down Mexico way...

borders, intersections + colonias

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international sustainable development
july 2006
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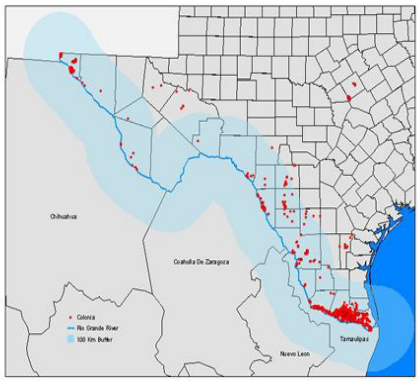
What happens at the edges? The Southern American border, because of its forced rigidity, opens areas of disconnect. The points that do allow access to the United States from México become spaces where Mexicans and Americans socialize, purchase things and mediate boundaries. US-Mexican agreements have allowed the operation of *maquiladoras* (American assembly plants) isolated within Mexican borders, like off shoots of American consumerism. Also straddling the political border are *colonias*. These neighbourhoods, that are neither wholly American nor entirely Mexican, also straddle other in between spaces. *Colonia* are both buildings and "architecture": self-built vernacular. The homes built here are amalgamations of styles, like the residents, they are no longer Mexican but they are also not entirely 'American'. *Colonias* are propertied places of dwelling, but many think of them as slums and the residents as squatters. *Colonias* also sit in between a problem and a solution. The word itself is on the edge: a Spanish word, with a Tex-Mex meaning, that is almost too revealing to translate into English. Colonies, colonial and colonialism hide the deeper truth.



Colonia is translated from Spanish as a colony or housing estate. But related to the border between México and the Southern states of Texas, New México, Arizona and California this does not describe fully what a *colonia* is. Since some of these towns are on the American side of the border state governments have, or have been forced to, define these settlements to start to deal with the issues that are specific to these places. The United States Department of Housing broadly defines *colonia* as to 'include any unincorporated community within 150 miles of the

U.S. México border that was established before November 28, 1990 and lacks adequate infrastructure or housing' (Arosemena 42).[1]

Colonias are essentially towns made up of a Mexican immigrant population. They are typically rural but also exist, unincorporated, on the peripheries of larger cities. The definition is also used to encompass any Mexican or Mexican-American town, settlement or ghetto. "The *colonia*s" in the Rio Grande Valley have been 'maligned as the symbol of Texas squalor and described as pockets of Third World Poverty in the world's richest nation (Fong 108)'. The rural settlements were at one time farmers' fields that have been subdivided to allow for their 'development' and sale as a low-income subdivision.[2]

These lots were usually sold on a Contract for Deed basis. Contract for Deed is initiated with a small down payment (usually between $100 to $1000 dollars) and an agreement of some monthly payment. The seller then retains the deed on the property until all payments are made in full and, if even one payment is missed, the seller can foreclose on a property, and any improvements made. The seller also typically "guarantees" that services will be provided within a certain amount of time. Infrastructure improvements rarely happen in the subdivisions and so *colonia* after *colonia* is left without water, gas or electricity and the *colonistas* are left with little recourse.

'*Colonia*s, and Hispanic communities in general, seem keenly aware of the risks of exploitation, perhaps because of a collective memory of broken promises (Donelson 339)' which can cause problems when other Anglo groups try to give aid. Because some residents distrust governmental and legal paths, and there are no banks or checks and

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1 Arosemena's article predominately criticizes this definition. She argues that *colonia* type settlements are a problem not only within this border region but also exist within much of Texas. Other articles also suggest that as Mexican immigrant populations grow and shift to find work so will *colonias* spread north as needed.

2 This description of 'colonia' and 'contract for deed' is knowledge garnered from almost all readings, including internet research; though it is new knowledge nearly all references would have to be cited since few differ in this part of the conversation.

