THE POLITICS OF GARBAGE: MUNICIPAL SOLID WASTE IN OAXACA, MEXICO

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By
Sarah Anne Moore
Lexington, Kentucky

Co-Directors: Dr. John Paul Jones III, Professor of Geography and Dr. Susan M. Roberts, Professor of Geography

Lexington, Kentucky

2006

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This dissertation analyzes the politics of garbage in Oaxaca, Mexico. In particular, it explores the tactics used by a marginalized *colonia* near the dump to affect waste management and local development. This *colonia* provokes garbage crises by blocking the metropolitan area’s access to its dump. As a result, garbage builds up in the city and public officials are forced to negotiate with *colonia* residents. I argue that two prior processes are essential to the success of this strategy. First, the mid-sized city in southern Mexico implemented many new waste management practices during the latter half of the 20th century and the first few years of the 21st in order to produce an image of a clean and modern city for residents and tourists. While the city tried to modernize by increasing the level of sanitation, a concomitant increase in consumerism meant that it was impossible for this clean and modern city to be produced on the ground. Nevertheless, these
contradictory processes made cleanliness the marker of urban modernity. Therefore, garbage in the city can undermine the legitimacy of modern urban institutions, as it does in the case of the garbage crises. Second, a process of “modern” citizen-formation was underway wherein an association with garbage identified one as “outsider”. In this way, garbage crises are struggles over citizenship and belonging.

KEYWORDS: Solid Waste, Modernization, Mexico, Citizenship, Urban Political Ecology
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Chapter 1: Introduction

While much attention has been paid to the “garbage crisis” (Melosi 1993; Miller 2000; Melosi 2000; Rathje and Murphy 2001) in northern countries, especially the United States, less attention has been paid to the “politics of garbage” in the global south. Ironically, at the time that northern countries are dealing with the aftermath of decades of siting problems and costly and environmentally suspect municipal solid waste (MSW) technologies, countries like Mexico are trying to import these very same practices in an effort to “modernize” (Aguilar 2001). These trends have led to a multi-billion dollar waste management equipment and services market. As Table 1.1 shows, waste management equipment and services constitute a significant proportion of the total global environmental market. While the world-wide technology trade expands, though, garbage problems persist (United Nations 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.1 Global Environmental Market (US Billion$)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equipment Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste Management(^1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solid waste(^2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazardous(^3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD 2004

These problems persist, in part, because while countries in the global south are attempting to modernize waste management through the importation of technologies,

\(^1\) This is a subset of Equipment Total.
\(^2\) This is a subset of Services Total.
\(^3\) This is a subset of Services Total.
they are also confronted with significant changes in the quantities and qualities of the waste they have to manage. As consumption-based development projects proceed in these areas, per capita waste production increases. In the case of Mexico, for example, this means that people today produce twice as much garbage as they did 40 years ago (SEMARNAT 2003). At the same time the ratio of organic to inorganic waste has gone down (SEMARNAT 2003). This means that the waste-stream contains a smaller proportion of items that will decompose and more materials that will be a continuing burden on the disposal system because they do not break down naturally.

The changing nature and quantity of waste produced in the global south presents challenges beyond the sphere of waste management. The municipalities dealing with waste face a crisis of legitimacy if they are not able to keep their city clean. On the other hand, the need to eliminate waste from the city begs the question of disposal, one that is very difficult in many parts of the world. The negative environmental and public health effects produced by the open-air dumping common to the global south are distributed unevenly. This uneven distribution often becomes a point of contention between state agencies and local populations.

Beyond these difficulties, though, there is also the fact that many waste-related problems like these cannot be addressed by technology alone. That is to say that garbage and its management are also social, economic, and political issues (Hawkins and Muecke 2003; Stallybrass and White 1986; Stam 1999; Strasser 1999). This dissertation addresses the politics of garbage in Oaxaca, Mexico, by considering waste’s relationship to processes of modernization, urbanization, and the formation of citizen-subjects in the city. I argue that the modernizing city of Oaxaca experienced the contradictory processes
of modernization that produce both the need for ordered and clean urban spaces and a proliferation of waste in the city. These processes, combined with the disciplining of modern citizen subjects, produced the context in which a particular form of urban environmental protest (the creation of the garbage crises discussed below) could be effective. In the remainder of this chapter, I first discuss the context of the urban environment in Latin America in which this politics of garbage takes place. I then turn to the garbage crises that occur periodically in Oaxaca, Mexico. I follow this with some brief background on the city of Oaxaca. After these brief sections setting up the context of the problem, I outline the research questions, research methods, and data analysis. I end the chapter with an overview of the dissertation.

**Defining the urban environment**

Any discussion of environmental problems in the context of Latin American cities must begin with definitions of the terms ‘urban’ and ‘environment’. Rather than thinking of the city in terms of area – that is as a static, circumscribed place separate from ‘rural’ areas – it is useful to think of the urban as the result of a set of practices that creates what are identified as ‘urban’ landscapes. This more dynamic view focuses on the ways that both institutions and citizens make and remake urban areas continuously. Further, it is important to note that this making and remaking of the city is not separate from the making and remaking of rural areas. The two are tied by the exchange of resources, people, technologies, and environmental goods and bads, among other things. While most of this dissertation will deal with the activities of people and institutions who call the city their home, it must be noted that the flows of cities, particularly those of waste and water, often have a negative impact on surrounding areas and people.
In both the global north and south many types of ecological thinking concentrate on the conservation or preservation of what we call ‘nature’, often defined as pristine areas separate from human interference. Urban environmental movements, particularly those based on environmental justice, on the other hand, have sought to redefine the environment as, “where we live, work and play” (Novotny 2000). Given this definition, there are many urban ecologies. Urban gardening, either for subsistence purposes or to create community spaces, is one example of the relationship between urban spaces and nature. Urban greenspace, parks, and thoroughfares are also important parts of Latin American urban ecologies. Though these particular parts of the urban eco-scape are beyond the scope of this particular project, they are important factors in the constitution of urban environments.

