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## The Environmental Divide: Neoliberal Incommensurability At The U.S.-Mexico Border

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the coincidence of transnational environmentalism in the local contradictory politics of neoliberal governance in Ciudad Juárez, a major manufacturing city on Mexico's northern border. The paper argues for a more nuanced understanding of environmentalism as both a product of and productive of the larger state and economic transformations which seek to make individuals the bearers of responsibility for social welfare. In addition, the paper shows how neoliberalism, paradoxically, reinforces communal and collective action as it simultaneously breaks down such action, along the fault lines of the environment.

... the mines of misery are exploited by house speculators  
with more profit at less cost  
than the mines of Potosi were ever exploited.  
(Karl Marx, *Capital* vol. I, 1976: 812)

Since the inauguration of the first Earth Day, in April 1972, the modern transnational environmental movement can be roughly mapped onto the global shifts in capitalism that have

led to the rise of neoliberal governments worldwide. For example, as Wolfgang Sachs and others have pointed out, First World anxiety about rainforest depletion has not always worked in the service of the indigenous peoples who live there. On the contrary, Third World poor are frequently cast not just as victims of environmental degradation, but as perpetrators of it, lacking a commitment to global environmental citizenship (see Sachs 1993; see also Escobar 1995; Gupta 1998: 292). This view has provided the ideological justification for policies that devolve responsibility for environmental preservation and clean-up onto the already overburdened poor themselves. Similarly, battles in the rural United States over resource control in the past two decades have pitted extractive users of landscape against recreational users in ways that have helped propel grassroots popularity of scaled-back government protection of wilderness and reductions in support of rural working families (see Buttel 1992; McCarthy 1998). With accelerating capital mobility, the concomitant withering away of the welfare state and the rise of stratified forms of citizenship entitlements within neoliberal states (see Holston and Appadurai 1999), the environment has become an open field of contestation subject to larger battles waged by the state against those most vulnerable to capital's transformations. Environmental politics have been, under neoliberalism, as much a tool for the creation of citizen/subjects willing to take on formerly state responsibilities as they have been an effect of such.

Along the U.S.-Mexico border the battle of the environment attained a pitched fervor in the early 1990s when U.S.-based environmentalists launched their counteroffensive to Mexico's proposal to liberate trade and industrial development through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). At first blush the effectiveness of environmentalists' aggressive international media campaign to secure significant protections for the environment under the trade treaty might suggest that at least in the NAFTA, environmentalists successfully tempered

the neoliberal state's effort to rid itself of responsibility (see Barry 1994; Audley 1997). In Ciudad Juárez, however, as I demonstrate below, city officials have found environmental discourse to be a particularly useful rationale for reconfiguring state-society relations in ways that encourage the poor to bear the physical hardships of creating a "clean and sanitary" city suitable both to the needs of export-processing firms and to local capitalists. Environmental politics (which initially appeared as a threat to local political legitimacy in Juárez) became an effective tool not simply for fracturing collectivities and furthering processes of individualization. Environmental politics, in the hands of the city government, have come to play a decisive role in converting the urban poor into active, volunteering agents of the very processes and policies which continue to place them at significant economic and political disadvantage.

In this essay, based on four years of fieldwork (1994-1998), I examine the city's management of one of its most vexed environmental concerns of the last two decades: a settlement of some 250 homesteading households atop the municipal dump. While originally sanctioned by city authorities in 1990, the settlement became a thorn in the city's side during the negotiations over the NAFTA. Consequently, city leaders undertook to rationalize waste management by moving its waste burial operations to a state-of-the-art sanitary landfill, and in so doing refashion Juárez as a world-class industrial city. Yet, while the presence of several hundred squatters on the old city dump tarnished the elite's imagined self-image, city administrations under the socially conservative, pro-business PAN (Party of National Action) have been loathe to undertake any expense to relocate settlers to more environmentally appropriate terrain. Indeed, the city's commitment to environmental health for all its residents, under the banner of responsible government, is compromised by its need for settlers to remain on the dump. Its commitment to its pact of responsible gover-

nance in exchange for responsible citizenship on the part of city residents is countervailed by the important role that dump homesteaders play in protecting landscape both for future capitalist investment and as guarantors of environmental health for the *rest* of the city's citizens.

Environmental politics in Ciudad Juárez, particularly those surrounding the dump, reveal the ruptures within any presumed hegemonic or monolithic characterization of neoliberalism. Critics of neoliberalism often lament the retreat of the welfare state for its casting of vulnerable subjects (particularly the poor) into the deregulated marketplace with little shielding from the economic forces breaking down collectivities and alienating people from one another. The atomizing, individualizing consequences of state rhetoric and policy are so often taken at face value that a critique of "individualization" has become an article of faith for those wary of the wrenching effects of any state-society reconfiguration glossed as neoliberalism in the past two decades (cf. Gustafson 1994; Hannon 1994; Gledhill 1995; Cravey 1998; Otero 1996; Phillips 1998; Alvarez et al. 1998; Dagnino 1998; Paoli and Telles 1998). However, as Mary Coffey has pointed out for Mexico, "individuals" are not the only subjects being forged under neoliberalism. Indeed, "community" continues to be an important category that can be mobilized in the pursuit of autonomy and self-reliance under neoliberalism (Coffey, forthcoming). While characteristically patron-client relations tend to create vertical alliances, Mexico's patron-client relations prior to the neoliberal era produced not individual clients, but communal clients. The "structurally induced personalistic style of Mexican politics" (Eckstein 1977: 92) conjoined claimants upon the state in tight *community*-based bonds of both horizontal and vertical reciprocity; this dense three-dimensionality favored agents whose vertical embeddedness protected against the flattening of the market and the law, both of which presume the horizontal commensurability of individuated