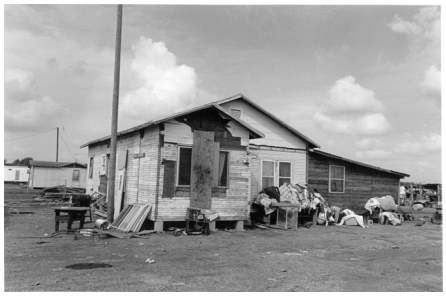
balances involved in the Contract for Deed, the buyers are left powerless to retaliate if a seller chooses not to install running water or sewage or decides to disappear (leaving the buyer with no formal rights to the property). This type of sales agreement, obviously, favours the seller. Added to this, buyers often do not have the English skills to fully understand the transaction, which affords the seller increased power. In 1995, legislation was implemented to alter Contract for Deed so that the agreements became less seller biased. All documents must be written in Spanish and English and foreclosure is no longer an option once 40% has been paid off. These and other safeguards have been added so that the buyer has more rights, and is able to retaliate if necessary (Ward 92-3). This has done much to increase the stability and sense of permanence of the *colonia* and its residents.

Colonia 'developments' are a phenomenon on both sides of the México-United States border. The 'border region' is defined as the area along the Rio Grande/Rio Brava that sits between the secondary checkpoints, 113 kilometres north and 35 kilometres south of the international boundary line. Many immigrants who cross the boarder illegally remain in limbo in this 113 km band of the southern states. Because the checkpoints north are more rigorous and harder to cross many immigrants stay here and set up their lives in this in-between zone. To the south is another type of limbo. Because of the American *maquiladoras* in the industrial zone set-up here by the Mexican government, Mexicans living here have special exceptions and requirements placed on them. They may not drive their cars into southern México and visitors from other countries may enter this area more fluidly than is the case at the next checkpoint south (Richardson xiii). This border is perhaps similar to other borders but Marquez

and Padilla describe the situation most clearly when they write that the border 'rather than separating the two countries, in many ways it functions as a connection between interdependent communities, on each side of the border, forming a distinct region. Therefore, the borderlands encompasses two peoples, two countries, two languages and everything that falls in between, and here at the border these two halves meet and interact as one (Marquez 14).'

In Texas alone there are over half a million people living in about 1500 unincorporated towns or *colonia*s. And, perhaps because of the large numbers, Texan *colonia*s also seem to be the best discussed and documented. And although many people are writing and trying to work at improving situations in the *colonia*s, the 1990 census of the Rio Grande Valley in 'Deep South Texas showed the highest levels of unemployment and poverty and the lowest levels of educational attainment in the United States (Fong 107)'. This vast number of Mexican and Mexican Americans also succeeds in making a hybrid culture on this edge.

C*olonia*s, as well as sitting on the physical border between countries also sit in the in-between space of property ownership and squatter settlement. The land where *colonia*s are established is legally owned by the family that may live there, but they will also most likely live in conditions not dissimilar from what squatters experience in settlements in and around cities around the world. Slums and squatter settlements are also called *colonia*s around México City, aligning these very different ways of establishing a place of permanence.



Ananya Roy explores 'the American paradigm of propertied citizenship by mapping its edges of exclusion: social groups that do not meet its propertied mandates and are therefore

rendered marginal in the discourses and practices of citizenship (Roy 464)'. Roy argues that what we see in this model of propertied citizenship is markedly different from the way that citizenship is understood within developing countries (Roy 469). She suggests that by posing questions of the Third World on the First we disturb the 'normalized hierarchy of development and underdevelopment (Roy 466)' and can be seen to add solutions 'and the promise of hope for the thorny dilemma of persistent American poverty (Roy 466)'. If we ask these questions then 'transnational policy making disrupts the teleology of development, which sees Anglo-America as the idealized yardstick against which all else is to be judged (Roy 466)'.

The notion that citizenship is tied to property is especially interesting at this transnational boundary. The land and the homes that *colonos* live in are owned, and often by American citizens, but *colonistas* are not regarded as 'citizens' by most Anglos. *Colonos* are not afforded the 'luxuries' that most citizens take for granted, like running water, fair wages and representation. Roy looks in particular at the situation of homelessness but her theories and arguments may just as easily be applied to the *colonia*s and their residents. The criminalization and medicalization of homelessness can be applied here as attitudes of the public and the government seeks out paths of policy, 'homelessness [and/or the *colonia*/*colonista*] has been repeatedly inscribed as a public health concern, requiring both containment and technicist intervention (Roy 472)'.

