Promotoras Reimagine Revolution: Strategies of Resistance in Colonia Chilpancingo

This thesis is presented by Student Dominica Meade 833774

to the School of Languages and Linguistics

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in the field of Languages (Spanish)

in the School of Languages and Linguistics Faculty of Arts

The University of Melbourne

Supervisor: Mara Favoretto

Date: 22nd October 2021

Word length: 15,574

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Acknowledgement of Country
I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation who are the Traditional Custodians of the Land upon which this thesis was researched and written. I pay my respects to the Elders past, present and emerging and I acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. Always was, always will be, Aboriginal Land.

I would also like to acknowledge the Kumeyaay people who are the First Nations people of the San Diego and Tijuana region on which this thesis is based. For millennia, the Kumeyaay people have been a part of this land. This land has nourished, healed, protected and embraced them for many generations in a relationship of balance and harmony. This legacy must be acknowledged. This is the land of the Kumeyaay.

Personal Acknowledgements
I would firstly like to thank my supervisor, Dr Mara Favoretto for all of her assistance, encouragement and motivation throughout this year. I have loved the Spanish and Latin American Studies Department for my whole degree, and I thank Mara for all of her guidance and support over these years.

Eva, Anna and Sasha, you have become such great friends and I'm so grateful for our lovely little cohort! This honours year wouldn't have been the same without you all. To Jorge, thank you for one of the best classes I have ever taken in my entire undergraduate degree. Your help with this thesis was invaluable.

I owe a special thanks to my housemates, Audrey, Elly and Arthur (and Jack, even though you left us) for all of your support. I am so lucky to have housemates who are kind, great cooks and even better friends. Audrey and Elly in particular, I cannot thank you both enough. To live with my best friends during this year has been such a blessing.

Most importantly, I thank my parents. Your company, food drops and motivation have helped me more than you'll ever know. I love you both.

To all my other friends and family, los quiero a todos! You're all the best.

Abstract

Small-scale community activism has the potential to realise significant change. This thesis analyses the specific methods of activism employed by a community in a small town called Colonia Chilpancingo on the border of Mexico and the United States during the 1990s through to the early 2000s. The strategies and methods employed by activists in Colonia Chilpancingo demonstrate the potential for small-scale community activism to resist injustice. This thesis argues that cross-border collaboration, autonomous organisation and activism that exhausts a variety of resources can strengthen community resistance and therefore achieve major positive environmental and social changes.

Introduction

The Spanish word 'maquila' is derived from the Arabic language and was once used to refer to the fair exchange of payment and services that occurred in milling operations (Hansen 1045). Specifically, maquila referred to a portion of grain that would be retained by a millworker in exchange for their services at the factory or mill in which they were employed (Hansen 1045). Fairness was an important connotation of the word, as this portion of grain was to correspond with the amount of work carried out by the factory employee. From here, the maquila process evolved to define "any particular activity in an industrial process" (Angulo 139). It became an umbrella term to describe the industrial processes that occurred in the assemblage of a wide variety of goods and services. In this sense, the word maquila has strayed from its roots. The contemporary maquila processes place less value on notions of fairness or reciprocity between employees and manufacturer owners. The modern day 'millworkers' of the maquiladora industry instead pay for their own employment with their health, livelihood and environmental surroundings.

Contemporary maquiladoras are manufacturing plants based in Mexico where the employees assemble a variety of commodities such as oxygen masks, car parts, furniture, television parts and other goods. The commodities manufactured in the maquiladoras are imported in smaller parts. Once workers are finished assembling the materials, they are exported for consumers in the US and other countries. Transnational Corporations (TNCs) are attracted to maquiladoras because the labour is inexpensive and there are significant tax breaks provided through trade agreements between Mexico and the US (Liverman and Vilas 334). Companies that have minimised their expenses on labour have also been known to contaminate the environments which surround maquiladoras, made possible by the lack of environmental regulation that comes with liberalised trade (Gladstone et al. 19; Liverman and Vilas 334). These factories rely on a

female dominated workforce, as women are perceived in this industry as "docile, dexterous and cheap" (Salzinger 10). This thesis will elaborate on the effects that this environmental damage has on the health of the maquiladora workers and their communities. Specifically, this research will demonstrate that resistance from a seemingly disempowered female workforce has the potential to create change and reverse these damaging effects.

The border of the US and Mexico is a desirable place for TNCs wishing to assemble and export materials. This is because many are based in the US and the geographic proximity of border cities in Mexico means that the transportation of these materials is cheap and fast. These areas are known as Export Processing Zones (EPZs) and due to agreements made between Mexico and the US, these EPZs serve to liberalise trade between them. Free trade between the US and Mexico blossomed after the termination of the Bracero Program in 1964 (Frambach 428). The Bracero Program lasted 20 years and legalised Mexican labour migrants to work in the US for the purpose of replacing US workers fighting in World War II (Bachour 180). When the program came to an end, there was an exodus of unskilled labour to Mexican border cities in search of the employment they'd lost in the US. The northern border cities in Mexico were suddenly confronted with an abundance of labourers in search of work.

As a solution to this problem the Mexican government implemented the Border Industrialisation Program (BIP) to stimulate industrial development and employment in the Mexico-US border region. A key component of the BIP was the Maquiladora Program whose purpose was to promote the large-scale development of manufacturing plants in newly established EPZs along the border (Frambach 428). These manufacturing plants – the maquiladoras – were to allow US based and other foreign TNCs to import parts and materials duty-free, where they would assemble these parts in the plants and would pay duties solely on the value added in Mexico. The establishment of the BIP and the maquiladora industry in Mexico was not only to provide

employment for the masses of workers that overwhelmed the border, but it was also an attempt to realise a prosperous economic future for the nation (Bachour 180). Mexico had a vision for the growth and global integration of the Mexican economy and it was preoccupied with increasing employment opportunities for its citizens. However, the benefits of industrial growth that steadily grew from the BIP in 1965 did not proliferate as expected (Harvey 99).

Whilst there was no remarkable economic benefit that came from the maquiladora program, the industry did in fact provide employment opportunities for its citizens. This employment was reserved for women, but not because they were valued more than men as employees. Instead, they were seen as an obedient and passive workforce (Salzinger 10). This was an essential development in the early stages of the maquiladora industry that shaped the conception of its 'ideal worker' for decades to come. Female workers were seen as 'weak', but as this thesis argues, a group of women subverted that perceived weakness and transformed it into their strength.

There is one key consideration that perhaps faltered Mexico's vision for economic success and national prosperity. The maquiladora industry exposed Mexico to the logic of TNCs, whose hyper-exploitative capitalism harmed the people employed in the industry and those living nearby (Laurell 261). The environment that surrounds the maquiladora plants has been irreparably damaged and has caused numerous health problems for those in the surrounding communities (Carruthers, "Globalization" 557). Considering these social, environmental and economic consequences it is perhaps fair to proposition that these conditions were in fact unfavourable for Mexico (Laurell 250). The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that was established in 1994 is perhaps the archetype agreement that enabled the proliferation of liberalised free trade between the US, Mexico and Canada. NAFTA led to an explosion of maquiladoras along the Mexico-US border, particularly in cities Tijuana, Juárez and Matamoros which quickly became the industrial epicentres of the region (Carruthers, "Globalization" 559).

Since NAFTA was established there has been continuous discussion over its impact on the lives of individual people in these industrial epicentres and the damage the manufacturing plants have caused to the environment (Gladstone et al. 19; Frambach 432; Domínguez et al. 193; Grineski et al., "Environmental Injustice" 2; Williams and Homedes 331). There are numerous, well documented investigations that demonstrate how challenging life for maquiladora employees can be on the border (Carruthers, "Globalization" 2008; Carruthers, "Justice" 2008; Grineski and Collins 2008; Kopinak and Barajas 2002). The challenges imposed on the female-dominated workforce include gendered discrimination, exposure to toxic hazardous waste, low wages and limited access to trusted worker-represented unions[1] (Carruthers "Globalization" 557; Domínguez et al. 286, 191; Frambach 431). The most horrifying and detrimental of these challenges has perhaps been the effect of toxic waste exposure on pregnant women and children. Exposure to hazardous waste has become the known cause of neural-tube birth defects such as spina bifida and anencephaly (Carruthers "Globalisation" 557). Children in surrounding communities have been disproportionately affected by the ongoing exposure to toxins and these health consequences have hindered their capacity to perform at school (Grineski and Collins, "Exploring Patterns" 265).

Evidently, injustice is rife. However, the focus of this thesis is not to dwell on the numerous injustices that plague the US-Mexico border region, or to victimise the maquiladora employees that endure circumstances beyond their control. This thesis will highlight the potential of community organisation by analysing a particular case of resistance that triumphed over seemingly insurmountable problems. One community in particular located in the industrial epicentre of Tijuana defied all odds and became a landmark case in the region that demonstrated

[1] Independent labour unions are rare in the Maquiladora industry. Most labour unions are official government unions that frequently prioritise the interests of company owners. These are often referred to as *charro* unions, which refers to the political bossism and corruption that occurs within these unions (Frambach 431).

how small communities could indeed take on domineering TNCs (Carruthers "Justice" 140). This community is called Colonia[2] Chilpancingo and their methods of activism that helped them reverse these injustices will be the central focus of this thesis. This analysis is essential to demonstrate what possibilities exist that can resist environmental and social inequality.

The maquiladora plant Metales y Derivados was erected in Colonia Chilpancingo in 1972. It was a smelting plant designed to recuperate copper and refined lead from automobiles and other sources. The plant functioned as such for 20 years until it was shut down in 1994 for not complying with Mexico's environmental laws. A study conducted in 1990 measured the levels of lead found in the river situated below the plant and the results demonstrated that the lead levels in the river were some 3,000 times higher than US standards (Carruthers "Globalization" 138). When the Metales y Derivados plant was shut down, the owners of the plant received numerous fines and were ordered to undertake 'compulsory' clean-ups. The New Frontier Trading Corporation, based in San Diego, owned the plant. A senior staffer at the corporation, José Kahn, was responsible for the Metales y Derivados site. Upon receiving fines and notices to fulfil his obligations to remove the hazardous waste produced by the plant, Khan fled across the border from Tijuana to San Diego.

He left behind him 23,000 tons of toxic hazardous waste, including 7,000 tons of lead slag ("Metales y Derivados Toxic Site" par. 2). The Colonia Chilpancingo community was exposed to these elements and the impunity displayed by the owner had devastating consequences for the neighbourhood. It was considered to be one of the greatest examples of NAFTA's institutional failures in protecting the environmental health of communities that surround maquiladora plants (Carruthers "Justice" 138). The residents in Colonia Chilpancingo spent more than 20 years

[2] Colonias is a term that refers to small neighbourhoods or settlements, specifically along the US-Mexico border. They are often densely populated and without water, proper sewage disposal, electricity or paved roads (Núñez and Klamminger 148, 160).

expressing their concerns and pushing for local and national officials to clean-up the toxic site due to the threats Metales y Derivados imposed on public health and the environment. It wasn't until 2004 that the Mexican and US governments took accountability for the damage. In that year, the Colonia Chilpancingo promotoras[3] achieved their goal: the clean-up of the Metales y Derivados toxic site. They organised themselves tirelessly and set a precedent for other communities in the region as one of the first successful cases of small-scale community activism. This thesis will interrogate the type of activism that occurred in Colonia Chilpancingo to make national officials from the US and Mexico take action. It will argue that small-scale community resistance can be a powerful source of change and that Colonia Chilpancingo's activists realised this change with vigour and relentless dedication.

