructure studies) and yet marginal in its recent impacts on either discipline's core themes of study, might there be more than a mere coincidental parallel between how politics of invasion got objectified in Echeverria's early neoliberal Mexico, at *El Barzón,* and now in Morena's new wide-tent attempt to reimage progressive party politics in Mexico?

Whereas critical migration scholarship, moreover, tends to locate ethnonationalism as an ideological possession of certain subjects (as an 'outmoded belief' that migrants are invaders), on one hand, and settler colonial studies frames invasion as a predominantly transnational-scale phenomenon, locating a politics of invasion in contemporary Mexico as a boundary-object, mobile across these scales, challenges the geopolitical presuppositions of these scholars. Beliefs about certain populations as 'invaders' in contemporary northern Mexico may be primarily regional or local, and only secondarily national--or vice versa. Such actively shifting loci of political interpretation suggest that social theory would do well to focus more on the interplay of the production of place and the production of subjectivity (rather than the production of subjectivity as a misrecognition of place, or vice versa) in theorizing politics of invasion. The study of boundary objects like the invaded house I track in this chapter, alongside my *Barzón* interlocutors, offers a ready-to-hand method for making such an analytic shift come to life.

Chapter Two

Territory as Lab: Policy Expertise, the End of Land Struggle, and the Infrastructure Building State

> *--What's going on is that these houses are built to the size of the median Mexican, someone who is not so tall as you are.--he explained.*
> *--You're talking about the Lilliputians. I'm certain that your grandchildren have toys that are bigger than the duplex I rent. Wouldn't it have been better to build apartments for the working class?*
> *--After many studies on the topic we realized that the Mexican does not want to live in a multifamily unit. He feels that he does not own anything when his property is in the air. He wants to feel that he owns land flush with the street, with its own jardin [garden]...*
> --Jardinera *[flower bed].*
> *--They call it a* jardin--*he clarified, annoyed at the interruption.*[75]

Introduction: What Happened to Policy Expertise at Infonavit?

This scene, from a 2015 detective novel by the Tijuana-based novelist Hilario Peña, recalls for me an encounter I had at the Mexican national worker housing institute, Infonavit's, central offices shortly after the novel's publication. During my fieldwork in Tijuana, in the aftermath of the same subprime housing boom that provides the setting for Peña's novel, I met an architect from the institute's headquarters, visiting for an event here in the north. The event, held in the 'community center' of Provive, the real estate firm that appears as the focus of Chapter Three, announced final plans and funding—powerpoint included—for a new public park, sponsored by the federal housing institute. After the event, I had presented myself to our visitor from Mexico City, and the conversation ended with an invitation to visit the institute's headquarters, do interviews with staff, and visit some new projects around Mexico City in which

---

[75] Peña, Hilario. Juan Tres Dieciséis. España: Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial México, 2014.

the institute was involved. About six months later, in late 2016, I was able to take up that offer.

I organized a week of interviews with staff at several different federal housing organizations, starting with the most powerful, Infonavit. The Mexico City headquarters, a large, concrete, brutalist structure to one side of the *Zocalo*, on a significant street of corporate offices known as *Barranca del Muerto* (Death Canyon), into whose bowels I had gained access via a park in east Tijuana, had been featured in *Total Recall*, the cinematic version, featuring Arnold Schwarzenegger, of the Philip Dick dystopian science fiction story, *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale.* In the movie, Infonavit's headquarters was the operational headquarters for a company that specializes in implanting pleasurably false memories into the brains of those who can't afford genuine pleasurable experiences.

Little did I think, at the time of this visit, that a chapter of my dissertation based on that week's interviews would focus more on knowledge and historical memory than on the fabrication and destruction of buildings. This chapter does start, however, with a brief story, based in my fieldwork at the headquarters, involving the construction and destruction of a very specific group of buildings—a housing laboratory to be exact.

Towards the end of that week, I spent some time with a young architect whom I'll call Romero. He was one of several young men who made their presence known in this wing of the central offices—a wing technically assigned to finances, yet which did a bit of everything and was constant upheaval due to higher-ups' bureaucratic whimsies. This was an institution where, as one architect put it, "the very top people have the shortest tenures—it's a springboard to positions of greater national prominence for them." The truth of this quip would soon be evidenced by Alejandro Murat's (son of a former governor of Oaxaca) leaving the institute later that year— in a bit of a mess, if the many accounts from construction firms and other industry

83

insiders in Mexico City and Tijuana are to be believed[76]—to run for and win the governorship of Oaxaca himself.

Rather than political rumors, however, I know that my time with Romero is supposed to be spent discussing topics fit for experts in housing (I am interpolated as one of these throughout the week, grouped with architecture researchers and urban sociologists who also roam the halls of the institute). Soon, then, we get down to business. As he explains it, one of the key critiques facing Infonavit staff in the aftermath of the subprime construction boom was about "the homogeneity of our housing models—really, the homogeneity of the models used by the private [construction] firms," with which Infonavit formed financing partnerships in those years. "Everyone began to build the *pie de casa,* right?" he says, referring to a housing model whose name translates literally to 'stem house." The stem house, a model that would appear in Mexico and other Latin American nations in the mid-twentieth century as an imagined middle ground between *autoconstruccion* and industrial building methods, offered a single industrially produced room (or two), with the idea being that residents could then expand the building on their own--by self-building or hiring local laborers. The expansion would sometimes be imagined horizontally, and in other cases as a vertical expansion.

"Right. Now the director of Sedatu goes around giving speeches saying the *pie* is a thing of the past, that 'we no longer build that way in Mexico," I say, taking the opportunity to mention the secretary of rural and urban development, a federal office whose mandate overlaps with Infonavit's, yet whose influence paled at the time in comparison to what is, after all, Latin America's largest mortgage bank.

---

[76] As the Infonavit scandals retrospectively revealed by Lopez Obrador's administration (2018-2024) show, these assumptions were correct. Ostensibly because of Murat's ongoing salience as a political broker, as governor, the new federal administration has not pursued revelations involving Murat directly, but focused instead on his successor, David Penchyna.

"More or less," is Romero's response, as he flattens an already flat tie. "After all, what do

the needs of culture and climate and families in the Yucatán have to do with those in Baja

California?" Pulling a sleek coffee table book off a shelf, Romero explains that this attention to

"culture" as the antidote to homogenous, serial housing's shortcomings has materialized most

iconically in an ongoing project gathering visionary projects from the most innovative architects

working in each state of the republic. The aim: "to imagine what a more *site-specific* [the phrase

is uttered in English] Mexican public housing future might look like."

The word 'ethnicity,' much less 'race,' never enters explicitly into what might be called a

rhetoric of 'site specific culture.' Exploring the book, *From the Territory to the Inhabitant*, I

suddenly recognize the name and design of an architect whom I had met at a regional

construction industry conference earlier in the year.

"Sure, I contributed," the architect had told me over drinks at an expansive ranch run by

one of the conference's backers, according to field notes scribbled the next day while nursing a

hangover, "but I gave them the kind of project that they would never use, as a kind of 'f--- you,'"

he had said. "It was me saying, 'you say 'we want to change,' but you really don't.'"

The voice this unnamed architect was ventriloquizing was not a specific official; any

number of high-ranking officials would embrace this posture in the post-subprime moment in

which my fieldwork occurred. This claimed need for reform, as my architect acquaintance would

contend, "was only as forceful as the federal firepower," that could be mustered to back it up. As

a special 2016 issue of the CNN Mexico magazine vehicle, the ominously named *Expansion*

would declare, the *"*new kings of the real estate sector" would be those who accepted the then-

president Enrique Peña Nieto's "new rules," namely, that housing's "proximity and accessibility

come first."[77] New "federal contention zones" aimed to show some federal pushback against the disorderly, peri-urban public housing construction that had dominated headlines in Mexican territorial policy in recent years. It aimed to express a "renewed" federal seriousness in managing urban territories. By amounting to a merely restriction-based policy ("don't build here,") that, moreover, excluded terrains where the state had already given permits under previous urban planning law, however, it in fact evinced for critics like my architect friend the superficiality of the Institute's commitment to re-evaluating its own mission, post-subprime.

I mention all that context to say this: if, in fact, my architect acquaintance *had* been thinking of one specific Infonavit bureaucrat above all the others, at least as symbolically embodying a superficial institutional will at Infonavit to reimagine their expertise, in retrospect a clear candidate, connected to the competition itself, stands out. When, two years after my conversation with Romero, an academic colleague in Mexico mentions in an email that the *Territory to Inhabitant* project has expanded to a more ambitious scale--that of taking the design winners of the original contest and building a "Housing Laboratory," campus based around their prototypes--I head online to see what I can find. Among the first items I find is an interview in *Architecture Magazine* with Zedillo Velasco. Zedillo Velasco, who happens to be the son of the Mexican president, Ernesto Zedillo, who subjected Infonavit to a series of 'financial reforms' in the 1990s that removed its construction responsibilities from the institute in favor of a more strictly mortgage financing mission, does not mention his father by name in the interview. What he does do, however, is promise the kind of sweeping solutions to vast national problems that a figure like his father might approve of:

When I arrived at Infonavit, the first thing I noticed is that the institute was financing a

---

[77] "Resurge La Vivienda En México." *CNN Expansión*, 2 Feb. 2016, expansion.mx/economia/2016/02/02/el-resurgimiento-de-la-industria-de-la-vivienda-en-mexico.

large number of homes, more than fifteen hundred per day, but there was no involvement with architects whatsoever. As an architect, I explained to them the importance of having architects in the discussion of low-income housing. That involvement had stopped for several years in a lot of Latin American countries, but particularly in Mexico, where only politicians and private developers were included. So, we spent a lot of time talking to architects about how important design was for low-income housing. [...]

It was important to show how houses should perform differently from one territory to the next. We began a project called "From the Inhabitant to the Territory," which started as a research process to understand the basic needs of people living in different. [...] We were sitting in the lab, trying to find a cure, and a lot of those houses could be the cure for a lot of cities. Now they [the new administration] have the possibility of taking the medicine to the city.[78]

On certain level, the weakening of expert authority that this passage describes is an undeniable phenomenon. It's the same phenomenon that my architect acquaintance who satirized Zedillo Velasco's competition, only to win it, described. And it's the same one that saturates the Peña scene quoted at this chapter's start--complete with a corporate architect and private detective arguing in an Abbott and Costello-esque circle about the minimum size of a front-yard vegetable patch for it's being designated '*jardin*.' Yet whereas Peña's satire points ultimately to the foreclosure of Agrarian Reform by greedy capitalists as the culprit, and whereas my anonymous architect acquaintance blames Infonavit's own bureaucratic mediocrity, its lack of serious purpose, for Mexican public housing's lack of plans/project up to the task of address Mexicans' shelter needs, the *Architecture Magazine* interview suggests a solution that waters both down and blends them into simple problem of substitution. Might Infonavit's ills be neither historical nor bureaucratic, but result simply from the need to hand the institute's reins back to the architects, allowing experts to lead a new search for "cures" to what ails Mexican cities?

---

[78] Gerfen, Katie. "Apan Housing Laboratory, by MOS." *Architect*, 4 Sept. 2019, www.architectmagazine.com/design/apan-housing-laboratory-by-mos_o.

Less than a year after that Zedillo Velasco interview, a new presidential administration, with its own desire to choose Infonavit's future would offer its own answer to that question; no, an architect-led Infonavit was not the cure-all for what ailed Mexico's cities. Emblematic of that posture would be Carlos Martínez Velázquez, the new director of López Obrador's Infonavit, who would commission a study of the new lab he was to inherit early in his tenure. Symptomatically, he found the following deficiencies:

1. The facilities are not designed to carry out technical tests of materials, so they do not comply with the characteristics of a housing laboratory.
2. [Because they were in a single climatic location] the prototypes selected from the project "From the Territory to the Inhabitant," whose objective was to consider prototypes to serve different climates and terrains, were not able to serve substantially to carry out such housing research.
3. The complex is too far from large metropolitan areas and universities to function as an alternative educational or research space.[79]

The review concluded that the lab would need to be liquidated and closed to all activity until that could occur. In the ultimate irony, a laboratory for studying what could be done to prevent Mexican public housing from continually being left unfinished and/or unoccupied by its intended occupants, resulted in the lab itself being left unfinished and unoccupied. The idea that simply foregrounding architecture more at Infonavit would somehow lead from blueprints from buildings, from buildings to institutional transformation at Latin America's largest mortgage finance bank, and from institutional change to territorial remodeling, was disproven here not only in theory but, with this short-lived, high price tag lousing lab in a small town in Hidalgo, in practice. Disproving a theory--especially a flimsily built one--however, can be far easier than

[79] "Infonavit Buscará Habilitar Espacio Arquitectónico En Apan, Hidalgo." *Grupo En Concreto*, 3 July 2020, grupoenconcreto.com/infonavit-buscara-habilitar-espacio-arquitectonico-en-apan-hidalgo/

offering an original alternate answer to the questions it raises. Indeed, as the Colombian sociologist Alexis Cortés has argued, based on a comparative analysis of Chilean and Brazilian social scientists' accounts of urban invader social movements of the 1970s and 1980s in those respective nations, in each of these national contexts there emerged in the period a certain parallelism between land struggle politics and the accounts generated by the theorists that claimed to account for them. "The radicalization of the *pobladores* [i.e., land invasion] movement caused a radicalization in scholarly interpretations," as well, Cortés contends, often toward idealized socialist or liberal capitalist perspectives, respectively. The Brazilian case offers Cortés' strongest argument for this claim that social theory and social movements contributed to a mutually polarized feedback loop between them. There, Cortés observes how this polarized trend within a single national social science scholarship became attached to specific city milieus. While both Sao Paulo and Rio scholars generally supported *favelado* social movements, São Paulo scholars saw the movement locally as a radically autonomist one, while scholars in Río de Janeiro tended to downplay the movements' possibilities for radical social change (they emphasized, instead, *favela* residents' political rationality in bringing modest improvements to themselves and their families).[80]

Can Mexican architects' and urban social policy experts' more broadly, relation to social movements surrounding the rise and decline of a vast public housing construction engine over the past half century, be characterized through a similar dialectic of political polarization? In certain way, I think this chapter answers in the affirmative. Yes, Mexican social sciences of the early neoliberal era evinced divergent political approaches toward land struggle participants and

---

[80] Cortés, Alexis. "The Theoretical Construction of Pobladores and Favelados as Social Movements in Latin America." *Latin American Research Review* 56.1 (2021). 87-88. Cf. Bortoluci, José H. "Brutalism and the People: Architectural Articulations of National Developmentalism in Mid-Twentieth-Century São Paulo." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 62.2 (2020): 296-326.

the housing projects that sought to literally contain these movements. Unlike in the Brazilian

case, however, I show that while more conservative experts may have supported certain forms of

managed land invasion in urban Mexican contexts, they did so while implicitly opposing or

simply ignoring the simultaneous existence of rural land struggles. In this respect, the context for

the evolution of Mexican social policy expertise may be more justly compared in some ways not

to Cortés' Brazilian or Chilean case studies--nations where rural land struggles were clearly

politically secondary at this time to urban ones--but to nations like Bolivia, Peru, or Colombia,

where land invasions were a struggle equally associated with rural as with urban political

struggles up through the 1980s.[81] Indeed, to stick with Cortés a moment longer, it may be fair to

summarize the foregoing argument by stating that although Mexican scholars did indeed tend to

fall into divergent and at times quite polarized camps regarding land invasions' political

possibilities, such a split was not so crucial to the mutual influence of expert knowledges and

social movement politics on one another as in early neoliberal Brazil or Chile. This is since in

Mexico such polarities in turn splintered further around a second set of spatial poles: namely,

around how scholars saw (and didn't see) rural and urban space as related, or unrelated. By

tracking the salience of these rural-urban political frames, I find how not only architects, but

sociologists, demographers, and increasingly pseudo-self-appointed corporate leaders would

---

[81] Cf. Mayer, Enrique. *Ugly stories of the Peruvian agrarian reform*. Duke University Press, 2009;
Puente, Javier. "De comunero a campesino: el «corto siglo veinte» en el campo peruano, 1920-1969."
Investigaciones Históricas 40 (2020): 9; Quiroga Manrique, Catalina, and Diana Vallejo Bernal. "Territories of
Water: Agricultural Infrastructure, Agrarian Reform, and Palm Oil in The Marialabaja Municipality, Bolívar."
Revista Colombiana de Antropología 55.1 (2019): 59-89;Rosset, Peter. "Re-thinking agrarian reform, land and
territory in La Via Campesina." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 40.4 (2013): 721-775; Soliz, Carmen. ""Land to the
Original Owners": Rethinking the Indigenous Politics of the Bolivian Agrarian Reform." *Hispanic American
Historical Review* 97.2 (2017): 259-296; Tinsman, Heidi. *Partners in conflict*. Duke University Press, 2002;
Webber, Jeffery R. "Evo Morales, transformismo, and the consolidation of agrarian capitalism in Bolivia." *Journal
of Agrarian Change* 17.2 (2017): 330-347.

come to see the task of social expertise as one not necessarily of supporting all land invasions (i.e., rural and urban) but of using land invasions as starting points for theorizing new academic, legal, and economic distinctions between rural and urban space.

What happened to expertise in territory and urban planning at Infonavit, and across neoliberal Mexico? Grasped as a window onto attempts to manage politics--including, centrally for this era, a politics of invasion, through infrastructure-building as a site of national coherence (*vis* global capital and domestic social demands), and a site of national promise.

By juxtaposing this historical moment when Latin American states seemingly claimed more coherent and muscular policy and planning answers to the territorial challenges of their respective populations, and a present in which such expertise and/or authority now feels comparatively absent or lacking, we can get a sense of the scale and form of a historical contradiction that experts and residents in public housing worlds, perhaps more intimately even than most Mexicans, live within. As a complement to my account in chapter one, of the invaded house, and *its* mobile presence across office archives and national political debates relitigating the 1970s from the present, my focus here on land invasion politics' epistemic mobilities as in turn limited by and limiting Mexican social policy (and housing policy in particular) aims to broaden and deepen the historical scale and regional context of that prior chapter's claims.[82]
In this respect the chapter models a framework in which to consider Mexican politics of invasion of the neoliberal era: not only as a polysemous politics in the relatively collaborative sense of a "boundary object," but also as one over whose epistemic valences and narrative public framings social movement actors, state bureaucrats, and corporate classes fought to control.[83]

---

[82] For a relatively traditional political theory approach to this question, in the contemporary Latin American context, cf. Dargent, Eduardo. *Technocracy and democracy in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

[83] The literature theorizing and/or employing the concept as a key term is extensive. I am particularly indebted for my use of the term, which is standard, to the following works. Best, Jacqueline, et al. "Seeing and not-seeing like a

For social theory conversations at large, I aim with this chapter to show how foregrounding social policy expertise (a category which in my contexts highly overlaps with academic social science), as a tool used to manage politics can lead not only to dialogical insights regarding a certain mutual influence (*a la* the insights of Cortés arguments regarding South America), but also to how more chaotic narratives, for instance, of the proliferation of precarious knowledge production alliances and polarizations alike between scholars, the state, corporations, and social movements alike, can also be given space. Recent historians of the Global Cold War era have, through a focus on how global/national forms of political authority combined during the mid-twentieth century with a broad class of techno-economic expertise to form what was known as, "development knowledge," sought to expand the study of knowledge production toward the inclusion of narratives involving just the kind of complex collaborations that I aim to narrate here.[84]

And while I center in this chapter Latin American late Cold War knowledge production contexts, the chapter's core claim--that public housing and urban infrastructure development narratives allowed mainstream Mexican experts to both obscure rural land invasions and rationalize urban ones, making public housing appear to divergent audiences as the sheer embodiment of neoliberalism, or alternately as its concrete limit--speaks directly to the concerns of such scholars. There is good reason, of course, as to why these contexts so easily dovetail. Just as infrastructure-building had, together with monetary stimulus, been the key to the New Deal in

---

political economist: The historicity of contemporary political economy and its blind spots." *New political economy* (2020): 1-12; Deutschmann, Christoph. "Disembedded markets as a mirror of society: Blind spots of social theory." *European Journal of Social Theory* 18.4 (2015): 368-389.

[84] The term is particularly prominent in the work of Nicole Sackley ad Jacob Tropp, among others. Sackley, Nicole. "Foundation in the Field: The Ford Foundation New Delhi Office and the Construction of Development Knowledge, 1951-1970." (2012): 232; Tropp, Jacob. "Transnational development training and Native American 'laboratories' in the early Cold War." *Journal of Global History* 13.3 (2018): 469-490.

the U.S., giving new momentum to such models globally after the second world war,[85] so the increasing urbanization of global populations during this same period (one of global demographic explosion, moreover) would encourage shifts in the internal tendencies and composition of development knowledges over time. As Daniel Immerwahr has written, "for the day-in, day-out work of designing aid schemes, the United States depended on rural experts, for the obvious reason that much of the global South was agricultural. And so rural sociologists, often in the company of anthropologists, found themselves in positions of great influence within the foreign aid bureaucracy."[86] At the same time, this focus on rural territory as the preferred site of state-led infrastructure building was also subject to shifting political and economic calculations by the 1960s.

As the U.S. Senate's Report on International Housing Programs for 1962 would plead, using unusually emotive and alarmist language for a bureaucratic document of this kind and moment:

> [...A]dvancements in agricultural production and the new developments in industry and commerce have brought about population shifts from the rural areas to the cities of an unprecedented size, resulting in the doubling and tripling of some capital cities in the last generation. Such a shift has caused serious dislocations, overcrowded slums, and unbelievably horrible living conditions by the new city dwellers and has created pressures of a social, economic, and political nature far above the capacity for the underdeveloped countries to handle with their own resources. The United States has a vital interest in the effect such developments will have on the stability of the underdeveloped free nations of the world. Social and political unrest and communism are natural consequences of such conditions. The actions of these large masses of underprivileged and ill-housed people can wipe out all the gains from economic assistance to these countries.[87]

---

[85] Patel, Kiran Klaus. The New Deal: A Global History. Princeton University Press, 2017.

[86] Immerwahr, Daniel. *Thinking Small*. Harvard University Press, 2015, 53.

[87] United States, US Senate. (1962). Report on International Housing Programs. Committee on Banking and Currency, Subcommittee on Housing, Washington, DC: USGPO.

The message was clear: as global populations moved toward urban space increasingly, infrastructure-building and investment would need to be rapidly shifted toward those same spaces. Otherwise, all that the post-war world had built and rebuilt to this point might be 'wiped out,' by revolt and popular revolution. Despite this call to action in the early 1960s, however, prominent U.S. development expert Charles Abrams would in 1964 lament the World Bank's continuing intransigence, in refusing to loan for housing in developing countries, despite United States' encouragement with the *Punta del Este Accord* of 1961 following the revolution in Cuba. The bank, which distinguished between what it called productive and consumptive investments, saw housing as a net consumer of wealth, as compared to more basic needs for water and agricultural infrastructure. "The feeling," by World Bank leadership, wrote Abrams, was "that housing is a bottomless pit."[88] It would take until the 1970s, in fact, for the bank to acknowledge it could no longer ignore housing and urban infrastructure investment more broadly. In a 1972 policy paper, World Bank experts acknowledged for the first time that its own stock of experts was confronted by a "shortage of experience and expertise on urbanization problems."[89] Today, histories of twentieth century 'development knowledges' have begun to register this early neoliberal era shift toward urban expertise as a new key piece of development knowledges during this transitional period in global geopolitics.[90]

In the Latin American context, historians have of late focused on this shift increasingly, yet have done so from a distinct perspective. Rather than focusing on infrastructure

---

[88] Abrams, Charles. Man's Struggle for Shelter in an Urbanizing World. India: M.I.T. Press, 1964, 93.

[89] Bohr, Kenneth. (May 14, 1971), "A Proposed Bank Approach," memorandum, p. 3.

[90] Collings-Wells, Sam. "Developing communities: the Ford Foundation and the global urban crisis, 1958–66." *Journal of Global History* (2020): 1-19; Mashayekhi, Azadeh. "The 1968 Tehran master plan and the politics of planning development in Iran (1945–1979)." *Planning Perspectives* 34.5 (2019): 849-876; Van Waeyenberge, Elisa. "Crisis? What crisis? The World Bank and Housing Finance for the Poor." *SOAS Department of Economics Working Paper Series* 191 (2015).

building/investing as a lynchpin of Cold War global governance, to be interrogated through the USAID, World Bank, and studies of 'global expertise' touching down in specific sites, scholars of Latin American post-war urban planning knowledges have focused more on the participation of specific Latin American experts in such global circuits, or on the consolidation of expert constituencies at national and regional scales through the growth of new university systems. Such a choice of historical perspectives is well-founded. After all, as the World Bank admitted in the early 1970s its own dearth of urban planning expertise, Latin American social scientists gathered in Mexico City for their first regional conference on population--featuring declarations that "the time when the knowledge of our demographic phenomena came to us Latin Americans exclusively from institutes and offices located abroad... has almost disappeared."[91] In focusing on a time (the 1970s, and specifically Luis Echeverria's 1970-76 term that saw Infonavit's creation) that has been highlighted of late as critical for the consolidation of Latin American social science in recent work by Latin American scholars like Fernanda Beigel[92], Juan José Navarro and Fernando Quesada[93], and Juan Jesús Morales[94] among others,[95] the aim of this chapter is to unpack one unconsidered setting of Latin American development expertise's

---

[91] *Ibid, 397.*

[92] The Politics of Academic Autonomy in Latin America. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2016.

[93] Navarro, Juan José, and Fernando Quesada. "El impacto del proyecto Camelot en el período de consolidación de las Ciencias Sociales Latinoamericanas." *El desarrollo de las Ciencias Sociales. Tradiciones, actores e instituciones en Argentina, Chile, México y Centroamérica* (2010).

[94] Jesús Morales, Juan. "Científicos sociales latinoamericanos en Estados Unidos: cooperación académica, movilidad internacional y trayectorias interamericanas alrededor de la Fundación Ford." *Dados* 60.2 (2017): 473-504.

[95] Critical postwar planning studies apply their attentions to both histories of the Cold War and the Global 1960s, on one hand, and the application of Foucauldian 'archaeologies of knowledge' approaches to Latin American social thought in that period, on the other. C.f. Barandiarán, Javiera. Science and environment in Chile: The politics of expert advice in a neoliberal democracy. MIT Press, 2018. ; Beigel, 2016; Heilbron, Johan, Thibaud Boncourt, and Gustavo Sorá. "Introduction: The Social and Human Sciences in Global Power Relations." *The Social and Human Sciences in Global Power Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018. 1-25; Maia, João Marcelo Ehlert. "História da sociologia como campo de pesquisa e algumas tendências recentes do pensamento social brasileiro." *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 24.1 (2017): 111-128.

epistemic consolidation in the early neoliberal era: the space in which land invasions emerged, during this same period, at the heart of Mexican and Latin American politics.

In this respect, the chapter follows Mexican Cold War historian Elizabeth Henson's recent call for scholars of this period to turn their attentions beyond *guerrilla* violence, to "what was potentially revolutionary in the land invasions, the occupations [of government buildings], the confrontations on the patio of the statehouse," as well.[96] To Zedillo Velasco, Hilario Pena's private detective, my anonymous architect acquaintance of this introduction, and scholars of Latin American social science/planning knowledge histories alike, I would make a parallel point to Henson's. Scholars should look beyond academic institutions, state experts, and the 'global location' of knowledge production, to consider more directly what was epistemically radical about land invasion practices, and to ask how their polysemiousness both challenged and fueled new Latin American expert approaches to theorizing/governing territory. Such a shift, moreover, would place these Latin Americanist conversations in more direct theoretical conversation not only with transnational historians, but with other contemporary social theories that pivot on accounts of invasion (settler colonial studies, decolonizing methodologies, critical migration/security studies).

To model such a conceptual shift, the chapter contends that Henson's move toward greater attentions to land invasions is not enough. Politics of invasion, as Chapter One argued, is a broader terrain than land invasions alone--and is characterized by a polysemiousness that allow invasion to be both positively and negatively connoted in different times and places by elites/settlers and underclass/indigenous Latin Americans alike. To draw greater attention to this politics of invasion in the dual contexts of Mexican and global infrastructure-building state

---

[96] Henson, 2018.

forms' historical heights and the heights of Agrarian Reform-era land-based struggles across

Mexico and much of the region, it is necessary to ask as well: how did the experts and expert

knowledges claiming to mediate and manage these two key contexts do so not only in social

practice (i.e. by building public housing for land invaders, or alternately by billy-clubbing them,

as the case may have been) but in social and political theory?

Locating the epistemic co-production of land invasion politics and of infrastructural

visions of development in social policy expertise at the height on Mexican state-led

infrastructure-building visions in the early 1970s requires a careful unpacking of key knowledge

practices,[97] both with and against the grain of elite state/corporate interests. Invasion politics

involved diverse knowledge practices, which I aim to retrace and unpack in the coming pages, in

1970s Mexico and its broader Latin American agrarian reform and Cold War contexts. These

practices range from the production of new social movement-oriented media (in the chapter's

section one) to new so-called 'closed models' of urban space in Latin Americanist social science

to present 'migration' as an inherently coherent element of national economy development (in

section three), to the rhetorical flexibility of a populist president who claims to back both a new

commitment to urban infrastructure building and an intentionally 'ill-structured' (see chapter

one) policy position toward the policing of land invasion (in section four).

To do give the reader a sense of all this, the chapter moves back in time, from Infonavit's

headquarters circa 2016, in this introduction, initially to some similar offices of radical social

scientists at state housing experts (as well as outside such institutions) circa the 1970s and early

1980s (Infonavit would be founded in 1972). Before turning in later sections to how mainstream

---

[97] Casas-Cortés, María Isabel, Michal Osterweil, and Dana E. Powell. "Blurring boundaries: Recognizing knowledge-practices in the study of social movements." *Anthropological Quarterly* (2008): 17-58.

Latin American social science--oriented as it was toward the control and management of an infrastructure-building state through social policy--intervened in these contested spaces of knowledge production, this first main section aims to initially foreground for the chapter what scholars and other experts whose explicit ideologies of class and/or ethnic autonomy aligned with those of land invasion practitioners of the period. Contrary to the implications heard in Zedillo Velasco's *Architecture Magazine* interview above, this section locates Infonavit in its early years not as a bastion of architectural expertise *full stop,* but a site in which the politics of that expertise was also under attack, particularly around its proper relation to land struggle movements, nearly from the institute's origins.

Keeping within this same period, section two of the chapter shifts institutional perspective from state to corporate business experts. By interrogating the influence of a key text from Mexico's business leaders, *Mexican Business Thought,* published shortly after the infamous assassination of one of that clique's leading members, Eugenio Garza Sada, by Mexican *guerrillas* in 1973, the section more broadly locates the rise of Mexican businessmen as semi-self-appointed experts in social theory during this period. Like their more radical leftist counterparts, these scholars also based their political postures during this period centrally around land invasions, or as they put it, the need to defend and diffuse private property. Together with this influential book text, the section tracks how business leaders organized across sectors in new business councils during the 1970s (prefiguring a more direct involvement of the Mexican business class in party politics by the '80s) to frame land struggles in the countryside as symptoms of an outdated (Agrarian Reform-era produced) property system. To legitimize this claim, the section shows, Mexican business experts drew on both the classics European theorists of neoliberal economics (Von Mies, Schumpeter, etc) and on *indigenista* racial-ethnic

governance frameworks whose career as a staple of twentieth century Latin American statecraft, entangled with that of the infrastructure-building state in Mexico, would soon enter a prolonged period of waning influence and social authority. With this story of racial-ethnic governance on the one hand and economic neoliberalism on the other, with the practical policy plank of 'more private property, more real estate speculation, more infrastructure building!' in the middle, section two really begins to unpack my account of how the politics of invasion gets conceptually marginalized and oversimplified. In this case, the motives are clear enough: land invasions are to be converted into a pretext for the Dirty War studied today by Henson and others, and for repression against land struggle groups, in a war jointly run by state police and the private police forces (*guardias blancas)* of Mexico's large landowners.

Just as mainstream social science knowledge production in this period needed to claim a potential practical application, a social policy impact, to really gain clout, however, for Mexican corporate narratives to really impact Mexican public opinion, however, did they not also need academic and state expert backing? Section three of the chapter tracks the 'harmonization' of academic, corporate, and state expertise in social policy and territory during this period through a specific form of social modeling--internal migration studies--that fit well both with business experts' property-based narratives and with the state's need to naturalize mass rural-to-urban population displacement in terms that would not pull back the veil on the underlying cause for such displacement: an ongoing Dirty War. To compartmentalize social conflict in theory, and conflicting social science disciplinary approaches in practice, the chapter's penultimate section proposes, involved leading experts at the intersection of academic and state power prioritizing methodological and conceptual overlaps. Paradoxically, internal migration studies--despite the underlying phenomena's being attributable to land struggles!--offered such a disciplinary middle

ground, where various disciplinary narratives could have their say (if they did not politicize the concept of rural depopulation). In serving this key role, internal migration studies and the diverse social science disciplines that contributed to it served as the high-water mark of the Mexican infrastructure building state's claims to social policy expertise.[98]

By way of conclusion, the chapter will take stock, on the basis of its analysis to this point, of what broad insights it has gathered into what happened to social policy expertise and knowledge forms at institutions like Infonavit, as well as into the relationship between infrastructure building and a politics of invasion that such expertise has claimed to managed through much of neoliberal era.[99] Public housing's rapid expansion, occurring across Mexico largely in the years directly after those covered in this chapter, emerges in the light of this chapter's analysis, I claim, as something surprisingly incoherent: the single remaining leg of a social policy platform built, during the 1970s era covered in this chapter, around three main, overlapping, pillars--infrastructure building, family planning, and racial-ethnic governance.[100]

---

[98] Jo Guldi dates the infrastructure state's emergence in Europe to the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, defining it as "governments regularly design[ing] the flow of bodies, information, and goods." But can we also speak now not only of origins, but of a peak of power and coherence for that state model? This chapter of the project suggests that we can. Guldi, 2012, 4.

[99] Though beyond the scope of this chapter, it's useful to keep in mind that, as an ethnonationalist idiom, invasion was also resurgent in the U.S. during this time, when Latin American migration studies merged with major university systems and their roles in regional statecraft, and when land struggles of the Cold War Agrarian Reform age were at their peak. Cf. Fox, Cybelle. ""The Line Must Be Drawn Somewhere": The Rise of Legal Status Restrictions in State Welfare Policy in the 1970s." *Studies in American Political Development* 33.2 (2019): 275-304.

[100] Also beyond the direct scope of this chapter, it could be argued that today, scholars unaware that a blind spot in knowledge production with respect to the relationship between infrastructure building and land invasion struggles in early neoliberal Latin America structures tend to reproduce its intentions in contemporary analyses of 'the Latin American neoliberal city,' looking through specific local and national entanglements between Agrarian Reform-era land struggles and global infrastructure investment toward a more "global" periodizing cuts. Latin American studies' considerable attentions to "the neoliberal city" over the past quarter century or more (during which time this phrase has been the leading object of inquiry), scholars have tended to ask about Latin American cities' places in global geographies of image-making, comparative political and financial power, givenness to embracing Washington Consensus financial policies, etc., but without these answers being grounded in usually in institutional ethnographies where local/global distinctions get made and unmade. Thus, we have ethnographic studies of the neoliberal Latin American mall, but not of the mall's holding company; of urban debtfare from the perspectives of the poor, but not

At the height of a global infrastructure-building boom, after all, state-building projects offered a material medium across globalization could occur in unique ways--and not only in terms of spreading U.S.-centric market or governance models. Critical foreign credit lines between the 'First World' and 'Third World' tended to pass through state-backed infrastructure projects in this period in unparalleled and to a degree unquestioned ways. As historian Raul Madrid notes, in discussing the 1982 debt crisis, a crisis led by Mexico, from the perspective of Euro-American lenders, sovereign lending was considered a more secure bet (up until 1982) than lending to commercial borrowers in the 'Third World." Longtime Citycorp Chairman Walter Wriston's dictum, as Madrid himself points out, that "sovereign nations do not go bankrupt," because "the infrastructure doesn't go away, the productivity of the people doesn't go away, the natural resources doesn't go away. And so, their assets always exceed their liabilities," became a "rallying cry for a whole generation of international bankers."[101]

Social policy coherence in this early neoliberal (pre-'82) context served as a site of genuine coherence between foreign and domestic policy for some nations, including Mexico. That said, this relative coherence was nevertheless always in fact more partial, ephemeral, and filled with silenced social critiques than its official governance idioms would acknowledge. In recovering this historically contested terrain of knowledge production, and the centrality of land invasion struggles to it, I aim--turning our gaze back toward the present--to reconsider invasion in its major present day tonalities for social theory, that is, as a tool of imperialism or, conversely, as an ethnocentric fantasy about the nature of human migration.