subjects (see DaMatta 1990). In this way, communities in Mexico were comprised of, to borrow Marilyn Strathern's term, "dividuals." As the key political actor of the long-ruling PRI-dominated state, community members ("dividuals") were a particular form of collective, composite agents reflective of complex hierarchical social relations (Strathern 1988: 13).<sup>1</sup> As my case material shows, the neoliberal state in Mexico has not dispensed with dividualizing communities in the service of creating individualized neoliberal citizen-subjects. Instead, it has sought to appropriate communities as a way of aligning the political aspirations of the neoliberal state to the neoliberal market (Coffey, forthcoming).

In this paper, I direct attention to the nature of community as it has shifted under neoliberalism in the wake of the state's reconstitution of the material bases underlying patron-client relations. As we shall see, what has coalesced in Ciudad Juárez as "community" (the dividualized product of neoliberalism) bears the imprint of concerted effort on the part of the city government to manage the crises in local governance brought about by wider shifts in national economy and politics. *Both* community and political subjects are being remade at the dump in Ciudad Juárez by the city's efforts to channel its production of "citizens" (individual agents of self-governance) through dividualized community relations. The breach between these two forms of pressure on the dump's homesteaders exposes the city's contradictory efforts to manage a dangerous environment; these efforts have been predicated upon a dividualized community that necessarily persists in the face of the stated mission of three successive PAN administrations since 1992 to promote fully autonomous, self-reliant and individualized "citizens" who will sever themselves from community and the dangerous environment of the dump. In a further complication to the standard analyses of neoliberalism, as this case study will show, no single powerful agent controls this process. The challenges to governance raised by the collision of divergent

interests at the dump (land-holding elites' efforts to raise the value of speculative real estate, PAN operatives' efforts to build grassroots support and legitimacy, and settlers' efforts to secure the permanency of their homesteads) reveal the contradictory role that the environment plays in neoliberalism's own inherent contradictions.

### Neoliberalism in Time and Space

Mexico undertook neoliberalism along its northern border long before the formal, federal embrace of policies that shrank national bureaucracies, liberated protected sectors, deregulated industry, and promoted individual and community self-reliance and autonomy throughout the rest of the country. In 1966, the Border Industrialization Program opened the border region as a free trade zone where U.S. firms were welcomed to build export-processing factories (*maquiladoras*), pay minimal taxes and export their finished goods and profits. *Maquila* cities and *maquila* families living along the border never enjoyed the same level of public subsidizing of social reproduction that families and communities in the federal district did. Through the 1980s, infrastructure spending in border cities lagged behind spending in cities in the interior (Guillén 1990; Cravey 1998). Neither the state nor industry was interested in shouldering the costs of social reproduction along the border. Thus from the moment of incipient industrialization there, when *maquila* families were pulled into factory work, they were also pulled into webs of communal interdependence that were more remote from state control and support, when compared with working families in the interior (cf. Cravey 1998). Nonetheless, while more limited until the early 1990s, the allocation of land and public works services in working-class settlements followed patterns established by the ruling party throughout urban Mexico; public entitlements, offered as rewards for elec-

toral support at all levels of office, bound working-class families and communities to the long-ruling PRI (Institutional Party of the Revolution). These practices reached their political limits during the 1980s, when the *maquilas* experienced yearly double-digit expansion and Ciudad Juárez swelled from under half a million to a million in population. The federal government's long neglect of border cities dealt the ruling regime significant electoral losses: the socially conservative, pro-business PAN secured the mayor's office and the governorship of the state of Chihuahua in 1992 and has held onto the mayor's office in five elections since.<sup>2</sup>

Most accounts of neoliberalism in Mexico have focused on policy changes within the ruling party (see for example Gledhill 1995; Fox 1994; Dresser 1991; 1994). Ciudad Juárez and other border cities complicate these understandings. Neoliberalism was sometimes advanced by opposition party administrations while at other times obstructed by these same fledgling political players who, lacking any organic basis of support, often mimicked older PRI clientelist practices of allocating public goods in order to nourish the grassroots. Thus, for example, the PAN first won the mayor's office in Ciudad Juárez in 1983, but lacking block-level organization, lost the city to the PRI in 1986. When the PAN returned to power in 1992, it solidified its control of the city through a mix of policies, some of which advanced the signature features of neoliberalism (those that tended towards individuation) while others strengthened processes of dividualization. Since 1989 the city has tacked uneasily back and forth between rhetorical and practical paternalism, on the one hand, and assertions and policies that oblige all city residents to become stewards of their own destinies, on the other.