Chapter One will consider one of the most successful tactics that Colonia Chilpancingo promotoras employed to ensure their success: binational camaraderie. This chapter will take readers to the borderlands of the US and Mexico and explore the complex terrain that ultimately defined the Metales y Derivados case. David Carruthers is a political scientist who has dedicated significant time to understanding the activism of Colonia Chilpancingo activists in the context of the border region (Carruthers "Globalization" 557; Carruthers "Justice" 137). Along with other distinguished scholars and novelists alike, Carruthers has focused on understanding the region in terms of the pervasive ambivalence that defines the atmosphere on the border (Carruthers, "Globalization" 557; Anzaldúa 4; Dear and Burridge 306; Ibarraran-Bigalondo 134). The US-Mexico relationship is pained by a long, tumultuous history that has heavily influenced the border region (Foos 5). Despite this conflict, the activists at the centre of the Metales y Derivados case study transformed the divide into a stronger union that would eventually serve the people and their local environment. Binational activism brought together the resources from

[3] Promotoras is a word that refers to community activists in Colonia Chilpancingo (Schreiber 159).

San Diego and the voice and knowledge of Tijuana. This unison helped Chilpancingo promotoras dominate their fight for justice.

Chapter Two will argue that the other key moment for Colonia Chilpancingo promotoras was the inauguration of the local activist collective, Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental. The formation of this collective was a crucial moment for the activists in the community because it legitimised their negotiations with the key Mexican government institutions involved in the case. This contention is based on the perception of the Mexican state as neglectful. In order to illustrate this shortcoming, the chapter will draw on scholars' criticisms of the state that contextualise its failure to serve and protect all citizens equally as was the case in Metales y Derivados (Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2007; Pellow 2018). Reactions to this negligence have materialised in myriad ways. The most notable attempts to challenge this aspect of the state have been major episodes of institutional disorder, such as the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) uprising (Gilbreth and Otero 9). However, communities that are unlikely to harness this scale of political organisation resort to other strategies to mimic the same potential for change, such as Colonia Chilpancingo. This is what the activist collective provided for the promotoras: it mirrored the revolutionary essence of large-scale political organisation. However, it did so in a way that is perhaps less likely to be identified as radical. This chapter will argue that the collective political organisation of Colonia Chilpancingo's activists transformed their mobilisation and ultimately won them the case.

The final chapter of this thesis will contend that the third key component of Chilpancingo's success that served the promotoras was the documentary *Maquilápolis: A City of Factories* (Mexico 2006). The documentary tracked the story of a Chilpancingo promotora that fought alongside the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental for the clean-up of the manufacturing plant. It was used as a resource that enhanced the activism of the collective due to the way it was

imagined, filmed and distributed (Schreiber 161, 178). *Maquilápolis* was carefully curated to strengthen the activist collective and chastise the industry that caused their suffering in the first place. Chapter Three will use cinematic trends that were established in Latin America's revolutionary decades to illustrate which techniques and aesthetics used in *Maquilápolis* helped prioritise the voice of the Chilpancingo promotoras (Arenillas and Lazzara 2016; Solanas and Getino 1970; Chanan 2017). Through comparison with the decolonial approach to filmmaking in the 1950s, 60s and 70s in Latin America, this chapter will study the film under the same paradigm. It will argue that subjectivity and autonomy in *Maquilápolis* transformed not only the documentary itself, but what it provided for the activists in Colonia Chilpancingo.

Chapter One

Binational Camaraderie: Cross-Border Activism that Triumphed Injustice

Cross-border collaboration that occurred between Colonia Chilpancingo and San Diego's Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) was a key contributing factor that led to the overall success of the Metales y Derivados case. Both communities came together to eradicate the manufacturing plant. In this process, the binational united front combatted a number of negligent government authorities through demonstrations, petitions and meetings. The EHC was a key not-for-profit that transformed the status and political organisation of activists in Colonia Chilpancingo. With the resources provided by EHC, and the voice and knowledge of Colonia Chilpancingo activists, the two communities were able to achieve their end goal: the closure of the Metales y Derivados manufacturing plant. Binational activism also defied the limitations imposed by the US-Mexico bureaucracy and resisted the 'us versus them' rhetoric that defines the region. This chapter will conceptualise the borderlands as a dividing line that separates two very different states, and how this divorce has been internalised and understood by maquiladora workers. Cross-border collaboration and the steps that were taken by both communities to address the environmental injustice in Colonia Chilpancingo overcame this barrier imposed by a tumultuous history. The neighbourhood was transformed by bold and effective transnational activism and it is one of the reasons their story should be celebrated.

Understanding the Borderlands

The 3200-kilometre border that separates the US and Mexico is politically loaded, culturally integrated and economically prosperous – for some. The region is often thought of as enigmatic, peculiar and difficult to define (Carruthers "Globalization" 557). There are multiple ways to conceptualise the borderlands. The region is most often defined by industrial development, migration and heavy militarisation (Dear and Burridge 306). Whilst it is the epicentre of US-

Mexico trade, migration and the ever-expanding *narcoeconomía*[4] , the territory is also a microcosm of inequality founded in the US-Mexico political and economic relationship (Grineski and Collins, "Across Borders" 529). An "us versus them" rhetoric emerged as a result of this conflict and this only intensified during Trump's Presidency with the rise of immigration issues (Papakyriakopoulos and Zuckerman 467). There is also an ambivalence that delineates the US-Mexico relationship. As both states share a border, cooperative diplomacy has proved essential for the progress and development of both countries (Andreas 64). The borderlands are known for possessing a certain interdependent, culturally hybridised version of US-Mexico culture, discernible through border cities such as El Paso and Juárez, often referred to as El Paso-Juárez – a single binational border town, as opposed to two separate adjacent cities (Dear and Burridge 302, 306). The rise of 'Spanglish'; cross-border collaborations in art, film, television and activism; as well as border-crossings for the purpose of family, work or leisure demonstrate the hybridisation of the region that has evolved in recent years (Dear and Burridge 314). Unsurprisingly, globalisation is a significant driver behind this cultural integration. Further, it is noted as one of the primary drivers of both states' commitment to cooperation in political and economic spheres, despite obvious tension ("U.S.-Mexico Economic Relations").

A combination of sociocultural and geographical conceptions define the terrain of the US-Mexico border region and this has formed "an abstraction which marks the 'state of mind' of the borderlands" (Ibarraran-Bigalondo 134). When describing the essence of the border region many have drawn on the significance of dualities (Carruthers, "Globalization" 557; Ibarraran-Bigalondo 134; Anzaldúa 3). At its core, it is a dividing line that separates "*un lado and el otro lado*": rich and poor, Global North and South, urban and rural, Latinx and Anglo American (Ibarraran-Bigalondo 134; Carruthers, "Justice" 137). Perhaps the most ground-breaking work that

[4] *Narcoeconomía* refers to the economic growth generated by drug trafficking and other illegal activity carried out by drug traffickers (González 9).

describes this 'state of mind' and serves justice to the complexities of the US-Mexico borderlands is presented by the pioneering Chicana feminist, theorist and philosopher-poet, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987). She describes the borderlands as:

> Una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it haemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture (3).

This open wound is made up of a long history that dates as far back as 1848, when The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed and created the boundary which now separates the US and Mexico (Anzaldúa 7). The line that divided both nations was intensified by the conflict that preceded the Treaty. The Mexican-American War and the consequent annexation of Texas was a definitive moment in US-Mexican history that solidified the unbalanced power dynamics between both countries (Foos 5). It was also the beginning of new exploitative social relations endorsed by the US that were based on the benefits of 'free labour' and capitalism (Foos 5). In defence of Manifest Destiny[5], the US invasion of Mexican territory was violent, oppressive and contributed significantly to the trauma that now occupies the border region (Rodríguez 14). This not only provides context for a contemporary understanding of the borderlands, but it also reiterates the long-founded tumultuous, complex bilateral relationship between the US and Mexico. Conflict in the region is not a recent phenomenon, nor are trade and policy agreements that have long served the interests of ideologies founded in the likes of Manifest Destiny or the Monroe Doctrine[6].

[5] Manifest Destiny was the idea that the territorial expansion of the United States into Indian or Mexican territory was justified as it was the destiny of English-speaking Americans to spread democracy and freedom to the "lesser peoples inhabiting the region" (Griswold del Castillo 32). The Mexican-American war occurred in the backdrop of Manifest Destiny.

[6] The Monroe Doctrine was a façade that promised to safeguard Latin American countries from European colonialism, but instead supported US centric goals that were rooted in US paternalism and condescension over Latin America (Gilderhus 6, 16).

The Winners and Losers of Globalisation

The long-founded tumultuous binational relationship described above has materialised in bilateral trade agreements that have negatively impacted Mexican workers and civilians along the border. NAFTA[7] has failed institutionally to protect the environment and the health of the Colonia Chilpancingo community (Carruthers, "Justice" 138). The environmental damage and health risks imposed on border residents as a result of NAFTA and other Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) perhaps indicates Mexico is the 'loser' of globalisation in this instance. The establishment of EPZs in the 1940s, the Bracero Program in 1942 and the BIP in 1965 were initiatives that founded the maquiladora industry and that were the building blocks behind NAFTA as they stirred an interest in the economic potential of deregulated, liberalised trade for the North American nations. However, FTAs have provided limited gains for Mexico's economy, particularly when this economic progress is considered against the social and environmental costs of free trade that have been greatly aggravated by NAFTA (Frambach 428).

Since NAFTA's implementation in 1994 there has been an explosion of industrial development and scholars, activists and researchers alike have been drawn to studying the intersections of social and environmental injustice that plague the region as a result (Liverman and Vilas 2006; Carruthers, "Justice" 2008; Domínguez et al., 2010). These studies have revealed the interconnected nature of industrial development, environmental degradation and negative social impacts that follow hazardous waste exposure, such as the health problems identified in Colonia Chilpancingo (Carruthers, "Justice" 138; Kopinak and Barajas 230). The Metales y Derivados plant and other manufacturing sites in Tijuana have been criticized for the damage they have

[7] The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) is the updated version of NAFTA as of July 2020 (Chatzky et al. par. 3). Despite this, the problems that emerged with NAFTA are unlikely to be resolved as there are limits to participating country's obligations to protect the environment and labour rights (Labonté et al. 10). It is also interesting to observe that there are no such limitations in USCMA in regarding intellectual property rights (Labonté et al. 10). See Labonté et al. (2019) for more information.

caused to surrounding environments (Kopinak and Barajas 150). Air pollution and soil contamination are of great concern in Tijuana as a result of the toxic chemical waste that followed large-scale industrial development (Grineski et al., "Environmental Injustice" 2, 3). The river Alamar was severely contaminated as a result of lead oxide from the Metales y Derivados manufacturing plant (Kopinak and Barajas 229). This creek flows through Colonia Chilpancingo and the pollution put the entire community at great risk due to the health consequences arising from such contamination (Kopinak and Barajas 229). Toxic waste exposure primarily affects the health of both women and children. Whilst neural-tube birth defect rates have risen in women, children have been negatively impacted in their ability to perform at school therefore limiting their future opportunities (Carruthers "Globalization" 557; Grineski and Collins, "Exploring Patterns" 265). The most vulnerable groups endure the greatest hardship as a result of transnational industrialisation. These results are terrifying and with little government supervision or regulation, such atrocities are able to persist unchecked (Kopinak and Barajas 229).

