Questioning as We Walk:

Case Analysis of Community Organizing in Rio Grande Valley Colonias

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Urban and Regional Planning)
in the University of Michigan
2017

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To Alex

And my parents Daniel and Michele

For supporting me every step of the way.

And in memory of my grandfather William

Who was so excited to see a doctorate in the family.

Acknowledgements

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Abstract

Why are United States (U.S.)/Mexico colonias assumed to lack the capacity to organize? Are they, in fact, capable of community organizing? This dissertation sought to resolve a major discrepancy between evidence of colonia organizing on the ground and theories of community organizing that obscure colonia-based practices. Deriving from recent critiques of the field, the research uses a relational theory of organizing to reframe historic and contemporary colonia organizing practices. Using a qualitative case analysis of the Rio Grande Valley (Valley) of Texas, twenty-one colonia organizations and networks embedded within the case were comparatively examined. Data collection included twenty open-ended interviews with colonia organizers and observations of fifteen organizations between 2014 and 2016. This data was then analyzed through a relational framework that emphasized the position of Valley colonia organizing within the "third country" of the U.S./Mexico border, a region that remains distinct from the United States and Mexico.

Based on this analysis, the dissertation identifies four historic and four contemporary colonia organizing movements. The narratives of these eight movements subvert commonly held knowledge concerning colonia organizing by highlighting not only the existence of such organizing, but also its tenacity and breadth of scope. A common theme emerges regarding the role of self-help. However, this self-help implies a "do-it-yourself" attitude, not the government self-help housing programs that are frequently associated with colonia development. Contemporary colonia organizers are reappropriating the term "self-help" and, in a time of

government austerity, are creating several regional colonia movements with the goal of supporting low-income, grassroots colonia leadership. Key to this goal is the creation of community-based civics education driven at a regional scale by the colonia residents. Ultimately, the dissertation not only upends a common assumption regarding colonia capacity to organize, but also provides insights into community organizing theory and its grasp on the connections between social context and practice. At an even higher level, there is a need to reassess theoretical definitions of "territory" and "sovereignty" to match the practices of the ultra-poor.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Figure 1: Protesters at the 2015 César Chávez Day March in San Juan, Texas (Rivera, March 2015).

> *La justicia esta tan a nuestro lado que se nos vas a cumplir.*
> *[With justice being so firmly on our side, we are going to succeed.]*
> *~ César Chávez*

Over one thousand Rio Grande Valley (Valley) residents annually march down César

Chávez Boulevard every March 30th, now known as César Chávez Day. Waving red flags

adorned with the symbol of the United Farm Workers (UFW) and chanting "Sí, se puede,"[1] these

residents are organizing for both colonia and undocumented resident rights. The annual march is

the result of a collaboration between nearly a dozen local grassroots and nonprofit organizations,

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[1] "Sí, se puede" translates to "Yes, we can" and is the famous slogan of the United Farm Workers. Created by the famous Chicana organizer Dolores Huerta, the slogan is more generally associated with President Obama's now famous 2008 presidential campaign.

together actively representing an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 colonia residents (Proyecto Azteca 2, interview, 2015). These networks, while still relatively young, provide opportunities for colonia residents to improve their communities, both physically and relationally. Recent achievements include the successful Right to Light campaign in the colonias, improvements to the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) within the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District (PSJA ISD), and the successful lobbying for colonia-friendly sheriffs across Hidalgo County. However, academic scholarship has yet to thoroughly interrogate the historic and contemporary aspects of colonia organizing; instead, colonias are still depicted as apolitical and incapable of community organizing, despite historical and contemporary evidence to the contrary. This dissertation inserts itself between the grounded evidence from colonia organizers, on one hand, and organizing literatures, on the other, to ask why this discrepancy exists and persists.

Building upon the foundational work of Stall and Stoecker (1998) as a starting point, the dissertation's framework uses a blend of grounded insights and an updated notion of feminist organizing, pulling from third- and fourth-wave feminisms that emphasize relationality and intersectional *nepantla*. Relationality defines power not as a finite commodity that is taken, but as an element of all relationships. Thus, to think relationally means to consider the power relations between two actors (E. S. Anderson 1999; Young 1990). Power, then, is not taken, but is something that is given to another (Latour 1984). In this view, equality is a relationship built upon neutral power. Inequality is a relationship built upon abusive and oppressive power.

Nepantla is a concept used in Latinx[2] Studies to define the feeling of inbetween-ness or nowhere-ness that accompanies life between different "worlds." The term *nepantla* derives from the Nahuatl term for inbetween land or space [*tierra entre medio*] (Anzaldúa 2002, 1). In its contemporary uses, *nepantla* expands upon the feminist concept of intersectionality, which analyzes how oppression operates through overlapping identities (i.e. gender, race, class) (Crenshaw 1989). *Nepantla* refers to a sense of "liminality" within conflicting identities, or a state of intermediacy. What distinguishes the use of *nepantla*, here, are its territorial connotations and direct links to physical spaces. As opposed to traditional border studies, *nepantla* emphasizes territories that blend and transcend existing borders. This extends beyond an analysis of "transnational" space to emphasize locations, like the U.S./Mexico border, that span different contexts and become distinct territories. From this, the *nepantlera* is the social activist that operates within *nepantla* (Anzaldúa 2002; Koshy 2006). Both concepts frame the dissertation's analysis of colonia organizing at the U.S./Mexico border and present these activities within a new terrain of poor people's movements in the twenty-first century. In this dissertation, colonias are viewed as communities living with *nepantla*, an aspect of their context that has profound implications for their organizing.

The dissertation uses a qualitative case study of the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas to frame this analysis of colonia organizing. The research uses the Valley as the case and the U.S./Mexico border region as the case context, to formally account for the effects of regional culture. Valley-based colonia organizations and networks are treated as embedded units within the case of the Valley. From 2014 to 2016, I collected data from fifteen organizations – out of the

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[2] "Latinx" (pronounced "Lah-teen-ex") is used throughout the dissertation as a gender-neutral version of "Latino," "Latina," or "Latin@."

twenty-one identified in the Valley – through participant observation of their community meetings, participation in their protests, content analysis of relevant documents, and open-ended interviews with their organizers (Appendix A). This data was then qualitatively coded first for descriptive characteristics to highlight the basic cultural and organizational context in which Valley colonia organizations operate. After this, the data was re-analyzed more conceptually using a dramaturgical and feminist framework that untangled relational issues of power, identity, and space (which will be explained in greater detail later in this chapter).

To begin, however, I first ask: Who are we talking about? Who is being organized? And what constitutes colonia organizing? The term "colonia" is currently under scrutiny by government officials and academics, and is in danger of being either over-generalized or completely dissolved, as the influence of the U.S./Mexico border on these communities is being increasingly de-emphasized by scholars seeking to cast colonias as a distinctly U.S. issue. Moving from a definition of "colonia" that emphasizes both their material and relational deprivations, I then question existing colonia literature that diminishes the impacts of organizing in these communities.

Defining "Colonia"

In Spanish, the term "colonia" means "neighborhood" or "community." Given the location and context, however, the term receives different connotations. For instance, in many South American countries, "colonia" is synonymous with "municipality" and is, therefore, a census designation, though the use of "colonia" in these contexts has also changed over time (Hoey 2016). In most of Mexico, "colonia" refers to a specific type of neighborhood – one of

high socio-economic status (Davies and Holz 1992, 119). However in the United States, "colonia" takes the opposite connotation (Davies and Holz 1992).

Federally-Mandated Definition of "Colonia"

In the 1950s, several developers along the Texas-Mexico border exploited loopholes in their state's land use regulation through the illegal subdivision of unincorporated land, outside the auspices of incorporated municipalities. These plots of land appealed to those who could not afford housing in incorporated settlements, but had, largely, moved to the United States to work in agriculture as temporary laborers under the Bracero Program (which ran between 1942 and 1964) (L. Arizmendi, Arizmendi, and Donelson 2010, 88; Ward 1999, 19). These unincorporated communities came to be known as "colonias." Over time, the colonias slowly grew larger as more migrant workers sought affordable housing and land. Unfortunately, they were marked by poor housing, a lack of basic services, and unclear legal titles. In the 1980s, several local organizations began to advocate for state-led intervention in the colonias to provide residents with basic services, but misconceptions regarding the legitimacy of residents' citizenship largely prevented action (L. Arizmendi, Arizmendi, and Donelson 2010, 88–90). It was not until 1989 that Texas began recognizing the colonias, pressured by a *New York Times* article that publicized the plight of colonias residents and described their settlements as "one of the nation's most wrenching public health problems" (Applebome 1989; L. Arizmendi, Arizmendi, and Donelson 2010, 88).

Over the next five years, numerous actions were taken to slow the growth of colonia settlement in Texas. In 1990, the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act (Cranston-Gonzalez Act) constituted the first official recognition of these settlements, an action which allowed colonias to receive state and federal aid for the first time. As such, the act created

the first definition of "colonia" for official federal designation. Organizations like the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) still use variants of this definition for their colonia-based programs. Per the Cranston-Gonzalez Act, a community is considered a colonia (and therefore eligible for colonia-directed funding) if it meets the following five criteria:

1. "Is in the State of Arizona, California, New Mexico, or Texas";

2. "Is in the area of the United States within 150 miles of the border between the United States and Mexico, except that the term does not include any standard metropolitan statistical area that had a population exceeding 1,000,000";[3]

3. "Is designated by the State or county in which it is located as a colonia";

4. "Is determined to be a colonia on the basis of objective criteria, including lack of potable water supply, lack of adequate sewage systems, and lack of decent, safe, and sanitary housing; and"

5. "Was in existence and generally recognized as a colonia before the date of the enactment of the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act."

(*Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act* 1990)

Adding a sixth criterion, the 1995 Model Subdivision Act in Texas rendered it illegal to subdivide county lands without notifying the county, essentially making the development of new colonias illegal. Colonia-like settlements developed after 1995 are, instead, referred to as "model subdivisions" or MSDs, for short. While most colonias are tracked by the government, though with numerous problems (Rivera 2014), MSDs are not tracked by the government, making it

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[3] This mainly excludes San Diego County.

extremely difficult to track the extent and location of inadequate physical planning[4] and housing on the ground (Durst 2015).

Since the Cranston-Gonzalez Act and Model Subdivision Act, several other key pieces of colonia policy have passed, generally with the goal of stemming colonia growth and development. Around the time of the Cranston-Gonzalez Act, Texas began remedying loopholes that led to the illegal subdivision of properties, passing Senate Bill 2, which established strict regulations for rural subdivision and development for any border county seeking state funding (L. Arizmendi, Arizmendi, and Donelson 2010, 89; Henneberger, Carlisle, and Paup 2010, 106). Senate Bill 2 also established the Economically Distressed Area Program (EDAP) which, for counties following newly established subdivision laws for rural lands, provided funding for water and wastewater services (Texas SB 2, 1989). In 1995, the State of Texas passed Senate Bill 336, which provided significant protections for purchasers in Contract for Deed agreements (Texas SB 336, 1995). Under the bill, contracts were required to be written in English and Spanish and, after 48 monthly installments were paid by the purchaser, or 40-percent of the purchase price was paid, purchasers could not be forced to forfeit property for any reason (Ward 1999, 92–93).

While these laws, and other similar legislation, helped to stem the growth of new colonias, critics argue that they still fail to address the underlying problems that created colonias – inadequate access to affordable housing and inadequate political representation – and instead simply slowed the growth of existing colonias or masked problems by avoiding adequate tracking (L. Arizmendi, Arizmendi, and Donelson 2010; Davies and Holz 1992, 137–38;

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[4] "Physical planning" refers, here, to the planning and design of basic services and utilities. This term cogently expresses the territorial nature of colonia impoverishment and the physical inequalities colonia residents face.

Henneberger, Carlisle, and Paup 2010; Ward 1999). Some scholars have argued that these laws, in fact, perpetuated poverty in existing colonias through the "grandfathering" of plots, placing the onus on residents to provide services and build their structures to meet local codes (L. Arizmendi, Arizmendi, and Donelson 2010). Furthermore, the federal definition of "colonia" is currently under scrutiny and debate, particularly as Texas legislators are looking for ways to remove the designation of "colonia" from numerous communities (The Colonia Initiatives Program 2010). It is widely agreed that the 1990 definition, now over twenty-five years old, is outdated and does not represent the needs of these communities. However, as the next section will show, in some ways the older definition of "colonia" may be closer to representing the issues on-the-ground than some of the newly proposed definitions.

Towards a Contemporary Definition of "Colonia"

While most scholarship on colonias takes the federal definition at face value, several scholars question the label of "colonia" by emphasizing the relational injustices in the history of colonias that are masked by the current definition (Hanchett 2010; Larson 2002). Some interrogate the cultural implications of using a Spanish language term to identify these communities (Mukhija and Monkkonen 2007); others emphasize these communities' physical similarities to other unincorporated rural settlements in the United States (Durst 2015; Stuesse 2001; Ward 2004). Of these, the latter represents the hallmark call for a new definition or, in fact, the dissolution of the term. These researchers, located primarily in policy schools, focus extensively on housing policy and see great overlap between, as an example, Valley colonias and impoverished, peri-urban Dallas communities. In terms of housing policy, there are great similarities between colonias and other rural Texan communities; in fact, there is a phenomenon referred to as "colonia creep": colonia-like development outside of the policy-heavy 150-mile

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border region (Rios and Meyer 2009, 12). However, in terms of issues of relational justice and, more importantly, culture, race and ethnicity, colonias and colonia-like communities stand apart, subjected to vastly different policies.

Instead of a trend towards generalization, I suggest the opposite – a focus on the variation across colonias and colonia-like communities given their spatial organization and histories. While colonia-like conditions may be more widespread (Mukhija and Monkkonen 2007), I contend that rural, unincorporated, and impoverished communities directly adjacent to the U.S./Mexico border experience an additional set of issues that is not present further inland in the United States; as one example, the increase in numbers of unaccompanied minors coming into the Valley during 2014 had significant impacts across the region and spurred much organizing in the colonias. Rather than defining the colonias in terms of their material deprivation, which suggests a distributive injustice, newer definitions of "colonia" suggest a relational injustice that emphasizes, first, the history of marginalization they experience as the poorest border communities (Hanchett 2010; Larson 1995; Larson 2002; Mukhija and Monkkonen 2007). In this respect, colonias are understood as historically stigmatized and marginalized because of their socio-economic status, perceived illegal residency status, and proximity to the U.S./Mexico border (Stuesse and Ward 2001).

Colonias are, then, defined in this study as: highly impoverished communities along the U.S./Mexico border that have historically experienced both distributive and relational injustices based upon their socio-economic status, proximity to the U.S./Mexico border, and perceived illegality and informality.

Per this definition, some border communities that may not be traditionally included in colonia studies are included here. As such, this research treats colonia-like MSDs in the border

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region as colonias and treats many unrecognized settlements developed prior to 1995 as colonias as well. This allows the dissertation to remain consistent with the views and beliefs of residents and organizers. At one colonia-based grassroots organization, the operational definition of "colonia" was "any community in our area [Hidalgo County] in great need, regardless of their founding date" (LUPE 1, interview, 2015). Unfettered by outdated government definitions and policies, that organization's process of identifying colonias involved searching for those severely marginalized by the government, which meant working at the margins of the federal definition of "colonia" and serving primarily undocumented residents (LUPE 1, interview, 2015). A local Community Development Corporation (CDC) identified colonias as only slightly different than other low-income areas within border cities, stating that the intense poverty and isolated nature of colonias begets a different strategy:

> *...in the colonias, it's even more impactful, you know. So you just take what you do in Southmost [the most impoverished neighborhood in Brownsville, Texas], where they have curbs and gutters and water and streets, and then now take that and put it in a place where they don't have all those things, then you're ... amplifying what you do.*

As the CDC employee states, these distinctions between colonias and neighboring incorporated, impoverished border communities are razor-thin, but significant for those on the ground, both in the approach to colonias and for the results they see. He furthered explained that colonia residents were more distrustful of outside organizations due to their historic encounters with repressive groups, but his organization's attempts to connect with colonia residents have resulted in the greatest impacts their organization has seen, when compared to their work in non-colonia communities (CDCB 2, interview, 2015). Despite calls to generalize the colonia condition through comparisons to similarly impoverished communities across rural Texas and the Southeastern U.S., a critical distinguisher exists within the border region that is perceivable on the ground. As Larson states:

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The United States-Mexico border historically has been characterized by its isolation from the core of both nations. The United States side has viewed the border as a place of lawlessness, poverty, backwardness, and ethnic difference, physically and culturally distant from either the Midwestern 'heartlands' or the urban 'melting pots.' Mexicans, too, traditionally dismissed their northern borderlanders as pocho,[5] *tainted by their proximity to the United States. Margaret Montoya captures the view from both sides: 'Border towns everywhere are different, incorporating the characteristics of the nation-states they link together, but nowhere are they as distinct from their respective core zones as along the United States/Mexico border.' (Larson 2002, 137)*

Thus, colonias must contend with the compounding issues of material deprivation and ambiguous identities stemming from their border proximity. These mark colonias as ever so slightly different from other impoverished communities further inland within the United States. While this should not limit information-sharing between colonias and other colonia-like communities (as I explain at the end of Chapter Two), it involves a recognition that colonias, in their history and trajectories, remain culturally distinct from more inland communities.

What is Colonia *Organizing*?

Community organizing scholarship so often begins with an account of Saul Alinsky's work, but I would like to define organizing as Valley colonia organizers define it. From open-ended interviews with colonia organizers, two key aspects arose when defining "organizing." First, organizing is viewed as a grassroots activity that builds the capacity of colonia residents. An organizer from one colonia organizing group, ARISE, describes their definition as follows:

...gifts, talents, answers to our questions or answers to our needs, [are] already there in our community...There's no need for somebody else to come here and say, "Here, I brought the answers for you." ...there's leaders and there's a lot of potential, just a lot

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[5] As she continued to describe *pocho*: "*Pocho* is also used by Spanish speakers in the United States to describe a Mexican-American who is overly Americanized in speech and culture." (Larson 2002, 137)

[of] opportunity for the community to answer, for themselves, what they need to do for themselves. Which is another belief [of ours]: ARISE does not do for the people what the people can do for themselves.

Another, larger, colonia organizing group, LUPE, also defines organizing from this bottom-up perspective. LUPE describes their approach as "creating power and expanding your limits" (LUPE 1, interview, 2015). They envision organizing as a flywheel. The residents form the core of the flywheel and their concerns and ambitions are the spokes of the wheel. Organizers are the water or energy that is added to give the wheel its momentum (LUPE 2, interview, 2015). In both these instances, power, questions, and answers are understood to already exist within the community; what is needed is a facilitator to create movement. This is a relational argument. Colonia residents and organizers do not seek to usurp power from the government through organizing. Instead, they seek equal relationships built on mutual respect, but to do so entails empowering communities of currently disempowered colonia residents.

Second, the organizer is a "facilitator," a key component in Valley colonia organizing that was consistently present across numerous interviews (ARISE 1, interview, 2015; Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016; bcWORKSHOP 3-2, interview, 2016; bcWORKSHOP 4, interview, 2016; LUPE 2, interview, 2015). Organizers described "facilitation" in one of two ways: facilitation either involved drawing out questions resulting from the colonia residents' lived experiences, or it involved translating questions into political action. As an example, such questions from the recent past included, but were not limited to: Why is it so hard to vote? Why does my community flood all the time? Why is there no grocery store in my neighborhood? Why is it so difficult to reach my job in the city? Why are our children struggling in school? Why won't the local city listen to my concerns? Why does my neighbor outside the colonia have services that I

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lack? While organizers often described one process or the other, on the ground, I witnessed them doing both.

Colonia organizing, then, is the process of facilitating the connection between colonia residents' lived experiences and larger political advocacy. This process, as this dissertation argues, involves a certain amount of "technical" knowledge regarding civics and citizenship, knowledge that colonia residents, as recent immigrants or second-generation citizens, often lack.

Academic Accounts of Colonia Organizing

Colonia organizing remains little studied in academia. Over the past ten years, scholars have begun examining its historic roots, mainly studying the organizing of the United Farmworkers (UFW) in the 1960s (Bowman 2005). A long-term examination beginning with 1966's UFW melon strike and continuing through 2016's regional colonia networks has not been undertaken. In fact, recognition of any colonia organizing remains a struggle:

> *In Texas … one does not see anything like the same level of informal social organization, and social capital is often almost nonexistent. What this means is there is minimal horizontal social interaction among neighbors, and little or no organizational linkage into supralocal authorities and organizations. This is why I have characterized colonias as 'settlements' rather than 'communities.' (Ward, 2004, p. 261, emphasis original)*

I call this, and similar arguments, "incapability arguments." They are often premised upon the assumption that the low population density of colonias precludes the social capacity necessary for successful community organizing, inadvertently characterizing colonias as passive and immobile. However, this project and several others show that incapability arguments place emphasis on the wrong problem. Past colonia organizing scholarship shows a consistent theme: the ill-equipped colonia organizer. Rather than a lack of colonia organizing, instead many colonias suffer from a lack of sufficient civics knowledge needed to successfully organize

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community (Dolhinow 2003; Dolhinow 2005). In turn, where colonia organizers gain sufficient civics and technical knowledge, their organizing efforts are quite successful in impacting political change (L. G. Arizmendi and Ortiz 2004).

As an example, Dolhinow's research in geography (2003; 2005) is one of the most comprehensive on colonia organizing in the Paso del Norte region (spanning from El Paso, Texas to Las Cruces, New Mexico) and is the closest neighbor to this dissertation.[6] Contrary to this dissertation's findings, Dolhinow (2005, 570–74) concludes that colonia organizers lack sufficient understanding of political structures to enact change and that they are largely concerned with *chisme* (gossip). This focus on *chisme* evolves from insufficient knowledge regarding local politics and law; thus, Dolhinow concludes that these groups remain incapable of effecting change because they are unable to identify adequate solutions to the problems they face.

By contrast, my dissertation notes similar potential issues in Rio Grande Valley colonia organizing, but quickly notes that, unlike their counterparts in Paso del Norte, Valley organizers are cognizant of this issue and are actively addressing the problem. My pre-dissertation proposal research in the summer of 2014 exposed the presence of colonia organizing in the Valley, also noting a focus on civics education and a strong desire to communicate a history of organizing to

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[6] Her studies emphasize the disruptive nature of "NGOs," in an interesting choice of an international development term to describe domestic organizations that in the U.S. should be referred to as nonprofit organizations or NPOS. Nevertheless, Dolhinow's observations concerning the disruptive nature of these external NGOs mirrors responses from the Valley, as numerous organizers described multiple attempts from national foundations to co-opt grassroots initiatives (EVN 1, interview, 2015; Proyecto Azteca 2, interview, 2015). However, these organizers all continued on to describe positive associations they were cultivating with these same foundations. Furthermore, organizers often stated their desire to create self-sufficient and independent programs free from government funding (ARISE 1, interview, 2015; CDCB 2, interview, 2015; LUPE 2, interview, 2015).

younger colonia residents (**Figure** *2*). Originally, this project sought to study the impacts of government-funded self-help housing programs; however, colonia residents were more interested in discussing their broader organizing activities than in discussing housing funding. In 2014, colonia organizers were advocating for streetlights, proper drainage systems, protections from predatory lenders and lawyers, proper identification to promote voting, access to birth certificates, and President Obama's executive orders on immigration, to name a few. These initiatives did not focus on housing and offered a more encompassing understanding of César Chávez's notion of "self-help," or the recognition that residents could change their own situation and that community organizing is the momentum towards change (LUPE 2, interview, 2015). Given the presence of UFW's self-help in the colonias long before government intervention, before academics created the notion of "self-help" housing programs in the 1980s, and before the colonias were even called "colonias," it should be asked why colonia organizing is continually overlooked or discounted in the literature.

Figure 2: A mural at LUPE's San Juan Community Center depicts César Chávez, Dolores Huerta, the United Farm Workers emblem, and farmlands, to remind their constituents of their origins (Rivera, March 2015).

Thus, the dissertation seeks to examine the conflict between what is written and what is on the ground in border colonias. As such, it asks: *how has community organizing historically impacted colonias and what is currently guiding contemporary colonia organizing?* To answer this, the dissertation also asks: *how has colonia organizing traditionally looked? How does this mirror or differ from larger organizing trends in the United States and across Latin America? How is colonia organizing currently operating? How is it (not) serving the needs of colonia residents?*

These questions all aim for answers that connect colonia organizing practices on the ground to larger theories about community organizing. Similar issues are currently being debated on a larger scale in community organizing theory, as Randy Stoecker (2010) states:

> *... we no longer understand the relationship between community organizing and its societal context. One model tells us to use confrontation and conflict everywhere and always. Another tells us nowhere and never. One says to build organizations and then act. Another says act to build organizations. We have clearly lost our way, and we have lost our way because we have forsaken a theoretical perspective that can help us judge our practice. (Stoecker 2010, para. 19)*

Stoecker (2010) expresses disenchantment with organizing practices separated from theories of society and action. While I agree, most community organizers, not of a professional strand of Community Organizers, are unable to adhere strictly to organizing theories, and unable to stop and read about competing organizing theories or theories of society. Instead, here, community organizing is examined, not through the lens of an external theory of community and organization, but through the community's own understanding of their community and the practices needed to address their issues. In the next section, I briefly outline a framework for understanding community organizing that considers the relational (power-based) and *nepantla* (territorially-based) concerns embedded within community organizing practice.

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Brief Description of the Research Framework

The dissertation uses qualitative case analysis to understand how colonia organizing has historically impacted colonia development, as well as how this history informs contemporary organizing. As such, part of this research involves an historic overview of colonia organizing that is seldom told outside of the colonias. This is accomplished using the concept of insurgent historiography. In this section, I provide an overview of the form of qualitative case study used in the dissertation, the focus on open-ended interviews, and the framework used in data analysis.

Qualitative Case Analysis
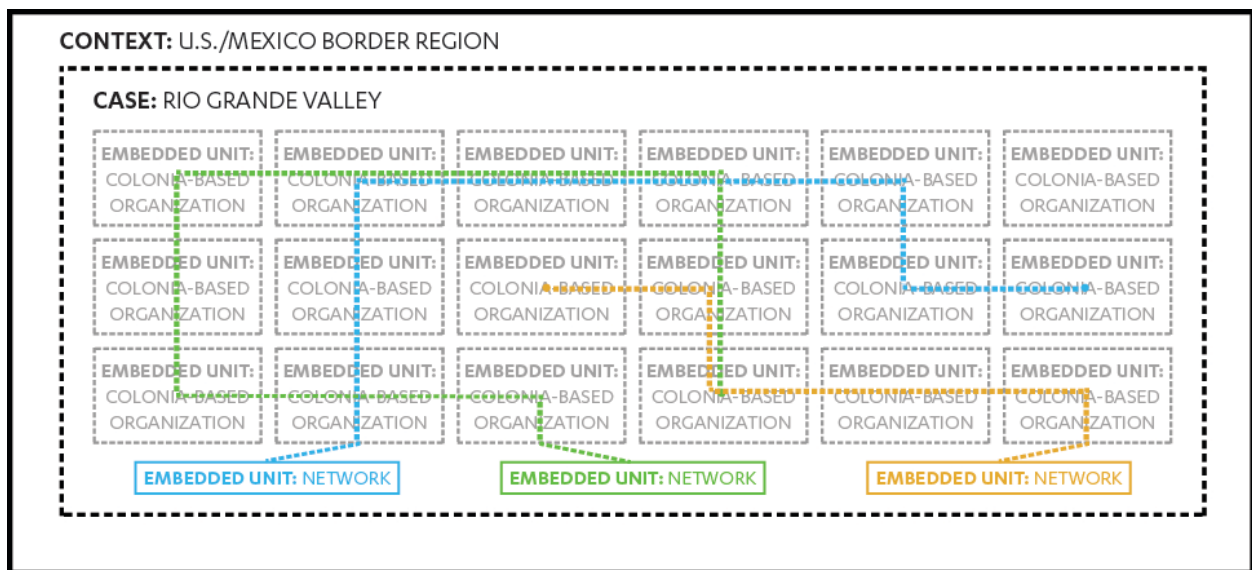
Figure 3: Diagram showing how the embedded, single-case framework functions. Within the context of the U.S./Mexico border region and the case of the Rio Grande Valley, multiple colonia organizations are analyzed. These "embedded units" must operate within the case and context analyzed in the dissertation. Examining these units within the larger case of the Valley allows several networks to emerge, linking together these organizations.

The dissertation uses an embedded, single-case framework (Yin 2009, 46), which involves the selection of multiple "embedded units" comparatively examined within one larger case (Figure 3). As such, the Rio Grande Valley forms the case itself. The U.S./Mexico border region forms the wider context of the study. The embedded units are the colonia organizations

operating within the Valley. In this framework, the connections linking together colonia

organizations and organizing networks became a critical second layer of analysis. Colonia

networks have not been examined in previous studies, so their inclusion in this case study was

critical.

Qualitative case studies are the most common method used in examining community

organization and nonprofit activities in colonias (L. Arizmendi, Arizmendi, and Donelson 2010;

Dolhinow 2003; Dolhinow 2005; Donelson 2004; Stuesse 2001). Deeply connected and rooted

within a single community, this method offers two advantages. First, it allows for the input of

various stakeholders *in situ* while providing a framework for combining these diverse views

through triangulation of data sources (Yin 2009, 17–20). This allows Valley colonia organizers

the opportunity to gain a holistic view of their activities, something that organizers rarely have

the resources and time to thoroughly do. Second, it permits a comparative approach. While some

case study scholars do not advise multiple-case studies, as they are viewed as lacking the depth

of single-case studies (Stake 2006), one of the goals of this research is, ultimately, the extension

of community organizing theory. In this respect, comparative examinations of multiple

organizations are believed to support a wider range of theoretical insights (Eisenhardt 1989).

From these considerations, a model of comparative study within a single case was

developed, built upon Yin's concept of the embedded, single-case framework (2009, 46). Using

the case of the Rio Grande Valley, the "embedded units" are the colonia organizations operating

within the space of the Valley. Analysis occurs at the level of the case, and thus, three cross-

organization networks were identified within the Valley. This model of case study departs from

earlier scholarship on colonia organizing, which tends to focus on one organization (a single

case) and assumes organizational isolation (Dolhinow 2003; Dolhinow 2005; Stuesse 2001);

however, in two notable circumstances, colonia organizing has been examined, not just from a truly feminist standpoint, but by highlighting the collaborative nature and histories of colonia organizing (L. G. Arizmendi and Ortiz 2004; Donelson 2004). These two studies employed a similar embedded approach as my dissertation and resulted, as well, in compelling arguments regarding the history of colonia organizing and collaboration. Appendix A further explains the criteria for inclusion in the study for embedded units, and lists all interviews and participant observations undertaken for the dissertation research.

Insurgent Historiography

> *If we redefine 'planning' to include the community-building tradition—what we might call planning from below—then we create the possibility of a far more inclusive set of narratives, embracing not only the African American community but also the Latino and Asian American communities who have all, in response to their exclusion from mainstream planning, developed counterplanning traditions of self-help, community solidarity, and community organizing for social and economic development. (Sandercock 1998, 9–10)*

Sandercock describes insurgent historiography as "the struggle of memory against forgetting." Insurgent historiography was developed in the 1990s by planning theorists interested in gathering the experiences of communities of color. As Sandercock (1998) states above, many of these communities experience planning through highly informal means that traditional theories of planning have not adequately represented or captured. Thomas (2004) advocates the use of open-ended interviews to create oral histories of highly distressed communities. While planners rarely have the resources to conduct true oral histories, the premise of insurgent historiography is to break with the currently popular semi-structured interview approach and opt, instead, for open-ended interviews. While semi-structured interviews remain the most popular form of interviewing in urban planning, this dissertation used open-ended interviewing. These

longer interviews (typically two hours in length or more) involved a free-flowing discussion of

colonia and organizing issues. While I arrived at every interview with a set of questions, they

served mainly to keep the conversation going if a lull happened to develop. The open-ended

interview serves as a base for the practice of insurgent historiography, or the process of retelling

history from the perspective of marginalized communities to counter dominant histories

(discussed in greater depth at the end of Chapter 2). In this dissertation, insurgent historiography

serves to subvert dominant narratives regarding lack of social capacity in border colonias. In

listening to organizers' stories, a vastly different narrative of colonia organizing emerges from

that commonly referenced in colonia scholarship. This shift allows interviewees to openly share

their experiences and feelings without the researcher's agenda influencing the discussion as

extensively as it does in semi-structured interviews (K. Anderson and Jack 1991). Hooks

cogently describes the concept as follows (as quoted in (Sandercock 1998, 1)):

> *"Subversive historiography connects oppositional practices from the past and forms of resistance in the present, thus creating spaces of possibility where the future can be imagined differently—imagined in such a way that we can witness ourselves dreaming, moving forward and beyond the limits of confines of fixed places." (bell hooks)*

Thus, insurgent historiography allows marginalized undercurrents to surface, and

provides an appropriate framework for understanding nascent community organization practices.

This is not a reconstruction of colonia history based upon news articles as these are, often,

distanced from the residents themselves (particularly in the colonias).[7] This involves countering

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[7] Archival work undertaken for this dissertation involved letters, pamphlets, and interviews with colonia organizers themselves, avoiding second-hand or external accounts of events. Even in 2015, I noted newspaper accounts of the colonias that were blatantly incorrect and served to foster fear about these communities. Newspaper accounts that are used were extensively evaluated for their accuracy or were written by an organizer.

a dominant theory – in this case dominant theories of community organizing and of colonia history – so that endangered narratives become empowered and can surface.

These endangered narratives include knowledge from a generation of colonia organizers that began their work before the notion of "colonias" even existed (as evidenced in ARISE 1, interview, 2015; Proyecto Azteca 1-1, interview, 2014; Proyecto Azteca 1-2, interview, 2015; LUPE 2, interview, 2015). These organizers are beginning to consider retirement, but their stories and histories have not been captured by existing colonia or organizing research. As such, throughout the dissertation, while organizer names are omitted to protect their identities, the research distinguishes between "senior organizers" and "organizers." Senior organizers are those who have organized in Valley colonias for more than ten to fifteen years and, thus, hold valuable knowledge of the histories of colonia organizing. Many senior organizers had such a long-term view of organizing; they could recount standing beside César Chávez in early migrant farmworker protests. These narratives should be preserved as they represent critical knowledge of counterplanning practices. This research marks the first attempt to capture this knowledge; future work is needed to maintain its complete history.

Analysis Framework

From these open-ended interviews, analysis occurred in two phases (**Figure *4***). In the first phase, with half of the interviews completed, transcripts and field notes were freely coded in ATLAS.ti to search for descriptive patterns of information regarding organizing programs/activities and spatial characteristics of the Valley and colonias. From this descriptive analysis, the database of Valley colonia organizations was expanded to include newer and lesser known groups. After the interviews were completed, a second coding pass introduced dramaturgical analysis and relational/intersectional analysis. Dramaturgy applies the metaphor of

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"performance" or "drama" to social actions to analyze the contradictions and conflicts of human

interaction *in situ* (Saldaña 2009, 102–4). Participants are "actors" who have "front stage"

personas used in public situations, but they also have "back stage" personas that reflect their

actual beliefs. The existence of varying personas within one actor is not considered inconsistent

or misleading, but instead a natural part of human interactions. In sociology, the concept of

dramaturgy was developed by Irving Goffman (1990) to examine the context, not the causes, of

human behavior. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014, 76–77) state that "dramaturgical coding

is appropriate for exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions in

case studies, power relationships, and the processes of human motives and agency." Saldaña

describes six overarching codes that guide qualitative dramaturgical analysis (2009, 102–3):

1. *Participant-actor <u>objectives</u> – motives in the form of action verbs: OBJ*

2. *<u>Conflicts</u> or obstacles confronted by the participant-actor which prevent her from achieving her objectives: CON*

3. *Participant-actor <u>tactics</u> or strategies to deal with conflicts or obstacles and to achieve her objectives: TAC*

4. *Participant-actor <u>attitudes</u> toward the setting, others, and the conflict: ATT*

5. *<u>Emotions</u> experienced by the participant-actor: EMO*

6. *<u>Subtexts</u>, the participant-actor's unspoken thoughts or impression management, in the form of gerunds: SUB*

Dramaturgy was deemed most appropriate for the dissertation given its focus on

explaining context and its emphasis on the tenuousness of identities. These aspects of

dramaturgy greatly complement the second layer of analysis in the dissertation, which uses the

concepts of relational power and intersectionality to define territories of organizing.

As a second-level of analysis, feminist concepts are overlaid upon the dramaturgical

analysis. Feminism, here, is understood in terms of third- and fourth-wave feminism, but mainly

the latter, emphasizing the two concepts of relationality (Butler 2004; Miraftab 2009; Roy 2015; Sandercock 1998; Young 1990) and intersectionality (Anzaldúa 2002; Crenshaw 1989; Keating 2006). Third-wave feminism emphasizes the concept of intersectionality, which examines not just gender and sexuality, but how it compounds with other aspects of individuals, such as race and ethnicity and economic status (Crenshaw 1989). For the purposes of this research, I also contend that legal status forms a fundamental aspect of an individual's identity, so issues of citizenship and residency are also included in the intersectional analysis. This intersectional analysis, when combined with the relational analysis, gives us a method for identifying the idea of *nepantla*, as ambiguous identities often cause changes in how power functions. Intersectionality also displays how these compounding effects function relationally (a continuation of fourth-wave feminism). As such, power and interrelations become a critical issue; in this respect, the dramaturgical framework used above for examining community organizing already begins the process of thinking relationally. The framework's components are described in more detail in Chapter Two.