This project concentrates on the flows of environmental resources and risks in Latin American cities. As Carlos Minc puts it, “[e]cology in the Third World begins with water, garbage, and sewage” (Roberts and Thanos 2003). All three issues are tied to the distribution of vital resources through the city or the elimination of wastes from the city. These processes of distribution and elimination are essential factors in the health of the populous, which has led observers to describe environmentalism in urban Latin America as, “the environmentalization of public health issues” (Roberts and Thanos. 2003 p. 99). Of course, such constituting forces as class, ethnicity, and gender influence access to and use of urban environmental resources as well as exposure to pollution. Some issues, like smog, can be termed relatively “democratic” because they affect people of diverse backgrounds in the same ways, though some people may have more choice in how to react to them. On the other hand, “water, sewer service, and garbage collection are
relatively less democratic and therefore, less often solved by the big municipalities” (Roberts and Thanos 2003 p.104).

According to recent research, there is no obvious link between population size, population growth rates or population densities of cities and their levels of urban environmental problems (Satterthwaite 1998 pp.70-71). Rather, the most reliable indicator of environmental problems in Latin American cities and other places in the global south is affluence. The production and accumulation of wealth in urban areas, along with a lack of comprehensive development planning, has had many environmentally damaging effects. While some cities are able to use their economic wealth to attack these externalities, others cannot. Because municipal governments are often burdened with the responsibility of environmental management in urban areas, their inability to solve such problems has huge implications for urban governance and livelihoods.

Responsibility for the urban environment

Many urban residents in Latin America feel that it is the responsibility of the municipal government to assure a clean and healthy living and working environment (Roberts and Thanos 2003). Historically, the city’s responsibility for the public health of citizens can be traced to earlier periods of modernization (Gonzalez Stephan 2003). In Mexico, this expectation is embedded in the historical relationship between urban centers and citizens’ rights. Those people, identified by the state as ‘citizens’, have entered into a contract, legally validated through the Constitution of 1917, with the municipal government, which is bound to them by a set of rights and obligations. While citizens participate in the production of the city through their everyday lives, it is the
responsibility of the city to provide the services necessary for the social reproduction of urban citizens. As McGrannahan and Songsore state:

> Many environmental services such as piped water, sewerage connections, electricity, and door to door garbage collection not only export pollution (from the household to the city) but also shift both the intellectual and practical burdens of environmental management for the household to the government or utility… (Satterthwaite 1998 p. 74).

This relationship between the city and the citizen rarely exists in its ideal form, but the obligations of the municipality to provide sanitation systems, potable water, and solid waste collection has been written into many city ordinances. It is also a part of constitutional law in many places, as well as the subject of newer environmental legislation at state and federal levels. However, the relative obligations of different levels of government as well as the availability of resources to meet those obligations are constantly shifting because of external and internal pressures.

Deregulation in many Latin American countries has left urban environmental problems exclusively in the hands of municipal entities. Many environmental problems, however, such as air or water pollution, cross these political lines. This leads to the potential for “joint irresponsibility” (Roberts and Thanos 2003 p.108) where no individual municipality is willing to attend to such collective environmental bads or to the provision of services to avoid these.

External pressure from international organizations such as the World Bank has led to pressure to ‘neoliberalize’ the economies (and ecologies) of Latin American countries. This has also meant shifts in the responsibilities of local, state, and federal governments and the private sector. Many of these new strategies for managing urban environments in
Latin America have engendered significant public opposition. The garbage crises described below are one example of this.

**Garbage Crises**

For over ten days in January 2001, some 2500 tons of trash – everything from plastic diapers and Coca-cola containers to banana peels and rotten meat – piled up on the streets of Oaxaca de Juárez (Oaxaca) and the surrounding area. Groups from *Colonia* (neighborhood) *Guillermo González Guardado* near the dump had blocked access to the site in protest of the city’s inability to prevent a large fire there. Behind this motivation, however, lay a series of broken accords between the *colonia* and city officials that included plans for the sorting of hazardous materials, the creation of a new landfill, the recovery and reforestation of the existing site, and the construction of a local health center. Whether the fire was started intentionally by *colonia* residents to attract attention to their cause, as some more cynical observers claimed, or whether it resulted naturally (e.g., from combustible materials deposited there), was never determined. What is known, however, is that the event rekindled an underlying controversy over the seemingly intractable problem of waste disposal in the growing city.

This case presents one example of environmental justice (EJ) issues in the global south. Rather than being seen as purely technical issues, the location of waste disposal and processing facilities is acknowledged as the result of complex socio-spatial practices that simultaneously produce both waste and marginalization. Such insights have not only broadened notions of justice, risk, value and the environment, but have also led to a re-examination (among academics, policy makers, and activists alike) of what it means to practice “politics”.
Here, I argue that the same historical and spatial processes that “marginalize” such communities can also provide the political leverage necessary to achieve their local development goals. It is their location, both physical and social, that makes it possible for residents of Guillermo González Guardado to block the flow of municipal trash and so reveal it to visitors, residents, and politicians. The ability to make visible the abject product of capitalist development – garbage – gives them unique power while at the same time marking them as the “other” to “normal” urban citizens. This case, therefore, presents a reworking of traditional concepts of environmental justice by examining the contradictory processes of marginalization and political activism particular to the global south.

The Context of Oaxaca

Ciudad de Oaxaca de Juárez (Oaxaca) is, in many key respects, an exemplar for studying the politics of MSW in the global south. The rapidly growing urban area is home to 500,000 people. The pace of growth and its haphazard nature has meant that municipal services are not well planned or distributed, while land and housing are scarce commodities (Murphy and Stepick 1991). The metropolitan statistical area of Oaxaca produces about 650 tons of garbage a day. This is disposed of in the open-air dump located in Zaachila, a municipio approximately 11 kilometers south of Oaxaca’s central district. There is no waste treatment and municipal solid waste, medical waste, and hazardous waste are all dumped there.

Oaxaca’s garbage “crises” produce a number of effects. Local newspapers cover each blockade from beginning to end, provoking regular discussions of municipal solid waste management in general. The focus on MSW management, in turn, has highlighted
divisions between the central city and its suburbs in terms of governance and responsibility. Finally, broader questions about ecology, human health, and urban development have entered public discourse through renewed attention received by various environmental “experts”. As a first reaction, the city of Oaxaca tried to find another place for its trash. However, none of the other surrounding townships were willing to sell land to the city for another dump; they noted that such a solution would only relocate the problem (Velez Ascencio 2001). Some residents argued that the garbage problem undermined the city’s authority and showed that power should be more decentralized (Ramales 2001). The fact that the city allowed garbage to pile up in the street left officials open to accusations of disinterest and neglect by citizens concerned about Oaxaca’s environmental and human health and the possible negative impression on tourists (Sumano 2001; Jarquin 2001; Rivas 2001). These concerns were also voiced by environmentalists, who trace the problem to a lack of ecological conscience and an increase in consumerism (Rivas 2001; Leon and Osorio 2001).