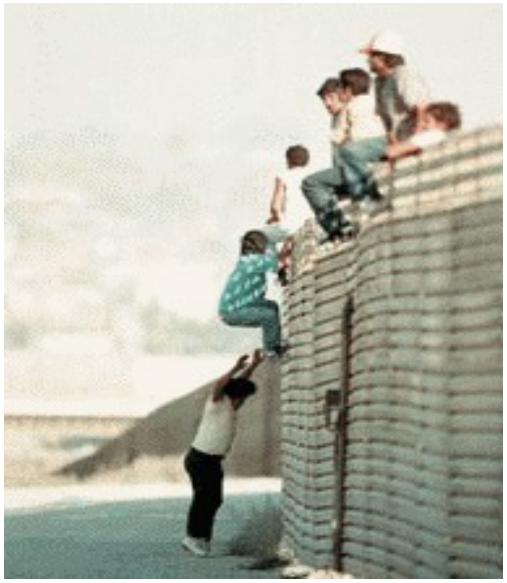
But property alone in America is not enough, the right to 'safe and sanitary shelter paradoxically supersedes the right to shelter…the rationalized urban landscape of housing regulation and codes [leaves] little room for informality (Roy 474)'. The *colonia*s are one of the few places in North America that informality is allowed and necessary:

> '…since houses do not meet building codes, they cannot be serviced. If the houses had met building codes, the overwhelming majority of residents in the *colonia* would not have been able to afford them. The paradigm of propertied citizenship as it turns out,

only recognizes formal rights of property, marginalizing the shelter claims of the poor and other vulnerable social groups (Roy 475).'

Owning land, and a shelter, is one of the priorities for recent immigrants from México and 'despite high interest rates, missing infrastructure, grinding poverty, and broken promises, *colonia* housing keeps expanding (Fong 108, Richardson 43).' Many will chose to buy un-serviced property, in rural areas rather than rent in a city. In these rural areas substandard conditions are the 'price of gaining entrance to the public domain of propertied citizenship (Roy 478)'. This ideal of the American dream fits well with Mexican culture, 'this constellation of a propertied ideal and the work ethic has a well-established history (Roy 483)'.

The Federal government has also been very supportive of home ownership for, as Ward states, three reasons: settlement history in the US implies a desire for a rationalistic approach to authority, homeownership is seen as a way to reinforce good American values (like stability, thrift, nationalism etc.) and homeownership insists on a fixed investment. This focus of the government towards housing has manifested itself in incentives to support private house acquisition (Ward 87). Homeownership has also become another way people classify others, 'similar to the way they use other social markers such as class, race, income, occupation and education (Pereau 249)'. Ownership is one issue that defines the southern *colonias* from the northern, even though the populations are, through northward immigration, relatively homogeneous.



Since the first train line north in México was built in the late 1800's, waves of Mexicans have headed towards the border, and after the revolution of 1910 these border regions continued to be settled by immigrants from the south due to the political power in the north (Ward 18), with some immigrants crossing the border to work in farms of south Texas. During the 1940's, and through 1964, a government program called *Bracero* (meaning labourer) operated to allow American farmers legal access to Mexican workers, initially while their usual supply of labourers were in Europe on tours of duty during World War II (Donelson 334). Many temporary workers settled in this desert, continued to work and set down roots. In between 1986 and '89 many of these residents were granted amnesty in the Immigration Reform Act and allowed to legalize their status in the U.S. This legalization without fear of deportation is argued to have helped Anglo landowners profit. It also established a segregation of the Mexican-American population outside voting boundaries, making it easy for the problems that they face to be ignored on governmental levels (Donelson 334). Due to the influx of poor, but legal, residents many *colonias* were established during this time (Donelson 334). During the 1980s both sides of the border population continued to grow.

Population growth in the border region has far surpassed country averages in part due to the industrialization of the Southern side of the border by American based *maquiladora*s. The word *maquiladora* originated in colonial México. Millers charged a "*maquila*" for processing other people's grain. Today the same term is used to describe

'bi-national product assembly factories (Donelson 333) that process (assemble and/or transform in some way) components imported into México that are, in turn, exported - usually to the United States with little or no levies.[3] Between 1990 and 1998 the numbers of maquiladoras increased by almost 90% (form 2100 to 4000), but residents of this region have not benefited from the new industry in the area. The *maquiladoras* primarily support the American firms that establish them, since the women that are typically employed there are usually paid substantially less than their US counterparts. Added to these low wages, and the lack of tariffs placed on the assembled goods, the American consumer ends up paying less for products and the company sees greater profit. NAFTA and other agreements opened markets in México and the United States, but the size of the US economy means that US investors have much more capital to invest in México than the other way around. México wanted to gain the ability for Mexicans to sell their labour where they were able to make the most money and American corporations (who open *maquiladoras*), as well as private citizens (who hire illegal maids and labourers), have been quick to take advantage of that (Richardson 110).