To highlight this point, the chapter conclusion uses as its jumping off point a closer look

---

from that of the bank officers; and of urban insecurity and violence, but not from the perspective of the private security company Dávila, 2016; Han, 2012. ; Zeiderman, 2016.

[101] Madrid, Raul L. Overexposed: U.S. Banks Confront The Third World Debt Crisis. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2019. 62.

at President Luis Echeverria's employment himself, in distinct contexts of his presidency, all the various expert perspectives on a 1970s politics of invasion tracked in prior sections. Echeverria's expert-cum-populist persona embodied in one figure, the chapter claims, the internal tensions between leading an infrastructure-building state and managing an epochal wave of land invasions that at times threatened to seize that infrastructure, on one hand, or on the other (to paraphrase of the U.S. Senate subcommittee report of 1962), to wipe it all away. What may sound in the 2020s like an incoherent policy jumble was, in context, the height of policy coherence in a moment when infrastructure-building's centrality to state authority seemed like a safe entanglement to bet would endure--not just in public housing production, but in highway building, school building, hospital building, etc.--going forward.

These promises and expectations have been bruised and revealed as unfinished over time for many Mexicans--elite experts and everyday occupants of public housing alike (as chapter three will claim to show!). For this very reason, however, *this* chapter hopes to have shown by its end the relevance of understanding the recent historical forms of Latin American politics of invasion for anyone interested in understanding the contemporary contradictions of territorial expertise and authority in Mexico, Latin America, and these sites global entanglements. As the chapter's conclusion will ask, leaving as an open question for continuing social theory conversations, how might particular U.S.-centric social theories like settler colonial and migration studies that invoke their own theories of invasion, participate in this blindspot of knowledge production where they intersect with sites of territorial knowledge politics whose recent regional histories remain comparatively understudied? Before getting to this final question, however, there is much ground to cover-and all of it contested.

Theorizing Continuity Among Invasions:1970s Policy Experts Against the Grain of State
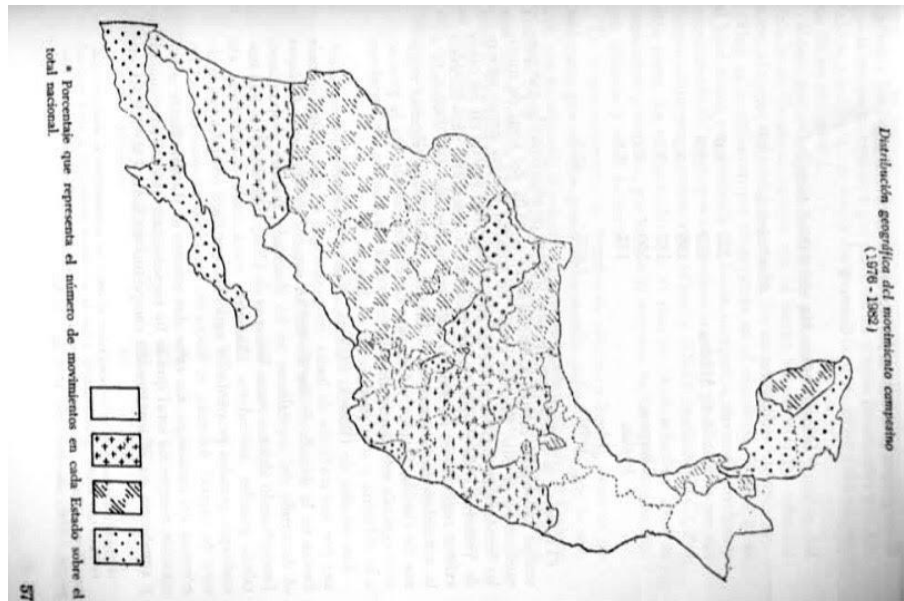
Figure 13. "Geographic Distribution of *Campesino Movements,* 1976-1982," from essay by Aguado López et. al. [102]

This is a snapshot of *movimientos campesinos* in Mexico during the 1976-1982 *sexenio* of López Portillo, as illustrated in a joint essay by three Mexican sociologists.[103] The authors count 1,298 distinct movements active during this period, composing more than half of all *campesino* political struggles during the six year period. Indirectly, land struggles cast an even larger shadow; the second most common form of struggle accounted for, 456 distinct *movimientos*, were struggles against official repression.

The immensity of those numbers portrays a struggle in the grey zone between legal and extralegal protest practices whose dimensions had not been achieved since the Mexican Revolution (and which are said, in contemporary high school history books on both side of the

---

[102] "Geographic Distribution of Campesino Movement (1976-1982)," in Aguado López, et. al, 1983: 57. (CC)

[103] Aguado López, Eduardo, José Luis Torres Tranco, and Gabriela Scherer Ibarra. "La lucha por la tierra en México (1976-1982)." *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* 28.113-4.

Rio Grande, only to have been reached in twentieth-century Mexico during the 1917 revolution, and certainly not as late as the early 1980s!). In part, these numbers reflect a Mexican state on its heels, struggling to police property rights, and evincing a permissive attitude of 'tolerance' that many analysts had associated with López Portillo's predecessor, Luis Echeverria.[104] López Portillo was mobilizing the military, police, and what public opinion he could scrape together against these movements, and yet, according to Aguado López and his co-authors, this repression was met not with a fracturing of the movement, but by its expansion and deeper integration. "The *campesino* movement has shown itself in a period of sharp ascent and maturation," wrote Aguado López and his co-authors in the early 1980s, "and the growing number of movements, acquiring more sophisticated organizational bases through new groupings, are beginning to advance toward transcending one of its most serious obstacles: local isolation."[105] Turning the spotlight on the authors themselves for a moment, however, it would be fair to describe rural sociology as a discipline in Mexico in much the same way during these years. Local isolation was a challenge there, as well. While researchers in the U.S. could access state department funding through intermediary institutions and foundations,[106] or find jobs in nations like Mexico, as 'international development experts,' working for global foundations, the politics and economics of knowledge production in early neoliberal Mexico were different. Mexico's first national rural sociology conference—with participants largely in sympathy with land struggle participants and contextualizing these struggles—wouldn't occur until 1979.

---

[104] Middlebrook, Kenneth J. "Political Reform and Political Change in Mexico." *Latin America and Caribbean Contemporary Record* 1 (1983): 149-61.

[105] Aguado López et al., 50.

[106] U.S.-based private foundation and international support for such research was considerable, but generally far more fleeting and limited than in the U.S. Cf. Calandra, Benedetta. "La Ford Foundation y la" Guerra Fría Cultural" en América Latina:(1959-1973)." *Americanía: Revista de Estudios Latinoamericanos* 1 (2011): 8-25; Rodríguez, 1972.

The same detailed attentions anthropologists like Lourdes Arizpe applied to "ethnic frontiers" in studies of specific indigenous groups' rural-urban migration[107] were not available to López and company, given that the national scale of land struggles—in contrast to the closely monitored state and academic study of rural-urban internal migrations—was very seldom written about by sociologists across Mexico or the U.S. (a fact that would change as land struggles became more urban, in their national orientation, during the 1980s). Given these practical limits, what was it like to attempt a social theory of early neoliberal land invasion politics—against the grain of congealing expert social science and political discourses held by most prominent national institutions? And before that, what did it even look like to theorize land invasion as a political strategy, rather than as (as we'll see in section three of this chapter) as a social problem?

For Graciela Flores Lua, Luisa Pare, and Sergio Sarmiento Silva, three Mexican sociologists of the 1980s entangled in that pursuit, the more concrete challenge that emerged was the need for data upon which to map a national-scale snapshot of land invasion-centered struggles. No single institution (except arguably the federal police and military, to some extent) systematically tracked land invasions. No comparably detailed national data had appeared for a five year period, it appeared to the authors. Newspaper archives served more to sample than to gather extensive data, and were combined with the authors' direct contact with land struggle organizations. Even having invested considerable of their own research efforts into data collections, however, understanding the political motives of land invasions, could not be clarified with statistics alone.

---

[107] Arizpe, S. *Migración, etnicismo y cambio económico un estudio sobre los migrantes campesinos a la ciudad de México*. No. 304.87253 A7. El Colegio de México, 1978.

For these scholars, the coordination of land struggle organizations across local, regional and even international territories (most often as members of communist organizations in the latter case) involved complex questions of scale and social solidarities that numbers alone couldn't unpack. As the authors would jointly conclude in their introduction to an exceptional study of Mexican *campesino* land struggles during the 1970s and 1980s, *Las Voces del Campo* (The Voices of the Countryside), a few relatively isolated scholars working at the margins of state power also would not be enough to unravel all these pressing questions about the sociological character of land struggles:

> We are conscious of the fact that a great part of the *campesino* movement escapes organic expressions. Still, this does not mean that the movement is any less effective or important. Instead, it means simply that it is far more difficult for researchers to follow its tracks. Its continuity is so widely extended over time that frequently it does not take hold in the collective memory, but in that of the eldest community members and of particular movement directors. These expressions are no less important than collective memory would be, and should be rescued for a historical memory of the *campesino* struggles.[108]

Such a passage highlights the precarious political condition these researchers perceived in even their own project of history-writing. It was a writing against striking forms of social inattention and collective forgetting. The passage only hints, however, at deeper reasons for this under-historicization of the land struggle movement. In part, this is because some reasons were already well known: as an ongoing movement of the poor against capitalism, evidence of invasions was regularly erased. It was called 'eviction,' or ignored by many elite-run local media altogether--left an object for government and academic statistics. Media were frequently kept away from such violent encounters, moreover--from invasions to evictions, to the scuffles between political groups in between.

---

[108] Lúa, Graciela Flores, Luisa Paré, and Sergio Sarmiento Silva. *Las voces del campo: movimiento campesino y política agraria, 1976-1984*. Siglo XXI, 1988.

These were known reasons. However, there were also less known reasons that remain largely hidden to scholars. The obscuring and/or reframing of land struggles in elite political and corporate discourses of the era, as well as in a growing influence of new forms of social policy expertise (like demographics) and social policy institutions (like public housing), had been subject by the mid-1980s to hardly any critical studies. Today, such topics are beginning to be recovered by contemporary historians of post-war state planning knowledges. As scholars working in this vibrant yet also understaffed sub-disciplinary space will attest, this space remains understudied and without "hold in the popular memory," still today.

What, then, has been forgotten about the conditions in which Mexican social scientists interested in theorizing land invasion politics *qua* politics in the early neoliberal era found itself? Consider, for a start, the stance taken by the Federal Operational Center for Housing and Population (COPEVI), a significant though shorter-lived public housing institution of the same 1970s crop to which Infonavit initially belonged. In the February 1981 edition of their own magazine, Habitational Dynamics (*Dinamica Habitacional),* COPEVI staff would opine about an ongoing property dispute gaining national and even global attention in the south of the nation at that time. Informal worker settlements in Acapulco that had been expanding with the city for decades were now, or rather for the previous several years and with growing political pressure had been already, subject to calls from local and national authorities to self-evict. Political leaders were accusing two hundred thousand residents of that city, in essence, of land invasion. COPEVI staff, meanwhile, were to accuse these political leaders, "through the collusion of *tecnicos*," i.e., economic planning bureaucrats, of organizing "economic and political interests that have begun to promote eviction" in Acapulco.

In an unusually pointed public critique of public servants and institutions by other

servants at another state institution dedicated to *politica social*, "the case of Acapulco," COPEVI staff went on:

> ...raises serious questions about the *tecnicos* involved in the eviction, as well as of the colleges and professionals who have remained quiet. [...] Technical knowledge is not neutral. It is an instrument at the service of those in power. The *pueblo* can understand and manage technical knowledge, but obviously this doesn't happen when the dialogue (of the authorities) seeks simply to manipulate those affected, imposing technocratic decisions behind a complex language that hides the distaste they have for those affected most. (290)[109]

The *pueblo*, 'the people,' a term typically indexing non-elite citizenry in much Latin American political discourse, could manage technical knowledge just fine, thank you very much. COPEVI's point was not only that, however. In addition to communities deserving to collectively manage their own territorial planning, the benefits of such an arrangement also stemmed, the article suggests, from taking away control of social policy expertise from groups intent on using that tool to undo Agrarian Reform, prevent further redistribution, and concentrate power further in their own hands.

As a timely intervention in unfolding political events, enacted moreover by state bureaucrats themselves, an article like this helps show a complementary side of radical social theories of invasion politics at work--outside academic sites *per se*. More broadly, however, the COPEVI staff comments speak to what was, during the early neoliberal era, a growing recognition among both Mexican public housing insiders and rural land struggle participants alike that in a state increasingly centered on managing its new infrastructure networks--highways, ports, public housing, utilities grids, and so on--new forms of technical knowledge, specific to the neoliberal era in their claims upon these networks as a whole were coming to the

---

[109] Mercado, Mercado Moraga. Arturo Loppe López, gestor urbano. México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Xochimilco, División de Ciencias y Artes para el Diseño, 1989.

fore of social governance. The COPEVI intervention in Acapulco's multi-year mass eviction drama, of interest to us here primarily for what its positioning among Mexican public institutions indicates, however, is even more remarkable when the drama's transnational dimensions are brought more clearly into view.

In the face of divided local expert opinions early in the expulsion effort, COPEVI was only one voice in this coming-together of contested knowledge models. Local politicians called in national experts and, eventually, international ones for backup. In one interesting development, a Swedish expert on welfare planning for low-income European populations, Lars Sundbom, was invited by the government in Acapulco to personally review the mass eviction plan, and offer his supposedly non-partisan judgement.[110] Sundbom praised the eviction project, and specifically the state's planned resettlement site for the potentially evicted as "stunning, with enormous social impact, worthy of imitation."[111]

To this international expert parroting the politics of local government leaders, however, the one hundred and thirty thousand Mexicans being accused of land invasion had their own experts and even their own fledgling private media--in addition to occasional support from public media like *Dinamica Habitacional* or Infonavit's own monthly national magazine, *Vivienda* (*Housing*). "It's not that foreigners cannot offer opinions regarding our problems," the urbanist Angel Mercado would counter, responding to Sundbom's judgements in the new leftist national magazine *UnoMasUno*. "On the contrary," Mercado contended:

> various concerns went over the head of [Sundborn] our illustrious visitor--for instance consulting the opinion of the General Council of the Popular *Colonias* of Guerrero, or consulting the high level of professionalism in studies concluded for the inhabitants by

---

[110] Sideback, Goran and Lars Sundbom. 1982. Local Politics and Social Planning: Some Cross Community Differences in Day Care Programs in Sweden. Swedish Institute for Social Research.
[111] *Mercado, 288.*

Workshops Three and Five of the UNAM School of Architecture Auto-governance.[112]

Mercado is alluding here to workshops formed during the 1970s through the national university's architecture school's internal reorganization around 'auto-governance' models. These models demanded, in language that overlapped considerably with the COPEVI bureaucrats' article above, a revolution in planning. Community-led urban planning was to mean that experts played a more secondary role, while in terms of social theory (as opposed to practice), the workshops emphasized a need to re-politicize expert knowledge, against then current tendencies towards its depoliticization. The fact that large-scale infrastructure-building itself tended to generate the greater concentration of social wealth in sites where it did arise, regardless of how many or few people were involved in its planning, was not yet seen by such groups as a major stumbling block to their calls for political change.

The successful opposition to the Acapulco unsettlement plan—the largest seriously attempted mass eviction in twentieth century Mexican history—would affirm to movement participants (experts and invaders alike), moreover, that their models of epistemic authority had their own power that was worth pursuing and further exploring. Though largely forgotten today, the expertise of invaders, on this major stage of twentieth century political encounter, outdueled that of the state and international development knowledge alike. In addition to helping further to flesh out what radical expertise regarding land invasion politics looked like in a key Latin American site of such politics' twentieth century flourishing, COPEVI's article helps us grasp at a micro-scale how knowledge production materially mattered as a factor in land struggles themselves.

In what follows, this chapter aims to extend that sketch, unpacking how invasion politics

---

[112] *Ibid, 288.*

mattered to, and from the perspectives of multiple expert communities of this formative moment, when infrastructure-building states and hemispheric invasion politics profoundly coincided and co-constructed each other's expert meanings for Latin America and (whether in terms of their rejection or emulation) in sites beyond. Having located provisionally what knowledge production looked like against the grain of the mainstream in the era of Infonavit's origins, however, I now turn toward the several streams that made up--and continue today to make up--that mainstream itself.

Corporate Fantasies of the End to Land Struggles

The turning point in Luis Echevarria's administration, with respect to its sympathies for agrarian land struggles, would come with the 1975 formation of the *Consejo Coordinador Empresarial* (Business Coordinating Council). This new national association of business leaders would, in retrospect, play an enduring role in neoliberal Mexico--shaping public opinion in critical ways nearly two decades hence, for instance, as Mexican's contemplate the passage of a free trade agreement with the U.S., called NAFTA. Feeling themselves and their principals threatened by President Echeverria's so-called 'open door' policy toward groups participating in agrarian struggles against large landholders, the new business council had initially organized as an explicit counter-offensive. Land invasions, they claimed, threatened not only their investments, but the injured Mexico's reputation as a space where global investor's property would be secure.

Echevarria, it was true, promoted negotiations with autonomist land struggle groups to a greater degree than his predecessors. Where prior presidents had negotiated with only a single representative of even relatively large groups, like unions, involved in land invasions, Echeverria

111

would engage with multiple leaders, it was said, from a single organization. It was as if his strategy was not to divide and conquer, but--in the eyes of the CCE--to incentivize invasions to multiply. Joining together under one heading several of the nation's most prominent existing banking and commerce leader *agrupaciones*, the CCE staked a claim to the title of Mexico's most influential business council at a critical moment for presenting a united front, a single coherent message and account of why Mexicans should condemn land invasion actors--up to and including the president himself.

As they would continue to do in coming decades--up through NAFTA's passage, and just before that the official legal conclusion of a decades-long Agrarian Reform--a polemic about private property was to be at the center of the business council's messaging.[113] To this point, the CCE might sound remarkably like the business wings of the Republican or Democratic party in twentieth-century U.S. politics. Yet this would be true only to a point: in promoting private property, the CCE would specifically attack not public housing--a welfare institution still in its infancy at this time in Mexico--but land invasions and the collective property form that Agrarian Reform had as good as invented, known as the *ejido.* Rather than enacting a fully formed neoliberal business class perspective, the success of this counter-attack would prove instrumental to, during the 1980s, the rise of a refashioned businessman-led conservative PAN party[114]. Ironically, it would be this PAN party, in close alignment with northern Mexico's powerful construction and materials industry (because led by the same folks) that would seize hold of Infonavit from Zedillo Velasco's father and make it into a key state-tool of construction industry

[113] Tirado, Ricardo, and Matilde Luna. "El Consejo Coordinador Empresarial de México. De la unidad contra el reformismo a la unidad para el TLC (1975-1993)." *Revista mexicana de sociología* (1995): 27-59.

[114] Rivera, Alicia Ortiz. "El Consejo Mexicano de Hombres de Negocios: órgano de acción política de la elite empresarial (The Mexican Council of Business Men: A Political Action Organism of the Entrepreneurial Elite)." *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* (2002): 101-139.

expansion for two decades.

Remaining focused on the CCE's origins for now, however, means considering the group's effective appeal not in the 1990s, when Mexican social policy's broader coherence, and the glorious promise of Mexico's infrastructure-building state, appeared comparatively in tatters, and with Infonavit's continuing expansion emerging as an exception to the rule, increasingly relied upon by struggling Mexicans as other welfare state promises, like full employment, waned. No, it means staying for now in 1970s, when infrastructure building still inspired popular and middle class publics, often through elite-controlled mass media outlets. At the same time, in a period when Cold War policies and the vulnerabilities of domestic infrastructural politics was making capitalists everywhere extra militant themselves, the CCE would experiment early on in pairing their propaganda with direct actions. These actions were not invasions, but merchant strikes.

Amid a war of words with Echeverria, after the president struck back at criticism of his regime's perceived 'softness' on land invasions, a series of merchant strikes in major cities was declared illegal by the federal government, leading to a staring contest in which capitals and political leaders accused the other party of treason.[115] Such conflicts in certain ways clearly exceeded the immediate questions surrounding land invasion; they concerned the relative sovereignty of two key groups of national elites, and power struggles between them that to considerable degrees hardly concerned itself in reality with *campesino* and indigenous social movements for land. Equally true, however, is the fact that these elites did not choose to frame such antagonisms in terms of a debate over land invasions--rather, they were forced to do so by those *campesino* and indigenous groups they sought largely to exclude.

---

[115] Arriola, Carlos. "Los grupos empresariales frente al Estado (1973-1975)." *Foro internacional* 16.4 (64 (1976): 449-495.

In this context, no single social group could claim either practical authority or the authority of unique expertise with respect to the management of territory and social policy, and yet the convergence of political tensions at the intersection of invasion politics and public infrastructure building projects made multiple groups try. In the case of the CCE, trying meant positioning the nation's leading capitalists as the self-identified voices of a liberal society defying populism and socialism. Just as Echeverria was a rumored communist, so land invasion was framed as identical in gravity and aim to the actions of *guerrillas* (despite generally varying degrees of violence used). In addition to its mass media assault, though, and these well-distributed rumors, the CCE would also create new narratives toward the end of the Echeverria term, serving to hyper-charge an already vital national political rumor mill, from which would emerge the gravest of premonitions. As the political scientist Soledad Loaeza would detail*,* the worst premonition concerned a *coup d'etat* against Echeverria himself, to be conducted (it was widely said) by the Monterrey Group in league with the CIA.[116] But prior to the *coup* rumors coming to full bloom, the most impressive rumor to emerge, as Loaeza chronicles, in the summer of 1976, and likewise attributed to the nation's industrial elite, concerned anxieties about the nature of property in land.

On November 18th, Felix Barra Garcia, the secretary of the agrarian reform, announced the redistribution of 37,131 hectares of irrigated land in the Yaqui and Mayo Valley to long solicitous and well-organized *campesinos* and indigenous groups, along with another 61,655 hectares of pastureland in other municipalities of Sonora. Subsequently, several groups of *campesinos,* motivated by the apparent responsiveness of the Echeverria regime to large-scale *campesino* movements in the Yaqui and Mayo, made their presence felt on lands in Durango and

---

[116] Loaeza, 1977.

Sinaloa. These events threatened to create a climate of unrest in the countryside, but not only

that: they would serve as a concrete pretext for the private sector to speak in the most expansive

and general manner of 'aggressions' and 'provocations,' providing content for rumors that, only

a year later, would have seemed absurd. One of these rumors has already been mentioned, in

chapter one--namely, that government surveyors (including employees of the newly formed

Infoanvit, perhaps?) were to create a new archive of property ahead of the nationalization of all

private property. Before these dangerous rhetorical extremes were briefly breached, however,

and the CCE came to nearly openly request a U.S. coup, the CCE had attempted for a far longer

part of the Echeverria years to appeal as a calm, responsible, objective policy authority to a broad

public. Perhaps the most remarkable artifact of that effort, lending itself to a genealogy of

knowledge production, through its status as the group's most elaborate attempt to

monumentalize, if you will, its own policy perspectives, was an edited text by a potpourri of

CCE types-- industry leaders from banking, manufacturing, and primary materials elites. Titled

Mexican Business Thought, the text lets us deeper inside elite fantasies of land reform's

foreclosure, and claims to authority in managing that foreclosure as a technical business, at the

dawn of neoliberalism.[117]

As the first president of the new business lobby, and director of the Modelo brewing

company, Juan Sanchez Navarro, would assert in the volume's introductory essay, "the

contemporary corporation is not the old capitalist company—it's not the same capitalism.

Human ingenuity has not yet qualified the new forms of production and distribution. One hopes

that they will one day!"[118] Business leaders could comment authoritatively on social matters like

---

[117] Aranguren, Fernando. Pensamiento empresarial mexicano. México: Avance Editorial, 1974.
[118] *ibid. 225.*

the policing of private property, the director's words seemed to imply, in part because the pace of economic change and upheaval meant that nobody was a true authority yet. Agree or disagree, here certainly was a deeper level of social analysis than found typically in the CCE-backed mass media reports praising merchant strikes and villainizing Echeverria.

On a more domestic scale, meanwhile, Sanchez Navarro would turn first not to the expected line-up of enemies one might guess--Echeverria, social movement and *guerrilla* organizations, even rogue leftist academics. While all these groups would come in for their lumps in one or more of the essays to follow in the volume, in another gesture of notable gravity, the CCE's director instead would turn the business community's attentions first toward getting its own house in order. Here was the need for a 'united front' in a peak infrastructure-building state moment when neither Mexican capitalist coalitions, nor state authorities, nor U.S. financiers, nor peasant political movements had a clear hegemony, and alliances between these groups were relatively ephemeral. To "fall into exaggerated self-criticism in order to accentuate the social responsibility of the corporation today" not only made little sense, Navarro would contend, but given our lack of a full understanding of the economic transformations underway globally in this moment, excessive self-criticism was itself "a danger."

Conflict amongst the business class would, Navarro held, give enemies of business "materials with which to attack us," thereby distracting from the real responsibility of the corporation: the professional "formation of men."[119] Even for the wealthiest Mexicans, arguments were real weapons in this historical moment, not to be discounted in favor of more bloody, traditional means. Arguments about land invasions, however, perhaps because they bordered directly on such bloodiness, were perhaps the sharpest weapons amongst which one

---

[119] *ibid, 234-235.*

116

could choose. Modeling restraint and circumspection in his own prose, however, Sanchez Navarro would demonstrate how, by centering private property in one's arguments (with its rhetorical connotations of civilization, Christian society), one could condemn land invasions without barely mentioning them at all, much less unpacking them as internally complex political tactics.[120]

More remarkable than these (in themselves rote, superficial by the 1970s) rhetorical tactics of celebrating capitalist property forms, however, was the deeper analysis of global capitalism on display not only in the volume's opening article, but by multiple business elite contributors throughout the volume. In a time when it appeared unclear whether capitalism would survive, or was attacking itself, Navarro would contend--citing Josef Schumpeter and Von Mises, neoliberalism's intellectual godfathers-- the human orientation of the corporation would need to respond to a future in which economic problems might no longer be fundamental—because they were acknowledged to be no longer fully in human control. In this future, imagined by Sanchez Navarro through Schumpeter, the political would take priority once more in a society like Mexico--if that society, that is, was to make good on what Navarro considered a potentially unique historical opportunity for society to liberate itself from economic capriche.

"To the extent that we can leave the play of economic factors to follow their own

---

[120] This strict conceptual division between economics and society echoes Von Mises' proposal for what historian Quinn Slobodian has traced as "a model of 'double government' inspired by the Habsburg example delinking cultural and economic administration" in order to attain what Slobodian calls "an uneasy settlement between mass democracy and capitalism" (Slobodian, 2018). Navarro's motivations, however, are clearly located closer to home than the Habsburg empire: unlike Von Mises, Navarro was not concerned (at least explicitly) with securing capitalism's survival from waves of transnational migration that threatened to overthrow it in a new age of mass politics. Rather, he was concerned with a Western Civilization's paternalistic corporate order whose concern was not, fundamentally, making money but "making men." Cf. Slobodian, Quinn. Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism. Harvard University Press, 2020.

accord," the volume would conclude, letting them play out "without intervening, to their natural conclusion, we will be able to say that we are marching beyond any economic revolution."[121] Remarkably, for a volume whose production was considerable motivated by growing elite fears of land invasion-led social upheaval, Sanchez Navarro proposes here that corporations' true space of social agency and control was not in trying to master macro-economic forces, but to simply prevent them from dominating a company's social mission.[122] The mass media arguments, to the effect that land invasions *were causing* Mexican macro-economic upheaval are absent for a moment, substituted for here by a more agnostic, almost Platonic, stance. If these were the teachings, however, how would Sanchez Navarro's 'men' position themselves—even with the supposed bulwark of a stronger property system hypothetically in place—outside the pure play of economic forces, in order to survive future crises?[123]

In addressing this question, we can also push the story of the publication of *Mexican Business Thought* slightly into the polemic narrative. In an October 1976 address before a

---

[121] *ibid. 235-236.*

[122] This strict conceptual division between economics and society echoes Von Mises' proposal for what historian Quinn Slobodian has traced as "a model of 'double government' inspired by the Habsburg example delinking cultural and economic administration" in order to attain what Slobodian calls "an uneasy settlement between mass democracy and capitalism" (Slobodian, 2019). Navarro's motivations, however, are clearly located closer to home than the Habsburg empire: unlike Von Mises, Navarro was not concerned (at least explicitly) with securing capitalism's survival from waves of transnational migration that threatened to overthrow it in a new age of mass politics. Rather, he was concerned with a Western Civilization's paternalistic corporate order whose concern was not, fundamentally, making money but "making men." Cf. Slobodian, Quinn. Perfect Capitalism, Imperfect Humans: Race, Migration and the Limits of Ludwig von Mises's Globalism.Contemporary European History, Vol. 28-2:143-155.

[123] It's worth keeping in mind, as I do in asking this question, how the provenance of the question may prefigure, in crucial ways, the kind of "men" being imagined; for example, the fact of its being raised through the writings of a member of Monterrey's business elite, a member of the Law and Philosophy faculty at UNAM, as well as by a CCE leader, at a moment not only when indigenous and *campesino* land struggles were becoming more systematically repressed, but when *mestizaje* as a national racial project is also becoming unsettled by 'internal' and transnational migrations alike. What would be Northern, *mestizo*, indigenous—or not—about this new man? With respect to region, it's equally worth noting that the northerner Navarro's target audience, beyond the Mexican business community and middle class public, was in some ways an audience of one—with the Mexico City-born Luis Echeverria himself the target.

gathering of Monterrey businessmen that included several authors from the volume, Echeverria

would further escalate the war of words, infuriating his audience by asserting that:

> the rich and powerful of Monterrey call themselves Christians and thump their chests, but
> refuse to assist their fellow believers, and who despite creating industries find themselves
> reactionaries and enemies of the people when these industries fail to show a social
> sensibility.[124]

Whether intentionally or not, Echeverria had taken Sanchez Navarro's contention that

Mexican capitalists should not fall into chest-thumping self-flagellation, and presented this group

as the precise opposite--as chest-thumping over-achievers, boasting about their good social deeds

to make up for a bad conscience. Faced with the need to respond to Echevarria's "Third World

populism," as observers of the time called it, however, Navarro and his colleagues sought to

show that the Mexican corporation *did* in fact have a fundamentally social mission.

As one of Navarro's fellow CCE leaders, a furniture manufacturing executive and co-

contributor to *Mexican Business Thought,* would contend, fleshing out this part of Navarro's

vision:

> Quite concretely, an aim to life, a family structure, must be achieved when a simple
> *campesino* is transplanted [...] to the city. Such an aim today is not in place. Perhaps we
> have improved their material economy, but we have destroyed their platform of first
> principles, because we have not helped them to transplant all that would be needed to
> their new life situation.[...] For this reason the company in addition to being a good
> company, must also be a good school. The businessman must be a shaper of executives.
> The executives must be the same for supervisors, and these for those at their command.
> But don't say that this is paternalism. It is not that, because teaching is not the *patrimonio*
> of a father, but of a man.[125]

By imagining the corporation as a humanist bulwark against a fundamentally unsettled

---

[124] Loaeza, 576. According to Loaeza, this single speech, more than the 'agrarian unrest,' as such, precipitated
capital flight and the second devaluation of the *peso* during *Echevarrista* regime.
[125] Aranguren, 29.

future characterized by much of their present—as technified agro-industry remained stunted by *campesino* and Maoist *guerrilla* "invasion, insecurity and unrest"—Mexican business leaders would double down on the durability of the corporation, while also acknowledging their own non-sovereignty with respect to an increasingly globalized economy.[126] Regional political tensions disappear here, resolved at the scale of the individual factory and the individual worker, via the organicist aesthetics of class-based assimilation: the *campesino* is transplanted not only from countryside to city, but into a system that "makes men." Just a decade later, with a Third World Debt Crisis indexing the decline of a Mexican infrastructure-building state's future prospects and autonomist social movement organizations growing increasingly critical of the very *paternalismo* that CCE authors promised not to participating in, such overt use of assimilationist narratives would no longer be part of mainstream "development knowledge." In the mid-1970s, however, such a stance on the future of Mexican society, legitimated by the Mexican state's public experts (in ways the chapter considers momentarily), still served to locate the corporation's claim to expertise in an ostensibly coherent nation-building vision where racial-ethnic governance, family planning/demographic control, and infrastructure building (whose corporate control was forwarded and legitimately by glorifying private property) all were thought to fit together--at least when society was functioning 'properly.'

The ability for the CCE even to imagine such a functional future at this historical moment, I would argue, is itself remarkable. Mexico's business elite felt itself in this moment literally under New Left *guerrilla*'s crosshairs—the *Mexican Business Thought* volume includes an essay by a Monterrey corporate leader assassinated the very year of its publication by the *guerrilla* group *Liga del 23 de Octubre.* In the face of such conflict, it wasn't simply bank

---

[126] I borrow the term non-sovereignty from, among others, Yarimar Bonilla. Bonilla, Yarimar. "Unsettling sovereignty." *Cultural Anthropology* 32.3 (2017): 330-339.

account balances, I would argue, that kept Mexico's business elites relatively coherent in their messaging (even when such messaging hit extremes, like seemingly attempting to provoke a U.S. *coup*). Rather, capitalists' power and faith also derived from the most momentous context that they couldn't fully control: not land invasions, but the 'peak' moment of nation-building as an infrastructure-building business. Beyond the nation's relatively limited middle class consumer base, and before the nation's pivot toward an export-oriented *maquilized* economy, this promise must have felt all the more like an unavoidably common fate. Like life itself, as Navarro asserted, 'the economy' was ultimately in no one's hands, and the corporation's purpose was simply to have enough control so as, together with politics, to steer society through this otherwise rudderless period in history.[127]

For Rogelio Sada Zambrano, director of what was then emerging as the nation's largest primary materials producer (Cemex, or *Cementos Mexicanos*) and another fellow contributor to *Mexican Business Thought*, the case was shaping up to be undeniable. *El ejido*, the land system implemented as the cornerstone of agrarian reform during the immediate post-revolutionary decades, was not only a fundamentally collectivist rural institution. For Sada Zambrano (another first son of Monterrey), it was also where private property was stymied. In the volumetrics of Keynesian development economic discourse used by Sada Zambrano, the *ejido* was a bottleneck, holding back an unlimited diversity of more productive uses for the land, like "mortgaging, renting, selling, saving, borrowing against."[128]

Just as history supposedly proved private property's superiority ideologically, the *ejido's*

---

[127] In terms of squaring the circle, Navarro's proposal may still strike us as uncannily insightful regarding the dawning neoliberal era, even as it also shows a self-protective face to that dawn. If Navarro could just justify the intervention of Mexican businessmen in politics by asserting the business community's own notion of "social purpose," that aligned with the national economy's, who knows? Rumors might finally abate regarding Echeverria's supposed plans at an overnight "nationalization of rural and urban property."

[128] *Aranguren, 104.*

condition of "abandonment, deterioration, and destruction," as Sada Zambrano described it, was meant not only to prove this superiority materially, but also to define the stakes of the contest. To Mexico's business elite, it must have seemed a matter of life and death. In fact, Sada Zambrano hears it—or something like the voice of the angel of death—in his contribution to *Mexican Business Thought*: from that abandoned *ejido* field, he purports to hear "the agonizing echo that groans '*Tierra y Libertad,*'" the old Zapatista slogan of the revolution[129]. Whether he was mistaking that distant moan for a cement truck coming to 'urbanize' a privatized *ejido* is not my direct concern here, though I have my suspicions. What is evident from Zambrano's fantasy is his desire for a future in which collective property—and with it land struggles that included claims to new or expanded *ejidos*—is displaced by private property, for the first time "diffused... and made available to all social classes." This new horizon is not explicitly urbanized in Sada Zambrano's essay, but it does appear in the text as an *"obra"* (a work, a built structure) to be contemplated, he says "by future generations."