Contemporary Ciudad Juárez is a study in contrasts. Its industrial parks feature the most advanced and complete infrastructure that Mexico has to offer, including preferential supplies of energy and potable water; paved, well-lit and well-

drained roadways; sumptuous landscaping, and sophisticated telecommunication and climate control systems. Most workers, however, struggle to survive in ramshackle settlements scattered across the irregular desert terrain, in the shadow of industrial effluent. Indeed, it was this contrast (between the gleaming "First World" domain of production and the squalid, "Third World" domain of social reproduction built up around the toxic by-products of industry) that drew transnational environmentalists' attention in the late 1980s and early 1990s (see Hill 2000, Chapter 3).

Until then, Juárez's environment was of little concern to few of the city's wealthy and powerful: local capitalists, factory management and ruling party (PRI) elites. In fact, for years, city leaders regarded the dump (the chief [if illegal] site of industrial disposal) as a point of storied pride: since 1970, a thriving resource-recovery cooperative (SOCOSEMA) had accumulated significant prosperity by pulling valuable materials from the waste stream there. The scavengers' industriousness testified to the poor's ability to productively endure hardship, while providing a metabolic service to the city. As one cooperative member proudly put it to sociologist Devon Peña: "We were the original recyclers!" (Peña 1997: 235). The scions of several elite families, who had helped organize the cooperative, write its federal charter and secure its lines of credit for capitalization, rose to political and social prominence in the city on the widespread reknown of their work with the cooperative. Cooperative members are still quick to point out that the political fortunes of the city's second PAN mayor, Francisco Villarreal (1992-1995), began with his campaign for popular support of the cooperative in 1970. Nonetheless, the city's relationships to the cooperative were not without tension: the principal source of that tension stemmed from the settlers who had colonized a narrow strip of the dump's surface, along its northern edge, in 1990.

By 1994, the dump had spread across more than 40 acres, about 1,200 meters up a southeastern ravine in the Sierra de Juárez, the massive, irregular-shaped mountain that forms Juárez's western boundary. In just more than two decades, the city had reversed several millennia of geologic formation. It had poured its solid wastes into a wide, deep arroyo, covering them with layers of limestone rubble and dirt dug from an alluvial plain that once loomed over the arroyo on its southern side. Garbage and fill brought the arroyo surface even with the narrow spur of rock and rubble on its north, from which cascaded an even wider, deeper arroyo. The relatively flat surface between the arroyos held irresistible appeal for land-hungry, desperately poor rural migrants: on this northern edge of the dump now stands a rectangular settlement of some 200 shanties and modest cinderblock or adobe shelters, situated on homestead plots each ten meters wide by twenty meters deep. Remote but clearly visible from this vantage along the mountain skirts and flat valley floor, stretch the city's scores of working-class settlements, most of which came into being by the same political and economic processes that brought homesteaders to the dump.

Since the revolutionary period of 1910-1920, the PRI had used land allocation across the Mexican countryside to serve the dual purpose of delimiting the economic mobility of millions of poor Mexicans while securing their political allegiance. Over the course of seven decades, rural Mexicans devotedly offered their electoral support to the PRI in thanks for land reform, which had converted hundreds of millions of acres into communal peasant holdings. Nonetheless, the federal government's deliberately restricted support of the peasant sector gradually and steadily propelled impoverished small holders toward the country's chief urban centers (primarily Mexico City), where the regime faced the challenge of recruiting potentially disgruntled migrants back into the party fold. It met this challenge through the *indirect* allocation of land for

homesteading; it provided land and services through small-scale political operatives whose carefully orchestrated rituals of exchange and deference built urban party loyalty from the ground up (cf. Cornelius 1975; Lomnitz 1977; Vélez-Ibañez 1983; Montaña 1976; Díaz Barriga 1996; Gutmann 1996).

Land invasions, organized by political brokers on territory ordained by the state for just such purposes, created Mexico's version of liberal governance based on a chimera of citizen political independence and efficacy. As Susan Eckstein (1977) demonstrated in her study of Mexico City's peri-urban settlements in the late 1960s, the practice of indirect land and infrastructure allocation enabled the regime to effectively limit the material support it offered to urban working-class families by stifling demands for public entitlements and subverting them through networks of personalized favor allowances. In this way, the regime fostered networks of asymmetrical reciprocity in working-class settlements, which dividuated homesteaders by binding them to one another and to the brokers who secured for them land, legal tenure and ultimately city services.

The PRI's deployment of grassroots political brokers (called *lidés* in Ciudad Juárez) enabled it to engage the most critical feature of liberal governance, what Michel Foucault and his followers have termed "governance at a distance" (Foucault 1982; 1986; 1991; Cruikshank 1994; Barry et al. 1996; Hindess 1996; Coffey, forthcoming). This distance (established through the practice of obliging urban immigrants' allegiance to small-scale, low-status operatives) allowed the regime to divert rank and file frustrations with the limits placed on goods and services away from the regime itself and towards its most visible representatives, its *lidés*. This strategy of governance, effectively deployed throughout Mexico, seems to have first appeared in Juárez in the mid 1960s, when *lidés* staged PRI-ordained "invasions" of federal lands on the city edges with large groups of would-be homesteaders (see Valencia 1969: 68-69).

Nonetheless, in the following two decades, not all settlements received secure or immediate state sanctioning. The prospect of denied state support assured continued loyalty on the part of homesteaders. That, and their fears that their sweat equity (the physical effort invested in clearing land, building homesteads and sharing in communal labor projects), committed residents to dividuation (community collaboration and loyalty to their *lidés*, who alone had license to negotiate with city authorities for titling and services).