LIMINAL THEORY OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING	COMMUNITY ORGANIZING		FEMINISM	
	Objectives	Relational	Intersectional
	Conflicts	Power	Race + Ethnicity
	Tactics	Territories	Economic Status
	Attitudes	Representation	Gender + Sexuality
	Emotions		Legal Status
	Subtext		
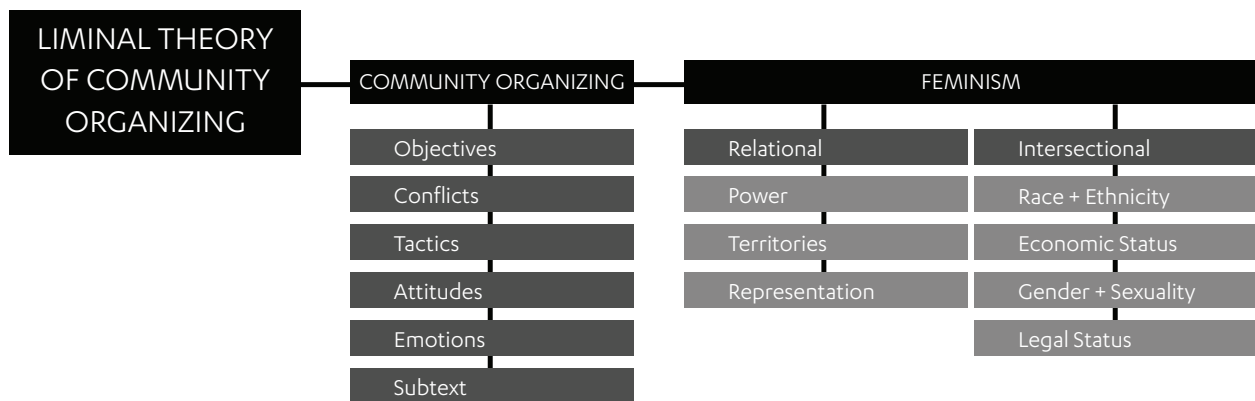
Figure 4: Dissertation framework for analysis. The framework used a dramaturgical framework underpinned with feminist concepts of relational power and intersectionality to analyze the actions of colonia organizers within the context of the Valley.

Dissertation Outline

To answer these questions and address the issues described above, this dissertation is divided into five core chapters. Chapter Two delves into the theoretical framework underpinning the dissertation. The chapter first reviews three dominant organizing traditions present within community organizing theory in urban planning: Alinskyite, Freirian, and feminist. In examining these organizing traditions, a common qualifying remark is that these traditions are ideals, and do not represent actual practice. In pushing against these common remarks, Chapter Two advocates for a relational justice perspective on community organizing. This relational justice approach takes historic context and relationships as a starting point for any analysis of organizing. As such, the rest of the dissertation follows this approach by first establishing the historic context of the Rio Grande Valley in the U.S./Mexico border region and frames contemporary colonia organizing within this context.

Chapter Three establishes the context in which colonia organizing takes place by examining the Rio Grande Valley within the context of the larger U.S./Mexico border region. It first defines the concept of Westphalian territory and sovereignty, to overturn several misconceptions about border regions that are inherent in the concept of "territory." It then provides an overall description of the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, noting its economic, environmental, and social connections to the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. These connections remain tenuous as several outside forces (like the border patrol) seek to sever the two halves of this transnational community. This sense of imposition and abandonment is then examined through spatial subtexts revealed in organizer interviews. These subtexts invoke ideas of power relations both politically and economically between the Valley and urban centers such as Washington D.C., Austin, and New York City. The chapter concludes with the recognition that

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the Rio Grande Valley is part of the Global North and South, but also distinct from these global categorizations. The Valley is, then, a liminal territory, and colonia organizing must be examined within the context of this liminality. Additionally, this places practices of colonia organizing alongside critical studies of relational poverty, which seek to overcome North/South dualities in the study of poor people's movements.

Chapter Four begins the analysis of colonia organizing by first examining its historical roots. The chapter uses insurgent historiography to piece together a narrative from interviews with senior organizers and from archival work. It examines fifty years of colonia organizing in the Valley starting with the 1966 United Farmworker Melon Strike and concluding with new organizing networks in 2016. This narrative is broken across eight distinct approaches, four historic and four contemporary. Each approach leverages vastly different sources of inspiration for its organizing philosophies, but the approaches all work together for the good of the colonias. The common thread binding the approaches together is a belief in mutual self-help.

Chapter Five is devoted to disentangling the concept of "self-help" from distributive justice programs, focusing instead on unpacking the nature of mutual self-help in colonia organizing. First, I explore how "self-help" has come to refer to sweat equity housing programs in border colonias. This definition appropriates a critical aspect of border culture, the self-help ethos, and has led colonia organizations down a distributive justice path since the early 1990s. In contrast, multiple definitions of "self-help" exist that vary in terms of scope and focus. From this, I show how self-help in border colonias, today, is returning to a form found in early mutualistas. Separating self-help from sweat equity allows a key aspect of border life to be understood within the border context, not as it has been defined by academics and government officials.

Chapter Six provides an overview of three key aspects of newer colonia networks that mirror larger organizing trends across the U.S. and Latin America. Mirroring trends in community organizing outside the United States, colonia-based organizations have begun forming large coalitions with the explicit purpose of increasing civic engagement across the Valley. Those engaging in these newer activities display a healthy caution when dealing with foundation and government funding, as organizers increasingly demand autonomy in problem solving. New experimental practices include regional cooperation and coalition building, flat organizational structures, and new education-based initiatives focused on civics and political representation. Namely, the role of "expert" is being reassessed in these newer programs. These tactics are analyzed against larger trends across the Americas for evidence of complex strategy sharing between Latin American organizing and Latino organizing in the United States.

In the conclusion, I argue that a relational approach to community organizing theory provides a link between social context and organizing practices. Following the calls of other community organizing scholars (Fisher and DeFilippis 2015; Stoecker 2010), this more context-based approach illuminates previously marginalized practices, but also allows organizers the opportunity to better understand how organizing practice is tied to social and cultural conditions. In the Valley, this approach helped illuminate why colonia organizing takes its current form, and how it has historically dealt with extreme marginalization within a border context.

From this, I offer three implications for this dissertation. First, for colonia studies, is the recognition that colonias do not inherently lack social capital or horizontal integration; instead, colonias are capable of organizing, often to great effect. Second, for colonia organizers themselves, I offer a series of comments regarding current regionally based programs. Organizers risk diluting the impacts of these newer programs. Based on insights given by senior

organizers, I suggest a series of strategies to avoid dilution, namely by questioning the push to make "programs" and the trend towards "efficiency." Lastly, for community organizing theory, I show how a context-based theory can assist the field in connecting organizing practice to its social context. Ultimately, the dissertation shows how traditional territories within urban planning can further marginalize periphery communities and how, in the twenty-first-century, it is time to reassess these spatial and theoretical territories.

Chapter 2: Building a Relational Theory of Community Organizing

Introduction

Within urban planning, community organizing theory is governed by three major models/traditions: the Alinskyite, the Freirian, and the feminist. Together, these three traditions provide a wide array of potential organizing tactics for the practitioner; however, these traditions are rarely put into practice as purely as they are portrayed in organizing theory. This gap is frequently expressed in qualifying remarks in organizing theory pieces, such as:

> *Community organizing practice, of course, rarely reflects an ideal model in its pure form, as each effort requires strategies and tactics that are specific to the given situation. (Martinson and Su 2012, 59)*

These observations are quite common (Fisher and DeFilippis 2015, 370; Fisher and Shragge 2000, 1–2; Martinson and Su 2012, 59, 75–76; Stall and Stoecker 1998, 734), suggesting that some nuance in how organizing occurs in practice is not adequately captured in organizing theory. This perspective is being taken up by several prominent scholars (Fisher and DeFilippis 2015; Fisher and Shragge 2000; Stoecker 2010) who provide a starting point by examining the connection between organizing and its societal context:

> *… we no longer understand the relationship between community organizing and its societal context. One model tells us to use confrontation and conflict everywhere and always. Another tells us nowhere and never. One says to build organizations and then*

act. Another says act to build organizations. We have clearly lost our way, and we have lost our way because we have forsaken a theoretical perspective that can help us judge our practice. (Stoecker 2010, para. 19)

Stoecker later suggests that a more fluid theory of community organizing is needed to observe how specific social conditions beget specific organizing tactics, contending that this project begins with a greater theorization of society (Stoecker 2010, para. 22). This critique informs the heart of the discussion here; however, I contend that community organizing practices are not only informed by a theory of society, but also some notion of *social change*, as informed by theories of power and justice (Tilly 1997). As such, organizing theory can better understand when certain practices are useful, for instance when confrontation is beneficial and when it is harmful, by understanding the historical and contemporary contexts surrounding organizing practices (Fisher and DeFilippis 2015). In determining how different contexts and constraints alter organizing practice in situ, organizing scholars can more accurately judge its success.

In this chapter, I argue that a relational perspective on organizing practice yields more complete theories on the connections between social context and political action. Relationality, broadly, refers to a feminist concept of justice, which takes relationships between individuals, as opposed to distributive or materially-based issues, as the genesis for inequality (Anderson 1999; Roy 2015; Young 1990). Unequal relationships lead to power imbalances and domineering political structures, generating the more systemic inequalities that distributive justice initiatives so often fail to engage (Young 1990, 15–38). A relational perspective, today, not only encompasses a definition of justice and power, but also provides analytic tools for reflecting upon the interconnections between historical and contemporary struggles and local and global organizing (Featherstone 2005).

To examine these issues, this chapter first provides an overview of the dominant organizing traditions found in urban planning – Alinskyite, Freirian, and feminist. I then argue, following other scholars (Fisher and DeFilippis 2015; Stoecker 2010), that community organizing theory needs a greater focus on the role that context and marginalized histories play in the success or failure of organizing practices. The predominant models, each born of their own histories and contexts, offer a glimpse into where their ideas thrive and where they falter. I then highlight how a relational approach to justice allows us to examine these histories and contexts of community organizing, introducing Anderson's concept of democratic equality (1999; 2004; 2007). From these, I argue for a more fluid conception of community organizing that emanates, primarily, from the context in which organizing occurs.

Dominant Theoretical Models of Community Organizing

While there exists a large body of literature on community organization, its traditions, practices, and influences, the majority of this work adopts a primarily Alinksyite perspective (Alinsky 1946; Alinsky 1971). Saul Alinsky's framework for community organization remains the most discussed in the field, not because he "founded" the field, but, perhaps, because he was among the first to clearly articulate a replicable model for community organizing practice (R. Sen 2003, XLIV). Alinsky was the son of Russian Jewish immigrants who moved to the Chicago area before his birth. Alinsky was heavily influenced by the Chicago School of Sociology, receiving both his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Chicago, and brought a distinctly modernistic approach not just to his ideas of social change, but also to his writing style.

While Alinsky remains heavily discussed and debated in organizing literature, two other models of organizing exist, coming from different contexts and times. First, during the 1960s, Paulo Freire began his work in Northeastern Brazil, working from a model of organizing merged with an educational focus (Freire 1970). From his own experiences growing up in poverty, Freire developed the model of critical pedagogy, which uses education to empower communities. Second, feminist scholars have endeavored to point out the contradictions and biases built into the Alinksyite organizing model (Bradshaw, Soifer, and Gutierrez 1994; Hyde 2004; Stall and Stoecker 1998). Namely, Alinskyite organizing is criticized for downplaying the contributions of indigenous leadership, which is often led by women, in favor of the professionalization of the field, which is dominated by men (Stall and Stoecker 1998). However, the feminist perspective has also been criticized for not sufficiently accounting for racially based differences in organizing (Gutierrez and Lewis 1994; Gutierrez and Lewis 2012; Marquez and Jennings 2000; Rivera and Erlich 1998; Salomon 2003; Young Laing 2009). While the Alinskyite, feminist, and Freirian approaches to organizing remain key components to understanding organizing practice, they fail to describe the entire field of organizing. In particular, organizing practices from outside the U.S. and England remain understudied within organizing theory (Bayat 2009; Bayat 2013; Roy 2015). Bayat (2009; 2013) contends that certain forms of organizing remain under-examined, due to their invisible nature. This section methodically reviews each of these three major models of community organizing, describing their histories and implications, and it describes each model's strengths and weaknesses.

Alinskyite Organizing

Saul Alinsky was born in Chicago in 1909. Receiving multiple degrees from the University of Chicago, he experienced the height of the Chicago School of Sociology. Deriving

from an industrial union model, Alinsky established his rules for proper community organization through two texts: *Reveille for Radicals* (1946) and *Rules for Radicals* (1971). To accompany his highly influential texts, Alinsky also earned numerous accolades throughout his organizing career, further solidifying his expertise on organizing. His role in founding the Back of the Yards movement in Chicago and the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) remains highly influential to this day. Incredibly savvy, Alinsky's primary goal was to support poor communities of color through his professional organizing expertise and ready access to politicians and media. Analyzing his texts and professional organizing experience, scholars note the following key elements of Alinskyite organizing (Bradshaw, Soifer, and Gutierrez 1994; Martinson and Su 2012; Stall and Stoecker 1998):

1. "Non-ideological": refraining from the use of political or theoretical ideologies to make goals as appealing as possible to a general audience; instead, focus is placed upon a "common good";

2. "Organization of organizations": using people power to counteract existing power structures; the old saying goes: the more constituents gained, the greater the potential impact;

3. "Wins-first, process-second": focusing on small, attainable goals, generally at the local level;

4. "Community organizer versus community leader": distinguishing external community organizers with "power" from internal community leaders without "power"; this was mainly about the professionalization of Community Organizers.

Drawing on these general rules, Alinskyite organizing typically resembles highly local constituency-building focused primarily on clearly defined, single campaigns. While scholars

today recognize the ability of organizing to transcend local contexts (Pastor, Benner, and Matsuoka 2009; Benner and Pastor 2011), Alinskyite organizing focuses extensively on local organizing at the neighborhood level, a practice that has been criticized for not fully interrogating inequalities that occur beyond the local scale (Fisher and Shragge 2000, 13–14). Fisher and Shragge describe this issue cogently: "Community organizing with a social action politics has the greatest potential to articulate demands and promote alliances which reach beyond the community" (Fisher and Shragge 2000, 14).

Furthermore, Alinsky's understanding of "expertise" externally located important organizing knowledge, with the Community Organizer holding the political power, bolstered by large numbers of residents. As such, Alinskyite organizing focuses more on organization (as an object) than organizing (as a process); thus, it has a very distributive view of justice. Furthermore, Alinsky's non-ideological stance was another product of his time, especially during an era when many community scholars sought to distance themselves from Marxism and Communism during the Cold War (Alinsky 1946, 3–18; Castoriadis 1997, 1–34). However, Alinsky's organizing methods remain critical to contemporary practice and theory, though they reflect a different, more modernistic, time in planning.

Freirian Organizing

In 1960s Brazil, educator Paulo Freire was cultivating a different model of organizing premised upon the concept of critical pedagogy.[8] Critical pedagogy is the process of organizing through educating; however, this "educating" remains firmly planted within the community

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[8] His concept of liberation education is referred to under numerous terms, as Martinson and Su (2012, 66) list: "popular education, critical pedagogy, empowerment education, liberatory practice, and … liberation education."

itself, as Freire writes: "The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their

redemption" (1970, 54). He continues on to state that a "humanizing pedagogy" is the only way

to effectively address the problems of the oppressed (Freire 1970, 68). This is accomplished

through a "problem-posing theory and practice" that begins with the "people's historicity," or

their creative ability to assess their own material reality (Freire 1970, 84). This is accomplished,

through organizing, with the following:

1. "Problem-posing, not banking, education": The organizer is a teacher and student (at once) who dialogues with community about their actions, as opposed to "depositing" knowledge within the community (Freire 1970, 71–77, 80–81; Hegar 2012, 161–62);

2. "Conscientização/conscientization": a "critical consciousness," or the recognition of social, economic, and environmental contradictions and how these lead to oppressive relationships (Freire 1970, 35–36; Martinson and Su 2012, 66);

3. "Culture circles": Moments of dialogue between individuals experiencing the same sets of problems (Martinson and Su 2012, 66), with the goal of subverting existing oppressive structures (what Freire calls "anti-dialogical" action) (Freire 1970, 179);

4. "Triggers/codes": The use of various forms of representation (visual, verbal keys, etc.) to identify commonalities through critical dialogue (Freire 1970, 87–92; Martinson and Su 2012, 66);

5. "Praxis": The merging of theory and action, not simply dialoging about issues, but also acting upon those issues towards the aim of liberation from oppression (Blackburn 2000, 7–8).

These five elements form the base of critical pedagogy. Freire's ideas are markedly different than Alinsky's; whereas the Alinskyite framework stems from a "Northern" context, Freirian perspectives emanate from Freire's impoverished upbringing in rural Brazil. As such, the Freirian model has heavily influenced organizing throughout Latin America, but continues to receive less recognition in English language studies (Hegar 2012). However, Freirian ideas of organizing are becoming increasingly influential within Latinx communities across the U.S., as I will show through the colonias example in Chapter 4.

The Freirian model of organizing, while highly influential, is criticized for two major reasons (Blackburn 2000). First, its dichotomy between the "oppressed" and "oppressors" constructs a duality between the powerless and the empowered (Blackburn 2000, 10–11). While such a duality may exist in some communities, power relations are often more complex and communities may not envision themselves as powerless. Second, the Freirian model may also lead to the displacement of indigenous leadership and the imposition of foreign ideas. Blackburn (2000) provides the example of 1980's Nicaragua, where a Freirian literacy program was used to promote nationalism and a singular Nicaraguan culture. The Miskutu people found their cultural practices and indigenous leadership under attack from this literacy program, which cast their community in a negative light in the name of "solidarity." Despite such shortcomings, Freirian organizing remains critically important and highly influential due to its emphasis on education-based action.

Feminist Organizing

A less consistent, but imminently important, tradition of organizing resides within feminism. Directly in response to Saul Alinsky, feminists have argued that Alinsky's views of organizing not only minimize the impacts of communities of color, but also minimize the

impacts of women in general, as women were historically marginalized in Alinskyite organizing and social movements (Stall and Stoecker 1998, 730–31). With the revelations of third-wave feminism in the 1980s and 1990s, which focused on the issue of intersectional identity and questioned the idea of the modernist expert, feminists began to question the teachings of Alinsky as a framework for research on community organizing. In contrast with Alinsky's organizing theories, feminist organizing takes, as its core, the following principles (Bradshaw, Soifer, and Gutierrez 1994; Hyde 2004; Stall and Stoecker 1998):

1. "Gendered lens": confronting a dominant "masculine bias" in our society, one that was introduced into community organizing through Alinsky's work;

2. "The personal is political": recognizing the past work of female community organizers, which have been historically marginalized because of their situation in "private" spheres (in contrast to "public sphere" organizing done by those influenced by Alinsky);

3. "Private space": organizing occurs in the household and is non-confrontational due to women's relegation to the private spheres of life;

4. "Importance of relational ties": recognizing that women become organizers because of emotional attachments to family and loved ones, often eliminating the divisions Alinsky created between "Community Organizers" and "community leaders";

5. "Inclusivity and diversity": dedicating efforts to reducing all forms of oppression in society.

In short, feminist community organizing has emphasized relational justice issues that Alinsky's work does not explicitly address. In doing so, feminists have expanded our definition of "organizing" away from the notion of the professional Community Organizer, and its

accompanying organizations like IAF, and towards more every day, covert practices (Scott

1985). Feminists contend that Alinsky's work has been used to relegate women to the position of

community leader, seen as a less prestigious job, while men are brought to the forefront to

engage in the power struggles. They combat this perspective by examining relationships and

relationality in community organizing, rather than just examining distributive notions of power

(Stall and Stoecker 1998). These perspectives have added greatly to the theory of community

organizing; however, a growing body of literature has criticized feminist organizing perspectives

for not adequately incorporating intersectional issues, mainly issues of race and ethnicity (Young

Laing 2009; Rivera and Erlich 1998; Gutierrez and Lewis 1994; Gutierrez and Lewis 2012;

Salomon 2003; Bradshaw, Soifer, and Gutierrez 1994). This criticism is, generally, also a

broader criticism of second-generation feminism, in which women of color contend that

feminists tend to emphasize the "gendered lens," and subsequently the creation of a singular

form of feminism, over "inclusivity and diversity" within feminism, or a plurality of possible

feminisms.

Avoiding Political Appropriation in Community Organizing

        While the three organizing traditions above remain important to the study and practice of

community organizing, their shortcomings highlight an issue in advocating for specific

organizing techniques without a requisite analysis of the organizing context. Many of the

critiques lodged above highlight the fact that these models are, themselves, products of the

context and the eras in which their namesakes operated. To place these tactics outside of their

intended context, as in the case of the Miskutu noted above, opens organizing practice up to

political appropriation. Political appropriation is "when members of the dominant classes adopt

political critiques that were developed by members of the marginal classes and use them against

other members of the dominant classes" (deBoer 2016, para. 2).[9] Political appropriation, as a concept, merits further discussion in community organizing theory, as it involves the unintended use of organizing practices against the marginalized.

One of the greatest examples of such political appropriation, in the case of Alinskyite organizing, is the well-documented dissolution of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN). In the late 2000s, the Tea Party adopted Alinskyite organizing tactics and began heavily campaigning for conservative principles (Fisher and DeFilippis 2015, 369–70). In doing so, they created a "Reveille for Conservatives" that fundamentally changed the outcomes of the 2010 mid-term election. Despite its bipartisanship, ACORN was read as a "progressive" organization by conservatives for its extensive support of voting rights, which entailed mobilizing inner-city, largely Democrat, poor people – making ACORN a prime target for Tea Party organizing. In 2009, ACORN was repeatedly accused of fraud. When the brother of ACORN founder Wade Rathke was found guilty of embezzling almost one million dollars, Tea Party attacks on the group mounted (Hersh 2009). Due to a conservative shift in the House of Representatives following the midterm elections in 2010, ACORN lost all government funding and subsequently closed its doors (Baker 2012). The strength of Tea Party organizing, following Alinskyite practices, is unsurprising. Given their non-ideological perspectives, such organizing techniques can be politically appropriated for nearly any purpose, which was perhaps not Alinsky's intention. Ultimately, Alinsky's techniques, originally intended to assist low-income communities, were used against that very purpose in an act of political appropriation.

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[9] While I agree with deBoer's definition of political appropriation, a trend that is becoming more commonplace in the internet age, I do not agree with the rest of his piece, which comments on current events without requisite evidence.

These issues with organizing theory not only pose risks for organizers who follow these models, but also pose risks for academics who assess organizing using these models as theory. Organizing should be evaluated as an inherently political and social act; even if communities themselves eschew ideologies and seek to remain neutral, they are ultimately (re)acting within a specific political and social environment. As Stoecker (2010, para. 19) suggests, community organizing needs a theory of itself that is informed by social contexts. A starting place is the recognition that community organizing's practice is shaped, first and foremost, by the political, economic, and cultural issues that the community encounters (Fisher and DeFilippis 2015, 364). More importantly, community organizing seeks a certain type of justice in the face of unjust events and relationships. As a start, a clearer sense of what that constitutes justice is needed.

Moving from Distributive to Relational Forms of Justice

To determine when certain organizing tactics are needed, I suggest a relational theory of community organizing. In other words, I advocate for a theoretical framework that analyzes organizing practices within their social contexts and local histories. It may include elements of Alinsky, Freirian and feminist theories, but a relational view will explain under what conditions specific organizing practices thrive and when they fail or amount to political appropriation. Relational justice is, itself, a fundamental aspect of third- and fourth-generation feminism, constituting the study of relation-based injustices as opposed to material-based injustices. A major element of relational analysis is understanding how relationships between different actors have historically trended towards domination. However, in analyzing actions historically, care must be taken not to ascribe action to context. Judith Butler (2004) offers a cogent formulation of this point:

...to bespeak a kind of generation that precedes and exceeds a strictly causal frame. Both of them are pointing to conditions, not causes. [...] Conditions do not "act" in the way that individual agents do, but no agent acts without them. They are presupposed in what we do, but it would be a mistake to personify them as if they acted in the place of us. (Butler 2004, 11)

Context, then, is interrelated with action, but neither direction is causal. This conclusion leads naturally to a relational view of contemporary and historical events. To outline that view, I first specify the differences between distributive and relational justice.

Distributive Forms of Justice

Young (1990) establishes the difference between distributive forms of justice and relational forms of justice. Distributive justice defines equality through an evaluation of resource and welfare distribution (Young 1990, 16–19), asking what is the equitable distribution of resources? What resources should be readily accessible to all citizens? And who is (un)deserving of those resources? To act in a distributive manner, one must assess the current state of the distribution of resources and welfare, identifying patterns that connote some form of inequality (Anderson 1999; Young 1990, 28). From this snapshot, one then decides where redistribution and taxation must take place (Anderson 1999). This form of equality often appears as egalitarianism, but Anderson (1999, 289–312) argues that this approach is dependent upon luck and pity, not necessarily justice or equality.

Moreover, distributive justice suffers from a static model of the social institutions that surround resource distribution. As a result, distributive justice is highly criticized by feminist scholars for its overemphasis on individuals, which ignores the role of social connections in material justice (Anderson 1999; Stall and Stoecker 1998; Young 1990, 28–29). Instead, feminists argue for a view of social justice that does not see power as held, but instead as given,

and that adopts a temporal understanding of social institutions and equality. This is a relational view of justice.

Relational Forms of Justice

Relational justice takes social relationships as its starting point, not material distributions (Anderson 1999, 313), examining how oppressive and domineering relationships create injustice (Young 1990). As such, relational justice emphasizes power as given by one individual to another (Latour 1984); in other words, power cannot be kept and stored (like an object) by an individual, but is associated with particular individuals through the actions of many. Actions based upon relational justice promote what Anderson (1999) calls democratic equality or "equality in the capability or effective freedom to achieve functionings that are part of citizenship, broadly construed" (1999, 321). "Capability" refers to the ability to achieve one's basic needs (Anderson 1999, 316; A. Sen 1992, 39–42). While individuals can achieve a goal, they may, for whatever reason, decide not to pursue it, but they are legitimately granted the option. Anderson gives the example of citizenship (Anderson 1999, 317–18). In democratic equality, citizens are guaranteed a set of capabilities that will allow them to function as citizens, such as voting, engaging in free speech, petitioning government, and being considered an equal (Anderson 1999, 317–18). Thus, to function as a citizen, one must be able to participate fully in civil society and have one's basic needs met. However, civics education, when used to bolster nationalism, has the potential to further marginalize, instead of empower (Junn 2004), often by following an "equality-of-resources" approach to education that is distributive, not relational (Anderson 2007, 615). Herein lies the crux of democratic equality: for some citizens, distributive justice is equally as necessary as relational justice, but to adequately administer distributive justice we must take relational justice as a starting point.

Summary

Focusing on a more relational perspective will bring more organizing practices into our purview. As Judith Butler (2004) writes:

> *"We do not need to ground ourselves in a single model of communication, a single model of reason, a single notion of the subject before we are able to act. Indeed, an international coalition of feminist activists and thinkers—a coalition that affirms the thinking of activists and the activism of thinkers and refuses to put them into distinctive categories that deny the actual complexity of the lives in question—will have to accept the array of sometimes incommensurable epistemological and political beliefs and modes and means of agency that bring us into activism." (Butler 2004, 48)*

Taking this as a starting point, the act of examining community organizing practices is less about asserting the influences of predetermined models or traditions, especially those established within contexts foreign to the community under study, and more about assessing what practices are already present, why they were chosen, and how they function for or against a specific community, within its own context. Most importantly, however, it requires long-term assessments of the historical contexts driving contemporary organizing, to develop an understanding of how domineering relationships were made and continue to be reinforced. This requires recognizing the impermanence of organizing practices – they are subject to change at any moment, and that change does not signal internal inconsistency if they still match the community's shifting needs. Lastly, it entails an equally fluid sense of community – who is organizing or being organized, where are they physically located in relation to one another, and how might individual issues or philosophies counter the community's larger concerns? How do we determine whether a community organizing strategy is appropriate within its context?

Relational approaches provide a means of making such questions tractable. Beginning with an analysis of the context in which organizing arises is critical to this approach – taking a

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twenty-first century view of the territory of organizing, defining its scope in relational terms, and providing historical context for the problems at hand. This historical grounding is of importance if, as in Chapter One, organizing is understood as the process of facilitating a connection between lived experience and political advocacy. Organizing, then, is a process that is constantly being remade and reconsidered, as lived experiences and the political context change. Then, from this analysis of territory, we can begin to analyze the relationships between people, organizations, and institutions in that context. Having established the needs of the community, the models of organizing currently in use, and, most importantly, the trending direction in which they are changing, is organizing meeting those needs?

In the next two chapters, I examine the historical and contemporary contexts of the Rio Grande Valley within the U.S./Mexico border region, establishing the historical relationships and events that continue to influence colonia organizing. Both chapters introduce critical dimensions of colonia organizing that are typically misunderstood by traditional analyses. This approach surfaces a plethora of competing practices, yet, as shown in the following chapters, each practice plays a valuable role within the community.

Chapter 3: Territories of Border Organizing

NIDEAQUÍNIDEALLÁ

de que I know yo si sé
backnforth here soy de aquí
regreso dicen y que what
aterricé o acá o allá

my first name is de aquí
my last name is de allá
my last name is nideaquínideallá
yet to be defined
evolucionario hybrid

~Tato Laviera (2006), excerpt

Introduction

"*Ni de aquí, ni de allá*" is a popular rallying point for Latinxs on social media and is often written as one cohesive sentiment – "*nideaquínideallá*."[10] It translates roughly into English as, "Not from here, not from there." The term expresses a profound conflict experienced by young Latinxs, often with immigrant parents, who feel disconnected from their parents' home country and from their current country of residency. This conflict is expressed as the feeling of "nowhereness" or inbetweenness that is often referred to as *nepantla* in academic circles. *Nepantla* derives from the feminist concept of intersectionality, which describes varying degrees

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[10] Phonetically: "knee-dey-ah-key-knee-dey-ah-jah"

of oppression that result from the different elements of an individual's identity (race/ethnicity, gender/sexuality, economic status, legal status) (Crenshaw 1989). *Nepantla* expresses a sense of liminality associated with intersectional identities (Anzaldúa 2002), examining how feelings of inbetween-ness and nowhere-ness work across threshold spaces at conceptual, and actual, borders. The ideas of *nepantla* and liminality are the underlying sources of *nideaquínideallá*.

While it is often tinged with a negative connotation, Rio Grande Valley residents instead expressed *nideaquínideallá* as a positive aspect of their communities, supporting bilingualism and cultural diversity (Participant observations, most clearly expressed in Rockefeller's 100 Resilient Cities – Brownsville), and attributed its negative aspects to forces external to their communities, like discrimination from politicians or misplaced actions from foreign academics or nonprofits, as one resident tried to verbally sort out:

> *We've all got tios and primos and friends that aren't... I mean, until 2001, until 9/11, there was no border, as far as we were concerned, you know what I mean? You crossed over and go, "Hey, you wanna go have this for dinner?" and, the only French restaurant south of San Antonio is in Matamoros [in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas]. We had a restaurant here that burned down in Brownsville and they had to rebuild, so they just opened up in Matamoros while they were rebuilding in Brownsville, because the customers are just right there and have family over there and [are] going to birthday parties and sleepovers... I mean my kids have tons of friends over there in Matamoros and I've got staff, here, that live in Matamoros now. I mean people up north don't understand that we're one, we're a city of 1.2 million people when you take in Matamoros, and that we need to think that way. And we always did. It's only bureaucrats in Washington that think they can build a wall... And they've done a successful job in hurting us, in that fashion.*

The negativity associated with *nideaquínideallá*, I argue, can be partially attributed to our formulation of pan-American space, which remains theoretically divided between "North" and "South" at the U.S./Mexico border (Roy 2015; Wacquant 2010). This division is not inherent to cultural practices in the border region, as the resident above tries to express, but is imposed upon

these communities by external forces – in the example above, by U.S. politicians sufficiently

disassociated from border life that they attempt to physically divide transnational familial ties.

Colonia research has struggled to properly place these communities between the so-called Global

North and Global South. It is not uncommon to hear colonia scholars speak of the shocking

"third world" conditions within these communities, externalizing the image of poor colonias;

however, other scholars emphasize the emphatic "first worldness" of colonia issues, stressing the

U.S. and Texan policy issues that perpetuate colonias. Both perspectives are simultaneously

correct and incorrect, suffering from the same problem: an adherence to the division between

North and South in the Americas that dilutes the dynamic interconnections between the two,

demonstrated so keenly in border residents' sense of *nideaquínideallá*. Where do colonias situate

themselves globally if they are historically influenced by both U.S. and Latin American

organizing trends? Over time, have they viewed themselves as aligned with Latin America? Or

aligned with the U.S.? Or both? Or neither?

Answering these questions is critical to understanding how power and politics function

relationally in colonia organizing. The answers also highlight how *nepantla* exists across the Rio

Grande Valley. As a peripheral or liminal territory, the Valley experiences issues of power

differently than more centralized regions within the United States, as evidenced by subtextual

comments from colonia organizers and residents throughout this study's field work. As Anzaldúa

(2002) foretells in her work, these subtexts are often expressed by border residents as spatial

conflicts, either related to their border proximity or to disconnection from perceived centers of

political power within the United States. For Valley residents, these spatial subtexts often

invoked "Washington D.C.," "Austin," or "New York City" as territories of power removed

from the border context, but continually interfering with border life. Not even "Detroit" or other

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equally impoverished U.S. cities were viewed as comparable alternatives given the complexities of U.S./Mexico border life. "Medellín" and "Lima" represented potential alternatives to some residents, but no consensus was apparent among interviewees. Such spatial subtexts are critical to understanding how colonia organizers and residents view themselves within a global space. These larger-scale subtexts influence colonia organizing on a smaller scale by influencing how and where residents look for solutions to their problems. Subtexts also tacitly define who Valley residents trust and how they understand issues of power and political sovereignty, two critical components of community organizing strategies.

Going beyond Westphalian categories of territory (like "city" or "state"), this chapter outlines "territories of colonia organizing" and establishes the larger social context in which colonia organizing occurs; more explicitly, the goal is to comprehend the border context in which the Rio Grande Valley is situated (see Figure 3 in Chapter 1). Without this, numerous misunderstandings and stereotypes might contradict the lived experiences of Valley residents at the border. There are commonly held misunderstandings about Valley life concerning things as fundamental as the climate and landscape of the Valley – it is tropical, for instance, not a desert – or as intangible as their sense of security – most residents feel a greater threat from the border patrol than from undocumented residents. These issues affect all Valley residents, including colonia residents, and affect the nature of community organizing.

This chapter presents an overview of the territories of power, politics, and place that inform colonia organizing within the Rio Grande Valley. First, I discuss the concepts of nepantla and intersectionality in greater detail. Next, I question the concept of Westphalian territory and explain how this theory of territory interferes with recognition of the social context along the U.S./Mexico border. I then introduce the Rio Grande Valley itself through basic statistics as well

as GIS maps that highlight economic, social, and environmental connections that extend beyond

it, emphasizing connections across the border into northern Mexico. This base analysis

establishes a U.S./Mexico border tension. From this, I offer an overview of the effects of

increased border militarization in the Valley since 2001. While the border has always been

leveraged for and against Valley residents (as I argue in Chapter Four's analysis of the United

Farmworkers), lately the scales have tipped substantially in the federal government's favor. The

perceived government imposition and shattering of "natural" cross-border flows has created a

sense of liminality and marginality that further distances Valley residents from more northerly

cities. Valley residents often resist comparisons to other U.S. cities; however, they still

emphasize the need to participate in politics as full U.S. citizens. This ambiguity regarding their

global positioning (as one example) is used to highlight the tension between "Northern" and

"Southern" influences in the Valley. As Chapter Four will further show, this sense of in-

betweenness (or of *nepantla*) has been leveraged throughout the history of colonia organizing

and, as such, is a critical aspect of colonia organizing.

Intersectionality and *Nepantla*

Roy (2016) posits that the term "inequality" is dangerously close to becoming a trope, to

being seen as an unassailable condition entrenched within hierarchies of established powers. She

argues that inequality is not a blanket term that equally affects us all – instead, the poor are

uniquely impacted by this issue. Unpacking the relationships and power structures that define

inequality and poverty is, I argue, the first step in understanding the "poor people's movements"

(as Roy calls them) seeking to rectify these problems. This is how to fully grasp the practices of

community organizing in ultra-poor communities like the colonias. To do so, scholars like Roy

argue for a reconfiguration of poverty studies, within both academic and real spaces, specifically to understand how poverty functions transnationally. However, relational perspectives, alone, do not completely capture the advanced marginalization of the ultra-poor, and a greater understanding of the role of identities in these power structures is needed. As Anzaldúa (1990) notes: "Necesitamos teorías [We need theories] that will rewrite history using race, class, gender and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries—new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods" (Anzaldúa 1990, xxv).