This abstraction of infrastructure as a distributed 'private property,' whose public dimensions are simply not addressed may sound, in retrospect, like the seed of an infrastructure-building state's future discord. For Sada Zambrano in the mid-1970s, however, this vision was not a nostalgic bourgeois fantasy, but a way of imagining and reckoning with the future of a 'Mexican system' (a term, as Navarro suggests as connoting not only capitalism, but a specific kind of corporation-led modelling of 'men') amid radical transformations to global trade, racial imaginaries, the pre-eminence of durable infrastructure building to state-craft, and to the broader territorial management tool bag available to the state[130]. In navigating these cascading

---

[129] *Ibid, 105.*

[130] For an economic anthropology-esque perspective on these shifts, consider the writing of Alejandro Dávila Flores, who observes that during 1970s and early 1980s, while nearly all dollarized loans granted by development banks were destined for public sector spending, in practice "a part of these loans, variable depending on the degree

transformations, a broad association between property and the pedagogy of 'social' citizenship would prove a confident touchstone for Mexico's corporate elite in squaring their 'moral thinking' about industry with social movements that vocally opposed them.

In the background of the CCE's bold claims, however, and in particular its direct antagonism of Echeverria's governance approach as that presidency wore on, however, was an investment in social governance expertise that by its very terms exceeded the limits of corporate institutions, spilling into academic and state knowledge production bureaucracies in ways that a common state-building project helped paper over. As this coherent expert edifice was being built in the 1970s, however, cracks were also simultaneously to show. How long would the right to "school" the *campesino,* for instance, be backed by actual schools? Would the knowledge of society claimed by Sanchez Navarro--who was not only as a beer brewer, but as a member of the *UNAM* law faculty, find itself more broadly backed up by academic institutions and the legitimizing claims, as land invasion politics continued to expand in scale in coming years? To the degree that mainstream academic and business perspectives maintained an overlapping mainstream model of Mexican society during this period, as well as to the degree that expert knowledges, as we know now (retrospectively, from a post-subprime perspective), would emerge over time, how intentional or structural were these respective tendencies, from the perspective of early neoliberal era public experts?[131]

---

of national integration of the financed production processes, was channeled, through the mediation of the central bank, to the [currency] exchange market." Cf. Flores, Alejandro Dávila. "El circuito del dolar en Mexico (1970-1982)." Investigación Económica 44.172 (1985): 159-211.; Stallings, Barbara. "Latin American Debt: What Kind of Crisis?" *SAIS Review* 3.2 (1983): 27-39.

[131] As Sarah Babb notes, the influence of economic experts in Mexican governance would grow stronger over the neoliberal era. Yet in other areas beyond economics, Mexico would see in this period a "fall of experts" like what Eduardo Dargent has tracked in his case studies of Colombian and Peruvian technocrats across the era. Cf. Babb, Sarah. *Managing Mexico: Economists from nationalism to neoliberalism*. Princeton University Press, 2004.

Co-producing Social Knowledge and Corporate Vision

In *Devaluation in Mexico,* the best-selling 1976 book by law professor, prolific author,

and sometimes public servant Luis Pazos*,* a key scene appears in the otherwise mostly

contentious and argumentative prose. In the story, based on a true one, an enlightened inhabitant

of the countryside weighs in on the *ejido* question, seeking to convince a visiting Mexico City

bureaucrat through concrete evidence of his own view:

> See here, it's that the—look there—look at all that abandoned land, full of weeds. That is
> an *ejido*, that other piece of land as well. The other terrain, which you see all nicely
> sowed and cared for is [private] property...in the end, when it is not your land, what does
> it matter?"[132]

Pazos' text encouraged readers to use *ejido* abandonment in the 1970s Mexican

countryside to justify the privatization of collective lands. This was the CCE's familiar

argument, but painted in the style of a "a Mexican Milton Friedman" pastoral, as one Mexican

critic wrote in 1977.[133] Such pushback indicates that Pazos' text was not exactly mainstream for

other academics; the text's many reprintings throughout the next decade, however, spoke to a

broader mainstream audience that listened to what the Mexican Friedman said. And what he said,

while appearing to criticize rural abandonment, in fact aimed to make such abandonment

permanent. Here 'emptied out land' could justify in advance a privatization of the *ejido* that was

already well underway (albeit illegally or extra-legally) in parts of Mexico by the 1970s. The

tactics resonate, certainly, with the function of *terra nullius* myths that accompanied, at different

times and locales, colonial settlement of The New World.

Yet, as the shifting moral and epistemic valences surrounding 'land invasion' politics in

---

[132] Pazos, Luis. *Devaluación en México*. Bertelsmann de México, División Círculo de Lectores, 1987.

[133] Girón, Alicia. "La devaluación en México. Luis Pazos." *Problemas del Desarrollo. Revista Latinoamericana de Economía* 8.29.

this moment on display so far in the chapter also make clear, corporate/elite land grabs in this era did much more to multiply the political meanings of this practice than can be summarized in terms of shifting models of racial-ethnic governance. First, there is the influence on these politics of infrastructure-building as a critical site for Mexico's attachment to the global economy (credit markets and markets for goods) during the early neoliberal era to consider.[134] Secondly, in an era when Mexican state power was still ascendant, and corporate power uncertain in the face of insurgent social movements increasingly bridging rural and urban space, arguments like Pazos' could not convince many social scientists beyond some economists. Calling for the end to Agrarian Reform was not a social theory, and the disciplinary complexity of the social sciences, supported by growing Mexican state bureaucracies behind the university system, was too diverse for voices like Pazos to hold quite such large audiences as mass media could provide. But that did not mean that less radical versions of similar familiar ideas about private property needing simply to be made "available to all social classes,"[135] would not make their way into social theories of 'inter-regional migrations' or 'rural-to-urban migrations,' that were coming to serve as common points of reference for Latin America's social policy institutions and its emerging university-educated middle classes, alike.

In the 1969 volume *Urbanization and Marginality,* for instance, Ramiro Cardona, a Colombian demographer who would serve during the 1970s as a key institutional figure in the flourishing fields of Latin American demography in general, and of internal migration studies in particular, would highlight the "first cause" of rural displacement as (following European

---

[134] Cf. Luce, Mathias Seibel. "Sub-imperalism, the highest stage of dependent capitalism." *Bond, Patrick; Garcia, Ana (Ed.). BRICS: an anti-capitalist critique. Joanesburgo: Jacana, 2015. p. 27-44* (2015).

[135] Aranguren, 106. "It is an obligation to use private property in such a way as to contribute to the general welfare. It's an obligation to diffuse private property, enabling access to all social classes."

agricultural studies' presidents) simply "agricultural technification."[136] There would be little to no mention of social conflict as a root cause, because there was no root social cause. In this emerging Latin American social science space, the root causes were for mechanical engineers to explain, or perhaps, on the demographic growth front, epidemiologists. In practice, this allowed Cardona and other social scientists to positively discuss "urban land invasions," calling for governments to supportively regulate rather than evict such invaders, all without delving too deeply into the more controverted statist politics of 'tolerating' or attempting to radically repress rural unrest. U.S. foreign policy toward such land struggle practices (and Latin American states' responses to them) shifted during the 1960s and 1970s considerably, at times leading and at times arguably being led by the policy approaches of said states.

In the ambiguous context of Cold War policy, academics had considerable interstitial influence across state policy in the North Atlantic and certain parts of Latin America, particularly where growing domestic corporate industries and state policy could dovetail. Reflecting on this positionality years later, the influential British geographer Peter Ward saw his work as an academic proponent of urban land invasion "regularization" *vs* Mexican state actors during the 1970s as simply a matter of defending relatively voiceless urbanites. By making the "empirical practice" of invaders "credible" (if not yet credit-worthy!) to elites and politicians, Ward would claim decades later, in a 2004 roundtable with other prominent 1970s scholars of "urban informality," that academics (or was it the invaders?) were able to have their ideas "directly transposed into new housing policies" at federal levels.[137]

This naturalization of urban property struggles as legally discrete from rural ones, a

---

[136] Urbanización y marginalidad. Colombia: Asociación Colombiana de Facultades de Medicina, División de Estudios de Población, Estudios Socio-Demográficos, 1969. 534.

[137] de la Rocha, M. G., Perlman, J., Safa, H., Jelin, E., Roberts, B. R., & Ward, P. M. (2004). From the marginality of the 1960s to the" New Poverty" of Today: A LARR Research Forum. *Latin American Research Review*, 183-203.

distinction that would be increasingly codified in law and policing practice in the decades to come, extended Cordona's modeling of internal migration into new legal fictions. The First World, expert-validated "empiricism" of such new policy measures, meanwhile, meant that differential approaches to policing rural and urban populations could be defended without reference to the more explicitly abstract Cold War geopolitics of counter-insurgent containment strategies and debates surrounding the use of *guerrilla* tactics on the left.[138] Of course, such a generalization did not hold equally across all Latin America. Somewhat paradoxically, 1970s Brazil would see, for instance, the rise of several new schools of "progressive architects" directly aligned with urban social movements, and whose influence on national politics[139]--while not overwhelming, was also far less negligible than the efforts I highlight in this chapter by some minority of architects within Infonavit and COPEVI academically aligned with a far more isolated academic pole (the Auto-governance Faculty at UNAM's School of Architecture).[140] The trajectory of institutionalized Mexican architecture at places like Infonavit and COPEVI in this respect bore far greater resemblance, regionally, in the 1970s to an institution like the SCA (*Sociedad Central de Arquitectos*) in 1970s Argentina; there too, as Gabriela Gomes has shown,

---

[138] Strangely, yet symptomatically, in a 2004 conversation between Ward, Janice Perlman, and several other influential urbanists of the early Latin American neoliberal era, titled "From the marginality of the 1960s to the 'New Poverty' of Today," the topic of the Cold War does not arise; it's marginal to Perlman's 1979 text, just as Mexican *guerrilla* and *campesino* movements were to Ward's research. This is also despite the geopolitical context of their early respective research projects, most conspicuously Perlman's classic ethnography of *favela* residents in Brazil, carried out in the immediate aftermath of the state's 1964 military coup. Just as Perlman seems to have mistaken *favela* residents' apolitical postures for transparent "empirical" truth, rather than strategic dissimulation (considering the risk of openly claiming communist allegiances at this time), so new social science models focusing on 'the urban' as a metonymy for the nation, to the exclusion of rural political forces, empowered such inattentions. Parts of this point are made in greater detail by Browdyn Fischer. Cf. Fischer, Brodwyn. "The Red Menace Reconsidered: A Forgotten History of Communist Mobilization in Rio de Janeiro's Favelas, 1945-1964." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 94.1 (2014): 1-33.

[139] Bortoluci, José Henrique. "Architectures of democracy: housing movements and progressive architects in São Paulo (1970-1990)." *Revista Estudos Históricos* 31.65 (2018): 369-388;

[140] Cf. Montes, J. Victor Arias. "ARQUITECTURA AUTOGOBIERNO 40 AÑOS." *Archipiélago. Revista Cultural de Nuestra América* 20.76 (2012): 58.

progressive politics would be limited and co-opted, in a rather defining manner for decades to come, into serving new corporate and industrial demands.[141]

What this co-optation looked like in Mexico, however, was not simply a matter involving architects, or houses for that matter. Rather, it co-emerged with the consolidation of Latin American social sciences itself. Take the U.S. Latin Americanist Wayne Cornelius's internal migration model, for instance (published like Cardona's, in a 1969 article). There, Cornelius would offer his own closed system model of Latin American internal migrations, based supposedly on Mexican realities, and with rural and urban territories and populations entangled in a zero-sum game. Land, like people, could supposedly only be urban *or* rural, reflecting a teleological presupposition regarding 'the rural' giving way to 'the urban.' In such a closed system model, explanations regarding the social frictions, economic bottlenecks, and governance challenges accompanying this rural-to-urban transition could be identified with only an extremely limited set of predetermined variables—*mostly* overlapping with quantitative social sciences' traditional variables such as human reproduction rates, aggregate consumer activity trends, or the productive limits of land under industrial farming.[142] Converting the first of these factors at the bottom edge of his model's visual diagram into a more territorial idiom, representing what many peers would deem 'rural population pressures,' Cornelius states simply, like a physicist, "spatial concentration." Unlike a physicist, however, for whom the entropic tendency of nature leads to a gradual dispersal of matter in the universe, the political scientist could grasp in human matters a principle tending away from an originary rural human

[141] Gomes, Gabriela. "La política habitacional y el saber de los expertos en el nuevo orden arquitectónico de la Argentina "moderna" (1966-1973)." *Dossier "Erradicación de Villas, Resistencia Popular y Regímenes Autoritarios en América Latina"* 5.10 (2018): 16.

[142] Hirschman, Albert O. HG, and Albert O. Hirschman. "The rise and decline of development economics." *The Essential Hirschman*. Princeton University Press, 2013. 49-73.

dispersal—and toward cities.

So detached from rural forces does Cornelius' Mexico-centric model make the migrant's circuit (the extent of his "adaptation") through urban space, in fact, that a space which in Cardona's models had served as a temporal 'window' upon arrival to the city, during which a migrant is most likely to become a political "change agent," becomes instead a series of gaps in time—an "anomic gap," as well as a "frustration gap."[143] In these gaps, which Cornelius defines as "a time lag between the abandonment of the traditional value system and the acceptance of a replacement system," by an individual "migrant," the 'rural' appears as a kind of psychosocial loss.

Like his leading (largely North Atlantic-based) Latin Americanist colleagues' inattentions to Cold War political forces, however, Cornelius's naturalistic/organicist framing of the loss of rural land and community as an injury allows it to rapidly 'heal' back here into a supposedly healthy legitimation of elite urban governance. "[There] can be little doubt that rapid urbanization has contributed to conditions of material scarcity, overcrowding, and service deprivation in the big cities," Cornelius concluded in his 1969 essay on internal migrations, "yet it would appear that the rate of demand creation among the urban masses, and therefore the magnitude of the collective "frustration gap," is not as great as has been assumed."[144] The depth of psychosocial loss of rural territory through forced urban-ward displacement is ultimately replaced here, in the model, by the author's reckoning that because new migrants have not

---

[143] The rural is imagined here, as in much of the contemporaneous literature, as a 'cultural system' filled with more intense kinship ties, relative inattention to the intricacies of 'national politics,' and high levels of "religiosity" (no matter that Cornelius' own highly inconclusive survey data, included at the end of the article, might be used to doubt these very criteria). Despite malleable data and plastic conceptual categories, however, there was as little room for doubt in Cornelius' conclusion as there was, supposedly, in the countryside for Mexicans. See Cornelius, Wayne A. Urbanization as an agent in Latin American political instability: the case of Mexico. *The American Political Science Review*, 1969, vol. 63, no 3, p. 833-857.
[144] *Ibid, 855.*

generated huge spikes in consumer demand in the city, their material (and by extension, human social) needs are in fact being met. In the years after Cardona's or Cornelius' models were completed, the expansion of international migration of Mexicans to U.S. agricultural camps and inner-cities, or the self-enclosed nature of early Latin American internal migration models, evince just how carefully directed *away from the critical categories of global geopolitics* these studies were, to have excluded even so fundamentally overlapping a phenomenon as transnational mobility.[145]

These arguments not only build on, but come together with the chapter's main attentions to Latin American 'land invasions' and their limited inclusions in 'internal migration' theories. In the growth of both public housing and land invasion struggles, particularly as considered 'from above' in the closed models and fetishized empiricism of late Cold War/early neoliberal era social sciences, the 'rural/urban' as framing dichotomies would allow the rural to be included or excluded from key sites where 'the national' was being re-defined for publics, for politics, and for property regimes that materialized an interface between them and their 'migrant' doppelgangers.[146] Like the compartmentalization of moral complexity surrounding rural land

---

[145] As Robert Edwin Scott's 1964 study *Mexican Government In Transition,* would note, within the ruling PRI party's 'sectoral' structure, the *campesino* sector had a larger rank and file than either the 'popular' (i.e. urban) or the (industrial) worker sector. Yet when it came to the senatorial and congressional representation of these sectors, 'popular' sector influence had been declining in consecutive elections, from 1943 onwards.

While Latin Americanist staff at the U.S. state department could affirm these tendencies noted by Scott as bulwarks against a worrying expansion of 'unofficial' agrarian political struggles during the 1960s (Lorde, 1965), the growing significance of 'internal migrations' to grasping 'political structure' during the same decade could imagine 'urbanization' less as a bulwark than as a 'substitute' for agrarian politics, inherently neutralizing or-- befitting these incipient employments of 'systems theory' abstract industrial thinking—'automatically' neutralizing it. In any case, the notion that agrarian exodus was an outcome of, or at least manageable through 'political structure,' and 'economic structure,' rather than expressions of their incipient 'unsettlement' or collapse, was legible when attributed to technology (agrarian technification) and other "material amenities," and far less so when seen as a product of incremental political exclusions—exclusions that would only grow with exponential population growth from the 1960s to the 2000s. Scott, Robert Edwin. Mexican Government in Transition. University of Illinois Press, 1971.

[146] As Ananya Roy argues, with refreshing directness, "the urban and rural are governmental categories." Cf. Roy,

struggles—achieved in models with simple centering of urban social processes as a telos and

national measure of economic development/wellbeing—so the compartmentalization of

conflicting social science disciplinary approaches, prioritizing instead methodological and

conceptual overlaps, embodied a convergent approach during this period in Mexico and much of

the region.

At the first Regional Latin American Conference on Population, held at the *Colegio de*

Mexico in 1970 and cosponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, the U.N., the International

Union for the Scientific Study of Population, and various development organizations, a collective

awareness of this increasingly consolidated expert space, located between university and state

policy in relatively new bureaucratic and institutional networks, was itself on display. As Victor

Urquidi, the *Colegio de Mexico* president and an influential voice at CEPAL, would plainly state

at the outset of his opening address to more than three hundred academic attendees:

> Today we begin a meeting that many will not hesitate to classify as of the greatest
> importance with respect to the future of Latin American man, given that the conference
> deals with man in his numerical expression, his dynamics, his mobility and many other
> aspects that make up the structure and characteristics of a population. It is the Latin
> American man—studied through scientific methods of demographic, social, and
> economic analysis—who today precisely concerns us.[147]

Highlighting here three aspects of the 'Latin American man' that the social sciences

---

Ananya. "What is urban about critical urban theory?." *Urban Geography* 37.6 (2016): 810-823.

For similar insights, I am also indebted to another key co-theorist of these categories during the 1970: Luis
Echeverria. at the launch of a new "Three Party National Agrarian Commission" in 1975, intended to assist the
already vast Secretary of Agrarian Reform, the President would emphasize that when speaking of "agrarian reform"
"we are not thinking of Mexican-style forms of collective labor," in which the fault lines between capital and the
differentiated insertion of various ethnic groups into capitalist production could melt away. This rhetorical sleight of
hand, in which Mexico ceases to be considered a 'system,' is only possible because it was one. What is particularly
meta-systemic, though, was an ability that Echeverria shared with other actors in this genealogy: the ability to
articulate a stance whose terms shifted with their audience, and whose significances emerged only in the
displacement of pressures from one node of a moral-material economy to another.

[147] Urquidi, Víctor L. "Sesión Inaugural de la Conferencia Regional Latinoamericana de Población." *Estudios
Demográficos y Urbanos* 4, no. 03 (1970): 396-400.

might aggregate prototypically around—numerical expressions of population, and mobility trends—Urquidi places here the challenge of grasping Mexican/Latin American territorial directionalities and reasons for those ("his dynamics") as equally salient to understanding their quantity.

In addition to this new sense of an interdisciplinary mainstream (in which, as this section affirms, internal migration studies and urban ethnography were to serve as key interdisciplinary genres/knowledge nodes), however, Urquidi's address to the conference would also notably turn toward the global politics of such a watershed moment for Latin American social sciences broadly, noting that "the time when the knowledge of our demographic phenomena came to us Latin Americans exclusively from institutes and offices located abroad...has almost disappeared."[148] While affirming the meeting itself as "happy proof that Latin America does not work in isolation and that it accepts scientific contributions from other areas [of the globe]," a collaborative spirit that the prominent influence of North Atlantic experts, such as Cornelius and Ward in Mexico, could index, by way of reminding the conference's global sponsors and donors of an emerging mainstream Latin American social science's commitment to neutrality (despite these allusions to a politics of Cold War imperial dependence). The politics of producing mainstream Latin American social science certainly embodied such global contradictions and the need for expert knowledges to find new practical and rhetorical solutions alike to those geopolitical tensions. How scholars responded to this need, and what motivated them as North Atlantic or Latin America-based scholars, was motivated by no single model or set of priorities. Nonetheless, a consolidating mainstream with its own internal norms, capable of generating its own data and knowledge on populational phenomena, yet also remaining politically neutral in

---

[148] *Ibid, 397.*

this new 'knowledge autonomy' by adhering to approaches widely accepted by North Atlantic

counterparts, was unquestionably coming into being.

This consolidation of social sciences knowledges unintentionally figured rural land

struggles as a constitutive blind spot to new 'mainstream' approaches. Whether the three hundred

in attendance at the *Colegio de Mexico* conference sensed it or not, agrarian land struggles were

becoming structurally marginalized in 'internal migration theory,' approaches and depoliticized

interdisciplinarily in urban ethnographies of urban land invasion. In this process of achieving key

forms of intellectual autonomy from the North Atlantic World, however, new national academic

experts were not the only 'local' actors molding political imagination, however. It's time to turn

to the influence of state expertise—with which social scientists tend more directly to interact

than with corporate elites—on Mexican expertise in territory during the heights of early

neoliberal Latin American land invasion politics.

Social Policy Coherence as Tool; Policy Incoherence as Tactic

The early neoliberal era in Mexican social policy planning fetishized territorial coherence

in unprecedented ways. Little embodied the paradoxical outcomes of this focus on policy

coherence in urban planning as thoroughly as the *Plan Director* wave. A flurry of municipal

development plans for major metro-areas across Mexico in the late 1970s, culminating with the

appointment of a *Plan Director* for Mexico City in 1982, aimed to rationalize city planning, to

avoid wasteful building and inefficiency in infrastructure building, and to "avoid excessive

speculation with respect to both lands and constructions employed in public housing."[149] This

was the official line. In practice, however, the goals of growth and efficiency remained difficult

---

[149] Varley, Ann. "¿Clientelismo o tecnocracia? La lógica política de la regularización de la tierra urbana, 1970-1988." *Revista mexicana de sociología* (1994): 135-164.

to keep in line. As the British geographer Ann Varley, in a 1994 essay looking back over the

prior two decades of Mexican territorial policy, observed:

> The agrarian and urban sectors of the state bureaucracy have conflicting interests in the urbanization of *ejido* [the collectively owned rural property form]. [President] Lopez Portillo introduced the requirement that each expropriation must be approved by SAHOP [the newly formed *Secretary of Human Settlements and Public Works]*, as a response to the corrupt practice of overestimating the area to be regularized, for the purposes of illicit land speculation. The potential conflicts inherent in this measure can be calculated by the fact that in an expropriation carried out in 1981, in the Tulyehualco *ejido* (south of Mexico City, an area of high land value), the Secretary of the Agrarian Reform apparently tried to approve the expropriation of an area twice as large as the one actually carried out, once SAHOP vetoed the original proposal. Agrarian sector officials may have resented this veto as "interference" by SAHOP in "their" territory.[150]

Growing turf wars among the 1970s flowering of Mexican federal territorial institutions

was also recognized by (primarily Mexican) contributors to the impressive conference and

critical essay collection, *A Decade of Urban-Regional Planning in Mexico, 1978-1988*.[151] Was

such institutional incoherence not evidence, editor Gustavo Garza asks in the introduction, that

territorial-based social policy and economic planning "is nothing more than a 'discursive

facade,' used to dissimulate an absence of political will to engage in territorial planning, rather

than simply using [policy and state institutions] as an apparatus of political legitimation"?[152]

While falling short of interrogating the role of academic knowledge production in this

legitimizing process, the volume did represent a break in the early neoliberal mainstream

academic approach sketched in the previous section of this chapter: for social science disciplines

so newly forged in Mexican university systems—urban sociology programs at select Mexico

---

[150] *Ibid*, 153.

[151] Garza, Gustavo. Una Década de planeación urbano-regional en México, 1978-1988. México: Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Demográficos y de Desarrollo Urbano, 1989.

[152] Garza, Gustavo. "INTRODUCCIÓN.: IMAGEN GLOBAL DE LA PLANEACIÓN TERRITORIAL EN MÉXICO." In *Una Década De Planeación Urbano-regional En México, 1978-1988*, edited by Garza Gustavo, 9-24. México, D.F.: El Colegio De Mexico, 1989. p. 23. Accessed May 13, 2021.

City campuses, for instance, were a product of the Echeverria years—questioning the state-academic relationship was a radical shift in disciplinary agendas. With the thickening of social science mainstream relationships to the state around a consolidated set of "behemoth" territorial institutions by the 1990s—and with Infonavit now growing into a new (corporate Mexico-approved) position among these as a leading institutional voice—a sustained unsettling of mainstream Mexican social science's politics of neutrality *à la* Garza et. al, or the radical 1970s scholars discussed earlier in this chapter, was to prove increasingly unlikely. As Infonavit and a few other post-Agrarian Reform institutions rose to prominence, academic networks would be disciplined by the need to compete with more intensively concentrated corporate influence over their knowledge models and policy trajectories.[153]

In these longer timelines, policy coherence as a mere ideal of knowledge production and critique, versus a genuinely achievable end of social governance, emerges as far from the only large-scale social effect. The work of legitimizing an expansion or reduction, consolidation or multiplication of expert networks/institutions—whether at a federal governance scale and/or through shifting state support for certain kinds of academic knowledge production—has its own political calculus. To identify this specifically political dynamic of knowledge production surrounding invasive politics in early neoliberal Mexico, however, it is necessary to focus not

---

[153] Varley's analysis is contrary to other academic analysts of this early neoliberal Mexican moment, including that of the two most prominent geographers and urban studies of Mexico scholars in Britain in the period, her dissertation advisor, Peter Ward and mentor Alan Gilbert. Gilbert and Ward claimed in their 1985 text, *Housing, the State and the Poor: Policy and Practice in Three Latin American Cities*, that the emergence of Infonavit helped mark the emergence of a new horizon of engaged state planning for the Mexican state—especially after Echeverria's exit in 1976. In some ways, the claim was certainly true. In other ways, as the historian Kenneth Maffitt proposes, however, Gilbert and Ward's perspective participated in a transnational middle class inattention to massive strikes, marches, and postering around the city decrying the state's new urbanist strategies as self-interested, repressive, and complicit with U.S. imperial designs. This inattention is what this chapter theorizes. Varley, in the passage quoted, directs us toward the same concerns as Maffit. See: Maffitt, Kenneth F. "Nueva política social, viejo contrato social: políticas de vivienda y protesta urbana en la periferia de la Ciudad de México, 1960s-1980s." *Historia (Santiago)* 47.1 (2014): 113-132.

only on 'turf wars' or rebelliousness among social policy institutions, but also specifically on

where such a productive contradiction of knowledge production becomes apparent in a single

site of annunciation: that of the president.

In foreign policy, where land invasion politics in their contemporary Latin American

forms were unfamiliar and distant, Mexico's expanding infrastructure projects (that will get

heads of states' attention in 1975) combined with Echeverria's talents as a speaker, idealism

could go far in assuaging global capitalists' fears that their factories in the nation were (as the

CCE warned them) about to be seized by invaders, liquidated.[154] In a 1975 interview with *Le

Monde*, while on a series of foreign visits, and in response to several questions subsequently

published under the interview sub-heading of "Rationalizing the Population Growth Rate,"

Echeverria emphasized:

> [T]hese are old problems and resentments created by small or even big landowners who
> long ago occupied land belonging to agricultural communities which had not staked their
> claims at the right time. These communities would now like to recuperate their property
> and reoccupy their land.[155]

---

[154] Like the once-mighty Secretary of Agrarian Reform, an institution that mediated tens of millions of Mexicans'
land access over the better part of the twentieth century, conflicts between rural and urban-oriented state institutions
and land struggle organizations during the early neoliberal era saw rural land struggles come to be marginalized as
the neoliberal era took further shape. The incipient marginalization of the *Confederación Nacional Campesina*
(CNC) a parastatal union which during the 1940s-1970s remained the largest labor organization, and sector of the
ruling PRI party's organized base, would most clearly signal this shift.

       On one hand, the CNC became marginalized within the ruling party by elites concerned with controlling
larger urban industrial labor forces and with pushing rural populations from lands that (thanks to new technologies)
could be farmed on *hacienda*-scale estates more profitably than in the recent past. On the other hand, the CNC was
to become marginalized during the 1960s and 1970s *vis* the emergence—detailed in chapter three of this project—of
new *campesino* and indigenous political organizations—both within the PRI party's broad ranks, and in self-
described independent and autonomist movements. These autonomist groups would be defined precisely through a
more confrontational, territorial competitive relationship with the Mexican state, including a CNC increasingly seen
by its millions of members as a gatekeeping organization standing between landless Mexicans and the unfinished
redistributionist agenda of Agrarian Reform.

[155] Niedergang, Marcel. "Une Interview Du Président Echeverria Alvarez Au Moment Où S'achève La Visite De M.
Allende LE PRÉSIDENT DU MEXIQUE DÉCLARE AU " MONDE ": " Nous Ne Pouvons plus Tolérer Que Des
Sociétés Étrangères S'enrichissent Sur Notre Dos "." *Le Monde.fr*, Le Monde, 3 Dec. 1972,
www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1972/12/04/une-interview-du-president-echeverria-alvarez-au-moment-ou-s-
acheve-la-visite-de-m-allende-le-president-du-mexique-declare-au-monde-nous-ne-pouvons-plus-tolerer-que-des-

The reference to the deep time of colonization here would seem to indirectly acknowledge indigeneity as a political force, on one hand; yet the assertion of indigeneity here as an ethnic fault line formed "long ago," must also be read in the opposite direction, as a discourse that attaches indigeneity to supposedly essential, unchanging identities. At a time more broadly when *indigenista knowledges,* as discussed earlier, were still in effect, but incipiently falling out of official favor—and the plasticity of interdisciplinary knowledges was gradually shaking off such language (if not its formative influences), the politics of Echeverria's interpretation to a European media outlet of 1970s land invasions as caused by history, rather than contemporary forces, is inherently ambiguous.

By refusing to be pinned down abroad on the issue, the president could assert back home a more targeted series of approaches, depending on audience and constituency. During a brunch hosted by the powerful National Cattlemen's Association in 1976, Echeverria would insist that land invasions be prevented in coordination not only between large landowners like his audience and "peasant leaders," but also in consultation with the federal Defense Secretary, in order to "take the bull by the horns," as he put it.[156] By using the metaphors of the industry he was addressing, Echeverria located 'invasions,' not as a matter of historical justice for indigenous Mexicans, but as a space where an intensive masculine *mestizo* identity—the very term of greeting for a central Mexican 'gentleman' is *caballero*, i.e., 'cowman'—was vigorously affirmed.

In more national urban policing-oriented contexts, Echeverria could strike a similar tone, but while shifting the more aggressive paternalism of the country to a more reserved masculinity

societes-et_3034512_1819218.html.
[156] Duque Juarez, Oliverio. "Echeverria Urges Dialogue on Agrarian Issues." *El Sol De Mexico*, 2 May 1976, M3.

137

of the city. "At times one hears about the invasion of lands by peasants," Echeverria would ambiguously note in a speech to his cabinet in the final year of his presidency, 1976. "But the invasion of communal lands by urban landowners is usually forgotten. The government," Echeverria would conclude, "is fighting both equally."[157] Now, the claim was patently false: urban land invasions were tolerated far more regularly in this era than rural invasions, even as the arc of Echeverria's own presidency had shifted from hedging toward support for rural land invaders to increasingly providing military backing for elites who sought to defend their large land tracts. Thus, the claim that "the government is fighting both equally" was more aspirational than factual.

As a policy ideal, however, such dreams of coherence were buoyed by growing material commitments to new urban infrastructures that would, it was hoped, serve as a carrot to the stick of Echeverria's harsh cabinet meeting warnings. Echeverria's own investments in the projects, in turn, hinged on their ability to help Mexico maintain its global financial standing (by keeping access to international investment capital available), while also promising to frame growing Mexican soft power among the non-aligned Cold War nations on the world stage.

---

[157] "ECHEVERRIA DELIVERS GOVERNMENT REPORT BEFORE DEPUTIES." *Newsbank/Readex*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports, 1 Sept. 1974, 12C5802992E3EC18.

Figure 14. "Mexico - Shelter." In this still image, from short film produced by Mexican housing institutions, including Infonavit, and focusing on that new institution's activities (to be shown at the U.N Habitat Conference in 1976) a family stands on the future site of their home, as a computer screen is superimposed. The film claims that new technology will make housing provision more efficient. As a visual trope, however, the film also suggests the relationship between shifting forms of technical-expert knowledge and the state's power to manage mass politics through infrastructure.[158]

Such idealism, indeed, allowed Echeverria to contrast his nation's infrastructure project successes to a dystopian view of the North Atlantic's own influence on his nation's continuing development. At a U.N. Habitat Conference on Global Settlement, for instance, the Mexican president would emphatically describe how:

> By the time [urban] population levels in the leading nations of the developed world passed the one million mark, those nations already had several decades of industrial revolution behind them. The rural masses that arrived at the gates of the European cities as labor reserves and made the accumulation of capital possible because of their low wages are not the same masses that are flooding into the cities of the underdeveloped countries only to enter the ranks of the marginalized, a situation that not only betokens injustice but also throws economic models based on internal exploitation and dependency

---

[158] "Mexico - Shelter." *Centre for Human Settlements Fonds*, 1976, www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9UaNpLV1oc. Digital and analog versions of this video are located at the University of British Columbia Archives in Vancouver, Canada (Centre for Human Settlements Fonds, video code: MEX-128-SA-3, housed: Box 14).

abroad into an insurmountable crisis. Explosive urban growth in the Third World is the result of an arousal of false expectations, not of social or economic change. [159]

This contrast between urbanization as a motor of geopolitical power in the Global North, but of crisis in the Global South, was by the 1970s a thesis firmly lodged at the core of Latin America economy and international relations thinking. According to certain leading intellectuals, it was a thesis to which the majority of Global North peoples also readily consented. As the Brazilian IR theorist Helio Jaguaribe would quip, resistance to global resource redistributions only arose when Global North nations faced the bill[160]. In Echeverria's address, however, one heard no threats of bringing those aroused expectations back down to size through brute force.

Echeverria's positions in his own cabinet meeting speech and at the UN Habitat speech, respectively, are seemingly paradoxical. He poses urbanization as an inevitable unfolding of imperial capitalism in the latter space, and as a theater for the performance of sovereignty in the former--looking to achieve a cohesion between domestic and foreign policy that the centrality of infrastructure-building to both at this moment made perhaps more imaginable than for any other Mexican president for decades before or after. Such flexibility, in the context of proliferating discourses about invasion tracked across this chapter--some explaining the phenomena away, others demonizing the practice as a practice only of? potential communist *guerrillas*, and still others naturalizing the practice while banking on its political cooptation in the future--proved both a powerful and a volatile tactic of populist power brokering.[161] It's what the politics of

---

[159] "Address by Luis Echeverria Alvarez, President of Mexico, at the U.N. Conference on Human Settlements." *Habitat International*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1976, pp. 111–118.

[160] Jaguaribe, Helio. "La relación norte-sur." *Estudios Internacionales* (1988): 425-438. 436.

[161] Echeverria could treat invasion practices as a private squabble whose cultural history was to be respected, as a site for regaining the sympathy of rural elites who needed his backing against land invasions, and as a grey zone of formal politics that he could draw popular support through as needed to counter the influence of the state's most powerful capitalist factions. For a populist Latin American leader at the height of the Cold War, the

invasion sounded like at the heights of Mexico's infrastructure-building state.