Research Questions

It is clear then, that the politics of garbage in Oaxaca are about more than garbage management. They are also about the nature of urban modernization and the relationship of city residents to it. Struggles over the management of MSW are thus struggles over the “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1996). That is, they are contests over the production of urban space and the construction of urban belonging. Given that, this dissertation seeks to discover how and to what effect garbage became a site of contestation through which the right to the city is determined. This larger question is pursued through two main sub-questions: 1) What relationship between Oaxaca City and garbage emerged through the
imposition of “modern” waste management ideas and practices through the 20th century? and 2) How, when and with what effects does the presence or absence of waste mark and produce the modern citizen-subject and its other?

Research Methods and Data Analysis

The above questions were pursued through archival investigation, interviews and surveys. Most of the archival materials were collected at the Hemeroteca Pública Néstor Sánchez (Néstor Sánchez Public Archives) in Oaxaca. I reviewed newspaper articles dealing with garbage and garbage management from 1950 to 2005. I also collected legal documents and state and municipal planning documents from the public archives, the public library, and government officials. These documents all contributed to my understanding of the historical and contemporary waste management practices, issues, and politics in the city of Oaxaca. They also provided the basis for analyzing the representations of garbage, urban citizens, and outsiders.

Interviews were conducted with federal, state, and municipal officials involved in waste management, the members of Guillermo González Guardado’s neighborhood committee and the leaders of three environmental organizations active in waste management issues. These semi-structured interviews took place in the interviewees’ places of employment or their homes and lasted an average of one hour each. Specifically, the government officials I spoke with were the local director of environmental education and the local head of environmental management of the federal agency SEMARNAT (Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources), the Councilors of Ecology for both the city of Oaxaca and the village of Zaachila, the Secretary of Ecology of Zaachila, the General
Coordinator of Urban Administration and Municipal Services of Oaxaca City and the surrounding areas, and the Director of Waste Management Systems of Urban Administration and Municipal Services of Oaxaca. The only government entity directly involved in waste management that refused to talk to me was the head of the State Institute of Ecology. I had multiple interviews with the president, secretary, treasurer, and other members of the neighborhood committee in Guillermo González Guardado. Some of these interviews were conducted individually, others in larger groups. They also included tours of the colonia and the municipal dump. I also interviewed the leaders of three environmental organizations: the Institute of Society and Nature of Oaxaca (INSO), Citizens’ Alternative, and a smaller unnamed organization of environmental educators. Of these, INSO is the largest and the most well-established. Both Citizens’ Alternative and the environmental educators group are newer, though the former is larger and more formalized than the latter.

Survey data were collected in September, October, and November of 2004. I drafted the surveys based on my knowledge of issues in municipal solid waste management in the area. The local university students who conducted the surveys helped to shape their final form. Surveyed neighborhoods were selected on the based on consultation with local experts. The goal was to select neighborhoods of different income levels and locations with respect to both the central city and the garbage dump. The colonias included in the survey ranged from the relatively high income well-established areas of Colonia Reforma and El Centro to more peripheral, lower income areas (Xoxocotlan, San Martín Mexicapan). The community of Guillermo González Guardado,

\[^4\] Because colonia level income data is not available through government census data, I relied on local expertise in selecting the colonias that would be surveyed.
located a mile west of the dump, on the access road was also surveyed, along with the
center of the municipality of Zaachila, of which it is part. A total of 361 surveys were
collected and analyzed. Most of the surveys were conducted orally, with the surveyor
taking extensive notes on the responses. Time taken to complete the surveys ranged from
15 minutes to 45 minutes or more, depending on the respondent’s interest in the subject.

Archival and interview data and open-ended survey responses were analyzed
using discourse analysis, paying careful attention to the development of narratives on
urban space, modernization, garbage, and citizen-subjects. The following tropes (Roe
1994; see also Hajer 1995), identified in my preliminary research, were traced: 1) spatial
order vs. disorder, 2) cleanliness vs. filth, 3) traditional vs. modern 4) center vs.
periphery, and 5) insider vs. outsider. While not taking these dichotomies as absolute
distinctions, I investigated their rhetorical power and material effects in MSW
management and urban politics. These tropes, which circulate around the garbage
“crises,” are unevenly incorporated into public imaginaries and representations of
garbage, the city and the citizenry, as well as daily practices of waste management.

Survey data were also descriptively summarized. Responses were coded as
ordinal variables for several questions and their tabular distributions were examined the
relative popularity of possible responses. Tables were produced for all respondents and
for the three categories of central city, outer city, and Zaachila. In these cases, Colonia
Reforma and El Centro were categorized as central city, Xoxocotlan and San Martín
Mexicapan were categorized as outer city, while the category of Zaachila refers to both
the central area and Guillermo González Guardado.
Overview of the Dissertation

Following this introduction, the dissertation is divided into five chapters. In Chapter Two, I explore relevant academic literature out of which a particular analysis of the politics of garbage emerges. Here I argue, with Beck, that the notion of risk (and therefore of waste as risk) should be considered historically and spatially contingent. Moreover, many of the risks faced by the world today are the products of certain processes of modernization that have led to effects beyond what could have been imagined. Risks are also the consequence of the technologies of order employed by nation-states. For this reason, their existence challenges the legitimacy of state institutions designed to contain them and leads to a new type of politics based on struggles over the distribution of environmental bads (Beck 1999). The politics surrounding the distribution of risks is at the center of environmental justice activism and research. Following Laura Pulido, I argue that the most compelling studies in the field are those that interrogate the meaning of marginalization by considering it a social relation and by examining the historical and spatial process that produce it and the uneven distribution of environmental risks. As subaltern scholars of modernity note, these processes are also what produce the subjects of modernity. Given this, I then review some of the historical developments that have shaped Mexican citizenship. As this process of citizen formation took place mostly through urban space, I argue that a Lefebvrian approach is useful in understanding the relationship between waste management, the production of the city of Oaxaca, and the production of citizens and others.
Modern notions of the city require the expulsion of waste from urban areas and its simultaneous separation from citizens. Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection is instructive in analyzing the significance of the threat waste poses to the integrity of the social body and to individual identities. This threat is especially pertinent in the context of a “modernizing” city like Oaxaca, where order and cleanliness are the markers of civility. Building on this, I then trace (with González Stephan) the disciplining of cities and citizen bodies in Latin America through discourses and practices of hygienization and sanitation. Finally, I argue that the politics of garbage can be considered in terms of the new politics of social movements explored by Alvarez et al. (1998).