The concept of intersectionality emphasizes the compounding nature of inequality when gender is considered in conjunction with race, ethnicity, sexuality, economic class, and legal status (Crenshaw 1989; Ranft 2013, 208–9). Intersectionality is largely associated with commencing the "third-wave" of feminism, breaking from what many black feminists saw as the marginalization of their concerns under second-wave feminism beginning in the 1960s (Crenshaw 1989; hooks 1981). Many Chicana feminists also protested second-wave feminism, and *nepantla* was one of the concepts these feminists created to describe not just how race and ethnicity intersected with gender, but also the spatial disjunctions they experienced. *Nepantla* derives from an indigenous Nahuatl word meaning "middle" or "inbetween," and is used today to describe issues of intersectionality within marginalized spaces, as Anzaldúa expresses:

> *Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I call nepantla, a Nahuatl word meaning tierra entre medio [in-between lands]. Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. Nepantla es tierra desconocida [is an unknown or hidden land], and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling. Most of us dwell in nepantla so much of the time it's become a sort*

of 'home.' Though this state links us to other ideas, people, and worlds, we feel
threatened by these new connections and the change they engender. (Anzaldúa 2002, 1)[11]

Nepantla involves inhabiting an inbetween space that links two worlds together, but also

generates distance from either world. *Nepantla* underlies Valley residents' indescribable feelings

of inbetweenness and describes young Latinxs' sense of *nideaquínideallá*; in fact, *nepantla* and

nideaquínideallá share similar linguistic roots. While these concepts have been used extensively

to undergird literary and linguistic studies, they remain foreign to urban studies, even in

transnational studies. While the concept of North and South has some historical precedent, the

concept of *nepantla* demonstrates how the boundary between these ideas is not clear cut, and

how new avenues of urban studies research will progress from a renewed understanding of

North/South borders, as Keating (2009) writes: "Boundaries become more permeable and begin

breaking down. This loosening of previously restrictive labels, while intensely painful, can create

shifts in consciousness and transgressive opportunities for change" (Keating 2009, 94).

Ranft (2013) combines the concepts of intersectionality and nepantla to create a singular

concept, "intersectional *nepantla*," that looks at both the individual and geographic aspects of

identity that influence advanced marginalization – to use Wacquant's (2015, 254) term

purposefully, as he, too, seeks to name this aspect of inequality. Ranft argues that intersectional

nepantla not only identifies injustices, but also provides a platform for community organizing,

making it an apt framework for examining the goals and impetus behind community organizing

(Ranft 2013, 212–13). As Anzaldúa states, *nepantla* is not merely a phenomenon, but can

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[11] Many thanks to Francisco "Mo" Torres of Harvard Sociology for explaining the concept of "*nepantla*," describing its ties to *nideaquínideallá*, and pointing out this important passage from Anzaldúa (2002)!

describe an individual who becomes a *nepantlera*, or an agent of social change within the liminal space (Koshy 2006, 149–50).

Questioning Westphalian Territory and Sovereignty

> *Beyond the sensationalism that might accompany these images [of illegal smuggling tunnels], it is the undeniable presence of an informal economy and the politics of density surrounding it that are exposed here. As we actually insert the actual location of these illegal tunnels into existing official border maps, a different image of the borderline appears. The linear rigidity of the artificial geopolitical boundary, that has 'flat-lined' the pulsations of the living complexity of the natural, is transformed back into a complex set of porous lines perpendicular to the border, as if they were small leakages that began to percolate through a powerful dam. As these lines puncture the borderline in our fictional cartography, they almost restore the primacy of the network of existing canyons, juxtaposing the natural with the socio-economic flows that continue to be 'under the radar' in our official modes of urban planning representation. (Cruz 2007, 122)*

Most Americans envision the U.S./Mexico border as a wall, single or doublewide. However, architect Teddy Cruz's description is closer to the truth: a border that is more akin to a dam, a very poor dam riddled with fissures and cracks throughout its breadth. Despite attempts to seal off the U.S./Mexico border, it remains the most traversed in the world (Romero and LAR 2008, 6–9). Borders, the dynamic margins of sovereign states, are often envisioned as divisive lines in the landscape, clearly defining an interior and an exterior; however, the reality is much different: extraterritorial zones litter the edges of sovereign states.[12] With global categorizations, such as "Global North" and "Global South," the prevailing issue is a strict adherence to national sovereignty that makes these classifications into conceptual battlegrounds. These classifications adopt Westphalian notions of territory and sovereignty, or the idea that nations are sovereign immediately at their borders.

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[12] Extraterritorial zones: heterotopic zones, dead zones, concessions, and foreign-trade zones, to name a few.

"Territory" has traditionally been defined as the extent of sovereign power. This definition of territory emerges from the 1648 Peace of Westphalia (*Treaty of Westphalia* 1648), a treaty meant to resolve border conflicts across Europe. To resolve these issues, the treaty created the model of sovereignty which now bears its name: the idea that nation states hold absolute sovereignty, right up to the edges of their borders. This intertwining of territory and sovereignty, while forming the basis for peace in certain circumstances, has led to war and colonialism in others. Regardless, Westphalian conceptions of territory and sovereignty persist in international studies, especially in fields such as urban planning, where Westphalian sovereignty forms the basis for local planning as well. As an example of Westphalian thinking, Hudson defines sovereignty as "the bundling of rule-making authority within bounded territories" (Hudson 1998, 89–90), a formulation which territorially designates an interior and exterior (as is characteristic of Westphalian sovereignty). This model also fosters "us" versus "them" thinking, as illustrated in Judith Butler's (2004) post-9/11 analysis of the U.S.

This bundling of sovereignty with territory has been called the "territorial trap" because it disregards the real systems, both formal and informal, that bypass geographically-based sanctioned "sovereignties" (Agnew 1994; Cruz 2007; Elden 2005). The idea that sovereignty defines territory is not an historical fact; despite the common belief to the contrary. As Agnew writes:

> *…even when rule is territorial and fixed, territory does not necessarily entail the practices of total mutual exclusion which the dominant understanding of the territorial states attributes to it. Indeed, depending on the nature of the geopolitical order of a particular period, territoriality has been 'unbundled' by all kinds of formal agreements and informal practices, such as common markets, military alliances, monetary and trading regimes, etc. (Agnew 1994, 54)*

While the historical aspect of this argument was largely under-examined for nearly a decade, Elden (2010) picks up this critical thread, summing up the significance of Agnew's work:

> *In a piece published the year after 'The Territorial Trap', but much less well-known, Agnew provided an interesting gloss on this argument (Agnew 1995). He was critical of two key assumptions that shaped debates in the mid 1990s: the idea that social science had neglected space; and that there was a 'geographical turn' taking place. Rather than being 'spaceless', he suggested, social science had long been filled with geographical terms and assumptions. One of these, of course, was the territorial trap. But, he argued, the reason that this thinking had become static and unable to cope with dynamics, change and transition was that "social science has been too geographical and not sufficiently historical, in the sense that geographical assumptions have trapped consideration of social and political-economic processes in geographical structures and containers that defy historical change" (Agnew 1995, 379). (Elden 2010, 758)*

It is this historical understanding that defines territory, per Agnew. As such, territory is a "distinctive mode of social/spatial organization" that is historically at the nexus between place and power (Elden 2013, 10), as Elden explains: "Territory is not simply an object: the outcome of actions conducted toward it or some previously supposedly neutral area. Territory is itself a process, made and remade, shaped and shaping, active and reactive" (Elden 2013, 17). From this processual definition of territory, historical understandings of it influence help to explain how certain territories come into being, and how they were previously constituted. This prevents viewing territory as rigid and established. Thus, when Roy (2015) speaks of "territories of poverty" or Wacquant (2010) describes "territorial stigmas," they refer to a series of historical systems of power and decision-making that create a spatial (dis)ordering of relations.

Following an historical view of territory, it is perhaps more honest to consider sovereignty as Carl Schmitt describes it: "Sovereign is he who can make the exception" (As quoted in Bach 2011, 100). Rather than viewing sovereignty as a container, it can be thought of as "a political order produced by an assemblage of administrative strategies" (Ong 2006, 98–99).

This extends past the typical assessments of islands of sovereignty that normally accompany border studies (Hudson 1998; Agamben and Weizman 2007) and looks towards the connections, or "spaces of flows," that perpetually reconnect across territories (Brenner et al. 2003) as Cruz (2007) suggests with his model of a weak dam. Disentangling territory from sovereignty is critical for addressing twenty-first century problems in urban theory. While capital's ability to transcend borders is well recognized, culture and protest have not been considered in a similar light within urban theory, as Ananya Roy states:

> *...spaces and processes exemplify the global historical context within which a new agenda of poverty scholarship must be forged. This historical conjuncture requires a reconsideration not only of familiar territories of poverty but also of the modalities of global North and global South through which poverty research and expertise are structured. It is no longer the twentieth century, and the new century portends a dramatically rearranged world, one in which shifting territorializations of power and poverty demand new analytical practices and new imaginations of politics. Urban social movements, often connected in networks of transnational solidarity such as those that extend from the Western Cape of Africa to the southern periphery of Chicago, already know this. But does critical theory? (Roy 2015, 2–3)*

Dominant global categorizations (i.e., Global North/South) fail to describe some of the most important and compelling regions of the world. In terms of community organizing, these practices can transcend national boundaries and are transmitted across communities more likely bound by a shared culture or world philosophy than by nationality or economic character. In an extreme example, organizing practices and knowledge are being shared through international organizations like Slum Dwellers International (SDI) (Appadurai 2002); however, this more formal example still restricts itself to some notion of the Global South. Transcending national borders is often even more prosaic, with community organizing mobilizing across contexts as kernels of ideas; some examples include the "right to the city," the Occupy movements of the early 2010s, and the concept of "*horizontalidad*" (Sitrin 2012), just to name a few. These

concepts rapidly spread through communities across the globe in the 2000s and early 2010s, mainly through social media of various forms, which are outside of the scope of this discussion.

These ties become trapped in North/South divides, primarily at the U.S./Mexico border and, most especially, post 9/11, as the border became increasingly militarized and divided. In her analysis of this post 9/11 era, Judith Butler shows that instead of admitting that the U.S. is part of an international community, America's kneejerk response post 9/11 was to bolster nationalist pride and fortify our borders:

> *It is the loss of the prerogative, only and always, to be the one who transgresses the sovereign boundaries of other states, but never to be in the position of having one's own boundaries transgressed. […] We now see that the national border was more permeable than we thought. Our general response is anxiety, rage; a radical desire for security, a shoring-up of the borders against what is perceived as alien… (Butler 2004, 39)*

Butler's (2004) analysis examines this shoring up of borders and notes the precariousness of this situation and the inability to actually reify nationalist pride and form impermeable barriers against the rest of the world. Butler's analysis is profound because it provides a cultural assessment of national and global divisions and suggests interdependency over nationalism.

Several scholars are now attempting to rectify this division and, through different means, are arriving at similar conclusions. Their approaches involve the unification of "ultra-poor" studies transnationally and a re-evaluation of key social justice terms. Most provocatively, Loïc Wacquant argues that "territorial stigmas" exist that box the ultra-poor into communities further marginalized by a deficiency of state services (2015, 254). Wacquant shows, through transnational comparative studies, that such stigmas exist within "Northern" nations, though this "advanced marginalization" is manifested differently in each location (Wacquant 2010). Regardless, advanced marginalization is intensifying across so-called "Northern" nations, just as it is in "Southern" nations. Roy (2016) argues that urban theory needs a transnational

understanding of poverty that rejects outmoded global categorizations from the twentieth century and embraces twenty-first century "territories" of influences. This idea of "territories" is not new, as Yiftachel wrote in 2006:

> *...there are no clear-cut distinctions between North and South, West and East, discourse and materiality or homeland and diaspora. These categories should be seen as 'zones' in a conceptual grid which attempts to draw attention to the main loci of power and identity within an obviously messy, overlapping and dynamic world. (Yiftachel 2006, 212)*

The concept of "territory" invoked by Wacquant, Roy, and Yiftachel is becoming increasingly common in urban theory to describe marginal practices in urban planning and sociology; however, its use comes at a time when geographers are questioning its definition and use. Thus, the rest of this chapter seeks to explicitly define the larger context for colonia organizing.

The Rio Grande Valley

> *The U.S.-Mexican border 'es una herida abierta'[13] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. (Anzaldúa 2012)*

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[13] "…Es una herida abierta…" translates roughly to "…is an open wound…"

Figure 5: Map of the U.S./Mexico border region, showing the location of the Rio Grande Valley (Rivera 2014).

The Rio Grande Valley (referred to as the "Valley" in this dissertation and sometimes "RGV" by local organizations) is a region roughly comprised of three South Texas counties: Starr, Hidalgo, and Cameron.[14] The Valley is bordered by the Rio Grande River and international border with Mexico to the south and the Gulf of Mexico to the east (see *Figure 5*). Contrary to its name, the Valley is not, in fact, a valley, but is instead the vast floodplain and basin of the Rio Grande river. For much of the year, its land slowly drains water and, as such, is susceptible to flooding, particularly in the rainy season during the fall. Due to its proximity to the Gulf of Mexico, the Valley has a humid subtropical climate that is naturally cooled by the winds of the Gulf. This proximity also makes the Valley susceptible to hurricanes and tropical storms;

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[14] Sometimes Willacy County is considered a part of the Valley; in that case, generally, residents refer to the region as the "Lower Rio Grande Valley." However, these terms are very fluid.

however, the rains, when properly directed, allow agriculture to thrive. For decades, the Valley

has contributed to a significant portion of the U.S.'s total citrus production, in particular its

grapefruit production. Throughout the twentieth-century, this attracted large numbers of migrant

farmworkers to the Valley. In search of opportunities, campesinos (rural farmworkers) from

Mexico were told of the immense opportunities held in the Valley. While other border regions

attract more industrial activities, the Valley has long attracted more agricultural activities.
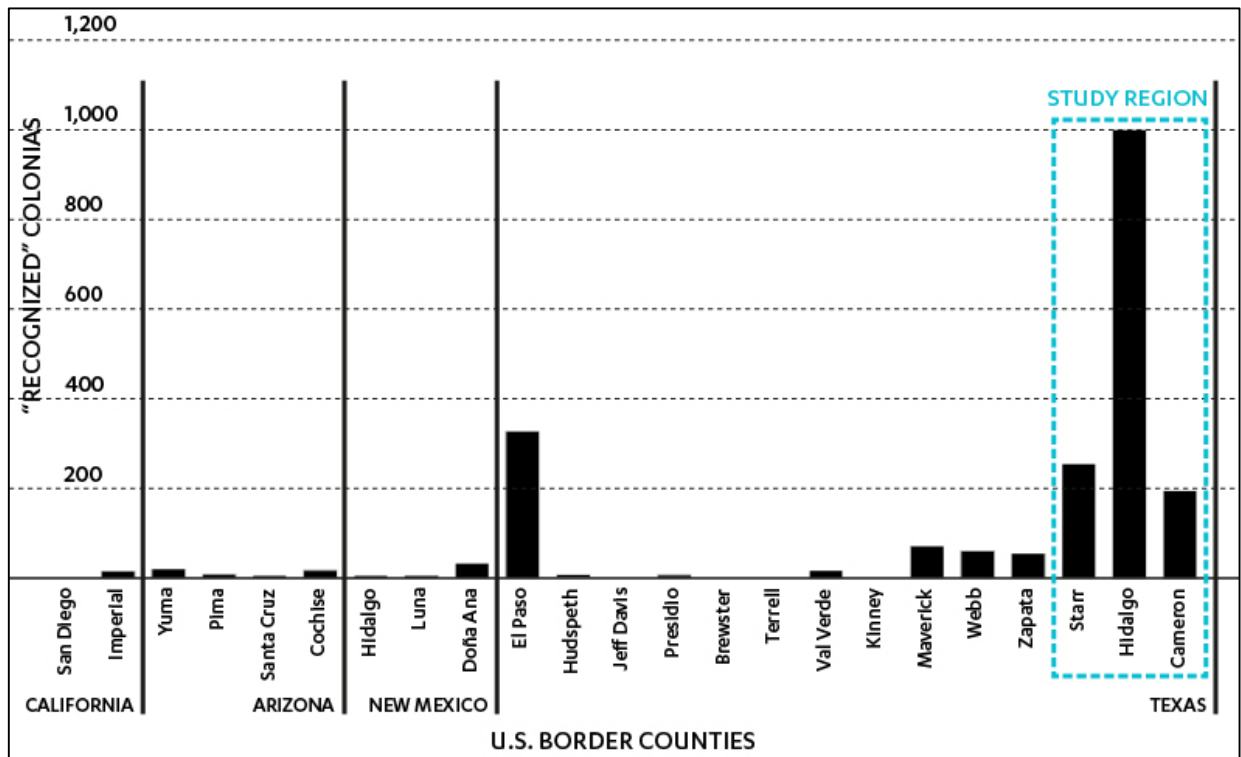
Figure 6: Chart showing the number of federally-recognized colonias by border county, showing the Rio Grande Valley to the far right (data from HUD 2008). This chart does not show non-federally-recognized colonias, such as impoverished model subdivisions, due to a lack of data regarding the locations of these communities (Durst 2015).

The influx of migrant farmworkers largely drove the Valley's high concentration of

colonias. Compared to other border regions, the Valley, especially Hidalgo County, by far

contains the highest number of colonias (*Figure 6*). The development of colonias was spurred by a

combination of policies that brought Mexican campesinos to the Valley (such as the Bracero

Program) and a dearth of policies surrounding campesinos' housing. The lack of affordable

housing across the Valley was described by one colonia organizer:

> *There's not enough affordable housing for rental or for ownership in our cities. Not only that, a lot of the cities are really becoming more and more prone towards NIMBYism, the [stance of] not in my backyard. In a lot of [local cities], their development codes say that you can't build a home in this little city unless it's at least 2,500 square feet. Well, essentially what they're saying is we don't want low-income people living here. The City of McAllen, where I live, want low income people working there, they want them to keep their municipal buildings clean, their parks clean, to do the landscaping, the hotel housekeeping, and things like that – [but] they don't want them to live there. So where else do people go? They go to these concentrated areas of poverty in the colonias, because there they can buy a piece of land from an owner. It's owner-financed. They may be paying 22- to 26-percent interest on their land, but at least they get land. And then, they get a dilapidated mobile home to put on it to live in, or they'll construct their own home out of pallets from the grocery store.*

In addition to the lack of affordable housing, the organizer describes another

phenomenon gripping the Valley: the rise of the service sector. A series of droughts in the early

2000s caused the Valley's farms to scale down significantly. Thus, workers from across the

Valley turned to the service industry for employment. This work is characterized by its minimum

wages and uncertain hours. Wage theft is also an unfortunate characteristic of the Valley's

service sector, especially for the area's undocumented residents. Thus, the Valley is one of the

most impoverished regions of the United States. Per the 2014 U.S. Census, approximately 34.5-

percent of Valley residents live below the poverty line, with 48.4-percent of residents under

eighteen-years of age living in poverty, nearly twice the average rates for the U.S. and Texas.

Furthermore, these estimates are most likely negatively biased, due to the frequent omission of

impoverished colonias and model subdivisions from the census (MacLaggan 2013).

However, these statistics mask the more dynamic economic connections in the Valley, as

it is one of the fastest growing regions in the U.S. At several locations, the Valley maintains

direct connections across the international border. Most notably, the "sister cities" of Brownsville/Matamoros and McAllen/Reynosa provide direct access across the border from built-up urban areas. Other important international connections exist more formally at the Free Trade Bridge in Los Indios, at the Nuevo Progreso Pass with Progreso Lakes, at the Donna – Rio Bravo International Bridge, and at Rio Grande City and Ciudad Camargo. Together, however, these fail to capture the more informal and less reified connections that bind the Rio Grande Valley to the Northern edge of the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. This binational region functions as one community of 2,552,178 people, with approximately 1,241,957 people on the U.S. side in the Valley and 1,310,221 people on the Mexican side of the border adjacent to the Valley.[15]

Together, this binational community shares numerous environmental resources, most notably water from the Río Grande. The Río Grande is one of the most regulated rivers in North America. These regulations, among other issues, ensure that the river continues to reach the Gulf of Mexico, an important issue as the Rio Grande Valley (the last stop along the river's course) greatly depends upon the Río Grande for its water systems. Because of the river, Northern Tamaulipas and the Valley are connected to one another environmentally, as both sides of the river's basin. The health of the Río Grande is dependent upon the health of its northerly reaches and the health of its southerly reaches. This interconnection is widely recognized by numerous international treaties and organizations that monitor the health of the basin and the river (bcWORKSHOP 3-1, interview, 2015; bcWORKSHOP 3-2, interview, 2016). Thus, while the

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[15] These 2010 population figures come from the 2010 U.S. Census and Mexican-based INEGI estimates. In the United States, this includes the counties of: Cameron (406,220), Hidalgo (774,769), and Starr (60,968). In Mexico, this includes the municipios of: Matamoros (489,193), Valle Hermoso (63,170), Río Bravo (118,259), Reynosa (608,891), Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (15,775), and Camargo (14,933).

river appears to delineate a clear division between north and south, in practice it binds its two sides together into one ecological system.

In addition to being connected economically and environmentally, these two communities in the Valley are knit together culturally. As mentioned in the Introduction, Larson succinctly describes this unique "border culture":

> *The United States-Mexico border historically has been characterized by its isolation from the core of both nations. The United States side has viewed the border as a place of lawlessness, poverty, backwardness, and ethnic difference, physically and culturally distant from either the Midwestern 'heartlands' or the urban 'melting pots.' Mexicans, too, traditionally dismissed their northern borderlanders as* pocho*, tainted by their proximity to the United States. Margaret Montoya captures the view from both sides: 'Border towns everywhere are different, incorporating the characteristics of the nation-states they link together, but nowhere are they as distinct from their respective core zones as along the United States/Mexico border.' (Larson 2002, 137)*

"*Pocho*" in Spanish is used to describe tainted fruit that is discolored. Here, Larson refers to *pocho*'s use as a pejorative description of Anglicized Mexicans. In Mexico, *pocho* describes Northern Mexico as a culture set apart from the rest of the country, due to its overly American cultural influences. Yet, *pocho* is also used to describe the U.S. side as well, as Larson further clarified: "*Pocho* is also used by Spanish speakers in the United States to describe a Mexican-American who is overly Americanized in speech and culture" (Larson 2002, 137). As such, there is recognition from both the Mexican and U.S. sides of the border that the U.S./Mexico border remains culturally distinct from both nations. Chicana scholar and Valley native Gloria Anzaldúa (2012) famously calls this phenomena "the third country," a region that remains so distinct, it has become its own territory. As I explain in the next section, attempts by the Federal government to divide the third country have, in many ways, begun to reify its boundaries (most notably through the Border Patrol's inland checkpoints). The third country is widely recognized by Valley residents who leverage it as a strength. In most Valley schools, children are taught all courses

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bilingually, in both English and Spanish, and learn both Mexican and American histories. Valley residents often work with coworkers who live in Mexico and commute across the border daily. They often have family and friends who live on the opposite side of the border. They shop for goods on whichever side offers the greatest advantage. They sometimes attend school on the opposite side of the border. These are just a few of the many personal connections that stitch together the Valley and northern Tamaulipas.

From this brief overview of the Valley, its interconnection with northern Tamaulipas is evident, not even accounting for the informal and, at times, illegal interconnections which exist. The Valley also maintains connections deep within Central America and northern South America. Reynosa is the final stop along the eastern-most leg of the infamous train, *La Bestia*, which brings migrants to the Valley. Over the course of the 2000s, these interconnections have been increasingly fragmented and made illegal by the U.S. government from afar. Thus, Valley residents, who already sensed a significant cultural distance from the center of the U.S., began to feel politically marginalized as well.

Transcending Border Militarization

The imposition of the border from afar is increasingly felt by Valley residents. While the Valley functioned as one cohesive region for decades with its now-Mexican counterpart in northern Tamaulipas, since the start of the 2000s, the border has come to dominate daily life increasingly. Butler (2004) describes in great detail the post-9/11 reactions that resulted in the mounting fortifications of the U.S.'s international borders. At the U.S./Mexico border, this included not only the walling and shoring up of the borderline, but also the imposition of a 100-

mile border territory in which the border patrol operates. Thus, at the Valley's northern and southern edges, the border patrol acts to restrict the flows of Valley residents.

During my research, my fieldwork often threw the phenomenon of border militarization into view. Three examples from my field notes most clearly exhibit the effects of militarization in the Valley: a Saturday trip to the pristine Boca Chica beach with friends involved an inland Border Patrol checkpoint on the road back to Brownsville; a trip to Austin involved a fully automated car scan and Border Patrol questioning at the new checkpoint in Sarita, Texas, almost one hundred miles inland from the international border line; and on U.S. 83, I twice witnessed border patrol officers responding to traffic incidents, instead of municipal or county policemen. These examples all target the mobility and movement of Valley residents within the Valley. For a U.S. citizen, these events are a nuisance; however, to those whose residency remains tenuous (the DAPA/DACA residents) or who are undocumented (or have close family and friends who are undocumented), these events can become threatening. Several colonia organizers explained that one of the most dangerous things an undocumented resident could do is be out on the open road (LUPE 1, interview, 2015; LUPE 2, interview, 2015). A routine traffic stop could mean the separation of family members. In an extreme case, one organizer posed the question of restricted mobility during a major natural disaster, such as a hurricane:

> *…emergency evacuation is always an issue when it comes to the … colonias, [especially regarding] immigration. So, our question always is, and we never get a public answer nor do I expect them to give a public answer, we don't want the [Border Patrol] checkpoints to be open if there's a mandatory evacuation. They will not come out and say whether that will or will not [be the case] because they think people are waiting here for a hurricane to bring drugs North. So they're not going to say the checkpoint is going to be closed, but it is an issue that creates a lot of anxiety among blended families that have family members that are not documented. They're not going to leave their grandmother here and evacuate. That's just not going to happen. Nor [are] they going to put their children on buses to get them out of here if it's a mandatory evacuation.*

Figure 7: Photograph showing a colonia directly adjacent to the U.S./Mexico border wall (Rivera 2015). The contrast, here, illuminates Valley residents' sense of abandonment, as the government spends millions on constructing the border wall.

As such, all Valley residents, regardless of their socioeconomic or residency status, feel the impacts of border militarization without even crossing the physical border line. The border is, thus, described more as a region in these accounts. Both Valley residents and the Border Patrol understand this. As one organizer stated, "I think the immigration issues here and the militarization of the border are things that affect all of us, not just people in the colonias." Thus, while immigration remains a factious topic in U.S. politics more generally, Valley residents sense a greater issue with the increasing presence of the military, as a housing specialist described:

> *We don't like the fact that we have helicopters hovering overhead. We have all these DPS troops that are down here and what's the governor spending? Twelve or thirteen million a month? I'd like one month of that spending for housing. Give me thirteen million … instead of having all the DPS people here. And we know the second layer of border wall is probably going to happen and here it [costs] twelve-and-a-half million a mile. We*

could use one mile of that spending down here to do other things, besides doing these crazy things.

Valley residents often expressed that the vulgar amounts of money given to the Border Patrol would be better spent on the community instead (*Figure 7*) and that the results of excessive border militarization spending did not increase their perceived safety, as one organizer stated:

There are people coming across in much larger numbers. Whereas, before, they were coming in fours and fives, now the coyotes are bringing them over in groups of thirties and forties. And so, I can understand [ranchers'] anxiety and their fear, but for the most part ... I feel more afraid when I see the military down here, it doesn't calm me at all.

At night, the Valley transforms from a safe, neighborly community into a heavily surveilled landscape, as most "illegal" crossings are thought to occur at night. This greatly impacts rural colonias, as their rural locations are often along the paths for undocumented immigrants traveling north. This nightly shift in the Valley's character can be felt by all the Valley's residents, as I explained in a 3am field note:

The side effect of this [insomnia] is that I get to hear the Border Patrol at all hours of night, particularly from 2am to, perhaps, 5am. They roar down East Avenue and our side street about once every five minutes (according to my unofficial mental time chart). East Avenue is supposed to be a 30-mph road, but I am certain that they go down the road at about 50 mph, with their brights on too. At least, perhaps because of our proximity to the International Bridge, we aren't subjected to the early morning helicopter scans in our neighborhood – that was quite frustrating at the rental on Ebony Avenue. I have little doubt that they ran over my neighbor's cat the other day too ... As time goes on, I am understanding more and more why the residents harbor a dislike for the border patrol, it's a constant reminder of how the federal and state governments view the community, almost as if the border communities are young children that cannot, for one second, go unmonitored, lest they burn the house down. (Field note, March 18, 2015)[16]

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[16] I would rent one of two places in Brownsville from my friend "Jaime," depending on availability, during my fieldwork. The first rental was adjacent to a resaca off Palm Boulevard on Ebony Avenue in a high-income neighborhood. The second rental was adjacent to the International Bridge to Mexico and one block from the border

Despite increasing militarization and a sense of "insecurity" along the border from afar, Valley residents overall did not report feeling unsafe in their own communities and, in general, described feeling safe. By contrast, the prevailing sentiment from Valley residents is that the Mexican side of the border is too dangerous to work in, even for those who intend to do good (ARISE 1, interview, 2015; EVN 1, interview, 2015):

> *Ten years ago it probably would have been easier [to work there], because there was a lot more interaction between the two cities, but over the last ten years, with not only the build-up of the border but just the security and cartel activity, there just isn't a lot of cross-border collaboration.*

This is evidenced by a reluctance to cross into Mexico for economic gains, even when it pertains to more affordable healthcare:

> *We have [a lot of] violence in Mexico now, and a lot of people in the colonias used to go over there for medications and dental. A lot of Winter Texans[17] would go over to Mexico for dental. Blue Cross/Blue Shield and the Mission School District used to have medical providers in Mexico. What's going to become the outcome of that? We know that pharmaceuticals are being sold under-the-table from Mexico at the pulgas [flea markets] here and we know that means people are self-medicating, which is good in one respect; but in the other respect, from a public health viewpoint, we're now going to be looking at a lot more disease-resistant bacteria, because people are self-medicating.*

As the organizer describes, increased violence on the Mexican side of the border has deep impacts on the U.S. side, informing the decision to seek healthcare. Increasingly, the economic advantages from the Mexican side of the border are being moved to the U.S. side (for instance,

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wall on East Avenue in the impoverished neighborhood of Southmost. Both locations felt safe and neighborly during the day, but seemed to transform during the night.

[17] "Winter Texans" is a local phrase used to describe the retired Canadians that flock to the Valley in the winters to escape the snows up north. Generally, Winter Texans live in RV parks and will go camping in the surrounding national parks. Their discarded RVs are a major source of housing for colonia residents. Unlike colonia RV parks, Winter Texan RV parks are provided with basic resources and utilities within incorporated urban areas.

smuggling pharmaceuticals into the Valley's *pulgas*). Another example from Reynosa are the informal shuttle services to McAllen's Walmart. Certain goods are more affordable on the U.S. side of the border (namely groceries), so residents from Reynosa developed informal car-shares to the local Walmart. From these car-shares, residents can shop on the U.S. side of the border and are then brought back to Reynosa. As such, ties to Mexico are not simply economic, environmental or cultural, but envelop and extend beyond these larger systems to inform everyday life. Organizers often spoke of visiting family members and friends that live on the Mexican side, eating dinner at new restaurants in Mexico, coworkers whose daily commute involved crossing the border, traveling the beautiful coast of Tamaulipas, or taking guardianship of nieces and nephews so they could attend school in the U.S., to name just a few examples.

Thus, regardless of increased border militarization or increasing violence in Mexico, border residents still find ways to maintain economic and social connections across the border, not even mentioning the inability to sever cross-border environmental systems. However, border militarization has, in practice, intensified a mistrust of centralized government in the Valley. This is evident in subtextual statements made by organizers throughout the interviews.

Spatially-Based Subtexts

> *I think, most of us are very concerned with the militarization of the border and the fact that people always say from the great border states like Utah … which is not a border state … but that's how crazy it is. The representatives and senators who don't know this area are making decisions about us here. (Valley nonprofit director)*

In the Valley, residents described a sense of liminality due to their physical distance from perceived power centers where policies are debated and enacted. These centers most frequently included Austin, Texas; New York City, NY; and Washington, D.C. This distance also created a

detachment from the "real" issues facing colonia and Valley residents. This liminality was expressed two different ways in organizer interviews: from a governmental perspective and from an economic perspective.

Politically, organizers often gestured to perceived power-based inequalities due to spatial distinctions between the Valley and centers of political influence, such as Washington D.C. and Austin. Washington D.C. and Austin are viewed as power centers that cannot relate to the fringes of their sovereignties at the border. "Washington-Austin" thus became a shorthand for misguided attempts to influence border life from "up north," as an organizer shows:

> *People up north don't understand that we're one. We're a city [Brownsville] of 1.2*
> *million people when you take in Matamoros and … we need to think that way … and we*
> *always did. It's only bureaucrats in Washington that think they can build a wall and*
> *they've done a successful job in hurting us, in that fashion.*

A sense of betrayal was commonly expressed in these political statements. One senior organizer described how support for colonia improvement reached a zenith in the mid- to late-1990s, then slowly dissipated (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016). In the 1990s, when colonias first received federal recognition, politicians spent time, money, and resources to not just improve colonias, but also understand them. Academics flocked to the Valley with federal funding to examine colonia issues. Then this focus slowly tapered off and federal money was directed elsewhere. As organizers pressed against this trend, representatives from Austin and Washington D.C. responded that the colonia issue was "already solved" and did not merit any continued work. However, within the Valley, issues of advanced marginalization persist, as one organizer stated:

> *Colonias were sexy back in the mid-90s. They've [since] fallen off people's radar. We are*
> *trying to remind people that half a billion [people] live in there still and there are still*
> *some of the same remaining issues … and there are a lot of new ones … We've got water*
> *and the sewer and what's the next thing?*

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This sense of abandonment causes Valley residents to seek inspiration and assistance from other sources. These comparable communities are generally within Latin America, and not the U.S., as Valley residents sense a fundamental difference between border poverty and poverty elsewhere in the U.S. One organizer described it thus: "I think being poor here is different. People have a lot more challenges than if they were poor in the inner city of Atlanta or Washington D.C. or Chicago, because of the lack of community resources." Instead, organizers found greater similarities in Latin American communities, as a different organizer explained: "We should not be relating to Washington, and New York, and San Francisco, and even poor places like Detroit. We don't have the same issues. Medellín, Bogotá, Lima, those are the issues that we know very well."

While part of the similarity is cultural, tied to a common language (Spanish) and urban practices, the commonalities between the Valley and Latin American urban areas are expressed above as a sense of mutual resource-based deprivations (in the first case) and a sense of shared issues (in the second case). Medellín is commonly used as an equivalent comparison. In fact, Medellín is so revered by the Mayor of the City of Brownsville that the two cities maintain a collaboration to discuss solutions to urban problems (Participant Observation, Rockefeller Foundation 100 Resilient Cities Meeting in Brownsville, March 25, 2015). However, several organizers emphasize that this distancing may be a self-fulfilling prophecy, since the Valley remains tied to the U.S. legally. The Valley's liminality (particularly in the colonias) has led to a suspected decrease in voting rates, as one organizer explained: "…only two out of ten registered voters vote here. And that's where we're working very hard on getting them out to vote, because why should Austin pay any attention to us or Washington pay any attention to us if people aren't voting?" While issues of voting rights in Valley colonias have yet to be extensively studied and

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quantified, this is currently the subject of two doctoral dissertations, one at Texas A&M and the other at Tel Aviv University, both currently in the data collection phase (Michal Braier, interview, 2015).

Several Valley-based organizing campaigns seek not only to encourage voter registration in the colonias, but to also assist registered voters into voting booths. This is not restricted to federal or even state elections, but is also aimed at local elections. Reminding Valley residents, particularly in the colonias, that they are still part of the U.S. political system has become a major source of new organizing activities (as I explain more in Chapter Four). However, to get residents voting, these campaigns must surmount the sense of abandonment and marginality that accompanies not only political interactions outside the Valley, but economic interactions as well.

Further disassociated from the colonias is a "New York City" subtext that begins to invoke issues of economic privilege and the consequences of race-based differences. New York-based foundations are often seen as a coercive force, which generally usurp community movements for their own personal edification. Several colonia organizers (whom I will not list to protect their organizations) described phone calls and emails from two nonprofit foundations that asked to "take over" successful colonia initiatives in exchange for a small amount of money. "I'd like to take over your network," one organizer recounted the foundation employee stating in their phone call. The sense from these organizers was that the foundations saw colonia organizing successes and wished to financially support them, but would ultimately take credit for their hard work. In the three instances of this attempted cooptation I encountered in organizer interviews, organizers resisted and did not take the offered monies.

While "take over" attempts remain a rare and extreme event, another organizer stated quite plainly, "They [foundations] don't understand the Valley." He felt as though nonprofit

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foundations brought predetermined models for change in the colonias that were inconsistent with the realities of the Valley. Another organizer described one nonprofit foundation as "white people in towers in New York City that have a brilliant change that they want us to implement."

Despite this frustration, these organizers preferred to accept funding from nonprofit foundations over the government, though they resent the externally generated "solutions" that so frequently accompany foundation funding. As shown above, this frustration is often expressed spatially by the distance between a perceived center of economic power, oftentimes "New York City" but in a few instances also "San Francisco" and California more generally. Through my participant observation, I noted how nonprofit foundations reinforced this perceived distance. At the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities meeting in Brownsville, Texas, Peter Madonia, a Chief Operating Officer, stated that when Rockefeller first told him he was being sent to Brownsville, he thought they meant Brownsville in Brooklyn, not Brownsville, Texas. Despite these grievances, issues with foundations appeared, in this study, more as isolated incidents. More generally, colonia organizers regard nonprofit foundations very highly; however, this does not mean their approaches to Valley problems are not fraught with some conflict. The larger message colonia organizers had for nonprofit foundations was: please support *grassroots* solutions to the problems of poverty. This is particularly important in the Valley, as many colonia organizers believe that the solutions to their problems do not lie in the north.