Not only have scholars discussed the entrenched structural inequalities of the industry, but employees themselves have understood and resisted this systemic oppression. Without the cheap labour provided by Mexican women, the maquiladora industry would not exist. Neither would the industry thrive if there were no consumers on the other end of the line. The maquiladora employees that work tirelessly below minimum wage in the manufacturing plants are keenly aware of this exchange. The following account is an excerpt of an interview conducted by David Carruthers with a maquiladora worker in Tijuana:

> We know that there are many things that we have to put up with on this border – the maquiladoras, the contamination from the maquiladoras, the fact that all the things we assemble, that we build, that we sew together, are not even for us – [this] is very clear in everybody's minds (García Zendejas 2005).

The sentiments described above implicitly refer to '*el otro lado*' – the United States. The 'us' and 'them' rhetoric has emerged from power structures embedded in years of interventionalist and domineering behaviour from the US. The historical tensions that characterised the border region have informed current dynamics that created this 'third country'. Conceptualising the borderlands as a 'Third Space' echoes Homi Bhabha's interrogations of cultural hybridity, and he too contends there is a defining ambivalence in the region (Bhabha 7). According to Homi Bhabha, this ambivalence is a result of the creation of liminal, in-between spaces that engenders new understandings of culture and identity (Meredith 3). These tensions and ambiguities are felt intensely by residents. Perhaps even more so by maquiladora employees working tirelessly in substandard conditions for the financial benefit of *el otro lad*o.

Cross-Border Collaboration

In some ways the borderlands are equivocal. However, there is no denying the underlying animosity that was borne out of a complicated binational relationship that has lasted centuries. The tone of this relationship has extended itself to the promotoras of Colonia Chilpancingo, who were keenly aware of their place on the border divide. Their community has endured environmental injustice for decades whilst their employers have capitalised off their low wages while saving money by abandoning environmentally safe practices in the manufacturing plants they own. Whilst NAFTA enabled TNCs to exploit local workers, neighbouring communities on the US-Mexico border collaborated to resist the obvious injustice occurring in Colonia Chilpancingo, Tijuana. The Chilpancingo promotoras built a strong relationship with San Diego residents across the borderline in an effort to further develop their activism. This unison overcame the conflict which defines the region. Rapport that was built between activists in both San Diego and Colonia Chilpancingo was realised through two primary actors. Firstly, the San

Diego based organisation Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) and secondly the promotoras of Colonia Chilpancingo.

It will be argued that three stages were revolutionary for Colonia Chilpancingo's fight for justice. The collaboration was effective because both communities, Colonia Chilpancingo and the San Diego based EHC, shared the same vision to create environmentally just communities. The EHC is run by a combination of researchers, academics and passionate community members who use their varying disciplines and expertise to combat the toxic pollution threatening public health ("Staff"). The EHC's public mission is to empower communities in order to achieve social change ("Mission" par. 1). In an effort to realise their vision for an environmentally just world, they try to implement their mission by initiating grassroots campaigns, leadership development programs and continually promoting community organisation and agency[8].

The EHC chose to work with Colonia Chilpancingo they share many of the problems found in San Diego's communities: substandard housing, over-crowded schools, a lack of social services, low-paid jobs, polluting industries mixed in with residential and commercial sites, industrial truck traffic, air pollution and a lack of parks and healthy food outlets. They are also adjacent to Tijuana's largest Maquiladora industrial complex ("Baja California" par. 1). The EHC began their involvement in the border region in 1983 with the co-sponsorship of an International Environmental Conference in Tijuana. After a decade of developing a cross-border relationship, EHC established a Border Environmental Justice Campaign in 1993 with the intention of halting the passage of NAFTA. Already EHC had seen the devastating effects of the Maquiladora industry, and their commitment to defend the land with Tijuana residents grew stronger

[8] To find out more about the coalition and its members, visit www.environmentalhealthcoalition.org

("Border Environmental Justice" par. 2). The vision of activists in this district of Tijuana aligned with the vision of activists in EHC.

David Carruthers has dedicated significant time to understanding the Metales y Derivados case in the context of binational activism and environmental justice[9] ("Globalization" 2008; "Justice" 2008). Carruthers notes the extensive work that the EHC did with Colonia Chilpancingo residents throughout the course of their journey, particularly in their efforts to draw international attention to the case ("Justice" 139). Carruthers repeatedly references the EHC and their role in Colonia Chilpancingo's journey ("Justice" 139, 140). This shared vision inspired a series of collaborative initiatives that would transform Colonia Chilpancingo's fight for justice. The subsequent sections of this chapter will go through each of the separate stages of collaboration and it will illustrate why they were monumental for their fight. Each campaign or initiative would not have been possible without the collaborative activism between both communities.

A) CEC Citizens Petition

The Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) is a trinational organisation between Canada, the US and Mexico dedicated to protecting the environment and biodiversity of the North American region ("About" par. 1). After NAFTA's implementation, the CEC created a process for citizens of the agreement to file a petition against the government of participating countries for the inadequate enforcement of its environmental laws. This is referred to as a submission, and it is filed by the public with the Secretariat of whichever country is deemed at fault.

[9] Environmental justice is a contemporary field of study that interrogates the intersection of social and environmental issues and how these problems often follow predictable patterns of oppression and domination (Coolsaet 7, 8).

The EHC were one of the first organisations to utilise the citizen's petition as a mode of resistance ("Border Environmental Justice," par. 14). It was a relatively new process at the time of the submission for the Metales y Derivados plant, with just three submissions filed with the Mexican Secretariat at the CEC before Metales y Derivados. The EHC took advantage of this process in 1998 with the abandoned manufacturing plant. Without the EHC, Colonia Chilpancingo activists may have remained unaware of the process as it was a recent, newly formed initiative created on behalf of the CEC. The following quote is an excerpt of the submission filed by EHC and Colonia Chilpancingo:

> Submission ID SEM-98-007
> The submitters allege that Mexico has failed to effectively enforce its environmental law in connection with an abandoned lead smelter in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico, that poses serious threats to the health of the neighboring community, and to the environment. The submitters assert that the New Frontier Trading Corporation through its subsidiary Metales y Derivados, failed to repatriate to the United States the hazardous waste it generated, as required under Mexican law and the La Paz Agreement ("Submissions" par. 1).

The submission was significant for various reasons. Firstly, it led to an independent, unbiased investigation into the public health and environmental repercussions from the Metales y Derivados site (CEC 34). In this process, the Secretariat:

> Invited the most relevant municipal, state and federal authorities, the principal academic institutions in the region, and any other interested parties to submit information on the health or environmental effects caused by the contamination at the Metales y Derivados site (CEC 34).

This assessment and its conclusions – which were in favour of the submitters – meant that the risk associated with the abandoned lead smelter manufacturing plant were officially and publicly recognised as a dangerous hazard (CEC 33, 35, 38). Beyond this, it also called for an investigation into the obstacles for Mexican authorities faced in effectively enforcing environmental law (CEC 42). The conclusions in this regard were that law enforcement efforts remained limited due to a lack of resources and funding, as the Mexican Federal Attorney for Environmental Protection (PROFEPA) that deals with environmental violations has significantly less funding than the US Superfund provided by the EPA (CEC 43).

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the submission created a fact-based conclusion in regard to the risks associated with the deserted manufacturing plant. This resulted in the indisputable fact that the Metales y Derivados site was putting public health at risk and contaminating the environment with hazardous, toxic chemicals. The promotoras' allegations were confirmed, and the CEC released its final factual record in 2002. Specifically, Mexico was found to be failing to effectively enforce its General Law on Ecological Balance and Environmental Protection with respect to Articles 170 and 134 (CEC 7). Article 170 outlines that safety measures should be implemented in the case of "contamination with dangerous repercussions on ecosystems, their components or public health" (CEC 7). Article 134 further reinforces this by stating that prevention measures should be implemented if there is "soil that is contaminated by the presence of hazardous materials or waste" (CEC 7). The submission concluded Mexico failed to enforce Articles 170 and 134 and this information was made publicly available, as seen in Figure 1.1:

7 February 2002

COUNCIL RESOLUTION 02-01

Instruction to the Secretariat of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation to make public the Factual Record regarding the assertion that Mexico is Failing to Effectively Enforce Articles 134 and 170 of The General Law on Ecological Balance and Environmental Protection (SEM-98-007)

THE COUNCIL:

SUPPORTIVE of the process provided for in Articles 14 and 15 of the *North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation* (NAAEC) regarding submissions on enforcement matters and the preparation of factual records;

HAVING RECEIVED the final factual record;

NOTING that pursuant to Article 15(7) of the NAAEC the Council is now called upon to decide whether to make the factual record publicly available; and

AFFIRMING its commitment to a timely and transparent process;

HEREBY DECIDES:

TO MAKE PUBLIC and post on the registry the final factual record with respect to this submission; and

TO ATTACH to this resolution and the final factual record the letters sent by the Parties to the Secretariat pursuant to Article 15(5) of the NAAEC commenting on the draft factual record.

Figure 1.1 (CEC 145)

The confirmation of this failure from a trinational government body between the US, Mexico and Canada, placed pressure on US and Mexican governments. Following the Factual Record, more attention was drawn to the case. The CEC publication was followed by increased media coverage which will be covered later in this chapter under section C) international attention. The agreement to formally clean-up the site came in 2004, two years after the CEC finalised their investigation. An important element of this publication is that it exposed weaknesses in the Mexican government, for instance the lack of financial resources available to PROFEPA (CEC 43). The agreement that actualised the clean-up involved financial funding from the US, which may not have eventuated without this report. These revelations officially uncovered by the CEC

Final Factual Record eventuated as a result of the CEC citizens petition, submitted by EHC and Colonia Chilpancingo promotoras. The publication unsurprisingly played a significant role in the eventual site clean-up and the collaborative submission made by EHC and Colonia Chilpancingo was an essential step in the eventual closure of the Metales y Derivados site.