In Chapter Three I set the context in which these politics of garbage developed by discussing the history of the city itself. First, I discuss the general context of waste management in Mexico and then the specifics of the Oaxaca case. Next, I consider the history of urbanization in Oaxaca from colonial times to the present, arguing that the city’s history has produced a segregated population. The uneven relationship between the state of Oaxaca and the rest of Mexico for a long part of its history produced certain types of isolation in the state. The more recent integration of Oaxaca during the period of neoliberal reform has also had negative consequences. After establishing the broad historical context in which this study takes place, I then discuss the phenomenon of squatter settlements in Oaxaca and their role in urban development. Finally, I briefly discuss the history of the area around the dump and of the colonia Guillermo González Guardado.

Chapter Four describes the discursive and material practices deployed by the municipal government of Oaxaca in the management of waste in the city during the
second half of the 20th century. I argue that two contradictory trends emerge. On the one hand, city officials increasingly engage in the discursive production of Oaxaca as a clean and modern city. On the other hand, the waste management practices the city employed were increasingly inadequate to producing this clean and modern city on the ground. The argument proceeds historically. During the first period, from 1950 to 1970, city officials industrialized waste management by importing new technologies and formalizing its relationship with laborers. In the 1980s, the city took a number of steps toward the “modernization” of waste management. It built a mechanical waste sorter (processadora), installed transfer stations and began to use a new dump sited in the municipio of Zaachila. None of these had the impact on waste management that the city intended. The processadora never functioned and was soon closed down. The transfer stations became foci of contamination in the city about which citizens complained. The dump, though adequate at the time, eventually overflowed and became a point of contestation.

In the 1990s municipal officials became increasingly reliant on the private sector for waste management (though formal privatization was never accomplished). The cooperation of businesses and individuals in the purification of the city was a popular theme. At the same time, the municipality formalized its ownership of the new dump in Zaachila thanks to revisions to land tenure laws established in the Constitution of 1917. During the last several years, the city has continued to concentrate on improving collection and the “efficiency” of its waste management system, but my survey data indicates that a majority of residents still consider garbage to be the main environmental problem in the city and most still do not consider Oaxaca a clean city. This illustrates the
city’s inability, despite its modernization efforts, to produce a clean and modern city on the ground.

In Chapter Five I shift the focus of my analysis from the city to the citizen-subject. Specifically, I ask how, when, and to what effect citizenship and belonging is mediated through one’s proximity to garbage. The proper citizen subject is one who can separate her or himself from garbage. Those who cannot perform that separation, however, are often marked as “others” and represented as dangerous outsiders. In this chapter, I first briefly discuss the various possible meanings of garbage. I next discuss its contemporary, agreed upon status as the abject product of development that threatens the city and its citizens. I then examine the relationship of the proper, modern citizen-subject to waste as it is described by government officials and environmentalists. Next, I discuss various groups associated with waste in the city and how that association taints them. Of these groups, the two most important are the scavengers and the people who live around the dump. While portrayals of scavengers are complex, they are still based in a discourse that separates them from the modern clean citizen. Representations of the *colonia* residents are also complex, but they have a more contentious relationship with city officials and with other residents of the city. Their tactic of blocking the city’s access to the dump, forcing garbage to pile up in the center, is effective in making the city meet some of their development goals. In that sense, the tactic is politically useful. At the same time, however, their identity as abject others persists in the way that citizens and officials perceive and describe their behavior.

In Chapter Six I summarize the main points of the previous chapters. I then present some broader conclusions about the relationship between the politics of garbage
and the processes of modernization and abjection. In brief, I argue that this case illustrates the advantages of Beck’s concept of reflexive modernization in understanding the contradictory trends of ordering the city and the proliferation of municipal solid waste. Further, the politics of garbage can be thought of as what Beck calls “subpolitics”, in that they undermine the legitimacy of the modern institutions that are supposed to control the risk of waste. This needs to be considered alongside Kristeva’s notions of the abject and abjection to better understand how modern citizen-subjects are produced in relation to waste.
Chapter 2: The Politics of Garbage

This chapter will establish the definition of the politics of garbage on which the following chapters will be based. Because waste politics usually emerge from the real or perceived threat to human and environmental health posed by garbage, I first consider the nature of these risks. I then turn to work on environmental justice to highlight arguments about the distribution of these risks and the marginalization of certain groups. After a consideration of the historical creation of marginal subjects in Mexico, I consider the relationship between cities, garbage, and citizens. I conclude by arguing for a new politics of garbage based on an understanding of this relationship and its importance in Latin America.

The Risk of Waste

Waste is commonly treated as a risk to human health and the environment (Adamson et al 2002; Field 1998; Lee 2002; Novotny 1998; Westra and Lawson 2001). Waste as risk, however, should be considered a dynamic and historically contingent category. As Ulrich Beck argues, risks must be understood as “socially constructed and produced ‘quasi-subjects’” or as a “powerful uncontrollable ‘actor’ that delegitimates and destabilizes state institutions with responsibilities for pollution control, in particular, and public safety, in general” (1999 p. 150). Contemporary risks are the result of the logics of a particular type of modernity/modernization:

In their (difficult to localize) early stages, risks and risk perception are unintended consequences of the logic of control which dominates modernity. Politically and sociologically modernity is a project of social and technological control by the nation-state. Above all others it was Talcott Parsons who conceptualized modern society as an enterprise for constructing order and control. In this
way, consequences – risks – are generated that call this very assertion of control by the nation-state into question… (Beck 1999 p.139).

For Beck, the need to manage risks and the emergence of a world risk society are related to a process of reflexive modernization whereby the successes of the first modernity are leading to social and ecological problems beyond what was previously imaginable. This leads not only to new technological challenges, but also to the emergence of a new type of “subpolitics”:

Reflexive modernization is the age of uncertainty and ambivalence, which combines the constant threat of disasters on an entirely new scale with the possibility and necessity to reinvent our political institutions and invent new ways of conducting politics at social “sites” that we previously considered unpolitical (Beck 1999 p.93).