Conclusion: Land Invasions, Social Policy Expertise, and the Neoliberal Era

In an essay titled "Bordering on Anthropology,"[162] Claudio Lomnitz rehearses the

moment of shifting Mexican state commitments to national urbanization (as the telos of

industrialization and development) in a remarkable way. He arranges this historical moment as

the moment in which U.S. and Mexican anthropological disciplines also begin to fail to see a

common world. In Lomnitz's account, it's 1946, and the Mexican journalist and anthropologist

Fernando Jordan has created a minor scandal in a newspaper editorial critiquing comments that

Robert Redfield (the preeminent U.S. anthropologist) had recently made on Mexican national

radio, as an invited guest commentator during President Miguel Aleman's inaugural speech.

Redfield had used part of the radio appearance, you see, to question President Aleman's

celebration of industrialization, wondering into a live microphone what its costs would be in

terms of Mexico's rich cultural diversity. Jordan struck back that Redfield would prefer to keep

Mexicans, rural, their cultures immortalized like museum pieces, even if that meant that

industrialization would pass the nation by and the nation's poverty would remain unchanged. As

Lomnitz proposes, Jordan's forceful response to Redfield offers an early instance of the kind of

---

polysemiousness invasive politics, shifting in its meanings and possibilities from one subnational group perspective to another, as well as in the view of various international relationship, could be embodied in the figure of someone like Echeverria, with his political acumen and willingness to entertain seemingly contrary political positions, in fairly unique ways--albeit not without their historical continuities with the present. The uniqueness of the figure, however, does not make them less historically interesting, but rather offers a rare window (an open door, if you prefer) onto the way in which invasive politics across local, national, and international scales was becoming subject to/the subject of entire governance playbooks and governance postures by the 1970s. See: Varley, 1994.

[162] Lomnitz, Claudio. "Bordering on anthropology: dialectics of a national tradition in Mexico." *Empires, Nations, and Natives*. Duke University Press, 2005. 167-196.

epistemic asymmetries that would send U.S. and Mexican anthropology in distinct directions in coming years and decades.

Lomnitz's point is clear, and powerful. Whereas in the post-war period experts from an already industrialized and urbanized U.S. could immediately grasp the advantages of Mexican rural, quasi- pre-industrial society, Mexican development knowledge was directing itself toward attaining the advantages of being a U.S. peer, not its playground. In the space between economics and politics, Redfield and Jordan found themselves speaking past one another. This chapter can be seen to tell a somewhat parallel parable of Mexican expert knowledge and its global valences--from a starting point merely a quarter century after the exchange Lomnitz recounts, yet a world away. By 1970, Mexico had been an urban-majority nation for a decade already, and its pace was accelerating. From under-industrialized, the emergence of cost-cutting *maquiladora* factories, foreign-owned, were to make even some of Mexican industrialization's most hearty nationalist backers, like Jordan, into doubters--all in the matter of less than thirty years. A mere generation after the Redfield-Jordan debate, the premise of industrialization as a salve to the nation's problems was not nearly so widely accepted by academics, industry, or state experts alike as it had been. What is even more striking, however, are the differences in expert attitudes toward urbanization between 1946 and 1976, when Echeverria left office.

Whereas Jordan could accuse Redfield at this still relatively early stage in Mexican industrial infrastructure building of wanting to sabotage a national project, by Echeverria's day charges of sabotaging the nation's industrial future looked like those of the CCE--claiming that the Mexican president was plotting to nationalize all private property. Corporate expertise, wedging itself between state and scholarly knowledges of agrarian reform, demographic governance, and public housing's claims on urban development alike were now mimicking the

political mediation roles only recently far more dominated by the state itself. Whereas in '46 urbanization, industrialization, and national development seemed like political choices to be made or set aside, opportunities to be seized upon or not, by '76 urbanization/industrialization was something quite different. Even within a discipline like anthropology, remarkably, the ethnic/racial governance frameworks that had underpinned Redfield's and Jordan's neat mapping of culturally homogenous and culturally diverse futures onto 'urban' and 'rural' spaces respectively (a distinction around which, though Lomnitz doesn't note it they still in 1946 could seamlessly agree), by the 1970s no longer held.

In the course of accounting for the differences in migration trajectories between indigenous, *mestizo* and other groups, Lourdes Arizpe, who was among the first to designate "*campesinos indígena*" as a group partially bridging ethnic lines, would consider in her writings on Mazahua migrants to Mexico City in the 1970s that:

> ...[*M*]*estizos* generally migrate to improve their economic and social position; the Mazahuas, meanwhile, the poorest and most marginalized [in their hometowns] in all directions, tend to migrate to mend their situation in their towns of origin, and therefore migrate for temporary and seasonal periods. Yet if ethnic frontiers established by the *mestizos* have served to maintain the benefits of economic development within the limits of their own group, the nature of [economic] development is also making this frontier disappear [i.e., by generating new urban underclasses]. This point is pertinent to discussions concerning 'culture change' as a determining factor in migration.[163]

In other words, while rural-to-urban population movements could impose or erase ethnic frontiers, in either case, the assimilation of indigenous and *campesino* groups to a national *mestizo* culture was, Arizpe argued, not inevitable in either of these scenarios. Where the future of the infrastructure-building state, and industrialization at large, had only decades prior seemed the outstanding possibility to be debated by national and international experts interested in

---

[163] Arizpe, 1978. 237-238.

Mexico, by the 1970s it was a force to be managed--while the frontiers of ethnicity/race were

emerging (in studies like Arizpe's) as potentially beyond directly management.[164] This turn away

from questions of culture to more abstract sciences of population marked primarily, in the 1970s,

a commitment to interdisciplinary communicability, translatability, and the performance of

apolitical objectivity. As a result, however, this arrangement of mainstream expertise generated

growing blind spots of state expertise toward land invasions and the radicalizing politics of

ethnicity-race they embodied. Such blind spots would be most pronounced in the analyses of

U.S. scholars of the 1970s like P.G. Bock, one of the 1960s founders of 'nation security' as a

field of academic study. In a monograph analyzing the collaboration of Infonavit and private

constructors in the early 1970s development of a monumental, planned Mexico City satellite

settlement 'Cuautitlan-Izcalli,' for instance, Bock would contend that the project embodied a

resolution of prior tensions between a socialist leaning urban policy aimed at reducing social

inequality and poverty, and a planning model in which the primary aim was a technically

functional 'modern' urban space. "Any remaining doubts regarding the state's abandonment of

the [socialist] socioeconomic model can be resolved," Bock would conclude, "by looking at the

housing program of the new town. By 1973, the least expensive Cuautitlan-Izcalli home sold for

62,500 pesos (U.S. 5,000)."[165] Bock's conclusions elided two contrasting facts, however: first,

---

[164] Campesino and Mazahua societies are tracked in Arizpe's writing here as differentiated in their modes of city-ward migration, and in the employment of these differential modes by *campesinos mestizos* to maintain indigenous migrants as economically marginal actors across rural-urban interfaces. "Urban marginalization," to use one social science keyword increasing at the core of disciplinary knowledges in the 1970s, remains a relatively marginal space of decolonial thought. Yet the co-production of disciplinary knowledges with the 'lively data' of rapidly-shifting 'internal' and 'transnational' migration streams during the postwar era all too clearly have common investments in fixing populations in place, with these investments continuing to shape knowledge production--contributing, as the chapter details, to the edifice of territorial tools that perform a phantom "end of land struggles" by displacing the whole narrative and conceptual apparatus of land struggles.

[165] Bock, P. G., and Morton Berkowitz. "The emerging field of national security." (1966): 122-136.
Bock, P. G. *Internal migration policy and new towns; the mexican experience*. No. 04; HB1991, B6. 1979.

that *autoconstruccion* possibilities for self-built structures on empty lots did exist at the new

development (albeit for a small fraction of residents), and second that the Mexican state was

directly provisioning the mortgages at subsidized rates. A model project like Cuautitlan-Izcalli,

embodying public housing's rising salience in Mexico (and regionally--it was framed by its

Mexican backers as destined to be 'bigger than Brasilia)--could serve as a 'natural' tool of

counter-Agrarian Reform, on one hand, by redirecting 'socialist' demands for land into

'capitalist' demands for housing. Yet, as a product built by the nation's progressive new worker

housing institute, Infonavit, and modeling newly legitimized 'self-built' housing options,

moreover, a project like this could equally naturally appear to embody for Mexican publics a

muscularly welfare-statist project. When national elites aimed to modify--but not overturn--a

national system under increasing pressure from disobedient *campesinos/*indigenous groups,

public housing became the path of least policy resistance--perceptually legible as neoliberal and

anti-neoliberal in its tendencies, depending on one's vantage. However, public housing's ability

to serve these two masters, while outliving the Cold War proper, would eventually face a crisis

of coherence whose political face would be (as I show in the chapter's introduction) frequently

framed in terms of a crisis of social policy expertise.

　　Indeed, public housing's continual expansion since Infonavit's 1970s founding, kicked

into overdrive during the 1990s as part of a global spread of subprime mortgage markets that

would fuel new forms of short-term corporate real estate and public infrastructure speculation in

the early 2000s,[166] can be read against the history of this chapter as shifting in part to fill an

---

[166] During the 90s this blindspot became so complete that social scientists elaborated, in good faith, mythologies of
Mexican civil society's emergence during the collective rebuilding of Mexico City following a devastating 1985
earthquake. Such a genealogy allowed social movements to be studied from an origin point disconnected from
agrarian-based land struggles of the recent past, avoiding altogether the moral and social complexity of
contemporary social movements' continuities and debts to groups whose activities conspicuously, tactically

emergent 'policy gap.' Where in the old early neoliberal model described in this chapter, housing and urbanization, 'family planning' population policy, and broadly *indigenista* racial-ethnic governance institutions and idioms all served as columns of Mexican social welfare policy (*politica social*), by the twenty-first century two of those three legs had weakened tremendously--leaving the more durable leg to do more, even as its basis in social policy expertise ebbed.[167] A final ethnographic vignette, situated at the influential Department of Urban Development office in Tijuana's city hall shortly after my return from the month in Mexico City with which I began this chapter, can help embody not only this fraying of social policy expertise, but how such fraying gets narrated and (mis)remembered by an expert whose career spans both early neoliberal and contemporary northern Mexican urban social policy.

When Carlos Ignacio Huerta, a veteran of the state's "Land and Housing" program of the 1980s, when Ernesto Ruffo became Baja California and Mexico's first PAN governor, welcomes me to his office for the day's interview, it is in the context of my hopes to discuss local planning and infrastructural oversight processes. This is a key issue over certain political figures with their own visions of a state renaissance in social policy expertise (like the architect Carlos Zedillo Velasco, in this chapter) can point as a seemingly easy case of the Mexican state's fraying claims to urban expertise. Not only were municipal planning agencies in many cities' recommendations increasingly ignored by zoning commissions and construction companies during the 1990s and 2000s, but today, as many housing developments built between 2000 and 2012 continue to await

---

straddled legality and illegality in ways that, if taken seriously (rather than framed as irrelevant to how this *new* civil society works), would lead to a questioning of expert knowledges' own tradition of avoiding serious discussion of such tactics).

[167] For some Mexican social theorists, President Vicente Fox's closure in 2003 of the decades old *Insituto Nacional Indigenista* as the state's belated explicit acknowledgement of this new arrangement. In the meantime, a new column of welfare state strength had grown remarkably, as well--the public health system. Yet because of that system's own travails, and its lack of political capital and financial capital resources for expansion as compared to housing, I leave it aside in this limited space.

for the their water, electrical, and road infrastructures to receive full legal acknowledgement, or "reception," by municipalities as subject to local political caretaking, many cities have attempted to avoid such costly caretaking of increasingly abandoned or deteriorated public works by simply failing to instate the necessary urban development experts to preside over this process. Isn't this situation again evidence that calls like Zedillo Velasco's, to place urban planning 'back' in the hands of architects is not far from the truth? Well, no.

In Tijuana, this position does exist. It is known as 'Head of Subdivision Receptions.' And Carlos Ignacio Huerta is the second official to hold the post since its recent creation. At the Infonavit offices in Mexico City, more than one of the more senior officials I interview complain that cities with figures in positions like Huerta's are hardly more efficient in incorporating new public housing developments than cities with none at all. "These officials do the bidding of the mayors and governors that appoint them," one official explains bluntly, "and it's in the mayors' interest that the number of new 'received' developments remains low--because then the city can request fewer federal funds [for various programs whose distribution depends largely on the demographics of 'municipalized' residential areas]." Local and state officials keep those funding numbers low to "gain the patronage" of presidents and other high ranking officials.

Naturally, though, is not the story Ignacio Huerta, who now grabs a set of maps from his window office overlooking the financial district, is here to tell me upon my return from the capitol. He removes a pair of rubber bands from the map and unfurls it across the length of an entire meeting room table. These maps, as Huerta explains, assess and appraise ("*avaluen*")--the most recent, subprime-era past of *obras* built between 2000 and 2010. "There are something like sixty development from *el boom* [the housing construction boom of that decade] that have not passed through the reception process," he explains, walking around the map and naming location after

location, nearly all on the urban periphery, of course.[168]

"We may be slow from the perspective of some builders," he acknowledges, "but remember I am only the second administrator of this post and many cities remain without anyone in a position like mine at all. It's a complicated process still and we're trying to simplify it." After answering politely, and without much revelatory insight, a few further questions about the reception process's labyrinthine steps--steps that some local construction firm executives that I interview will criticize, while some others admit hardly knowing the process exists--Huerta rolls out a second map, an older map, atop the first one of the city today.

"This is Tijuana as it was when I first worked for the city, " Huerta tells me, while showing a map whose eastern expanses, shown circa the late 1980s, remain an open question: a grid of hatch marks showing subdivided lots, but few constructed buildings. "Back when Ruffo was governor," Huerta recalls, "we sold thousands of lots in the east of the city, big lots on which people could build a real home--not these *Pinchonavits* [he invokes here the play on words combining the housing institute's name with the word for 'birdcage] that we deal with today." Huerta is referring here to a novel, large-scale land sale program led by Ernesto Ruffo (Mexico's first governor from the far right PAN party) through which the head of urban development's own reputation had been made. working alongside national PRI politicians, doing the work of bipartisan governance. While drawing my attention to different features of this (now historical) map, Huerta claims that the rampant speculative building of the first decade of the 2000s was an aberration, contradicting the well-ordered city that he, experts and politicians had devised a quarter century ago.   The state housing programs of the late 1980s and early 1990s that he had collaborated on

---

[168] for citation: https://zetatijuana.com/2016/06/incumplen-entrega-de-fraccionamientos-al-municipio/

with Ruffo, (as well as on a pre-presidential campaign, for assassinated progressive PRI party politician Luis Donaldo Colosio) "limited land speculation in their day much better than today's method--with Infonavit putting all the power in the hands of the builders!" He then recounts to me the sizes of lots sold through Ruffo's government program (bigger, cheaper) as compared to those being advertised at the time by construction companies (smaller, more costly). Huerta narratively ground his own power now, in 2016, as the overseer of a new and quietly influential public office, in the city's pre-subprime and pre-drug war neoliberal past--recalling when the political and economic cost-benefit relations of PANismo's political capture and its efforts to form new local real estate markets (from lands previously subject to organized land invasions) still pointed in the same direction.

What Huerta's narrative of the late 1980s-early 1990s conjuncture leaves out, however, is that same theme of political violence that (as I have shown throughout this chapter) often lay just behind or beyond expert narratives--narratives in which housing served as a modernist facade behind which land struggle movements of the 1970s could be, by turns, ignored and violently repressed. Prior even to his election, Ernesto Ruffo's election campaign employed an anti-invasion politics to demonize auto-constructed sections of Tijuana as sites of dangerous ethnic and ideological difference. As the historian Carlos Valderrabano has documented, the first definitive rehearsal of this new, "whitened" nativism would emerge when Ruffo's campaign organized a spectacular confrontation with residents of the *Camino Verde* area. This canyon, located east of downtown Tijuana, had been settled during the 1980s through coordinated land invasions by Mixtec-speaking people, largely displaced from San Miguel El Grande, Oaxaca, and in coordination with certain sectors of the local PRI. *Camino Verde* residents would come to blows with Ruffo's representatives during the campaign itself, as Ruffo began a campaign to successfully

have the area's twenty-four thousand residents stricken from local registered voter lists. As "invaders," the campaign argued, *Camino Verde*'s residents were invalid voters.[169] Only property ownership could re-establish their legitimacy, implicitly whitening them. Indigenous people and *campesinos*, as this victorious PAN strategy seemed to show, could be discursively avoided altogether in the North, while implicitly attacked under officially "color-blind" banners of regional nativism and the defense of private property. In this new alignment, formally constructed housing (associated with secure property rights) was becoming a new boundary object in urban politics. And the new governor would play to his base on these very lines, in declarations to the press that "whoever wants to illegally settle land will be treated as a delinquent, because they are committing a crime." Contrary to Huerta's narrative contrast of an unintended loss of state urban policy control to corporations, Ruffo's "Land and Housing Program," and others like it in other northern Mexican states to follow, in fact served as a path whereby state violence enabled a new wave of urban corporate land grabs, complementing those enacted in the Mexican countryside in prior decade.

Amid the twists and turns of infrastructure building and land invasion movement politics that have mutually shaped the face of Mexican territory-making over the neoliberal era, I have aimed to show in this chapter how mainstream expert knowledges tended to depoliticize agrarian land struggles as inevitable yet transient bumps in the road to development--empowering a new class of corporate 'experts,' who were to treat land invasion politics and infrastructure-building as a zero-sum game. Mexican and Mexicanist transnational social sciences knowledges, in seeking their own institutional consolidation and political legitimation during this period, tended on the whole to affirm those 'zero-sum' visions of territory-making: whether by privileging the

---

[169] Cf. Valderrábano, Azucena. Historias del poder: el caso de Baja California. Argentina: Grijalbo, 1990. 90-91.

quantitative reductivism of demographics, elevating it to a translational paradigm for moving across diverse disciplinary knowledges, or through the introduction from economics and political science (via the engineering models of closed electrical circuits and stress-testing) of visions of territory-making as a 'closed system.' As I have also attempted to highlight, however, such tendencies of knowledge production--like the tendencies of territory-making they helped to naturalize--were neither entirely dominant across neoliberal Mexico, nor entirely inevitable. Radical social scientists theorized Mexican land struggles against the grain of such closed system models, largely by attempting to merge their efforts with those of land invasion movement perspectives themselves. Radical architects attempts to challenge mainstream narratives that framed public housing as a substitute for rural small-scale property holding by writing for a new leftist press, or by challenging neoliberal imperatives from within new planning institutions of the 1970s, like Infonavit. Finally, both of these expert groups, as well as land struggle movement activists themselves, drew on parallel experiences in popular land struggle and public housing institutionalization unfolding in other Latin American nations. Some of these comparative experiences, for instance in 1970s Chile and Brazil, suggested that public housing could be successfully politicized within the state, to serve social movement politics, to some degree. Other experiences, however--such as in Argentina--suggested that the growing influence of national construction, primary materials, and real estate capital over territorial-planning could effectively repress and depoliticize social movements, even more effectively than the state. By experimenting with these possibilities in its own right, against a backdrop of particularly enduring and large-scale agrarian land struggle, Mexican social policy expertise of the neoliberal era tells a critical story shedding light on this broader regional experience.

Chapter Three
Post-Durable, Affective, and Unfinished:
The *Obra Negra* (Black Work) as Infrastructural Model

Introduction: A Post-Subprime Catch-22

At the end of the day's festivities, as night falls on the northern Mexican public housing company Provive's anniversary celebrations in Ciudad Juarez, in a decade-old public housing development called *Riberas del Bravo* (literally, Banks of the Brave), a Zumbathon featuring hundreds of local participants shakes to life. With nearly all the participants women, and recorded by a documentary film crew gathering material for a Provive-sponsored, investor-oriented film, the performance attracts hundreds more from streets lining the park. Basketball courts, recently re-engineered thanks to funding from Infonavit, fill up with dancers. Where earlier a youth soccer tournament had carried the momentum of the day, and children in tri-color national team jerseys had competed for trophies, the Caribbean intonations of reggaeton tracks now fill the night. This kind of closing activity is an apt choice for a housing development whose population is well known to Provive, even without its surveys and social programs, to consist predominantly of Veracruz-origin people with Caribbean cultural connections.[170]

The women dancing tonight are mostly in their thirties and forties, many accompanied by their children. Coordinated outfits allude to the more quotidian reality of Zumba classes held at a

---

[170] Throughout the 1990s, even as Chihuahua was growing to position itself as a critical market for expanding public housing production nationally, its public housing market had remained effectively limited to a liminal, "native", Juarez-origin residential micro-class. This micro-class was particularly associated, as in Tijuana and other northern cities, with "*maquila* supervisor" positions, which were located just above the growing tides of increasingly "migrant"-identified labor, still excluded at this point from limited Infonavit credits. And while hundreds of thousands of Ciudad Juarez natives fled the Drug War for the U.S., with visas obtained during the pre-9/11 era, Veracruz residents would be forced to flee "backwards" to economically depressed towns in Veracruz.

nearby repurposed housing unit-turned-studio. Gyrations combining with stomps and kicks make

the Zumbathon the more spontaneous double to another Provive sponsored project: boy scout-

style youth police programs whose gymnastics exhibitions every few months punctuate my

fieldwork in Tijuana, Provive's operations hub and main real estate market. Here in Ciudad

Juarez, where Provive is attempting to establish a niche market hold, the more subtly militant

Zumbathon distinguishes female residents both from police and, it seems, from their husbands

and other men. No post-adolescent man participates, though many look on from the sidelines,

drinking beers in plastic cups. Occasionally a teenage boy jumps into the rows of dancing

women and children, affecting an exaggerated effeminacy that recalls the clowns that perform at

local festivals and in town squares on weekend nights in many parts of Mexico.
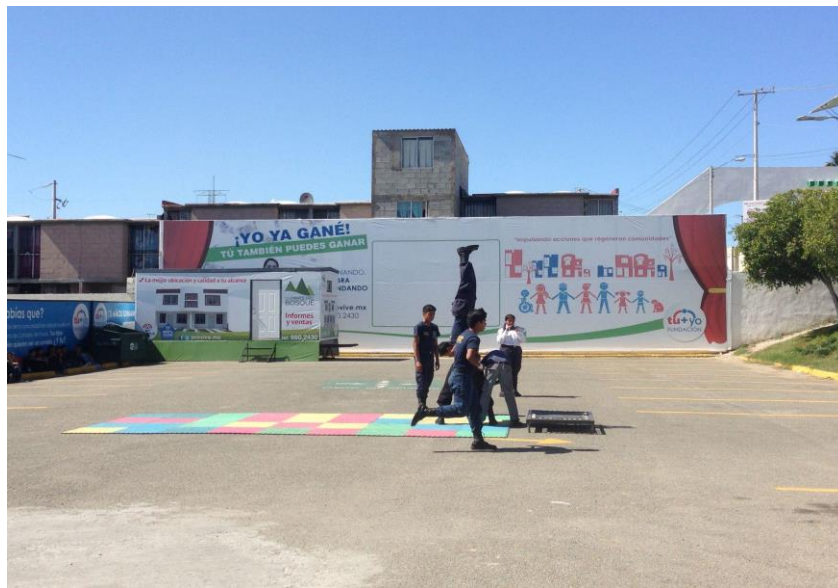
Figure 15. A youth police group practicing in 2015 in the parking lot of Provive's offices
in east Tijuana. The program was financed by local police at a considerable scale in this
and several northern Mexican cities during the 2010s' post-narco war shift toward a
politica social more centered on social/spatial 'rehabilitation.'

Provive's anniversary celebration is immediately noteworthy, from the perspective of an

anthropology of post-subprime public housing, in that it marks a step in the growth of a

significant and telling new sub-market within public housing which, before 2010, simply did not exist at any formal national scale. I am referring to public housing repossession, rehabilitation, and resale as a business not simply for Infonavit, but for private real estate firms. Today, with Infonavit's own auction system for repossessed public housing units barely scraping the true magnitude of disoccupied properties nationally, the private sector has gone from non-participant to crucial corporate ally in keeping Mexican public housing worlds afloat as socially viable. Provive, as the largest start-up entrant into this field in northern Mexico, embodies this new sub-market's leading edge--one where opportunity overlaps with a worryingly stagnant overall state of Mexico's public housing construction/financing industries since 2010.

At today's anniversary YouPlusMe (*TuMasYo*, Provive's in-house corporate foundation) has scheduled most of the programming. Its staff, wearing uniforms, hand out balloons and raffle tickets to neighborhood residents, and make small talk and help manage the kid's soccer tournament. At the evening Zumbathon, taking the stage after nearly two hours of dancing, the foundation's director Alex Martinez, flanked by the zumba instructor, thanks attendees effusively for showing their commitment to this neighborhood's "rescue." It's 2016 at this anniversary scene, just six years removed from the heights of Mexico's U.S.-backed Drug War, a struggle with no clear winners but obvious losers—low-income Mexicans, like those dancing on this basketball court. Like much of southeast Ciudad Juarez overall, which served as an undeveloped periphery of the city until serving as a huge field for new public housing construction in the previous decade, this neighborhood had become mostly abandoned as a result of drug war insecurity. Today, as this chapter considers, recovery remains an ambivalent promise at best, even for those residents sympathetic enough with the builder (and bold enough) to take part in the evening's dancing.

It's against this receding horizon of promise that Provive intervenes, promising not to reverse urban deterioration in general, but to limit it, in limited areas, and perhaps for a limited time. Yet it's also against this same horizon that residents in *Riberas* judge the company's claims, measure this emergent penumbra of corporate governance shading over the development with mixed emotions.

Today, as this final core chapter of the dissertation considers, ideals of rehabilitation and recovery remain ambivalent promises at best for many residents--requiring, even from those bold (*brava*) enough to dance this evening, not simply an ability to tolerate uncertainty, but to inhabit a shared structure of feeling, grounded in the still unfinished, unresolved timespace of a neoliberal era and its still vastly influential infrastructure-building feats. While drawing security in numbers from the evening's corporately organized event, it's the evening Zumbathon participants' willingness to a claim public space (tonight) that tomorrow and the next day will likely be relatively abandoned once more, that makes the events unfolding here palpable to some in the crowd as an act of courage--by daring to venture into a space beyond where the modest limits of Provive's corporate governance's powers in *Riberas* may seem truly enduring. Of course, residents are also being recruited indirectly here at the celebration--recruited to legitimize and embody the corporate foundation's neighborhood policing programs, in which such courage becomes more directly commodified, reframed as the "natural" vigilance of any private property holders. For now, though, that part of the story can wait. What's more central to this chapter than new corporate governance models taken up during my fieldwork by northern Mexican public housing builders is the fact of a shared, if structurally unfinished, sense of sympathy available for use in the first place (whether appearing here *qua* residents' bold claims on insecure public spaces, as corporate productions of 'social capital' *qua* 'social cohesion, etc).

"Where is Torreon?" Alex calls into the mic, as Zumba music continues in the background. Referring to a smaller northern state, from which Ciudad Juarez began first to draw significant "migrant labor" (as trans-regionally displaced domestic labor streams in Mexico are called) for its growing *maquiladora* sector during the 1980s, the call conjures a scattered cheer from the crowd. "Let me hear you!" the executive calls out his own non-northern provenance (Alex was raised in Mexico City) audible now in amplified form in his own 'national' accent.

"Where is Jalisco?" the executive calls out next. A louder cheer now responds. "Jalisco knows how to dance!" Alex adds, building up the continuity between potentially sensitive (*sensible*) identities, and affirmative associations of dancing with "knowing," i.e. being sensible (*sensible*) people.[171] But the loudest shouts are saved for Veracruz, for which the volume of cheers more than doubles.

As the cheers echo forth and music continues to bellow from speakers behind the elevated stage, I find myself chatting with Amelia, a *Riberas* resident. Wiping off with a towel handed to her by her young daughter, who holds her leg as we speak, Amelia points out that "this was the first time many of us have gone dancing at night since the violence," at its peak between 2007 and 2010. "Most of us—any woman in Juarez, in general—will not do that [i.e., go to clubs to dance] now. At least not yet. Even doing this tonight," she adds, "takes courage." At the same time, she points out, the collective aspect of dancing in public, plus the security of such a public event is "exceptional,'" she notes. Exceptional here, as I take it, means both excellent and ephemeral. Whether this reclaiming of space will continue, however, once life returns to usual is

---

[171] Notably, the sensible crowd addressed here, as in most other of Provive's (and later in the chapter, Ruba's) neighborhood organizing activities, are women. As scholars of migration in the Americas have repeatedly shown, since 9/11 most notably, "the gendered construction of immigrant danger has shifted. The new danger is masculine, one personified by terrorist men and "criminal aliens." Golash-Boza, Tanya, and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. "Latino immigrant men and the deportation crisis: A gendered racial removal program." *Latino Studies* 11.3 (2013): 271-292.

a trickier question.

After the events of the day, back at Provive's corporate condo in a private luxury development on the west side of the city, a half hour's freeway drive away, the celebration continues among a select group of white collar staff, me, and the company's two-person documentary film crew. They've been hired to film the weekend's events for an investment film meant to communicate Provive's business model to new global investors as it seeks to expand from a regional to a national scale. Amid the clinking of glasses and cheers of, "Long live Alex, mayor of Juarez!", chants (made only half in jest) that last well into the morning, the company's future has never seemed brighter.[172]

"All that [empty] housing means a long on-ramp for us," one employee at the party that night confirms to me, "lots of opportunities to grow for a long time if we do things right." Doing things right means involving stakeholders like the local politicians recruited for the day's celebration—their pictures guaranteed to appear the following morning in the local press. It also means appealing to local public opinion, which may be more sympathetic to Provive's mission than many of the company's local construction competitors, firms may prefer to see unoccupied housing simply bulldozed, creating room for more construction projects--rather than seeing it enter into the hands of an upstart firm intent on invading their market territory. "We fought a civil war to even get into this market, the employee tells me, as Alex comes to toast us and join the conversation. "When you're seen as the invader," he would conclude, "you have to fight

---

[172] As Provive CEO Antonio Diaz stated in a 2018 media interview, "Today we have four billion pesos [roughly two hundred million dollars] generated from capital gains in the areas that we are regenerating. These gains are distributed among approximately forty thousand families.The result of rehabilitating communities, *reoccupying abandoned houses, removing invaders, and bringing in families*, is to generate more demand to live in these areas. These are areas that today are well connected, well inserted into the intra-urban area. [...] Infonavit's past due portfolio is between eight and ten percent. In the case of Provive, our past due portfolio is between one and two percent, a natural [i.e., sustainable] average. It's a very low indicator as compared to that of the institute." Navarrete, 2018.

tooth and nail to even get into a market like this."

"Yes, but to be honest the Catch-22 for us is bigger than that," Alex explains. "On the one hand we want to be in these markets for a long time, and there's a lot of work to be done. Yet on the other hand, we're in theory supposed to wrap up YouPlusMe's social interventions in a neighborhood in just two to three years. The problem is, like you heard today, residents don't want us to leave. And we don't want to leave!" Alex is referring to a moment early in the day's festivities when the head of a neighborhood committee co-organized by Provive and residents, speaking at the ceremony, expressed gratitude that "*Tijuana nos volteó a ver*" ("Tijuana has turned and looked at us, acknowledged us"), while calling openly for the company and foundation "not to leave."

The company's point person for its Ciudad Juarez operation, overhearing the seriousness of Alex's tone, joins the conversation. "We have to be realistic," he counters, knowing Alex's trust in his opinion will allow it to land without any negative effects. "We will leave one day. That is how this business works. We are *supposed* to leave, remember," he reminds Alex, who of course remembers. In an early partnership between Provive and *Fundacion Hogares* (the Homes Foundation), founded by Infonavit in 2010 to help consolidate 'best practices' for managing a post-subprime public housing abandonment crisis, Alex helped design the foundation's intervention timeline.

"But I don't want to leave this place *en obra negra,* [unfinished, literally, 'a black work']," Alex responds. "These people still need us. That won't end in another twelve months."

To this, the point person shifts in tone. "Look, let tomorrow take care of itself. Today, you're the most popular man in this city, Alex! You are the mayor of Juarez!" To which the rest of us respond, "Mayor of Juarez! *Viva! Viva!*" Rather than making promises about a brighter

future--such as populated the opening ceremonies of the celebration in *Riberas* some hours earlier in the day--these words from Alex in a more intimate setting are also more ambivalent about what the future *should* bring. The explicit message from Alex may be that he doesn't want to leave *Riberas* and the company/foundation's work there 'unfinished,' (*en obra negra*); yet the conflictedness between the company's actual strategies and these sentiments also suggests that Alex's ambivalence may be structural, as well as personal. What if the *obra negra* is an enduring structure of feeling, a complex mood or set of affects, in contemporary Mexico--and whose saturating quality involves its indexing the materiality of more literal *obra negras* (i.e those made of concrete and steel)?

Figure 16. Parents and youth at the *Riberas del Bravo* anniversary celebration line up for a bike race earlier in the day's celebrations, while a soccer tournament unfolds behind.
.

Before unpacking this dense question more directly, though, let's back up to get our bearings, briefly locating this chapter's public housing companies' geographic contexts in those of late neoliberal Mexico, and emerging global mortgage finance markets of the past twenty years, more broadly. Lasting no longer than Provive's and The Homes Foundation's original

159

intervention timelines,[173] two to three years, the global subprime crisis of 2007 to 2010 was, historically speaking, in this sense a remarkably brief disaster. This was the case, at least, for certain key global centers of capital in North America and Western Europe. Nations, particularly of the First World, embodied this idea that the crisis was ephemeral by claiming to resolve it through temporary so-called "bad banks," which would purchase underwater mortgages (typically from private banks) and later sell them back to the private sector once market stability (i.e. liquidity) had been restored.[174] Once private firms recovered sufficient confidence in the market to repurchase formerly underwater properties from banks, leading to more corporate ownership of residential housing, the bad banks disappeared in these rich nations—and with them, in theory, the time of crisis.

This was not so, however, in Mexico, and in much of the non-North Atlantic world. While key global economic policy institutions, like the U.S Fed, created a recovery Rubicon, many less wealthy nations 'lagged,' well behind its successful crossing. Despite throwing global markets into disarray, forcing a reordering of state-corporate relations, and generating hundreds

---

[173] Working with a leading public statistics and polling firm, the Homes Foundation would model a new set of best practices, culminating in its 2015 'Social Cohesion Index' which would measure, through extensive house to house interviews, levels of 'social cohesion' in Mexico's new public housing worlds, along four axes: interpersonal confidence, sense of belonging, active comportment, and identity. Boasting a team of social psychologists, statisticians, and even anthropologists in its employ, the concept drew on serious social science. Specifically, the methods of this Infonavit spin-off organization would return to a line of work whose most prominent proponent, the prominent Austrian sociologist Peter Berger, led a research project that would conclude in the 1998 report to the Club of Rome, *The Limits of Social Cohesion*, that the Homes Foundation would late use as a template.

See: Meadows, Dennis L.., Meadows, Donella H.., Behrens, William., Randers, Jørgen. The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind. Reino Unido: Universe Books, 1972; Berger, Peter L. The Limits Of Social Cohesion: Conflict And Mediation In Pluralist Societies. Reino Unido: Taylor & Francis, 2018; María y Campos, Mauricio de. ¿Estamos unidos mexicanos? los límites de la cohesión social en México: informe de la Sección Mexicana del Club de Roma. España: Planeta Mexicana, 2001; 2015, *Bases Para La Construcción De Un Índice De Cohesión Social*, www.fundacionhogares.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/indice-de-coesion-social.pdf

[174] Aalbers, Manuel B. *The financialization of housing: A political economy approach*. Routledge, 2016 ; Byrne, Michael. "Bad banks: the urban implications of asset management companies," *Urban Research & Practice* 8.2 (2015): 255-266.

of millions of mortgage foreclosures globally, global capitalists were quick, forceful, and often led by national banks in asserting the crisis as a 'fixable' error of markets whose fallout failed to shake neither financial infrastructures nor concrete and rebar ones. But not in all states. Mexican politicians balked at bail-outs banks and other financial actors, allowing several bankruptcies.[175] In Mexico, where a 1980s plan to nationalize and then re-privatize the banking system (known by the acronym Fobaproa) is today still widely remembered as a major theft of social wealth, a Mexican bad bank would surely have become a target of uncontainable popular criticism.[176] Instead of a highly public institutional resolution, then, the Mexican central bank and Infonavit have, in a sense, been forced to work out a more dispersed approach to addressing the crisis.[177]

This fragmentary Mexican state approach to post-subprime market resolution, or 'resetting,' took several forms. It initially meant offering some limited back-room bailouts and credit extensions to construction firms and Mexican mortgage banks. Soon, it meant a more public-facing intervention as well: founding a national repossessed public housing auction system to liquidate (*à la* North Atlantic bad banks, though at a slower unfolding pace and less intensive scale) underwater mortgages at reset prices. And while this auction system would help jump-started a re-normalization of Mexican real estate markets, in part by allowing new forms of market access to small and startup companies like a Provive, Alex's "Catch-22," in which short and long-term tactics and strategies and timelines for rehab *feel* incoherent. This is not only

---

[175] Kutz, William, and Julia Lenhardt. "'Where to put the spare cash?' Subprime urbanization and the geographies of the financial crisis in the Global South," *Urban Geography* 37.6 (2016): 926-948.