While effective in limiting potential unrest, the PRI's distant governing carried risks to ruling party legitimacy, however. This was particularly so in Ciudad Juárez, where by the early 1980s, the federal government had failed to expropriate enough land on the city's perimeter to provide *lidés* with their basic tool in the binding of new immigrants to the party's structures. At the same time, the local government's decision to prohibit development of the land along the mountain skirts, in favor of the flat desert floor south of the Rio Bravo valley, alienated some of the city's most important elite families who had counted on the gradual drift of urban development southward and westward. With the stroke of a pen, when the city finalized its first federally mandated urban plan, in 1979, prosperous real estate developers found themselves holding hundreds of now worthless mountain acres. They turned to the increasingly maverick *lidés*, who, with little public land at their disposal, had lost their bread-and-butter means of support.

As the 1980s unfolded, a variety of fragmented and conflicting interests determined the course of Juárez's urban expansion. *Lidés*, sometimes working with party operatives, sometimes working with large landholders, and increasingly working for themselves alone, stormed the mountainsides and any land that they could reasonably convince homesteaders to occupy, much of it decidedly environmentally unsuitable. The PAN returned to office in this melee, in 1992. Francisco Villarreal, trading on his long association with the scavenging

cooperative, was elected mayor on a populist platform that promised to regularize thousands of illegally settled homesteads, extend services and prevent further exploitation of working-class families by cleaning the city of its *liders*. The first two promises lay squarely in the camp of old welfare state paternalism, while the third gestured toward a new, neoliberal mode of governance.

Villarreal's own tenuous support compromised his third campaign promise. While true to his campaign platform, he prohibited bureaucracies, such as the Office of Human Settlements (which negotiates title transfer from private owners to homesteaders), from any business with *liders*; he nonetheless let some *liders* continue to operate. One such semi-sanctioned *lider*, Heriberto Chacón, received city approval for a planned settlement at the dump in April 1990. Soon thereafter Chacón began selling small homesteads in a development he called Panfilo Natera (after a revolutionary war general) to desperately poor immigrants.

Initially, despite his history as a notorious PRI and free agent *lider*, Chacón encountered no obstacle to settling Panfilo Natera. In contrast to many of his previous real estate ventures, Chacón had secured formal transfer of title from the owner of the land leased to the city for the dump. As the land's owner of record, Chacón, in suitably transparent neoliberal fashion, began developing a legitimate, officially licensed subdivision. However, in short order, the federal government's weathering of the environmentalist assault on the free trade agreement soon caught up with Villarreal's administration. The city dump, which had once served as Villarreal's badge of political legitimacy with the city's poor, came to represent the failure of a local neoliberal administration to match its political rhetoric of modern governance to its management of its environment. Under pressure from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (see U.S. EPA 1992) and with financial support from the federal government, Villarreal's administration soon drew up plans to open a new,

fully lined, monitored and drained landfill, in the flat mesa land 30 kilometers south of the city center. This new landfill, Villarreal's director of sanitation assured me in 1994, would never fall prey to *liders* such as Chacón; human settlement would be strictly and forcefully prohibited. "This will be a sanitary landfill," (*relleno sanitario*) he told me, "not a dump" (*dompe*). Emphasizing the distinction between the two, he added: "There will be no people living anywhere near there."

### The Changing Political Environment

Over the course of more than 15 years (from roughly 1983-1998), homesteaders throughout Ciudad Juárez struggled to grasp the veiled rules underlying real estate development and infrastructure allotment. Not only did particular *liders* rise and fall from political favor, homesteaders throughout the city endured a fundamental shift in the political fortunes of *liderazgo* (leadership) as the primary conduit for resources and public works. Under Francisco Villarreal's and subsequent administrations, the PAN, in eliminating *liders*, sought to convert political subjects into political citizens. Villarreal adopted a rhetoric of "citizenship" and, like many PAN mayors, introduced rituals of citizenship, including "Miercoles Ciudadano" (Citizen Wednesdays), which invited "citizens" to publicly voice their grievances to the mayor's office and in so doing take ownership over the processes of governance implemented by the city. City administrators instructed homesteaders petitioning for legal tenancy and for services that city offices would no longer negotiate with *liders*, only with residents. While on the surface this move suggested a commendable gesture toward breaking the system of bossism that had long kept Mexico from international approval as a full fledged democracy, it also represented a significant hardship for residents of areas like the dump, who traditionally, as dividualized subjects, pooled resources and al-

lowed *liders* to undertake the costly efforts to secure services for communities. Under the PAN, as presumably independent individuated citizens fulfilling the liberal vision of commensurable citizen-agents of their own futures (see Holston and Appadurai 1999: 6), residents had to navigate, one-by-one, city bureaucracies and they had to learn the proper sequences for securing titles without the assistance of *liders*, whose authority was no longer recognized. In communities like Panfilo Natera, where every adult householder worked (either in remunerated or unremunerated activities), few could afford the time off from factory work or the burdens of household duties to undertake the things that *liders* had traditionally done for residents.