The fact that risks have important political and health effects is a part of why contests over the distribution of the goods produced by industrial society are being subsumed by contests over the distributions of bads (Beck 1999 p.73). Given these arguments, it becomes clear that not only “risks” but also the nature of environmental politics must be reconsidered. In a similar analysis, Hajer (1995) asserts that environmental politics should be seen as “a site where the established institutions of industrial society are put to the test” (p.39).

The notions of risk and environmental politics in Beck’s formulation are helpful in analyzing the politics of garbage. Here garbage, as a product of a certain type of development, has overflowed our abilities to dispose of it, endangering environmental and public health. At the same time, the inability of modern state institutions to deal adequately with waste is undermining their authority. Garbage as a quasi-object, as an actor, produces serious social, economic, environmental and political effects.
Unfortunately, the difference between those who create risks, those who benefit from them, and those who are victimized by them is largely glossed over in Beck’s attempt to construct a meta-theory of reflexive modernization. On the other hand, environmental justice (EJ), while having much in common with Beck’s work on the risk society, concentrates more specifically on the distribution of risks (Harvey 1996; Pulido 2000, 1996; Liu 2000; Fischer and Black 1995; Stebbins 1992; Gottlieb 1993; Szasz 1994; Bullard 1993; Lee 2002; Heiman 1996; Hofrichter 1993; Faber 1998; Di Chiro 1998). In the next section, I will discuss EJ research and its importance for this project.

Environmental Justice

Most scholars locate the beginning of the environmental justice movement in the United States during the anti-toxics movement of the 1970’s. The anti-toxics movement was effective in gaining media recognition, an important step to further public support and eventual legislative attention (Allan et al 2000; Szasz 1994). More than this, the experiences of the leaders of these anti-toxics movements were transformed into “populist myths” (Stott and Sullivan 2000 p.3) and became the basis for further organization (Hofrichter 1993). Famous cases like Love Canal publicized ineffective toxic waste disposal practices at a time when the hazards of many popular chemicals had already been established by scientists like Rachel Carson (1962). While Carson’s particular emphases differed from those of the anti-toxics activists, she shared many of their basic critiques of how hazardous wastes were being (mis)managed (Stott and Sullivan 2000).

When the United Church of Christ Commission on Racial Justice released its report, Toxic Waste and Race in the United States, in 1987, it added a new dimension to
the activists’ struggle by demonstrating the spatial correlation between hazardous waste facilities and communities of color. This prompted a slew of new academic work on environmental justice issues (Bullard 1993; Bowen et al. 1995). Mapping the overlap between certain hazardous materials and/or land uses with poor and minority communities was and remains a compelling approach to addressing the uneven and unjust distribution of environmental bads in a society.

The specific spatial nature of the debate, though, prevented researchers from moving quickly beyond two major questions (Pulido 1996, 2000). The first of these was whether hazardous facilities correlated more strongly with race or with class. The second one was whether hazardous land uses preceded or followed the establishment of the marginalized community. The static notions of space and social relations implied in both of these questions distracted attention from the broader processes that produce marginality. As Laura Pulido explains:

In addition to a general absence of solid historiography, there is a tendency to treat the two primary categories of analysis within the environmental racism literature, ‘race’ and ‘class’ as static categories, instead of social relations; although this allows researchers to operationalize questions concerning, ‘which came first’ and to compare the significance of race and class in creating inequitable patterns, it does so only by ignoring the historical and spatial contingency of racial categories and the dynamic complexity of urban socio-spatial patterns (Pulido et al 1996 p.421).

Pulido argues that more rigorous and compelling work in environmental justice and social science more generally must interrogate the categories, not only through which we perform our daily activities, but also through which we conduct research, act politically, and form policy. This argument orients EJ toward an analysis of the historical
socio-spatial processes that produce marginalized populations and that create and unevenly distribute environmental risks.

Like Beck, many environmental justice scholars see the politics of waste as a reaction to certain processes of modernization that are prevalent in “developed countries” (Faber and O’Connor 1993; Field 1998; Fischer 1995; Harvey 1996; Heiman 1996). For this reason, EJ has concentrated mostly on what is alternately called the “industrialized world”, the “global north”, “western civilization”, etc.; that is, those places that are seen as “modernized” (or even postmodern). The underlying assumption that only parts of the world are “modern”, however, presents a narrow picture of the processes of political, environmental, and economic change that have created the very differences between societies that the assumption seeks to explain. That is to say that the division of the world into the premodern and modern identifies places along a scale of progressive modernity, while at the same time it obscures the fact that it is the historical and spatial relationships between places that have produced gross inequalities on a global scale. Moreover, it tends to replace the static notions of space and identity that Pulido critiqued with a teleological model of development and resistance. As is argued by post-colonial and subaltern theorists in Anglo, Latin American, and South Asian contexts, a world-system in which some places benefit from the exploitation of other places, and wherein such inequality is explained through temporal distinctions (those that are “behind” have the opportunity to progress to modernity) is the legacy of processes of colonialism and globalization (Dussel 2003; Mendieta and Lange-Churión 2001; Mignolo 2001). These scholars view modernization as heterogeneous, uneven, and contingent rather than as a teleological advancement towards some finite point of development. For the work presented here, this
means that while struggles over environmental justice in the context of Mexico may differ from those in the global north, they are equally a product of the historical socio-spatial processes that shaped the modern world. The notion of coevalness (Fabian 1983), therefore, is essential to the understanding of the politics and policies that shape municipal solid waste practices. Rather than envisioning the global south as backward in a telos of urban development, it is necessary to understand how and why struggles over environmental justice are different in the rapidly growing cities of the global south while at the same time acknowledging that failed waste management schemes in such places are often the result of technologies, practices, norms and even urban imaginaries directly or indirectly transferred from the global north.