[176] There is also reason to believe that the Mexican government limited its support for construction industry actors for its own personal political reasons—most powerful firms were linked to the party's national rival, the PAN.

[177] This fragmentary plan, never framed as a whole in part so as not to legitimate the idea of a national crisis from which Mexican citizens deserved to be bailed out, and in part because it involved limited corporate bailouts that the ruling PAN party wished to minimize, contrasts historically with the muscular, at times spectacular assertions of social policy coherence staged at Mexico's infrastructure building state-heights, in the Echeverria administration of the 1970s--see Chapter Two.

despite, but also perhaps because of, the company's embodying more than most the industry's attempted new commitment--spurred by Infonavit--to greater corporate involvement in local governance.

But to what contradiction exactly does this sensed incoherence refer? Is it strictly temporal one, in which an expected market reset and the completing timelines for rehabilitating a housing development, continue to prove allusive? Is it a primarily spatial one, in which the underlying human insecurity of public housing properties in much of periurban Mexico today turn such terrains into site of triage--where public security and public infrastructure overlap only spottily, limiting one another's claims to authority? Or is it, as this opening scene has also seemed to show, a structure of feeling whose irresolution exists as a tension between specific affects? In this chapter, I wager that all three answers contain some truth--but that time-space dimensions nevertheless become most legibly understood in their own *obra negritud* (unfinishedness) in their contextualization through/as facets of an unresolved structure of feeling.

Drawing on field work in two northern Mexican public housing real estate firms--Provive and Ruba, a second real estate firm to be introduced shortly--this chapter asks two specific questions about this unfinishedness/irresolution typifying the waning of a Mexican infrastructure building state's former peak powers (during the late Cold War). The first of these questions concerns more local ethnographic (but also, with respect to the chapter's attentions to affect) intimate scales. First, how do the affective states typifying corporate and residents' sensibilities overlap in Mexican public housing worlds *en obra negra*? In such spaces, where attachments to formerly promised futures past--not only subprime public housing promises of the early twenty-first century, but infrastructure-building state fantasies of '*mestizo modernity*,' as discussed in Chapter Two-- have been largely short-circuited, do sympathies across class, corporate/consumer

divides, and stagnating real estate markets--find in the *obra negra* a common affective object and order?[178]

Second, and at a more abstract or general scale, this chapter asks: how might grasping the technical infrastructures in which we all live as radically, i.e. quasi-permanently, unfinished alter our social theories about where political possibility lies in an equally unfinished neoliberal era? Residents and even corporate experts of northern Mexican public housing worlds are forced today to confront, or pushed by their surroundings to perceive the politics of infrastructure increasingly beyond promissory/catastrophizing scenarios of the future, the chapter claims. Instead, they engage in something approaching a poetics of the *obra negra* as well. Residents in the chapter--much as the public housing mortgage debtors met in Chapter One at *El Barzon'*s offices--occupy their present housing units more or less like caretakers who cannot be dispossessed because they do not truly possess in the first place. The question then, for social theory, is this: how does the *obra negra* help us to grasp infrastructural timespaces as 'unfinished' in ways whose potentiated unfamiliarity calls forth new explanations about the relationships of late between infrastructural, social movement politics, and states?[179]

To address these questions, the chapter turns to concepts arising from my field sites themselves. While Provive works in housing developments that they assert were often left as

---

[178] In addition to Raymond Williams' classic phrase, which I draw on here, I am also indebted to Catherine Fennell's more recent adjacent discussion of "materialist sympathies," for the approach to structures of feeling taken here. For Williams, a structure of feeling attends to the 'active', 'flexible' 'temporal present,' and so is particularly useful in theorizing ethnographic data at (initially) low levels of generalization. Williams, Raymond. Structures of feeling. In Marxism and Literature. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. 128-135; Fennell, Catherine. Last Project Standing: Civics and Sympathy in Post-Welfare Chicago. N.p.: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

[179] Here I follow the work of historians and anthropologists of urban planning like Shannon Dawdy who have asked the prior question: how do we track the infrastructural timespaces beyond the limited social theory palette, as perhaps most influentially modeled for current U.S. anthropology by James Scott's *Seeing Like a State*, that frames infrastructure-building as a site of state-led utopian promise and dystopian ruin, while missing more minor genres of collective fantasy? Cf. Scott, James C. *Seeing like a state*. Yale University Press, 2008.

obra negras by the original constructors, and which their intervention aims remake, residents in developments where Provive works also continually remind me during field work interviews that they live in permanent *obra negras* (whose completion would require not only corporate intervention, but state reinvestment and, quite possibly, a time machine able to bring these forces to bear when the housing originally under construction). At another field site I discuss in this chapter, meanwhile, the construction firm Ruba's 'Natura,' megadevelopment in East Tijuana, meanwhile, I show how intentionally slow industrial building (a tactic I discuss as strikingly parallel to the typically slow pace of informal *autoconstruccion* housing in Latin America during the mid-twentieth century, albeit at a different scale) unintentionally reproduces the *obra negra* in its own right. While grounded in infrastructural materialities and indexing a sense of the infrastructure building state's decline, the *obra negra* term tends, I claim to be used to reckon with these new and historically recurring territorial trends alike--all while foregrounding an increasingly expansive form of 'grounded' political critique. Newspaper headlines, as a shorthand, help to capture this immediately, while also emphasizing the term's sheer proliferation, saturating national imagination in the post-subprime. Here are a few from the years of my fieldwork, collected from Mexican newspapers:

"200 Hospitals in *Obra Negra* in Veracruz"[180]
"Man Found Without Life in an *Obra Negra*"[181]
"Democracy in *Obra Negra* in Mexico"[182]
"Senator Exhibits the *Obra Negras* [of his Election Rival]"[183]

---

[180] "Duarte y Fidel Dejaron 200 Hospitales En Obra Negra En Veracruz," *La Silla Rota*, 18 Apr. 2019, lasillarota.com/estados/duarte-y-fidel-dejaron-200-hospitales-en-obra-negra-en-veracruz-veracruz-hospitales-sector-salud/280878.

[181] Salas, José. "Localizan Hombre Sin Vida En Una Obra Negra," *El Sol De San Juan Del Río,* 22 Dec. 2019, www.elsoldesanjuandelrio.com.mx/policiaca/localizan-hombre-sin-vida-en-una-obra-negra-4617257.html.

[182] Pérez, David Marcial, and Ulises Ruiz Basurto. "Krauze: 'La Democracia Mexicana Está En Obra Negra,'" *El País*, 28 Nov. 2016, elpais.com/internacional/2016/11/28/actualidad/1480309799_215698.html.

[183] "Senador Exhibe Las Obras Negras," *Noticias De Yucatan*, July 2017, www.noticiasdeyucatan.news/2017/07/senador-exhibe-las-obras-negras-de.html.

"Simulation and *Obra Negra* in Contracts that Yunes Delivered to a leader of the PAN"[184]

"The Educational Reform Pending, in *Obra Negra*"[185]

"The Nation in *Obra Negra*"[186]

"Pure *Obra Negra*, 50 of [President] Peña Nieto's Hospitals"[187]

"Young Person Found, Hung, in *Obra Negra*"[188]

In 1970s Mexico, *obra negra* was still more predominantly a construction industry term meaning, literally, black work. It referred not so often to quasi-permanent unfinishedness as to temporary unfinishedness. It was a construction site, in the first instance, at a certain stage of the construction process. That stage was embodied by the mere concrete and steel structure, before floors or wires or cabinets were added. Where, then, did its shifting temporal meaning initially emerge from? The answer has multiple explanations, but among them is the rise of public housing. In the case of much low income state-financed housing since the 1970s in Latin America, one or more critical parts of the site's own infrastructure (floors, electrical connections, cabinets, etc.) never were added, even if provisionally promised by political rhetoric, corporate builder advertising, or even dubious mortgage contracts. As these gaps between expectations and reality--between what a formally/industrially built house *might* promise and what it in fact

---

[184] Castillo, Fernanda, and Miguel Ángel León Carmona. "Simulación y Obra Negra En Contratos Que Dio Yunes a Líder Del PAN: ORFIS: e-Consulta.com Veracruz2021." *E-Consulta.com Veracruz*, 2 Oct. 2018, www.e-veracruz.mx/nota/2018-10-01/estado/simulacion-y-obra-negra-en-contratos-que-dio-yunes-lider-del-pan-auditoria.

[185] "Http://Comunicacion.senado.gob.mx/Index.php/Informacion/Grupos-Parlamentarios/23360-La-Reforma-Educativa-Pendiente-En-Obra-Negra-Romero-Hicks.html. "*Reforma Educativa, Pendiente 'En Obra Negra': Romero Hicks*", Senate of Mexico, Office of Social Communication, 30 Sept. 2015, comunicacion.senado.gob.mx/index.php/informacion/grupos-parlamentarios/23360-la-reforma-educativa-pendiente-en-obra-negra-romero-hicks.html.

[186] Ramos Mendez, Aurelio. "País En Obra Negra." *https://www.cronica.com.mx/*, La Crónica De Hoy, 8 Feb. 2020, www.cronica.com.mx/notas-pais_en_obra_negra-1145259-2020.

[187] Staff, EMD. "Pura Obra Negra El 50% De Los Hospitales De Peña Nieto." *El Mañanero Diario*, 29 May 2019, www.elmananerodiario.com/pura-obra-negra-50-los-hospitales-pena-nieto/.

[188] Salas, José. "Localizan Hombre Sin Vida En Una Obra Negra." *El Sol De San Juan Del Río*, El Sol De San Juan Del Río, 22 Dec. 2019, www.elsoldesanjuandelrio.com.mx/policiaca/localizan-hombre-sin-vida-en-una-obra-negra-4617257.html.

delivered--came to grow over the neoliberal era, the common significance of 'unfinishedness,' would overflow its earlier construction industry meaning, taking on more political and more polysemous meanings.

Today, post-subprime, the term often refers to this history of the infrastructure-building state's own permanent unfinishedness. A person living among/in *obra negras* no longer awaits the completion of promises made by local or federal officials, but occupies the very space *once* occupied by that promise. Today, to live in public housing structures *'en obra negra,'* residents in Provive and Ruba-administered neighborhoods claim, is to live in a house not as its owner exactly, but as though at some indeterminate point in a spectrum between a caretaker technician (invoked by the term's original construction worker perspective) and a resident whose occupation of their own house—because ephemeral, like the built structure itself—would amount to, or border on, an invasion. A politics of invasion, as can be glimpsed here, adheres to the *obra negra,* even as this social model more overtly indexes senses of infrastructural durabilities' (i.e., the durability of particular built structures, but also of the infrastructure-building state's) growing precarity.

On this topic, of how infrastructure and invasion fit together in the chapter's analysis of the *obra negra* and its multiplying social meanings tracked in this chapter, a pair of further considerations are in order here. First, just as the project to this point has claimed to show several facets of invasion politics' proliferating and shifting political valences in neoliberal Mexico, so the hyper-ambiguity of the *obra negra* indexes and foregrounds here a not dissimilar figure of polysemiousness, yet one whose concrete materiality as infrastructure (as opposed to the foregrounded Cold War historicity indexed, as Chapter One claims, by invaded houses at *El Barzon*) stands at the fore. Like the invaded house, the *obra negra* engages the complexity of this

political conjuncture, employing conceptual figures employed by my interlocutors. Second, though, these polysemous meanings generated by and/or attributed to the 'black work,' might help generate explanations about the relationships between infrastructures, social movement politics, and states of the kind capable of shedding light on Kenny Cuper's question regarding why public housing declining or expanded in distinct parts of the world during the neoliberal era

The chapter thus offers orientations for future scholarship toward the beginnings of a dialogue between the *obra negra,* and critical infrastructure studies, on one hand, and new historical scholarship addressing the entanglement of anti-migrant invasion idioms in U.S. anti-welfarism ethnonationalist politics of the U.S. neoliberal era, on the other. As that scholarship highlights[189], an affective "politics of disgust"[190] toward Latin American residents' legal use of welfare benefits (and fantasies exaggerating the extent of that use) emerged from the same set of post-peak infrastructure building state conditions. By highlighting the importance not only of public housing's (and public infrastructures' broadly) divergent global trajectories, but also of divergent collective sensibilities (and in/sensibilities) to those very divergent transnational histories--particularly as evinced in divergent discourses of 'invasion' across these national spaces during the era--the chapter both responds to and goes beyond Cuper's call.

Given such an emphasis, a few further brief comments on the chapter's national-cum-transnational comparative framings appear in order. In the post-subprime, the term *obra negra*'s implication of something that is *likely* permanently unfinished--not only at the scale of the house,

---

[189] Fox, 2019. Also, Gilens, Martin. *Why Americans hate welfare: Race, media, and the politics of antipoverty policy*. University of Chicago Press, 2009; Park, Lisa Sun-Hee. *Entitled to nothing: The struggle for immigrant health care in the age of welfare reform*. NYU Press, 2011. On this anti-welfarist politics' entailments beyond pro-welfare institutions, see: Meiners, Erica R. *Right to be hostile: Schools, prisons, and the making of public enemies*. Routledge, 2010.

[190] Hancock, Ange-Marie. *The politics of disgust: The public identity of the welfare queen*. NYU Press, 2004; Soldatic, Karen, and Barbara Pini.

but at the scale of the nation, indexes what urban sociologist Antonio Azuela referred to in a

2010 essay as "the post-post-revolution."[191] Recalling Alex's 'Catch 22' of market temporality

noted earlier in this introduction, for Azuela property regimes based on ideas of familial and

national *patrimonio* (patrimony) that dominated the Agrarian Reform era of Mexico's mid-

twentieth century have come undone in the neoliberal era, rendering Mexican legal scholars (and

perhaps we can add here construction executives, as well) the reluctant party needing to, but not

wishing to, declare that the emperor is naked. "In short," Azuela asserts, "there are national

patrimonies that existed as promises that never materialized." What Azuela attributes to law,

however, this chapter attributes--following its model, the *obra negra*--to more concrete causes, at

several scales.

First, one must consider the slowing momentum of durable infrastructure building as an

embodiment of global development, national governance, and collective futures at global scales

in recent decades. Second, one must consider the more specific Mexican public housing context

of *half-materialized* promises, built yet not "fully built," where promises to build at massive

national scales have materialized, yet not proved socially fulfilling. At the intersection of these

scales, the chapter finds reason to engage a scholar more attentive to infrastructural materialities,

the anthropologist Timothy Mitchell. As Mitchell laments, "contemporary discussions about

infrastructure often focus on its frailty and failures"[192] to a fault, whether these discussions are

academic or in broader public spheres. These stories of disappointed promise (like Azuela's) as

---

[191] Azuela, Antonio. "Property in the Post-post-revolution: Notes on the Crisis of the Constitutional Idea of Property in Contemporary Mexico." *Tex. L. Rev.* 89 (2010): 1915.

[192] Mitchell, Timothy. "Introduction: Life of Infrastructure." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34.3 (2014): 437-439. For examples of this focus on infrastructure's promissory structure, see: Hetherington, Kregg. 2014. "Waiting for the Surveyor: Development Promises and the Temporality of Infrastructure." Journal of Latin American and Carib-bean Anthropology 19, no. 2: 195 – 21 Knox, Hannah. "Affective infrastructures and the political imagination," *Public Culture* 29.2 (82) (2017): 363-384.

Mitchell goes on to observe, clearly churn political narratives, but not necessarily greater insight for social theory.[193]

Specifically, urban studies and critical infrastructure studies' ongoing focus on promise and failure as the primary timespaces of contemporary infrastructure globally threatens to reify late liberal capitalism's own self-descriptions. In the actions of North Atlantic 'bad banks,' or those of Mexico's housing auction system organizers in the wake of the subprime crisis, for instance, such polarities of promise and failure might prove especially unavoidable, just as Provive and Ruba executives in this chapter remain notably invested in such temporalities. Yet where the *obra negra* as a contemporary Mexican infrastructure may be an opening onto the future, it is at least equally oriented toward the past. Starting in the 1970s, construction's use (particularly in northern Mexico) to launder wealth became a powerful yet highly inconsistent engine of urban growth-- generating prominent half-built projects that, in a broader context of *peso* devaluations and sovereign debt crises framing Mexico's1970s-1990s meant that an *obra negra* landscape could be associated with specific shifts in regional and national trajectory. With rising international migration at the end of the twentieth century and (most recently) widespread forced displacement in many rural Mexican sites because of drug violence forcing the sudden abandonment of housing, the *obra negra'*s periodizing significances would proliferate. Still other projects would be left unfinished when their owners disappeared to the U.S., or were abandoned because of health and safety concerns--from toxic pollutants left by factories.

The polyvocality of the *obra negra* is thus the point. It may be occupied, invaded, abandoned, covered and sealed, making categories of success and failure, as well as temporal orientations to future and past, perceptually blur. These latter conceptual horizons are important

---

[193] Perhaps most influential among anthropologists in step with this tendency has been James Scott, whose work on the history of the state offers a cryptohistory of infrastructure-building state 'failures.'

for social theory to study, to be sure, but not at the risk of obscuring more ignored realities of the

unevenness of state-building processes.[194] What structures of feeling--beyond speculation about

the future--occupy the contemporary? Historians, more accustomed to tracking geopolitical

decline and open-endedness in political processes than anthropologists, at times, may have a

jump on critical infrastructure studies in attending to such processes.

As the historian of European empires Lauren Benton has proposed, two dimensional

narratives of sovereignty, in which territories are or should be homogenous and easily defined,

misses out on the far more numerous moment in history when places existed "with an uncertain

relation" to imperial power. Benton calls the territories of empire spaces that "composed a fabric

that was full of holes, stitched together out of pieces, a tangle of strings [...] and encased in

irregular, porous, and sometimes undefined borders."[195] Not failure or success, but

unfinishedness in its own diverse forms (holes, tangles, pores) is paramount for Benton.

Today, in an age where, as Mitchell also writes, the neoliberal era has ushered in new

financial infrastructures that 'allow the accumulation of capital to [increasingly] bypass the work

of building durable or productive structures for collective life,"[196] unfinishedness should take the

cake as a rising basic condition of territorial politics on which social theories of infrastructure

---

[194] Asad, Talal. "Reflections on violence, law, and humanitarianism." *Critical Inquiry* 41.2 (2015): 390-427.

[195] Benton, Lauren. *A search for sovereignty: law and geography in European empires, 1400–1900*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.

[196] *Mitchell, 438.* This inflection point that Mitchell's comments indexes, from a growing to declining global public infrastructure investment, is not his own original insight. The finance economist Joao Gomes, among others, has been vocal about such an inflection point. The economic productivity of infrastructure investment has been widely subject to renewed debate by economists in the neoliberal era. Yet social theory outside economics has largely interrogated this shift from the perspective of finance capital's growing power centers (leading to a flourishing of economic anthropology in the early 2000s), but largely not from the perspective of what infrastructure's global political futures lose in the transaction. This chapter's focus on collective sensitivities to this inflection point, in and around post-subprime Mexican public housing corporate projects, to reimagine public housing's 'failures' and learn from them, aims to take up and build out Mitchell's brief transposition of those latter economic debates (about infrastructure-building's futures) into more sociological/anthropological registers of analysis. See, Gomes, 2019.

building and contemporary technopolitics increasingly focus, as well. Rather than further studying how state infrastructures have failed in their promises, or alternately maintain their promissory structures into the present,[197] it's time we consider the global coherence of infrastructural timespaces at the level of collective sensibilities like vigilance, frustration, and courage, whose collective attachments seem to adhere to the present without making spectacular forays into future-making. In fact, this chapter's organization unfolds thematically around these specific affects, as key facets of the *obra negra* qua affective infrastructure.

Figure 17. A member of the film crew collecting footage for Provive's investor film, atop an *obra negra* owned by the company in Ciudad Juarez.

Their separation is artificial, of course, given that their open-ended, unfinished relations as mediated by durable infrastructure belies a truly enduring stable relation between them.

---

[197] For Scott, what is central to state-building schemes of the industrial age has been their promissory nature: from the promise of escape from need, to the promise of an end to class struggle, to the promise of a capitalist situation where anyone could help administer the state. Despite the historical distance between the global economics of infrastructure building in early twentieth century contexts about which Scott writes and those of the neoliberal era, the majority of critical infrastructure studies continues to follow this work's influential lead.

Centering vigilance, frustration, and courage in the following sections provides an artificial

stability useful for teasing out the varied ways in which post-durable timescapes of Mexican

infrastructure-building unfold.

The chapter proceeds in three sections. Each one thematizes one of these three moods in

the context of residents and corporate actors reckoning with the sensed unfinishedness of the

infrastructure surrounding them. In addition to supplying some further regional-historical context

against which to track the *obra negra* ethnographically, the chapter continues in section one by

introducing Adriana, Alex's counterpart at Ruba's Natura megadevelopment, where she works as

director of social development and is sometimes referred to in jest, like Alex at Provive's

anniversary celebration, as 'the Mayor of Natura.' In highlighting how Adriana's intense

commitment to Natura's success gets embodied in shifting forms--moving over the two years of

my fieldwork progressively from a more promissory to a more vigilant mood-- the section

considers how sensitivity to Natura (Ruba's new Tijuana mega-development under construction

during my fieldwork) as a space *en obra negra* engenders anxious shifting affective conditions

not only for residents, but in Adriana (and, already, Alex's) case, among corporate employees, as

well.

Section two extends the chapter's tracking in parallel of structures of feeling between

residents and corporate actors where Provive and Ruba operate. Here, however, my aim is to

juxtapose lower-level employees at the real estate firms and residents' overlapping frustrations--

as indexed or, indeed, as literally caused by the sensed unfinishedness of infrastructure. First, the

section tracks the story of Sandra, a resident who participates in Provive/YouPlusMe-sponsored

neighborhood committees and activities in Tijuana, yet whose own seeming impotence as

director of security for her street-level committee leaves her doubting her own belonging in the

development--her ability to endure in place. Then, before returning to conclude Sandra's story, the section juxtaposes to a conversation I have with Veronica, a low-level white collar accountant at Provive's Ciudad Juarez offices.

Despite their differing personal histories and attachments to the built environments of public housing in which they work (and live, in Sandra' case), a similar set of attentions to infrastructural unfinishedness seem to drive both women toward a similar structure of feeling with respect to *obra negras.* Shifting the chapter back to Provive market sites, in both Tijuana and Juarez, the section shows how Mexican public housing's ongoing post-subprime market *irresolution,* as well as the precarity of property values and a plague of underpolicing in urban peripheries, conjures not only promise, but a desire/demand for moral resolution that gets repeatedly frustrated.

Finally, in its third section, the chapter turns to consider how the *obra negra* indexes courage (*ser bravo/a*), particularly in the case of residents who live *en obra negra* not only in one of the expanded usages of the term--i.e., its metaphorical, intentionally polemical, or scaled-up meanings--but in an unrehabilitated, unoccupied house, as invaders. Living *en obra negra*, while involving vigilance and frustration, as this section claims, foregrounds bonds of sympathy that are rarer in my fieldwork among public housing residents with more secure legal title (including even the residents in section two). While other interlocutors throughout the chapter exhibit courage in their own ways, this final section (telling the story of Gabby and Juan--self-identified housing invaders) foregrounds the courage needed to live in a literal *obra negra,* where dualisms of promise and portent have long ago collapsed in one another. Such courage in the case of an ostensible absence of future--because of the absence of a durable, stable foothold in the present--allows me to contend that critical infrastructure studies can? expand its vision of

how constellations of materialist sympathies unfamiliar to neoliberal financial modes of calculation shape a politics of infrastructure in its most basic conditions. In establishing such new objects of study, I hope to open new possibilities in response to Cuper's call for new accounts of global infrastructural divergence *at the scale of affective infrastructures,* specifically between infrastructure studies and historians of anti-globalist (anti-migration and anti-welfare) collective affects with their own local histories and idioms of a politics of invasion.

Infrastructural Vigilance at Public Housing's Experimental Future

"When our CEO saw this development for the first time, in 2015, he said, 'This is how we build from now on!'" As my initial tour of the new southeast Tijuana public housing development "Natura" comes to an end, I stood surrounded by concrete with Adriana, director of community development for Ruba in Tijuana. Not only were the houses concrete, and so of a piece with virtually all public housing units built across Mexico since a national housing institute was formed in the 1970s, but we were also flanked, Adriana and I, by a concrete security booth to one side, and a remarkably wide "boulevard" (given the paucity of residents here who can afford a car) of hydraulic asphalt, freshly poured by Cemex, unfurling in the other.

"These will last more than twice as long as concrete roads, without need of repair," Adriana highlighted, contrasting this feature at Ruba with materials used in more typical Mexican public housing developments. Uncommonly thick, durable roads support the ongoing circulation of multi-ton Caterpillar backhoes, too. It is this circulation of ditches and mounds and stacks of an ongoing, unfinished construction site that unfold just beyond the condominiums here, that helps make sense of Ruba's thickened investment in Natura. *Intentionally slow-paced, plodding construction* here, at this planned thirty-thousand unit mega-development in southeast

174

Tijuana, coincides with an enduring trickle of residents arriving each month to live in the completed sections.

Yet it also contrasts—in some ways self-consciously, and hyper-performatively on Ruba's part—with the 'look,' and, Ruba hopes, also the *feel* of the subprime era. Aside from some higher quality materials and a few minor design choices that diverge from the developments of a decade prior, however, the material structure of Natura is hardly a *radical* experiment. Certainly, it doesn't approach the utopian designs of Infonavit's short-lived 'Housing Lab' discussed in the previous chapter. Beyond, behind, or to one side of Ruba's dreams to establish with Natura a new structure of promise for what public housing should be with Natura, I will claim, more ambiguous and conflicting structures of feeling, in which such promises are perceptually cut down to size, also occupy this corner of Mexican public housing worlds. Before diving into these questions of affect ethnographically, however, let's back up. How did such promissory potential as Natura aims to embody become attached, for one of Mexico's largest construction firms, to plans for slow building in the first place?

As the subprime housing construction boom had been ramping up, gaining synergies from the simultaneous expansion of the *maquiladora* low-wage factory sector (especially in the north), the production speeds that gave the *maquilas* their fame in global supply chains would be translated, construction industry experts promised, into a different commodity. As demonstrated by articles in the leading Mexican real estate industry periodical, *Expansion*, titled "Constructing Houses, Practically the Same as Fabricating Cars," and "[Construction Company] Homex Fabricates [*Maquila*] Housing", this association of housing with the space and speed of the factory was crucial.[198]

---

[198] Martínez, José Manuel. "Homex 'Maquila' Viviendas." *Expansión*, 21 May 2016, expansion.mx/negocios/2008/05/30/homex-maquila-viviendas.

As the notorious real estate investor Sam Zell described to an audience at Northwestern University in 2004 regarding his recent partnership in forming one of Mexico's largest building firms, the homes, "take just over five weeks to build, sell for around twenty thousand dollars; ninety-five percent of the selling price is financed by mortgages offered by the Mexican government."[199] The velocity of this industry was particularly important to Zell, who would cash out of the company in 2007, just prior to its long walk toward bankruptcy. As the exoskeleton of an industry that was in many respects already run by U.S. corporations, U.S. investors were intrigued by the idea that housing could be converted into a kind of *maquilized* product itself, i.e., a commodity with seemingly ever-quicker production times and (thanks mostly to falling real wages) ever-lower costs. Promising that, with the help of new technologies, and in particular more sophisticated concrete mold systems, the *obra negra* now takes no more than twenty three day to complete, companies had investors on quarterly conference calls drooling. Aluminum mold systems would offer not only the speed of the *maquila,* it was said, but also the reduced reliance on human labor enjoyed by more automated industries, like car assembly.[200]

At a moment when construction company values were expanding rapidly and going public, such an elegant single measure of efficiency—the mold!—suggested that investors need not understand the ins and outs of housing markets, as profits were based on innovation, rather than asset bubbles. Paradoxically, the familiarity of the *maquila* space papered over the

---

[199] "Entrepreneur Sam Zell Addresses Kellogg Real Estate Club." *Entrepreneur Sam Zell Addresses Kellogg Real Estate Club - Kellogg School of Management*, 5 Jan. 2004, www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/news_articles/2004/zell_5_04.aspx

[200] Mold systems not only required specialized new concrete mixtures, but specially trained personnel to operate these technologies. Not only did construction companies not have that personnel, since before the 1990s molds had been rarely used in the industry, but—recalling again the *maquila* industry's evolution—they were prohibitively expensive for Mexican companies to employ. As with the growth of the *maquilas*, domestic Mexican companies had to look to multinationals for technology and capital. This time, however, it was a multinational Mexican primary materials and "logistical solutions" giant, Cemex, that would make this uniform industrial solution of mold systems work for builders.

impressive fact of how differently Mexican housing was being judged by investors: construction

times for U.S. residential houses are in fact longer today, according to census data, than they

were when such data was first collected in the 1970s,[201] yet this did not seem relevant to the

investment value of U.S. builders. But models need not promote broad social welfare, as long as

they can help attract capital. The *maquila* and the mold were two examples of this.[202]

I learned during the next year and a half of visits to Adriana and Natura, as well as

through interviews with staff at the company's headquarters in Ciudad Juarez, that the notion of

building slow reflects Ruba's decision to performatively break with the *maquilazado* model,

even more than some of its rivals in the public housing space. "How we work now, requires

more from me. It requires more vigilance than what people in the industry expected before

2010," Adriana tells me, then quips, "this job may take years off my life, but I love it."

After pointing out the project's slow pace and therefore greater than usual investments in

durable and social infrastructures, Adriana and I pause in front of a security gate. On the other

side of the gate sits another Infonavit-financed housing develop, called *Las Delicias,* whose

construction preceded Natura (it was built around 2006) and whose rapid deterioration (it stands

nearly half 'unoccupied,' according to Adriana) now threatens to spread to its newer neighboring

development. With private security officers (or municipal commercial police, *policia comercial*,

---

[201] "Construction has appeared stuck in a time warp," write Stefen Fuchs. U.S. construction-sector productivity is lower today than it was in 1968, while productivity in other industries (including ones as dissimilar as manufacturing and agriculture) have grown exponentially in that same timeframe. Construction times for U.S. residential houses are in fact longer today, according to census data, than they were when such data was first collected in the 1970s. Fuchs, Steffen. "Reinventing Construction: A Route to Higher Productivity." *Reinventing Construction | Modular Building Institute*, Feb. 2018, www.modular.org/HtmlPage.aspx?name=MA-feature-higher-prod.

[202] With federal housing credits flowing to workers in the *maquila* industry disproportionately, one might assume that the notion that housing itself need not be *construido* (constructed) at all, rather than *maquilado,* fabricated, would be inevitable. But my point here is precisely that there is more than simply market convergence at work in this national reframing of housing.

who can be hired through the city) typically exceeding even public housing developers'

aforementioned "maintenance funds," the fact that a nondescript security booth in a public

housing development in southwest Tijuana remained manned that day, nearly three years after

Natura sold its the first unit, certainly draws my attention. But it's Adriana's subsequent

discussion of the booth that sticks out in my memory:

> Over there the people do not want to work, it's not important to them, it doesn't interest them, it's a lost cause [*un caso perdido*]. And you say, "No, no, no, there's no such thing as lost causes!" But I cannot do it. I can't get involved over there in *Las Delicias*, and especially not with my uniform. […] The thing is that they [the developers of *Las Delicias*] sold [housing units to] people the same way we do. But they never worked with the community. So when you do want to work with them [the residents of *Las Delicias*], you have to re-educate them, have to make them more aware. And it is difficult. Better let's not walk through because it's kind of ugly. But look, see it's all graffiti, full of trash. The people there do not take care of it […] I don't like to have this [security booth], I'll tell you why. It's like a checkpoint. Like a border. It is not alright. The thing is to educate this other community so that they live like in this one. Why do I have to have a border? But if this checkpoint is taken away from me? *Los tianguis* [the outdoor informal markets] will cross me, the criminals will cross me, the speeding, everything, it will create chaos.

Adriana's account at the security booth seems to speak of a singular difference between

subprime era developments and the sort of 'new model' that Natura represents. Structural

differences in the company's approach to infrastructure building allow Adriana and her staff to

naturalize differences of security between the development and its neighbors. Greater human

security, after all, is the single greatest upshot of slow building. Nothing justifies greater private

security more easily than an open construction site in most of Mexico. The security elements

enable Adriana to secure the development's boundaries to an extent. But what does this

vigilance, blurring as it does--through neighborhood committee organizing projects and a new

pace of building--traditional industry boundaries of the construction industry and public

sphere/state functions, amount to for Adriana?

Months further into fieldwork, I try to go deeper, while chatting in Adriana's office one day before heading to the Cemex Boys and Girl's Center for a meeting on election rules and procedures in the neighborhood committees Ruba is legally privileged to oversee across the development. Things are getting more worrisome for Adriana now, some three years into the development's growth. Housing invasions and abandonment have begun to crop up at an alarming rate. Police service to the district is weakening, however, and the *policia commercial* proved unreliable, allowing a construction site to be robbed. If six months earlier Adriana had been vigilant, now she is feeling nearer to besieged.

"Want to hear something?" she asks, "It's my opponents, so you see what they think of me," she smiles. Plopping a handheld audio recorder on the desk, Adriana beckons me closer to the tiny speaker. "This is from a private meeting I had the other day with several Natura residents, the 'nonconformists'' she says, pantomiming air quotes. "I've told you about them, they're quasi-political opponents."

"They're the ones who want to have control over zoning the *tianguis* and that sort of thing, right?" I asked, recalling conversations we'd had a month or two earlier, when Adriana had lamented her defacement in the local press, as the face of Ruba's social policymaking at Natura, by the powerfully politicized municipal *tianguis* union leaders and a handful of residents allied to them.

"Yes, they're the ones!" Adriana replies with some savor. The audio comes in staticky and little muffled, but clear enough to get the gist of the opening statements and tentative statements of principles by the group. In addition to wanting control over the organizing and zoning of outdoor markets in the development (a right Adriana and Ruba reserve for themselves) the group also claims the autonomy to organize independently of Ruba neighborhood

179

committees.

Discussing the legality of carrying off their own elections without Ruba's involvement, one nonconformist on the tape asks impatiently, "But why do we need elections if I already, now, have my zone organized?"

Adriana's voice answers: "Look, you are welcome to present yourself as a candidate, and encourage people to vote for you when elections occur, but that is the process..."

"But we've already voted, already elected a committee," another voice responds.

"But according to the law, Ruba has the right to organize neighborhood committee elections, and we did not recognize those elections."

"Well, if that's how things stand, then there is no space for me," says the first nonconformist.

Figure 18. An occupied street in Natura, southeast Tijuana, circa 2015.

Adriana pauses the tape. "Crudely put," she concludes, "that meeting shut them up. Now they might try to sow some discontent at today's meeting [on committee elections], but I think they were somewhat humbled after this." She sets down the recorder on the desk now, as though 'stepping back' emotionally from the intense exchange we've just heard. "Although my aims are not political," she says, "what I want to do is continue educating, and it wins me enemies, you

180

know?"