The difficulties facing Panfilo were even more pronounced as "environment" became both a tool for inculcating citizenship and also for physically dividing citizens one from another. The PAN's attempt to mince, separate and divide traditional community collectivities intensified as the city government deployed a policy of "environmental insecurity" for insisting that homesteaders take responsibility for themselves. After Panfilo's homesteaders discovered, via the news media, that their *lider* (Heriberto Chacón) appeared high on the list of the PRI's most notorious brokers, they fearfully approached city officials with their preciously guarded receipts for monthly land payments. To their dismay they learned that in many cases after a year and a half of expensive payments, they had been duped into purchasing land that their *lider*, Chacón, had no right to sell.<sup>3</sup> Eager to rid the dump of settlers, the city encouraged homesteaders to move on. In the summer of 1994, as Panfilo's case languished, the sanitation department sent out agents to warn residents of the danger of subterranean gasses, generated by decomposing wastes, that placed the community at risk of fires or explosions. But the city offered no viable options for settlers. (It did not, for example, offer to buy settlers out, or pay for relocation.) Soon settlers began to believe

that the city was simply toying with them in order to take over land into which they had put significant investment. Rumors circulated widely that city officials intended to convince residents to leave in order to resell their improved lots to new, more powerful real estate interests.

Initially, Panfilo Natera thrived on the edges of the city's busy waste management center. All day long garbage-laden trucks rumbled up a deeply pocked road from the city's western highway, arriving at the dump to disgorge their contents in giant piles that towered over awaiting teams of scavengers and city sanitation department employees. The scavengers raked through the wastes, quickly excavating valuable materials before bulldozers leveled and buried the piles. While the dump was in operation, Panfilo's residents felt reasonably secure. With that much state-sanctioned activity, surely the community was viable, reasoned residents. After all, the settlement had grown up in plain view of the sanitation department. However, when the city closed its activities, tore down its weighing station and gathered up its fencing in October 1994, Panfilo's isolation stood out in bold relief. Surrounded by an arroyo half a mile wide to the north, acres of abandoned landfill to the south, a steep mountain face to the west and separated from the thickly settled communities to the east by an inoperative lumber yard (also built atop the landfill), Panfilo suddenly appeared small, distant from legitimate social activities, and vulnerable to any abrupt change in political favor.

With their increased anxiety, the settlers' demands for regularization of tenancy become more insistent. Villarreal's administration, eager to deploy some features of welfare state paternalism to pacify unruly groups, granted a modest concession. It agreed to undertake regularization, but not of the whole settlement; the city would grant regularization on an *individual* basis. It would regularize only those residences that did not sit atop garbage and it required residents themselves to affirm that their houses had been built on suitable land. Be-

cause Panfilo rested atop the northern perimeter of the dump, where the upper edges of landfill blended with the irregular canyon wall, some (but few) of the homesites might be free of garbage. A high-ranking official in Villarreal's Office of Human Settlements, Ricardo Zavala (an alias), told me in an interview in 1996:

We tried to resolve the matter of Panfilo Natera because, you know, people were there, they were living there. For the municipality, once people are there, you have to do something. But it was a tricky situation. So what we did was say to each family "You are responsible for telling us if the land where you are living is *firme* (good, firm), if it's decent land, or if there's garbage there. But if you tell me that your land is good and I'm going to sign off on that and regularize your homestead, then what you're saying is that *you* inspected your property" (emphasis added).

The director of sanitation during this period further elaborated how environmental responsibility was framed as an individual choice for homesteaders of "high risk areas." During one interview about the dump, he reminded me of a well-publicized story of the "woman who wanted Villarreal to sign that paper":

This woman was in a place where there was a canyon and so they told her that she had to move, because of the dangers of flooding in the rains, or that she would drown, or in any case that you could die there. They said all that, and she said, "no, no, I'm not leaving." So they said "look, it's our responsibility" ... And then she said "No, no. You tell them that I'll sign anything you want. I'll take full responsibility, but I'm not leaving."

In linking responsibility to the environment, city officials did not coerce residents. Rather, they encouraged residents to embrace a view of themselves as responsible citizens, and in so doing turned responsibility for determining the environ-

mental suitability of the community into a household burden, effectively individuating households from one another. While historically, the community (the illegal or invaded settlement) was the subject with whom municipal governments made their deals (through a *lider's* brokerage), Villarreal's administration broke down communities at risk of the physical environment into their individual components: homesteading families. Historically community members obtained collective goods (i.e., public works infrastructure) by acting as divided subjects and by first securing regularization of the *entire* community. However, in Panfilo Natera (and elsewhere in the city during the 1990s) households were left to fend for themselves, as individual units. Moreover, the situation opened critical opportunities to further undermine any sense of collaborative ventures or shared position vis-a-vis the city. Neighbors took an interest in each other's property only in order to evaluate the fairness of the city's treatment of their own conditions. The establishment of whether land was "*firme*" (firm) or "*buena*" (good) could be deployed in other conflicts within the settlement. One resident, Don Emilio, (an alias) complained to me that he had gone to the Human Settlements to report that his land was "*firme*." However, a neighbor, who was angry at Don Emilio for a bad bet on a cock fight, alleged that Don Emilio's land was "*pura basura*" (pure trash). As a consequence, Don Emilio was still struggling to get his property designated as "*buena*" well into 1997. The physical environment became not a shared or equalizing condition for all community members, but rather the means by which residents could settle other kinds of scores in disputes both petty and large. The city's discouragement of any kind of community-wide resolution of land tenure produced fractures and fault lines that continued to divide community members one from another. The physical environment, in Panfilo Natera, became a tool of social individualization in the production of political citizens.