Many people move to the border because wages are high by Mexican standards, though to Americans they are low. This dramatic increase in population to support the factories easily explains why so many *colonia*s are being built on the south side of the border. It also starts to explain the transition north across the border. Though *maquilas* pay relatively high wages, minimum, farm worker and illegal wages in the Southern states are still typically higher than those in northern México. Since the majority of people have already moved once for better life, the move across the border may not seem such a big transition, offering the possibilities of a better life and an interstitial zone to establish your place in a hybrid culture.

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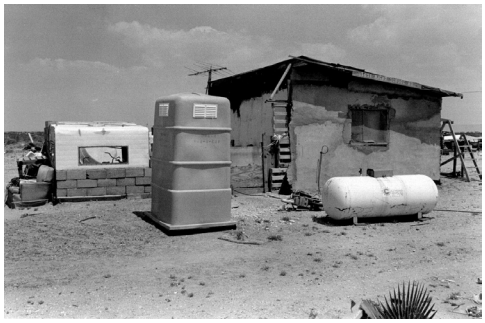
3 www.madeinmexico .com



Establishing oneself and building a home in a *colonia* are slow processes. Recent immigrants will typically invest in a car (to provide transport to and from work); their next investment will then be land (usually with a very low down payment) and then a trailer; somewhere to live. Unlike in Mexican *colonias*, in Texas residents do not typically build a 'shanty' as a first shelter and since the 1960's trailers have been filling the gap in low-income housing, rising from 100,000 to 25,000 in 20 years (Ward 87). Trailers vary almost as much as *colonia* housing and both depend on the nature of the homeowners long terms goals. Some homes will remain a trailer, and the owners will build a wall around its base to give it a sense of permanence or a roof over the top to protect it. The standard sequence of settlement starts with a trailer; hybrid structures are then attached to the trailer and then a permanent house of concrete block or adobe (Valez-Ibanez 10).[4]

Most people intend to build a house and due to lack of funds and the seasonal nature of their work people usually build their houses part by part as money and materials become available, 'the household-led expansion and upgrading progresses, the work being undertaken on weekends and in residents spare time' (Ward 102-103). This spacing allows them to stager the costs of owning a home over long periods making ownership a possibility for the very poor (Ferguson 202). Levels of "consolidation" vary greatly in any given *colonia*. Consolidation is the long-term method that people in *colonia*s, and squatter settlements, go about constructing their houses. Most households in low- and middle-income countries build their own homes over 5-15 years (Ferguson 202). And

4 The original dwellings will then accommodate family as they move into the area or children as they grow up and need homes of their own.

there is a definite culture of self-management and self-building, which also involves community, collaboration, and mutual aid that spreads throughout a *colonia*.

Fong suggests that 'the challenge in the relationship between poverty and development is how to involve the residents of the *colonia*s to participate and assume responsibility and leadership to acquire self-sufficiency and empowerment through working with non-governmental and governmental agencies to overcome poverty and powerlessness (Fong 109).' Since they are already involved in self-help and improving their environment, a 'hands on approach to build self-sufficiency and self-empowerment' (Fong 109), the next step to community empowerment may not be that much of a "challenge".

Ward agrees that there are simple changes that would allow *colonias* to be safer more stable communities. Policies supporting low-tech development, the implementation of technical assistance programs, at-cost construction yards[5], support for the development of less expensive housing designs and county building codes that allow for innovative construction techniques (Ward 128) are all ways that governmental policy changes would benefit safer *colonia* development. One of the major moves forward in facilitating safety in *colonia*s is the application of codes that do not reinforce middle-class norms where they are not financially appropriate. Codes would have to include the flexibility to gradually implement health and safety related changes, 'while buildings are officially coded unfit for habitation, the highly innovative uses to which materials are put speak to the enormous resistance of people determined to hold sway in the creation of their own dwelling space (Ward 128)'.