B) The Environmental Health, Leaders Taking Action - *Salud Ambiental Lideres Tomando Acción* (SALTA) program

Cross-border collaboration between Colonia Chilpancingo and San Diego residents entirely transformed the political organisation of Chilpancingo's promotoras. One of the most notable examples of this collaboration that helped the activists mobilise was their participation in an interactive, online leadership development program established by the EHC called the *Salud Ambiental Lideres Tomando Acción* (SALTA). This program inspired leadership in women living in Colonia Chilpancingo who wished to see changes in their community. EHC's strategies for achieving social and environmental justice are built around three core strategies: community organising, policy advocacy and leadership empowerment ("Social Change" par. 1). With over 30 years of experience, EHC have determined leadership development as one of the key pillars in helping communities achieve self-determination ("Social Change" par. 3). Under the EHC framework this is actualised through the SALTA training program ("Social Change" par. 7). Colonia Chilpancingo activists had been protesting for eight years for the removal of the Metales y Derivados case when they embarked on EHC's well-researched SALTA training program in October 2002 (EHC "SALTA"). The below figures capture testimonies from Colonia Chilpancingo activists who took part in the SALTA program. Their involvement revealed the positive impact the training program had on inspiring the women take action and create a safer, healthier environment in Colonia Chilpancingo. Vanessa Conde, Carolina Gámez and Itzia López Luján are all Colonia Chilpancingo residents who mobilised against environmental

injustice occurring in their communities and whose testimonies demonstrate that they were further empowered to do so by their involvement with EHC and the SALTA program.

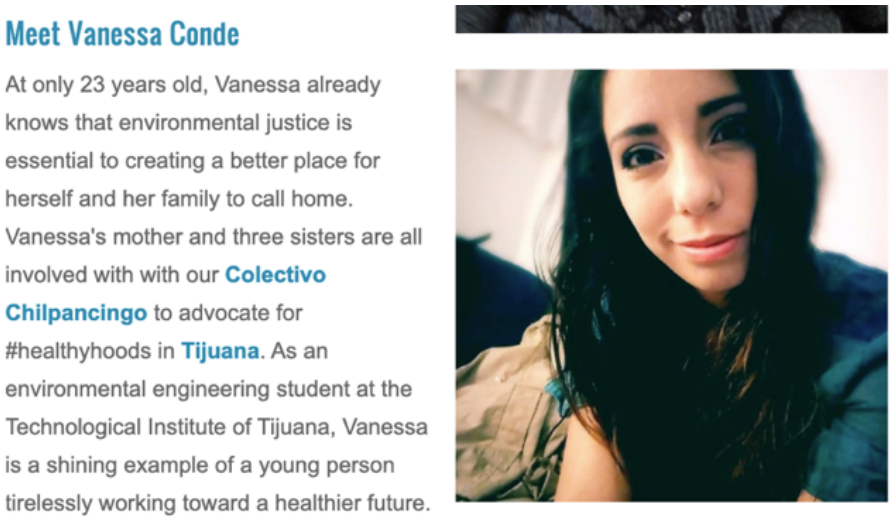

Figure 1.2 ("Leadership Development")

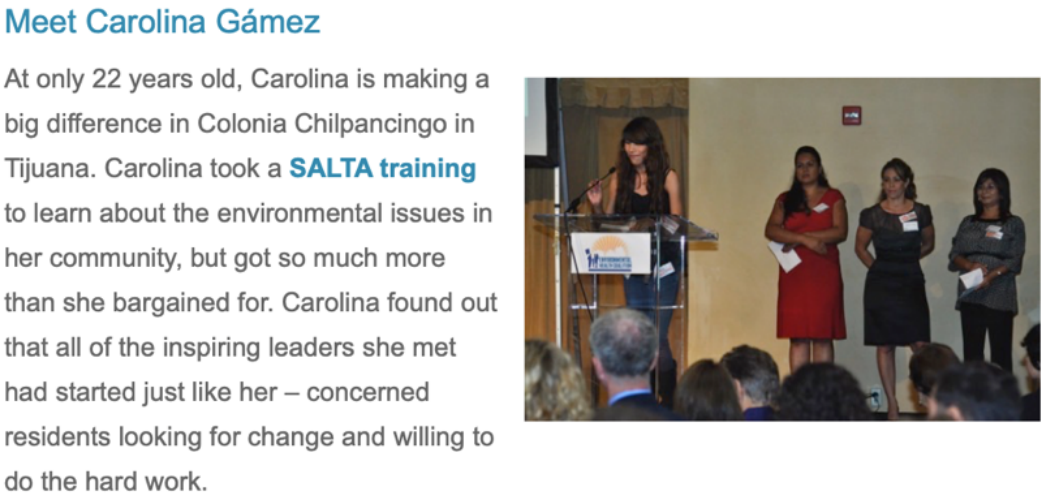

Figure 1.3 ("Leadership Development")

MEET ITZIA LÓPEZ LUJÁN

Itzia and her video camera

Itzia López Luján is 13 years old and has been a member of the EHC Youth Group since she was seven. She is the daughter of Guadalupe Luján, one of the first promotoras of the Colectivo Chilpancingo. Itzia has done radio and television interviews on issues regarding air and the **Arroyo Alamar**. She was born in the community in which she participates and has been involved in all the campaign's activities to promote environmental justice in her community. "I like making things like comic books and games to teach others about the issues we work on, like air pollution and the Arroyo Alamar," says Itzia. "I live very close to the maquila and I would like to see my community clean and have safe jobs."

Figure 1.4 ("Leadership Development")

In Figure 1.2 Vanessa Conde reports what different courses of action she has taken since her training with the SALTA program. One important step for Vanessa Conde was joining the Colectivo Chilpancingo, officially known as the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental. The collective was established in 2002 after a number of Chilpancingo activists underwent the SALTA training program. To summarise briefly, the Colectivo Chilpancingo enabled the promotoras of Colonia Chilpancingo to formally announce a self-directed community clean-up. This pressured the Mexican government to take accountability for their actions and remove the Metales y Derivados site. The significance of this collective for the success of the Chilpancingo community will be further explored in the following chapter. This feat was a landmark success

for the community and it would not have been possible without the political organisation, communication and empowerment demonstrated by the promotoras – all of the key skills that the SALTA program aims to develop.

However, it was not only the resources provided by EHC in their SALTA training program that fulfilled their mission. Above all, it was the ability of the promotoras to turn their learnings into action as they were the ones who actualised the change that their community desired. The formation of the Colectivo Chilpancingo is demonstrative of this leadership development – one of the key objectives of the SALTA program. Action taken by promotoras after the training program illustrates the potential of cross-border collaboration. The ambivalence of the border region is marked by this peculiar intersection of powerful binational community collaboration yet also binational policy and trade agreements that create the problems in the first place. Despite this, the SALTA program was a collaborative practice that revolutionised community power in Colonia Chilpancingo and set a precedent for other activists aspiring for environmental justice in their own community.

C) International attention

One of the positives of building transnational connections is the international attention that eventuates from this relationship. The cumulative effects of gaining the attention of a notable trinational organisation such as the CEC and the extensive community organisation that emerged from SALTA were transformational for the Colonia Chilpancingo community. As mentioned, the CEC's Factual Record that was published regarding the Metales y Derivados manufacturing plant attracted attention from academics and government authorities in not only Mexico but also the US. The case study evoked conversations in scholarship that focused on the intersection of not only environmental issues and social inequality, but also how both of these problems

overlapped with geopolitics, history and economic relationships between two very different states – with the US deemed an economic super power and Mexico as a developing economy (Frambach 427; Bachour 181). This provided a rich area for research and attracted distinguished scholars such as David Carruthers and Sara Grineski to contribute to the conversation regarding environmental justice as it relates to maquiladoras in the borderlands (Carruthers, "Justice" 137; Grineski and Collins, "Exploring Patterns" 2).

However, the international attention that the case attracted went beyond academia. Following the CEC, articles were published in the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal and the Los Angeles Times among other smaller publications like the not-for-profits Mother Jones magazine, Rethinking Schools and the Americas Program (Sullivan 2003; Fritsch 2002; Gorman 2003; Bryce 2001; Christensen 2006; Treat 2002). The case was also included in the Environmental Justice Atlas[10], which is a global platform directed by ecologist-economist and scholar-activist Leah Temper, distinguished economist and professor Joan Martínez-Alier and post-doctorate researcher Daniela Del Bene (Temper et al. 2018). These three scholars have been a part of a greater movement to bring awareness to the unfair burden of environmental problems on poor communities and communities of colour (Coolsaet 7; Temper et al. 576). The Environmental Justice Atlas is the largest existing inventory of ecological struggles from around the globe that documents resistance to toxic pollution and extraction (Temper et al. 575). The Metales y Derivados case was published on the website and was recognised as a distinguished case that established for the first time a structure for cross-border community collaboration on toxic site clean-ups (Brototi 2019).

[10] See EJAtlas 2021 for a comprehensive overview of global environmental justice cases.

Figure 1.5 (EHC "The People's Plan")

Figure 1.6 (EHC "The People's Plan")

The Metales y Derivados case was also reported in monthly *Toxinformer* articles published by the EHC as demonstrated in Figures 1.5 and 1.6, available in both Spanish and English. These reported not only on the progress of Colonia Chilpancingo activists, but also on other environmental justice related issues in the San Diego – Tijuana region. The *Toxinformer* articles published by EHC regarding the Metales y Derivados site tracked the journey of Colonia Chilpancingo activists in detail, enabling scholars and reporters to also stay up-to-date on the progress of the case (EHC "SALTA"; EHC "The People's Plan"). Media coverage and exposure of what was occurring in Colonia Chilpancingo helped elevate the standing of the case by bringing it into the public eye. While the case was not heavily reported on beyond the American continent, it certainly placed the necessary pressure on US and Mexican government authorities to eventually cleaned up the toxic site.

The transnational organisation that occurred between Colonia Chilpancingo activists and San Diego's EHC helped establish a series of tactics which proved to be crucial contributions in the promotoras' fight to have the Metales y Derivados plant removed. Whilst the US-Mexico border has been a site of conflict and unrest, the camaraderie of both communities defied this dynamic and triumphed over both the negligent US and Mexican state governments. Most importantly, it proved that small-scale community organisation has the potential to cross borders and resist injustice imposed by state institutions.

Chapter Two

Resistance Reimagined: Community Organisation in Colonia Chilpancingo

> "Revolution means engaging with radical hope and a focus on praxis and social movements" (Harvey 17).

The institutions responsible for protecting the health and environment in Colonia Chilpancingo neglected to protect the wellbeing of its residents by allowing the Metales y Derivados site to contaminate the neighbourhood. The absence of the state to fulfil its role to perform functions essential to social welfare – such as protecting the health of Colonia Chilpancingo residents – has led to a rise in grassroots solutions to social problems in Latin American (Grindle 6, 8). The activism employed by Colonia Chilpancingo activists is a story of radical hope that defied the state and achieved environmental justice in the community. The SALTA training program discussed in the previous chapter leg to the inauguration of the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental. This chapter will argue that the establishment of this collective was integral for the eventual victory for Colonia Chilpancingo residents – which was the clean-up of the Metales y Derivados manufacturing plant in 2004. This was made possible by the collective as it reimagined the parameters of power for local residents in Colonia Chilpancingo.

In order to illustrate how the collective reimagined the state-community relationship, this chapter will explore scholarship that problematises the nation-state. The limitations of the state and its institutions have inspired alternative solutions to achieving social and environmental justice. To underscore the potential of community mobilisation, this chapter will draw on discourse that dissects possible avenues of resistance that range from large-scale political organisation to small-scale community mobilisation. The Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental is an example

of small-scale resistance that was able to deliver significant changes for the Chilpancingo community. The establishment of the collective therefore highlights the value and potential of autonomous political organisation that is also able to overcome the limitations of the state.