### Securing Environment In Time/Place

Even as the city increasingly discouraged Panfilo's residents from seeing themselves as a collective community, it also helped foster other conditions which not only facilitated the community's collective cooperation, but required it. The city's efforts to scare residents from the dump were, in point of fact, as half-hearted as was its concern for the health of the dump's homesteaders. As one city official explained it to me in 1995, the problem of Panfilo lay not simply in convincing the existing residents to move away, but in assuring there would be no future colonization of the dump. The then-director of the Department of Sanitation worried that something needed to be done to prevent further settlement at the dump; after all, there was ample open space for settlement there. Juárez's consultant on city planning expressed a similar concern when he told me, in October 1994 (shortly before the dump was to close), that "in Mexico, dumps are magnets for development." No city official wanted the soon-to-be closed Juárez dump to fall victim to the habits of poor Mexicans who "don't understand the environment," as the director of sanitation put it to me. Because of that failure to "understand the environment" he mused, "we have to encourage some other kind of suitable development there, something like a *patio fiscal*" (a holding pen for confiscated automobiles), whose presence would ward off any would-be settlers or *lidere*s, those who tend to ignore the physical unsuitability of the environment at the dump. Nonetheless, short of any such far-fetched and expensive visions, the city could reasonably rely on the existing residents of Panfilo to police the vast open areas surrounding it against any further incursions. Residents were willing to engage in this kind of unwitting public service in order to strengthen their own tenuous hold on the landscape underlying their community.

The marginal and precarious nature of land tenure and ownership effectively inspires residents to police the space surrounding their homesteads. Residents of new settlements quickly learn that there is safety in numbers; a thickly concentrated settlement is harder to dislodge than one with few homesteaders. Space outside the "authorized" boundaries of settlement is thus dangerous to the settlement because any homestead outside the margins that *lidere*s dictate invites reprisal from city authorities or large landholders, who, if not wholly supportive of an invasion, can deploy riot police to beat up and jail homesteaders. Thus in the interest of protecting their own stake on territory, homesteaders are often more than willing to ensure that no uninvited settlers seek to take advantage of the incipient settlement and set up homesteads on the perimeters. Thus settlers bind together in a communal effort not only to increase population but to concentrate it in space.

Settlers also seek to protect a settlement by converting the dangerous open (and potentially vulnerable) spaces on the settlement's edges into socially useful space. This practice was one highly effective way that settlers in Panfilo Natera fostered collaborative social relations that helped convert the dump into a defensible settlement. Settlers recognized the dangers posed by the dump's vast, uninhabited areas, and thus took care to prevent unauthorized settlement. Often when inquiring visitors cast their view across the acres and acres of barren landfill surrounding Panfilo on three sides, settlers firmly denied that there was any more land available for homesteading: "*Ya no hay lotes*" (there are no more lots for sale). However, as the next section of this paper will show, settlers, in taking a stake in securing the space for the community's survival, nonetheless wound up securing it for purposes that benefited them very little, as became clear to them after they

defended one space (the soccer field) only to watch it vanish from their collective grasp.

### The Soccer Field

Visitors and residents gained access to the settlement via a vacant field that lay between the homesteads and the roadway which conveyed the city's tractor-trailers of trash from the highway, down-mountain. The empty field, whose boundaries lacked visible demarcation, abutted another one whose boundaries were clearly marked. In 1994, when the dump closed, between the fenced lumber compound and the field traversed by travelers, lay an area enclosed by a thick network of cables: a spider web of lamp cords, extension cords, and cables that carried pirated electricity to houses in the settlement. Inside this ersatz fencing lay a fairly level area of landfill, from which poked the broken shards of sharp objects such as bottles, cans, and other bits of trash. Scrubby vegetation had begun growing there. Residents called this area the soccer field and used it on Saturday and Sunday afternoons for pickup games. Residents claimed this space as their own, and put it to an important social use. Though only men played in the games, women and children used the time during the games to socialize on the sidelines, building inter-household ties and forming a sense of community through their exploitation of the otherwise vacant space. The soccer field, an element of the shared built environment, was a critical piece of the community's otherwise very limited social infrastructure.

Many visitors to the dump (social workers, missionaries, journalists and researchers)<sup>4</sup> take for granted that residents had created this space themselves. Residents' desire for a communal space in which to create physical conditions for dividuality apparently had overridden their need to economize on securing electrical power. Viewing the landscape of the dump, many

visitors presumed that residents had voluntarily taken on the additional expense of bringing their pirated electricity all the way around the field instead of directly across it. Each household supplied its own lines to cut into the utility's lines. Going around the field instead of directly across it required up to three times the length of patched lamp and extension cords. This presented a considerable expense for residents. But by keeping the space clear of the lines and fencing its boundaries with those same lines, residents seemed to have made the field social property.