Summary

Dr. Julieta Garcia, she was the past president of UT-B [University of Texas at Brownsville] and she's now starting the UT Americas Institute. She's actually creating an Aspen-like think-tank that focuses on the issues of the Americas, predominantly the Global South, and her theory is, and I believe so, that the Rio Grande Valley is the connector between the north and the south … and this is where a think-tank should be

located to bring those things together. Not really even focused on any one issue, just being able to get a bunch of smart people together to do that kind of work ... You go into her office and there is a big map of the Americas. She said, "That's where we are, we are right in the middle of everybody else. Oh, and by the way, we speak both languages and our problems here are Global South problems." (Valley nonprofit director)

Dr. Garcia, a Valley-based academic and former President of UT-Brownsville, examines the Rio Grande Valley as a bridge between the Global South and the Global North. While she notes the blending of U.S. and Mexican issues in the Valley, she views Valley problems as specifically Global South problems. While many residents would agree with Dr. Garcia, as exhibited in the previous sections, there is uncertainty regarding where to look for solutions. Another Valley-based scholar and colonia organizer, Dr. David Arizmendi, finds that while many Valley issues, notably colonia poverty, are border-specific problems, non-border-specific solutions remain the best paths forward (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016). Scholars and organizers that follow this logic state that the colonias embody the issues of Texas-specific policies and mindsets, particularly the creation of restriction-less zones. Larson (1995), for instance, describes the colonia as a greater example of neoliberal policy than Houston.

By contrast, many colonia organizers state that solutions will be found from within the community itself. This accompanies their definition of organizing as facilitating the growth of community-based capacity. This attitude represents the "self-help ethos" of the Valley, and, perhaps, the border region more generally. Given the uncertainties regarding sovereignty and power in their communities, Valley residents have historically turned to themselves for solutions. This is a theme that the next two chapters will draw out in more detail.

There is no single answer to the question: where does the Rio Grande Valley situate itself globally? The Valley, as a border region, transcends the current urban theory narratives of Global North and Global South. It is, confusingly, both and neither. This character of the Valley remains

important when examining colonia organizing, as this is the complex context in which organizers

and residents work. Issues of power and politics that form the heart of organizing are less clearly

defined at the peripheries of sovereign territories than at their hearts. Following Anzaldúa (2002;

2012), I would state that colonia organizing in the Valley is operating in a territory of power and

politics distinct from the cores of both Mexican and American politics. This territory takes the

border as its center and emanates north to south spatially. Within this territory, residents form

binational bounds that are daily tested internally by the Border Patrol and externally by political

powers attempting to assert a North/South ordering over this "third country." Valley residents

are, then, in a state of *nepantla*, between the north and south. As such, they serve as a critical

bridge between these two worlds.

Thus, organizing within the Valley should not, as it has in the past, be read solely through

the lens of U.S. politics; additionally, it should also not be read as a distinctly Global South

practice. It is, as Roy (2016) states, its own practice connected to a specific territory of poverty

that transcends dichotomous global categories. She further states:

> *...poor people's movements are not organized around the cause of ending poverty. After all, these movements are acutely aware that racialized poverty is not an anomaly, but rather a necessary supplement to prosperity. Instead, be it the National Welfare Rights Organization or the National Union of the Homeless, poor people's movements transform poorness from stigma to rights, from lived experience to political agency. I am also arguing that social science research must document and analyze the histories and futures of such organizing. (Roy 2016)*

Through the next chapters, I will follow the historical development and trajectories of

colonia organizing in the Rio Grande Valley to show how a highly impoverished community in a

historically and academically marginalized space is transforming, as Roy states, their "lived

experience to political agency."

Chapter 4: From "Huelga" to "Unidos Venceremos"

Figure 8: Photo contrasting early forms of colonia organizing with newer forms. (left) Photo from the UC-San Diego Farmworker archive, showing the first farmworker march in the Rio Grande Valley, which stretched from Rio Grande City to Austin, Texas in the summer of 1966 (Fishlow 1967); (right) The 2015 Cesar Chavez Day march in San Juan, Texas (Rivera 2015).

Introduction

On September 9, 2016, hundreds of Valley residents gathered in Edinburg, Texas to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the historic 1966 Melon Strike. Organized by the United Farmworkers (UFW) led by César Chávez, the Melon Strike began in Rio Grande City on the western edge of the Valley. From there, migrant farmworkers marched over three hundred miles from Rio Grande City to Austin, Texas to protest the working conditions and racism present on the farms. While the 1966 movement never crystallized due to Texas' anti-union laws

(Arizmendi, interview, 2016), it still remains highly influential and is credited by colonia

organizers and residents with catalyzing the movement to improve physical conditions in the

colonias. Through time, the farmworker movement changed into the movement for colonia

services. However, this history has yet to be recognized within colonia literature. Even UFW

archives at Wayne State University and the University of California-San Diego contain little

documentation of these early activities in the Rio Grande Valley and their connection to

contemporary colonia organizing is still understudied. The knowledge of these historical

connections remains with older colonia organizers and residents, those who remember walking

with Chávez in those early farmworker strikes (*huelga*)[18] and continue to work in the colonias on

new regional initiatives (*unidos venceremos*).[19]

      This chapter examines the historical lineages of colonia organizing in the Valley from

1966 to 2016, beginning with four long-standing traditions, then focusing on four newer

organizing developments (*Figure 9*). Using interviews with colonia organizers and first-hand

historical accounts captured in several archives (See Appendix A), this chapter reviews four

early forms of colonia organizing from 1966 to 2003: the early farmworker unionizing

movements of the United Farmworkers (UFW) and Texas Farm Workers Union (TFWU), faith-

based community organizing (predominantly Catholic) for basic social services, Freirian-based

promotoras, and the Border Low Income Housing Coalition (BLIHC). The UFW's 1966 Melon

Strike in Rio Grande City is considered (by organizers and residents) to be the first overt act of

organizing in Valley colonias; the influence of César Chávez's Community Union Model

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[18] "Huelga" is Spanish for "strike" and was the historic rallying slogan for the United Farmworkers.

[19] "Unidos Venceremos" is Spanish for "United We Stand" and was the rallying slogan for the 2015 César Chávez Day march in San Juan, Texas.

continues to influence contemporary colonia organizing. Accompanying the UFW movement in the 1960s was the rise of faith-based organizing, which gained strength when the Catholic Church restructured its leadership within the Valley in 1967, creating a more local focus. With faith-based organizations advocating for federal-level colonia recognition in the late 1980s, government funding for colonia-based public health initiatives supported the promotora movement, a hybrid Mexican/American form of information and service delivery that emphasizes home-based educational support. Lastly, following colonia recognition in the early 1990s, colonia organizations formed the BLIHC, a local coalition whose goal was to support grassroots organizing and problem-identification across Valley colonias. These four movements represent overlapping organizing philosophies and tactics that were cherry picked from Latin American and American organizing cultures to suit the peculiar conditions of the U.S./Mexico border and colonias. As such, while these various tactics have vastly different lineages and goals, they remain complementary in their objectives and foci, creating important colonia-based coalitions.

After discussing these four long-standing colonia movements, I describe four coalitions that have developed since the beginning of the twenty-first-century: the Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network (EVN), Unidos por UT-RGV (Unidos), the Land Use Colonia Housing Action (LUCHA), and public interest design. These four movements all emphasize cross-organization collaborations (not unlike the historic BLIHC) that bring together colonia-based organizations with vastly different organizing tactics and structures. This provides the movements with a variety of knowledge bases and tactics from which to pull given the situation at hand, and also provides a broad constituency of colonia residents (in one case, upwards of 40,000 residents) to

give campaigns potency. New foundation funding is supporting these collaborations and further incentivizing their development.
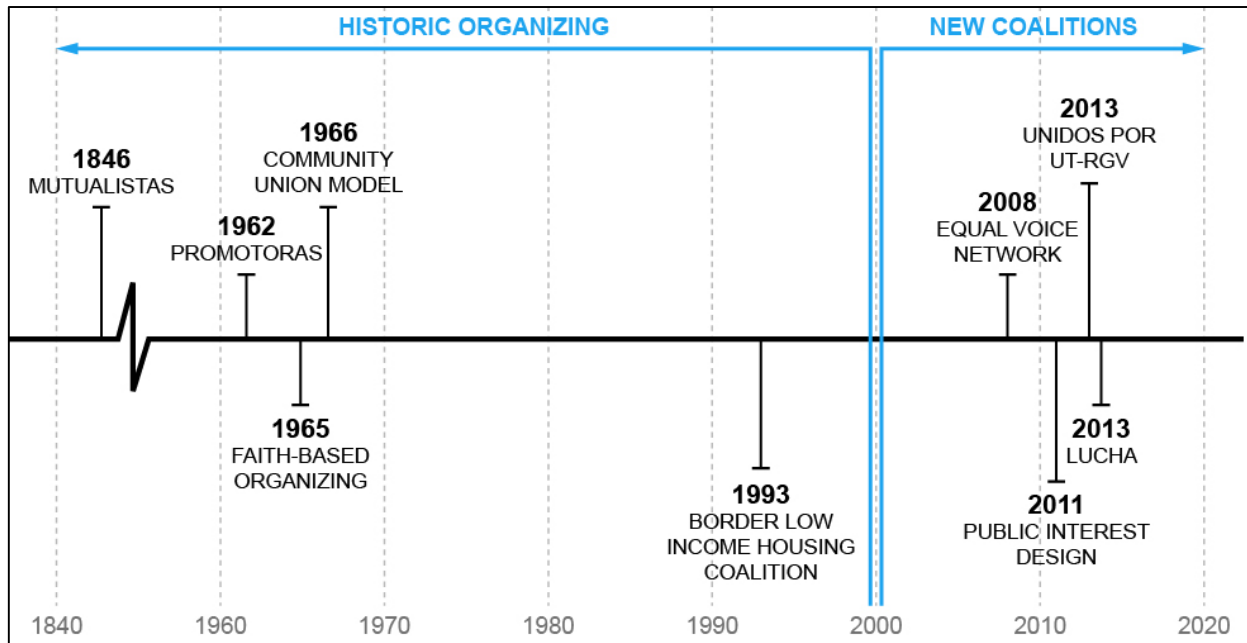
Figure 9: Timeline showing the founding of historic colonia organizing movements and the coalitions and movements developed in the new millennium (Rivera 2016).

These eight organizing models are, on a large-scale, blending together to form new organizing strategies. However, at the heart of all of these strategies is an idea of self-help. This "self-help" is not that of the sweat equity[20] housing programs that dominated colonia re-development throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (L. Arizmendi, Arizmendi, and Donelson 2010; Chapa and Eaton 1998; Durst and Ward 2014; Larson 2002; Ward 1999; Ward 2004), but is instead a faith in the colonia's capacity to identify salient problems and appropriate solutions to those problems. It derives from early border *mutualistas*, or nineteenth-century mutual aid societies at the U.S./Mexico border that underscored the capacity for residents to provide for themselves, emphasizing volunteerism and shared cultural bonds (Marquez and Jennings 2000;

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[20] Sweat equity is a form of self-help housing that requires households to work a certain number of hours on the construction of their own homes and the homes of several other families.

Pycior 2014). This history of colonia organizing counters existing literature on colonias that cites "lack of capacity" for integration; as the community sees it, the capacity exists, but needs to be drawn out and reinforced with some skill-based training.

Analyzing four long-standing and four newer colonia movements, several important themes emerge throughout the chapter. First, there is an important transition from organizing for working conditions to organizing for living conditions that follows the UFW's unsuccessful attempts to unionize in Texas. This brings to fruition several organizing concepts held by Chávez that were stymied in California, but function well within Texas' policy environment. Second, these eight movements are bounded by a self-help ethos ubiquitous across the border region. Separate from the government's use of "self-help" to describe sweat equity housing, the self-help ethos is a border phenomenon that emanates from a suspicion of government and the realities of living within a liminal space (covered more extensively in Chapter 5). While its exact definition and operationalization changes over time, self-help remains the implicit mantra for major colonia movements. Lastly, as time progresses, these disparate movements increasingly coalesce into multi-pronged campaigns that leverage diverse organizing tactics to achieve common goals. Examining these historical and contemporary colonia organizing movements advances academic understandings of cross-organization collaboration in organizing and the funding supporting this activity, the impacts of the UFW in the Rio Grande Valley, and, most importantly, the capacity to organize in border colonias.

Mutualistas

Mutualistas represent some of the earliest forms of community organizing within the U.S./Mexico border region. Since the Mexican-American War (1846-48), mutualistas have

provided basic social services to border residents and formed organizing networks to protect

border residents from racial and economic discrimination (Marquez and Jennings 2000, 541).

These groups traditionally held strong cross-border ties to communities in Mexico, creating a

sense of solidarity that fought against cultural assimilation and fostered a distrust of U.S.

institutions. They organized against actual and perceived community threats, such as racial

discrimination from federal laws, but most importantly, they served as cultural centers as well,

placing the border region's unique heritage on display (Pycior 2014, 75). Over time, these groups

began to diversify their concerns, focusing on labor issues and civil rights issues (Marquez and

Jennings 2000, 541).

Mutualistas eventually influenced the Chicano movements of the 1950s and 1960s, most

notably influencing the organizing of César Chávez and the United Farmworkers (UFW) (Pycior

2014, 71–82). While the UFW in California did not pick up as many elements of the mutualistas,

in Texas the UFW's organizing was forced to continue a heavily mutualista style of organizing,

due to Texas' anti-union laws (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016). Such anti-union laws prevented

the UFW from successfully organizing in Texas with the strategies and techniques they

successfully employed in California. As a result, the UFW was forced to develop a different

organizing model in Southern Texas; this was called the Community Union Model.

Community Union Model in the Valley

The United Farmworkers (UFW) is a prolific early-Chicano movement in the United

States that sought to unionize abused and chronically underpaid farmworkers. UFW is

traditionally described as Alinskyite (Stall and Stoecker 1998, 734) on the basis of its founding

members' time as organizers with Fred Ross (directly trained by Alinsky) at the highly

influential Community Service Organization (CSO). However, a very brief overview of historical accounts of César Chávez's life and of the origins of the UFW suggest an alternative interpretation. Working backwards, chronologically, Chávez began the UFW under the name National Farm Workers' Association (NFWA) in 1962 with Dolores Huerta, Antonio Orendain, Gilberto Padilla, and Philip Vera Cruz. These organizers left the CSO when the group refused to adopt the issue, as Orendain states:

> *In the CSO we were trying to give voting power to the Mexican Americans. We were working real (sic) well, but when the doctors, lawyers, and the middle class got into it, they used us just for political power and to win elections. Therefore, by 1962 we had gotten completely away from the farm workers' problems, and so we got out of the CSO and formed the National Farm Workers' Association. (Antonio Orendain, as quoted in Bowman (2005, 6)).*

Unlike Alinsky and Ross, Chávez was, himself, a farmworker who worked the fields with his family after they lost their family farm during the Great Depression (Chavez and Stavans 2008). Chavez's insistence on working in the fields runs counter to the notion of community organizer as separate from community leader, and many of the UFW's organizers were also farmworkers – Chávez's drive for organizing was motivated by his personal experiences. Moreover, much of his published community organizing philosophy was informed by his readings of Mahatma Gandhi and St. Francis of Assisi prior to his time at the CSO (Chavez and Stavans 2008; García 2008, XXIII), an exercise which helped Chávez formulate a system of nonviolence consistent with his devout Catholicism (Chavez and Stavans 2008, XXII; Orosco 2008). As a result, many of Chávez's speeches and organizing tactics included Catholic overtones – for example, the famous hunger strikes reflected the fasting of Lent. Furthermore, historians also suggest that the UFW's success was nearly fifty years in the making, well before Alinsky or, even, Chávez (Salomon 2003). Many of the UFW's tactics (especially the "huelgas"

or strikes on specific growers) are reminiscent of 1930s Filipino farmworker unions in Hawaii, a movement with direct ties to Mexican-American farmworker unions (like the UFW) through Pablo Manlapit's Filipino Labor Union (FLU), with which Vera Cruz (who helped begin the UFW) was associated (Salomon 2003, 9–20). In addition, the UFW was supported by the Chicano movement of the 1960s, which has its origins in the Zoot Suit (Sailor) Riots in Los Angeles in the 1940s (Salomon 2003, 21–30). Within this larger context, the UFW did not begin its work in Texas until 1966, when UFW organizer Eugene Nelson, alongside Chávez and Huerta, made the plight of Rio Grande Valley farmworkers one of the UFW's central foci.

The Rio Grande Valley has one of the largest populations of migrant farmworkers in the U.S. (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016). The Bracero Program, the largest foreign worker program in U.S. history, brought hundreds of thousands of Mexican migrant farmworkers into the United States between 1942 and 1964. Many of these workers filtered through the Rio Grande Valley on the path to other U.S. states, choosing to create home bases in the Valley, especially as they married and sought a stable home for their children to attend school. However, despite the grand anti-discriminatory claims of the Bracero Program, these poor farmworkers found themselves priced out and unwelcome in the incorporated urban areas of the Valley; over time, they purchased land in illegally subdivided communities with few basic services (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016). Eugene Nelson and Antonio Orendain are both credited with beginning the movement to organize the ultra-poor in the Rio Grande Valley in 1966 (Bowman 2005, 7; Texas Farm Worker's Support Committee 1977), decades before farmworker communities became known as "colonias." At the time, the Valley was a significant citrus- and melon-producing region in the United States; however, only five major farms existed in the region, and the minimal employment opportunities and ready supply of farmworkers led to abysmal working

conditions (Fishlow 1967). To rectify this, the UFW attempted to unionize Valley workers in 1966. Under the leadership of Nelson and Orendain, they organized their first strike against La Casita Farms, the largest melon farm in the region located outside of Rio Grande City (*Figure 8*). As Nelson told farmworkers: "You must be brave… You are the sons of Zapata. In the tradition of the American and Mexican revolutions, and as citizens of the United States, you should stand up for your rights" (Fishlow 1967).

Over four hundred workers agreed to strike, nearly 80 percent of the workforce (Fishlow 1967). The growers had two responses: bring in green card workers from Mexico to replace the strikers and bring in the notorious Texas Rangers. The Rangers, having a particularly storied history with Mexican-American communities across Texas, arrested Eugene Nelson and attempted to physically force strikers back into the melon fields. Allegedly, the Texas Rangers would spray protesters with insecticides in attempts to disband them (Bowman 2005, 17). While Starr County officials took the side of the growers and banned all forms of protest, several Hidalgo County officials were more sympathetic towards the farmworkers. Mayor Al Ramirez of Edinburg, recently hospitalized due to injuries sustained in a car crash, had his hospital bed wheeled into a protest to show his support (Fishlow 1967). Despite all of the UFW's efforts, however, no union contract ever came to fruition after the 1966 Melon Strike (as it came to be known).

Continually harassed by abuses from the Texas Rangers, farmworkers in the Valley struggled to join the unions that were emerging in California. The Valley's border condition significantly weakened efforts to unionize, in comparison to Californian unionizing, due to the steady availability of green card workers across the border in Mexico (Bowman 2005, 21–23; Fishlow 1967). In May 1967, Valley campesinos collaborated with Mexican green carders to

hold a transnational picket line at the Roma and Camargo international bridges, as green carders blocked the Mexican side and campesinos blocked the U.S. side (*Figure 10*) (Bowman 2005, 24–27). This transnational cooperation led to a successful freeze on the Valley's melon harvest. However, Mexican green carders recanted after just three days for fear of losing employment opportunities, causing the U.S. farmworkers to also stand down due to fear of losing their jobs to the green carders. These transnational union-busting tactics, though rendered illegal by the Immigration Department in July 1967, pitted Mexican farmworkers against U.S. farmworkers, fracturing their movement and weakening unionizing attempts (Fishlow 1967).

Figure 10: Cross-border strike in 1967 (Fishlow 1967). (left) Green card strikers on the Mexican side of the border. (right) U.S. migrant farmworkers striking on the U.S. side of the border.

After the 1966-1967 strikes, Valley farmworkers did not see the successes that their fellow Californian UFW farmworkers saw. Despite the Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act (FLCRA) of 1963 and Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act (AWPA) of 1983, migrant farmworkers are still prohibited from unionizing in Texas, significantly restricting the UFW's activities in the state (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016; Texas Farm Worker's Support Committee 1977). As the UFW led unsuccessful efforts to unionize Valley farmworkers, Chávez fell under heavy scrutiny by a subsection of Valley organizers for, in their view, focusing UFW efforts squarely on Californians to the detriment of Texans. The desire for a locally based union ultimately led Antonio Orendain, a long-time Texas UFW organizer, to leave the UFW in 1975

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and found the Texas Farm Workers Union (TFWU) (Texas Farm Worker's Support Committee 1977). This occurred while Eugene Nelson stepped down as the UFW's Director of Texas operations and Rebecca Flores Harrington took over the position. The fractioning of Valley farmworkers further prevented any significant unionizing efforts.

Since the UFW was barred from unionizing Valley farmworkers, and was unsuccessful in lobbying for pro-union policies in Texas, Chávez instead advocated for a different tactic in the Valley throughout the 1980s, the Community Union Model, which shifted the UFW's focus from working conditions (the plight of farmworkers) to living conditions (focusing on service delivery to colonias). The Community Union Model seeks to move organizing out of the sphere of the farmer and the field and into the farmworkers' community, legitimizing their presence by improving the physical conditions of their communities (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016). Originally, Chávez wished to use this model in California, organizing within the farmworker communities instead of the fields, but Filipino farmworkers "jumped the gun" and began striking in the fields, forcing Chávez's hand (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016). While the model did not come to fruition in California, Chávez saw its place in Texas, where the self-help ethos of the border region dovetailed with his vision of resistance from within the community.

To bolster this work, Chávez founded La Unión (later known as La Unión del Pueblo Entero or LUPE) in 1989 on land Chávez received from the local Catholic Church in San Juan, Texas (LUPE 2, interview, 2015). LUPE remains one of the strongest colonia organizations in the border region, following Chávez's Community Union Model and reminding colonia residents of the UFW's legacy in the Valley through annual events and marches. With over 7,000 members, LUPE focuses on a dues-based model of organizing developed by Chávez; for a small membership fee, colonia residents gain access to valuable services offered by LUPE, such as tax

preparation services, local coupons, and citizenship services, among others. Sociologist and former organizer with the UFW, Proyecto Azteca, and Azteca Community Loan Fund (ACLF) David Arizmendi called such services the "maintenance" of a successful community organization. Maintenance plays a critical role in LUPE for three reasons, he stated (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016). First, maintenance allows organizers to interact with the residents on a day-to-day basis through the services provided. Needed services are established through house meetings with residents and through an annual survey (LUPE 2, interview, 2015). Second, because residents pay membership fees to participate in LUPE's services, the organization remains accountable to the people, and not to the government or to a nonprofit foundation. As one LUPE organizer stated, "Chávez used to say to me, 'you can't protest the government if you are taking money from it'" (LUPE 2, interview, 2015). Lastly, and most importantly, maintenance allows LUPE to maintain a daily presence in the colonias, so when residents need to be mobilized on a major issue, they are more willing to participate. As Arizmendi states, "The transition from a consumer to a warrior is in belief – that is where the organizing power comes from" (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016).

As he continued to explain, successful organizing relies upon a give and take between organizers and residents. In the end, however, the Community Union Model is premised upon a notion of self-help that emphasizes the need for low-income families to invest in themselves and participate in community organizing efforts. Through LUPE and its neighboring organizations, the UFW's model continues to thrive in Valley colonias through Chávez's Community Union Model. This organizing work focuses on colonia service delivery as a basis for community empowerment and member dues as the basis for community-based accountability. Today, the Community Union Model remains one of the most commonly used colonia organizing tactics,

often underpinning newer collaborative networks due to the enormous constituencies these groups can mobilize. In the next section, I review an equally influential colonia organizing tactic which has historically worked in tandem with the Community Union Model: the faith-based model.

Faith-Based Community Organizing in the Valley

Protestant and Catholic churches have both served as important and reliable hubs of organizing in communities of color, due to their member-based financial support and their indigenous leadership (Lloyd 2014). Wood and Warren define this faith-based community organizing as an "intervention" where "religious communities seek to empower their members to pursue their political goals in the public sphere" (2002, 9). Using a feminist lens, I argue that faith-based community organizing also operates within the private sphere as well, especially in marginalized communities like the colonias. In the Valley, the Catholic Church is a major influence that cannot be ignored, both in the public and private spheres of political life. The Diocese of Brownsville covers the entire Rio Grande Valley and has the highest percentage of Catholics among a Diocese population in the entire United States, with 85 percent of the population associated with the Catholic Church (Cheney 2015). The Catholic Church in the Valley is a major colonia organizing force and its members, in particular its Sisters, have founded numerous grassroots organizations. Valley churches conduct organizing campaigns to advocate for immigrant rights within the church itself, while several Sisters have also created autonomous organizations (like ARISE and Proyecto Juan Diego) that contain Catholic overtones with secular missions. Furthermore, Catholic leaders have greatly assisted historic

movements, like migrant farmworker organizing, making them a significant part of any historic analysis of Valley colonia organizing.

Established in 1965 out of the Diocese of Corpus Christi, the founding of the Diocese of Brownsville coincided with the surge of farmworker organizing instigated by the UFW in 1966. Appointed in 1966, then-Bishop of Brownsville Humberto Medeiros supported the organizing of migrant farmworkers and immigrants from the start. Medeiros was known to bless the organizing of farmworkers to show his support of their unionizing efforts (Fishlow 1967). Shortly after the 1966 strikes, the UFW established a Texan headquarters in San Juan and established a working relationship with the local Catholic Church, residing adjacent to the Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle, a prominent historical religious site at the center of the Valley. This location was not arbitrary, as Bishop Medeiros had given ten acres of land associated with the Basilica to Chávez for the express purpose of organizing the poor residents living in Hidalgo County. Chávez, perhaps, enjoyed the symbolism of this act, as he often imbued his organizing with the iconography of Catholicism (Chavez and Stavans 2008, XXII; Orosco 2008). This relationship between Bishop Medeiros and Valley organizers continued well after he was promoted to Archbishop and relocated to Boston.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, faith-based organizing increased in the border region, at-large, to respond to several refugee crises and the working conditions of migrant farm workers (Henkel, Jr. 2010, 138). Little documentation exists from this time, but according to the information available, faith-based community organizing took a strong social justice perspective premised upon the need to continuously provide social services (Henkel, Jr. 2010, 133, 137). In the early 1980s, several faith-based groups began to push for policies to address the water issues found in colonias (Applebome 1989). This advocacy eventually led to the recognition of colonias

in the 1990 Cranston-Gonzalez Affordable Housing Act and subsequent government-based

attempts to address colonia issues.

Today, the Catholic Church continues to advocate for colonia and immigrant rights in the

Valley, primarily through several groups of Sisters. For instance, ARISE (A Resource in Serving

Equality) is a grassroots organization with multiple locations across Hidalgo County founded by

Sister Gerrie Naughton of the Sisters of Mercy order in 1987. Today, ARISE is co-sponsored by

the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word. Both of these groups are

highly involved in social justice initiatives across the country (in the case of Sisters of Mercy,

across all the Americas) and issues of racial equality and immigration. ARISE, founded by these

two Sister orders, and through Sister Gerrie's interactions with women in the colonia of Las

Milpas, became heavily focused on women's rights and empowerment. ARISE continues to

serve women today by training them to act as "animators" within their communities, or by

assisting other poor women "to do and change and to help others" (ARISE 1, interview, 2015).

Much like LUPE, ARISE's organizing functions on a "maintenance" model of services;

however, ARISE focuses on empowerment through education in a form reminiscent of Freire's

critical pedagogy, offering classes to colonia women and children on a variety of topics that meet

their needs. As a senior organizer with ARISE explained:

> *We've always felt, and ARISE's belief is … to attend to [people's] needs. Us being in the community is like listening to them: what is it that they're worried about? What are their concerns? What are their needs? What are they needing? What do they want to learn? And so … English classes were one of the requirements, one of the needs of the community. Their houses were flooding. Their streets were flooding. There wasn't a [health] clinic. There wasn't a fire department. There were a lot of infrastructural needs… in Las Milpas,[21] but people needed English classes so that they could apply for*

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[21] Las Milpas is a colonia in Hidalgo County, and the first colonia that ARISE organized within.

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amnesty programs or for agriculture programs ... that's how they were going to be able to become citizens. And so ARISE started providing ESL classes to the adults and then based on that we had up to thirty groups of six to eight women or six to eight men studying ESL, just in the area of Las Milpas, ... they wanted to be at home, studying English, without having to go to this big [school] setting or [going] out of their way to [attend] classes. This way it was at home, because ARISE is a home-based program ... It was neighbors coming to somebody's home.

In this way, ARISE focuses on intimate and private settings for assisting colonia residents. Since their first ESL classes in the colonia of Las Milpas, ARISE has expanded both in terms of the communities they work in and the classes they offer. With this "maintenance," ARISE, like LUPE, can mobilize their constituency very quickly when the need arises. In treating their classes like "therapy sessions" for the participants, whereby they can empathize with one another, colonia- and status-based issues are identified for organizing purposes (ARISE 1, interview, 2015). Acting as a "bridge" between the community and the relevant agencies and institutions, ARISE's organizers bring these concerns from the colonia home to the public sphere (ARISE 1, interview, 2015). Much like LUPE, ARISE forms the base for many newer collaborative networks in the Valley due to their ability to quickly mobilize their constituency.

Another Church-based organizing group is Proyecto Juan Diego (PJD), located in the colonia of Cameron Park. Cameron Park is one of the Valley's largest colonias, directly adjacent to the incorporated City of Brownsville. In recent years, Brownsville has aggressively annexed the land surrounding Cameron Park, but has not annexed Cameron Park itself. PJD was founded in 2003 by Sister Phylis Peters of the Daughter of Charity order to assist Cameron Park. Like ARISE, PJD uses an education-based model of empowerment. PJD offers ESL and citizenship classes to the residents of Cameron Park; however, unlike ARISE, PJD focuses primarily on issues of health education using a promotora-based model, which uses trained community-based nurses to educate by going door-to-door (which will be explained more in the next section).

As opposed to ARISE and PJD's organizing-heavy focus, local churches in the Valley do not organize as extensively, but still provide social services in colonias mainly in the form of undocumented immigrant assistance. Most notably, since 2014 numerous Valley churches have taken the problems of unaccompanied minors into their own hands. Many of these churches feed, clothe, and monitor the needs of these minors, who are largely of Central American (mostly Honduran) descent. At San Felipe de Jesus in Cameron Park, unaccompanied minors are given a special section of the church during masses and have become an integral part of the colonia's community (Ybarra 2016a). In April 2015, the Equal Voice Network began recruiting participants to aid the Sacred Heart Church's respite center in McAllen, which was collecting clothes, shoes, and toys for the unaccompanied minors and distributing these items in backpacks (to help the minors keep all their belongings safe) (Personal communication, EVN, 2015). By the end of summer 2016, the center had assisted over 40,000 refugees, providing them with hot showers, food, and clothing-filled backpacks (Ybarra 2016b).

While not a comprehensive overview of all of the Catholic Church's initiatives throughout Valley colonias, these examples show the breadth of the missions and tactics employed by the Church to address the severe poverty and inequalities experienced by the Valley's impoverished communities. Faith-based community organizing and secular organizing in the colonias have always greatly overlapped in terms of resources, tactics, and campaigns. This overlap is a testament to the centrality of the Catholic church in the life of colonia residents and, more generally, in Mexican-American border culture.

Promotora-Based Organizing in the Valley

Perhaps the most widely recognized form of colonia organizing, in academia, is the

promotora model. Promotoras are indigenous leaders, generally women, specially trained to

address specific issues through door-to-door campaigning to reach rural and agrarian

communities (L. G. Arizmendi and Ortiz 2004; Ramos, May, and Ramos 2001). The promotora

model, though its origins may go further back, is believed to have originated with Chinese

"barefoot doctors" in the early 1950s (Lehmann and Sanders 2007, 5), a model that then

extended throughout Asia and quickly became replicated throughout Latin America in the 1960s,

when public health models shifted from waiting for patients to arrive at health clinics to

proactively seeking out medical needs in the community (Jenkins 2011). More specifically, the

use of promotoras in the U.S. increased with the Federal Migrant Health Act in 1962 (Balcazar

2012, 1230), which increased financial support for promotoras. In academic literature,

promotoras are often referred to as community health workers (CHW); however, I refer to them

as promotoras, here, to emphasize the model used in the U.S./Mexico border context.

In the Valley, the promotora model is adapted from similar practices used across agrarian

Mexican communities (L. G. Arizmendi and Ortiz 2004, 23–24). The promotora, alongside the

house meeting tactic used by the UFW and faith-based groups, remains one of the most

successful organizing tactics in rural colonias. By bringing organizers to the colonias, residents

(with little effort) can stay connected to networks of colonia organizing, while also gaining

access to valuable services. The key to the promotoras' success in the colonias is their ability to

leverage indigenous leadership and knowledge; in other words, promotora programs often

emphasize local residents in leadership programs, to ensure that the colonia residents sees a

familiar (i.e. safe) face at their doors. Oftentimes, promotoras wear brightly-colored shirts

(typically blue or red) with their organization's logo clearly visible on the front and back to identify themselves as allies (ARISE 1, interview, 2015; LUPE 1, interview, 2015). Furthermore, they will also drive into the colonia in familiar vehicles to assuage any fears residents may have when seeing a foreign vehicle (Government Official 1, interview, 2015; Government Official 2, interview, 2015). In this manner, the promotora model transcends the difficulties of organizing in large, rural, and population-sparse communities like the colonias.

The promotora model is deeply connected to Paulo Freire's concept of liberation (liberatory) education, which empowers community through education by highlighting the socially constructed nature of poverty (Freire 2000). In the Freirian model, the organizer is the instructor whose task is to support the community and promote social justice (Martinson and Su 2012, 65). The "animators" described by ARISE in the previous section reflect a Freirian model of organizing through educating. As one organizer explicates: "Poor people have always been exploited. I think that's one thing down here [in the colonias], if there's a way to do it, they're going to find out. So again, we go back to education, education, education, trying to educate people as much as possible."

The Freirian organizer then facilitates *conscientization*, or a "critical consciousness that leads to action" (Martinson and Su 2012, 66). This process would occur in "culture circles" where community members would (with the aid of the organizer/instructor) share their histories and experiences, share common struggles, and develop actionable strategies to overcome these struggles (Martinson and Su 2012, 65–66). In faith-based colonia organizing, *conscientization* occurs within the home-based classroom setting. By contrast, the promotora model is not a pure-Freirian model of organizing, but adopts many of its key characteristics, namely the use of education to initiate action. The promotora model adopts this language, but alters Freire's

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"culture circles" to fit the needs of rural and agrarian communities. By going door-to-door, promotoras expand the notion of the "cultural circle" to include the physical space of the community. Often, colonia-based promotoras will hold educational sessions within the heart of their communities, in the shade of a tree, inside makeshift tents or in someone's living room. This is where the bulk of colonia organizing takes place. After these meetings and informational sessions, promotoras then communicate the community's responses and concerns back to other organizers and officials.

In this sense, promotoras also function as community researchers, not just sending information into the community, but acting as representatives of and experts on their communities (Ingram et al. 2015; Johnson et al. 2013; St. John et al. 2013). Promotoras are excellent research partners since they are well-respected within their communities (and, in fact, often live in the community), they understand the local culture, and they are trained to collect unbiased data from their neighbors (Johnson et al. 2013, 639). The Valley's use of promotoras is widely recognized in public health studies, with far too many studies to list here (Meyer et al. 2013; Ramos, May, and Ramos 2001). Promotora-based organizing generally covers common health concerns in colonias, such as diabetes, asthma, and obesity. Colonia residents lack access to affordable medical care, the Valley needs a public hospital (Proyecto Azteca 1-2, interview, 2015), and 60 percent of Valley residents currently lack health insurance (CDCB 2, interview, 2015) as they fall below the poverty threshold for Obamacare (Proyecto Azteca 1-2, interview, 2015). Additionally, the increasing difficulties involved with crossing the U.S./Mexico border makes Mexico-based healthcare less of an option (Proyecto Azteca 1-1, interview, 2014). Thus, promotoras *de salud*,[22] the most common type of promotora, are trained in public health and

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[22] "*De salud*" translates roughly to "of health," so promotoras *de salud* are a type of community health worker.

many are even certified nurses. These promotoras visit colonia residents in their own homes to check on health (especially for elderly or prenatal care) or to spread knowledge about general care and well-being. As such, promotoras are often asked to collect data for public health research targeting the colonias. Usually, this takes the form of a short survey, trying new technologies for data collection, or simply reporting new health concerns. However, the process is slow. Promotora-based health research seems more useful for small-scale, targeted studies than for large-scale studies. Furthermore, promotora-based data collection is not based upon random selections of participants and is dependent upon the promotoras' selection of residents.

The most well-known promotoras *de salud* in the Valley work with MHP Salud. MHP Salud's main goal is to increase colonia residents' access to health care. As such, they are often in attendance at major colonia gatherings, in addition to their door-to-door services. In addition to promotora-specific organizations, some community-based organizations add health-based programs to their repertoires and, as a result, often employ promotoras from the communities. As previously mentioned, Proyecto Juan Diego, a faith-based organization working in the Cameron Park colonia, employs several promotoras for its growing health-based programs. LUPE also uses promotora-style organizing to maintain a presence in their constituencies, though the tactic is rarely used for health-related purposes, but rather for the purpose of organizing undocumented residents. The use of promotora-style organizing, but regarding non-health issues, is a trait potentially unique to the Valley that merits analysis in other Latin American and Latinx contexts.