Problematising the State in Latin America and Beyond

Latin American theorists have for many decades problematised the nation-state. Aníbal Quijano, renowned Peruvian sociologist, in his essay *Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America* (2000) discusses the implications of the state, specific to Latin America (222). Quijano unpacks the colonial narrative that is attached to nation-states throughout the region and considers the impact that this legacy has had on the power structures within state institutions (222). The establishment of nation-states during the independence movement at the start of the 19th Century in Latin America resulted in unequal power structures that served to exclude subaltern groups (Quijano 229). Quijano reminds us that;

> Nation-building, and especially nation-state building, has been intended and worked against the majority of the population: 'Indians', 'Blacks' and 'Mestizos'. The coloniality of power still is, in most of Latin America, dominant against democracy, citizenship, nation and nation-state (228).

It is essential to consider how the state is problematised in different regions, such as Latin America. Quijano draws on the example of the development of independent European-like nation-states in Hispanic America (226). The 'Indians' and 'Mestizos' that comprised the region were excluded from any political participation in the creation of newly independent nation-states upon the expulsion of the Spanish crown (Quijano 226). Through this example, Quijano reminds us of the colonial legacy that remains in Latin America's nation-states (226). The Latin American identity – Black, Indigenous, Mestizo – strays far from the Eurocentric identity that infiltrated

the state during colonisation (Quijano 228). In other words, the state and its institutions were created by an elite Creole minority for a racially diverse majority (Quijano 228). This distinction brought forth by Quijano reminds us that the history of the state in Latin America differs from other nation-states across the globe. This notion was reinforced by Walter Mignolo (2007) in his own exploration into race, colonisation and the impact this had on the power structures within the nation-state. Mignolo builds on Quijano's thoughts by considering how race interacts within the modern nation-state in Latin America (157). Mignolo contends that this interaction exists within a paradigm of power, control and authority (157).

Ideas brought forth by both Quijano and Mignolo are fundamental in acquiring a better understanding of what the state means in Latin America specifically. Their criticisms of the state contextualise the failure of government institutions to address inequality in Latin America as they were designed to serve Creole elites above other citizens. This explains the inability of Mexico's government bodies to take accountability for the hazardous toxins that were released at the Metales y Derivados plant that were harming the Colonia Chilpancingo community. Enrique Dussel has also published extensively on the topic, building on the conversation surrounding the impact of domineering Eurocentric structures in Latin America, like the nation-state (Dussel 1994; Dussel 2008; Dussel and Ibarra-Colado 2006). Dussel in his book *Twenty Theses on Politics* (2008) speaks of the persistent veneration of Western culture and the consequent contempt for all peripheral versions of culture and politics (119). This belief extends itself to the nation-state, as Dussel contends that it has been "traditionally defined as… a monocultural political totality" (120). This is an inherent fault of the nation-state as modern institutions fail to recognise the various nations, languages, histories or religions that exist under a single polity (Dussel "Twenty Theses" 120). These peripheral groups identified as 'Other' – woman, Indigenous, Mestizo – are then rejected and impoverished by state institutions (Dussel and Ibarra-Colado 503). This condition is the homogenisation of the nation-state that serves to exclude people and ideologies

that stray from Eurocentric ways of thinking (Quijano 228, Mignolo 157). Arturo Escobar also problematises the state in Latin America as a function that is deeply attached to the demands and desires of the capitalist market, and therefore is incapable of producing equitable economic opportunities for all (Escobar 419). This notion is common in many countries. However, it remains potently true in Latin America due to its position as 'underdeveloped' whose only way 'up' to the 'First World' is to participate in capitalist 'modernisation'[11] (Escobar 423). As Latin America's most prominent decolonial philosophers and theorists, Mignolo, Quíjano, Dussel and Escobar all reiterate the inherent injustice that infiltrates the governing structures in Ibero-America. The legacy of Eurocentrism in Latin American nation-states has meant that racially exclusive, hierarchical ideologies infiltrate the way the state functions in its institutions, judiciary and polity.

The ideas described above provide some insight into the reason behind the Mexican government's refusal to clean up the Metales y Derivados site. The Mexican nation-state was unable to fulfil its role as a protector of its citizens and it is difficult to rationalise years of inaction that quite clearly caused suffering for many individual people. The neglect and inaction displayed by the state is perhaps better understood when it becomes clear that it was not created for the purpose of protecting all citizens equally, but rather for exclusively protecting society's elite, as identified by Aníbal Quijano (228).

This narrative is not specific to Latin America and some theorists of the Global North have likewise criticised the state (Pellow 2018; Pulido, "Geographies" 2017). David Pellow is a prominent US based sociologist who argues that the state functions as an inherently oppressive institution which champions patriarchal, authoritarian, militaristic and ultimately environmentally

[11] The use of inverted commas in this sentence is there to de-legitimise the words being used. They speak indirectly to a value system that ranks countries based on capitalist gain.

unjust practices and relationships (24). Pellow critiques the environmental justice movement[12] as it "continues to seek justice from institutions and a legal system that was never intended to offer it in the first place" (Pulido, "Conversations" 47). Other notable scholars that are focused on environmental justice also contend that the state is a barrier in achieving this justice (Pulido "Geographies" 2017; Pellow 2018; Armiero 2019; Scott 2012). David Pellow contends that the solution to environmental injustice lies beyond the state and advocates for transformative justice, as opposed to exclusively reformist solutions (21). Pellow advocates for radical change as he has identified the persistent yet unsuccessful state-centric pursuit for justice (24). This growing body of literature surrounding state versus anti-state discourse has encouraged many scholars to shift the way in which they comprehend the state's role in incidences of environmental injustice. The well-respected qualitative social scientist Laura Pulido wrote an essay on the "poisoning" of the Flint River in Michigan, United States (2016). She characterised the state as a "nefarious" system designed to "prioritise fiscal solvency over human lives" (Pulido "Flint" 1 - 10). Both Pellow and Pulido denounce the state as a neutral force and perceive its institutions as mechanisms that perpetuate environmental injustice (Pulido, "Geographies" 529; Pulido, "Conversations" 47).

A Way Forward: Overcoming the Obstacle of the State

The question then arises of how one can resist injustice when working within the sphere of the state. Different forms of mobilisation have emerged in response to this question, with the most prominent example perhaps being the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) uprising in 1994 (Gilbreth and Otero 9). The EZLN are a radical example that demonstrate the potential of bold, transformative practices as a solution to the barrier of the nation-state (Gilbreth and Otero 9). The EZLN uprising was an "unorthodox rebellion" that resisted state power in an effort to defy the hegemony of the Mexican nation-state (Gilbreth & Otero 9). EZLN rebels

[12] The environmental justice movement is a response to the interconnected conditions of pollution and inequality (Sze 5). The Metales y Derivados case falls under this category due to the interconnected nature of public health problems and environmental damage caused by toxic pollution.

opposed the lack of democracy and the neoliberal free-market reforms that were being enforced by the Mexican state (Gilberth and Otero 11). The Partido Revolucionario Institucióonal (PRI) had monopolised the state's power through their 71-year rule and there were concerns raised over the state's dismal record on adhering to human rights and the rule of law[13] (Gilbreth and Otero 11). After 12 days of armed rebellion, the EZLN became the first guerrilla movement to resolve the problems faced by their community through peaceful means (Gilbreth and Otero 7, 24). The newfound community-controlled social and political institutions that followed the rebellion in Chiapas recognise the potential of political movements that challenge the state (Stahler-Sholk, "Neoliberal Homogenization" 61). It serves as an excellent example of a transformative pathway to solving injustice, which is what David Pellow considers the future of activism (Pellow 21; Stahler-Sholk, "Globalization" 493). This approach to realising justice helped revolutionise the social and political landscape in Chiapas and proved effective in dismantling the overarching power of the state (Gilbreth & Otero, 14, 17). The US and Latin American based theorists referenced in this chapter have chastised the nation-state for perpetuating oppressive power structures and the EZLN is a radical example that demonstrates how to overcome this.

However, working toward widespread, national change that adopts the same 'unorthodox' methods would perhaps be less effective if applied to other communities; a sentiment brought forth by James Scott in his book *Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play* (2012) (Stahler-Sholk, "Globalization" 493). Achieving justice does not necessarily need to depend on major episodes of institutional disorder (Scott 19). Large scale rebellion such as EZLN, while certainly effective, is perhaps an unrealistic goal for many communities seeking to realise justice. Pilar Calveiro, an Argentinian political scientist residing in

[13] The Mexican state was criticised for the routine employment of authoritarian practices, an example being the state's connection to massacre of 45 Indigenous people on December 22, 1997 in Acteal, Chiapas (Gilbreth and Otero 10).

Mexico, explores how reinventing the relationship between the state and the locale helps dismantle hierarchical state power on a smaller scale to that of EZLN (201). Calveiro notes the importance of promoting autonomous community organisation as it better equips communities to work towards justice and equality in their own locale (208). Autonomous community action also has the potential to simultaneously engage with state authority without subordinating to them (Calviero 201). Drawing on the example of the Municipio Autónomo Cherán K'eri case[14] in Michoacán, Mexico, she considers how a community is able to govern itself without being incompatible with state and federal policy (211). The state of Michoacán and its police institution in particular was plagued by corruption and violence that served little benefit to the community of Cherán (211). Calveiro contends that through creating this autonomous political organisation, they resisted and evaded the violence that was perpetuated by this institution (211). The Purépecha people, through the creation of the Municipio Autónomo Cherán K'eri, did not collide with the institutions of the state, but rather expanded and reformed the traditional state polity. The relationship between the state and its people was reimagined in this instance. Evidently, the reinvention of this relationship is an achievable practice, and one that was also realised in Colonia Chilpancingo, Tijuana.

The resistance that occurred in Cherán demonstrates the need for anarchist sensibilities in small scale community activism and this has been acknowledged by theorists Marco Armiero (2019) and James Scott (2012). Both scholars explore "the art of living *with* the state rather than *through* or even *against* the state" (Armiero 115; Scott Preface xvi.). This is perhaps a less radical adaptation of anti-statist discourse. However, it concedes the necessity of working with the state as a mechanism for generating change in certain situations of injustice. This pathway toward justice was realised by Colonia Chilpancingo when they established the Colectivo Chilpancingo

[14] Cherán is home to the Purépecha nation and is where the autonomous, self-governing body, the Municipio Autónomo de Cherán K'eri was created. See Calveiro (2014) for more information.

Pro Justicia Ambiental. By matching the state and its institutions through establishing their own institutional platform, the promotoras were able to protect their community in a situation where the state would not. In many ways, the organising that occurred in the case of Metales y Derivados is analogous to the EZLN uprising. As low-income earning women, the Colonia Chilpancingo activists were disregarded for over ten years while the manufacturing plant continued to – in the words of Laura Pulido – "poison" the community in Chilpancingo (Pulido, "Flint" 1). The small-scale organisation that eventuated in this case demonstrates a pathway toward resolution that reimagined the community-state relationship. While different from a large-scale uprising, the Colonia Chilpancingo promotoras outwitted the institutional barriers placed in front of them and continued to fight for their community.