In a 1974 study of six hundred and seventy-eight "migrants," interviewed by Wayne Cornelius in Mexico City, only three specified housing as their most pressing concern. "It is clear that most of these individuals," Cornelius wrote, "regard basic services and improvements such as piped water, sewerage systems, and paved streets as of more immediate importance in the creation of an adequate dwelling environment than a house built of permanent materials."[203] As a result, Cornelius went on, his study could confirm one of the most surprising study results other Latin Americanist urban sociologists had begun to note, as well: "permanent construction of the house proceeds, but only at a pace commensurate with a family's financial resources...the basic construction period alone may last for 10 to 15 years." I bring up this dusty old study here, in reflecting on Adriana's words, in order to set something about that perspective in broader context.

Just as the houses of the families in Cornelius' study tended to remain *en obra negra* for ten to fifteen years or longer, so Natura, for reasons of slow building that do not differ much from those of Cornelius' study subjects, was doing so on a much different territorial scale, fifty years later. This is only true, to be clear, because the residents Cornelius studied surely had more reasons than thrift for delaying completion of their *obra negra* for decades. The equally critical reason for millions of Mexican in those years, as all across Latin America, was security of possession.

Rather than a means of cost-savings, the resistance to using permanent materials often had to do at that time with 'migrant' residents' sense of uncertain possession/title on land that had often been acquired (indirectly or directly) through relatively recent land invasion. Residents

---

[203] Cornelius, Wayne A. "Urbanization and political demand making: Political participation among the migrant poor in Latin American cities." *The American Political Science Review* 68.3 (1974): 1125-1146.

preferred to be evicted from an *obra negra*, and lose something, rather than from a finished house, and lose more. At root, this relationship between speed of construction and tactics for managing financial and human security in concert is not that different from the model Ruba has employed at Natura. The key difference is with regards to *how* human and financial security are linked: whereas unfinished *autoconstruccion* residences of the past (and, to a lesser extent, present), frequently built on collectively invaded lands in urban peripheries allowed residents to create habitational claims to possess space while minimizing their potential economic losses should police come one day to violently evict residents, for Ruba today building slowly allows construction costs and infrastructure maintenance costs to overlap in time and space. The same private security guard team surveilling a construction material storage site, for instance, may also deter crime on Natura's nearby occupied streets.

From that perspective, Natura does seem a new model of sorts for Mexican public housing. By the end of my fieldwork, in 2017, however, Adriana herself is becoming more pessimistic about the future of the Natura experiment's future as a potential model for Mexican public housing writ large. Human security at the development is declining, as the construction firm's private security budget for the development shrinks and crime rates soar across the region in manners (related to broader shifts in state-cartel turf wars). Eventually, if slowly, municipal police presence at the development--something Adriana has pushed for since 2013--does pick up. Even with this greater presence, however, the development's future remains uncertain. Her vigilance never, in our meetings, gives way to a sense of impotence, however. Nevertheless, a growing frustration over our last months of conversation is palpable--as her "enemies" at the development seem to grow in strength.

For residents and other corporate staff, however, the *obra negra* condition of local

infrastructure (at Natura and in other market settings of the two real estate firms, Ruba and Provive)*,* by contrast, is most intensively sensed not as a tactical opening (as 'slow building' has become for Adriana) but as a limit to personal agency. Infrastructural unfinishedness is not a tactic for them, as it is for Adriana, even if her vigilance remains a key element of the narrative. For these next interlocutors, also highly (if not understandably hyper) vigilant actors in their own spheres, an attunement to local technopolitics *en obra negra* through public housing is, nevertheless, a source of frustration even more than an object of vigilance. In the next section, I unpack their perspective to further fill out our sketch of the *obra negra* as an emergent structure of feeling proper to a specific place and time in global infrastructural assemblages.

*'You know the one...*en obra negra*?: Frustration as Post-Durable Infrastructural Mood*

To get from Sandra's street in the first section of the *Cañadas* public housing development in east Tijuana to the second section without crossing the highway, this particular no man's land (*tierra de nadie, as* Sandra calls it) is your best bet. We are walking over the debris of one torn down and another never-fully-constructed structure on this elevated highway-side sliver of land. The second section of this development never spread to occupy all pre-urbanized, i.e., flattened and compacted, lands that the housing developer *Casas Beta* had originally devised for it, Sandra explains. Thus, this site was "invaded" a couple years back by a group of landless people affiliated with the national civil society organization, 'The Peasant's Torch' *(Antorcha Campesino).*[204] "Initially, when they arrived, and I was in all this mortgage

---

[204] Rodríguez Escobedo, Francisco José, et al. "Organización, asociación campesina independiente y autonomía. Los casos de la Coalición de Obreros, Campesinos y Estudiantes del Istmo y Antorcha campesina." *Comunicaciones en Socioeconomía. Estadística e Informática* 6.2 (2002): 1-49.

debt," she tells me on the walk, "I thought they would solve my problems--maybe a fresh start."

Antorcha had long been a political force in land reform politics, and as the reform was informally, then officially, foreclosed (from the 1960s to the 1990s), became increasingly involved in urban land invasions. *Antorcha's* arrival in Tijuana, in the past decade or two prior to my fieldwork, is notable in that it runs against the general national (and certainly northern regional and Tijuana metropolitan) trend of foreclosing land invasion efforts more systematically, with fewer politicized exceptions, over the years. For Infonavit, alongside the rise of the PAN (1980s to 2012), this trend became a more and more significant territorial and clientelist political tool in relation to tolerance of urban land invasions for political and economic gain (the key populist territorial policy for the PRI). *Antorcha* arrived during the house boom and post-subprime era to Tijuana partly due to evictions, partly to Drug War insecurity, and partly to generalized housing insecurity experienced by millions, with and without Infonavit accounts. These considerations have to do, as well, with how *Antorcha*, as a complex, urban-rural, distinction-transgressing movement, remains vital enough to fill sixty-thousand seat stadiums for Mexico City political events, and is considered by many to have the potential to become its own breakaway so-called 'party of the poor.'

Weeks prior to our walk, chatting with Sandra after we both attended a local neighborhood committee meeting in *Cañadas*, sponsored and hosted by a start-up institutional real estate investment firm, she reveals to me that she is an affiliate of *Antorcha Campesino* herself. The information had felt somewhat private, sensitive, as it passed between us in front of the neighborhood offices of our host real estate firm, Provive. How could Sandra be a member of this real estate firm's neighborhood committee, an organization meant to help fulfill the broader

rehab plan of "removing invaders...and inserting families,"[205] while also an affiliate with an organized land invasion at the periphery of her own development? Her choice to share this information outside the Provive offices carries a certain risk, she feels. "If you use this information in your research," Sandra asks me in this same conversation, "you're going to change my identity, right?"

Now, weeks later, and walking across her development with her, I ask Sandra again: what exactly is the risk associated with your dueling affiliations?" "Actually, I don't even have both affiliations anymore. In the end," Sandra explains, "*Antorcha* was too demanding for my husband and me. Some of my relatives are still in it, though!"[206] Noncompliance with these time-demanding activities means losing one's lot, as recently has happened to Sandra. "But they have a long waiting list," she acknowledges, shaking her head at the fact, "so another 'invader' just takes my place." She laughs for a moment, exasperated. Perhaps the *Antorcha* plan was never so serious a promise, I find myself wondering, but more so a way of getting one's mind away from the precariousness of present circumstances?

As we continue to walk toward the *Antorcha* settlement, that feeling of precarity grows a bit clearer, in any case. "New neighbors," as she calls them, have recently invaded a formerly covered house down the street. "Don't get me wrong," she goes on, "there are invaders on the street who are good people, who pay their [street-level committee enforced] fees to keep the garbage collection coming and the street gate working." These new neighbors, however, blast music at all hours of the night. They have a young child, moreover, whose continual crying has

---

[205] These are CEO of Provive Antonio Diaz's words. Navarrete, 2018,

[206] In exchange for *Antorcha's* promise to lobby the government and eventually gain legal rights to the land for Sandra and others, affiliates like her "had to pay dues, attend weekly meetings, and" most gruelingly, Sandra recalls, "travel regularly to protests as far away as [the state capital of] Mexicali," some three or four hours away by car. In Tijuana proper, Sandra says, "*Antorcha* has picketed outside Infonavit's central offices quite a few times."

raised concerns among some residents on the street.

"At first, I talked with folks from Provive, told them that my neighbors were bringing complaints against the new invaders to me, and they tell me to get in touch with the police. But they told me that 'legally we cannot enter a house once it's occupied, except with a warrant or another legal authorization'," i.e., an eviction notice. "If they don't encounter the *act* of invasion, like breaking in, and halt it," says Sandra, "it becomes a question of illegal possession, another kind of crime altogether." As a result, "with houses like that one, the police wash their hands until a bank or Infonavit tells them to act. I get so angry about it I can cry."

"So next I went to Infonavit," she recalls, "and they told us to send them a letter." The letter, to be signed by a critical mass of legally recognized street residents, and declaring the house disoccupied by the rights-holder, "can sometimes push the institute [Infonavit]" to target the unit for legal recuperation.[207] Some neighbors have lost faith in her leadership, she laments. And the letter aside, Infonavit has been *obstaculizando mucho*, creating obstacles, and she can hardly understand why. Finally, she goes to the occupied house, looking at least to resolve the noise issues—and is rebuffed. "They are *deportados*," Sandra says, "and so I asked, 'Would you have invaded a house in the U.S.?' They told me, 'The laws are different in the U.S., they can evict you in a second there. Here, the laws are different'." The moment shocked her. "I just left at that point," she says, "I didn't know what to say." Are there words that can be sufficient when attempting to find justice in a place where property, belonging, and built space itself hang *en*

---

[207] As the default rights holder for a house disoccupied by its mortgage-holder, the mortgage originator is the rightful actor in starting eviction proceedings. Yet Infonavit is only likely to invest in the costs of court proceedings and of securing the recuperated unit (new locks, filling in broken window frames, etc.) if the unit can be sold as part of a bulk "packet" of recuperated housing units to some institutional investor like Provive. In this way, indirectly yet consequently, Provive's lack of interest in purchasing the house on Sandra's street may be empowering the invaders next door, even as the company offers legal counsel to Sandra in how to remove the "bad neighbor." While asserting a bright line between citizen and invader, Provive's own operations can thus contribute to the ambiguity of where this line, in practice, comes to be drawn as a matter of legal fact-making.

obra negra?

Before returning to Sandra's story at the end of this section, when she and other neighbors can turn this question for a moment on local authorities, I turn here first to consider what an accounting staff worker, Veronica, at Provive's Ciudad Juarez office would have to say to about her own labor, and Provive's direct relationship with the unfinished state of housing-- after all, it's the company's inventory. As I find in interviewing her, the question of how a broad sense of infrastructural unfinishedness pertains to not only Veronica's work, but why she does it, is an entirely apt one. Veronica is from the area, and cares about it deeply. Her small, windowless corner of the Juarez corporate office represents the small nerve center of its financing and accounting department, and between its strategic importance and Veronica's demeanor, is arguably the best positioned place from which to grasp how Provive's work on houses *en obra negra* emerges from the labor process, and in that process, as a structure of feeling. In Veronica's case, that structure of feeling resonates with Sandra' sense of infrastructural unfinishedness as profoundly frustrating--even while, because formally inverted from Sandra's perspective (as consumer versus corporate actor) we might expect the opposite.

Working at once with housing and business models, market geographies and the price of steel, Veronica's office is populated with spreadsheets of quantifications, valuations, open computer tabs with geotagged federal property databases, and Provive's own computerized inventory system. These diverse components hang together for Veronica through her own continual activity. Like Sandra, Veronica is known in her community as exceptionally hardworking, albeit on tasks that, in a Sisyphusian sense, she describes as all boiling down to a waiting game: "waiting for the an evaluation firm in Mexico City to get back to you, waiting for

federal housing credits to come through so we can process a new buyer's contract, waiting to

hear the bad news, too, that one of our [supply of repossessed] houses has been invaded again."

She continues in this register:

> So, I have my nose to the grindstone [*picando piedras*], working one phone call after another with evaluation firms. We're going around and around over margins of ten, twenty, thirty thousand pesos [roughly eight hundred to two thousand USD in 2016] before it's fixed. After that, it's passed along to Infonavit to process as part of the basis for its mortgage loan; and it's sent to the National Housing Commission [*Comisión Nacional de Vivienda,* a federal body founded along with the 'boom,' in 2001] to begin processing a federal used housing subsidy [i.e., a key part of the payment Provive receives at point of sale]. That takes three weeks or more to be processed. That processing period [between when the purchase begins and ends] is the next problem.
> While I'm arguing with [an evaluation firm] in Mexico City, what's happening to the house we just rehabilitated, so that it can be evaluated and sold? You see, it's a security problem. That house is just sitting empty. So that's where the real trouble comes. [...] I'm sitting in this office waiting for those subsidies to be processed so that the buyer can sign a contract, take the keys, and move in, meanwhile someone has entered and stripped the empty house of its pipes, wires, spray painted the interior, started a fire—fire damage to roofs is, oh god, the costliest repair. So, they want us to play by some of these rules that other builders have been able, even now, to avoid. We end up rehabilitating the same place sometimes two, even three times, and there goes our [profit] margin.

The fragmentary commodity form that Veronica negotiates with, and on behalf of, in the

passage above, and in her typical workday therein described, is to be sure directed toward a

certain resolution, rehabilitation, and re-coherence of that form. Veronica's labor is directly

invested in establishing such coherence—namely, an exchange value acceptable to evaluator,

Provive, and potential buyer alike.[208] The preponderance of *irresolution* in these negotiations,

---

[208] "The *capitalino* [Mexico City] evaluation firms place more emphasis on the costs of materials," she explains, "which they consider a more "national" measure, over the more locally comparative measure of recent sales prices in other nearby houses or developments." Here is a reason for Veronica to form a grudge against Mexico City evaluators, she admits. While a focus on materials in valuations tend to deflate value, generalizing value from a specific location tends to inflate it. Thus, "now when I have a phone call to negotiate the evaluation proposed by a firm," Veronica explains, "and I say, 'But look at what we sold this other house nearby for!' they then respond, 'But you bought this house so cheap, you think just because you repaired this and that, the price has risen how much?'

however, is not lost on Veronica herself. As Veronica and I discuss, this irresolution is somewhat exceptional when compared to the more established markets of central Mexico,[209] and radically more so when juxtaposed to the relatively 'resolved' post-subprime real estate markets of the North Atlantic world.

As Veronica finds herself negotiating between the *obra negra* (unfinished house) and *casa tapada* (covered house), and the production, for clients and evaluation firms alike, of a visually attractive, exchangeable rehabilitated house on the other, this fracturing coherence of the process itself is also notably re-territorialized as a personal moral entanglement. Having accepted her position at Provive after working for years in sales for the housing boom's largest constructor, Homex, which built much of the housing Provive now recuperates, for Veronica these evaluations are personal. In addition to local and central Mexican *peritos* (evaluators), for instance, Chihuahua's unusually powerful state housing commission has become more exigent post-boom with respect to its own minimum requirements for housing rehab conditions, requiring companies like Provive to build walls, for instance, between rehabbed and abandoned lots. From Veronica's perspective, these requirements have the clear purpose of building walls not against potential invaders, as one might think, but of protecting politically well-connected incumbents like Homex against invasive, disruptive competitors like Provive, by making the costs of market entry as high as possible. On hearing this, I can't help but think of Sandra who— unremuneratedly—experiences the limits of her own ability to make the houses on her street coherent by reifying this, in part, as her own failure. In this sense, both Sandra and Veronica partially identify as the 'invader' they each are ostensibly struggling against. Their frustrations

---

[209] The contrast is not only between local and national standards, though. It is also between the fact that materials-based standards propagated by national firms, Veronica says, location-based evaluations based on values once assigned (at the time of construction) uniformly to entire streets or sections of a development at time, more frequently by local firms.[#] While the former practices tend to deflate value, the other tends to inflate it.

are structural on both material and social planes.

"I saw firsthand the ease with which permits were granted to Homex to build on known flood plains," Veronica reflects, leaning forward at her desk as though awakened by the memory from the near-trance state, induced by spreadsheets of materials, costs, and evaluation dates spread across her desk and laptop, that seemed to possess her office when I first knock on the door for an interview. "All that is permitted by Infonavit, the evaluators and the state housing commission, over the public protest of Implan [Ciudad Juarez's independent urban planning commission, where I was conducting archival research at this time]. But then in comes a company like Provive trying to repair the mess," she concludes, shaking her head, "and there is this burden of scrutiny! It's because certain interests must be protected." She laughs at her fate, or the company's, or the residents'. Fighting for margins of around a thousand dollars for the right to repair the mess that her former employer, and by extension she herself, had made, Veronica is also fighting to rehabilitate a history that frays into pieces, like wires stripped from an invaded house, to be resold to China as scrap metal.

Figure 19. A covered/walled up *obra negra* (also known as a *casa tapada*) owned by Provive, in *Riberas del Bravo*, 2016.

The public housing Veronica negotiates each day is guided chaotically, to be sure, toward

190

a condition of relative 'resolution.' All at once, it seems iconically visible, concretely palpable, intimately inhabited, confidential, strategic, discursive, mathematical, and spatially abstract. As Veronica well knows, resolution in this context is only relative. It's embedded in a more radically unfinished condition. One the one hand, such unfinishedness is normal--it's the open-endedness of markets. On the other, as a structure of feeling in which infrastructural unfinishedness weighs on her as the remainder of historical failing in need of righting, the enduring unfinishedness of the city becomes a source of particularly intimate frustration. The felt inability to rehabilitate what was, in the past, a failure is itself something other than failure. It's something closer frustration, even to rage. Compared to Adriana or Alex, executives whose struggles with the unfinishedness of their infrastructural assets is troubling yet no cause for desperation, Veronica's experience of the *obra negra* through her position at Provive reminds me of Sandra's more than that of Veronica's bosses: her vigilance is animated by frustration, a frustrated desire for concrete and steel to be the purveyor of moral resolution.

A few weeks after walking to the *Antorcha* settlement with Sandra, she and I are side by side, amid a circle of some thirty local residents, on a quiet street in the development. The weather has changed, with summer turning to fall. People are wearing sweatshirts and pants, with a few Provive employees and police officers in uniforms. This is an atypical, if not entirely unusual, setting for a meeting of the Provive-sponsored neighborhood committee: outdoors, beyond the confines of the Provive's sales office-cum-community center at the development's entrance. The multi-use corporate/community space, meanwhile, is itself a standardized part of the company's approach. At Natura, Adriana's staff also repurposes a single housing unit as an office space where corporate and community development activities merge. This plastic use of

neighborhood infrastructures, given my broader concern here with the polysemiousness of such spaces, is as notable as it is naturalized and unremarked upon in a neoliberal Mexican context where corporate civil society has become a considerable social force in recent decades.

With the wind blowing, people are forced to nearly shout to be heard. Luckily, though, Provive staff have brought a megaphone. The meeting's topic is a street cleaning campaign into which committee members are aiming to recruit their neighbors. Afterwards, a woman with a young child grasping each hand interrupts a police officer who is praising the project's potential. "*¡Oiga, señor!*" "Hey, sir!" she says.

"Go ahead," responds the officer.

"You talk about cooperation between neighbors and police?" asks the schoolteacher, who, Sandra whispers to me, is a friend of hers. "We went and filled out a report about the last robbery on the street, and when we were done the officer says to us, 'You know what color underpants he was wearing?' [That is, mocking the report.] It's the truth, *señor.*"

"Where? [At what police station?]" the policeman responds.

"Wherever you like," is the sharp riposte.

"I ask because—", the officer begins, with a commanding hand gesture. But the teacher cuts him off with a raised hand that commands him, a man perhaps a decade younger than herself, to stop.

"No, we are not going to talk about identifying employees [by getting into specifics about police stations]. I mean, we go to battle with the report and then [we're asked], 'What color was the gun the man carried? What color were his boxers?' [...] You know what they [the police] told me the day when we saw this invasion of the house on our street, the one *en obra negra*?" she asks, while pointing just down the street to the house Sandra and I were discussing on our walk

192

to the *Antorcha* settlement. "The police on the phone told me, 'Please leave, it's not safe.' As if I were going to leave my house and stand out in the street while a house down the street is being invaded?" Some at the meeting laugh exhausted laughs. "That was last year," Sandra's friend concludes.

"Ahuh." The officer is now more cautious.

"*Entonces ¿qué hacemos?*" the teacher asks. "Then what do we do?"

The officer, sensing his opportunity, raises to eye level some pamphlets that have been in his hand all along. The meeting has given way to the broader and more abstract topic of rebuilding trust between residents and police. While his fellow officer looks on with doubt in her eyes, the male officer launches into a confident segue, based on his "Citizen Link Program" paraphernalia. "That's why we've brought you this brochure with information for—"

"I already went to the C4," the teacher interrupts him. "I even went to that building. I already went." She is referring to the office of the new SWAT-style special unit of the municipal police—an office associated with a level of city power most likely well above this officer's pay grade. Now he is struggling to regather himself as the crowd restrains laughter over his discomfort.

"So, this strategy is to help avoid this type of situation," the officer begins. "We are giving you all today the number that brings you directly to the boss [for this delegation], the one responsible."

"I went to the C4 and they gave me the same. And excuse me if we are bringing negativity here. Excuse us—"

"Therefore, it is important—" the officer begins again.

"Excuse us," Sandra's friend interrupts again, "but if *ustedes* [the police] are going to do

something well, then do it *well* and if not, then you're telling us that you're not even taking us seriously [*ni nos estan importando*]. Because when it comes down to it [*a la hora de la hora*], the criminal will be right there [she points firmly to a length of street just behind the officer] and none of you will do anything. Then what do we do?"

The officer responds again, but even he seems now to sense he is on thin ice with the neighbors. By broaching the topic of security early in the meeting, rather than allowing the more secure topic of street cleaning and anti-graffiti wall painting (where crime prevention remains in the background, and beautification in the foreground), the meeting has turned into a rare opportunity to publicly interrogate cops.

As the officer trails off, another of Sandra's colleagues from the community organization takes a stab at mediating. "This situation you are mentioning, of when the authorities don't respond as they should? It is a big help [in such moments] if everyone is united. In the situation, for instance, that you talked about with respect to the shooting—if the neighbors closest by had been well organized, for instance through this program [she pats the same pamphlet as the officer] there might not have been a need for you to have been so exposed [to danger]." There are some nods of agreement, other faces are still.

"That's right!" the cop quickly adds.

"Yes," the committee member repeats, as though the phrase were a kind of talisman, "if the neighbors had just been able to look discreetly from their windows..." Of course, this spatial distinction between the security of inside and outside development areas, as with the social distinction between criminals and neighbors that underwrites it, is far less messy than the axes of Sandra's experience, in which her struggle with feeling like an 'invader' herself layers atop her role in policing the covered houses of her street, and of legitimizing Provive's rehab vision. As

the walls of Sandra's experience shift, sense of authority and control over territory itself as frustratingly *en obra negra,* remains a core experience--as well as one that the built environment everywhere materially indexes.

At Natura, despite greater corporate resources behind its projects, this frustration is similarly felt among residents at a neighborhood committee I observed throughout fieldwork. In the case of one memorable neighborhood committee, led by Susana and Emilio, and advised on this week by one of Adriana's social development staff, Graciela, feuds between residents of the same street come to serve as the most immediate actionable target for expressing such feelings. Directing his comments toward Graciela, who serves as an expert consultant to the groups, at the beginning of one meeting, Emilio laments the scandalous theft of committee funds that had been gathered by the committee to fund a street gate. "What really angers us is not even the loss of the down payment," he says, referring to a craftsperson who has absconded with the committee's cash. "Those things happen. What's more troubling now is how it will affect the project. Are some residents going to be burdened with more than their share of the costs?"

"How's that?" Graciela asks.

"Even after so many meetings to assure all neighbors were *conformes* [in agreement], after a lot of effort herding the cats, so to speak, and convincing the doubters that this was a good idea, now six people from the street are *inconformes*."

"Look," says Graciela, taking this all in. "Everything must be transparent, financially, so that no one feels taken hostage by the process, right?" Some slow nods around the room signal the committee's ambivalent attentiveness. "Emphasize that there is no deadline to pay, so that nobody feels overwhelmed. And approach the *inconformes* respectfully, so that no one will feel threatened."

Susana and Emilio seem under pressure to respond to Graciela's council regarding *los inconformes.* After a prolonged silence, Emilio ventures, "What we have decided on as a committee is simply to have a separate gate key for those who refuse to pay." Graciela's mouth opens slightly, but nothing comes out. While Adriana may take it upon herself to respond in the press to her more organized critics in the development, Graciela's main object isn't to encourage leaders at the street committee level to engage in such tit-for-tat tactics with people who, after all, live literally next door. Her aim is to help the committees do their job—namely, improve social cohesion among residents, and contribute to human security in the process.[210] Given, then, that the committee's improvised new security gate plan takes defensible space to an absurd, if logical conclusion, Graciela is left with her mouth slightly gaping, realizing that Emilio wants to symbolically evict the *inconformes;* yet the ambiguity of the situation leaves her silent in her frustration.

A few weeks after the meeting about the gate, Emilio is next to me, both of us sweeping the sediment at the end of the street back out toward the outlet. "Ruba stopped paying for it to be manned a month ago," Emilio tells me as we get underway, pointing to a security booth that stands in the distance, a street away. "They've cut back on the *policia comercial* patrols, too. Now there

---

[210] This is what North Atlantic neoliberal urban theory in the 1970s often called "defensible space", produced through a process of "urban triage."Cf. Newman, Oscar. *Defensible space*. New York: Macmillan, 1972. For the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juarez's urban studies scholar Leticia Peña, whom Ruba would tap as a partner upon entering the public housing rehab business through its nearly 'all in' participation in Infonavit's newfangled auction system in 2010, Newman remains a key reference. A promoter herself of the very-sixties acronym CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design), which formalized Newman and other U.S. urban studies scholars' environmental determinism of the early neoliberal period in the U.S. into a formal school of thought whose voice extended through certain institutions of the U.S. state, particularly the Department of Justice and HUD. The dozens of academic articles and books, public-private collaborations and NGO interventions employing CPTED principles to Mexican urban space—and public housing worlds in particular—all emerge, meanwhile, after 2010, in the wake of the subprime era. See "Modelo de intervención para la gobernabilidad y el desarrollo urbano participativo. El rescate de Riberas del Bravo, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México," *European Scientific Journal* 9.1 (2013).

are a couple private security guards that keep watch on Ruba's equipment. That's it!"

"One of the *comerciales* looted some building materials from the site a while back," Susana adds, "and so Ruba stopped contracting them. The rest [of the change] is more recent."[40]

"And the new police station?" I ask, referring to a building Ruba had built at its own expense in hopes of luring the city into setting up a permanent office in the development (legally, construction firms are only required to provide an adequate lot for the city to build a station at its own cost—an eventuality that rarely, if ever, comes to pass).

"It's still a ghost project, that station," Emilio responds. Pulling out her cell phone, Susana scrolls to a contact number for the station that she and the other neighbors had been given months ago. "The phone just rings and rings, with no answer. So, you have to call the municipal emergency number, which is like the lottery, in terms of whether they will respond." [211]

Susana shakes her head. "All we can do is to remain united, and rely on the support of the majority," she says, referring first of all to the participants in this monthly activity--the majority women. I look at the station, *en obra negra,* and feel the frustration that animates the group. It's the same frustration as Sandra or even, from a corporate perspective, Veronica share. For the present, this anger has an outlet in solidarity, activity, claiming this street as their own. After the sun sets in the evening, however, the sweeping will stop. The music will turn down, and fear of violence will turn anger boiling over back to increasingly-strained vigilance.[41]

---

[211] Today, as I write in 2020, a police station is up and running in Natura, though human security remains an unfilled social need. Homicide and drug related crimes on the rise city-wide and nationally since 2015 (after a post-Drug War cooling). And Natura is not exempt from this insecurity. As it happens, for the U.S. urban sociologist Oscar Newman, whose work epitomizes the neoliberal urban school of theory, the security gate was the material site where tweaking social infrastructure (via everything from collective surveillance to deepened relationships between neighbors on 'now quiet' streets) and remaking durable infrastructures (unplugging the street, buffering the front door) would be symbolically transplanted onto one another.

Figure 20. "We've Changed Our Office: Find Us in *Hacienda Las Delicias."*Advertisement For Provive in *Villas del Prado,* East Tijuana. Circa 2016.

"We've changed our offices," the Provive advertising mural reads, "visit us in *Hacienda Las Delicias."* To the right is a map, with the highway from *Villas del Prado,* near the Toyota factory (where this mural is located) and showing how to get to Provive's new office in *Las Delicias*. A few blocks from the mural, two couples--the older Irma and Hector, and the younger Juan, Gabby and their child live during 2015 and 2016. I would pass the mural when visiting these couples, who I first met through a friend from *El Barzón,* the legal aid association, who also lived in the development. The Provive mural's piling-up graffiti tags helped mark the time passed since Provive had decided to shelve (temporarily, it promised) its rehab plans for *Villas del Prado*. In an infrastructure-building context defined by unfinishedness, however, temporary could mean forever.

The company had been eyeing *del Prado* for some time with good reason: as an

unusually large subprime-era Tijuana housing development, with over fifteen thousand houses (an average development from the period contained something in the range of three to six thousand units) and with housing abandonment elevated, the development has reasons to be seen as a key to expanding and making a long-term claim on Provive's home market. On the other side? of these considerations, however, the particular urban triage approach developed by Provive and Homes Foundation, held that investment there was too risky. "With *del Prado's* level of abandonment," as Alex Martinez of YouPlusMe would tell me, "The time just isn't right to go in right now, we realized. Obviously, at some point we'll have to enter *del Prado*. There are too many empty houses there not to do so."

In the meantime, Juan and Gabby did enter the development--initially as sub-renters, renting a room from week to week, but before long as self-identified housing invaders. They too find their intervention almost unbearably risky. Unlike Provive, however, their task is habitation, not rehabilitation. The aim is survival, not profit. More than a calculated risk, invading an apartment *en obra negra*, a unit never finished and never sold by the development's original builders, as Juan and Gabby have, is an act of courage. This is a brief attempt to sketch that courage, as it manifests in and around the unfinished structure this family of three occupy.

Figure 21. Juan (left), Gabby (right, out of shot) and their daughter one evening in the apartment they have invaded.

At a pause in a scary movie, a film about a haunted abandoned asylum in Mexico City purchased that afternoon for twenty pesos from in front of an Oxxo convenience store down the road, Juan and Gabby heat up some hot water. The electricity here enters through a window. Wires spliced together by Juan snake across the floor, held together with bits of duct tape, from television to water heater, to floor fan. A single ironed work shirt hangs from a hanger attached to a single nail hammered into a wall. Today (it's mid-May of 2015, three months after I met the couple and four months since they invaded), extending the pause in the movie to share some drip coffee as their daughter draws with crayon on the floor, Gabby tells Juan and I that she can barely hold her coffee mug.

"My hands are aching from scrubbing this wall for three hours this morning, while Juan was out looking for work. Of course, you wouldn't know it from looking around!" Gabby had been scrubbing--fairly unsuccessfully, in an attempt to wipe away with soap and water the aerosol

200

graffiti left by the space's prior residents. "When we have a bit more money, we will buy some paint," Gabby tells Juan and myself, assuring herself that rehabilitation is in their future. Immediately, however, Juan reminds her that it won't.

"It will take three coats of cheap paint," Juan tells her. "And even the cheap paint, you don't want to know how much that costs." It's not the first time I've heard them discuss the need to paint the walls. The graffiti scares their daughter, who is still a toddler and thankfully can't read.

"I don't care how much," Gabby responds, taking a mug of the weak coffee from Juan. "I can't stand it." Along with repeated tags of the number eighteen (*los dieciochos,* a broad and often loosely affiliated *California Alta*-based street gang), the walls serve as the misogynist diary entry of young men threating violence against unnamed local rivals and enemies.

"She almost refused to move in here, you know," Juan turns to me, "because of the writing. Can you imagine?" He lets out a laugh, "not because there are no windowpanes, or electricity, or water, but because of the bad words? I mean," he adds quickly, sincerely, "I understand. But that was when the guy we were renting from down the street, an *adicto*, started wanting us to give him the rent earlier and earlier each week." There wasn't much of a choice.

"It's true," Gabby responds. "At first I was ready to leave this place. I mean it's a pure *obra negra.* But then I got to know Irma and Hector better, and that gave me courage, they are very trustworthy. So, I liked it a little better here." Irma, their next door neighbor who runs a convenience store out of her and Hector's front room--allowed Gabby and Juan to take the *obra negra* in the first place. It was she and her husband, himself a heavy machinery operator for a construction firm, who told Juana and Gabby they would watch out for the couple if they wanted to occupy the apartment. Gabby and Juan got their hot water heater, fan, fridge, and much else of

what populates the relatively bare house on credit from the older neighbors. The items were not gifts, but offered on credit *en confianza* (in confidence), and with Juan's and especially Gabby's labor in return. By the time we meet, Gabby works at her *patrona*'s store, and Juan helps with small jobs [moving merchandise, cleaning] to pay down the debt. At the same time, Hector and Irma don't pretend to be the younger couple's landlords.

One day while smoking cigarettes in the common area between their doors, I ask Irma if she recalls the day when the new neighbors arrived. "Yes," she responds:

> They were in sorry shape. They didn't know where to go after that crazy guy drove them out of the room they'd been renting. So, I said, why don't you take that place. There's nobody there. And when the police came to ask about it, I told them, "Look, I'd rather have a family in that apartment taking care of it than *los vagos* [vagabonds, gang affiliated youth], *using drugs* there, doing crimes there. Anyway, they see how many empty houses there are here. The majority, no? Plus, these kids reminded me of myself when I was young. Very brave [*Muy bravos*].

For the police, to disagree with Irma and Hector means promoting discord in a corner of Tijuana where even urban rehabilitation specialists have not been able to detect a profit margin. As Alex, the director of Provive's community development arm (legally separated as the YouPlusMe Foundation, though using Provive facilities, staff, and funds) says with respect to developments like *del Prado*, "yes, we think we can help improve people, but we also keep in mind who we're not: we're not the police." Again, where Provive-backed corporate social governance projects calculate unreasonable risk here, Gabby and Juan gathered courage to do what they felt they had to do to survive.

As time goes on, and we grow to know one another better, I learn more clearly how it is that Juan and Gabby would come to decide to take this risk. One evening in the fall of 2016, as the couple unwinds with their daughter at the end of a busy day, Gabby wonders aloud whether it was

so inevitable after all that she and Juan should have moved to Tijuana at all. "I think sometimes at night whether we would have been safer staying put" in their rural town in Michoacan, she announces for the first time in my earshot. Juan, sitting on the floor while he ironed his work shirt on a makeshift ironing board, admitted he sometimes wondered the same. "At least there," he says, "we have family."

"But that was also the problem," Gabby responds, as though moving around a circle of thoughts that continue to pursue her, "too many people knew who we were there." They were displaced, along with many other young adults from their town, when a new drug-moving gang took over at the beginning of 2015. Juan had told me most of the details in private, to spare Gabby hearing them anew, earlier in our acquaintance. The story was an all too familiar one: the group had given Juan the choice to join, flee, or be killed--like several of his friends who had been actively affiliated with the prior gang. "At least at your mother's home in Michoacan the windows had bars," Gabby says to Juan and me after a pause.

Juan and I go outside to smoke a cigarette and play peso arcade games as the evening grows later. Across the development, some streets away, fair rides have been assembled in the run up to Halloween--*El Triqui-Triqui* as it's locally known. One of the rides--the teacup ride, positioned most scenically of them all with respect to views of other parts of the city when I walked past earlier in the day--had a banner above it that read simply, "Fantasy." The rides' lights sparkle over the rooftops now. As we play video games that night, escaping into fantasies, Juan tells me a significant detail of the couple's last days in Michoacan for the first time: "just before we fled north a demon possessed me."

I drop the controller. "A demon?"

"Yeah."

"For how long?"

"For several weeks." Before the possession, he goes on now, "Gabby had been trying to help me break my addiction [to heroin], but it wasn't really working." He wouldn't listen to Gabby, he tells me, "and she must've been thinking what to do with me," especially--he points out--with "the violence around town ratcheting up." With her new baby's father's close friends getting hunted down by a new gang (ostensibly affiliates, according to Juan, of *Jalisco Nueva Generación,* a major organized crime syndicate in territorial expansion at the time), Juan's life was seized:

> I was trying to withdraw, and I began to channel a spirit--sort of like the ones on the DVD with the abandoned asylum, but places from town--the cemetery, you know, the hills outside town, or like the school that burned down years ago. [...] One night the devil appeared to me, was driving a car right by my parents' house, that's what I thought. This is while I'm with Gabby, nighttime. She told me afterward that I tried to follow it, Gabby says, 'speaking in tongues.' Gabby and my mother followed me and brought me back. They were afraid for me, I guess.