A house is a 'container for culture and meaning (Pereau 87)' and home also describes a cultural state. It is unlikely that an immigrant (who comes to a place with

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5 At-cost materials and no interest mortgages interest me and I am trying to understand the difference between this 'hand out' type system that still seems to prevail in America and the 'hand up' models, like the Grameen Bank, that prove successful in Developing counties. Selling products at low cost or interest free the projects cannot be self -sustaining.

the materials and forms of 'home') would change their housing; it is as unlikely that one would 'borrow a house-type than it would borrow a language (J.B. Jackson, in Pereau 87)'. Pereau argues that when one alters one's house 'those changes will undoubtedly signify other changes in their cultural and social world (Pereau 87). When one then reads the *colonia*s of Texas it is clear that there are changes taking place in the cultural makeup of the peoples as they shift away form the flat roofed adobe style houses and into the *dos aguas* (pitched roof) of American suburbs, away from the courtyard house to a hallway house, not to mention changes in materiality (Pereau 89). *Colonistas* pick their way between their Mexican traditions and new American experiences and this change in thought and understanding can be expressed in the dwellings that they build for themselves. The pitched roof form, which is almost standard in *colonia*s, presents two sides of an emerging dialogue. First it is the most easily identifiable house form north of the border and 'it presents a stable, formalized and even traditional organizing principal (Pereau 141) that reflects the hopes for their new, American lives. It also presents the strongest contrast to the flat roofs, and backwards lives that they left behind, '*colonia*s provide graphic evidence of the process of "cultural construction" as they move away from the traditional, and perhaps no longer useful, forms of housing and create neo-vernacular houses more relevant to their lives (Pereau 155)'.

The houses are a combination of Mexican and American, and though the forms may be diluted Pereau argues that 'the attributes of traditional houses do reappear… though transformed (Pereau 105). 'It would be a mistake to think that the *colonistas* have either totally abandoned there formative culture or totally embraced the ideas and artefacts of their adopted culture. The problem then becomes to 'identify the ways in which the new situation has merged with, disguised or slipped behind the older ideas about house form (Pereau 105)'. One such appearance is the strong culture of self-building, though the builders may not be skilled or trained, the knowledge and propensity to build ones own home still lives on (Pereau 106). Pereau relates the story of a man who

built his families' house with no windows since he was not sure where they would be needed until the interior rooms were built (Pereau 120).

Since houses are built piece by piece, one of the holdovers from adobe building is that each room can be planned as a self-contained entity. This has been translated, through Georgian military housing, in two ways into *colonia* houses. One is where a 'cluster of additive rooms developed a square plan but maintains the independence of rooms (Pereau 110)' and an American 'four-square plan [that] allows each of four square rooms, one window, an exterior door and two communicating doors (Pereau 110)' which preserves the interior circulation of Latino adobe homes. The inclusion of the hallway is a tell tale difference between the home where they came from and the new country they inhabit (Pereau 113). People make choices when building there homes and in this transitional area they involve responding 'to their own traditions and to those of the society into which they are moving (Pereau 125)' the choice of not using adobe (even though it is better in the climateof the southern states for insulation, thermal capacity and affordability) must 'be seen as a part of the *colonistas* cultural negotiation, the social construction of a new world—one that exists in a larger American landscape (Pereau 125)'. An American landscape of technology and progress that contrasts what may be consciously left behind with the 'backwards', natural adobe (Pereau 125-6).

Property walls also are a strong symbol in the *colonia*s, and carry the weight of culturally specific notions about exclusion, privacy and threshold. Defining the home in relation to the yard but then also to the street and the other houses in the neighbourhood remains important. This definition of space also aligns with Mexican notions of gender. Women and family inside the garden wall and the walls of the house are protected from the outside, male world of dangers, including the street, cars and strangers (Pereau 100-2). Though colonos carry their traditions with them the towns that they buy into are not their own.