Reinventing Radical Hope: El Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental

Radical hope can materialise in myriad ways. It can be achieved through large-scale political organisation demonstrated by the EZLN, or through resistance on a municipal level such as the establishment of the self-governing body in Cherán. It can also exist on levels even smaller that still maintain the sentiments of large and medium scale social movements which are perhaps less obviously disruptive in nature. El Colectivo Pro Justicia Ambiental is an example of small-scale community organisation that successfully mobilised against the power of the state. This story of resistance did not wage war against the state, nor did it dismantle the maquiladora industry in its entirety. However, the mobilisation within Colonia Chilpancingo was certainly revolutionary and changed the relationship between the Chilpancingo community and the Mexican state. This following section will consider how the establishment of the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental was an integral element in shifting this relational dynamic in the story of Metales y Derivados.

The closure of the Metales y Derivados plant in 1994 enforced by the Mexican Federal Attorney for Environmental Protection (PROFEPA) would mark the beginning of a 10 year journey for Colonia Chilpancingo residents. Below is a chronology that follows the sequence of events that occurred in this 10 year process. This timeline highlights the events that preceded the establishment of the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental on April 10 2002, and the important moments in their story that followed.

The case of Metales y Derivados: A timeline of resistance [15]

1986	New Frontier Trading Corporation erects their manufacturing plant called Metales y Derivados to the Mesa de Otay, located above the Colonia Chilpancingo community.
March 1994	PROFEPA call for the official shut-down of the plant due to violations committed against Mexico's environmental laws. Roughly 7,000 metric tons of lead slag is abandoned along with various other chemical hazards.
1998	Residents situated below the plant in Colonia Chilpancingo unite with the EHC and file a petition with NAFTA's Commission for Environmental Corporation (CEC) regarding Metales y Derivados and their failure to adequately close the maquiladora site.
June 12, 2000	A representative of the Chilpancingo community presents 500 letters signed by fellow residents to Julia Carabias, head of Secretariat of Environmental

[15] This chronology was sourced from EHC "History of Metales y Derivados" 2008.

	and Natural Resources (SEMARNAP) at a meeting with the CEC in Dallas Texas. At the same time, other residents of Colonia Chilpancingo and the Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) hold a press conference in front of the offices of the SEMERNAP to demand a clean-up of the waste site immediately.
July 17, 2001	Chilpancingo residents, Mexican and US allied affiliates and the EHC hold a demonstration in front of the offices of the New Frontier Trading Company in San Diego.
February 2002	The CEC publicly released its factual records on the Metales y Derivados case, confirming that the site did in fact present a risk to human health.
April 10, 2002	Colonia Chilpancingo residents form the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental. The group members, the EHC and allied supporters hold a 24-hour vigil in front of the PROFEPA offices in Tijuana to demand the immediate clean-up of Metales y Derivados.
May 16, 2003	The Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental present to the public their own plan for the site clean-up.
March 27, 2004	EHC representatives and the collective meet with officials from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), SEMARNAT, PROFEPA, Baja California state Ecology as well as Infrastructure and Urban Development.

	A 'Working Group' is established with the collective to plan the clean-up of the site, once and for all.
June 24, 2004	The Mexican government signs an agreement with the collective and the Working Group is formally committed to a comprehensive clean-up of the Metales y Derivados site within 5 years, with the immediate initiation of the first four stages of that plan.
2008	The Metales y Derivados lead smeltering site is finally cleansed of any toxic, chemical waste.

The series of events described above reflect the long, onerous journey endured by residents in Colonia Chilpancingo. Their fight required endless persistence and commitment. Notable contributions from allied supporters and non-governmental organisations, such as the EHC, helped maintain momentum and gain national and international traction for the case. There were seemingly endless petitions, demonstrations, meetings and protests that required continual organisation and rallying from Colonia Chilpancingo residents and their allies. Despite the attention this received from government organisations, like the CEC publication in February 2002, no serious action was taken to directly address the issue until June 2004.

However, a distinct moment emerges on April 10, 2002 with the inauguration of the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental. Just two years after the formation of the collective, Colonia Chilpancingo residents are victorious in their pursuit for environmental justice. Prior to the formation of the collective, as described above, residents worked as activists without an official platform to represent them. This form of community organisation lacked formality and perhaps

weakened the authority of demands from residents – which was reflective through the eight years of persistent protesting that reaped little reward for the Chilpancingo community.

The collective marked a transformation in the political organisation of residents in Colonia Chilpancingo. To revisit the examples of EZLN and the Municipio Autónomo Cherán K'eri, the common denominator of success in both cases was the use of official organisational platforms in their process. These helped the social movements garner momentum in their pursuit for justice. Similarly, the establishment of the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental served as a turning point in the case of Metales y Derivados because it allowed residents to pursue their agenda from an institutionalised level. This elevated the autonomous presence of Colonia Chilpancingo residents. There are three notable events that follow the collective's inauguration that support this claim:

A) The public announcement of a self-directed community clean-up
B) The founding of the multilateral, binational 'Working Group'
C) The final signed agreement between the Mexican government and the Colectivo to commit to a site clean-up

The examples listed above are reflective of the extensive progress made as a result of the platform created by the community. Firstly, the public announcement of the Chilpancingo community's clean-up plan was an assertive directive made possible by its delivery from the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental. Their command was effective because it came from an established, united front that proposed a solution to a problem that the government had proven incapable of addressing. This public broadcast proved the collective to be an entity capable of taking on the role of serving justice to Colonia Chilpancingo that had the power to demand government intervention.

The second notable event was the well overdue formation of the 'Working Group' that eventually led to the clean-up of the Metales y Derivados site. For the first time in the ten years that residents had been pushing for the site closure, the primary government bodies involved from both Mexico and the US met together to formally address the issue. Whilst this was a shamefully belated congregation, it was nonetheless an important stepping-stone in the process. The autonomous presence of the collective demonstrated their status as equals on the level of the state and its representatives. Once again, to revisit the cases of EZLN and the Municipio Autónomo Cherán K'eri, the importance of independent organisation becomes clear upon the realisation of the goals in each region. Whilst on different levels; state, municipal and neighbourhood, the significance of independent political organisation remains the same.

The final example, which was the signed agreement between the Mexican government and the collective, is perhaps the most explicit example that reflects the power of the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental. This seemingly minor detail symbolises the role that the collective held at the final stage of the process. Colonia Chilpancingo residents were leaders and revolutionaries that created a precedent for other activists in the region by signing this agreement. Never before had such an achievement been accomplished by maquiladora workers and neighbourhood residents against the forces of the state and foreign owned TNCs. Is it difficult to imagine such progress having been achieved without the leadership and agency demonstrated through the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental.

The achievements of the collective represent the potential of community organisation. In this situation, the Mexican state was incapable of fulfilling the role of protecting its citizens and the land. The Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental is a pertinent example of the potential of independent organisation that defends community when the state will not. As described in

this chapter, the state does not always serve its citizens equally. In an effort to resist this narrative, more emphasis on understanding the relationship between the state and individual people at a community level is required. The collective triggered a relational shift between residents and the state government which transformed their interactions from the moment the collective was inaugurated. Alternative practices that encourage seemingly 'minor' social movements have the potential to revolutionise a community. As postulated by many scholars dedicated to achieving environmental justice, the state is a threat and an obstacle when overcoming this. However, the agency of individual people that exist within the state is not lost. Radical hope can be realised on varying levels, from the EZLN to Cherán or Colonia Chilpancingo. The important observation is that the scale does not determine the success, but that the autonomous empowerment of activists can achieve justice regardless.

Chapter Three

Documentary Film that Resists Endemic Inequality: *Maquilápolis* (Mexico 2006) and Colonia Chilpancingo

Local, regional and national protests can be powerful sources of change. As this thesis has demonstrated, the resources made available to activists protesting on smaller scales is of paramount importance. The promotoras in Colonia Chilpancingo seized every opportunity to advance their political organisation and their role in the documentary *Maquilápolis: A City of Factories* (Mexico 2006) was no different in their quest to enhance their activism. The documentary reaffirmed their identity as empowered agents of change and the work itself was a form of activism designed to inspire small-scale mobilisation in other industrial epicentres along the US-Mexico border. In the process of realising these objectives, the documentary adopted a collaborative approach to its production and distribution that gave the activists a platform in which they could share their story unmediated. These techniques adopted by *Maquilápolis* enabled the subjects to unite against this cause of mistreatment and endemic inequality whilst highlighting the potential of small-scale activism to incite large-scale change. The collaborative approach to its production was vital for it did not victimise the workers nor detract from their activism; the unintentional victimisation of maquiladora workers has tarnished previous attempts to strengthen the fight of women in this industry through creative media productions. The method of production, distribution and the documentary's commitment to furthering political organisation emulates a revolutionary documentary style reminiscent of Latin American cinematic trends established in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. This chapter will use these trends to interrogate the documentary *Maquilápolis* by identifying specific techniques and aesthetics characteristic of these trends from the specified decades. Latin American documentary trends of this era prioritised autonomy and the voice of subjects within the distribution and production

processes in an effort to transform activism in the subcontinent. These objectives were reproduced in *Maquilápolis* which served the promotoras well in their fight for justice.

Residues of Revolution in *Maquilápolis* (Mexico 2006)

Maquilápolis is a compelling documentary that threads together several of the problems discussed in this thesis: unsafe working conditions, toxic pollution, low wages and gendered discrimination (Sorrensen 225). The film interrogates the complex relationship between these issues, the most pressing of which is the impact of these problems on the employees of maquiladoras in Tijuana. The documentary's key focus and the reason why it proved to help the promotoras in their political organisation was the resistance employed by Colonia Chilpancingo activists to demand the removal of the Metales y Derivados site. Certain strategies were used in the films production and distribution that helped build the identity of promotoras as activists and share their story with other communities along the US-Mexico border facing the same injustices. The most important approach in the films production was the involvement of Colonia Chilpancingo promotoras in each stage of the documentary process. The prioritisation of the promotoras' involvement in the production led to the incorporation of video-diaries which was a form of subjective filmmaking designed to highlight the voice of the promotoras which formed their identity as empowered agents of change. Importantly, upon the films distribution among other industrial communities the promotoras' future allies could better see themselves represented along with their own potential as agents of change.

These were the key actions undertaken by the promotoras and directors in the creation and screening of *Maquilápolis* that helped centre the voice and knowledge of Colonia Chilpancingo's promotoras. This style of production is reminiscent of cinematic trends that evolved during the 1950s, 60s and 70s in Latin America which prioritised autonomy, resistance and community empowerment – the three central ideas found in *Maquilápolis* (Arenillas and Lazzara 34; Schreiber

161). Analysing the documentary as it relates to these trends reaffirms the position of *Maquilápolis* as a resource that enhanced the activism of Colonia Chilpancingo promotoras as the documentary mirrored the techniques that were originally imagined to generate change and serve justice for communities in Latin America.