In the next section, I show how the philosophies of community and organizing that form the base of *conscientization* are currently expanding from its use as a household-based or household-to-household model into a regional advocacy model. These philosophies include the

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capacity for residents to become their own advocates with a small amount of education and the movement towards *conscientization*.

Early Regional Cooperation: Border Low Income Housing Coalition (BLIHC)

Since the early 1990s, several colonia organizers have advocated for the creation of cross-colonia networks of organizing that function across counties at a regional scale. Since the 2000s, planners have also begun to venture into issues of social justice at regional scales. Benner and Pastor (2011) ask whether the scale of an organizing venture must match the scale of the inequality to be addressed. Benner and Pastor (2011, 318–19) worry that regional equity organizers are a step behind the inequalities they face in practice; as organizers begin to focus on regional issues, Benner and Pastor see numerous social justice issues operating on a "mega-region" scale, surpassing the scale of the city. By contrast, Dewar and Epstein are concerned that a focus on the megaregion, or a "view from the clouds," may obstruct a more nuanced understanding of inequities across a region (2007, 121). While this work often defines the "region" and "megaregion" in terms of considerable conurban[23] population, colonia organizers have explored similar issues from the viewpoint of massive territories of sparsely populated communities. Thus, colonia movements towards regional equity ask whether these tactics have equal utility across rural communities, and not just urban communities. Bound together by common infrastructural and environmental issues, colonias operate within a similar policy

[23] "Conurban" is the adjectival form of "conurbation" or a large urban region made up from several metropolitan areas. Conurban regions typically develop when metropolitan regions grow into one another, creating a continuous urban area.

context and seek to create a large constituency across county lines to emphasize the widespread and systemic nature of the inequalities they face. However, colonia organizers, in creating this regional equity movement, still wish to keep this movement rooted in local leadership. Given these often competing interests, colonia organizers have experimented with various organizational and programmatic techniques since the early 1990s.

In 2004, the Texas Low Income Housing Information Service (TxLIHIS), led by MacArthur Genius Grant recipient John Henneberger, sought to revive an older network of colonia residents and organizers called the Border Low Income Housing Coalition (BLIHC). BLIHC was founded in 1993 and lasted ten years. It began with an ambitious plan to address housing and development issues in border colonias. These issues and BLIHC's suggested solutions were assembled into a comprehensive plan called the "Border Housing and Community Development Partnership" (BHCDP) (Border Low Income Housing Coalition 1993). BHCDP begins with an explicit call to support community self-help:

> *The [BLIHC] Partnership is based on the premise that long term solutions to barrio and colonia problems aren't possible without the active participation of residents and community organizations in developing the solutions. Where viable institutions don't exist, they must be created. (Border Low Income Housing Coalition 1993, 6)*

As such, this initial plan sought to turn the exploitation of the self-help drive in colonias, which developers leveraged to create the colonias in the first place, into a positive force for change (an issue which is described more thoroughly in Chapter 5). BLIHC's goal was to bring colonia residents and the government together via empowered community-based organizations (**Figure** *11*). The plan establishes eleven objectives to achieve within a three-year period (Border Low Income Housing Coalition 1993, 7). Eight of these objectives focus extensively on the physical planning and housing challenges facing colonias in the 1990s and call for government resources and new programs to address these material challenges. Two of the objectives focus on

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economic issues, mainly the need to create jobs within the colonias and teach useful trade skills to colonia residents through self-help programs. While government still played an extensive role in these goals, by either promoting programs or redirecting funding to address the physical challenges facing colonias, BLIHC still harbored suspicion of the government:

> *Total reliance on government has not proven to be effective in solving the vast problems of the poor in the geographically large border region. The effort to grow viable, community based, problem solving institutions, accountable to the poor, is a principal outcome of the Partnership. (Border Low Income Housing Coalition 1993, 11)*

Figure 11: Border Housing and Community Development Partnership's responsibilities for each of the three groups it seeks to bring together: individuals (colonia residents), community, and government (Border Low Income Housing Coalition 1993, 6).

Despite this suspicion, the format of BHCDP makes government funding an essential component of the plan's success (*Figure 11*). However, the plan appears to lack a sufficiently large incentive to coerce or force the government to participate. After the plan was put into action, this shortcoming became very clear. The three-year timeline turned into ten years and by 2003, TxLIHIS began to revisit the BLIHC, looking for new ways to reinvigorate the network.

Despite the shortcomings of BHCDP, its first objective is perhaps this plan's most ambitious and enduring, never leaving the minds of TxLIHIS organizers:

Objective 1: Empower local residents and communities to solve their problems. Support the development of 50 new community based organizations in barrios and colonias on the border. (Border Low Income Housing Coalition 1993, 7)

These new community-based organizations were expected to organize the participation of colonia residents, forming the problem-solving arm of this cooperative (Border Low Income Housing Coalition 1993, 11). However, to TxLIHIS and the colonia-based grassroots organizations of the Valley, BHCDP appeared as a grand first attempt to organize colonia residents post-Cranston-Gonzalez Act, but merited serious reevaluation in 2003. TxLIHIS Co-Director John Henneberger identified five key barriers to colonia organizing success:

- *Race: Low-income border barrios and colonias are virtually entirely Latino, who have historically been denied full access to public resources.*
- *Class: Low-income border barrios and colonias are by definition poor. Local and state political leaders are largely elites, who have not aggressively represented the interests of the poor in making policy and allocating public resources.*
- *Past organizing strategies: Much of the "community organizing" that has been supported on the border has focused on organizing and training elites such as middle class church leaders to speak on behalf of the poor. This approach has thwarted the rise of legitimate grassroots low-income leadership and community organizations.*
- *Cultural barriers: The majority of the residents of colonias are first through third generation immigrants. Culturally, linguistically and economically it is difficult for many to mount direct challenges to political authority, particularly at the state and federal levels, where border residents find themselves a marginalized minority.*
- *Devolution: Policy-making and resources for housing and community development have been transferred in block grants from the federal government to the state and local levels. Thus policy and funding decisions cannot be influenced at a single point, but must be approached through many jurisdictions. This requires skilled policy work to be undertaken at each jurisdiction, making advocacy a much more complex and expensive task. (Texas Low Income Housing Information Service 2015, 4–5)*

These barriers lead to a different set of objectives. First, there is an explicit recognition of the roles of race and citizenship. Past government efforts to improve colonias focused extensively on the economic poverty of these communities. This distributive justice approach

focuses extensively on material redistribution and only appears to mention representational issues in name: *colonia*. While the name "colonia" has been heavily criticized (Mukhija and Monkkonen 2007), TxLIHIS's recognition of the stigmas attached to race and citizenship in Texas marks a step forward for relational justice in colonias.

Second, this leads to a specific definition of "leader" in the colonias that only recognizes those who are truly indigenous to the colonias. These leaders do not serve as "participants," as they had in the BHCDP, but instead form the basis for and define the entire movement. While this shift remains consistent with most of the historic colonia organizing trends, it marks a secularization of colonia organizing, explicitly displayed under "Past Organizing Strategies." Church leaders are no longer considered to be grassroots low-income leaders; instead, the new leaders are aggressively defined as indigenous residents of the colonias. As such, TxLIHIS and the BLIHC are leading the way for new, experimental forms of organizing that are community-led (truly grassroots). These new organizing forms undergird community development in the colonias and set the tone for problem identification and solving.

The movement towards cross-organization collaboration and regionalization remains at the heart of colonia organizing in the twenty-first-century. However, new regional efforts do not erase the history of colonia organizing; instead, they appear to leverage the diversity of tactics used in colonia organizing to create multi-pronged solutions to systemic colonia problems. In this way, colonia organizing today is also merging with allied experts in public interest law, public interest design, and community development to reach their aims, all underpinned by the constituencies of colonia-based organizing.

Colonia Movements in the New Millennium

In the mid-2000s, two separate crises drew out the potential of collaborative networks in Valley colonias: an environmental crisis and an economic crisis. As an environmental crisis, several organizers and experts described the issue of colonia flooding as one impetus (bcWORKSHOP 2, interview, 2015; bcWORKSHOP 3-1, interview, 2015; bcWORKSHOP 3-2, interview, 2016; LUPE 1, interview, 2015). Flooding is the direct result of the construction of colonias on former agricultural land designed to retain water. Accompanying the issue of flooding is the lack of proper drainage and storm water management, which makes flooding into a policy- and resource-based issue. While many colonias experience flooding in even light rainstorms, hurricanes exacerbate the problem (*KRGV* 2016). In 2008, the Valley was struck by a Category-One hurricane, Hurricane Dolly, which caused flooding in the colonias that lingered for nearly 180 days (Proyecto Azteca 1-2, interview, 2015). The scope of this natural disaster and what followed it caused many colonia organizations to recognize a common issue. When asked what the most pressing issue in Valley colonias was, over half of the organizers interviewed for this dissertation named "flooding" or "drainage." A local landscape architect cogently expressed the issues of flooding and the need for drainage: "If you ask the residents in colonias, they say 'drainage' and 'housing'; though they would probably say 'drainage' first, because if you are not able to take the water out, it doesn't matter if you have a great house, it will get damaged by the floodwaters."

The other common issue identified was "housing." Also in 2008, the housing crisis greatly impacted colonia housing organizations' access to adequate funding. Prior to this economic crisis, sweat equity housing was the dominant paradigm of colonia community development, with much of its funding coming from private financial institutions and the federal

government (CDCB 2, interview, 2015; Proyecto Azteca 1-2, interview, 2015). The substantial

decrease in funding for sweat equity programs in recent years has led numerous housing groups

to diversify their programs and their funding sources. In this sense, diversification is bringing the

housing groups into collaborative networks with other organizations. While inadequate housing

remains a serious issue in Valley colonias, these groups are finding innovative ways to tackle the

issue by working collaboratively with grassroots organizations (bcWORKSHOP 2, interview,

2015; CDCB 2, interview, 2015; TxLIHIS 2, interview, 2015).

While collaboration always existed in some capacity, as evidenced through the UFW's

collaboration with faith-based community organizations and through the BLIHC, the new

millennium brought even more "intentional" collaborations to Valley colonias, as one senior

organizer describes it:

> *As the years went by and we started spreading, we started getting to know more [organizations] and have collaborated with them. They know that we're right in the communities, so they contact us with families or really big problems. ...as we started developing, with [the] Marguerite Casey [Foundation], that network started to [become] more intentional, the collaboration [became] more intentional, and then we realized the importance of, "well, if you're working on streetlights ... I'm working on streetlights for this colonia, let's come together, because if we come together we can work for all the colonias." [Then] we're not just talking to one commissioner, we're talking, now, to four commissioners and they're bringing it to another level of legislation and change. We need that, so not only do the two colonias we're working with get streetlights, but there's a plan for every colonia, or there's a vision for every colonia, to eventually have streetlights. That's when, again, that collaboration, that respect, the intention of doing something more, in general for the community and not for the organization, becomes something that we need to be aware of. [It's] the same thing with Equal Voice [Network]. If there's a group that is focusing on health, and they are the experts on laws and policies and all that, well then we have the people that are the experts in ... suffering the lack of those services. So then, again, that collaboration is what makes us have a bigger impact on the issues ... So in the last five years, I'd say, we have extended from being more in the community to a broader community and more in collaboration with other entities to be able to make change or an impact regional, not just in one particular colonia where we are, but in a broader picture.*

As the organizer states, the former model of precinct-based organizing was found to be much less impactful than countywide or, even, cross-county organizing. The organizer also explains the shifts that occurred within community organizations to accommodate new collaborations. First, organizations must find ways to identify systemic issues facing colonias. Second, they must place the community's issues before their organization's issues, working towards a common good. Lastly, organizations must recognize their particular strengths and weaknesses, allowing the most adept organization to address the problem.

From this, I identified four major collaborative networks through organizer and expert interviews: Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network (EVN), Unidos por UT-RGV (Unidos), Land Use Colonia Housing Action (LUCHA), and a network that has not adopted a name that I call the "Sustainable Self-Help Movement." These four collaborative efforts represent the forefront of colonia organizing in the 2010s, providing numerous insights into the need for strong community organizing bases in community development and showing a variety of possible models for collaboration.

Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network (EVN)

As one of the first "intentional" collaborations, Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network (EVN) is the oldest of the four networks. As a group, the EVN has made significant strides in promoting knowledge of the issues facing the Valley's most impoverished residents and, furthermore, have supported grassroots organizing across the Valley through information sharing. As a subgroup of the Marguerite Casey Foundation's larger Equal Voice Network, the EVN was founded in 2008 and coordinates a group of ten core constituency-based organizations. A "constituency-based" organization, here, means a truly grassroots organization led by low-income residents. The EVN regularly coordinated upwards of two dozen organizations across the

Valley, but many these groups are not grassroots-driven and, therefore, cannot officially participate in the EVN and receive Marguerite Casey Foundation funding. In total, the EVN represents an estimated thirty to forty thousand constituents across its core participants (Proyecto Azteca 2, interview, 2015). Participating organizations are compensated by Marguerite Casey for no more than thirty-percent of their annual income, the money to be used mainly for operating costs. The EVN's goal is to politically empower the poorest Valley residents through pan-organization information-sharing and multi-precinct lobbying. Information-sharing and lobbying objectives occur through two types of monthly meetings: director meetings and issue-based meetings. In director meetings, organization leaders meet to discuss the issues affecting the operations of their organizations and programs. These meetings are not held publically, as highly sensitive information is often shared between the leaders of the participating organizations.

By contrast, issue-based meetings, the more common type of EVN meeting, are highly public and open to non-EVN-affiliated organizations and individuals. Issue-based meetings focus on one of six major topics: immigration, jobs and economic security, housing, health, civic engagement, and education. Many organizers within the network emphasized the importance of information sharing and information dispersal in the EVN across these six foci, particularly in areas in which they have no expertise within (ARISE 1, interview, 2015; EVN 1, interview, 2015; LUPE 2, interview, 2015; Proyecto Azteca 2, interview, 2015). As such, EVN participants did not report conflicts between their organization's goals and those of the EVN, but instead reported that the EVN enhanced their commitments to their constituencies (ARISE 1, interview, 2015; LUPE 2, interview, 2015).

The EVN, then, is more of a support network for colonia grassroots leaders; however, its support has proven invaluable. Begun in 2008, the same year as the recession and housing crisis,

the EVN's support has greatly assisted colonia nonprofits, allowing them to weather the

recession. As one community organization notes, government funding is no longer a reliable

option:

> *We get HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] money that goes to urban county, like through the HOME program, to do re-construction and new construction. We probably worked four to five million dollars in 2006. Now, with urban county, we are probably pulling two-and-a-half to three million. Last year, we had to compete for $400,000 with urban counties, since they had been hit by the cuts in rural housing. So, that's all CDBG money. The same with SHOP, which comes from the Housing Assistance Council [HAC], they're a line item also for HUD, but the amount of money they have available we use … to purchase new lots. That has been cut drastically. So, yes, we really have suffered from the sequestration and the budget cuts. But, it's not just here in the Valley. I think that rural housing across the United States has been in trouble for the last few years.*

Sensing that government funding is no longer a constant, many colonia organizations are

diversifying their funding. While some expert-led groups can charge fees for their services

(bcWORKSHOP 2, interview, 2015; CDCB 2, interview, 2015), grassroots-led organizations are

often hesitant to extract money from colonia residents to provide services (EVN 1, interview,

2015). The one exception is LUPE, which is based upon Chávez's community union model and,

as such, extracts a small annual membership fee from its constituents. Since membership models

are generally opposed and colonia organizations feel they can no longer dependably rely on

government funding, many grassroots groups have turned to the EVN for financial support. This

turn towards foundation funding in Valley colonias mirrors larger U.S. trends in community

organization funding (Fisher 2016). The thirty-percent funding for operational costs led to

dependable support for quality staff and, consequently, many grassroots groups in the EVN have

cultivated a more solid base of organizers.

This financial independence leads to goal independence as well (LUPE 2, interview,

2015). The EVN, not constrained by the government's predetermined uses for funding, is freer to

protest government actions. The Marguerite Casey Foundation's only instruction to the EVN is to enact political change, a sentiment that values problem solving and collaboration, not "direct services" (EVN 1, interview, 2015).

> *We just feel very fortunate that we do receive Marguerite Casey Foundation money [EVN money] and it is general operating money. It is very nice. It is so different than others... White people in towers in New York City that have a brilliant change that they want us to implement. Instead, Marguerite Casey trusts the work we do, they just want us to grow our constituents and get the people civically engaged.*

Gratitude was a sentiment that frequently accompanied descriptions of the Marguerite Casey Foundation and the EVN.

> *Marguerite Casey lets us just figure things out on our own because people not from here don't understand how it works. You can tell them as many times as you want, but they just don't really understand the Valley.*

With their combined constituencies numbering in the tens of thousands, the EVN's base organizations collaborate on organizing initiatives for political change. Leveraging such a large constituency of residents allows them to attract the attention of politicians and government agencies across Texas. Campaign ideas are generated in issue-based meetings and then spread throughout the network. The organization(s) that are most skilled in the issue area take the lead on the campaign, with the other organizations offering their constituencies to support the cause. In this way, the EVN has begun to achieve several victories.

The EVN is rapidly transforming into a regional force for colonia advocacy; however, they feign to use the term "colonia" (bcWORKSHOP 4, interview, 2016). In fact, the EVN has even lobbied to legally remove the term "colonia," believing that it inhibits the ability to lobby for change in poor Valley communities (bcWORKSHOP 4, interview, 2016). This has allowed the EVN to focus on a variety of issues that relate to colonias in a more tangential manner, such as addressing the problems of public education in the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School

District (PSJA-ISD), which covers the majority of Valley colonias; improving the county police's relationship with colonias through successful support of pro-poor sheriffs, as opposed to pro-border patrol sheriffs; and successful lobbying for HB 3002, which gave the county the ability to install streetlights in colonias. While such initiatives assist non-colonia rural communities as well, participating organizations state that these issues emerged largely from their colonia-based constituencies. Through a strong base of financial support for operating costs and an open definition of political change, the Marguerite Casey Foundation has created a strong network free to protest the government and enact more systemic change.

However, the EVN remains heavily dependent upon its Marguerite Casey Foundation monies and, while its campaigns emerge from the community, the network itself is not a product of the community. As such, several interviewees (who all asked for this critique to remain anonymous) worry that the network only exists because of its funding and will not persist if the funding disappears. Furthermore, these critics also state that residents need a clearer avenue for voicing their concerns within the EVN. Despite these concerns, the EVN has quickly become a platform for residents, organizers, experts, and even government officials to meet and discuss pressing issues facing the Valley's most impoverished communities, and its success thus far is inspiring a similar network in the Paso del Norte region.

Unidos por UT-RGV (Unidos)

Another foundation-supported network, Unidos por UT-RGV (Unidos) shows a more grassroots-led initiative that is less dependent on foundation funding, but also less comprehensive in its scope. Unidos formed to strategically leverage the founding of University of Texas - Rio Grande Valley (UT-RGV) to positively impact the effects of higher education in the colonias. As such, it advocates for UT-RGV to act as an "anchor institution" in Valley

colonias to improve access to higher education and health services. While its impacts remain less certain than those of the EVN, Unidos has led to a stronger collaborative network in Valley colonias.

Unidos began in 2013 when the University of Texas (UT) announced it was closing its two schools in the Rio Grande Valley (UT-Pan America and UT-Brownsville) and opening one new school, UT-Rio Grande Valley (UT-RGV) (Hamilton 2013). At this announcement, Valley residents of all socio-economic backgrounds immediately expressed concerns about such a merger (though UT insists that it *not* be called a merger, but the opening of a new school) (LUPE 1, interview, 2015). The UT-Pan Am and UT-Brownsville campuses are nearly sixty-five miles apart and residents wanted to know if one or both of the campuses were closing, and who among current staff and faculty were keeping their jobs. The EVN's Education group was especially interested in this new development, as the highest density of Valley colonias reside in the rural farmlands between UT-Pan Am and UT-Brownsville, but remain disconnected from either campus due to poor public transit planning. In fact, many colonia youth are often forced to drop out of college in the Valley as they lack the money to afford a car or housing close to campus and, oftentimes, the act of leaving the household for college is inconsistent with the Mexican cultural practice of remaining at home until marriage (Proyecto Azteca 1-1, interview, 2014). To mobilize colonias residents, LUPE hosted a campaign to lobby UT to consider the colonias in the development of the new university, which led to the development of Unidos (LUPE 1, interview, 2015). bcWORKSHOP (a local public interest design nonprofit) and the CDC of Brownsville (CDCB) joined in on this effort by providing technical support in focus groups and community meetings (Unidos Community Meeting, observation, August 2014). As each of these groups was individually funded by the Ford Foundation, Ford took an interest in this collaborative effort and

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agreed to fund it, adding ARISE to the collaborative. In November 2013, Unidos received its first big break when then chancellor of UT Francisco Cigarroa brought university stakeholders, colonias organizations, and colonias community leaders to Weslaco to discuss ways to incorporate the colonias in the development of UT-RGV. The result was a list of four ways that colonias could be considered in the development of UT-RGV: economic development, education, health, and regional planning. However, colonia residents were upset to see that their concerns were not incorporated into the university's working groups after the conference; essentially, the university stated that colonias would receive health benefits from the new university, but not improved access to the campuses (Taylor 2014; Zazueta-Castro 2015).

In response to this egregious omission, bcWORKSHOP and CDCB held a series of public meetings from August 2014 to December 2014 to fully ascertain the needs of colonia residents. In these often-emotional public meetings, residents stated the criticality of educating their youth in the Valley, to keep talent in the region (Unidos Community Meeting, observation, August 2014). Colonias residents saw many talented students choose San Antonio over the Valley as they received better support and funding there, where the students remained after graduation (CDCB 1, interview, 2014). To address these concerns, residents developed the four areas of concerns and worked with bcWORKSHOP to create a report for the UT Chancellor. In 2014, during the process of creating the colonia report for UT, the chancellor, Francisco Cigarroa, unexpectedly stepped down and was replaced. The new chancellor, Bill McRaven, has refused to meet with Unidos and the university has yet to act upon any part of the colonia report. Currently, Unidos organizers are still trying to incorporate colonias concerns into the planning of UT-RGV, but little progress has been made.

Despite these issues, organizers often view Unidos as a starting point that has led to more robust regional partnerships. Unidos was heavily supported by the Ford Foundation, which brought together several colonia organizations already within its purview. The significant difference between Ford's Unidos initiative and Ford's later work with colonia regional cooperation is that, for Unidos, Ford brought in an external organization to work with the colonia residents: Public Architecture (PA), a design-based nonprofit from San Francisco. PA's 1% program encourages architects to dedicate one-percent of their time to pro bono activities; however, PA maintains a group of in-house designers that participate in a variety of projects. PA is a Ford Foundation favorite and was brought into Unidos to promote UT's commitment to Valley colonias. This partnership, at first, thrived under the leadership of President Francisco Cigarroa; however, the change in leadership pushed PA out of the picture and PA's unfamiliarity with Texan and colonia politics did not allow it to integrate with grassroots-led Unidos. By contrast, bcWORKSHOP, a Texas-based design nonprofit, held a better position on the issues and has maintained the support of the colonia residents. Thus, bcWORKSHOP continues to work with Unidos and this group of grassroots organizations. In addition, the Ford Foundation sensed its early mistake with PA and has since shifted gears in its colonia advocacy, coordinating only those organizations that have a sustained presence across the Rio Grande Valley (TxLIHIS 2, interview, 2015).

Land Use Colonia Housing Action (LUCHA)

The Land Use Colonia Housing Action (LUCHA) program is a cross-organizational partnership funded by the Ford Foundation whose goal is to empower colonia residents to advocate on behalf of themselves for policy changes regarding colonia land use and housing issues. LUCHA is the brainchild of TxLIHIS, CDCB, and LUPE, as an extension of BLIHC's

dedication to training low-income grassroots organizers. These three groups were all funded by Ford already, so they asked Ford to fund a new initiative. Ford agreed, but asked the group to add ARISE and bcWORKSHOP (also Ford funding recipients) to the team. Michal Braier, a scholar at Ben-Gurion University, describes LUCHA as "safe space" for colonia residents to address relational power issues (Braier, interview, 2015). Whereas the EVN addresses relational issues by creating a regional network of advocacy, LUCHA focuses on training colonia residents to be their own community organizers. Participants (or *representantes*)[24] attend a series of modules that introduce them to the technical aspects of a wide range of topics, such as housing, garbage collection, storm water management, civics, and EMT services, among others (CDCB 1, interview, 2014). Each module brings local experts to the group, like local politicians, sheriffs, local utility workers, professors, or other colonia organizers. These groups hear the residents' concerns and describe how various colonia systems function or why certain policies exist or do not exist. Some classes took the representantes outside the colonia on "fieldtrips" to government buildings or utility facilities (LUPE 1, interview, 2015).

From these "classes," the *representantes* learn about the systems and policies surrounding their communities and choose what systems to change and how – they become their community's organizer. LUCHA instructors often described the program as creating a "participatory democracy" within the colonias that exists in lieu of local representation and planners (CDCB 1, interview, 2014; LUPE 1, interview, 2015). As such, the *representantes* become colonia planners and policymakers, appealing to county- and state-level officials to change policies, enact new policies, mobilize their communities on issues, or change the physical planning of their communities. These *representantes* speak directly to media and to

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[24] "*Representantes*" translates to English as "representatives."

policymakers about the issues facing their communities, and senior organizers now re-direct

media requests to the *representantes*. This shift in approach exemplifies the goal of cultivating

low-income grassroots leaders by training colonia residents to speak publically (to politicians

and the media) about the problems facing their communities, in essence, cutting out the "middle

men" Community Organizers. The goal is to eliminate the long-held divide between specialists

and residents by providing residents with the knowledge necessary to become their own

specialists. In other words, colonia residents are given the necessary technical knowledge to not

simply point out their problems, but, as a community, identify the best solutions and speak

publically in support of their chosen solutions.

LUCHA's pilot program selected approximately twenty *representantes* to participate in a

series of classes and interactive experiences to learn about a variety of "specialist" topics, such as

housing and flood prevention. From these initial twenty, ten *representantes* finished all of the

courses and now act as community organizers. While one *representante* holds a Bachelor's

degree, the rest do not, even lacking high school diplomas (LUPE 1, interview, 2015).

One of the more compelling classes for these initial ten *representantes* was the storm

water management module. Through this module, they learned that the Texas Water

Development Board (TWDB) was conducting a survey of Valley colonias to assess the extent of

flooding issues. The TWDB randomly selected one hundred colonias out of the 1,500 they had

identified in their government database. This is the genesis of the issue. As one colonia organizer

described it, the TWDB was selecting colonias from a GIS map in Austin by "essentially

randomly pointing to one on a computer screen" (LUPE 1, interview, 2015). As a public interest

architect stated:

> *There is a Texas Water Development Board study that's happening right now, where the*
> *Texas Water Development Board hired a big civil engineering firm to identify colonias*

that have flooding problems and come up with solutions. Now, their study was basically somebody sitting at a computer and looking at satellite images, and not very well-rounded. And so, because of the organizing strategy behind drainage that we just mentioned, they [LUCHA representantes] were able to influence that study and make it a little more robust.

The *representantes* worked with senior colonia organizers to map the selected "colonias" and found empty lots, *resacas*,[25] and high-income neighborhoods among the selections. Upon discovering this, the *representantes* attempted to schedule a meeting with the TWDB to explain the discrepancies and how their random sample was not representative of Valley colonias, but all requests were ignored. So LUCHA went above the TWDB to their funders and voiced their concerns there. In addition to this, LUCHA mailed over five hundred postcards to the TWDB over one weekend so they would all arrive on Monday morning (LUPE 1, interview, 2015). Each postcard was marked with a description of a fake colonia in the study on one side and a handwritten note from a colonia resident calling for a fair, representative survey on the other side. These two actions mobilized the TWDB, and they soon met with LUCHA to identify real colonias that, together, were representative of the varying types of Valley colonias. The TWDB continues to update colonia residents on their progress and will share their findings with Valley colonia organizations.

From the successes of the pilot program, several organizations are retooling LUCHA to more broadly accept interested colonia residents. LUCHA is envisioned as a dynamic program and, as such, is constantly changing, as one of its founders describes: "We're in the middle of our fourth year and it's way different than when we first started. It's grown. There are some things you find don't work and do work. You have to go with those things that work."

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[25] *Resacas* are small bodies of water scattered throughout the Valley. These inland lakes are former segments of the Rio Grande river, remnants from when the river was permitted to freely change its course.

In September 2016, LUCHA organizers and representantes held a visioning meeting at LUPE's office to discuss LUCHA 2.0. In evaluating LUCHA 1.0 (what they are now calling the pilot program), organizers noted the time- and resource-consuming nature of LUCHA 1.0, and contrasted that with the limited number of colonia residents involved (bcWORKSHOP 3-2, interview, 2016). For LUCHA 2.0, organizers sought to decrease the amount of time demanded from residents and include more residents (bcWORKSHOP 4, interview, 2016). Currently, they are developing five modules, each focused on a different topic currently affecting colonia residents. The hope is to bring modules to colonias that are affected by the relevant issues; providing the residents with technical knowledge of the issues facing their colonia will enable residents to speak cogently on the issue on their own behalf to relevant officials and policy-makers. In LUCHA 2.0, the organizer takes a greater role as a facilitator, identifying issues to develop modules on and identifying colonias for training. Modules will be kept in a "LUCHA Library," an online repository. Each module contains three levels of content: an introductory level defining basic technical concepts, a secondary level containing more advanced concepts, and a tertiary level which relates the technical content to the specific colonia. Classes based upon each level will be taught by organizers and leaders in the LUCHA group. It should be noted that the visioning meeting unveiled uncertainties concerning the difference between "organizer" and "leader," a significant issue as feminist scholars note that such distinctions have traditionally fallen along a gendered divide (Bradshaw, Soifer, and Gutierrez 1994, 27–28; Stall and Stoecker 1998). Furthermore, LUCHA 2.0 still does not have a mechanism for identifying new issues about which to develop new modules. Regardless, as the organizer above states, LUCHA 2.0 is a work in progress but remains one of the more acclaimed organizing projects in Valley colonias.

Public Interest Design

Throughout Unidos and the EVN, a single nonprofit continually arises in the discussion: Building Community Workshop (bcWORKSHOP or BC). As public interest designers, BC's work constitutes a fundamentally different tactic for colonia improvement than any of the previously defined ones. Public interest design constitutes a newer movement within architecture and landscape architecture that seeks to address the "triple bottom line" in design processes. The triple bottom line seeks to simultaneously address economic, social, and ecological issues. In architecture, this involves identifying new products and processes to addresses these concerns. I contend that true public interest design involves, first and foremost, changes to the process of designing that incorporate participatory methods and resident-driven problem solving. In this respect, designers become facilitators, acting much like community organizers. Public interest design should interest planners because it merges community development tactics into the design process and, as such, these architects often work in the capacity of planners where planners are absent. The movement is commonly believed to have begun when Whitney Young, a prominent civil rights leader, criticized the architecture profession at a 1968 American Institute of Architects (AIA) meeting, saying:

> *. . . you are not a profession that has distinguished itself by your social and civic contributions to the cause of civil rights, and I am sure this does not come to you as any shock. You are most distinguished by your thunderous silence and your complete irrelevance. (Young Jr. 2011)*

This harsh criticism mobilized many designers to consider a design process that addressed the 99-percent. Kenneth Frampton states that architects are responsible for less than 15-percent of the built environment worldwide (Frampton 2007). This fact leads to an

architecture profession that follows the elite. In the 2000s, the public interest architecture movement began to grow to counter architecture and design's perceived elitism.

Despite the growing popularity of public interest architects, the Valley did not receive its first designers until the early 2010s. bcWORKSHOP is a Texas-based design nonprofit that employs architects, landscape architects, and physical planners. Founded in 2005 by Brent Brown in Dallas, bcWORKSHOP opened a permanent office in the Rio Grande Valley in 2011. First associated with Proyecto Azteca and then CDCB, they now have their own space in downtown Brownsville. BcWORKSHOP's first goal was to reimagine the housing design process in the colonias:

> *What CDCB starting seeing in some of the colonias – especially in Sunny Skies, which is just east of town, and Cameron Park, which is north of town – is you'd drive in and, in Sunny Skies, almost a quarter of the houses, out of the 864 houses, it's the same house, just a different color. So they said, "You know, we're getting these families new homes – durable, efficient homes – but we're changing this neighborhood. We're making it cookie cutter and that's not what we're about."*

In response to this revelation, bcWORKSHOP worked with CDCB to create not only a variety of design plans to diversify the colonias' housing stock, but also a new process for designing these homes using simple diagrams and mapping exercises, as the designer continued to explain:

> *In the Dallas office, we were working on this thing called SustainABLE House, which asks how can we do a custom-designed home that's geared toward a family's needs, preferences, and budget. So, we started in the Valley and [CDCB] said, "Hey, we need some more houses. We need clients to have choice in their houses. Here's the budget. Here's the square footage. Start meeting with families." So that's how SustainABLE House in the Valley started. We had a program to fit into and we just set up this way of working with clients to get to know them better, start talking about design in different ways and start using simple tools like photographs and blocks that represent spaces and using those to create a basic idea of what the house could be. Then, using computer models to show clients different options and pick colors.*

The SustainABLE House program has generated over one hundred different house plans and these homes (some sweat equity, some not) are cropping up not just in colonias throughout the Valley, but also in some of the Valley's most impoverished incorporated communities like Brownsville's Southmost neighborhood. In creating these homes, bcWORKSHOP began working with several communities to address the most common physical planning issues that emerged from their design meetings with colonia households. As previously shown, bcWORKSHOP became increasingly concerned with issues of flooding. Through a series of community meetings, local charrettes, and focus groups, bcWORKSHOP assembled the Colonia Neighborhood Plan Implementation strategies, a series of six in-depth colonia case studies outlining the basic characteristics and physical planning issues affecting these communities (Field observations, August 2014). These case studies formed the initial basis for organizing initiatives in LUCHA and Unidos. Furthermore, the plans cemented bcWORKSHOP's Rio Grande Valley office as local experts grounded by their emphasis on participatory processes. As such, bcWORKSHOP often holds community meetings within colonias and then packages the responses to communicate to a broader audience – in essence, these designers have become communicators for the colonia residents, gaining their trust and acting, increasingly, as community organizers.

This work, and their office in the Valley, continues to grow with each passing year. As an extension of SustainABLE house's basic strategies, bcWORKSHOP has introduced the RAPIDO program to respond to large-scale natural disasters. The program uses premade panels to assemble relief housing after hurricanes; here, the critical difference from other forms of relief housing is that these panels form the core of a permanent home. BcWORKSHOP has

demonstrated how this would function by assembling twenty pilot homes in this fashion. Thus, RAPIDO represents a preparedness model:

> *This is not only a disaster response model, but it's a disaster preparedness model, because what we did with these twenty houses is show that this isn't hard. The same process that we use for designing a custom-built house, you can do with this program and it didn't take that much time. It had to be done.*

As such, bcWORKSHOP continues to work with local contractors, specialists, policymakers, and, most importantly, colonia residents to identify new ways of identifying problems and communicating solutions. Even though they are trained and work as designers, bcWORKSHOP has become an indispensable member of newer colonia collaborative networks. Their distinctive perspective as designers merits its own category of colonia organizing as it constitutes an entirely new paradigm in colonia organizing.

Summary

From these four histories and their four contemporary manifestations, a new picture of organizing emerges that contradicts academic narratives of lack of social capacity in colonias. While the origins of U.S./Mexico border organizing can be traced back to the nineteenth-century mutualista tradition, a concerted effort to specifically organize colonia residents begins with the UFW's Melon Strike in 1966. Working in tandem with faith-based organizations and promotoras, colonia organizing always emphasized and leveraged its unique position between the North and South. Organizing models such as the Community Union model, the Promotora model, and BLIHC were heavily influenced by Mexican and U.S./Mexico border practices. These models reflect trends in Mexican organizing that were then adapted to a U.S. political context. Additionally, the form of faith-based colonia organizing found in Valley is heavily

influenced by Mexican religious and cultural practices, as evidenced by the profound presence of the church in the everyday life of Valley residents, more generally. These influences, outside of literature on promotoras, has traditionally been overlooked in colonia scholarship, and even then, the promotora model is often ascribed to organizers from outside the colonias; yet, these historic models heavily influence contemporary colonia organizing. The histories presented here point to a different narrative regarding colonia capacity to organize.

Furthermore, the histories here demonstrate how, through regional collaboration, organizing models are obfuscated in practice. Alinsky-like LUPE organizers work alongside Freirian-like ARISE organizers, leveraging each other's strengths and mitigating their faults. Despite this, it would be a mistake to associate, for instance, LUPE's practices with only Alinsky or, even, only Chávez. Even within their organizations, both groups adopt promotora-style techniques through constant community surveying (either by door-to-door canvassing or through community meetings) to assess the accuracy of their goals. Their organizing practices are fluid and dynamic, reminiscent of the Zapatista dictum: "*Preguntando caminamos*" or "Questioning as we walk." Unlike traditional community organizing models that imply pre-made answers, contemporary colonia organizing uses the act of questioning to surge forward. Consequently, the histories of colonia organizing, told through multiple insurgent historiographies, highlight the range of practices employed and how those histories are informing contemporary colonia organizing. With this new narrative, the four contemporary forms of colonia organizing need to be reevaluated in terms of their true potential to affect change, albeit in a manner different than the forms of community organizing commonly examined in the United States. The next two chapters explore various aspects of contemporary colonia organizing that further interrogate the influences of past organizing techniques on contemporary colonia organizing.