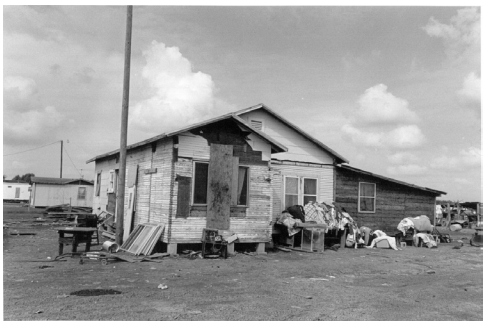
*Colonia*s are not built on the patterns of traditional villages or those imported to

México by the Spanish. Instead they take on the form of frontier towns and subdivisions. Lots are often larger, and occupancy is less dense, due to absentee ownership, than in typical suburbs. Much of this is due to the developers divisions of the property but few *colonistas* feel that this is a bad thing. Most people need cars to get to work, so driving to the other end of the *colonia* or to go shopping is as normal as it is to most Americans (Pereau 95-6) and only the larger *colonia*s have community centres, stores or public places that one would want to get to. In the larger context of development in the US the siting of sub-urban spaces has changed. Towns are no longer bordered or organized by landscape: a river, climate or streams but are now sited and settled near highways, tourist attractions or industry (Pereau 98). This is most obvious when looking at *colonia*s as they are typically sited with little care: in flood planes, with sites intersecting channels filled in the rainy season with run off. These are grids set out with minimal thought, on the worst land a farmer may own.

> The root causes of *colonia*s are the structural characteristics that cause poverty (such as low levels of educational attainment and low wage employment) and a shortage of decent, safe and affordable housing options of the very poor …and by not addressing the structural causes of *colonia* developments, *colonia* policy misses the mark and fails to prevent *colonia* growth…public policy addresses the symptoms (often ineffectively), and not the causes (Ward 113).

We may also look to the differences in policy towards illegal settlements to understand a different way to think about these places of dwelling. During the 1960's the Mexican government took the stance that *colonias* were unwelcome within their borders and responded with evictions and some low-income housing, but by and large they left them alone. Starting in the 1970's thinking changed and *colonia*s started to be seen as part of the solution to an unmanageable housing deficit and moved towards policies that encouraged self-help building by 'proposing small-scale interventions that would legalize

illegal land titles, provide essential services, support community organizations and initiatives…new forms of small credit were generated and a service of agencies emerged with specific responsibilities for housing-sector policies (Ward 7). *Colonia*s and other settlements were embraced as ways that people could be housed at minimal strain on the system while allowing solidification of communities, decreased transience and increased stability.



*Colonia*s in Texas are still viewed as a 'temporary problem of dysfunctional urbanization and as a refuge settlement for cross-border immigrant population (Ward 7)' thereby allowing "the colonia problem" to be seen as something that serves little purpose on a state and nation wide level. Allowing the continued neglect and embarrassment of colonias appears to be justified. This impression of temporariness downplays their role as ' legitimate working-class communities' and ignores the residents 'contribution to economic and industrial development in the border region (Ward 8).

Ferguson and Navarrete seems to understand the value of what they term 'slum housing'. Low incomes, high interest rates, difficulties in formal sector development, insecure property rights when legally pursued and few options when it comes to credit forces many people into "self help" home building. This home owning increases the stability and housed-ness of large numbers of people. They argue that though these reasons may be valid, and slum or self- made housing may be the only way in which 'eight hundred and fifty million (Ferguson 201)' people world wide can have homes, that these same homes 'reduce the efficiencies of cities and the economic growth of countries

and…stunt the human potential of enormous numbers of people (Ferguson 201). 'Although informal settlements help solve the individual family's immediate problem of finding affordable shelter, they generate immense private and public costs (Ferguson 203)'. And once slums have been built, reordering and upgrading slums with passable streets and basic services is too expensive to be a feasible resolution. They suggest that the solution to the problem of the slum is to 'decrease or stop their formation (Ferguson 204)'. Ferguson and Navarrete do not mention the potential solution of stopping the necessity for urban migration that is perhaps the root cause of urban slums. Another option, that they miss, would be to decrease the cost related to upgrading an existing settlement by the pre-organization of land. The American *colonia*s are one place were we can see this model taking place. There is clear decentralization, since the affordable lots are outside cities and suburbs, and lots laid out along grid-ed streets (though they may be dirt) allow for the possibility for emergency access, paving and drainage[6].

The lack of these amenities are obviously problematic and 'NGOs have sought to fill the void left by US-México border local and state governments, which have failed to provide essential services to *colonias* (Donelson 332) and there are many NGOs at work in the region. Because so many *colonias* are in Texas, and are such devastating pockets of poverty in the "wealthiest nation in the world" much attention is given to the towns, their residents, and the development of both, by government and religious and secular NGO's. Although large-scale state and national NGOs, and NGO networks are invested in the *colonias*, smaller grass roots and informal groups, often made up of *colonistas* are also very successful due in part to *colonias* physical isolation and their scattered patterns of development (Donelson 336). Two projects, the *Promotoras* and *Poyecto Aztecas*, are interesting in the way that they work with community members and inspire self-leadership and organization.