I learned otherwise, however, through Rosa (an alias), a young woman who lived with her husband and three small children in the strip of houses on the north side of the soccer field. Rosa surveyed the vacant landfill above the soccer field and told me how the community was working on a beautification project. She and her neighbors had planted a hedge of tiny fledgling shrubs on her street, to mark the northern boundary of the soccer field. According to Rosa, when Chacón had donated the land for the soccer field, he suggested that other land, too, might be available for community use. She mused about the land just above it and their plans for a community center. She talked about how she wanted to collect money from other residents to build a school, also on this unoccupied land. She and the residents of her street had conferred with Chacón, who had approved of their plans and encouraged them, thus, to "*vigilar*" (watch over) the two fields, to keep invaders off and to report any *paracaidistas* (parachuters, i.e., invaders) to him. It had been quite some time since Rosa had actually spoken with Chacón, who had been run off by city officials in 1993. Nonetheless, she had faith in his authority and honor. She looked forward to the eventual improvements that the residents would make to the community. And she took seriously her duties as "*vigilante*" (watch person) to protect the space, not for Chacón, but for the community.

When I asked Rosa about Panfilo's *ambiente* (environment), she pointed to the soccer field and spoke of collaboration among residents that kept out bad social influences (gangs from neighboring settlements, unauthorized invaders). The soccer field allowed Rosa and her neighbors to feel that they were contributing to making Panfilo "bonita" (pretty). The space was enlivened on weekends, when games were played, and protected by this social use from encroachments on terrain that could destabilize the settlement. Talking about the soccer field she told me, "*tenemos un ambiente agradable*" (we have an agreeable environment here).

Rosa was thus quite stunned when, in early 1996, she watched workmen arrive and begin digging a ditch around the perimeter of the soccer field. They soon built the foundation for a cinderblock wall that would eventually be topped by a high chain link fence. Abruptly, the soccer field was gone, and in its place, the lumber compound (which had been inactive up to this point) expanded and was now closed off by a sturdy and formidable barrier. Not long after, a sign appeared on the fence announcing "*oferta de trabajo*" (help wanted). While residents were deeply disappointed that they had lost their soccer field, they were eager and excited that a *maquila* (or so they thought) would open so near to their homes. They would no longer have to suffer such long commutes. Instead, the compound turned out to be a storage yard and not a production facility. Only a handful of residents were hired for positions exclusively in "*vigilancia*" (security). Those men who did find work at the compound were paid to keep thieves from stealing lumber and to watch over the remaining "vacant land," as it too soon would be employed in commercial development. By the summer of 1998, a natural gas depository had built another walled compound, in the formerly vacant area above the electric towers that Rosa and her neighbors dreamed would one day house a community center.

What settlers had secured for *their* environmental purposes (a space that reinforced dividuation) had been wrenched from their control, a frightening indication of the whole settlement's vulnerability and insecurity. It might be slated for further commercial or industrial development, but settlers had no way of knowing. As these commercial and industrial developments appeared, residents grew deeply suspicious that the city's prolonging of their regularization was a ploy to wear them down in order to get them to surrender their homesteads and move to one of its distant new subdivisions, many kilometers away from factories and shopping centers. Even in the face of growing insecurity, they believed that the dump was becoming very valuable real estate. They thus became more resolute in remaining and waiting for regularization and services.

Residents' suspicions of the city were not without reason, as Ricardo Zavala (in Villarreal's Office of Human Settlements) explained to me in 1996. While certainly landowners would make money from what city officials called "self-invasions" (invasions conducted by *liders* with the covert authorization of a property's owner) what they stood to gain in drawing development through illegal settlements *towards* their holdings was even greater. Self-invasions are a form of simple exploitation and simultaneously the means of land speculation. Self-invasions only involved a portion of a landowner's property. Once a settlement was in place on this smaller slice of land and arrangements made for expropriation and eventual installation of public works infrastructure, then property owners could make plans to develop their land into very lucrative undertakings, such as shopping centers or industrial parks. But landowners had to ensure that *liders* would not get out of hand. *Liders* exercised absolute control at ground level, so landowners needed to ensure that *liders* would only sell a limited portion of "available" land to settlers. Self-invasion thus also required a negotiation between *liders* and owners, given that owners needed to limit the amount of land that a *lider* would

have access to. *Liders* had to be trusted to settle only an agreed-upon area of land. Self-invasion, according to Zavala, was a process whereby a landowner would ask a *lider* to protect, say, 40 hectares of land, in an area vulnerable to invasions (i.e., adjacent to already settled areas or industrial parks). In exchange, the *lider* would be entitled to settle an additional, say, 10 hectares. His services would be paid for in what he collected from the commissions that he charged to settlers. *Liders* were handsomely rewarded for their services, but they had to police the boundaries of illegal settlements to assure that settlements did not overwhelm the established but invisible boundaries of what was a permissible settlement (or overflow into the area planned for bigger and better things).

This practice bore out at the dump, where Chacón, in exchange for title to a portion of the land leased to the city for the dump, had recruited settlers' assistance in protecting the soccer field from a threat of invasion, in order to keep that land out of circulation until the owner found a more lucrative investment: a lumber kiln. In addition, this practice carried the dual effect of protecting the property of the largest land-holding family on that side of the mountain, while simultaneously reinforcing residents' vision of shared, communal social relations, predicated on favors for and protection by a political and social superior.