Latin American documentary trends of this era that addressed inequality evolved in response to a particular value system that was present in other documentary trends (Solanas and Getino 1). The antithesis of cinema that prioritised social justice was demonstrative most obviously through the 'first cinema' of the United States. This genre of film endorsed Hollywood style, commercialised productions that were more concerned with profit than addressing injustice (Lazzara and Arenillas 3). Hollywood filmmaking was typically devoted to creating a "show" for the "amusement" of its viewers in an effort to maximise the financial gains for the directors and producers of documentary cinema (Solanas and Getino 1). This genre gave way to the bourgeois 'second cinema' of Europe that was an alternative to the 'first' of the US (Solanas and Getino 4). Also known as the 'author's cinema', it was branded by "auteurial" art films and an attempt at cultural decolonisation through the freedom of artistic expression that was afforded to the filmmaker at the time (Lazzara and Arenillas 3; Solanas and Getino 4). 'Second cinema' hoped to stray from the institutionalised cinema of the 'first', however failed to do so and ended up reproducing the style and values established in Hollywood productions (Solanas and Getino 4). The 'first' and 'second cinema' of the United States and Europe did not possess a value system in its curation or distribution that could serve community activists in Latin America. These were important developments in cinema across the globe that paved the way for revolutionary documentary film in Latin America that aimed to prioritise community empowerment.

The New Latin American Cinema movement in the 1950s and 60s crystallised the region's shift toward creating socially and politically motivated documentary cinema (Arenillas and Lazzara 3).

The movement transformed filmmaking and its processes by adopting what Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire would call the process of *concientización*, or consciousness-raising (Chanan 118). The focus of production became disrupting the ignorance that surrounded certain situations of injustice (Chanan 118). This trend in documentary filmmaking coincided with the beginnings of Third Cinema in Latin America. Third cinema was an alternative to both the 'first' and 'second cinema' that totally transformed documentary production in Latin America. Documentary and cultural studies theorists María Guadalupe Arenillas and Michael J. Lazzara in their book *Latin American Documentary Film in the New Millennium* (2016) contend that filmmaking that adopted the objectives of Third Cinema worked to decolonise film, the filmmaker and the audience viewing the film to ultimately "turn filmmaking into a weapon that could play a role in the multifront battle to liberate the oppressed" (Lazzara and Arenillas 4). Documentary cinema that was once preoccupied with educating its viewers instead used cinema as a resource to not only inform its audience, but to inspire activism. *La hora de los hornos* (Argentina 1968) and *Tire dié* (Argentina 1960) are two documentaries that are emblematic of this shift in Latin American cinema. Each film is representative of the region's commitment to political cinema which strived to chastise societal structures that perpetuated inequality (Chanan 117, 119). Known for their scathing criticisms on the impacts of neocolonialism and the false promises of capitalist development, both documentaries paved the way for a series of politically informed and socially motivated documentary productions (Arenillas and Lazzara 3; Sadek 287). The New Latin American Cinema underscored these important, profoundly political shifts that evolved in Third Cinema production (Birri 90; Wayne 18). Centred on decolonial politics, Third Cinema prioritised community empowerment as a means for generating change (Lazzara and Arenillas 34).

These central ideas as the foundations of Third Cinema were equally important to the aesthetics and processes that were used to communicate them. Third Cinema was characterised by

particular goals that were outlined by the directors of *La hora de los hornos* (Argentina 1968) Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in their manifesto *Toward a Third Cinema* (1970). The rejection of "surplus value cinema" was one key practise used in the creation of decolonised filmmaking (Solanas and Getino 1, 5). Refusing surplus value cinema was a direct response to the 'first cinema' of the US. Third Cinema was therefore less preoccupied with satisfying the economic interests of filmmakers and the objective became focused on the *concientización* behind the production (Solanas and Getino 1; Chanan 118). It also meant that Solanas and Getino could pioneer the beginnings of subjective cinema as the priority of the production was no longer financial (1). The goal of subjective cinema was to have "the worker film his way of looking at the world, just as if he were writing it" and this became a key practise in Third Cinema (Solanas and Getino 6). Solanas and Getino draw on the example of the *Chilean Partido Socialista*, who provided their cadres with film material in an effort to create anti-imperialist content to share with the masses (5). These were the earlier conceptions of what would eventually become the 'subjective turn' in Latin American cinema (Lazzara and Arenillas 37). The 'subjective turn' in cinema that occurred during the 1990s and 2000s restored a "confidence in the subject's right to speak" (Lazzara and Arenillas 5). The foundations of this aesthetic shift are rooted in the beginnings of Third Cinema and was a key feature of decolonial, revolutionary filmmaking (Solanas and Getino 5).

Maquilápolis is a documentary whose techniques and themes were built on the aforementioned goals of Third Cinema outlined by Solanas, Getino, Lazzara and Arenillas (1970; 2016). This is most apparent in the documentary's overall theme surrounding community resistance and mobilisation. This notion is reminiscent of the central idea in Third Cinema that the people will not relent – "*el pueblo no se va*" (Lazzara and Arenillas 34). The anti-capitalist politics that rose out of the 60s remains in contemporary documentary cinema, however has adapted to resist whichever perpetrator of endemic inequality is of focus – in the case of the *Maquilápolis*

documentary, the maquiladoras and their owners. There is a residual "flavour" of Third Cinema in contemporary filmmaking indicative through the plot of the documentary (Lazzara and Arenillas 25). *Maquilápolis* replicates the sentiments of revolutionary change that were instilled in the 60s and 70s era of Latin American filmmaking through the collaborative production process, its subjective presentation style and the documentary's method of distribution. The use of video-diaries as the primary mode of documentation in *Maquilápolis* is similar to the type of political cinema that occurred in the Third Cinema movement and the aesthetic shifts promoted under the 'subjective turn' in 1990s and 2000s. The documentary delineates injustice through the narratives of personhood made possible by collaborative production and interpersonal videography proves to be a powerful technique that preserves the autonomy and voice of the Colonia Chilpancingo community.

Collective Documentary Production

The history and evolution of Latin American cinema has shown that documentaries such as *Maquilápolis* have the potential to inspire activism should they possess the required *concientización* in their method of production (Chanan 118). Researcher and visual cultural studies specialist Rebecca Schreiber examines what processes were employed to prioritise the promotoras' political organisation in *Maquilápolis* and the impact this had on furthering the activists' agenda (161). Vicky Funari and Sergio de la Torre, as the directors of the documentary, had the intention to create a film that would "give the women a chance to express themselves and tell their stories" and they wanted "to use the process as a furthering of their own self organising" (qtd. in Schreiber 178). The resourcefulness of the documentary for the promotoras was of paramount importance for Funari and de la Torre ("How Maquilápolis Led the Way" par. 3). This objective was an important foundation that inspired the documentary's collaborative approach. The collective curation of the documentary that included Funari, de la Torre and the promotoras produced a subjective style of filming that served the Colonia Chilpancingo

promotoras in curating their identity as activists. This collaborative process also influenced the distribution of the documentary to better target potential allies experiencing the same injustice in industrial epicentres along the US-Mexico border. Reflections and analyses of the documentary – while relatively few – reference the impact that the directors' intentions and vision had on the final outcome of the film (Schreiber 178; Meichsner 231). The documentary was first imagined in 2000 when Funari and de la Torre met with promotoras from activist collective 'Casa de la Mujer/ Grupo Factor X' (Schreiber 159). Similar to the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental, Casa de la Mujer/ Grupo Factor X is a collective dedicated to improving the lives and wellbeing of women employed in the maquiladora industry.

These small details which featured at the start of the directors' relationship with the activists established solid foundations for the next six years of collaborative filmmaking. Schreiber reiterates that this foundation was a vital step that allowed the documentary to centre the voice of the promotoras (161). Sergio de la Torre was previously involved with Grupo Factor X when he was a member of *Los Tricksters*, an artist's collective that explored issues regarding diaspora, tourism and identity politics through art installations in San Diego and Tijuana ("How Maquilápolis Led the Way" par. 1). De la Torre is originally from Tijuana and met with the activists involved in this collective while attending a screening of Funari's film *Paulina* (Mexico 1997). Having previously built rapport with the activists, de la Torre and Funari coordinated a video workshop for the activists and it was in this moment that the vision of *Maquilápolis* began. The directors and the activists involved in Grupo Factor X tentatively named their venture 'The Maquila Project', and they began the collaborative process that was creating the *Maquilápolis* documentary.

The directors' connections with the promotoras eventually led them to Lourdes who was a member of the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental – the activist group discussed in

the previous chapter. This gave Lourdes the platform to guide the audience through her experiences as a promotora dedicated to removing the Metales y Derivados manufacturing plant from her neighbourhood. Lourdes provides a crucial basis for understanding the specific methods used by the promotoras to demand the closure of the Metales y Derivados plant. She recounts the numerous protests, demonstrations and tactics employed by the activist collective to seek justice for the Chilpancingo community. Placing Lourdes' voice at the forefront of the documentary was essential for the Colonia Chilpancingo promotoras because it prioritised their political project, further challenging the multinational corporations responsible for inflicting harm on their community (Schreiber 191). Without the voice of Lourdes there would have been little potential for the furthering of political organisation in Colonia Chilpancingo, as has been demonstrated in other creative artistic productions.

The shortcomings of creative productions that do not give precedence to the unmediated voice and knowledge of subjects was most clearly visible in Polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko's project *Tijuana Projection* (Mexico 2000). Wodiczko's project involved screening stories and images of Tijuana's promotoras where they shared their struggle as invisible victims of the maquiladora industry in Tijuana (Phillips 44, 45). The project was displayed onto the building Centro Cultural Tijuana (CECUT) which was intended to "give a voice… to women who work in Tijuana's maquiladora industry" ("Krzystof Wodiczko" par. 1). The project was delivered and created with minimal consultation with the promotoras and Wodiczko bestowed upon himself the position of giving these women visibility and voice through sharing their testimonies (Schreiber 171). Rebecca Schreiber argues that this visibility contributed to the vulnerability experienced by these women, many of whom were domestic violence victims (171). The promotoras were excluded from the production and this 'voice' was consequently tainted by Wodiczko's own interpretation of how he perceived the promotoras, which appeared to be as disempowered victims (Schreiber 176). Indeed, collaboration in artistic production can at times lead to a betrayal where the

process inevitably becomes one-sided (Kester 2). This concern as it relates to *Tijuana Projection* was raised at a panel hosted at CECUT that was called "Image Power: Cultural Interventions as Public Memory in Postmodern Spaces" (Buck-Morss). The purpose of this conversation was to draw insight on the complexities of artist interventions in the San Diego-Tijuana cross-border region (Buck-Morss). The panel involved experts in the field of cross-border relations, including sociologist Néstor García Canclini, cultural anthropologist Michael Taussig, artistic director George Yúdice, artist Krzysztof Wodiczko and the curator and philosopher Susan Buck-Morss who moderated the panel (InSite). A question from the audience was anonymously presented to the panel:

> My question… to Krzysztof in particular is at what point does a collaborator become a co-author? And I ask this question because of my concerns, which are probably shared by many people here, of how to avoid the problem of so-called collaborators becoming exploited persons who are utilised for those of us who are coming from a more privileged place in the art world (qtd. In Schreiber 173).