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6 This can also be seen in the settlements that we spoke of in class around Lima, Peru where gridded neighborhoods and larger networks are established before hand and then maintained by the residents.

One of the most pressing concerns within *colonia*s centres around health. In *colonia*s poverty is the norm, there are few environmental controls and housing is typically overcrowded by American standards [5.5 people vs. the average of 2.7 (Ramos)]. When these 'problems' are then combined with no sewer systems or running water, and adding the linguistic and cultural barriers, there are many fears that a danger to public health will emerge out of these conditions. The government, along with NGO's, are attempting to combat these health issues before they become a threat to the larger population (Ramos 568). The *Promotoras* is a program run through Community Outreach and Education Program (COEP) and the Centre for Environmental and Rural Health (CERH) at Texas A&M.

Promotoras are local women residents and/or community leaders that live in the *colonia* and know the people they educate, '*promotoras* meet regularly with residents in their neighbourhoods to encourage participation in education, health, job training, human services, housing and youth and elderly programs delivered in the community (Ramos). *Promotoras* help residents to become, and to stay, involved in the world outside of their communities, and in a way translate America to the *colonistas*. The Texas A&M program started with 'a "train-the-trainer" method of education and outreach'. The first step was to teach the *promotoras* about environmental health and safety and facilitate how that was in turn taught to the community. Although these educational efforts are largely related to NGOs 'the government is concerned about the birth defects, neurological defects, cancer, cardiovascular morbidity and respiratory problems (Ramos) common amongst *colonistas*. These concerns may be tied back to the *maquiladora*s and lax environmental regulations on the southern side of the border, the high use of chemicals in farming to the north, the contamination of ground water by the both of these (Richardson 41) in addition to malfunctioning septic systems.

Another interesting NGO is *Proyecto Azteca*, started by David Arizmendi. Sr. Arizmendi grew up in a *colonia* in Texas, and now operates *Azteca* out of San Juan.

Proyecto Azteca offers interest free mortgages to low-income families, in a model not unlike that of the Grameen Bank (Fong 111, Roy 466)[7]. This program offers mortgages through governmental grants, and in return requires sweat-equity in the building of homes. The program requires a new homeowner to be connected to nine other families. This group will be granted interest free mortgages in exchange for the building of their home as well as building the homes of the other members of the group. This insures that people are able to fix their own houses and build future houses that are closer to the complying to code. Plans for the houses were drawn up by architects and optimize energy efficiency through ventilation and shading. They are based on a typical suburban format where the front door opens into the hallway from which bedrooms open and that extends to the back door. Fong notes specifically that the strength of the *Proyecto Azteca* lies in the 'advice of the many *colonia*s residents who sit on the board and participate in the program' (Fong 110). It is the strength of the community and people that will allow this region to prosper and perhaps lead the way into a future hybrid culture.

This paper began by asking: What happens at the edges? *Colonias* inhabit, translate and transgress a multitude of in-between spaces and by doing so offer strong solutions to a host of problems. Now that I have some sense of these places it would be interesting to take this study further. I would like to closely examine one colonia on each side of the border. To draw them, and to understand their differences:

7 See footnote 5.

To map them and imagine how they could allow a greater fluidity in this region. In a small study of a *colonia* called Salem in New México, an NGO found that there were three priorities when it came to the improvements around the *colonia*: access to natural gas, naming the streets so that emergency response would be possible and thirdly create a park. A park to the immigrants of the *colonia* is culturally embedded: the park needed to contain a traditional town square (a *placita*), a place of community gathering. The park that was asked for understandably was a hybrid: the *placita* was to be balanced by basketball courts, football fields and a community centre (Bressi 93). The community space is something that most northern *colonias* are missing. The developer puts in streets and lots but does not think to use property for something that would not bring financial gain. In the example cited above, the land for the park was state land bordering the *colonia*, at its edge. And so perhaps it is the edges of these places, already at the edge, that allow spaces for thinking and exploring.

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