Chapter 5: Reclaiming "Self-Help" within Border Organizing

Introduction

Colonia organizing in the Rio Grande Valley has a rich history and set of traditions. These practices represent a hybridity of Latin American and U.S. organizing philosophies and tactics. Regardless of the tactic, early colonia organizing often leveraged the self-help drive that is ubiquitous along the U.S./Mexico border. The self-help ethos is, itself, the confluence of Latin American resourcefulness and the American idea of bootstrapping, amplified by the border region's historic distrust of the U.S. government. However, attempts to codify this self-help ethos led to government cooptation of the term from 1990 until the early 2000s. This cooptation of the self-help ethos is the focus of this chapter.

When colonia residents and organizers say "self-help," what are they referring to? Self-help is a well-known aspect of border life, at least since the founding of mutualistas in the nineteenth-century. However, numerous approaches to community improvement have been attached to the term "self-help," many of which are present in border colonias. The question of "which self-help?" is critical, as these various forms take different approaches to justice (either distributive or relational) that significantly alter the role of colonia residents in the improvement of their communities. Thus, the question of which self-help is a question of what type of participation? What type of justice?

In this chapter, I outline how the various forms of colonia organizing examined here are coalescing into new movements premised upon a desire to return to a definition of self-help that mirrors earlier colonia organizing. All of this is based upon a redefinition of "self-help" that de-coopts the term and brings it back to its originally intended use: as a statement of community empowerment and independence. This chapter first reviews new attitudes towards colonia residents that shift the conversation towards civics education as a valid form of self-help: a mutual aid style of self-help. This, I argue, is a shift towards relational justice that places the treatment and education of colonia residents at the forefront. I then offer an overview of how this shift in attitude is influencing the participatory structures in new colonia organizing, and how some of these changes are beneficial and some are still in development. The chapter finishes with a summary of self-help as a concept, showing how colonia organizing fights against relational injustices formed by sweat equity approaches.

Defining "Self-Help"

First, what does "self-help" mean in Valley colonias? For years, self-help was advocated by both Republicans and Democrats, as one senior organizer stated: "I think self-help tends to appease those who ride elephants, they don't like giveaways. But César Chávez rode a donkey and he did not believe in giveaways either." In this heavily laden statement, the organizer, referring to "sweat equity" when saying "self-help," refers to two separate notions of self-help. In the first sentence, the organizer describes "those who ride elephants," referencing Texan Republicans and their dislike of government "handouts." This statement invokes over two decades of government assistance to colonias in the form of sweat equity housing through Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) set-asides for border colonias. However, the

second half of the organizer's statement references Chávez. Stating that Chávez rode a donkey implies two things: the democrats, and Chávez's humble campesino upbringing. The organizer states that "he [Chávez] did not believe in giveaways either," implying that Chávez also believed that self-help was crucial, but this somehow contradicts the Republican manifestation of self-help.

Increasingly, sweat equity housing is viewed as counterproductive to the goals of colonia organizing (CDCB 1, interview, 2014), as one organizer explained: "Homeownership is not the top priority for colonia residents, it's definitely representation and, above all, education for their children." This organizer was expressing dissatisfaction with the use of sweat equity housing as a community development or organizing tool. As we sat next to one another in a community meeting in 2014, the organizer noted that colonia residents never discussed housing as an immediate issue, but instead focused on the need for colonia leaders and improved civics-based education. Thus, confusingly, self-help, when used by colonia organizers, can refer to one of many things.

I contend that "self-help," though a critical aspect of life within the border region, has been co-opted by the government and academics to refer to sweat equity housing, or the process of constructing homes premised upon the labor of the future occupants. However, colonia organizers use the term "self-help" to refer to an ethos more akin to *mutualistas*, or communities and organizations focused on mutual aid in service delivery. Mutualistas, in the U.S./Mexico border region, also include a distrust of the U.S. government, particularly immediately following the annexation of these territories from Mexico (Marquez and Jennings 2000; Pycior 2014). This self-help ethos also informs the concept of "progressive realization" on the Mexican side of the border, a concept found to be incompatible with hyper-formal U.S. housing policies (Larson

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2002). Progressive realization is a concept that emerges from Mexico (and international development more broadly) and entails incremental compliance with adequate housing laws and building codes (Larson 2002, 144). Through progressive realization, the community leverages its available resources to slowly bring their communities to full legal status and recognition. Larson contends that progressive realization is at odds with the American legal system's all-or-nothing stance on building code compliance; as a result, Larson advocates for programs that, in her words, "[place] law behind, rather than against, the activities of informals, without sacrificing legality or equality" (Larson 2002, 144). This is similar to César Chávez's Community Union Model, which uses a different form of progressive realization to slowly legitimize colonias through incremental improvements made by communities themselves. With these ideas of community-led self-help, a tension arises between it and sweat equity housing as self-help.

Self-help housing, because of its highly distributional focus, contains a static notion of social ontology; in other words, it lacks a temporal understanding of social relations because, to determine existing resource-holdings, it takes a snippet of time and acts upon the perceived inequalities within that snippet. Here, I argue that self-help in the border region historically referred to mutual aid, not necessarily housing. As such, self-help referred to relational justice, not distributive justice. At its base, this self-help argument directly concerns how residents participate in the processes of colonia improvement. While they are guided by ideas of self-help, there are significant differences between resident-led mutual aid and government-led sweat equity.

Sweat equity housing uses the power of the future homeowner towards the construction of a home. In planning and policy, sweat equity housing generally requires future homeowners to spend a minimum number of hours constructing their own home and, oftentimes, the homes of several other families. Proponents claim that sweat equity programs provide low-income residents with valuable construction skills, which can be transformed into construction jobs and provide a sense of ownership in the home. However, most colonia organizers believe that sweat equity housing impinges upon colonia households' ability to function. A local housing specialist described this conundrum, as he verbally tried to sort out when sweat equity (or what he called "self-help") is permissible, and when it is inappropriate:

> *You don't hear many self-help people say this, but I do all the time ... I would not wish self-help on anybody that doesn't absolutely need to do it. It's hard. It's difficult. It takes nine to ten months the way we do it with families working together. People have full-time jobs and then they gotta go work on their house for another three hours, but it's an option for people. So when you have really low-income people that need a place to live, then it's an option that we have to offer. When we decide who's going to get it, it's really based on their desire and their income. Right? And so, if they need to do it, and they're willing to do it, then we allow them to do it. If we can get them into a house with a standard mortgage with a little bit of financial assistance, we would ... much rather do that because it's easier for them. Life is hard enough already, for folks living in the colonias. Why put another level of burden upon them if it's not needed? Now, we do have families that say, "You know what, I wanna do that. I don't need to do it, but I wanna do it, because it's gonna save me $30,000." And those are some folks that have it together a little bit more and [are] able to deal with that stress in their life for nine months. But other than that, it's either self-select or we just say, "This is all we got for you. We don't have $30,000 in assistance to give you, but you do, through your sweat equity."*

As the housing specialist notes, sweat equity is most appropriate when the household elects to build their own house, not when they are forced into construction. There is widespread recognition among colonia organizers that sweat equity housing places yet another burden on

already overly burdened colonia households (bcWORKSHOP 2, interview, 2015; CDCB 2, interview, 2015; Proyecto Azteca 1-1, interview, 2014; Proyecto Azteca 2, interview, 2015). As such, it is not a contract that should be entered into lightly. However, the housing specialist did not end his description there, and went on to clarify what was so appealing about sweat equity:

> *[We are] going a step further and they're saying that self-help needs to be a part of all of this housing. There should more ownership, or more buy-in, into the process [rather than] from coming in and saying, "I live in a house that needs to be replaced or I want a new house, I want to buy my first house. I'm tired of renting." That process needs to be more driven and more empowering, rather than … something that's given. It's something that's created with the colonia.*

Sweat equity housing specialists seek to involve residents in the process of improving their communities, as a public interest architect described:

> *…which comes back to the part that, from the small house if you are able to engage a resident more they have a sense of personal responsibility for that house. Same with the neighborhood. If you are able to engage the community more, then people respect more the drainage ditch. They understand, more, the importance of not throwing trash in it and what does that mean for my neighbor, so it's a matter of education also, which we're also trying to do with the different projects we do. It's very important aspect of the projects. I would say all of them.*

For these housing specialists and public interest architects, as described in Chapter Four, sweat equity is no longer viewed as the only tool for making the process of colonia housing improvement "empowering." Instead, education and technical knowledge is increasingly seen as an important aspect of development. This shift in approach reflects a change from a distributive justice use of "self-help" to a relational justice use of "self-help."

Colonia-Based Forms of Self-Help

Turner emphasizes the importance of locally organized groups for the success of large-scale self-help, and the importance of pooling resources – less an emphasis on "aided" self-help

(or sweat equity, similar to Habitat for Humanity) and more an emphasis on "mutual" self-help

(or what has transformed into certain forms of slum upgrading; see Appadurai (2002)) (Turner

1963). He gives the example of brick deliveries to two separate self-help initiatives after a major

earthquake hit Pampa de Comas near Lima, Peru (Turner and Fichter 1973, 141–43). In the first

self-help project, a professional agency of architects received the relief funds and proceeded to

buy bricks for self-helpers, who then received bricks from the architects for their homes. In the

second self-help project, self-helpers organized themselves and the resultant grassroots

organization received the entirety of the relief funds, and the community agreed on allocating a

specific amount for bricks. In the first instance, self-helpers refused to accept the agency's

bricks, citing their cheap, poor quality. In the second instance, a self-helper leveraged local ties

with his distant relatives to find high-quality, affordable bricks, which the group happily used in

their new homes. This occurrence led Turner to reconsider the role of the Professional in

development (Turner and Fichter 1973, 145–47) and, afterwards, led him to promote successful

self-help as a grassroots undertaking, emphasizing the possibility for empowering communities

through self-management and self-coordination (Turner 1963, 389–90).

Herein lies the decades-old debate within self-help policy research: what is the proper

extent and scale of an intervention? Should self-help occur at the household level, with resources

and materials given to sweat equity programs? Or, should self-help occur at the community level,

with the community determining when and where to receive money and materials, and deciding

the best course of action?
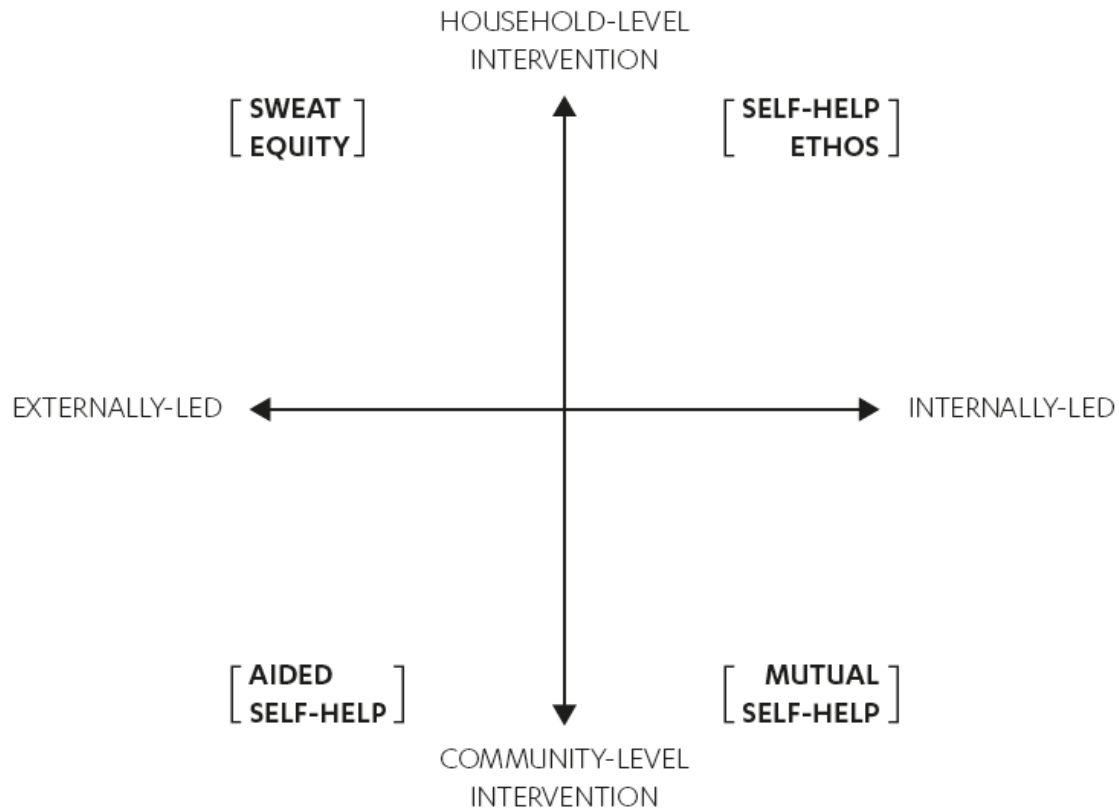
Figure 12: Matrix for understanding the various types of "self-help" expressed on two different scales. The first scale focuses on the level of the intervention, from the individual, household-level to the community-level. The second scale focuses on the impetus driving the self-help intervention, from externally led (outside the household or community) to internally led (within the household or community).

To answer these questions, I created a matrix to describe the possible manifestations of "self-help," following the influence of Ward (1982, 7–8) and Coit (1994) (*Figure 12*). Coit (1994) first distinguishes between individual-level self-help and community-level self-help. The individual-level focuses on self-building at the household-level, whereas, the community-level focuses on self-management. Ward, in his seminal book on self-help housing, also contends that self-help can occur at two levels: at the level of the household or small group, and at a larger, community-based level. Ward describes household-level self-help as follows: "At its most simple it refers to specific, and largely unrelated actions in which an individual or group takes partial responsibility for organizing and carrying through the installation of a particular work (a

sewage system for example), building and financing their homes, services and maintaining an object" (Ward 1982, 7). This is a highly distributive view of change, focusing on materially based issues. By contrast, community-level self-help focuses on more relationally based issues, as Ward continues to explain; at a "[m]ore complex level, a group may involve itself in several actions integrated vertically and aimed at transforming the local social and economic structure in a dramatic way" (Ward 1982, 7–8).

In understanding the potential forms of self-help there are two axes to consider: the scale of the intervention, and the scale at which the intervention is guided. The latter is not as widely recognized and, thus, leads to confusion regarding the type of self-help that is present across the border region. Instead, the matrix in *Figure 12* identifies four types of self-help: sweat equity, aided self-help, self-help ethos, and mutual self-help. Described above, sweat equity is a program involving residents in the construction of their own homes. Sweat equity emphasizes that the household must exchange something for services externally rendered and, where capital is not an optional, labor is the commodity (Kolodny 1980, 215). As such, sweat equity is a household-level intervention that is externally-led. When such improvements are internally-led, the nature of self-help changes to become more of an ethos, driven by a household's desire to improve their own surroundings with their own resources. Self-help as an ethos has been widely studied through research on the slums of India and Africa (Nakamura 2014; Hart 1973; Kudva 2009; Peattie 1994) and is distinctly different from externally-led sweat equity programs. As the housing specialist above states, there is a substantial difference between allowing a household to elect to build their homes, and requiring it.

This household-level work is not what Turner initially envisioned through his work in Peru. Instead, Turner had established a community-level model of self-help akin to aided self-

help. His original goal was to support externally-led, community-level programs that would channel government money into a communal fund for redevelopment (shown through the previous example of post-earthquake Peru). Aided self-help was also used to support community-led building maintenance in public housing communities in St. Louis in the 1970s, with mixed results (Kolodny 1980, 215–17). However, in the colonias, while aided self-help is used in some cases, the border region's innate distrust of the federal government has generally prevented this type of self-help.

Status of Sweat Equity as "Self-Help"

In the colonias, distrust of government funding increased after the 2008 housing crisis, leading towards mutual aid-style self-help. Incorporating the history of colonia organizing from its beginnings in mutualistas, this reads much like a "coming back home." Community-led and community-level work, I argue, is the natural purview of community organizing. As such, the move back to mutual aid signals a taking back of the term "self-help" in the Valley. In the colonias, sweat equity housing programs have long made claims relating to community organizing; however, several scholars find that sweat equity programs lack sufficient focus on organizing (Altmann 1982; Berner and Phillips 2005; Burgess 1985; Jakimow 2007; Landman and Napier 2010; Ward 1982). This discrepancy may result from sweat equity's highly distributive and individual focus, which, in the colonias, has precluded the potential for organizing by dictating the means of service delivery. Instead, as defined in Chapter 1, community organizing is the process of *facilitating* the connection between colonia residents' lived experiences and political advocacy. As such, organizing does not dictate, but should assist.

In the colonias, sweat equity housing programs suffer from many shortcomings. First is their slow pace. At one sweat equity program, the waitlist reached over 2,000 households in the

early 2000s (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016) and has now exceeded nearly 4,000 households

(Proyecto Azteca 1-2, interview, 2015). The average rate of construction for this program is

approximately twenty-five houses a year, far too slow to reasonably meet the need, as one

organizer explained:[26]

> *Well, I think the state, itself, recognizes that we still have a horrible amount of*
> *substandard housing, … we were building like sixty homes a year back in 2006. Right*
> *now, we're around twenty or twenty-five. We have 4,000 families on our waitlist. And the*
> *only thing that's really keeping us from working on that is lack of funding.*

This slow rate of production can be attributed to the lack of progressive realization in

sweat equity programs (Larson 2002; Larson 2005). If every house touched by sweat equity must

then become 100-percent compliant with building codes and laws, the process becomes more

expensive and slows significantly. In Mexico, progressive realization involves the slow physical

improvement of communities, aided by the government as communities reach certain levels of

compliance. This compliance is consistent with the resources currently available to the

communities (Larson 2002, 144). While the concept of progressive realization is integral to the

Community Union Model in the colonias, an influence of recent immigrants' political

expectations, this model is fundamentally incompatible with the U.S. political environment, as

Larson states: "…the United States has not adopted the international agreement that created the

concept [of progressive realization], arguing that an obligation that creates anything short of

absolute and immediate compliance is not really 'law'" (Larson 2002, 144–45). Divorced from

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[26] To clarify, this organization remains centrally important to colonia organizing, I argue that over time, their sweat equity programs have become the least impactful programs at their organization, but they continue to advocate for voting rights and improved affordable housing in the colonias.

the ability to slowly labor alongside the government to increase legal compliance, the colonias have, therefore, been forced to quietly undertake the project themselves.

Second, sweat equity has not seen the systemic changes it continually promised, even after nearly twenty-five years of building in the colonias. While quality of life has vastly improved in most Valley colonias, these improvements developed from broadly based community organizing for specific policy changes (from the BLIHC or LUPE or ARISE, to name a few), not from sweat equity housing programs. Sweat equity, with its slow pace and minimal footprint, has not achieved the critical mass necessary to create systemic change.

Attitudes and Emotions: Standing *by* the Residents

With the 2008 housing crisis, sweat equity programs faced a third shortcoming as government funding for these programs began to dwindle. This caused several sweat equity groups to close or remain nonprofits in name only. Most sweat equity groups are considering new directions for their organizations to support housing production, including shifts towards more private sector models, like social enterprises, that would create employment opportunities for colonia residents (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016; Proyecto Azteca 1-2, interview, 2015). However, more pertinent to the focus of this dissertation, the financial crisis brought many sweat equity groups into large scale organizing efforts. This move away from sweat equity accompanies new attitudes towards colonia residents. Instead of telling residents how participation will occur, these new programs are increasingly standing by residents, asking them what issues they should focus on and giving them the resources to identify legitimate solutions.

New attitudes towards colonia residents are bringing them into community development by merging grassroots organizing with actual physical planning objectives. This confluence

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makes residents the decision makers. A powerful example of this, at an organizational level, is LUPE, the largest grassroots organization in the Valley. Each year, LUPE conducts a survey of its 7,000 members to reevaluate its organizing agenda and services. In 2015, LUPE received over 1,300 responses to the survey (conducted non-randomly) and found the following topics to be of utmost importance to their constituency: access to healthcare, assistance with car maintenance, access to food, and assistance with tax preparation (LUPE 2, interview, 2015). These concerns shift from year to year, but inform LUPE's objectives.

Another, more ambitious, survey conducted in 2012 covered constituents across several colonia organizations and received over 1,500 responses specifically from colonia residents. This survey was conducted "non-randomly" through door-to-door campaigns, community meetings, list serves, and flyers distributed in offices (LUPE 1, interview, 2015). The responses were analyzed by a group of Ford Foundation-funded organizers who then presented their findings to colonia residents through a series of community meetings. After some tweaking, four areas of concern were confirmed: education, health, economic development, and regional development (LUPE 1, interview, 2015; bcWORKSHOP 2, interview, 2015). These areas of concern now form the basis of several colonia organizing networks and programs in the Valley, like LUCHA and Unidos. At a smaller scale, several more specific colonia concerns emerged: storm water management, access to street lights, and voting rights, among others.

At the EVN, colonia concerns are identified slightly differently and, instead, emerge first-hand from colonia organizers. While six general areas of concern were identified when the group first formed (see previous chapter), actionable organizing objectives emerge when individual organizers present issues drawn from their constituency, and others in the network confirm the systemic nature of the problem (i.e., the problem exists within their constituency as well).

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After concerns are identified in these colonia programs, the question becomes: how should these concerns be addressed? New colonia programs and organizing networks are premised upon the idea that residents have the capacity and power to change their own situation. This sentiment continues senior organizers' ambitions in the early 2000s to support the rise of "legitimate grassroots low-income leadership and community organizations," discussed in the previous chapter (Texas Low Income Housing Information Service 2015), consciously learning from prior organizing missteps. Even affiliated design-based nonprofits and CDCs are participating in this movement, reforming their sweat equity housing programs to mirror these organizing trends. A senior organizer succinctly described this new attitude towards colonia residents: "[Speaking to the colonia resident] C'mon, let's go together. I will accompany you, but eventually you will be up at the front." The influence of Freirian thinking is profoundly expressed in this quote. The idea is to build upon existing colonia capacity to organize by presenting the information necessary to spur activism. This existing community drive is a form of self-help that has its roots in U.S./Mexico border culture. As a senior organizer states, this self-help ethos originates in early colonia organizing and is returning to contemporary organizing:

> *The […] model, "Carla" said, was founded on the concept of self-help, not unlike the other organization next door. Apparently, self-help was one of César Chávez's core values, she said. Chávez believed that residents had the capacity to change their situation, and that the organization was just there to provide that consistent momentum for change. I said that this sounded very similar to the core values in LUCHA. "Carla" smiled and said, "most certainly." (LUPE 2, interview fieldnote, 2015)*

In this instance, "Carla" could see the interconnections between the Community Union Model, with its self-help ethos, and contemporary colonia organizing. Another senior organizer described a self-help sentiment that diverges from those expressed by colonia scholars or by

government programs. This form of self-help derives from a philosophy of knowledge

production and expertise in community organizing. Three prominent colonia nonprofit leaders

describe the self-help ethos as follows:

> *Colonia leaders are effective when they respect and yield to the capacity of the community to define its own problems and decide how it will resolve them, tapping the self-help motivation of residents. Their experience has taught them that when people are not involved in making decisions, they cannot be expected to follow along blindly. They accept a nonlinear development process based on purpose rather than plan, recognizing the inextricable nature of social and personal change. (Arizmendi, Arizmendi, and Donelson 2010, 93)*

Rather than viewing colonia residents as incapable of organizing or solution-making,

residents are instead seen as the sole catalysts for organizing and problem solving. However,

colonia residents often lack sufficient political savviness to immediately translate their issues

into actionable organizing; thus, "expert" organizers still have a place in these organizations,

with their specialized knowledge of civics and policy structures. While, at first blush, this

division of expertise appears like Alinskyite organizing, I contend that this shift in attitude is a

shift away from Alinsky's approach. Alinsky focuses on the separation of community leader

from Community Organizer because of a perceived power imbalance between the two, with the

professional Community Organizer acting as a bridge that holds the power necessary to influence

external stakeholders. By contrast, colonia organizers are increasingly divided into "experts" and

"resident-organizers," with experts deriving no power from organizing; instead, through civics-

based educational initiatives, they increasingly reinforce the power of the colonia resident-

organizer. One expert described this process:

> *They [colonia residents] know enough to say, "This has really screwed up my life." But beyond that, they can't go to a County Commissioner and have an educated conversation about drainage, for example, because they just know that, "When it rains, water comes in my house." So over the last year-and-a-half we've gone through this "LUCHA*

University" where we've been working with "representantes" of the colonias that are organized by LUPE and ARISE and then we go through educational things where, now, they know a ton about drainage. They know a ton about housing. So they can go to the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs and [participate in] public comment and do and speak and testify on an issue about housing and how it relates to them – and what they want. It's not me. You know what I mean? It's not John [Henneberger]. It's not Brent Brown, from bcWORKSHOP. It's a colonia resident who now has this education to know beyond complaining about it. Now, they can actually say, "This is affecting me. It's making my life difficult. Here are six things that you can do to fix it."

The goal of the expert, then, is to pass knowledge to the colonia resident with the hope of creating resident-organizers who can speak on their own behalf – what TxLIHIS calls the "grassroots low-income leader" (Texas Low Income Housing Information Service 2015). After this occurs, the expert recedes from the organizing process and becomes a policy or planning consultant to the community.

Thus, the shift described by the expert above is premised upon educating colonia residents about civics, a topic that is not well understood among recent immigrants and is often reviewed in a manner that downplays the impacts of racial injustices (Junn 2004). Civics, to colonia residents and organizers, encompasses sufficient knowledge of governance such that residents can participate fully as citizens in political processes. Given colonia residents' ethnicities and border proximity, civics programs are often explicitly targeted at immigrants, their children, and, increasingly, their grandchildren. As such, civics courses are inherently politically charged, advocating for and addressing the needs of poor Latinxs, and are increasingly tied to community organizing in these new programs. Education is then the calling card of these new attitudes. However, this is an ambitious goal, as an estimated 78 percent of colonia residents only have a high school diploma or less (Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas 2015, 17); in general, colonia residents lack the requisite technical knowledge to speak for themselves on issues as

complex as housing, political representation, and storm water drainage. In some regions, colonia scholars have found colonia residents attempting to organize their own communities and (in the opinions of these scholars) failing to accomplish goals due to a lack of civics knowledge (Dolhinow 2005).

Figure 13: Colonia organizer tests LUCHA's new Governance Module, designed to teach basic civics to colonia residents (bcWORKSHOP, August 2016). LUCHA, designed originally to be delivered as a comprehensive, university-style program, is now being reconsidered as a module-based program, which would provide colonia residents with the technical knowledge needed to solve problems in their own communities.

A lack of civics knowledge remains a significant obstacle for colonia organizing. According to Dolhinow (2005), insufficient knowledge of the U.S. political system greatly inhibited successful grassroots organizing at the Community Organizing Group (COG) in the Paso del Norte region. This lack of civics knowledge made colonia organizing appear more like *chisme* (or gossip) than actual organizing (Dolhinow 2005, 570–74). Evidence from the Valley confirms that this lack of civics knowledge impairs organizing efforts in colonias more generally

across the border region. TxLIHIS hypothesizes that this deficiency is a result of colonia residents' status as recent immigrants and members of the second generation (Texas Low Income Housing Information Service 2015, 4–5). However, the critical difference between Dolhinow's (2003, 2005) research and the research presented here is that Valley colonia organizations have identified this as an important issue and are actively addressing the problem (*Figure 13*).

Colonia residents are not incapable of horizontal integration or informal social networking; instead, the issue boils down to the ability to navigate the U.S. political system, to express (dis)contentment to political representatives, to rally against injustice, to advocate for needed physical planning — this is the divide residents must bridge. Valley organizations (both grassroots and nonprofit) are seriously addressing this concern from multiple angles using a wide variety of tactics, but the most common tactic is education, as one organizer states: "We do try to educate people, though. Well, this is what a county commissioner does, this is what he or she can or cannot do and here's what your rights are. You have the right to have your colonia drained, just like north McAllen does."

This form of education follows Freire's notion of liberation (liberatory) education and *conscientization* (Freire 2000). Discussed in the previous chapter, liberation education, or using education to initiate political action, has an extensive history in colonia organizing; however, while colonia organizers do communicate the socially constructed nature of colonia poverty to their constituencies, as Freirian practices dictate, "education" is used as a much broader rallying call in colonias. Education is used at multiple levels and scales to help recent immigrants become citizens (LUPE 1, interview, 2015; LUPE 2, interview, 2015), keep children in school and help them get into college (ARISE 1, interview, 2015; CDCB 2, interview, 2015), train new resident/organizers (LUPE 1, interview, bcWORKSHOP 3-2, interview, 2016; bcWORKSHOP

4, interview, 2016), provide technical knowledge about colonia issues (bcWORKSHOP 2, interview, 2015), and teach civics more generally (LUPE 2, interview, 2016; TxLIHIS 2, interview, 2015). For parents, education is also the preferred path out of the colonia for their children (Participant observation, August 22, 2014).

Through these initiatives, self-help is not akin to sweat equity, but becomes a model of participation that channels colonia residents' self-help ethos into community-level action to influence policy change, not just household-level subsistence.

Returning to Mutual Aid and the Self-Help Ethos

Rather than define self-help as sweat equity, I find that self-help in Valley colonias is, increasingly, a form of mutual aid, following the tradition of the mutualista and Chávez's Community Union Model, which is, itself, also based upon the mutualista. This mutual aid has several characteristics. Chapter Six will describe new characteristics of larger-scale mutual aid efforts, but in the remainder of this chapter I describe the aspects of mutual aid that have historical roots in the Valley: a respect for the colonia residents' time and an emphasis on Valley-specific culture.

Organizational Maintenance

Mutual aid organizations and programs offer services in return for organizing capacity and solidarity. In Chapter Four, I described Valley colonia organizers' concept of "maintenance," or the use of services to keep colonia residents engaged (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016; LUPE 2, interview, 2015). This concept derives from the mutualista and mutual aid. This form of organizing harbors a deep respect for residents, as described by one organizer: "On the positive side, people have great faith and I wish I had that kind of faith, you know... si dios

quiere... [if God wishes it…] And, again, they are very resilient and very creative and they've got a much different attitude towards things that I consider to be very stressful...”

However, organizers also remain acutely aware of the time constraints that colonia residents face due to their extreme poverty, as several organizers explained:

> *All my experience has been, especially with funders out of the state, is that they find it too difficult to organize constituency here and I think a lot of it is because our family members, you know our members in general, their main concern is paying the bills because they work paycheck to paycheck, they may not be able to make the meeting during the day.*

> *Our families, they can't come and tell our commissioners on a Tuesday morning at nine o'clock, they can't line up for public comments. And then they get out of work let's say like 5:30 or 6, and they are feeding their kids. And weekends, they don't get to go to the beach, they're working at the flea markets selling food or whatever else they make during the week, because it's just not enough to pay for it. So to organize our constituency, for them to share their voice for policy change, it'll take a little longer.*

> *Now, people who don't participate in the [Equal Voice] Network, how or where are they? That's probably not number one on their radar. Number one on their radar, obviously, is getting food on their table or having gas in their car so they can go to work.*

Colonia organizers work with this limitation by limiting the time commitments they seek from residents. As the first quote states, residents' time constraints are not often recognized by organizations outside the Valley or, I add, by many scholars examining colonia organizing. It is recognition of the colonia residents' time constraints that guides the form of contemporary colonia organizing.

The ability to pre-compensate residents, through needed services, for their organizing time is the core power of mutual aid approaches in the colonias, a form of "paying it forwards." This strategy has been present in colonia organizing since the early days of the UFW and is not a new aspect of their practice. The UFW quickly learned that it was difficult to mobilize the farmworkers in the fields, given their struggle to eke out a living. This issue, combined with the

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peculiar policy environment of Texas, ultimately led the UFW towards the Community Union

Model. In addition to the progressive realization approach to physical planning built into the

model, contemporary colonia organizers have long introduced other services to the model. LUPE

offers tax services, citizenship classes, coupons, notary services, and general information about

regional events for colonia residents. ARISE provides after-school activities, citizenship courses,

cultural courses, and healthy cooking classes. Lastly, Proyecto Juan Diego provides a variety of

health services and exercise courses. These services, and more from other grassroots groups,

provide needed daily assistance to colonia organizers, while keeping them abreast of organizing

activities. These constituencies are now forming the basis for new organizing networks (like the

EVN, LUCHA, and Unidos) in the Valley.

Communicating the Valley's Culture

Much like the mutualistas of the past, many contemporary colonia organizations also

teach the community about their origins and the border's distinct culture. At ARISE, children are

taught about their heritage through a series of after-school courses. One of their popular courses

teaches children Baile Folklórico, a regional dance that involves traditional costume. As a senior

organizer from ARISE explained, parents were excited to enroll their children:

> *The kids have such a beautiful, such a rich, culture in dance, in Folklórico. […] That triggered another program. People were saying, "well, Baile Folklórico is expensive, I can't afford to take my child to a Baile class..." or things like that. So, then, our funder was like, "well, would you register your kids if you had this?" And we said, "yeah, they would love to!" so then we started a Baile Folklórico. We identified someone from the community that was attending high school and then [taught] the Baile Folklórico class. Then after school for two hours, three days out of the week, they could come and teach Baile Folklórico to the children.*

ARISE not only teaches colonia children about the regional culture, but they also teach students from up north about border culture. Generally, these students are Latinx and attending high schools in northern Texas. As a senior organizer from ARISE described:

> *For the students, also, we provide an opportunity for them to learn about the Baile, learn about programs that are here, learn about the immigrants' life, learn about our issues, about our whole border. What does a wall mean? They hear about a border wall, but this is what it means, this is what it's really doing to our community. A lot of militarization, we talk about those issues with them. And then also, what can you do when you go back? You know, whether it's inviting other people to vote and to [make] the right decision or to consider things or to be involved in social justice issues or to come back or to replicate something like this back in your school and your community or to go to an immigrant camp.*

In a similar vein, LUPE is best known for embracing not only the Valley's history and culture, but also its history of community organizing. The organization proudly displays its roots in the UFW through murals, marches, and even its uniforms. Most importantly, LUPE continues to highlight major organizers from the history of colonia organizing. Just recently, they honored Dolores Huerta with an award, hosted screenings of academic films about the UFW's history, and celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the famous Melon Strike with a march and speech by Arturo Rodriguez, current president of the UFW. These initiatives serve not just to support the community, but also communicate the importance of the community to outsiders.

Summary

The historic and contemporary models of colonia organizing all exhibit this cultural influence towards mutual aid. However, government-led sweat equity housing programs have long attempted to leverage this attitude with few tangible results. While sweat equity remains important, primarily for those fortunate enough to get off the enormous waitlists or those who self-select into sweat equity programs, the building pace remains too slow and the impact too

restricted to generate the positive effects of progressive realization. Instead, mutual aid has shown greater promise in bringing systemic, relational justice to the colonias. Consequently, since 2008, sweat equity programs appear to be declining and mutual aid programs appear to be on the rise. However, distinguishing between "sweat equity" and "self-help ethos" is highly important. The self-help ethos is what makes colonia organizing function less in an Alinskyite way and more in a feminist or Freirian way. It is the recognition that residents have the capacity to change their situations, but with the assistance of their community (ARISE 1, interview, 2015; LUPE 2, interview, 2015). However, what "capacity," which "situations," and what "change" is being referred to?

Within the border region and even within the Valley itself, this question has a specific answer that can be tied to their historic detachment from the core of the United States. This detachment caused a long-standing need to self-govern and self-serve their own communities, forming the mutualistas. Mutualistas, in turn, reinforced this border culture with a self-help ethos that persists today, greatly impacting contemporary colonia organizing. Through organizing, the self-help ethos is channeled into community-level mutual self-help by emphasizing a shared culture, but also by continuously checking organizing goals against the perceived and actual needs of the colonia residents. Organizational maintenance is so key to colonia organizing that many organizers develop not only their programs, but also their entire perspective on their purpose around it (ARISE 1, interview, 2015; Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016; CDCB 1, interview, 2014; LUPE 2, interview, 2016). Daily organizing activities at colonia organizations emphasize maintenance, with organizers helping ease the burden of extreme poverty on colonia residents; however, organizers keep an eagle eye on these burdens for any hint of injustice or inequality. These colonia organizing practices do not conform to any of the traditional organizing models,

though they appear similar to practices in certain parts of the so-called Global South (Bayat 2009; Bayat 2013).