> They were also incredibly courageous. Finally, they found a *curandero* (traditional healer)

to perform an exorcism. By this time, the gang had warned Juan to decide. In the middle of a hallucinatory withdrawal, however, it was Gabby who seemed to have most influenced the family's decision to leave town for good.

Later, once we go back inside, I share what Juan had said with Gabby. "Yes," she affirms, "he purged the demon into one of our daughter's dolls." Her favorite one. Then, "when I brought the baby back to the house after the exorcism, she no longer wanted anything to do with that doll," Gabby recalls. "Its eyes came alive. We made a bonfire and burned it just before fleeing ourselves."

Mediating between subjectivity and territoriality, rehab and abandonment, I find myself

204

speculating as to whether the *obra negra* they occupy as invaders feels like it too might be destroyed, or otherwise become uninhabitable, at any time. Yet, in many ways, Juan and Gabby's day-to-day does not provide the luxury of such idle speculations about the future. What time they do have to themselves is spent in front of the television, or smoking on the stairs--seeking momentary reprieve from the saturating precarity that surrounds them. In this sense, an esoteric, secretive presence like the demon who helped eject the couple from a fast-collapsing world into one here in Tijuana more stuck between construction and collapse, gets substituted for to a degree here in *del Prado* by new public attachments of *confianza* (a term with economic and emotional connotations in this context).[212] These new connections, between the young invading couple and their more locally established and stable older neighbors, are a fragile foundation for the young couple to build on. Still, such relations of intimacy can easily flip back into motivation for secrecy. And while the durability of these new social bonds therefore remains unclear, ongoing attachments to home require attention as well.

Once, when Gabby hangs up after talking on her cell phone with her mother in law, Juan's mother, she turns her face to me--and it's as white as a ghost.

---

[212] Vélez Ibáñez, Carlos G.. Lazos de confianza: los sistemas culturales y económicos de crédito en las poblaciones de los Estados Unidos y México. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993.

Figure 22. A carnival rides a few blocks from Gabby and Juan's house, in *Villas del Prado,* east Tijuana.

"Juan's mother wants to move to Tijuana and live with us," she says. "She just told me so. But she thinks we're renting an apartment! We've never told her we were invading!" I discuss the matter with Gabby, while looking around for Juan (he is doing work in the store in the neighbor's front room).

"Would she understand, if you told her?" I ask.

"She wouldn't be angry with us," Gabby clarifies. "Only worried. We didn't tell her so as not to make her worried." In the process of not worrying, Juan's mother had devised a vision of Tijuana as a place of promise for her own future. Would Juan and Gabby interrupt that vision with the hard reality of occupying an *obra negra* as invaders? Rather than worrying (as before the call) about the couple's future, I am now left to wonder whether the couple's courage is more impressive in not revealing their state of occupation to family, or now in potentially sharing their precarity.

With the future taken from them, turned into an undependable promise, it's vigilance, frustration and courage that more inchoately fills this empty space--empty like the apartment's window frames or water fixtures, cabinets and bedroom (save for a mattress on the floor and a few toys for their daughter). It's a structure of feeling whose irresolution uncannily conforms to the built environment around them, itself wavering between future and past. Still, in comparison to scholarship that claims today that neoliberalism's purely financial infrastructures are causally/conceptually equivalent to affective uncertainty--as a symptom of finance capitalism's dispossessory/precaritizing effects on the era's global peripheries[213]--it's structure should not be read simply as 'deficient,' in its structural accountancy, but as comparatively thick.

Conclusion: Possible Futures for an Unfinished Present?

In its Tijuana usages with which I am especially familiar, the term *obra negra* became, according to some tellings by local architects and engineer acquaintances of the old school, prominent in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, as projects like the *Zona del Rio* introduced modest skyscrapers to the city landscape, the landscape's increasing indebtedness to drug economy wealth became pronounced--through the unfinishedness of certain projects in *del Rio,* for instance. Using construction to launder wealth (as I note in the chapter's introduction) became a powerful yet highly inconsistent source of funding for urban growth--with suddenly abandoned, half-built projects prominently foregrounding the equally sudden turns in fortune that such wealth--especially in the broader formative context of *peso* devaluations and sovereign debt crises of the 1970s-1990s--could suffer. In this sense, drug economy wealth was only one

---

[213] Gershon, Ilana. "Neoliberal Agency." *Current Anthropology* 52.4 (2011): 537-555; Pinker, Annabel, and Penny Harvey. "Negotiating uncertainty: Neo-liberal statecraft in contemporary Peru." *Social Analysis* 59.4 (2015): 15-31; Wacquant, Loïc. "Crafting the neoliberal state Workfare, prisonfare and social insecurity." *Sociologie Românească* 8.03 (2010): 5-23. Wacquant distinguishes between objective/'criminal' and subjective/social insecurity.

prominent facet of Tijuana's increasingly prominent *obra negra* landscape, yet it was also a prominent one for collective fantasy, and so of the *obra negra* as a cementing of such collective sensibilities in place.

Other projects would be left unfinished when their owners disappeared to the U.S., or were abandoned because of health and safety concerns--from toxic pollutants left by factories to the brittle, porous alluvial soils of the city's hillsides. As *obras negras* spread, so too did the internal striations of formality. It is, if not inevitable then, unsurprising that in much of Mexico, *la obra negra* has come to 'informally' model the un-rehabilitated, and indeed the never-to-be-rehabilitated.[214] Occupying these spaces, however, extends experientially far beyond the limits measured by the "rehabilitation timelines" against which YouPlusMe and Provive executive, Alex, railed for instance in this chapter's introduction.

Occupying an unfinished present, whose relations to the future and past can feel troublingly imperceptible extends, the chapter contends, into a sense of the *obra negra* as an affective infrastructure that, rather than promising to fix a crossed-wired contemporary Mexican public housing industry (as Ruba/Provive, as corporate entities, do promise), more so aims simply to make do with, and make sense of, the present. Consider, in this respect, today's most prominent theorization of the *obra negra* in contemporary art. The wire and mesh sculpture collection titled *Obra Negra,* by the celebrated Colombian visual artist Johanna Calle, can help the chapter thematize this idea of an unfinished structure of feeling as courageously, and

---

[214] The more radically never-finished projects, like one hundred thousand 'never substantially constructed' Homex housing units, existent only on budget reports, caused the SEC to fine the already-bankrupt company 3.3 billion dollars in 2017. That company's widely rumored links in turn to Sinaloa drug cartels, are key factors for the *obra negra's* local genealogy, further cementing human insecurity as a key dimension toward which the structure of feeling materially indexed by *la obra negra* is oriented. See: "SEC Charges Mexico-Based Homebuilder in $3.3 Billion Accounting Fraud." *SEC.GOV*, U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, 3 Mar. 2017, www.sec.gov/news/pressrelease/2017-60.html.

vulnerably, open to an unknown future, yet held to the present in a world where peace, safety, everyday life and its undergirding infrastructures, only precariously exists--and often demands human vigilance to hold together even in such precarious states.

Figure 23. A Johanne Calle Wire Mesh Sculpture, from *Obra Negra* Exhibition.

In Calle's sculptures, the *obras negras* that residents occupy, appear also to occupy the residents. An unfinished division between inside and outside worlds is depicted as torsos, heads, or feet get substituted for by blocks, mesh wires, and other materials making up the labors of dwelling. Rebar merges with faces and roofs replace the complementary angles of arms hanging at humans' sides. The work of imagining improved or ideal relations between society and infrastructure has been replaced, in Calle's works, by the work of representing what that very imagination of improvement (i.e. capitalism's liberal imagination) tends, in its ceaseless attention to potentialities, to leave out.[215] Focusing her attentions on mostly young women displaced to

---

[215] Calle, Johanna. *Johanna Calle: Variaciones Políticas Del Trazo*, TEOR/ÉTica, 2008. On the concept of the liberal imagination: Mazzarella, William. "Totalitarian Tears: Does the Crowd Really Mean It?." *Cultural Anthropology* 30.1 (2015): 91-112.

Colombian cities by civil war, and who, finding themselves invading houses *en obra negra* like Juan and Gabby in this chapter, Calle finds that most of the labor of quotidian maintenance for these half-built dwellings falls on their young bodies. Calle's understanding of the *obra negra* as an imbrication of bodies and materials challenges a liberal politics of representation and knowledge in which the human—or, if we find certain historians like Mae Ngai's arguments compelling, really just the European since the colonial period[216]—is conceived of as inherently mobile (and black and brown labor as easily displaceable), while private property is seen as settled. Yet it does so without offering any explicit alternative, for now.

In Calle's sculptures, foregrounding the *obra negra* means interrupting a dominant political aesthetic that made these lives invisible--made them a blind spot, to use the language of Chapter Two of this dissertation. This challenge, depicted in a language of literally intersecting human and infrastructural frailties, requires considerable courage from the artist to depict so forcefully, with such materialist sympathy.[217] To live oneself in a world seemingly saturated by unfinished infrastructures--as Calle's subjects, and my interlocutors in this chapter do to varying extents--may require even more courage. It requires, too, the vigilance to manage so frustrating a set of working conditions: where human insecurity, insecure property possession, and the inscrutability of the future promise little for residents to grab hold to for ballast, long-term.

At times, as the chapter shows, corporate and resident actors in Mexican public housing worlds find shared orientations and even solidarities across corporate governance-public housing resident relations, despite differences in social status, economic power, and claims to expertise

---

[216] Ngai, Mae M. *Impossible subjects: Illegal aliens and the making of modern America-updated edition*. Vol. 105. Princeton University Press, 2014, 14.

[217] Fennell, 641-666.

and control over local housing infrastructures. In the process of tracking sensibilities to the *obra negra,* however, this chapter has asked not so much about futures promised by these corporate-resident affinities, but about what/how affective infrastructures emerge in the absence or waning of such promissory potentials. How do political sensibilities to/at the intersection of infrastructural politics and politics of invasion endure in a space where infrastructures feel post-durable, precarious, and invasions (meanwhile) feel forced rather than freely chosen?

At a more abstract or general scale, this question, I claim, translates itself into another question still: how can social theory go beyond recent efforts to theorize the politics of infrastructure in predominantly promissory/catastrophizing frameworks (James Scott's *Seeing Like a State* perhaps chief among those works, for anthropologists)? In response, this chapter has offered two answers, and I will point future scholarship toward a third now. First, scholars can attend more broadly to the social theory potentials of categories used in everyday accounts of infrastructure themselves, like the *obra negra* in this chapter. Second, scholars can foreground affective constellations whose implicit temporalities diverge (as well as converge) with those most proper to financialized capitalism (speculation, risk, promise). And third, these affective infrastructures' global divergences can be studied more rigorously at transnational scales.

How, for instance, might the spacetimes of deferral and delay that migration studies scholars today discuss as critical maladies suffered by undocumented migrants and asylum subjects in the Global North overlap with the spacetimes of the *obra negra*?[218] Sandra's neighbors in this chapter's second section--the 'bad neighbors,' deported from the U.S. and now invading a house on Sandra's street--embody this critical question. Or how (as this chapter's

---

[218] Haas, Bridget M. "Citizens-in-waiting, deportees-in-waiting: Power, temporality, and suffering in the US asylum system." *Ethos* 45.1 (2017): 75-97; McNevin, Anne, and Antje Missbach. "Luxury limbo: Temporal techniques of border control and the humanitarianisation of waiting." *International Journal of Migration and Border Studies* 4.1-2 (2018): 12-34.

introduction briefly raised) in a more historical vein, have anti-welfarist politics in the neoliberal North Atlantic world, as animated in recent decades by emergent negative structures of feeling toward migrant 'invaders'(disgust, hatred, melancholy)[219] co-emerged with the affective structure of *obra negras* in regions of Latin America where housing invasions also generate overlapping negative collective affects (frustration, vigilance, courage). Accounting transnationally for how such histories and geographies of affective politics, infrastructure-building politics, and politics of invasion intersect and diverge represents a critical space for future scholarship to fill.

At a historical moment, moreover, when we seem to stand between the old and the new, such sensibility-developing attentions may be particularly timely for social theory. At a transnational scale, if global infrastructure investment and its declining centrality to finance capitalism were to continue for another generation, would this mean wealthy nations beginning to grasp (to use U.S. examples for a moment) events like the Flint, Michigan water crisis, or the growing vulnerability of U.S. energy infrastructures to cyberattacks not as isolated 'crises,' but as part of *what infrastructure is*, and how it must be related to--namely, as only partially under effective forms of political control, and as impressed upon moreover (in terms of said politics), by diverse politics of invasion? If so, might the U.S. one day adopt some version of the *obra negra* idiom to characterize its own affective infrastructures in the future? While such questions remain highly speculative, perhaps, one thing I hope to have convinced the reader is for sure: answers to, and the implications of these questions for how infrastructure-building and politics of invasion continue to enfold across Mexico, the U.S., and at broader scales still, should be

---

[219] See theorization of ethnonationalist 'border melancholia,' in: Brady, Mary Pat. *Extinct lands, temporal geographies: Chicana literature and the urgency of space*. Duke University Press, 2002. 65-70.

significant for scholars of Latin America, infrastructure, and contemporary critical/popular

politics of invasion (from ethnonationalisms to settler colonialism) for some time to come.

Conclusion
Unfinished Entanglements: Invasion, Infrastructure, and Dialogues to Come

Passing an afternoon with Miguel in his glass-cutting workshop, a converted 1980s-built house located some ten minute drive from his own public housing unit in East Tijuana, where the first pages of the project's introduction unfolded, I ask who buys his window installation services. As it turns out, *maquilas* are the biggest clients. "I have a friend who is a supervisor in one," I'm told, "and who recommended me for small, even medium-sized jobs."

Figure 24. Miguel's glass cutting shop, in a converted former housing unit in east Tijuana.

"So Provive isn't paying you to install new windows in the neighborhood?" I joke. The company, as we as housing insiders know, has its own small in-house repair crews and materials providers--involved in both "covering" repossessed houses (i.e., securing entrances and windows with cemented concrete blocks) and rehabbing resold housing.

"No," Miguel responds, "Provive hasn't knocked on my door. But because I can buy my supplies wholesale in larger quantities for *maquila* jobs, when a neighbor around here does need

work done, I can pass down the savings, work with them." That doesn't mean many neighbors, even at the neighborly rate, can afford to immediately replace a window in their house when it breaks.

"But look," Miguel says, spinning in an old office chair in his small office, which (judging from the dimensions) seems to have been a kitchen before some remodeling, "that doesn't mean people don't want things for the home. I'm experimenting with fish tanks to sell at the weekend outdoor markets--what do you think?" he asks. Miguel points to a tank in construction, on the top of a second workbench (really a beaten office desk) beside him. "I'm starting to sell them with little figures inside--you know, mermaids, ship anchors." Suddenly a sheepish artist, Miguel seems to hesitate for a moment before going on. "And with the smallest scraps?" he asks rhetorically, before opening a desk drawer. Beside the fish tank he places what he calls an *artesania*,[220] a small religious scene with glass and wire stick figures, on its top on the desk.

In the bathroom is another, more permanent miniature: a small portrait of a bathroom resting on a shelf above the toilet. With an unopened toothbrush package to one side and a half-opened package of corn starch on the other--the new products, mixed with candles, buddha, etc., give it qualities of a shrine. It's not only Miguel's exploratory, playful relationship to his *artesanias* that is experimental, though. Like Miguel, corporate and state housing experts also

---

[220] Anthropologists of the Andes, from Mick Taussig to Penelope Harvey, describe a mimetics of desire, wherein objects' miniatures, including dolls, are emplotted at shrines and other devotional sites to precipitate the appearance at 'life size' of what is being modelled in miniature. Harvey discusses motorbikes and houses as notable modeled objects in her work. Yet Miguel's religious scenes, like his fish-tanks, are commodities as well as miniatures. They thus also share in Katrin Flechsig's analyses of the artisanal production of *la miniatura de palma* for primarily tourist consumption in a town in the central Mexican state of Puebla. There, miniature production is far from a self-conscious tradition: local producers adhere to the barest facade of an 'invented tradition,' by exploiting the power of the minature to convert a romantic idealization of indigeneity into the cash-flow necessary for surviving the darkness of late liberalism.

employ scale models (concrete and abstract) as tools for indexing and participating in forms of space-making. Rather than emerging simply 'from the lab' and moving 'to the living room' so to speak, these also *merge* the lab and living room, as though in a co-modeling of microcosm and macrocosm. They are assembling worlds in aggregate, drawing on and adapting to heterogenous physical materials, socio-political scales of action, and resident imaginaries of space and time.

Figure 25. Enclosed from within, and from without, in two 1960s cartoons from the Soviet-backed Mexican weekly magazine *Politica*. On the left, one observer of the unfinished structure (labeled 'Mexican Revolution,' and 'Here Mexico is under construction') says to the other, "It began well, but then the plans were robbed, and the materials." In the cartoon to the right, the jailer tells his Latin American prisoner, "There, now you'll be safe from communism."[221]

Housing models (though by no means them alone among territorial tools) have long played this aggregative role in much of the world, and often explicitly so. In the two 1968-era political cartoons by legendary Mexican cartoonist Eduardo Humberto del Río García (pen name, RIUS) on this page, two housing models substitute first for the Mexican Revolution and then for the Latin American region. In each image, a house serves not only as a microcosm for broader territorial scales, but also as a social experiment--in the 'Mexican Revolution' cartoon it's the first of the socialist revolutions of the twentieth century, and in the 'Latin America,'

---

[221] "RIUS," in *Política*. May 15, 1961. p. 9.; "RUIS," in *Política*. April, 1, 1961. p 23. For the classic social theory critique of containment theory, in its convergences with neo-imperialism and short-circuited Third World decolonizations, see: Fanon, Frantz. The wretched of the earth. Grove Press, 1963.

cartoon, respectively, the emergence of 'Containment Theory' as U.S. foreign policy.

Such explicitly critical depictions of housing models would hardly remain confined to satirical cartoons, however, in Mexico's neoliberal era. Some two decades after RIUS's drawings, and two decades prior to my fieldwork in the 2010s (in 1986 to be precise), the National Institute of Anthropology and History in Mexico City would publish the proceedings of its first symposium on "Contemporary History," which it framed as running from 1940-1984.[222] Notably, the image on this volume's cover featured a building *en obra negra,* with no roof, wooden supports running through it, and visible cracks in the concrete. The house stands seemingly abandoned in the foreground, while in the image's background a blue and white sky of clouds seems to be in the process of morphing into skyscrapers. The message: if the present remain unfinished, the future even more so remains 'in the clouds.' Despite a more solemn tone, disjointed time-space is evident here—as with the RUIS cartoons or, arguably, like Miguel's miniatures and *artesanias*--another modeling of underclass housing/property claims and the limits of nation state sovereignty/order through one another. In the language developed by this dissertation, which has aimed to challenge the very stability of land in property/housing and of the nation state as separate scales of political action, these microcosms model after their respective manners facets of politics of invasion and infrastructure-building statecraft in co-production.

At the peak of the infrastructure building state, it was the blueprint, the contract, the permit, the scale model, that indexed the engineer's claim to political legitimacy. This, in turn, furthered the legitimacy of a state project that also fought Dirty Wars and accepted copious U.S. private capital. Today, it's the fragmentation of the products of those engineering visions that

---

[222] Primer simposio sobre historia contemporánea de México 1940-1984: inventario sobre el pasado reciente. México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1986.

tells the more compelling macro-scale story of where infrastructure-building state power is headed in Mexico (and beyond), however. Sometimes, as the preceding chapters show, this fragmentation is one of sympathies indexed materially by public infrastructures--while at other times, buildings are 'just buildings,' i.e., abandoned by state, corporate, and/or invader and other resident interests. Certainly, how the politics of infrastructure corresponds to popular collective structures of feeling, one on hand, and to macro-territorial politics of social welfare and territory-making on the other, is in a state of unsettlement across contemporary Mexico. That much is sure. Whether such sensitivities to and sensibilities of unsettlement is a precursor of things to come at more global scales, however, seemingly remains an open question.

Consider, for example, what happened in the northern Mexican economic capital of Monterrey on March 1, 2017. The chairperson of one of Mexico's largest transnational companies, and its largest in primary materials, Lorenzo Zambrano of Cemex, addressing the media after a tense board meeting, would reveal to the press that Cemex was "completely disposed" to bid for contracts on a new U.S.-Mexico border wall. The backlash began immediately. Mexican media declared the company traitorous; politicians competed to send their condemnatory tweets first--even Mexican bishops in their sermons that Sunday piled on criticism.

Days later, a spokesperson for Cemex would gather the press once more to reel back in Zambrano's comments. "We are providers, not constructors," the spokesperson would cryptically clarify.[223] And so, by definition, Cemex will not be *building* anything per se. The clarification clarified precious little, however, and tended, rather, to stoke the flames of the budding controversy it was meant to stamp out. *El Economista* media group, for its part,

---

[223] "Mexicana Cemex Dispuesta a Proveer Cemento a Constructoras Para Muro Fronterizo De Trump: Diario." *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 1 Mar. 2017, www.reuters.com/article/construccion-mexico-cemex-idLTAKBN1684NI.

reminded its Mexican audiences that given the wall's potential twenty-one billion dollar price tag, primary materials would be a substantial cost.[224] And given a global sand shortage (concrete is seventy-five percent sand, but only waterbed sands will do, while the Sonoran Desert, for instance, features sand too spherical to jigsaw together a durable substance with) costs would likely grow over the course of the project itself.

Meanwhile, public outcry over the mere idea of a Mexican company building a U.S. border wall was gathering force regardless of the seriousness of the plan itself. And while most of this outcry remained centered on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, U.S. media also began to show interest in the story, with some U.S. politicians weighing in, as well. For a moment, U.S. ethnonational audiences seemed to find a Latin American 'migrant perspective' they could identify with: that of a multinational corporation searching out an infrastructure contract abroad. Soon, Cemex would retract its name from contention for border-building contracts altogether.

Beginning in early 2019, Trump would shift tone regarding the wall again. Having long (and often) promised a concrete barrier dividing the two nations, the wall was now turning into a fence--and a steel one at that. "I'll have it done by the United States Steel Corp.," Trump would state in January 2019, "by companies in our country that are now powerful, great companies again--and they've become powerful over the last two years because of me and because of our trade policies."[225] The president's U.S. critics, meanwhile, saw the new steel fence as fodder for their own narratives. Minority speaker Nancy Pelosi would tell *USA Today* that Trump's wall had now gone from concrete to a beaded curtain. Memes of Trump's beaded curtain would compete with

[224] "Cemex Ve Su Crecimiento En EU Con El Muro De Trump." *El Economista*, El Economista, 4 Oct. 2017, www.eleconomista.com.mx/internacionales/Cemex-ve-su-crecimiento-en-EU-con-el-muro-de-Trump-20170316-0021.html.

[225] Orr, Gabby, et al. "From 'Wall' to 'Barrier': How Trump's Vision for the Border Keeps Changing." *POLITICO*, 8 Jan. 2019, www.politico.com/story/2019/01/08/trumps-vision-wall-concrete-steel-changes-1088714.

images of steel slat designs for social media circulation. This time, U.S. media accounts would occlude the fact that a cement wall would, virtually per force, have contracted Mexican companies for their primary materials.

Was an ongoing Mexican-led wall building project through Trump's re-election cycle even politically imaginable? If so, what would the eventual dimensions of scandal surrounding it have amounted to? On the other hand, if a Mexican firm had built Trump's wall and yet, it had inversely proven a non-story, or quickly died away from public attentions, what would this have told us about emerging relationships today between contemporary U.S./Mexican politics of invasion and technopolitics of infrastructure?

While public housing infrastructure building has drawn on public and private global investment institutions of various shapes and sizes, none of its products, notably, can claim as self-evident--as borders, bridges, airports, or highways can--a status as 'international.' No wonder that Cold War politics of containment—from U.S. imperialist machinations to keep Latin America from turning 'red,' to national governments' own domestic strategies for managing political unrest and dissent—found housing an inimitable tool. Yet such an 'inward looking' infrastructure, for this very reason so useful in producing broader geopolitical blind spots toward said unrest, still requires (from a historical perspective) its transnational positioning in networks of global governance, development expertise, finance capital, and demographic management to be unearthed, contextualized at scales in excess of the property/nation dualism. This project's attentions have aimed at bringing such connections to light; yet there is more to be done. There are many connections still waiting for both my Latin American studies interlocutors and my broader social theory interlocutors (in urban studies, settler colonial studies, migration studies and critical infrastructure studies alike), to continue making, particularly from transnational perspectives.

What are the specifically transnational entanglements of infrastructure building and politics of invasion that have characterized the recent past? If successful, this dissertation will serve future scholarship to develop robust answers to that question, particularly in the Americas.

To further entice future scholars toward engaging such questions, I hope, this conclusion offers one further brief discussion of a twentieth century Mexican context where invaders (not yet housing invaders) did occupy a prominent international infrastructure--in 1951. That was the year in which striking miners in the northern state of Coahuila would set out on a hunger strike, while marching along a centerpiece of the nation's then still considerably unfinished national highway system. The 765-mile long Mexico City-Laredo Highway, opened in its entirety in 1936, was to be, as U.S. Vice President John Garner declared at its inauguration, a tie that "will bind in perpetual amity all the countries of the American continents. May caravans of friendship ever pass in every direction over this great highway of peace."[226] Just over a decade later, over a thousand Coahuila miners would find themselves handing out flyers to American tourists passing their hunger caravan on the Laredo-Mexico City route.

"We do not bother no one," the flyers read in English, "we want justice for our problem."[227] Infrastructure capable of appearing to cater to tourists and workers, from the perspective of each, could make Mexico appear modern. Or it could turn volatile--as when a couple decades later in the land struggles of Acapulco during the late 1970s and early 1980s (as discussed in the introduction to the project) *autonomist* resident organizations and experts successfully refused eviction *en masse* by local government agencies. But back to the highway.

In the case of the Coahuila miners, despite support from the governors of several northern

---

[226] Winter, Bryan. "Caravans of Friendship: History, Tourism and Politics Along The Mexico City-Laredo Highway, 1920s–1940s." *International Social Science Review* 95.2 (2019): 1.

[227] Molina, Daniel. La caravana del hambre. México: Ediciones El Caballito, 1978.

states and a month-long encampment outside federal offices upon arriving at the nation's capital, the miners would fail in attaining most of their demands. In a certain respect, this early failure of a large-scale highway-bound union caravan would make even more remarkable the fact that further caravans (such as those noted in chapter one with respect to *El Barzón*'s emergence in the 1990s) would not dwindle but proliferate in coming decades. Certainly, the international status of the new road infrastructure, its privileged political position in a new, industrializing, Mexican infrastructure-building state, likely pushed national political leaders in Mexico to avoid the use of violent repression on protesters traveling such major public works. Even in 'failure,' the hunger strike, co-emerging with a major new infrastructure system, opened a space of possibility for popular politics that would endure. As highways came into focus as an "arm of struggle" at the height of autonomist rural land struggles, however, they also continued to fuel Mexico's participation in a broad shift, seen among poorer nations globally, back toward export dominated economic models.

Much in the same way, today border infrastructures have come to be used as a crucial arm of struggle in contemporary global ethnonationalist anti-migrant and pro-migrant politics alike. Borders model structures of feeling and forms of knowledge that compose political sentiments as diverse as "Build the Wall," and "No ICE/ No Borders." In this context, where transnational political energies unleashed/absorbed along with new trajectories in infrastructure building get naturalized as 'border politics,' grasping that a short time ago 'highway politics,' served a similar and in some ways historically continuous role as borders today can perhaps help denaturalize those energies' material attachments. This, with respect to public housing as an exemplary case, is in considerable part the effect this project aims to generate in readers.

What would it take to make public housing popularly legible in these same transnational

dimensions--i.e., as a part of a transnational world of public infrastructure whose politics is profoundly interconnected? Because of its divergences from specific U.S. histories, forms, and expectations of infrastructure building and social movement politics alike, such a legibility for Mexican public housing among U.S. publics may seem too abstract or distant from reality to seriously contemplate. This conclusion, though, has been planned with one final story fragment set up to make such connects feel more immediate, more natural.

Recall the story about Cemex and its decision not to build Trump's wall. Consider that if construction in concrete, and so likely using a Mexican provider, had continued, the odds on favorite for the wall-building contract would have likely been Cemex ally *Grupo Cementos de Chihuahua* (GCC), itself a large primary materials company operating bi-nationally in northern Mexico, Texas, and the Midwest. And the significance of GCC? It is owned by Federico Terrazas Torres, also owner of Ruba, the major Mexican public housing firm discussed in Chapter Three.

Returning to my earlier hypothetical about the border wall (would the U.S.'s contracting a Mexican builder for its wall have generated enduring scandal in the U.S.?), the question now appears as even more intimately embedded in this project's narrative. In the future, might we hear of a *Barzón* protest at Natura, complete with signs and speeches, but to protest not illegal eviction tactics or inadequate infrastructure maintenance, but the discovery that GCC's has been contracted to build a border wall, or? a migrant detention center? Such political counterfactuals seem increasingly proximate to fact today; even as their implications for our collective futures remain unclear.

If what we need is more attention to how infrastructural and invasion politics are entangled, however, a second site—in addition to popular politics—is also at the heart of this

dissertation's address. The disciplinary siloing from one another in contemporary university settings of critical migration studies and critical infrastructure studies is a clear bottleneck to moving stories like Cemex's border scandal from what it is here (an exemplary anecdote) and into an opening onto what I am calling for more of--studies, that is, that track the entanglements of invasion politics and infrastructure-state governance in the Americas. For this very reason-- that of opening greater interdisciplinarity in historically informed manners--Chapter Two's genealogy of social expertise around housing and migration is not idly historical, but aims to inform further reflection on where blind spots to invasion politics shaped/shape social theory. There (in Chapter Two) the project showed how land invasion politics animated the consolidation of Mexican and Latin American social theory in areas of critical overlap with emerging key forms of social policy expertise, but at the cost of these disciplines' marginalizing those same land invasion politics. What scholars do with this history, however, is an unwritten story.

Still, intervening in social theory debates at the intersection of critical migration studies and critical infrastructure studies was only one of the dissertation's two conversations with U.S.-based social science that pivot around what I call theories of invasion. The other is settler colonial studies. The project's three central chapters, both in their historical and ethnographic materials, track a neoliberal-era Mexico in which politics of invasion can be accounted for only as a confluence of liberal, indigenous, and other ethnopolitics. This is the case, the project shows, insofar as invasion discourses and practices can prove attractively polyvalent in their political meanings for actors of diverse affiliations and leanings.

Consider how, in Chapter One, Sidonio and Jorge--officials at *El Barzón Tijuana*-- articulate conflicting strands of conservative northern Mexican ethno-regionalism (on one hand)

and (for 2016) old-school late *indigenista*-era investments in something close to what Maria Muñoz calls "participatory *indigenismo* (on the other hand).[228] Despite this, they (Sidonio and Jorge) also engage with invasion discourses in a common office where their viewpoints most typically seem to tend toward coherence, even around this issue. Or consider how in Chapter Two scholars like Eduardo Aguado López and his politically 'against the grain' academic colleagues[229] would highlight, as among the most "combative" land invasion practicing groups of the 1970s and early 1980s, the *Frentes Campesinos Independientes* of Sonora and Oaxaca, respectively, and *los Indígenas de Venustiano Carranza, Chiapas* and *de la Sierra Norte de Puebla*, a mix of indigenous and *campesino*-identified groups with extensive alliances among themselves, respectively. In this case, Aguado López's and other scholarly stories of Chapter Two track land invasions as movements at this time transcending regional and ethnic limits alike.

The figure--affectively and concretely--that perhaps best models my concern with infrastructure's translatability across indigenous, settler, indigenous settler, and other ethnopolitics for this dissertation is the *obra negra* in Chapter Three. In the early neoliberal era, when most Mexican housing was self-built on invaded peri-urban lands, the *obra negra* was a

---

[228] At the same time, the coordinates of this dissertation also diverge from Muñoz's conceptualization of "participatory indigenismo," as emergent in a 1970s Mexico where identity-based indigenous politics gained form, supposedly, through confrontation with class-based *campesino* identities. In key moments of Muñoz's argument, *campesinos* and indigenous groups are engaged in a common struggle for land against one another (not against the wealthy, or the state, or even the momentum of their joint investments in infrastructure building). Besides very carefully picked land invasions as her evidence base, the broader trouble with Muñoz's depiction of ethno-politics as increasingly siloed between *mestizo* and indigenous groups in this period is that such a conclusion seems to have been reached not through a study like Aguado López and company's, of *unofficial/autonomous* and *state-supported indigenous organizations* alike; rather, her study focuses almost singularly on state-supported ones. Is it possible that social sciences' own blind spots toward politics of invasion, emerging, as Chapter Two argues, in contexts of social policy expertise consolidation and the heights of the infrastructure-building state project in Mexico, is the cause for Muñoz's one-sided claims regarding land invasions' relation to ethnopolitics in early neoliberal Mexico? Cf. Muñoz, María L. O.. Stand Up and Fight: Participatory Indigenismo, Populism, and Mobilization in Mexico, 1970–1984. University of Arizona Press, 2016.

[229] Aguado López, et. al., 113-4.

model that evinced an unwillingness in many cases to invest permanent materials on a structure that might be destroyed or repossessed by police suddenly. This was the *obra negra* as an accessory to land invasion, and thus as a tool of it, as well as a condition to be endured by invaders --i.e., the condition of unfinished infrastructure, limited water and electrical access, etc. By the post-subprime, however, as Chapter Three unpacks, the *obra negra* is being implicitly embraced as a 'new model' by a major Mexican builder (Ruba), and explicitly embraced as a structure of feeling which, on balance/prototypically, heaps frustrated criticism on those who govern public housing and are thus now responsible for 'keeping it' unfinished. This inversion of the *obra negra* from a site of underclass (*campesino* and indigenous) labor, as it was for most of the twentieth century, to today serving as a material/affective figure of state abandonment and the absence of a clear national future (with those earlier ethnic and class politics fragmented though by no means totally forgotten) is precisely the kind of history that might allow settler colonial and Latin American histories of the neoliberal era to open a richer conversation than has to this point proved possible.

Bibliography

Aalbers, Manuel B. *The financialization of housing: A political economy approach*. Routledge, 2016.

Abrams, Charles. Man's Struggle for Shelter in an Urbanizing World. M.I.T. Press, 1964.

Aguado López, Eduardo, José Luis Torres Franco, and Gabriela Scherer Ibarra. "La lucha por la tierra en México, 1976-1982." (1983).

Appadurai, Arjun, ed. *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Aranguren, Fernando. Pensamiento empresarial mexicano. México: Avance Editorial, 1974.

Aristegui, Carmen. "'Que Bueno Que Se Abrió La Polémica': Ramírez Cuéllar Sobre Su Iniciativa." *Aristegui Noticias*, 19 May 2020, aristeguinoticias.com/undefined/kiosko/que-bueno-que-se-abrio-la-polemica-ramirez-cuellar-sobre-su-iniciativa-video/.

Arriola, Carlos. "Los grupos empresariales frente al Estado (1973-1975)." *Foro internacional* 16.4 (64 (1976): 449-495.

Arizpe, S. *Migración, etnicismo y cambio económico un estudio sobre los migrantes campesinos a la ciudad de México*. No. 304.87253 A7. El Colegio de México, 1978.

Asad, Talal. "Reflections on violence, law, and humanitarianism." *Critical Inquiry* 41.2 (2015): 390-427.

Astillero, Julio. "Medir y Gravar La Riqueza Extrema Puede Ayudar a La Paz Social En México." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 26 May 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/es/post-opinion/2020/05/25/medir-y-gravar-la-riqueza-extrema-puede-ayudar-la-paz-social-en-mexico/.

 Azuela, Antonio. "Property in the Post-post-revolution: Notes on the Crisis of the Constitutional Idea of Property in Contemporary Mexico." *Tex. L. Rev.* 89 (2010): 1915.