Beck argues that it is important to “situate the non-Western world firmly within the ambit of a second [reflexive] modernity, rather than that of tradition” because it “allows a pluralization of modernity” by “open[ing] up space for the conceptualization of divergent trajectories of modernities in different parts of the world” (Beck 1999 p.3). This pluralization of modernity is one way to address the problem of “coevalness” referred to above. In a world risk society, everyone is part of a second, reflexive modernity. On the other hand, Castro-Gómez calls for an enhanced understanding of modernity as a practice that constitutes modern subjects. While Beck is more interested in how reflexive modernization works at a global level to unify opposition to the unintended consequences of the first modernity, Castro-Gómez interrogates the discourses and practices that produce the uneven terrain of insider and outsider on which any concept of modernity relies.
Following Foucault, Castro-Gómez argues that a new and productive trend in Latin American philosophy is to approach the present as dependent on historical factors and therefore radically particular (Castro-Gómez 2003 p.70). From there, he argues that the goal of “Latin American philosophy as critical ontology of the present” should be to foreground “the historical contingencies and the strategies of power that configured its humanistic claims to universal validity” and to thereby “reveal the technologies of domination that aided in its fabrication, as well as the different forms in which such a truth constitutes our contemporary subjectivity” (Castro-Gómez 2003 p.70, his emphasis). This indicates at least two different tasks: 1) to contemplate the present as a product of historical contingencies so that the purpose of philosophy, “is no longer to seek truth as such, but to seek the political economy of the truth, according to how the rules that configure its discourses appear and disappear” (Castro-Gómez 2003 p.70, his emphasis) and 2) to question modern institutions that establish the normative framework in which the modern subject lives. This is important because, “the disciplinary regimentation of what it means to be a good citizen clearly establishes a frontier between those ‘within’ and those ‘outside of’ modernity” (Castro-Gómez 2003 p.70-71). This shapes the question of the relationship between modernity and Latin America so that rather than asking whether the region is premodern, modern, or postmodern, the relevant question becomes, “through which practices have we been invented as collective agents (Latin Americans, Colombians, Mexicans, Brazilians, etc.) who ‘enter’ or ‘exit from’ something called ‘modernity’” (Castro-Gómez 2003 p.73).

Castro-Gómez’s call to investigate the processes through which the modern subject is constituted can be related to Pulido’s insistence on an interrogation of the
categories on which environmental justice research (and activism) is based. Rather than consider the marginal position of some groups a static and natural phenomenon, it is possible to trace the processes of modernization that produced belonging and alienation. In the next section I will consider some arguments about the practices that have produced “collective agents” subject to the processes of development and modernization in Mexico.

Subjects of Development

María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo argues in The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development (2003) that the modern mestizo identity of Mexico was built on a “production and reproduction of Indian difference” that was central to the development of a proletariat that would propel Mexico into modernity (Saldaña-Portillo 2003 p.204). Here, as in Bonfil Batalla’s (1996) example of Mexico profundo, the Indian became the signifier of a lack of modernity. This process of production and reproduction began with colonization and continues today. Like Bonfil Batalla, Saldaña-Portillo argues that the Mexican revolution between 1910 and 1917 was an important period in the formation of a mestizo identity. While, as Bonfil Batalla suggests, the Indian was an important symbol for revolutionaries because “Indian” connoted nationalism and populist goals, “Indianness” was also a threat to a revolutionary society (Bonfil Batalla 1996). The goal of a new indigenismo, therefore, was to “inoculate the modern nation, to prevent the nation of minority rule from becoming Indianized by the majority” (Saldaña-Portillo2003 p.212). The relationship between indigenismo and mestizaje is important:
Indigenismo glorifies Indian difference as a cultural formation. But it is mestizaje that represents political citizenship, as mestizos are the revolution’s architects in every sense. Indians may be Mexico’s ideal ancestors, but mestizos are Mexico’s ideal citizens (Saldaña-Portillo 2003, 212).

This contrast between citizens and non-citizens has continued through various 20th century development projects. From the 1940s to the early 1980s, Mexico pursued import substitution industrialization (ISI), emphasizing the development of manufacturing industries and increasing the pace of the shift to industrial, rather than subsistence, agriculture. In the early 1980s, however, President Salinas de Gotari changed Mexico’s focus from the inward-looking ISI policies to outward-looking neoliberal ones. This shift, Saldaña-Portillo argues, was accompanied by changing modes of citizenship. The shift from an ISI paradigm to a neoliberal one required that the “social contract” that had existed between the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) state and the peasantry since agrarian reforms under Lázaro Cárdenas (1936-1940) be broken:

In the contrast between the revitalizing of indigenismo policy and the shutting down of economic and political options for peasants, the Salinas administration imagined that it was possible to eliminate the peasantry as an economic formation while maintaining indigenous peoples as a cultural formation. However, colonial and post colonial regimes of subjection…have precisely articulated economic processes with cultural formations in the production and reproduction of Indian difference….Salinismo’s contrasting policies reveal that the PRI’s corporatist state-client relations have historically been produced on an artificial division between economic identity and ethnic identity, between political citizenship and cultural citizenship in the nation (Saldaña-Portillo 2003 p.219).

The “popular classes” in Mexico were thus separated from any notion of ‘Indianness’ and indigenous populations were relegated once again to the status of
incurably backward. What this construction of the modern versus the traditional ignores is the way in which all Latin Americans were made into ‘subjects’ of development through the very modernization project that they espouse. Saldaña-Portillo (2003) makes this point very clearly when she traces what she calls two “modalities’ of developmentalism. The first is the idea that societies move through progressive stages. The second is the idea that this movement requires “free, mature, fully conscious, self-determining individual subjects” (Saldaña-Portillo 2003 p.6). These subjects must fit particular goals of modernizing processes:

[T]he discourse of development requires an epochal change in its subject. It requires the subject to become an agent of transformation in his own right, one who is highly ethical, mobile, progressive, risk-taking, and masculinist, regardless of whether the agent/object of a development strategy is a man or a woman, an adult or a child (Saldaña-Portillo 2003 p.6).

Saldana-Portillo’s argument is that these notions of developmentalism were as much a part of revolutionary movements as they were of the project of modernization. Therefore, radical movements and politics were inscribed with the same model of subjectivity as development projects, a fact that limits their effectiveness for transformation (see also Esteva and Prakash 1998). While this is a provocative and interesting claim, her analysis of the subject of (under) development is the relevant argument here.

Development as a project, as the heir of the civilizing mission of colonialism, is often traced to Truman (see also Escobar 1995). Saldaña-Portillo argues that Truman’s inaugural speech focused this project on individuated subjectivities rather than nation-states (2003 p.24). His Point Four Program made the national citizen the target of aid:
“Its aid was directed at constructing appropriate subjects for national development…Because its development was ideological more than economic, because its addressees were individual subjects more that national economies, the Point Four Program…made individuals available for development” (Saldaña-Portillo2003 p.25).