Self-help, as manifested in the colonias, remains a core aspect of border life that has fused with colonia organizing. While sweat equity takes a decidedly distributive justice approach, the self-help ethos and mutual aid self-help both take a relational justice approach. This difference is key, as sweat equity programs have not addressed the systemic issues facing colonias. By contrast, mutual aid organizing has been slowly improving colonia life over the past century. Building on these community-level successes, colonia organizers are increasingly acknowledging the shared interests of colonias, more generally, and are forming regional cooperatives aimed at addressing even more entrenched relational injustices, transforming previous community-level efforts into regional-level efforts. This brings a different set of challenges to organizing practice that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Shifting the Power to the People

Introduction

The goals and missions of colonia organizers constitute their most basic philosophies and epistemologies, from which all other trends can be traced. Consistent with the theories of Butler (2004) and Goffman (1990), these philosophies and epistemologies often conflict between organizers and even change within each individual over time. This chapter discusses mainly the attitudes, objectives, and conflicts present in colonia organizations. Thus, this chapter seeks to provide an overview of the field of objectives present in the new colonia initiatives presented in Chapter 4. Ultimately, I show how colonia organizers and their allies are transforming these discrepant philosophies into a single regional strength. They inform programmatic decisions, problem identification, policy advocacy, and organizing tactics. It is in the new objectives that colonia organizing has shifted since the early 2000s, with this simple change: *the desire to create a legitimate low-income, grassroots contingency of organizers.* As previously mentioned, a senior community organizer described this larger objective as such: "We stand by the residents, not in front of them."

From this perspective of empowering a new generation of low-income grassroots organizers comes a new set of organizing objectives. The new objectives, here, were identified based on a dramaturgical analysis of organizer interviews. In discussing new colonia organizing efforts like LUCHA, Unidos por UT-RGV, and the Equal Voice Network (EVN), organizers

most frequently cited the following three objectives: broadening colonia organizing through regionalism, maintaining a grassroots network of colonia residents by avoiding organizational hierarchies, and promoting organizing structures that are self-sustaining. These ideas are summarized, here, as four major themes: regionalism, horizontalidad, sustainability, and independence.

This chapter continues Chapter 4 and Chapter 5's identification of a shift in attitudes towards colonia residents and explains how this shift is leading to larger and newer forms of organizing premised on correcting the mistakes made in previous organizing attempts. This shift can be largely credited to a handful of organizers who have fully experienced the transition from employment-based colonia organizing (i.e. farm worker unions) to place-based organizing (i.e. colonia-based grassroots organizing), a trend which (I will show) has begun to emphasize the liminal and spatial aspects of organizing – or the idea of *nepantla*.

Regionalism

The greatest shift created by the desire to empower a new generation of low-income grassroots organizers is the need to broaden the grassroots colonia constituency. Prior to the Border Low Income Housing Coalition (BLIHC), precinct-based advocacy severely impaired colonia organizing. Since colonias do not exist in incorporated urban areas, their "local" advocacy occurs at the county level (thus, occurring at the state level, as county government is the extension of state-level government). In Texas, counties are divided into precincts and, therefore, each county has multiple commissioners. In the past, colonia organizing focused extensively on mobilizing individual county commissioners on issues, with the commissioner depending upon the location of the colonia in question. This colonia-to-commissioner organizing

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strategy led to highly localized changes within single colonias and did not lead to systemic changes for colonias more generally (bcWORKSHOP 1, interview, 2014). This is the form of colonia organizing that is often studied by scholars (Dolhinow 2003; Dolhinow 2005; Donelson 2004; Stuesse 2001). However, new forms of colonia organizing increasingly recognize that advocacy is stronger when engaged in regionally. This was expressed, to my surprise, in a 2014 community meeting where residents were responding to Unidos' areas of concern:

> *The next issue was economic development. The speaker [a colonia resident] on this topic made a very heart-felt statement about the role colonias play in regional economic development. Too often, she said, local planners, higher education administrators, and politicians do not consider colonias in their economic development plans. Their impoverishment and lack of "big oil" money does not register with these officials. However, she argued that the high population of colonias should be taken into consideration and that … they represent a critical force in regional economic development. (Fieldnote, August 22, 2014)*

While recognition of the colonias' role in economic development has yet to occur, there are some promising trends that signal a potential shift between the colonias and major Valley cities and institutions. Recently, the City of Brownsville was selected as one of the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities. While their pilot meeting seemed overly focused upon the City of Brownsville and its connection to the City of McAllen on the opposite side of the Valley, Rockefeller seemed more interested in unpacking Brownsville's relationship to the Valley, including the colonias (Participant observation, March 25, 2015). This was clearly uncomfortable for Brownsville's city officials; however, they seem determined to make a positive impression upon the Rockefeller Foundation and, hopefully, (truly) positive regional initiatives will develop from 100 Resilient Cities. However, it is still too soon to say. Proven regionalism in the colonias comes, largely, from the Ford Foundation's initiatives. As a senior organizer describes:

Ford is allowing us to venture off into other avenues and help to think through these things with other groups, as well as implement those ideas. Because nobody pays you to do that, right? And the Ford Foundation will pay you to really… create a think-tank and a do-tank, together. And that's been pretty powerful for us. Otherwise, we'd all be in our same silos just doing the same thing. This has allowed it to be much bigger.

Within Ford's support of Unidos and LUCHA is the recognition that a regional, and cooperative, approach to colonia organizing can create systemic change by not just mobilizing one county commissioner, but mobilizing entire counties of colonia residents. In creating this regional movement, it becomes much more difficult for politicians to see colonias as a low-density, "offshoot" issue. Instead, colonias are viewed as a constituency and as a politically-empowered force throughout southern Texas. In this respect, Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. of the 27th District has become increasingly pro-colonia since he first took office in 1991 and has significantly contributed to the grassroots successes surrounding the recent Right to Light campaign that provided streetlights in the colonias. This political persuasion has continued to grow with the voter registration programs run by grassroots organizers in Valley colonias. Colonia residents are now selecting county commissioners and sheriffs who are increasingly sympathetic to their needs, eschewing the needs of the border patrol and neighboring cities in favor of the colonias (EVN, interview, 2015; Proyecto Azteca 1-2, interview, 2015).

In addition, the regional approach to organizing has established new networks of information sharing across counties. Projects and expertise are being shared with the realization that colonias share common issues that, on the surface, originally appeared to be one-off problems:

It's just amazing the level of extension that has happened now, with Ford, because we have been able to grow in knowledge and opportunities and to do [our work] not only for one colonia. Again, it's that systemic change, it's that change of policy and being a part of policy and being a part of these changes for colonias, and not just the one that I am

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working with, or the one I can touch, but más regional [more regional], más amplio [larger/more widespread].

Amplio is an apt word to describe the type of regionalization that is occurring. Translating from Spanish, "amplio" means large or widespread in a spatial sense *and* comprehensive in a policy sense. The organizer above implies both and notes that these shifts are leading to substantial policy changes in the colonias throughout the Valley. This regional policy lobbying has had a significant impact on her grassroots organization and constituency, as the organizer continued to describe how ill-equipped her group was to handle policy-based issues prior to LUCHA and Unidos. As another organizer states, while foundation funding has targeted policy change, these efforts are also transforming colonia programs: "The regional approach, Ford has allowed us to do that. Where, in the past, nobody had the money to think about what Hidalgo county or Cameron county... this has allowed us to… actually, gives us some money to actually think about how we do it and implement projects across the region."

Thus, the regional movement focuses first and foremost on policy changes, but through the information that is shared a sense of camaraderie is generated and empathy over shared problems surfaces. Though the foundations funding these regional networks do not intend it, this shared knowledge changes how problems are solved and changes the form of colonia programs. Two experts explained how these new regional colonia advocacy networks affect their programs and problem-solving processes. First, a public interest architect:

> *We identified a point where both [buses] can stop in the center of the whole colonia to attract more people, or ridership. It's a regional bus, it's the Valley Metro that can go either to Brownsville or McAllen. We identified that and we talked to Valley Metro, the City of Brownsville, and the other stakeholders … they all agreed that it was a good idea, it's actually going to get done. We're not sure when, but that's something we are pushing to do … It's a small thing, but it's helping to improve the system and understand the needs from those colonias.*

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Listening to the colonia residents' concerns, the architect learned that the colonia lacked public transit services. Digging into the issue, the architect learned that two bus systems (the city and the regional bus systems) bypass the colonia and do not transfer to one another. Working with the appropriate government officials, the architects could make a case for a transfer station within the colonia and, with the guidance of the colonia residents, they identified the safest location in the colonia for the new bus stop.

This holistic view often works best in the colonias when several organizations work together to identify regional issues. The second example, described by an affordable housing expert, highlights how this works:

> *If I'm in the colonias building a house and I come across an issue like drainage, or I've got families talking to me about drainage, or LUPE and ARISE have families talking to them about flooding. Well, okay, now what do we do? Well, now we've got the policy people in there writing policy about fixing drainage issues in the colonias. We've got designers and planners designing mechanisms to literally drain water ... So, our work program we call "LUCHA," which is "Land Use Colonia Housing Action." ... that work is all around those types of issues, whether it be housing, land use which includes things like drainage, streetlights in colonias, all those kinds of issues. And it's all grassroots driven.*

The affordable housing expert describes collective problem identification and problem solving. In this instance, five different organizations identified the issue of flooding in different colonias. Through their regional collaborations, they realized colonia flooding was a common issue and used their different areas of expertise to solve the problem through policy lobbying, physical planning, and organizing. Herein lies the greatest strength of the new movements in colonia organizing: their ability to tackle issues from multiple angles and levels. As problems are identified by colonia residents, organizers (who are increasingly the colonia residents themselves) mobilize the community and attract the necessary consultants and experts to lobby for needed policy changes, representation, or materials to address the problem.

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While these regional networks are tackling several systemic colonia issues, there are some limitations to this approach. Regional colonia networks in the Valley do not include all the Valley's colonias. Currently, most of the regional networks operate in the area between the City of Edinburg, down to McAllen, and over to Brownsville. While this captures many Valley colonias, which are scattered throughout the eastern half of Hidalgo County, these networks currently omit Starr County and colonias to the southeast and southwest of Brownsville. Colonia grassroots groups have recognized this and are currently working to organize the colonias in the Brownsville area; LUPE recently hired two new staff members to open an office in Brownsville. However, a noticeable omission from these organizing networks is Colonias Unidas, a well-respected grassroots organization operating in Starr County. When asked why Colonias Unidas was not a part of LUCHA, the EVN, or Unidos, most organizers responded with confusion and the admission that they had not considered organizing in Starr County. Thus, the networks described here mainly focus on Hidalgo and Cameron counties, along the U.S. 83 corridor and north into Edinburg, Texas.

Despite this shortcoming, regional networks are proving to be an effective organizing tactic for systemic change in Valley colonias. Currently, the concept of these networks is being introduced into the Paso del Norte region,[27] mainly through a new EVN network. Future research on this topic should follow up on the impacts of regionalism to determine if the strategy is useful to colonia organizing more broadly, and not just in the context of the Valley.

[27] The Paso del Norte region covers an area including Las Cruces, New Mexico; El Paso, Texas; and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. In this interstate and binational region, it will be interesting to see if regional networks transcend the different policy contexts created by the various juridical boundaries. Such boundaries are not an issue in the Rio Grande Valley, which falls fully within Texas. I suspect that the cohesive policy environment is what has allowed regional efforts to flourish in the Valley.

Horizontalidad and Autogestion

Accompanying the regional movement is a desire to create a certain type of nonhierarchical organizing structure, in what Sitrin (2012) calls "horizontalidad." Horizontalidad translates into English as "a horizontal position." In terms of social movements, horizontalidad implies a flat organizational structure that creates a base for direct democracy, in the vein of autogestion (Sitrin 2012, VI–VII, 3). Autogestion is the Lefebvrian concept of self-management stemming from spontaneous action (Lefebvre 2009, 141).[28] It is not a utopic concept, he contends, but a political strategy meant to address social issues from the bottom up, as opposed to approaching them from the top (the state) (Lefebvre 2009, 148–51). Autogestion is a process, not a product, and must be continually revisited from the bottom up to maintain its integrity. This revision comes from the Zapatista phrase "*preguntando caminamos*" or "questioning as we walk" (Sitrin and Holloway 2005), which encapsulates the idea of organizing through questions, rather than answers. As Holloway describes it:

> *To think of moving forward through questions rather than answers means a different sort of politics, a different sort of organization. If nobody has the answers, then we have to think not of hierarchical structures of leadership, but horizontal structures that involve everyone as much as possible. (Sitrin and Holloway 2005, para. 10)*

Through their research, Sitrin and Holloway show how these concepts of self-management surface through community organizing in Argentina and Mexico. They find that

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[28] This Lefebvrian concept most likely resulted after Lefebvre's visit to a Mexican mutualista; however, there is no concrete evidence for this connection. In describing territorial autogestion, Lefebvre writes: "I personally believe that the problematic of *autogestion* is transposed more and more from enterprises toward the organization of space. I have found some extraordinary examples, like in a Mexican shantytown, where two hundred thousand inhabitants are under complete *autogestion*" (2009, 160, emphasis original). This description sounds like the Mexican concept of the mutualista.

horizontalidad involves flat organizing structures built into quotidian life. Occupying physical spaces by cultivating a broad constituency, horizontalidad is as much a spatial concept as it is a political strategy. As opposed to Alinskyite constituency building, horizontalidad adopts a neutral definition of "power" that emphasizes equal relationships, rather than usurping or taking power. As with the Zapatistas, horizontalidad does not seek to overthrow the state, but simply to neutralize power between the community and the state through strong community-based organizing. Flat organizational structures and broad constituencies, in theory, allow horizontalidad to function as a direct democracy, permitting the widest possible citizen participation in community decision-making.

Colonia organizing has horizontalidad as a goal, but has not implemented it to the same extent as the Argentinian and Mexican communities studied by Sitrin and Holloway. New regional colonia networks express the sentiments of horizontalidad most clearly through their approach to resident-led problem solving. As described previously, resident participation in colonias is not restricted to delegated power or partnership, but is increasingly trending towards full citizen control (Arnstein 1969). As a public interest architect stated:

> *...collaboration, not only between stakeholders and experts, but [colonia residents], integrating the communities affected by whatever, it's, for our work, crucial. We think that, for anything, it's crucial to listen to the community and understand their problems. Well, understand not only their problems, but get them involved in the strategies and options for solving those problems. People have ten-year-old kids telling me ideas on how to solve things, and they're good ideas, so I think that speaking to them is very important.*

This view forms the basis of LUCHA and Unidos, and is a major component of the EVN. It is also evidenced in colonia residents' increasing leadership roles. The erasure of a band of professional Community Organizers marks the greatest trend towards nonhierarchical and broad

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(*amplio*) organizing structures. At ARISE, this idea is transformed into a rotating structure of leadership and support that blurs the boundaries between the two:

> *...we know that we are not here, forever, in leadership. There is always already somebody that's ready to take my place or take somebody else's place. And then I go back in line or, not in line, but there is that circle like, "Now I am able to support you, but now you are in front as leadership." We are not a hierarchical model, it's more of a women-led program and more of a circle, where we are all together.*

LUPE describes its organizing model in a similar manner using a flywheel model. At the center of the wheel are the constituents, who prop up the organization through their concerns, needs, and annual dues. The spokes of the wheel represent the extensions of members' concerns and needs, when amassed and categorized by the organization. From these spokes, LUPE organizers act like water, making the wheel turn and giving it a consistent momentum in the same direction. From this model, nothing occurs without the base of constituents and their concerns. Furthermore, LUPE organizers simply provide consistent forward movement; they do not set the agenda for organizing.

These models all emphasize a carving out of physical space. *Amplio*, used previously to describe colonia regionalism, implies broad spaces of organizing and protest; in this sense, colonia organizing is not restrained to the space of the colonia, but spills across the Valley and state. This is a key aspect of horizontalidad: it defines new territories through its own actions. In Argentina, this involved claiming industrial buildings as part of the organizing strategy, physically claiming the factory as part of the community (Sitrin 2012). While organizations like the Texas Organizing Project (TOP) use this strategy to protest wage theft at local businesses, colonia organizing more often claims the colonias themselves and the spaces of political decision-making (town halls, etc.). As described in Chapter 5, this act is more of a re-claiming, asserting their rights to exist within these spaces.

While horizontalidad scholars emphasize the appropriation of physical space as an act of organizing, in the colonias, spatialization also involves clearly communicating the extent of issues, and involves public interest architects. As such, visualizing the issues has become an integral part of regional colonia cooperation, as a public interest landscape architect described:

> *… [We are] getting them [colonia residents] to participate in the process, not just answering questions but actually visualizing the problem. "How deep does the water get in your colonias?" Things like that, that are able to draw out and share their experiences. Shared pictures, drawings, right? Whatever they felt like to be able to communicate the problem in their colonia. That's why we jumped in and helped fix this Texas Water Development Board [survey], to help conduct these kinds of workshops.*

These visualizations are critical organizing tools, as the public interest landscape architect further explained:

> *[Colonia residents might start interacting with the drawings, thinking out loud,] "Well, if I make an impact here, here's what will happen down the line. So if I block water, it'll affect people. Or if I take more water in, I can positively affect people, and so on." So they get those tools and then those residents are generally part of an organizing strategy with our partners and they can take those … design tools, and their organizing strategy and go to elected leaders at either the county level, or they've even gone to the state level, to talk about what they need, how the funds can be spent.*

Visualizing the issues across the spaces of the colonias takes what otherwise appears as a solitary issue and unearths the systemic nature of the problem. The participatory mapping described above allows colonia residents to reassess the spaces around them, creating new territories, examining their identities, and redefining political relationships in the process, as scholars studying other participatory mapping exercises have seen (Sletto 2009). As Bryan (2011) describes participatory mapping: "…mapping as practice provides a means of understanding how indigenous political understandings of space are shaped relationally by multiple and overlapping forms of territory and authority" (Bryan 2011, 40).

While participatory mapping is not necessarily integral to horizontalidad, it has greatly

aided colonia organizing. As the public interest landscape architect notes, participatory mapping

is now part of the larger organizing strategy. Combined with regionalization, these maps display

the extent of colonia issues in lieu of adequate government data and mapping. These maps are

often enough evidence to begin conversations with policy-makers.

The key in horizontalidad is to neutralize power in this manner. Political strategies are

not meant to "steal" or "usurp" power from the state, but to create a field of relations where

power imbalances are less prominent and mutual respect thrives. Merging this grassroots

problem identification with a political strategy gives the movement its teeth. One senior

organizer describes how colonia networks (in this case through the EVN) create a coherent

colonia constituency, influence elections, and advocate for colonia problems:

> *We have candidates' forums, where we invite the candidates to come and speak, but*
> *instead of listening to their platforms, we have the people in the community present our*
> *platform. So, if you get elected to be the county commissioner, will you work to improve*
> *the roads? Will you work to expand rural transportation? And, so, then we have them*
> *sign a note and, of course, they all say "Yes!" … So, again, what we do is when they get*
> *elected, we'll go back and visit them and say, "Well, remember you met in front of 350 or*
> *400 people and you said you would do this. So, let us work with you to get that done."*

Thus, at a local level, colonia organizing networks are beginning to function like local

government in the absence of a state-sanctioned local government – and this is occurring through

autogestion. In other words, colonia networks are proactively finding questions to ask by

constantly returning to the grassroots constituencies and re-examining their programs and foci, a

form of *preguntando caminamos*. Community meetings, focus groups, surveys, and classes are

all used to gain this information every week; as Sitrin (2012) notes, these activities have become

quotidian and are built into daily organizing activities and colonia life. However, this form of

organizing is extremely time-consuming for residents and can be slow moving. As one organizer

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states: "To organize our constituency, for them to share their voice for policy change, it'll take a little longer. And our funders, [as] I've felt and I've seen first-hand, they get frustrated and then they pull out too quickly…"

Colonia residents, as ultra-poor citizens, have little extra time to devote to organizing efforts, so information and data collection takes patience and time. Often, campaigns will take several years to crystallize, causing many scholars to label colonia organizing efforts as failures. However, this "quiet encroachment" or slow progressing organizing is gaining recognition (Bayat 2009; Bayat 2013) and remains critically important for ultra-poor communities like the colonias. Due to the time-consuming nature of this slow-moving organizing, women do most colonia organizing. One organizer explained why:

> We're really not hearing any of the male voices, which, as a feminist, sometimes I feel, "well, that's ok." … but, you'll find, here, that most of the leaders are women. And, basically, that's because they don't work outside their home, so they can come to the meetings or they can go to the county commissioners' court, because their husbands are out working. But I do think now it's time to hear the male voice on issues, because they're dealing with a whole other aspect in their employment.

To address this concern, TOP has increased their organizing for job security and proper wages in the Valley through the EVN. This has brought more men into colonia organizing.

While creating horizontal organizing structures is a major goal in contemporary colonia organizing, two shortcomings impinge upon this goal. First, nonhierarchical organizing structures are messy and difficult to trace. They involve consistent, daily repositioning of goals and reassessing of means. This constant questioning and uncertainty can quickly exhaust residents, organizers, and resident/organizers – and funders can become impatient. Colonia organizers struggle to find balance and strong footings upon which to work. As described by

LUPE and ARISE's organizing models, they defer consistently to the residents' lived experiences to situate their practices, and this strategy is in continuous motion.

However, horizontalidad suffers from a second problem: this model can place a substantial strain on residents' time. In Chapter 5, I described how the Community Union Model functions by essentially "paying it forwards" to the residents, exchanging services for future organizing. Newer colonia networks (like LUCHA) are built upon the incremental community improvement practices of the Community Union Model, but take tactical cues from horizontalidad. This entails more time from the colonia resident without the "paying it forward," when less services are given to the residents in exchange for future organizing power. This is marked by the steep decline in LUCHA representantes over the past year; while they began with twenty representantes, they are currently down to eight. For LUCHA 2.0, organizers are trying to identify a requisite maintenance model that will entice colonia residents to stick with the program.

Despite these issues, colonia organizers are heading in relatively a positive direction. Through regionalizing and horizontalidad, they are beginning to identify areas of weak organizing representation (like in Cameron County) and are trying to arm as many colonia residents with organizing knowledge as they possibly can.

Independence/Sustainability

Given the hope of expanding and flattening colonia organizing, an important question becomes: How do we sustain such efforts? A significant aspect of the move towards low-income grassroots leadership is this: What if we created an organism that survived on itself? And, no matter what we were doing, we were always involved in it together? It is not enough to teach

organizing and leadership to grassroots colonia leaders. These individuals must take the reins of the group and teach their skills to more and more residents. Horizontalidad suffers from the need to constantly revisit and reposition itself; as such, plans for sustaining the organization become critical to the survival of the movement. This idea of self-sufficiency takes two forms in Valley colonias: as a concern for financial independence, and for organizer independence.

Financial self-sufficiency

What organization would say "no" to financial self-sufficiency? To the ability to not live funding check to funding check? The reason financial self-sufficiency is a notable goal for colonia organizations stems from the border region's historic distrust of the federal government and from the decline of federal funding for colonias since 2008. As one senior organizer stated: "I think the days of nonprofits like ours being able to depend on governmental funding is up. I don't want to repeat what we went through the last seven or eight years ... My hair was black [referring to their grey hair] ..."

As noted in Chapter Five's discussion of sweat equity, government funding for sweat equity has been on a decline, with no signs of returning. One senior organizer explained the extent of the problem:

> *We get HUD money that goes to urban county that we use, like through the HOME program, to do re-construction and new construction. We probably worked four to five million dollars in 2006. Now, with [this] urban county, we were probably pulling two-and-a-half to three million. Last year we had to compete for $400,000 with urban counties, so they had been hit by the cuts in rural housing. Okay... so, that's all CDBG money. The same with SHOP which comes from the Housing Assistance Council, they're a line item also for HUD, but the amount of money they have available, we use that money to purchase new lots. That has been cut drastically. So, yes... we really have suffered from the sequestration and the budget cuts. But, it's not just here in the Valley. I think that rural housing across the United States has been in trouble for the last few years. So we're kinda glad we have a new HUD secretary from Texas.*

While colonia organizers had remained confident that HUD Secretary Julián Castro, a San Antonio-native, would be sympathetic towards the colonias, he remains stonewalled and has only proposed an optional five percent increase to the colonia set-aside for each border state's CDBG budget – an option that Texas declined.

This decline in government funding impacted grassroots organizations the most, though some Valley organizations had already moved away from dependency on government monies. For instance, faith-based organizations relied on funds from the church, so they already have a certain level of financial independence. Housing specialists and public interest architects also enjoy relative financial freedom, as one organizer explained, because they can charge for services when funding disappears:

> *In the housing market, it's much different than community organizing. I get to earn a lot of what we need. In any year [we are] 55 to 60 percent self-sustaining. I own property. I sell property. I do lending... I earn on being a lender. We have a real estate company, so we earn fees there. We do multi-family projects, so there are developers' fees that we earn there.*

In general, many colonia organizers prefer to avoid government funding altogether. LUPE organizers explained the reasons why. It was Chavez's belief that government grants would corrupt the ability of LUPE to protest the government, when necessary, disallowing the people to organize against institutional inequalities. Thus, LUPE follows a union model, where constituents pay annual dues to the organization in return for basic services. According to LUPE, they are the only organization in Texas (maybe even the Southwestern U.S.) that follows this resident-backed model (LUPE 2, interview, 2015), though the accurateness of this is debatable (Incite! Women of Color Against Violence 2007). However, the colonia residents do not provide sufficient money to run all LUPE's programs, so they still require some amount of external help. They hope to expand the number of donations in their annual budget to reduce dependence on

Foundation monies, and they recently hired a staff member whose entire job is to generate donations and increase their social media presence.

The greatest change has been the increase in foundation funding within the Valley since 2008. While nonprofit foundations were always present in Valley colonias, their presence dropped off after Hurricane Katrina, as Gulf of Mexico funding went to Louisiana and Mississippi (Proyecto Azteca 1-2, interview, 2015). After the Ford Foundation introduced organizers to the Rockefeller Foundation and other major funders, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation awarded Brownsville their Culture of Health Award. In general, organizers have noted an increase in funding opportunities from foundations, as one organizer explained: "…one funder attracts another funder. Funders – they like success." The Ford Foundation and Marguerite Casey Foundation have been instrumental in catapulting new colonia organizing networks. However, foundation funding is notoriously fleeting both in focus and in dedication to given regions (Ishimatsu 2013). When asked whether they felt foundation funding was more stable than government funding, most organizers felt they were roughly equivalent; however, many preferred foundation funding for its detachment from the government.

The Ford Foundation and the Marguerite Casey Foundation have been instrumental in the growth of colonia organizing through their models of supporting 25 to 30 percent of an organization's operating budget. This means, for organizations working with both LUCHA and EVN, upwards of half of their operating budgets are accounted for, as they receive operating support from both the Marguerite Casey Foundation and the Ford Foundation. From such stable financial ground, these organizations can hire more staff and better maintain programs. It has also discouraged hostility stemming from competitive funding competitions between colonia organizations across the Valley, and encouraged collaboration. Ford and Casey both represent an

improvement in foundation funding that seeks to support cities and regions with grassroots-driven solutions, instead of using externally-generated solutions that are then matched to cities and regions. As shown in Chapter Three, solutions generated from outside the community, and then imposed upon the community, are particularly disliked in the Valley, read as an imposition of power from a foreign culture. Instead, the Ford and Casey foundations have gained the trust of colonia organizers for their persistent support and their embrace of locally generated problem identification and solutions.

Organizers represented Ford and Casey as relative constants in their quest for financial self-sufficiency; however, any shift in the larger missions of these foundations could have consequences for colonia organizing, in a similar fashion as the 2008 housing crisis did for colonia sweat equity programs. Thus, many colonia groups keep a diverse base of funding to minimize the impact of losses. While financial self-sufficiency remains a key goal in colonia organizing, this goal is the furthest from being met – and this is to be expected, as it is a lofty goal.

Organizer self-sufficiency

Organizer self-sufficiency is the ability to sustain organizing efforts by engaging, and defining, a broad base of potential organizers. In Valley colonias, this is being accomplished through civics and technical education in organizing and colonia issues. While Unidos and the EVN both emphasize education and sufficiency, LUCHA offers the best example of the goal of organizer self-sufficiency. LUCHA 2.0 represents its core goal as follows:

> *The main goal of LUCHA is to build a base of informed and engaged residents, and to support the goals of long-term participation and capacity building from LUPE and ARISE. LUCHA wants to increase the educational capacity of residents so that they can identify local and regional challenges, explain these problems to others, identify possible*

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solutions, discuss strategies for moving forward, and prioritize important issues.
(LUCHA 2.0 Visioning Document, September 2016, translated by author from Spanish)

As such, LUCHA's goal is to give residents the skills needed to facilitate their own organizing. Current organizers do not see these residents as a threat; instead, they view this capacity building as a positive movement, as one senior organizer stated in her description of LUCHA:

> *People are becoming the experts and they are becoming the voices. And so, if I'm not here, the group continues. Or even if the group, all of us, LUPE, ARISE, and bcWORKSHOP and all of that [disappear], the knowledge that has already been left in our representantes is muy importante [very important]. So they have really learned to be able to advocate for themselves.*

This ability to self-advocate is critical to sustaining colonia organizing. Many senior colonia organizers, who have actual experience organizing with César Chávez, are either on the cusp of retiring or are recently retired. Many senior organizers are concerned about sustaining colonia organizing and, much like their own roots, wish to continue colonia organizing traditions by pulling new organizers from within the community.

Consequently, I see organizer self-sufficiency as one of the most profound goals of colonia organizing, as it represents the future of colonia organizing so fundamentally. Where do these organizers come from? What is their perspective on organizing? What is their knowledge of civics and of colonia service delivery? Do they know the histories of colonia organizing? These are the questions that will propel colonia organizing forward.

Summary

Amplio is the best word to describe the four major themes of current organizing: regionalism, horizontalidad, sustainability, and independence. *Amplio*, as an organizing concept,

defines a broad constituency with flat leadership structures meant to address widespread, systemic issues.[29] While there are elements of traditional organizing models in *amplio*, it is truly its own idea. While it embodies a form of critical pedagogy, it is not strictly Freirian, as it takes community-level education as its base. While it remains confrontational, it is not strictly Alinskyite, as it does not follow a hierarchical leadership model. Lastly, while it embodies the idea of everyday action, it is not strictly feminist, as it remains confrontational. *Amplio* is a daily practice that emphasizes the accretion of community-based knowledge, which is then used to organize against relational injustices.

In regionalizing their efforts, however, colonia organizers in the twenty-first century face vastly different challenges than their predecessors in the twentieth century. In addressing a broader set of systemic colonia-based issues, organizers struggle to keep organizing grassroots and accessible. The desire to create a regional colonia movement and the goal of keeping organizing grassroots are often at odds, as it becomes more difficult to keep leadership horizontal with a broader constituency. Despite this, regionalism is a promising goal for colonia organizing; given the colonias' rural location and sparse density, regionalism allows more colonias to join a movement for relational justice that shows the depth and breadth of the problems they face.

This is the character of contemporary colonia organizing; however, given the goals laid out in this chapter, colonia organizers are confronted with several practical difficulties. Continual reassessment of existing goals and practices, in the sense of the Zapatistas' *preguntando caminamos*, can help guide colonia organizing through this transitory period. Colonia organizers recognize this, and, through LUCHA 2.0, are attempting to do just that. However, programs like

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[29] This definition of "*amplio*" was created by me to describe the new types of organizing methods I found in Valley colonias.

the EVN and Unidos need more rigorously consistent evaluation if they hope to maintain close ties to the urgent issues facing Valley colonias. It is too easy to say that *amplio* is a goal, but not follow through with the daily questioning and learning that it necessitates – organizer burn-out was noted throughout the fieldwork (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016). However, there needs to be a deep connection to the people. Words like "efficiency" and "programming" create distance between organizers and residents; there needs to be a certain amount of "sacrifice for the cause" (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016). LUCHA 1.0 shows great promise as an organizing initiative; however, in discussions of LUCHA 2.0, "efficiency" began to creep into the conversations and, thus, the power of the program is under duress.

If colonia organizers can find a way to maintain committed to their current goals, colonia organizing promises to reach several impressive goals within the next ten years. Organizers simply need some tool that can keep them committed to the cause. In discussing organizing, resident motivators are so often the topic of discussion, but how can we keep organizers, themselves, motivated as well?

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Introduction

What is guiding contemporary colonia organizing? How has the history of colonia organizing impacted the future of colonia organizing? In interrogating the assumption that colonias are incapable of organizing, this dissertation uncovers multiple histories of colonia organizing that continue to influence a diverse set of organizations towards the goals of creating a low-income, grassroots organizing base across Rio Grande Valley colonias. In this field of diverse, and sometimes divergent, tactics, the connections between social context and practice are fluid and ever-changing. The determining of "appropriate" practices derives from the accumulation and dissemination of indigenous knowledge through new cross-organization networks, such as the EVN and LUCHA. These networks provide organizers, residents, and resident-organizers with a regional view of colonia issues and support policy changes on a larger scale than that seen in the past. In communities previously considered to be incapable of organizing, the presence of organizing in colonias at the regional level, not just the community level, raises questions about existing theories of community organizing in planning.

Numerous scholars point to the need to more thoroughly incorporate issues of social context into community organizing theory (Fisher and DeFilippis 2015; Stoecker 2010) and there is recognition that existing traditions of community organizing capture an "ideal" picture of organizing that is rarely put into practice (Fisher and DeFilippis 2015, 370; Fisher and Shragge

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2000, 1–2; Martinson and Su 2012, 59, 75–76; Stall and Stoecker 1998, 734). This fact is well-recognized by organizing scholars and merits further interrogation – what exists in the fuzziness of real organizing practices that is not adequately covered in the study of major organizing traditions? The dissertation used the case of Rio Grande Valley colonia organizing to examine such theoretical issues, while simultaneously highlighting how existing organizing theory marginalizes certain organizing practices, namely those that involve less visible and more incremental tactics.

To conclude the dissertation, I first provide a summary of each dissertation chapter. I then offer an overview of three different categories of implications stemming from this research, for colonia studies, colonia organizing, and community organizing theory. Next, I outline three potential future research projects stemming from the dissertation: questioning a "North/South" divide in urban theory, replicating this study in Paso del Norte colonias, and examining how the community organizing theory implications might affect the teaching of community organizing. I then close with some final recommendations for urban planning, more generally.

Chapter Summaries

This dissertation sought to resolve conflicts between existing theories of colonias and organizing and what is perceivable on the ground through an in-depth case study of organizing in Rio Grande Valley colonias. The format of the case study involved an examination of the U.S./Mexico border as the context for Rio Grande Valley colonia organizing, within which multiple colonia organizations and organizing networks were comparatively examined. Twenty-one colonia-based organizations and networks were identified for inclusion in the study. These groups were comparatively examined using data collected in open-ended interviews with colonia

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organizers and observations of meetings and protests from 2014 to 2016. This data, primarily

when concerning the history of colonia organizing, was also triangulated with archival data on

the United Farmworkers, the Diocese of Brownsville, and promotoras. Collected data was

analyzed using a relational justice framework for understanding colonia organizing that

examined inequalities stemming from historical relations of power. From this, the dissertation

was divided into seven chapters that first established the issues at-hand, introduced the

theoretical framework, examined the historical context for colonia organizing, and then

examined its contemporary practices.

The introduction challenges existing definitions of "colonia" by highlighting their over-

emphasis on distributive justice issues (such as lack of potable water, sanitation systems, and

adequate housing) to the detriment of relational issues (those involving power and a history of

institutional marginalization). Instead, colonias are defined by a history of *both* distributive and

relational injustices stemming from their extreme poverty and proximity to the U.S./Mexico

border. Due to this shift, the dissertation also questions a long-held assumption regarding the

incapability for colonia organizing (Dolhinow 2003; Dolhinow 2005; Stuesse 2001; Ward 2004;

Ward 2014). Thus, the dissertation asks: *how has community organizing historically impacted*

colonias and what is currently guiding contemporary colonia organizing?

To answer these questions, I first engage with three major traditions of community

organizing in Chapter 2: Alinskyite, Freirian, and feminist. In current analyses of these major

traditions, it is not uncommon for scholars to highlight how these "ideal models" rarely reflect

actual organizing practices (Martinson and Su 2012, 59). Expanding upon early feminist

organizing scholarship (Gutierrez and Lewis 1994; Stall and Stoecker 1998), I call for a more

relational approach to community organizing theory that focuses on historical relationships and

analyses of power. This not only adds nuance to analyses of organizing, but also permits an analysis of political appropriation, understanding how given practices are usurped from the context of marginalized communities and moved to areas of affluence. This need to focus, first, on context, then on a relational analysis frames the rest of the dissertation.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the U.S./Mexico border context for the subsequent analysis of colonia organizing within the Rio Grande Valley. It first examines two concepts that are key to understanding the basic environment of the border region: nepantla and territory. *Nepantla*, a Nahuatl term for inbetween space, has been adopted by feminists to express a feeling of nowhereness or lack of belonging associated with particular intersectional identities (Anzaldúa 2012; Anzaldúa 1981). *Nepantla* is a common sentiment along the U.S./Mexico border, brought on by being located at the international border in the "third country" (Anzaldúa 2002; Anzaldúa 2012). The third country is the space north and south of the U.S./Mexico border that shares a culture and history that is distinct from the nation-state cores of Mexico and the United States. This territory pushes against Westphalian notions that define "territory" as the extent of sovereign bodies. The rest of the chapter highlights how the Rio Grande Valley occupies the space of the third country and remains distinct from the core of the U.S. This context is key, as it implicitly informs colonia organizing by creating a distinct set of political issues that organizers must contend with.