Babb, Sarah. *Managing Mexico: Economists from nationalism to neoliberalism*. Princeton University Press, 2004.

Barandiarán, Javiera. Science and environment in Chile: The politics of expert advice in a neoliberal democracy. MIT Press, 2018.

Beigel, Fernanda. "La Flacso chilena y la regionalización de las ciencias sociales en América Latina (1957-1973)." *Revista mexicana de sociología* 71.2 (2009): 319-349.

____, ed. 2016. *The politics of academic autonomy in Latin America*. Routledge, 2016.

Benton, Lauren. *A search for sovereignty: law and geography in European empires, 1400–1900*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Berman Arévalo, Eloisa. "El "fracaso ruinoso" de la reforma agraria en clave de negridad: comunidades afrocampesinas y reconocimiento liberal en Montes de María, Colombia." *Memorias: Revista Digital de Historia y Arqueología desde el Caribe* 37 (2019): 117-149.

Best, Jacqueline, et al. "Seeing and not-seeing like a political economist: The historicity of contemporary political economy and its blind spots." *New political economy* (2020): 1-12.

Bohr, Kenneth. (May 14, 1971), "A Proposed Bank Approach," memorandum.

Boianovsky, Mauro. "Celso Furtado and the structuralist-monetarist debate on economic stabilization in Latin America." *history of political economy* 44.2 (2012): 277-330.

Bonilla, Yarimar. "Unsettling sovereignty." *Cultural Anthropology* 32.3 (2017): 330-339.

Bortoluci, José Henrique. "Architectures of democracy: housing movements and progressive architects in São Paulo (1970-1990)." *Revista Estudos Históricos* 31.65 (2018): 369-388.

Bortoluci, José H. "Brutalism and the People: Architectural Articulations of National Developmentalism in Mid-Twentieth-Century São Paulo." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 62.2 (2020): 296-326.

Bowker, Geoffrey C., and Susan Leigh Star. *Sorting things out: Classification and its consequences*. MIT press, 2000, 73-74.

Brady, Mary Pat. *Extinct lands, temporal geographies: Chicana literature and the urgency of space*. Duke University Press, 2002. 65-70.

Brown, Wendy. *Walled states, waning sovereignty*. Princeton University Press, 2010.

Buizer, Marleen, Bas Arts, and Kasper Kok. "Governance, scale and the environment: the importance of recognizing knowledge claims in transdisciplinary arenas." *Ecology and society* 16.1 (2011).

Burke, Roland. "Competing for the last utopia?: The NIEO, human rights, and the World Conference for the International Women's Year, Mexico City, June 1975." *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 6.1 (2015): 47-61.

Byrne, Michael. "Bad banks: the urban implications of asset management companies," *Urban Research & Practice* 8.2 (2015): 255-266.

Calandra, Benedetta. "La Ford Foundation y la Guerra Fría Cultural" en América Latina:(1959-1973)." *Americanía: Revista de Estudios Latinoamericanos* 1 (2011): 8-25.

Calle, Johanna. *Johanna Calle: Variaciones Políticas Del Trazo*, TEOR/ÉTica, 2008.

Cardona Gutiérrez, Ramiro. Urbanización y marginalidad. Colombia: Asociación Colombiana de Facultades de Medicina, División de Estudios de Población, Estudios Socio-Demográficos, 1969.

Carse, Ashley, and David Kneas. "Unbuilt and unfinished: The temporalities of infrastructure." *Environment and Society* 10.1 (2019): 9-28.

Carter, Daniel. "Violence, Ideology and Counterrevolution: Landowners and Agrarian Reform in Cautín Province, Chile, 1967–73." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 51.1 (2019): 109-135.

Casas-Cortés, María Isabel, Michal Osterweil, and Dana E. Powell. "Blurring boundaries: Recognizing knowledge-practices in the study of social movements." *Anthropological Quarterly* (2008): 17-58.

Castellanos, M. Bianet. Indigenous Dispossession: Housing and Maya Indebtedness in Mexico. Stanford University Press, 2020; Castellanos, M. Bianet. "Introduction: settler colonialism in Latin America." *American Quarterly* 69.4 (2017): 777-781.

Castro, Rosa., Urquidi, Víctor L.. La Explosión humana. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1974.

Castells, Manuel. "Apuntes para un análisis de clase de la política urbana del Estado mexicano." *Revista mexicana de sociologia* (1977): 1161-1191.

Castillo, Fernanda, and Miguel Ángel León Carmona. "Simulación y Obra Negra En Contratos Que Dio Yunes a Líder Del PAN: ORFIS: e-Consulta.com Veracruz2021." *E-Consulta.com Veracruz*, 2 Oct. 2018, www.e-veracruz.mx/nota/2018-10-01/estado/simulacion-y-obra-negra-en-contratos-que-dio-yunes-lider-del-pan-auditoria.

Centre for Human Settlements. "Mexico - Shelter." *Centre for Human Settlements Fonds*, 1976,

www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9UaNpLV1oc. Digital and analog versions of this video are located at the University of British Columbia Archives in Vancouver, Canada (Centre for Human Settlements Fonds, video code: MEX-128-SA-3, housed: Box 14).

"Comerciales Mexicanos: CONAPO 1995-1996 III." *YouTube*, Conapo (Consejo Nacional De Población), 29 Aug. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfG7uc8fbwc.

Collings-Wells, Sam. "Developing communities: the Ford Foundation and the global urban crisis, 1958–66." *Journal of Global History* (2020): 1-19.

Coole, Diana, and Samantha Frost. "Introducing the new materialisms." *New materialisms*. Duke University Press, 2010. 1-44.

Copeland, Nicholas. "Greening the Counterinsurgency: The Deceptive Effects of Guatemala's Rural Development Plan of 1970." *Development and Change* 43.4 (2012): 975-998.

Cornelius, Wayne A. Urbanization as an agent in Latin American political instability: the case of Mexico. *The American Political Science Review*, 1969, vol. 63, no 3, p. 833-857.

___1974. "Urbanization and political demand making: Political participation among the migrant poor in Latin American cities." *The American Political Science Review* 68.3 (1974): 1125-1146.

Coronil, Fernando. "Beyond occidentalism: toward nonimperial geohistorical categories." *Cultural anthropology* 11.1 (1996): 51-87.

Cortés, Alexis. "The Theoretical Construction of Pobladores and Favelados as Social Movements in Latin America." *Latin American Research Review* 56.1 (2021).

Cupers, Kenny. "Human territoriality and the downfall of public housing." *Public Culture* 29.1 (81) (2017): 165-190.

Dargent, Eduardo. *Technocracy and democracy in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Dávila, Arlene. *El mall: The spatial and class politics of shopping malls in Latin America*. Univ of California Press, 2016.

De Grammont, Hubert C., and Julio Moguel. "La Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México." *Historia de la cuestión agraria mexicana: Política estatal y conflictos agrarios, 1950-1970* 8 (1988): 222.

Delgado, Jaime. "Red De Peralta Protegida Por Jaime Bonilla, Fueron Cesados Por SAT y Salvados Por El Gobernador De BC." *Periodismo Negro*, 24 Jan. 2021. www.periodismonegro.mx/2021/01/23/red-de-peralta-protegida-por-jaime-bonilla-fueron-cesados-por-sat-y-salvados-por-el-gobernador-de-bc/.

Deutschmann, Christoph. "Disembedded markets as a mirror of society: Blind spots of social theory." *European Journal of Social Theory* 18.4 (2015): 368-389.

Dijstelbloem, Huub. "Bordering a Hybrid World: Infrastructural Isolation and the Governance of Human and Nonhuman Mobility." *Global Perspectives* 1.1 (2020).

Dip, Nicolás. La nueva izquierda en la historia reciente de América Latina. Un diálogo entre Eric Zolov, Rafael Rojas, Elisa Servín, María Cristina Tortti y Aldo Marchesi. *Escripta*, 2020, vol. 2, no 4.

Duque Juarez, Oliverio. "ECHEVERRIA URGES DIALOGUE ON AGRARIAN AFFAIRS." *El Sol De Mexico*, 2 May 1976, M3.

Echeverria, Luis. "Address by Luis Echeverria Alvarez, President of Mexico, at the U.N. Conference on Human Settlements." *Habitat International*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1976, pp. 111–118.

Economista. "Cemex Ve Su Crecimiento En EU Con El Muro De Trump." *El Economista*, El Economista, 4 Oct. 2017, www.eleconomista.com.mx/internacionales/Cemex-ve-su-crecimiento-en-EU-con-el-muro-de-Trump-20170316-0021.html.

Egan, Nancy Elizabeth. *Infrastructure, State Formation, and Social Change in Bolivia at the Start of the Twentieth Century*. eScholarship, University of California, 2019.

Expansión (2016). "Resurge La Vivienda En México." *CNN Expansión*, 2 Feb. 2016, expansion.mx/economia/2016/02/02/el-resurgimiento-de-la-industria-de-la-vivienda-en-mexico.

___2021. "El Exlíder De Morena Insiste En Que México Adopte Un 'Impuesto a La Riqueza.'" *Expansión Política*, 23 Feb. 2021, politica.expansion.mx/congreso/2021/02/23/el-exlider-de-morena-insiste-en-que-mexico-adopte-un-impuesto-a-la-riqueza.

Fanon, Frantz. The wretched of the earth. Portugal: Grove Press, 1963.

Fehérváry, Krisztina. *Politics in color and concrete: socialist materialities and the middle class in Hungary*. Indiana University Press, 2013.

Felix, David. "Monetarists. Structuralists and Import-Substituting Industrialization:" in W. Baer

and I. Kerstenetzky (eds.), Inflation and Growth in Latin America (Homewood, Illinois: Irwin, 1964).

Fennell, Catherine. "The museum of resilience: raising a sympathetic public in postwelfare Chicago." *Cultural Anthropology* 27.4 (2012): 641-666.

___2015. Last Project Standing: Civics and Sympathy in Post-Welfare Chicago. University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Fischer, Brodwyn. "The Red Menace Reconsidered: A Forgotten History of Communist Mobilization in Rio de Janeiro's Favelas, 1945-1964." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 94.1 (2014): 1-33.

Fischer, Carl. "José Donoso and the Monstrous Masculinities of Chile's Agrarian Reform." *Hispanic review* (2015): 253-273; Foss, Sarah. "Land and Labor Relations in Guatemala's 1952 Agrarian Reform: Rethinking Rural Identities." *Historia Agraria de América Latina* 1.01 (2020): 1-21.

Flechsig, Katrin. *Miniature crafts and their makers: Palm weaving in a Mexican town*. University of Arizona Press, 2004.

Flores, Alejandro Dávila. "El circuito del dolar en Mexico (1970-1982)." Investigación Económica 44.172 (1985): 159-211.

Fox, Cybelle. ""The Line Must Be Drawn Somewhere": The Rise of Legal Status Restrictions in State Welfare Policy in the 1970s." *Studies in American Political Development* 33.2 (2019): 275-304.

Fuchs, Steffen. "Reinventing Construction: A Route to Higher Productivity." *Reinventing Construction | Modular Building Institute*, Feb. 2018, www.modular.org/HtmlPage.aspx?name=MA-feature-higher-prod.

Furtado, Celsio. 1954. A economia brasileira. Rio: A Noite. 254-255.

Gamio, Manuel. Forjando Patria, Ed. Porrua, 2a. Edición, Mexico, 1960.

Garza, Gustavo. Una Década de planeación urbano-regional en México, 1978-1988. México: Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Demográficos y de Desarrollo Urbano, 1989.

___1989(b). "INTRODUCCIÓN.: IMAGEN GLOBAL DE LA PLANEACIÓN TERRITORIAL EN MÉXICO." In *Una Década De Planeación Urbano-regional En México, 1978-1988*, edited

by Garza Gustavo, 9-24. México, D.F.: El Colegio De Mexico, 1989.

Gerfen, Katie. "Apan Housing Laboratory, by MOS." *Architect*, 4 Sept. 2019, www.architectmagazine.com/design/apan-housing-laboratory-by-mos_o.

Gershon, Ilana. "Neoliberal Agency." *Current Anthropology* 52.4 (2011): 537-555.

Gilens, Martin. *Why Americans hate welfare: Race, media, and the politics of antipoverty policy*. University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Girón, Alicia. "La devaluación en México. Luis Pazos." *Problemas del Desarrollo. Revista Latinoamericana de Economía* 8.29.

Gitlitz, John S., and Henry A. Landsberger. "The Inter-American Political Economy: How Dependable Is Dependency Theory?." *Latin America, the United States, and the Inter-American System*. Routledge, 2019. 45-70.

Golash-Boza, Tanya, and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. "Latino immigrant men and the deportation crisis: A gendered racial removal program." *Latino Studies* 11.3 (2013): 271-292.

Gomes, Gabriela. "La política habitacional y el saber de los expertos en el nuevo orden arquitectónico de la Argentina "moderna" (1966-1973)." *Dossier "Erradicación de Villas, Resistencia Popular y Regímenes Autoritarios en América Latina"* 5.10 (2018): 16.

Gomes, Joao F., "Summary: The Decline of U.S. Corporate Investment" (2019).Wharton PPI B-School for Public Policy Seminar Summaries. https://repository.upenn.edu/pennwhartonppi_bschool/

González Casanova, Pablo. La democracia en México. México: Ediciones ERA, 1965.
 Prendes, Amador. "Hablando De Deudas." *Novedades*. 31 Aug. 1985.

Gordillo, Gastón. Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction. Reino Unido: Duke University Press, 2014.

Grupo En Concreto. "Infonavit Buscará Habilitar Espacio Arquitectónico En Apan, Hidalgo." *Grupo En Concreto*, 3 July 2020, grupoenconcreto.com/infonavit-buscara-habilitar-espacio-arquitectonico-en-apan-hidalgo/

Guldi, Joanna. *Roads to power: Britain invents the infrastructure state*. Vol. 19. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.

Haas, Bridget M. "Citizens-in-waiting, deportees-in-waiting: Power, temporality, and suffering in the US asylum system." *Ethos* 45.1 (2017): 75-97.

Han, Clara. *Life in debt: Times of care and violence in neoliberal Chile*. Univ of California Press, 2012.

Hancock, Ange-Marie. *The politics of disgust: The public identity of the welfare queen*. NYU Press, 2004

Harvey, David. The Urbanization of Capital. United Kingdom: Blackwell, 1985.

Heilbron, Johan, Thibaud Boncourt, and Gustavo Sorá. "Introduction: The Social and Human Sciences in Global Power Relations." *The Social and Human Sciences in Global Power Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018.

Henson, Elizabeth. Agrarian Revolt in the Sierra of Chihuahua, 1959–1965. University of Arizona Press, 2019.

Heras, Antonio. "Gobierno De BC Denuncia a Grupo Aeroportuario." *La Jornada*, La Jornada, 20 June 2020, www.jornada.com.mx/2020/06/20/estados/027n4est.

Hetherington, Kregg. 2014. "Waiting for the Surveyor: Development Promises and the Temporality of Infrastructure." Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology 19, no. 2: 195 – 210.

Hidalgo, F. Daniel, et al. "Economic determinants of land invasions." *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 92.3 (2010): 505-523.

Hildyard, Nicholas. "Public-Private Partnerships, Financial Extraction and the Growing Wealth Gap: Exploring the connections." *Sturminster Newton: Cornerhouse* (2014).

Hirschman, Albert O. HG, and Albert O. Hirschman. "The rise and decline of development economics." *The Essential Hirschman*. Princeton University Press, 2013. 49-73.

Immerwahr, Daniel. *Thinking Small*. Harvard University Press, 2015.

INAH. Primer simposio sobre historia contemporánea de México 1940-1984: inventario sobre el pasado reciente. México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1986.

Jaguaribe, Helio. "La relación norte-sur." *Estudios Internacionales* (1988): 425-438.

Jensen, Nathan M., and Guillermo Rosas. "Foreign direct investment and income inequality in Mexico, 1990-2000." *International Organization* (2007): 467-487.

Jesús Morales, Juan. "Científicos sociales latinoamericanos en Estados Unidos: cooperación académica, movilidad internacional y trayectorias interamericanas alrededor de la Fundación Ford." *Dados* 60.2 (2017): 473-504.

Jiménez, Alfonso Serna. "El movimiento campesino en México: una identidad fragmentada." *ESTUDIOS AGRARIOS*: 40.

Kellogg. "Entrepreneur Sam Zell Addresses Kellogg Real Estate Club." *Entrepreneur Sam Zell Addresses Kellogg Real Estate Club - Kellogg School of Management*, 5 Jan. 2004, www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/news_articles/2004/zell_5_04.aspx

Knox, Hannah, Harvey, Penny. Roads: An Anthropology of Infrastructure and Expertise. Cornell University Press, 2015.

Knox, Hannah. "Affective infrastructures and the political imagination," *Public Culture* 29.2 (82) (2017): 363-384.

Korsbaek, Leif, and Miguel Ángel Sámano Rentería. "El indigenismo en México: antecedentes y actualidad." *Ra Ximhai: revista científica de sociedad, cultura y desarrollo sostenible* 3.1 (2007): 195-224.

Kutz, William, and Julia Lenhardt. "'Where to put the spare cash?' Subprime urbanization and the geographies of the financial crisis in the Global South," *Urban Geography* 37.6 (2016): 926-948.

Leigh Star, Susan. "This is not a boundary object: Reflections on the origin of a concept." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 35.5 (2010): 601-617.

Lenti, Joseph U. "Invasores: Squatters, Informal Cities, and the Co-Optation of the Urban Poor in Latter Twentieth-Century Mexico." *Journal of Global South Studies* 37.1 (2020): 57-81.

Lipscomb, Joseph, John Harvey, and Harold Hunt. "Exchange-rate risk mitigation with price-level-adjusting mortgages: the case of the Mexican UDI." *Journal of Real Estate Research* 25.1 (2003): 23-42.

Loaeza, Soledad. "La política del rumor: México, noviembre-diciembre de 1976." *Foro*

Internacional 17.4 (68 (1977): 557-586.

Lomnitz, Claudio. "Bordering on anthropology: dialectics of a national tradition in Mexico." *Empires, Nations, and Natives*. Duke University Press, 2005. 167-196.

___2010. "Chronotopes of a Dystopic Nation: Cultures of Dependency and Border Crossings in Late Porfirian Mexico." *Globalizing American Studies*. University of Chicago Press, 2010. 209-239.

___2012. "Time and dependency in Latin America today." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111.2 (2012): 347-357.

Longhurst, B. "Raymond Williams and local cultures." *Environment and Planning A* 23.2 (1991): 229-238.

 López Portillo y Pacheco, José. "Primer Informe De Gobierno Del Presidente Constitucional De Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos José López Portillo y Pacheco 1° De Septiembre De 1977." Annual Mexican Presidential Briefings. First Annual Presidential Briefing by José López Portillo y Pacheco, 1 Sept. 1977, Mexico City, *Website of the Mexican Congress (Cámara De Diputados Del Congreso De Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos)*, www.diputados.gob.mx/sedia/sia/re/RE-ISS-09-06-15.pdf.

López Rodríguez, Ana María. "'Machi' Lopez: Lucha Por Los Desposeídos." *Crónica*, 31 Mar. 2011. *Http://revistacronica10.Blogspot.com*, revistacronica10.blogspot.com/2011/03/edicion-106.html.

Lúa, Graciela Flores, Luisa Paré, and Sergio Sarmiento Silva. *Las voces del campo: movimiento campesino y política agraria, 1976-1984*. Siglo XXI, 1988.

Luce, Mathias Seibel. "Sub-imperalism, the highest stage of dependent capitalism." *Bond, Patrick; Garcia, Ana (Ed.). BRICS: an anti-capitalist critique. Joanesburgo: Jacana, 2015. p. 27-44* (2015).

Maia, João Marcelo Ehlert. "História da sociologia como campo de pesquisa e algumas tendências recentes do pensamento social brasileiro." *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 24.1 (2017): 111-128.

Madrid, Raul L. Overexposed: U.S. Banks Confront The Third World Debt Crisis. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2019.

Maffitt, Kenneth F. "Nueva política social, viejo contrato social: políticas de vivienda y protesta urbana en la periferia de la Ciudad de México, 1960s-1980s." *Historia (Santiago)* 47.1 (2014): 113-132.

Mañanero. "Pura Obra Negra El 50% De Los Hospitales De Peña Nieto." *El Mañanero Diario*, 29 May 2019, www.elmananerodiario.com/pura-obra-negra-50-los-hospitales-pena-nieto/.

Manson, Steven M. "Does scale exist? An epistemological scale continuum for complex human–environment systems." *Geoforum* 39.2 (2008): 776-788.

Martínez, José Manuel. "Homex 'Maquila' Viviendas." *Expansión*, 21 May 2016, expansion.mx/negocios/2008/05/30/homex-maquila-viviendas.

Masco, Joseph P. "The Nuclear Borderlands: The Legacy of the Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico." Order No. 9926561, University of California, San Diego, 1999.

Mashayekhi, Azadeh. "The 1968 Tehran master plan and the politics of planning development in Iran (1945–1979)." *Planning Perspectives* 34.5 (2019): 849-876.

Mayer, Enrique. *Ugly stories of the Peruvian agrarian reform*. Duke University Press, 2009.

Mazzarella, William. "Totalitarian Tears: Does the Crowd Really Mean It?." *Cultural Anthropology* 30.1 (2015): 91-112.

McNevin, Anne, and Antje Missbach. "Luxury limbo: Temporal techniques of border control and the humanitarianisation of waiting." *International Journal of Migration and Border Studies* 4.1-2 (2018): 12-34.

Meiners, Erica R. *Right to be hostile: Schools, prisons, and the making of public enemies*. Routledge, 2010.

Mercado, Mercado Moraga. Arturo Loppe López, gestor urbano. México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Xochimilco, División de Ciencias y Artes para el Diseño, 1989.

Middlebrook, Kenneth J. "Political Reform and Political Change in Mexico." *Latin America and Caribbean Contemporary Record* 1 (1983): 149-61.

Mitchell, Timothy. "Introduction: life of infrastructure." (2014): 437-439.

Molina, Daniel. La caravana del hambre. México: Ediciones El Caballito, 1978.

 Cf. Montes, J. Victor Arias. "ARQUITECTURA AUTOGOBIERNO 40 AÑOS." *Archipiélago. Revista Cultural de Nuestra América* 20.76 (2012): 58.

Morales Martín, Juan Jesús. "Dominación filantrópica y gobernabilidad democrática: el caso de la Fundación Ford y CIEPLAN en Chile (1976-1990)." *Historia (Santiago)* 51.1 (2018): 141-163.

Morton, Patricia A. "Territoriality and Surveillance: Defensible Space and Low-Rise Public Housing Design, 1966-1976." *Amerikastudien* 65 (2020): 171-91.

Muñoz, María L. O. Stand Up and Fight: Participatory Indigenismo, Populism, and Mobilization in Mexico, 1970–1984. University of Arizona Press, 2016.

 Navarrete, Fernando. "Invasores e Inseguridad Amenazan Vivienda Abandonada: Provive." *Centro Urbano* -, 9 Aug. 2018, centrourbano.com/2018/08/09/invasores-e-inseguridad-amenazan-vivienda-abandonada-provive/

Navarro, Juan José, and Fernando Quesada. "El impacto del proyecto Camelot en el período de consolidación de las Ciencias Sociales Latinoamericanas." *El desarrollo de las Ciencias Sociales. Tradiciones, actores e instituciones en Argentina, Chile, México y Centroamérica* (2010).

Newman, Oscar. *Defensible space*. New York: Macmillan, 1972.

Newsbank/Readex."ECHEVERRIA DELIVERS GOVERNMENT REPORT BEFORE DEPUTIES." *Newsbank/Readex*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports, 1 Sept. 1974, 12C5802992E3EC18.

Noticias De Yucatán. "Senador Exhibe Las Obras Negras," *Noticias De Yucatan*, July 2017, www.noticiasdeyucatan.news/2017/07/senador-exhibe-las-obras-negras-de.html.

Ngai, Mae M. *Impossible subjects: Illegal aliens and the making of modern America-updated edition*. Vol. 105. Princeton University Press, 2014.

Niedergang, Marcel. "Une Interview Du Président Echeverria Alvarez Au Moment Où S'achève La Visite De M. Allende LE PRÉSIDENT DU MEXIQUE DÉCLARE AU " MONDE ": " Nous Ne Pouvons plus Tolérer Que Des Sociétés Étrangères S'enrichissent Sur Notre Dos "." *Le Monde.fr*, Le Monde, 3 Dec. 1972, www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1972/12/04/une-interview-du-president-echeverria-alvarez-au-moment-ou-s-acheve-la-visite-de-m-allende-le-president-du-mexique-declare-au-monde-nous-ne-pouvons-plus-tolerer-que-des-societes-

et_3034512_1819218.html.

Orlova, Vasilina. "Malfunctioning Affective Infrastructures: How the "Broken" Road Becomes a Site of Belonging in Postindustrial Eastern Siberia." *Sibirica* 20.1 (2021): 28-57.

Orr, Gabby, et al. "From 'Wall' to 'Barrier': How Trump's Vision for the Border Keeps Changing." *POLITICO*, 8 Jan. 2019, www.politico.com/story/2019/01/08/trumps-vision-wall-concrete-steel-changes-1088714.

Park, Lisa Sun-Hee. *Entitled to nothing: The struggle for immigrant health care in the age of welfare reform*. NYU Press, 2011.

Patel, Kiran Klaus. The New Deal: A Global History. Princeton University Press, 2017.

Pazos, Luis. *Devaluación en México*. Bertelsmann de México, División Círculo de Lectores, 1987.

Peña, Hilario. Juan Tres Dieciséis. España: Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial México, 2014.

Peña, Leticia. "Modelo de intervención para la gobernabilidad y el desarrollo urbano participativo. El rescate de Riberas del Bravo, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México." *European Scientific Journal* 9.1 (2013).

Pereyra, Diego, et al. "Tradiciones, actores e instituciones en el desarrollo de las ciencias sociales en Argentina, Chile, México y América Central. Una mirada histórica y regional." *Serie Cuadernos de Ciencias Sociales, San José de Costa Rica, FLACSO* (2010).

Pérez, David Marcial, and Ulises Ruiz Basurto. "Krauze: 'La Democracia Mexicana Está En Obra Negra,'" *El País*, 28 Nov. 2016, elpais.com/internacional/2016/11/28/actualidad/1480309799_215698.html.

Pérez, Maya Lorena, Luisa Paré, and Maya Lorena Pérez. "Los límites del discurso intercultural: cuestionamientos desde el post-indigenismo y desde la sustentabilidad." *LS Mateos Cortés, Los estudios interculturales en Veracruz: perspectivas regionales en contextos globales* (2009): 167-190.

Pinker, Annabel, and Penny Harvey. "Negotiating uncertainty: Neo-liberal statecraft in contemporary Peru." *Social Analysis* 59.4 (2015): 15-31.

Puente, Javier. "De comunero a campesino: el «corto siglo veinte» en el campo peruano, 1920-1969." *Investigaciones Históricas* 40 (2020): 9.

Quijano, Aníbal. "Movimientos campesinos en América Latina." *Visión del Perú* 3 (1967).

Quiroga Manrique, Catalina, and Diana Vallejo Bernal. "Territories of Water: Agricultural Infrastructure, Agrarian Reform, and Palm Oil in The Marialabaja Municipality, Bolívar." *Revista Colombiana de Antropología* 55.1 (2019): 59-89.

Ramos Mendez, Aurelio. "País En Obra Negra." *https://www.cronica.com.mx/*, La Crónica De Hoy, 8 Feb. 2020, www.cronica.com.mx/notas-pais_en_obra_negra-1145259-2020.
Reyes, Alvaro, and Mara Kaufman. "Sovereignty, indigeneity, territory: Zapatista autonomy and the new practices of decolonization." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110, no. 2 (2011): 505-525.

Reuters. "Mexicana Cemex Dispuesta a Proveer Cemento a Constructoras Para Muro Fronterizo De Trump: Diario." *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 1 Mar. 2017, www.reuters.com/article/construccion-mexico-cemex-idLTAKBN1684NI.

Rivera, Alicia Ortiz. "El Consejo Mexicano de Hombres de Negocios: órgano de acción política de la elite empresarial (The Mexican Council of Business Men: A Political Action Organism of the Entrepreneurial Elite)." *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* (2002): 101-139.

de la Rocha, M. G., Perlman, J., Safa, H., Jelin, E., Roberts, B. R., & Ward, P. M. (2004). From the marginality of the 1960s to the" New Poverty" of Today: A LARR Research Forum. *Latin American Research Review*, 183-203.

Robles-Ortiz, Claudio. "Revolution from below in Panguipulli: Agrarian reform and political conflict under the Popular Unity in Chile." *Journal of Agrarian Change* 18.3 (2018): 606-631.

Rodríguez, Alfredo, Gustavo Riofrío, and Eileen Welsh. "De invasores a invadidos." *Revista EURE-Revista de Estudios Urbano Regionales* 2.4 (1972).

Rodriguez, Fidel. "El Barzón Lyrics Translated in English and the Mexican Hacienda System." *Huarachesol*, 3 June 2019, www.huarachesol.com/el-Barzón-lyrics-translated-in-english-and-the-mexican-hacienda-system.

Rodríguez Escobedo, Francisco José, et al. "Organización, asociación campesina independiente y autonomía. Los casos de la Coalición de Obreros, Campesinos y Estudiantes del Istmo y Antorcha campesina." *Comunicaciones en Socioeconomía. Estadística e Informática* 6.2 (2002): 1-49.

Rosas, Gilberto. *Barrio libre: criminalizing states and delinquent refusals of the new frontier*. Duke University Press, 2012.

Rosemblatt, Karin Alejandra. The Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States, 1910–1950. University of North Carolina Press, 2018.

Rosset, Peter. "Re-thinking agrarian reform, land and territory in La Via Campesina." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 40.4 (2013): 721-775.

Rowse, Tim. "Indigenous heterogeneity." *Australian Historical Studies* 45.3 (2014): 297-310.

Roy, Ananya. "What is urban about critical urban theory?." *Urban Geography* 37.6 (2016): 810-823.

"RUIS," in *Política*. April, 1, 1961. p 23.

_____ in *Política*. May 15, 1961. p. 9.

Ruiz-Healy, Eduardo. "¿Comulga Ramírez Cuéllar Con Los Ideales De La Liga Comunista 23 De Septiembre?" *El Economista*, El Economista, 19 May 2020, www.eleconomista.com.mx/opinion/Comulga-Ramirez-Cuellar-con-los-ideales-de-la-Liga-Comunista-23-de-Septiembre-20200518-0165.html.

Saad-Filho, Alfredo. "The rise and decline of Latin American structuralism and dependency theory." *The origins of development economics: how schools of economic thought have addressed development* (2005): 128-45.

Sackley, Nicole. "Foundation in the Field: The Ford Foundation New Delhi Office and the Construction of Development Knowledge, 1951-1970." (2012).

Salas, José. "Localizan Hombre Sin Vida En Una Obra Negra." *El Sol De San Juan Del Río*, El Sol De San Juan Del Río, 22 Dec. 2019, www.elsoldesanjuandelrio.com.mx/policiaca/localizan-hombre-sin-vida-en-una-obra-negra-4617257.html.

Samperio, Ana Cristina. Se nos reventó El Barzón: radiografía del movimiento Barzónista. México: BPR Publishers, 1996.

 Scott, James C. *Seeing like a state*. Yale University Press, 2008.

Scott, Robert E.. Mexican Government in Transition. University of Illinois Press, 1964.

SEC. "SEC Charges Mexico-Based Homebuilder in $3.3 Billion Accounting Fraud." *SEC.GOV*, U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, 3 Mar. 2017, www.sec.gov/news/pressrelease/2017-60.html.

Senate of Mexico. "Comunicacion.senado.gob.mx/Index.php/Informacion/Grupos-Parlamentarios/23360-La-Reforma-Educativa-Pendiente-En-Obra-Negra-Romero-Hicks.html. "*Reforma Educativa, Pendiente 'En Obra Negra': Romero Hicks"*, Senate of Mexico, Office of Social Communication, 30 Sept. 2015, comunicacion.senado.gob.mx/index.php/informacion/grupos-parlamentarios/23360-la-reforma-educativa-pendiente-en-obra-negra-romero-hicks.html.

Sideback, Goran and Lars Sundbom. 1982. Local Politics and Social Planning: Some Cross Community Differences in Day Care Programs in Sweden. Swedish Institute for Social Research.

Silla Roja. "Duarte y Fidel Dejaron 200 Hospitales En Obra Negra En Veracruz," *La Silla Rota*, 18 Apr. 2019, lasillarota.com/estados/duarte-y-fidel-dejaron-200-hospitales-en-obra-negra-en-veracruz-veracruz-hospitales-sector-salud/280878.

Slobodian, Quinn. Perfect Capitalism, Imperfect Humans: Race, Migration, and the Limits of Ludwig von Mises's Globalism.Contemporary European History,Vol. 28-2:143-155.

Slobodian, Quinn. Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism. Harvard University Press, 2020.

Soldatic, Karen, and Barbara Pini. "The three Ds of welfare reform: Disability, disgust and deservingness." *Australian Journal of Human Rights* 15.1 (2009): 77-95.

Soliz, Carmen. ""Land to the Original Owners": Rethinking the Indigenous Politics of the Bolivian Agrarian Reform." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 97.2 (2017): 259-296.

Stallings, Barbara. "Latin American Debt: What Kind of Crisis?." *SAIS Review* 3.2 (1983): 27-39.

Taylor, Analisa. "The ends of indigenismo in Mexico." *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 14.1 (2005): 75-86.

Thompson, Edward P. "The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century." *Past & present* 50 (1971): 76-136.

Thornton, Christy. "A Mexican International Economic Order? Tracing the Hidden Roots of the

Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States." *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 9.3 (2018): 389-421.

Tinsman, Heidi. *Partners in conflict*. Duke University Press, 2002.

Tirado, Ricardo, and Matilde Luna. "El Consejo Coordinador Empresarial de México. De la unidad contra el reformismo a la unidad para el TLC (1975-1993)." *Revista mexicana de sociología* (1995): 27-59.

Tropp, Jacob. "Transnational development training and Native American 'laboratories' in the early Cold War." *Journal of Global History* 13.3 (2018): 469-490.

United States, US Senate. (1962). Report on International Housing Programs. Committee on Banking and Currency, Subcommittee on Housing, Washington, DC: USGPO.

Urquidi, Víctor L. "Sesión Inaugural de la Conferencia Regional Latinoamericana de Población." *Estudios Demográficos y Urbanos* 4, no. 03 (1970): 396-400.

Valderrábano, Azucena. Historias del poder: el caso de Baja California. Argentina: Grijalbo, 1990.

Van Waeyenberge, Elisa. "Crisis? What crisis? The World Bank and Housing Finance for the Poor." *SOAS Department of Economics Working Paper Series* 191 (2015).

Varley, Ann. "¿Clientelismo o tecnocracia? La lógica política de la regularización de la tierra urbana, 1970-1988." *Revista mexicana de sociología* (1994): 135-164.

Varner, Natasha. La Raza Cosmética: Beauty, Identity, and Settler Colonialism in Postrevolutionary Mexico. University of Arizona Press, 2020.

Vélez Ibáñez, Carlos G.. Lazos de confianza: los sistemas culturales y económicos de crédito en las poblaciones de los Estados Unidos y México. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993.

Wacquant, Loďc. "Crafting the neoliberal state Workfare, prisonfare and social insecurity." *Sociologie Românească* 8.03 (2010): 5-23.

Ward, Peter M.., Gilbert, Alan. Housing, the State and the Poor: Policy and Practice in Three Latin American Cities. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Webber, Jeffery R. "Evo Morales, transformismo, and the consolidation of agrarian capitalism in Bolivia." *Journal of Agrarian Change* 17.2 (2017): 330-347.

Williams, Raymond. Structures of feeling. In Marxism and Literature. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. 128-135.

Winter, Bryan. "Caravans of Friendship: History, Tourism and Politics Along The Mexico City-Laredo Highway, 1920s–1940s." *International Social Science Review* 95.2 (2019).

Wolfe, Patrick. *Traces of history: Elementary structures of race*. Verso Books, 2016.

Zeiderman, Austin. Endangered City: The Politics of Security and Risk in Bogotá. Duke University Press, 2016.