This focus was continued by subsequent administrations. An equally important shift was occurring in academic views of development, from Keynesian interpretations of economic processes to modernization theories like that proposed by W.W. Rostow in his *Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. These and other texts “displaced the scene of [development’s] emergence onto the terrain of attitudes held by national citizens, of choices made by national societies” (Saldaña-Portillo 2003 p.27).

That is to say, proper development required proper cultural conditions, including proper subjects in order to be successful. Truman and others had already established the existence of “modern” and “premodern”, “developed” and “underdeveloped” countries and subjects, and modernization theory sought to explain how the underdeveloped could “follow in the path” of the developed (Saldaña-Portillo 2003 p.27). In this way, development becomes an “extension” of the autonomous and self-conscious subject. Therefore, “the imperative of development is also a regime of ‘subjection’...aimed at making ‘underdeveloped’ populations available to capital as never before” (Saldaña-Portillo 2003 p.31). Rather than social Darwinism, “we have a model of development in which modernity was determined by one’s proximity to this subject…At the opposite end of the continuum of equally human subjects was the rule-bound, doctrine-led…profligate, emasculated, clannish subject of the ‘underdeveloped’ traditional societies” (Saldaña-Portillo 2003 p.42). According to Saldaña-Portillo, Rostow emphasized progress as a
matter of “individuated and collective choice outside of geopolitical or economic constraints: the choice of embracing technology…the choice of shedding feudal mind-sets…the choice to be independent…” (Saldaña-Portillo 2003 p.43). This set of choices gives the appearance that the subject is responsible for ensuring his and his country’s development, thereby denying the historical processes that created situations of unequal economic and power relations. In Latin America, this process of subjection often took place through the production of an ordered urban center, as discussed in the following section.

The Production of Urban Space

Since colonial times, the center of the disciplining of modern Latin American subjects has been the city. Indeed, as Angel Rama (1996) explains, the Latin American city itself was an exercise in ordering. During the 19th century, Latin American elites took up the European bourgeoisie belief in enlightenment notions of progress through which they “adapted themselves to a frankly rationalizing vision of an urban future, one that ordained a planned and repetitive urban landscape and also required its inhabitants to be organized to meet increasingly stringent requirements of colonization, administration, commerce, defense and religion” (Rama 1996 p.4). The key word in this vision was “order” as shown in the instructions imparted by the Spanish Crown in 1513. Rama highlights point number seven, which reads as follows:

Having ascertained what things are necessary for the settlements and having chosen the site most advantageous and abundantly provided with all things necessary to those who will settle therein, distribute town lots for the construction of houses, in orderly fashion, according to the quality of the recipients, so that, once constructed, the town will appear well-ordered as regards the space designated for the central plaza, the location of the church, and the
placement of the streets; because where such orders are given from the outset, orderly results will follow without undue cost or effort and in other places order will never be achieved (1996 p.5).

Rama argues that the process of colonization that took place mostly through these highly ordered cities, “triumphantly imposed its cities on a vast and unknown hinterland, certifying and reiterating the Greek conception that contrasted the civilized inhabitants of the polis to the barbarous denizens of the countryside” (Rama 1996 p.6). This process of city-led modernization in Latin America continues into the present. 5 Such an ordering of the city reflects what Castro-Gómez calls an “ideal of synthesis” between science, economic growth, and aesthetic development, which was based on the idea that there was a “rational order” that would be able to “guarantee the indissoluble unity between the true, the good and the beautiful” (Castro-Gómez 2001 p.139).

Like Timothy Mitchell’s argument in Colonizing Egypt, this urban order does not “appear as a fixed correspondence between material objects and the concepts they represent” (Mitchell 1988 p.173). As Mitchell explains, “Rather, order occurs as a play of correspondence and difference between things, or perhaps better, between forces…” (Mitchell 1988 p.173). An understanding of urban order here, then, requires an approach to space that recognizes the dynamism of social relations. Lefebvre’s concept of the production of space, particularly urban space, provides direction here. For Lefebvre, contemporary places are produced through the triad of representations of space, representational spaces, and spatial practices; alternatively, these are referred to as 5

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5 In Mexico it was briefly interrupted by agrarian development projects and forms of indigenismo in the late 19th and early 20th century.
conceived, lived and perceived space. While *The Production of Space* is a muddled and contradictory text, these notions have provided a useful heuristic or point of departure for many geographers (Soja 1996; McCann 1999; Merrifield 1993; for a critique of the use of Lefebvrian geography, see Unwin 2000).

In Lefebvre’s schema, representations of space or conceived spaces correspond to the abstract conceptual spaces of planners and bureaucrats. Representational (lived) space is the space through which life is experienced by people in their day to day lives. It is “space experienced through the complex symbols of its inhabitants and users” (Lefebvre 1991, p.33). Spatial practices are the everyday activities of life through which each society “secretes” its own space. These three moments are trialistically related (Soja 1996) and together produce the complex set of socio-spatial relations that is urban space. Lefebvre uses the concept of the city as “oeuvre” to emphasize that it is made through such “acts and actions” (Lefebvre 1996, p.103).

In terms of the politics of garbage, it is important to note that there is indeed a difference in the spatial imaginaries of the parties involved. City managers often deal exclusively in abstract terms, producing representations of space that deny the existence of waste in their city. This is engaged in and read by citizens, who receive contradictory signs about the existence and role of garbage in their daily lives. Spatial practices around garbage include efforts to exclude it from both public and private domains, and the recouping of garbage as a valuable commodity. I argue that the way in which one represents, experiences, and handles waste is an important node in the production of citizen-subjects, who, based on this, struggle over the “rights to the city” (Lefebvre 1996;
Mitchell 2003). Therefore, struggles over the management of municipal solid waste (MSW), the daily practices associated with it, and the meaning of garbage itself are about belonging and alienation, a point taken up in the next section.