In Chapter Four, the contextual analysis is deepened through an historical analysis of colonia organizing in the Rio Grande Valley. The chapter first reviews the base of nearly all border-based organizing: the mutualista. Mutualistas formed shortly after the border regions were annexed from Mexico in the late nineteenth century and are based upon the concepts of communal self-help and protection (Pycior 2014). From open-ended interviews with colonia

organizers and archival searches, four historical colonia organizing trends, occurring in the twentieth century, were identified: the Community Union Model, the Promotora model, faith-based organizing, and the Border Low Income Housing Coalition. In addition, four contemporary organizing movements, occurring in the twenty-first century, were identified: the Equal Voice Network, Unidos por UT-RGV, LUCHA, and public interest design. From these movements, the common assumption that colonias are apolitical and incapable of community organizing is overturned; however, this conclusion is not sufficient, and several important themes emerge from this historical analysis that are expounded upon in the remaining dissertation chapters, namely the concept of "self-help," the move towards regional social equity, and the emphasis on civics education.

Chapter Five unpacks the issue of "self-help" in border colonias. This term is used to describe multiple aspects of colonias and their organizing, making it a critical, albeit difficult, term to define. Since the 1980s, self-help, in academic literature on colonias, has come to define sweat equity housing programs, whereby residents construct their own homes with government assistance. However, colonia organizers often used self-help to define a disposition or ethos within border communities, one that focuses on a do-it-yourself (DIY) attitude towards not just housing improvement, but many aspects of communal life. It is the latter definition of self-help that is guiding contemporary colonia organizing – a credo to stand *by* colonia residents, not in front of them. This drive to organize by capitalizing on community-based self-help is driving organizers towards Freirian-like civics-based organizing tactics that emphasize education.

Chapter Six expounds upon the stated future ambitions of colonia organizing, namely, their drive to regionalize their organizing across county lines; to, simultaneously, create the flattest organizational structures while regionalizing; and to become as independent from

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external institutions as possible in terms of both finances and organizing. Ultimately, the Spanish word *amplio* best defines the future ambitions of colonia residents. *Amplio* translates to "broad" and refers to a spatial broadness (taking up space) and to thoroughness policy-wise. *Amplio* describes a trend towards relational justice in colonia organizing, focusing on changing the relationship between colonia residents and major institutions to change oppressive and systemic relationships plaguing the colonias.

Ultimately, the dissertation concludes that traditional models of community organizing, while offering insights into the genesis of certain organizing practices, fail to describe the breadth of colonia organizing. More insidiously, current theories of community organizing cast colonia organizing as a failure, due to its general lack of emphasis on concrete campaigns. However, colonia organizing in the Valley shows how education can provide a base for successful organizing. While this is an extension of the Freirian model of organizing, colonia practices extend beyond Freire's perspective and merge the constituency building techniques of Alinskyite organizing, the everyday organizing focus of feminist organizing, and the self-help ethos that is a core aspect of border culture. Self-help, in particular, illuminates how myriad forms of colonia organizing share a common base, allowing for the cross-organization collaboration that is currently so popular in the Valley. *Amplio*, to use the colonia organizers' own word, aptly describes their current organizing goals.

Implications

From this research, multiple implications emerge, not just for colonia organizing, but also for community organizing theory more generally. This dissertation shows how community organizing can function in highly rural settings with low population densities. It highlights how

movement building can occur across the U.S.'s most impoverished, rural communities. In this respect, the findings may also assist Native American communities, communities in rural Appalachia, or rural communities across the Deep South. However, I recognize that the social, cultural, and political contexts of these communities are different. Nonetheless, I offer the three implications below that directly result from the dissertation: implications for colonia studies; implications for the colonia organizers, more specifically; and implications for colonia organizing theory.

Implications for Colonia Studies

The dissertation finds that colonias are not inherently apolitical or incapable of horizontal integration. Instead, Rio Grande Valley colonias have a deep history of organizing and political advocacy, a history that can be traced to their initial development. The impulse to act is part of the self-help ethos of the colonias; however, in past studies of colonia organizing (Dolhinow 2003; Dolhinow 2005; Donelson 2004; Stuesse 2001), this drive was found to be insufficient on its own to lead to successful organizing. Instead, knowledge of civics became a critical component of successful colonia organizing. Civics teaches colonia residents the skills to act as full citizens, giving them the know-how to navigate the difficult policy environment of the border. While knowledge of civics is a necessary component of community organizing in general, I argue that this is even truer in the colonias, especially post-2008. Reductions in colonia-based government funding significantly changed colonia organizing, further grounding it within the community. However, a major question remains: if government monies for colonias return, will civics-based and regionally-based colonia organizing disappear?

Furthermore, colonia organizing is transforming into a regional undertaking. As individual organizations increasingly merge into supra-local networks, these groups highlight the

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power of a regional approach to colonia poverty. Groups like LUCHA and the EVN are actively changing the nature of colonia organizing by providing residents with necessary technical knowledge to act and by supporting organizers on a wide range of topics. These groups not only bring sufficient technical and civics knowledge to residents and organizers, they also show the breadth of the colonia problems across the rural landscape; issues that would normally be considered one-offs emerge as systemic issues. As a bonus, these regional networks are also emphasizing the political importance of colonia residents, highlighting their power as a voting constituency. Citizenship classes and voter registration drives (such as those undertaken individually by various colonia organizations and by the EVN) seek to bolster this effect. To this end, colonia organizing also seeks to create more just political processes not only by encouraging voting, but also by electing politicians and sheriffs who better represent their jurisdictions. This relational perspective necessitates, colonia organizers believe, a foundation in civics and citizenry that first- and second-generation residents may not have.

Thus, colonias are capable of community organizing and horizontal integration; however, given the socio-economic status of colonia residents, they need extra support in understanding the political context in which they live. Civics education creates a strong base for colonia organizing. A greater emphasis on civics education and technical know-how surrounding service delivery will empower colonia residents to organize their own communities and begin to dismantle domineering institutional relationships.

Implications for Colonia Organizers

Colonia organizers rightly assert that the answers to their questions, and even the questions themselves, reside within the colonias themselves. Given the context of the border region, ideas external to these communities must be modified to fit colonia needs. This makes it

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difficult to pen final implications for them; however, a few suggestions for their practice could help support their stated goals. These suggestions recognize that organizing models like the Community Union Model and the promotora model are organizer-intensive, requiring much effort on the part of the organizer. This recognition is key for two reasons. First, it is important to avoid organizer burn-out, not just for the organizer, but also for the community. Which leads to the second reason, these models require consistent input and guidance from colonia residents. Without that guidance, these models begin to look more like nonprofit service delivery than community organizing – seating organizing in the colonias opens the potential for relational justice, rather than just distributive justice.

This is most critical for LUCHA. LUCHA 1.0 involved the participation of a select number of colonia residents and fundamentally changed their political agency and savviness. This type of organizing cannot be undone since this knowledge is firmly implanted within peoples' minds. As such, LUCHA is one of the most promising initiatives currently in the Valley. However, visions for LUCHA 2.0, while seeking to include more colonia residents, are in danger of watering down the original mission in the name of efficiency. "Efficiency" is a dangerous word in organizing, as it can cover the real struggles within the community by pushing for simple solutions (Arizmendi 1, interview, 2016). "Program" is another dangerous term, one that seeks to replace the spontaneity of organizing with efficient and unmoving solutions. In envisioning LUCHA 2.0, these words are creeping into conversations and threaten the vitality of the cause. LUCHA needs much freer input from the community, which entails better defined modes of communication between specialists and residents. For organizers, their role is to ensure that such lines of communication remain open and free of relational injustices.

Furthermore, another major concern about these new networks is their dependence upon foundation funding. This fleeting source of money, while independent of the government, is notorious for quickly changing perspective and course. As such, the reliance on foundation funding in the Valley is disconcerting and makes new supra-local networks highly volatile. This is a concern that mirrors larger discussions in community organizing (Ishimatsu 2013) and, therefore, extends beyond the Valley or even the colonias more generally. However, this is an issue that colonia organizers must carefully observe.

Implications for Community Organizing Theory

At a higher level, colonia organizing in the Rio Grande Valley represents an important case study for understanding the connections between community organizing and the social context that drives its practice. The colonias, and their organizing, have deep historical roots. In previous examinations of colonia organizing, historical influences and the border context have not been sufficiently tied to an analysis of organizing; instead, tactics, practices, successes, and failures have been more extensively discussed. Where history and context are examined, these were often included as a "literature review" and presented from the perspective of scholars, not of the community. This leads to an evaluation of colonia practice outside of the historical border context that has shaped it.

From the initial development of the colonias, its residents have fought to legitimize their presence and their right to relational justice. The history of colonia organizing shows the early presence of the United Farmworkers and faith-based organizations. Their approaches to organizing took the unique context of the "third country" into account: operating within the political context of the U.S., taking on the hybrid cultural identity of the "third country," and understanding the easy introduction of organization "breakers" from Mexico. These three

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components continually shaped colonia organizing over decades in conjunction with the self-help ethos of the Valley. From these influences, the Community Union Model took hold, focusing on slow, incremental, and quiet movements. While the model focuses on the slow development of community services, it is remiss to define the model as "distributive." The Community Union Model's primary objective is the slow recognition and legitimization of the community through a show of capacity. While this model of organizing has clear influences from Latin America (through the Zapatistas), it is distinctly "third country." Furthermore, Southern Texan migrant farmworkers experienced a unique set of organizing constraints due to their immediate proximity to the border and the effects of state policies on unionizing – what worked in California did not work in Southern Texas.

The study of community organizing must recognize the nature of its practice, not as a profession that is studied and consciously put into practice, but as the emergent reaction of a community in the face of injustice. As such, the influence of the social context and history takes precedence over the application of external theories. Furthermore, it is normal to see several conflicting organizing models within one community. In the Valley, colonia organizing networks increasingly leverage the existence of various organizing models, and are learning when and where each tactic thrives. As such, opposing models are not inherently inconsistent when a sufficient amount of collaboration occurs across organizations. The influence of this realization on the teachings of community organizing is profound and merits further study.

Possible Future Studies

From this research, several additional lines of inquiry open, namely: the role of urban theory in perpetuating the North/South divisions in the Valley, the possibility of describing the

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effectiveness of civics-based organizing more broadly by replicating this study in the Paso del Norte region, and the implications of context-based organizing theory for the teaching of community organizing. Below, I flesh out each of these topics.

Questioning the "North/South" Divide in Urban Theory

Global North and South divisions in urban theory fail to reflect many communities and obscure the true nature of several twenty-first century phenomena, such as an increasing marginalization within the so-called Global North cities that is currently identified as a Global South phenomenon (Wacquant 2010). Not only do the practices of U.S./Mexico border communities show this to be true, it also questions whether the North/South divide ever truly existed. The "third country" at the U.S./Mexico border has existed for at least a century and a half, generating its own mode of civil society premised upon mutual aid, a form of communal self-help that emphasizes the production of services from within the community itself. Mutual aid has, over decades, reinforced the idea of the border as a distinct culture. Through organizing and cultural practices, the third country has begun to reify itself as a territory. Despite recent attempts by the border patrol to divide this territory, they have inadvertently supported notions of the third country by establishing a series of checkpoints 100 miles from the actual border. This action seems to define the edges of the third country, though its actual borders are more uncertain.

In examining colonias, a purely distributive justice view from the United States is insufficient to capture the whole of their practices. Instead, a relational and intersectional perspective allows nepantla to emerge as a valid cultural phenomenon along the border, without seeing this mixed identity as inconsistent. Assigning the region as the case (as opposed to the colonia organization) elucidates the influence of the global positioning of border colonias on

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their practices of self-help as mutual aid and highlights their historical independence from the nation-state. As such, the third country provides a wealth of information about urban theory and urban planning outside of the traditionally held territory of the nation-state. As scholars of global poverty begin to question traditionally held territories, the border colonia not only becomes an example of twenty-first century conceptions of our world, but also highlights fundamental flaws in our twentieth-century thinking, and the marginalization of border/bridge territories over the past century in urban theory. This research is not alone in unveiling the shortcomings of the North/South divide and contributes to a growing body of research identifying this significant shortcoming of urban theory and poverty studies (Roy 2015a; Wacquant 2015; Yiftachel 2006). Per this work, border colonias cannot be defined as a distinctly U.S. phenomenon because they operate within a distinct territory that blurs the idea of the nation-state. As such, their organizing practices are also reminiscent of this blurring.

These issues greatly influenced this study; however, they remained at the sidelines of the inquiry here. An important project that emerges from this dissertation is to further examine how urban theory has traditionally stumbled across border regions and how, following Chapter 3's discussions of territory, urban theory needs a twenty-first-century understanding of territory.

Replicating this Study in the Paso del Norte Region

As mentioned previously, another study is needed to examine community organizing in the Paso del Norte region, which includes Las Cruces, New Mexico; El Paso, Texas; and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Unlike the Rio Grande Valley, Paso del Norte involves two different states, with sometimes opposing colonia and organizing policies. It would be interesting to see if regional organizing is possible in this interstate region. Furthermore, it would also be interesting to examine whether civics-based organizing is also successful in this region. The results from this

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dissertation suggest that it would be successful, but further research is needed to state this confidently.

Teaching a Context-Based Community Organizing

Outside this dissertation, I examined fifteen syllabi for community organizing courses. All but one of these courses teach community organizing as a strictly Alinskyite practice. This over-emphasis on the Alinskyite model distorts our view of community organizing in academia, beyond organizing research, to affect future organizers and/or academics. However, in switching from a model-based version of organizing theory to a context-based theory of organizing, what knowledge or skills must we pass down to students? How do we teach organizing if organizing is tied to locality? These questions, while important, are beyond the scope of this dissertation and merit further investigation.

Final Recommendations

This study of Rio Grande Valley colonia organizing highlights a new trajectory for planning research outside of traditionally held territories of the nation-state, state, and city at a time when planning theory scholars are questioning basic assumptions concerning territory and sovereignty in planning. Planners have long tied territory to sovereignty; however, the marginalized, I argue, are not just socially marginalized, but often spatially marginalized as well. More generally, a keener sense of history and context is needed to understand how anti-poverty movements resist the contradictions inherent in the field. More so, this new perspective can show how anti-poverty movements attempt to communicate such contradictions to planners. In this sense, this research contributes to a wide range of scholarship that is working to overturn these assumptions across the various subfields of planning (Appadurai 2002; Benner and Pastor 2011;

Miraftab 2009; Robinson 2006; Roy 2015b; Roy 2015a; Sandercock 1998; Wacquant 2010; Wacquant 2015).

However, this dissertation took community organizing as its target. Even at the level of organizing, colonias increasingly follow cross-community and cross-county practices that are redefining the boundaries of social equity planning practices (Benner and Pastor 2011; Pastor, Benner, and Matsuoka 2009). This is the trajectory of new territories of organizing in the twenty-first century: the poor are carving out their own territories for action, as the systems that influence them, increasingly, do not match traditionally held territories of planning. As Wacquant (2015) states, territorial stigmas trap the poor into spatial categories that may not represent the social systems and structures that create their marginalization. Instead, it is necessary to find the mechanisms by which poverty is created and perpetuated. Understanding the social context first is key, I argue, to understanding how this context influences community organizing in marginalized communities. In examining colonia organizing, this is about identifying the territorial differences that make border colonias different from other rural, impoverished communities. Their border proximity and "third country" culture lead to a different form of development that necessitates a different form of organizing for services and representation. Without understanding the regional context, analyses of colonia organizing fail to capture the historic breadth and scope of its practice. In many ways, perspectives from the margins and from the nepantleras, those who bridge theoretical boundaries, can teach us more about theory than more central perspectives. However, this requires a more fluid basis for understanding the world, one that is messy and is constantly undergoing reevaluation. As Anzaldúa (1981) states:

> *Caminante, no hay puentes, se hace puentes al andar.*
> *[Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks.](Anzaldúa 1981, V)*

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Appendix A: Research Design

This dissertation asks: *how has community organizing historically impacted the planning of colonias and what is currently guiding contemporary colonia organizing?* To answer this, the research uses a mix of insurgent historiography and qualitative case analysis to piece together an historical narrative of colonia organizing and identify the current trajectories of its practice. Sandercock (1998) describes insurgent historiography as "the struggle of memory against forgetting." In the face of a dearth of information regarding the foundations of colonia organizing, insurgent historiography provides a strong approach for capturing the knowledge and experiences of senior colonia organizers, many of whom are entering or about to enter retirement. Many of these organizers remember the moment colonia organizing began in earnest, and this dissertation sought to capture this unique perspective before this information disappears. As such, insurgent historiography captures these experiences using open-ended interviews, not the highly popular semi-structured interview (Thomas 2004). While a list of questions for each interviewee was generated beforehand, these were used only to stimulate the conversation when needed.

Why the Rio Grande Valley?

In examining colonias, the breadth of the U.S.-Mexico border presents itself as a potential study region. Studying this 1,933-mile border is, however, too extensive a project; thus, a specific region was selected based upon two criteria: the estimated number of colonia settlements present, and the number of colonia advocacy groups. The region was selected based upon

county-level statistics, as the county represents the smallest unit of government that affects the colonias evenly through policies. As Appendix D shows, in examining these two criteria, two possible regions for study emerge, both within Texas: the El Paso region and the counties of the Rio Grande Valley. While El Paso's juxtaposition with not just an international but also a state border offers an interesting opportunity for comparison, the nature of the research question makes the Rio Grande Valley a more apt study region.

The Rio Grande Valley of Texas encompasses the three border counties of Starr, Hidalgo, and Cameron. Within this vast conurban region, over 1.2 million people live. Counting the Mexican side of the border, that figure increases to over 2.5 million people. The Valley also contains more colonias than any other U.S./Mexico border region, by far. Approximately three of every four colonias are in the Valley (HUD, 2014; Texas Secretary of State, 2014), and, furthermore, I estimate that nearly two of every three colonia advocacy groups are also located in the Valley (HAC, 2005). This concentration of colonias has led to an exacerbation of their problems of representation and planning.

Case Analysis

While early attempts were made to isolate the cases from one another, I quickly realized how farcical that attempt was. Colonia organizations and their networks remain tightly knit together; in several instances, organizers were employed at two or, even, three separate colonia organizations and networks. For reporting purposes, and to keep their identities anonymous, I would ask such organizers what their "home" organization was, and would report their information under that group. However, in reporting my findings, I took a regional view, analyzing the sum of their combined activities. Instead of using a colonia organization as the

"case," the Rio Grande Valley becomes the "case" and the colonia organizations and networks functioning within the Valley become "embedded units of analysis." This is why the dissertation uses what Yin (2009, 46) calls an embedded, single-case framework (*Figure 14*).
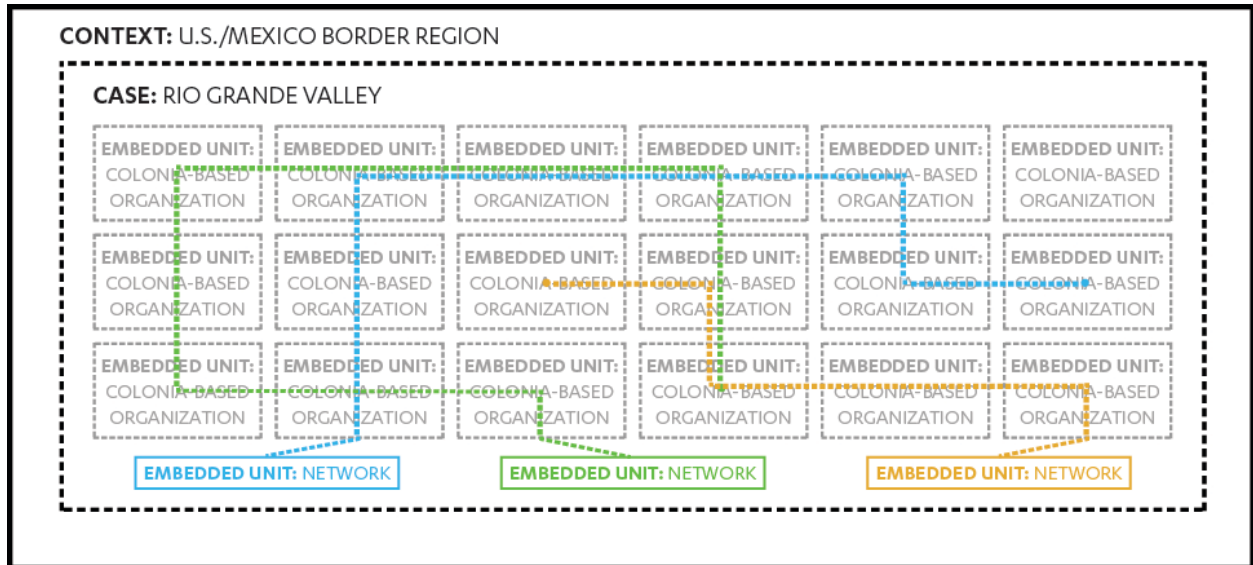
Figure 14: Diagram showing how the embedded, single-case framework functions. Within the context of the U.S./Mexico border region and the case of the Rio Grande Valley, multiple colonia organizations are analyzed. These "embedded units" must operate within the case and context of the dissertation. By examining these units within the larger case of the Valley, several networks emerge linking together these organizations.

This departs from earlier scholarship on colonia organizing, which tends to focus on one organization (a single case) and assumes organizational isolation (Dolhinow 2003; Dolhinow 2005; Stuesse 2001); however, in two notable circumstances, colonia organizing was examined, not just from a truly feminist standpoint, but by highlighting the collaborative nature and histories of colonia organizing (Arizmendi and Ortiz 2004; Donelson 2004). From this embedded, single-case analysis, a larger-scale view of the embedded units allowed larger collaborative networks to emerge as significant elements in colonia organizing.

Program Data	Organization Data	Target Community Data
Program Name	Organization Name	Target Community
Date Founded	Organization Founded	Scope of Target Community
Program Type	Self Help Center (SHC) Status?	Population
Main Funding Source	EIN Number	Average Household Size
Level of Colonias Service	IRS 501(c)(3) Categorization	Community Racial Demographic
Name and Position of Main Contact	Filed a 990 for 2012?	Percent Hispanic
Email and Phone Number	2012 Expenses, Income, & Assets	Poverty Rate
Communication with Contact	Address	Access to Basic Services
	Website	Median Annual Income
	Total Number of Employees	Homeownership and Renting Rates
	Mission Statement	Age Distribution

Figure 15: Types of data collected during Phase I of the research for case selection. The data is categorized into one of three types: program-level data (in blue), organization-level (in green), and community-level (in grey).

Selection of Embedded Units

A significant challenge of the dissertation was defining what constituted an "embedded unit" and identifying all of the embedded units within the Valley. Given the focus of the research (colonia organizing) and the case (the Rio Grande Valley), the following criteria were used to identify units of study for the dissertation:

1. Presence within the Rio Grande Valley: A unit must maintain a presence within at least one of the Valley's three counties (Starr, Hidalgo, and/or Cameron). "Presence" equates to either having an office or home base in the Valley or maintaining a full-time employee in the Valley.

2. Focus on colonias: A unit must have a substantial focus on colonias (defined operationally as either federally recognized colonias or as impoverished model subdivisions). Many potential units in the Valley focus on, for instance, low-income housing, but do not focus this work on the colonias.

3. Focus on organizing: A unit must use community organizing as a major focus of its work. Community organizing is defined, adapted from Stall and Stoecker (1998, 730), as: the process of reconfiguring and mobilizing community towards pre-political action and social movement. As such, community organizers are understood as those facilitating this process within the community.
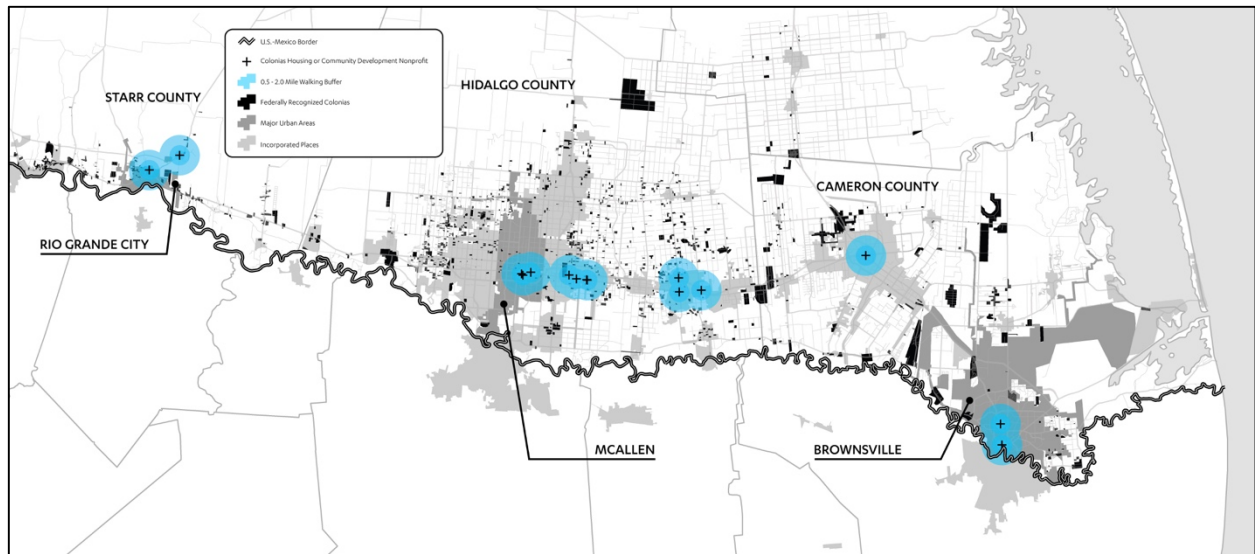
Figure 16: GIS analysis of the location of the embedded units within the Rio Grande Valley, shown in relation to the colonias and incorporated cities (Rivera 2014).

From these three criteria, seventeen organizations and four collaborative networks were identified for inclusion in the dissertation (See Appendix B). Of these, fifteen were available to participate in the study, in the form of participant observations and/or open-ended interviews. To examine colonia organizing within this context, I first created a database of all grassroots and nonprofit organizations working primarily within Valley colonias (Appendix B).[30] These groups were identified through my fieldwork, GuideStar searches, basic web searches, and analysis of organization websites (the categories of information collected are shown in *Figure 15*.) These

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[30] No comprehensive database of colonia organization exists. The closest to comprehensive one can get is the Housing Assistance Council's (HAC) (2005) report on nonprofit housing organizations working within the colonias. A quick examination of its accurateness through Google and IRS data searches reveals that this pre-recession database is no longer an accurate representation of colonia nonprofit groups. The majority of these organizations no longer exist, or exist solely in name, hoping to one-day return to their activism once funding can again be secured. Furthermore, the HAC database's emphasis on housing omits numerous groups that focus on other issues relevant to colonia well-being, such as health, citizenship, education, and public infrastructure, just to name a few. Thus, in order to understand the breadth of organizing across the Rio Grande Valley (Valley), it was critical that I create my own database to facilitate the accuracy of this dissertation.

organizations constituted the population from which I pooled interviews; it also provided an

opportunity to physically examine the territories of colonia organizing through GIS-based

analysis (*Figure 16*).

Archival Work

To complete the narratives analyzed in Chapter 4, archival work was undertaken to

complete the stories told by senior colonia organizers. This work, using insurgent historiography,

did not emphasize newspaper clippings, as mass media reporting continued to be a heavily

biased source throughout the Valley, but instead emphasized written and visual communications

from the organizers themselves. The majority of this work came either from the organizations or

from organizers themselves. Materials directly from organizers were either presented as hard

copies during open-ended interviews or digitally provided to the researcher via email or through

the organizers' websites. In the special case of the United Farmworkers (UFW), several notable

archives exist; the two used in this dissertation were: The University of California at San Diego's

Farmworker Movement Documentation Project and Wayne State University's *César Chávez,*

Walter Reuther, and the United Farm Workers of America Collection in the Walter P. Reuther

Library. These archives provided photographs, memorandums, pamphlets, letters, and more from

the UFW's activities in the Rio Grande Valley and California. Furthermore, a group of scholars

at UT-San Antonio, led by Dr. Raquel Marquez, recently began assembling an archive of the

UFW's early activities in Texas, specifically including their work in the Rio Grande Valley.

While that is still in progress, some of their early insights informed the work presented here.

A Note on Terminology: "Senior" Colonia Organizers

In numerous places in the dissertation, I use the terminology "Senior Colonia Organizer." This phrase is meant to distinguish between more junior colonia organizers (with, approximately, less than ten years of organizing experience in Valley colonias) and senior colonia organizers (with a decade or more of experience organizing in Valley colonias). A key distinction between "junior" and "senior" organizers is that the latter maintain an historical view of colonias that precedes, or shortly follows, their federal recognition. As such, "senior" colonia organizers oftentimes recalled first-hand experiences with organizers such as César Chávez and organizations like the United Farmworkers in their interviews. I therefore distinguish these organizers throughout the dissertation because senior colonia organizers' long-range perspectives serve not just to define contemporary colonia organizing, but contribute to the insurgent historiography of colonia organizing that forms the basis of Chapter 4.

Interviewee List

Interviews with interviewees who agreed to be audiotaped were analyzed primarily in terms of the interview transcript. Interviews with interviewees who turned down the audiotape but still agreed to participate in the study and were analyzed based upon the researcher's jottings and field notes. Many interviewees declined the audiotape to protect the identity of undocumented residents within their offices, or to protect their own identities. The actual names of respondents are either entirely removed from the dissertation or, when necessary, fake names were substituted. Regardless, all interviewees consented to identify their organizations, except for government officials who were unable to speak on behalf of their offices. Forty-five percent of respondents declined the audiotape.

The distinction between "organizer" and "employee" is also critical. Those designated as "employees" are not primarily tasked with community organizing, but instead may work in a more technical capacity in colonias and are "allied" in significant ways with colonia organizers; as such, the "employees" below do act as organizers in some capacity within the Valley. By contrast, "organizers" are those whose primary focus is colonia organizing.

- Arizmendi 1, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, September 12, 2016, field notes.*

- ARISE Organizer 1, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, April 8, 2015, transcript and field notes.

- bcWORKSHOP Employee 1, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, August 22, 2014, field notes.

- bcWORKSHOP Employee 2, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, March 30, 2015, transcript and field notes.

- bcWORKSHOP Organizer 3-1, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, March 30, 2015, transcript and field notes.

- bcWORKSHOP Organizer 3-2, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, September 13, 2016, transcript and field notes.

- bcWORKSHOP Organizer 4, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, September 13, 2016, transcript and field notes.

- Braier 1, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, December 4, 2015, field notes.*

- CDCB Organizer 1, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, August 22, 2014, field notes.

- CDCB Employee 2, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, March 27, 2015, transcript and field notes.

- EVN Organizer 1, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, March 24, 2015, field notes.

- Government Official 1, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, April 16, 2015, field notes.**

- Government Official 2, colonia site visit with Danielle Z. Rivera, May 1, 2015, field notes and photographs.*

- LUPE Organizer 1, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, April 23, 2015, field notes.

- LUPE Organizer 2, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, April 23, 2015, field notes.

- Proyecto Azteca Organizer 1-1, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, March 11, 2014, transcript and field notes.

- Proyecto Azteca Organizer 1-2, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, March 18, 2015, transcript and field notes.

- Proyecto Azteca Organizer 2, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, March 18, 2015, transcript and field notes.

- TRLA Employee 1, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, April 8, 2015, transcript and field notes.

- TxLIHIS Organizer 1, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, April 23, 2015, field notes.

- TxLIHIS Organizer 2, interview by Danielle Z. Rivera, November 2, 2015, field notes.

* Last names are only used in the dissertation in the case of scholar/organizers, as the researcher wished to give these academics credit for their ideas and scholarly work.

** Government officials requested that their names and branches of government not be reported, as they are not allowed to speak on behalf of their offices; instead, they provided information as friends of the researcher.

Participant Observations

Participant observations of community meetings and public protests took place in the Rio Grande Valley beginning in August 2014. In all cases, the researcher sat in the audience with colonia residents (in the case of meetings) or marched alongside the colonia residents (in the case of protests). All events and marches took place in Spanish, with the researcher translating the events and materials into English. Jottings on a piece of paper were used to capture meetings. In

the case of protests, no jottings were taken in the field due to the nature of the events. In either case, field notes were used to capture the observations immediately following the event. Participant observations took place across the Rio Grande Valley during the following dates:

- August 14 – 28, 2014

- February 15 – May 15, 2015

- September 5 – 14, 2016

Appendix B: List of Embedded Units

UNIT	ABBR.	FOUNDED	MISSION
ORGANIZATIONS			
American Civil Liberties Union of Texas	ACLU of Texas	1991	The mission of ACLU Foundation of Texas, Inc. is to be the nation's foremost champion of individual rights-litigating, and educating the public on a broad array of issues affecting individual freedom in the United States.
A Resource in Serving Equality	ARISE	1987	ARISE'S mission is to aid communities by helping residents identify life goals and providing resources to help them reach those goals on their own.
Azteca Community Loan Fund	ACLF	2001	To provide micro loans to low income families, and to assist low income families with down payments.
Building Community Workshop	bcWORKSHOP	2009	To improve the livability and viability of communities through the practice of thoughtful design and making.
CDC of Brownsville	CDCB	1975	CDCB's mission is to assist low-income families in attaining home ownership through low-market financing, the construction and use of home designed and targeted outreach.
Colonias Unidas		1989	To improve the lives of colonia residents in Starr County, a rural community which has one of the highest level of poverty in the country.
Fuerza del Valle	Fuerza	2010	Fuerza's mission is to help workers discover their power and create solutions to the problems they experience at work.
La Union del Pueblo Entero	LUPE	1991	We work with low-income families and communities to capitalize on opportunities for the voiceless to influence the development of public policy and better utilization of public resources for the benefit of the entire community.
Mano a Mano		1993	Our mission is to provide support and education about health, in all its dimensions, to empower people and achieve positive changes which will strengthen the well being of all communities.

UNIT	ABBR.	FOUNDED	MISSION
MHP-Salud - Weslaco	MHP Salud	1994	MHP Salud implements Community Health Worker programs to empower underserved Latino communities and promotes the CHW model nationally as a culturally appropriate strategy to improve health.
Movimiento del Valle Por Los Derechos Humanos		2003	Educacion y Organizacion Comunitaria
Proyecto Azteca	Proyecto	1992	Proyecto Azteca Inc works with farm workers, colonia residents, and other low income people to create and administer housing and home renovation programs.
Proyecto Juan Diego	PJD	2003	To improve the quality of life through educational, social, ecological, housing, health, a rustic and community development.
South Texas Adult Resource and Training Center	START Center	1992	The vision of the START Center is to provide community-based educational programs to move families from the periphery into the mainstream of the Rio Grande Valley economy through the use of a proactive strategy.
Texas Low Income Housing Information Service	TxLIHIS	1990	Support low-income Texans' efforts to achieve the American dream of a decent, affordable home in a quality neighborhood.
Texas Organizing Project	TOP	2010	TOP promotes social and economic equality for low to moderate income Texans through community and electoral organizing.
Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid	TRLA	1971	Texas RioGrande Legal Aid's mission is to promote the dignity, self-sufficiency, safety and stability of low-income Texans by providing high-quality free civil legal assistance and related educational services.
NETWORKS			
Border Low Income Housing Coalition	BLIHC	1993	The Border Low Income Housing Coalition (BLIHC) is a grassroots coalition that responds to the severely substandard conditions found in colonias along the Texas-Mexico border.

UNIT	ABBR.	FOUNDED	MISSION
Land Use Colonia Housing Action	LUCHA	2011	The goal of LUCHA 1.0 was trifold. To develop representantes' understanding and expertise in the areas of land use, public infrastructure, development, and water issues. To engage representantes to further focus their top priorities, and begin to make selections of preferences on possible solutions. And to craft policy and legislative initiatives in preparation for the 2015 Texas legislative session.
RGV Equal Voice Network	EVN	2008	Committed to creating a movement of social change through the civic engagement of the more than 25,000 individuals who are the constituents of the different organizations in the Network.
Unidos por UT-RGV	Unidos	2011	To empower low-income community members and other stakeholders to inform the future University of Texas Rio Grande Valley planning activities in building a true anchor institution.

Appendix C: Colonia Initiatives: Past and Present

MODEL	ABB.	EST.	ORGANIZATIONS	GOALS
MAJOR HISTORIC COLONIA ORGANIZING PRE-2008				
Community Union Model		1966	National Farm Worker Association, United Farmworkers, LUPE	Migrant farm worker rights; undocumented immigrant rights; citizenship assistance; voting rights
Faith-Based Community Organizing	FBCO	1967	Diocese of Brownsville; ARISE; Projecto Juan Diego	Basic service delivery; civics education; unaccompanied child assistance
Promotora-Style Organizing		1983	MHP-Salud; LRGV AHEC	Public health education initiatives
Border Housing and Community Development Plan	BHCDP	1993	BLIHC; TxLIHIS	Grassroots low-income resident organizer training;
MAJOR COLONIA ORGANIZING INITIATIVES POST-2008				
Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network	EVN	2008	Proyecto Azteca, LUPE, ARISE, Proyecto Juan Diego, TOP, START, Mano a Mano, Movimiento por los Derechos Humanos, Fuerza del Valle, TRLA	Street lights in colonias; education-based activism in the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District;
Unidos por UT-RGV	Unidos	2012	TxLIHIS, LUPE, ARISE, bcWORKSHOP, CDCB	Representation in UT-RGV activities; new colonia health center
Land Use Colonia Housing Action	LUCHA	2012	TxLIHIS, LUPE, ARISE, bcWORKSHOP, CDCB	Colonia resident training modules; Street lights in colonias; Contesting the TWDB flood survey
Public Interest Design Activism		2011	bcWORKSHOP, Proyecto Azteca, CDCB	SustainABLE House; RAPIDO; Youth Build

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