### The Political Economy Of Environmental Discourses

After Chacón and the other *liders* lost their political sponsorship in city government, several community members vied to assume the *liderazgo* mantle, but none achieved unequivocal support in the community nor anything approaching success with recalcitrant city officials, who in administration after administration, balked at carrying forward with the steps that would assure the settlers' permanent tenancy in the environ-

mentally unsuitable area of the dump. At the same time, however, officials frequently promised settlers their regularization. This placed settlers in a state of suspended animation between two versions of neoliberalism, one that the obliged residents to take individual responsibility for the environment in pursuit of the possibility of "official" recognition of land ownership and one that relied on residents' sustained, dividualized embrace of the environment in order to secure the community as a whole in the face of external "threats" from outside settlers. City offices changed hands three times between 1992 and 2000, but little change was seen in the settlement. Apart from electric service, as of May, 2001, titles still had not been transferred to settlers, nor was water or wastewater infrastructure slated for extension to the community. In the summer of 2000, shortly before the general election that would bring the PRI's dominance of national politics to an end, I revisited the Office of Human Settlements. When I probed for what had gone on with Panfilo Natera during his years in office, one high ranking official replied with a shrug, "this is a problem for the next administration."

With each change of administration, residents remain hopeful that the new administration will deliver on the promises of its predecessors. Their hopes recently soared when they successfully helped fight off an invasion in the southern quadrant of the dump. According to a news account posted to an electronic listserv of border scholars and political activists, the city itself had thwarted this invasion in the name of protecting would-be settlers from garbage: "There are many risks there including illnesses and the possibility of gasses leaking out of ground," one official stated (quoted from [Frontera-L@nmsu.edu](mailto:Frontera-L@nmsu.edu), March 27, 2001; see also *El Norte*, March 26, 2001). But my conversations with residents of Panfilo revealed a different reading of both the standoff between riot police and the would-be homesteaders. One resident told me that her neighbors, who had gotten wind of the invasion, informed city offi-

cials. They did so in order to demonstrate their commitment to the city policy that forbade any new settlement at the dump, in the hopes that the city would reward their policing efforts with legal tenancy and services. In the weeks following the aborted invasion the director of Human Settlements did in fact schedule several meetings with residents, the outcome of which, once again, turned on residents' obligation to conduct investigations of their own individual properties to "prove" their environmental suitability. "We're going to get our titles," I was told, "but first everyone has to inspect their lots to show that it's good soil."

In this most recent environmental encounter between residents and the neoliberal city, we can see, once again, how antithetical goals and processes within neoliberalism (those of individuation and dividuation) contravene one another. Given Panfilo's more than nearly decade long liminality, it is doubtful that, even now, residents will receive titles and services. And while the city can continue to voice its insistence on ostensibly obliging, encouraging and coaxing residents to one-by-one recognize the environmental unsuitability of the dump, it simultaneously continues to promote processes of dividuation that keep the community firmly embedded in the dump. The presence of homesteaders allows for land banking, an important ingredient in both the political control of far-flung settlements of poor families and in the creation of real estate scarcity, advantageous to powerful property holders in city. And in staying on the dump, not only does the environment not individuate residents one from another, but as a community Panfilo's residents' continued dividuation turns them as a group into an environmental buffer that keeps the dangerous environment of the dump out of circulation in the low-end real estate market, serving ultimately as a citizenship service in the environmental protection of others.

T. H. Marshall, in his classic study of citizenship, anticipated that the "pendulum" of citizenship entitlements would

eventually swing away from the large-scale support of direct and indirect social welfare, once the threat of an educated, healthy labor force became felt by powerful capitalist interests (Marshall 1950). Indeed, the rise of neoliberalism and the consequent undermining of the material bases of social solidarity, in country after country, since the mid 1980s, does seem to bear out Marshall's predication; neoliberalism's favoring of economic and political citizenship indicates that the accent in citizenship has shifted back towards forms of citizenship more amenable to capitalist interests. But despite his prescience, Marshall failed to anticipate that the citizenship pendulum would swing elliptically and arrhythmically (see Holston and Caldeira 1998), taking along some political subjects as citizens of the new order, leaving others who lack the rights of the older order while retaining their imputed burdens, now mapped onto new terrains such as the "environment." Transnational environmentalism, caught up on the larger forces of capital and state realignments, has become an unwitting accomplice to the stratification and polarizing effects of neoliberalism, contributing in Ciudad Juárez, as we have seen, to the coalescing of environmental stratification with political and social stratification.

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#### NOTES

- 1 My thanks to Elizabeth Dunn for suggesting this line of thinking to me. See Dunn 1998.

- 2 Francisco Barrio, brother of the manager of the city's largest *maquila* (indeed at one time the largest export-processing plant in the world) was elected mayor on the PAN ticket in 1983. However, as the PAN lacked an organic party structure to maintain support at the grassroots level, control of the mayor's office reverted to the PRI in the following two elections. In 1992, Francisco Villarreal won the mayor's office on the PAN ticket and Barrio was elected governor of the state.
- 3 The story is more complicated. After the city determined that the site was environmentally unsuitable, it "discovered" that Chacón's possession of the land was in question, for several reasons. The title transfer had not been completed by the time he had begun selling lots, a bank had embargoed some of Chacón's property, and discrepancies existed in two different surveys of property lines at the dump. Nonetheless such irregularities were overlooked in dozens of other settlements during this period.
- 4 Socosema's fame over the years has attracted a number of curious visitors to the dump as well as the significant presence of religious and non-religious "helpers" who are committed to both facilitating community members' spiritual salvation and assisting in their community self-determination. Elsewhere I have treated these efforts as part of the larger contradictory logic of neoliberalism (Hill 2000).

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