The issue at hand in this question is not regarding *Tijuana Projection* itself, but rather Wodiczko's process in the production, the distribution of the art installation and who actually benefitted. Wodiczko's response indicated he was committed to furthering the political agenda of the promotoras by assisting them to speak out through reaching a broader audience (Schreiber 174). However, as noted by Schreiber in her book *The Undocumented Everyday* (2018) the attendees were predominantly artistic creatives and followers of InSite, as opposed to other maquiladora workers (174). The story Wodiczko chose to share were testimonies of the maquiladora workers in situations that removed their agency and emphasised their helplessness (Schreiber 172). In the words of Schreiber, "Wodiczko's *Tijuana Projection* replicates precisely the most problematic dynamics of power and representation common to the documentary genre" (162).

Tijuana Projection is an example of creative content that reproduces the "spectacle of victimisation" as Wodiczko sensationalised and capitalised of the promotoras' suffering, rather than focusing on their agency as activists (Schreiber 172; Hesford and Kozol 13). This did little for furthering the political organisation of the promotoras and demonstrates the importance of incorporating subjects in the production process should the objective be to advance community mobilisation. Concerns were raised in the panel discussion regarding the true beneficiaries of 'cultural capital' production produced on the US-Mexico border at InSite and similar artistic events (Schreiber 169). It was noted that the artistic industry has a propensity to benefit the already privileged art community, therefore exacerbating the inequalities between the disadvantaged communities at the focus of production and the producers themselves (Schreiber 169). This experience was felt strongly by the promotoras who had engaged with Wodiczko's project and as a result Funari and de la Torre had to spend more time building trust with the activists (Schreiber 178). Funari and de la Torre appeared to be conscious of avoiding the problems that emerged after *Tijuana Projection*. The representation of the promotoras in *Maquilápolis* not only built upon the identity of the promotoras as activists but it also became a resource itself upon its distribution through prioritising their voice, agency and knowledge.

Subjectivity and Distribution as Strategies for Empowerment

Collaborative filmmaking in *Maquilápolis* brought the political organisation of the promotoras to the forefront of the documentary's narrative which allowed for other stages in the film's curation and distribution to better serve the community's protest. To ensure this objective was realised, *Maquilápolis* required the promotoras to represent themselves and their experiences unmediated. This was achieved through the use of camcorders which enabled the activists to create video-diaries that documented their story (Schreiber 177). The dissemination of injustice and activism from the subjects themselves played a significant role in the curation of their own identity as

activists (Schreiber 191). It also allowed the promotoras to pass on their knowledge to their constituencies within and outside of the maquiladora sites of Tijuana upon the films' public screening (Schreiber 192).

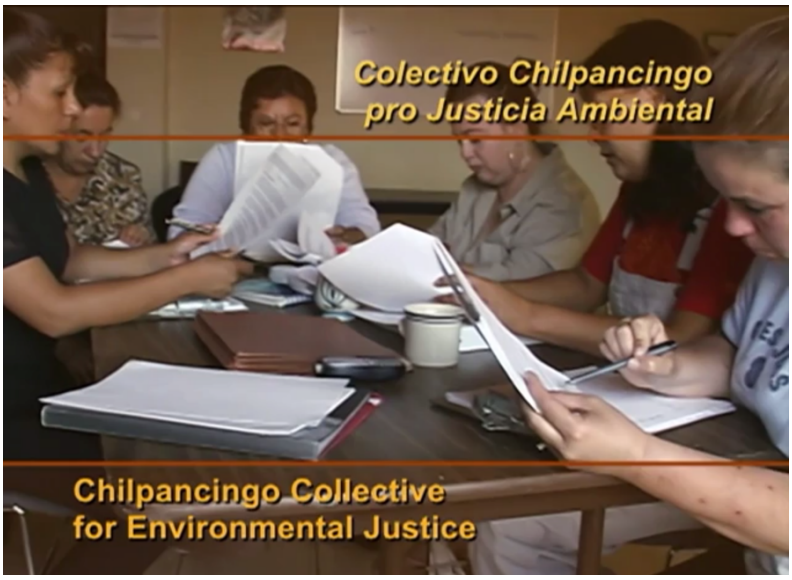

Figure 1.1 ("Maquilápolis" 00:55:30)

The above figure is an example of what Lourdes Luján chose to share with viewers by using her camcorder. It captures the activists from the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental gathered around a table working together to prepare for a demonstration outside the PROFEPA offices. Their objective is to demand a visit to the Metales y Derivados site from a PROFEPA environmental officer and they "will demonstrate day and night until he comes" ("Maquilápolis" 01:41:02:00). Through acting as a united front, the women became more powerful by presenting their demands as a group as opposed to individual activism; perhaps this is a lesson Lourdes wished to share with her constituencies. New developments in film technology led to the introduction of the camcorder to the consumer market in the 1990s and 2000s and this increased access to self-representation in documentary filmmaking (Schreiber 160). This form of cinema has been typically viewed as more "truthful" than conventional documentary production

(Schreiber 160; Solanas and Getino 6). *Maquilápolis* worked alongside the women at the centre of the injustice imposed by the Metales y Derivados manufacturing plant and transcended the camera and the subject by giving precedence to autonomy within the Colonia Chilpancingo community.

Figure 1.2 ("Maquilápolis" 00:41:33)

Lourdes Luján reflects on the determination required by all members of the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental. Persistent protest such as the demonstration at PROFEPA was a difficult but integral part of the Colectivo Chilpancingo's story. Figure 1.2 captures Lourdes' reflections on how difficult it was for the collective in the beginning. However, through conducting demonstrations such as the PROFEPA protest, the collective intensified their activism which helped the collective grow and make significant progress. Importantly, Lourdes' reflections sent an important message to the audience regarding the potential of small-scale mobilisation which suggests the promotoras' were hoping to inspire their constituencies and thus expand their reach. Lourdes describes the Chilpancingo collective's strength and how far their unrelenting resistance has taken them:

> They see that we are strong, so they are complying with all of our demands… How is it possible that high-ranking officials, faced with our little committee of five women – that we're making such trouble for them? … Imagine, five women making a government official tremble ("Maquilápolis" 00:56:04-00:56:31).

The video-diary excerpts emphasise the promotoras' strength as a small collective capable of achieving large-scale change. The prioritisation of the promotoras' self-representation was essential for enhancing their activism because of the message this conveyed to the audience. One key limitation of *Tijuana Projection* was the unequal 'returns' of the art installation for the promotoras versus artistic director Krzysztof Wodiczko (Schreiber 173). The audience was predominantly filled with fellow artists and this did little in terms of the promotoras political organisation – which was a desired objective of Wodiczko's production (Schreiber 174). Funari and de la Torre were determined to ensure the documentary would eventually become a resource that would actively enhance the activism in Colonia Chilpancingo and expand their political organisation across the border. To achieve this, *Maquilápolis* was screened in other industrial towns along the US-Mexico border (Schreiber 190). The documentary also featured at a Binational Community Outreach Campaign in 2006 in an effort to target specific audiences associated with the maquiladora workforce to inspire further activism (Schreiber 189). Lourdes Luján was present at these screenings and she answered questions about the film and the activists' campaigns (Schreiber 190). The exact results of these screenings are inconclusive as it is difficult to find this information, however it could perhaps be considered an effective resource regardless. The goals and outcome of the documentary align with the initial vision imagined by the promotoras and directors – to create a documentary that could be used as a resource to further community activism in Tijuana.

Lazzara and Arenillas contend that "Third Cinema will linger – though perhaps transformed and adapted to new circumstances – as long as endemic inequality and rampant injustice remain" (40). *Maquilápolis* is a greater commentary on neo-colonial injustice perpetuated by the Global North and the film explores this endemic inequality through the eyes of activists working toward environmental and social equality. Collaborating in the production of the documentary was an opportunity made available to Colonia Chilpancingo's promotoras that they pursued with the same vigour and intention that they applied to their political organisation. This collaboration was a practical mechanism that empowered their identity as activists. It also incited certain strategies in the documentary's production that better served the activists of Colonia Chilpancingo; the pitfalls of exclusive documentary productions which refuse collaboration with its subjects was clearly evident in *Tijuana Projection*. Subjective filmmaking was a crucial strategy used in *Maquilápolis* that prioritised the political project of Colonia Chilpancingo's promotoras. This representational strategy conveyed the specific tactics employed by the Chilpancingo collective which was most effective upon the documentary's distribution among other communities plagued by the same injustice. *Maquilápolis* was very clearly filmed for this audience with the objective of inspiring future mobilisation. The documentary illustrates the very potential of small-scale organisation that is able to inspire significant change. The promotoras of Colonia Chilpancingo seized this chance to strengthen their own collective and expand their reach to others. *Maquilápolis* was an extraordinary addition to the Chilpancingo activists' timeline of resistance that indicates another way to achieve unparalleled success in the face of powerful multinational elites.

Conclusion

The methods of activism employed by Colonia Chilpancingo's promotoras and the triumph that followed bears witness to what can be realised in the face of injustice. Their protest was long and arduous, however ultimately removed the Metales y Derivados site that was contaminating their community. Colonia Chilpancingo was confronted with one of the cruellest forms of violence. It was a slow but vicious attack than spanned over ten years and appeared in the form of toxic, hazardous waste that took the life away from their land and their children. However, it is important to focus on the lessons learned from the women who endured these ostensibly insurmountable circumstances. This thesis has shown that certain steps taken in a case of small-scale community protest are invaluable for achieving justice. More importantly, it has demonstrated that size does not determine success – it is the methods, the resources and the tireless dedication of activists that reveal the true potential of community resistance.

Three steps were identified as essential in this thesis for the Colonia Chilpancingo promotoras in their journey. The camaraderie built between Colonia Chilpancingo and San Diego's EHC presented the promotoras with resources that proved to be pivotal moments in their political organisation. Defying a turbulent US-Mexico state relationship, the unison provided vital tactics that brought the attention of the Metales y Derivados manufacturing site to the international attention of the media. The binational activism also fostered leadership in Colonia Chilpancingo with the SALTA training program and paved the way for the submission of the CEC Citizens Petition which formally recognised the maquiladora site as toxic and dangerous. An important development of the SALTA program was the inauguration of the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental – the second crucial step toward success discussed in this thesis. This collective legitimised their negotiations and elevated their status as activists in the eyes of the state. Most importantly, the collective possessed the revolutionary essence of large-scale activism

that led the promotoras to success just two years after its inception. This radical complexion was best captured in the documentary *Maquilápolis: A City of Factories* (Mexico 2006). The activists' participation in the curation, direction and distribution of this documentary formed their identity as Colonia Chilpancingo's promotoras and sent an important message to other communities along the border that they too can organise as they have.

The methods of activism employed by the Colonia Chilpancingo promotoras opens a window for further questioning; what can other communities learn from this case study? How can other small-scale protests emulate a similar trajectory of success that prevailed in Colonia Chilpancingo? As sites of environmental injustice continue to devastate different parts of the globe and the worlds' most vulnerable continue to bear the brunt of these consequences, these questions are now more important than ever. This case study demonstrates the interconnected nature of environmental issues and social inequality – environmental exploitation as it persists unchecked will continue to endanger and threaten the lives and wellbeing of individual people. As proven in this thesis, small-scale resistance can reverse this injustice and inspire large-scale change that prioritises the health of the land and the people. There are important lessons to be learned from the US-Mexico border and Colonia Chilpancingo certainly realised an important one.

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