**Garbage and the citizen-subject**

A progressive notion of environmental justice must avoid a simple mapping of particular identities onto certain spaces. The question becomes, then: “how exactly certain spaces and identities come to be equated” (Natter and Jones III 1997 p.152). What is at issue here is the nature of difference and differential power relations through (urban) space. Traditional views of urban belonging and power relations often focus on citizenship as a static category from which certain groups are excluded. In contrast, it is useful to view “citizens” and “others” as “internally, not externally related categories” (Isin 2002 p.24). Engin Isin argues for such a view with his extension of the concept of the “city as difference machine” (Isin 2002). Here he argues for a relational view of citizenship based on the “logics of alterity” (Isin 2002 p.24). These logics of alterity, “assume overlapping, fluid, contingent, dynamic, and reversible boundaries and positions, where agents engage in solidaristic strategies such as recognition and affiliation, agonistic strategies such as domination and authorization, or alienating strategies such as disbarment across various positions within social space” (Isin 2002 p.30). Following Foucault, Isin argues that citizenship is related to governmentality as the conduct of conduct.7

While domination, authority, and differentiation, obedience and opposition are implicated in each other in orientations

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6 To quote Lefebvre, “The right to the city cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life (1996 p.158, my emphasis).

7 See also *The Foucault Effect* for more on this definition of ‘governmentality’.
toward the other, these are often interpreted by members in other terms, such as good versus evil, virtue versus vice, black versus white, inferior versus superior, healthy versus unhealthy …. [Citizenship is] that kind of identity within a city or state that certain agents constitute as virtuous, good, righteous, and superior, and differentiate it from strangers, outsiders and aliens who they constitute as their alterity via various solidaristic, agonistic, and alienating strategies and technologies…. Thus, citizenship at any given moment and space cannot be defined without investigating strategies and technologies as modes of being political that implicate beings in solidaristic, agonistic, and alienating orientations of being political, constituting them as citizens, strangers, outsiders, and aliens. Ways of being political combine these modes as orientations through which beings are constituted as citizens, strangers, outsiders, or aliens (Isin 2002 pp33-36).

This means that, “[b]eing political is that moment when the naturalness of the dominant virtues is called into question and their arbitrariness revealed” (Isin 2002 p.275). For Isin, the main space of this politics of citizenship is the city:

The city is neither a background to these struggles against which groups wager, nor is it a foreground for which groups struggle for domination. The city is the battleground through which groups define their identities, stake their claims, wage their battles, and articulate citizenship rights and obligations. The city as an object of experience emerges out of these practices and has neither the unity, nor the cohesion, nor the shape that has been attributed to it. The city as a difference machine relentlessly provokes, differentiates, positions, mobilizes, oppresses, liberates. Being political arises qua the city and there is no being political outside the machine (p.49-50).

The city is therefore a space of liberty for citizens, but also of discipline for non-citizens. In this he agrees with Lefebvre who he quotes, “the right to the oeuvre, to participation and appropriation…are implied in the right to the city” (Lefebvre quoted in Isin 2000 p.14). In The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space (2003), Don Mitchell argues that this right to the city is “always contested, always only
proven in practice, never, that is, guaranteed in the abstract. The right to the city and social justice can only be advanced through struggle” (Mitchell 2003 p.5).

In garbage politics one’s right to the city is affected not only by racial or class markers, but also by one’s proximity to waste (which is not, of course, unrelated to race, class, power, etc). A physical or metaphorical link to waste marks a group as ‘outside’ the civilized space of society (Gandy 1994; Kwawe 1995; Mills 2000; Prashad 1995; Sibley 1995). Moreover, the exclusion from this universalized modernity produces redundant populations whose “wasted lives” (Bauman 2004) are devalued by society as a whole. Bauman describes this process of territorial, economic and political exclusion this way:

The production of ‘human waste’, or more correctly wasted humans (the ‘excessive’ and ‘redundant’, that is the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay), is an inevitable outcome of modernization and an inseparable accompaniment of modernity. It is an inescapable side-effect of order-building (each order casts some parts of the extant population as ‘out of place’, ‘unfit’, or undesirable) and of economic progress (that cannot proceed without degrading and devaluing the previously effective modes of ‘making a living’ and therefore cannot but deprive their practitioners of their livelihood) (Bauman 2004 p.5).

He goes on to describe the relationship between the production of ‘human waste’ and modernity, which he defines as “a perpetual, compulsive, obsessive and addictive modernization” (Bauman 2004 p.6, his emphasis).

There is a fundamental relationship between the politics of garbage and the processes of modernization through which people are identified as waste. As Scanlan argues (following Zizek):

The central notions of order and identity…can be characterized…as a withdrawal that in an act of self-definition creates an ‘indivisible remainder’ as a result of
which there is established a social and cultural coherence, a connectedness, that we recognize as the valuable sphere of life. This remainder might productively be thought of, and in a sense brought to life, as *garbage* (2005 p.121, his emphasis).

Scanlan argues that society “developed…as a response to this alienated waste – to garbage” (p.124). He describes in detail the process through which this occurred:

> It was only through the multiplication of various personal and nonpersonal tasks…that modern society was able to industrialize production processes by a division of labor and so develop a level of social rationalization that reached beyond the creation and consumption of mere necessities and through which society has ‘propelled’ itself forward into the world of abundance that characterizes consumer society. Such progress had the *necessary* effect of depersonalizing the waste process, meaning that apparently separate developmental processes within modern society were entirely complementary. The end result of this supposedly virtuous cycle is that without the organization of garbage disposal, specific kinds of industrial production become impossible and vice versa. The most overlooked, or avoided, consequence of the development of modern society as a system of social rationalization cannot be disentangled from the fact that specialist production and public bureaucracy ensures that we are already one step removed from the consequences of our own waste (2005 p.154).

Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection provides insight into how this separation from waste affects individual identity. It has been taken up by many scholars to explain processes of marginalization (Cresswell 1996; Popke 2001; Sibley 1995; McClintock 1995). I will first describe Kristeva’s theory itself and then discuss its use in urban geography.

For Kristeva, “[t]here looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there,
quite close, but it cannot be assimilated” (Kristeva 1982 p.1). The relationship between
the abject and the self is one of apparent opposition, as “the abject has only one quality of
the object – that of being opposed to the I” (Kristeva 1982 p.1). Therefore, “it is not lack
of cleanness or health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order.
What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the
composite” (Kristeva 1982 p.4). The ambiguity of the abject produces a fearful subject:

Abjection- at the crossroads of phobia, obsession and perversion…The loathing that is implied in it does not take
on the aspect of hysteric conversion; the latter is the symptom of an ego that, overtaxed by a ‘bad object’ turns
away from it, cleanses itself of it, and vomits it. In abjection, revolt is completely within being. Within the
being of language. Contrary to hysteria, which brings about, ignores, or seduces the symbolic, but does not
produce it, the subject of abjection is eminently productive of culture (Kristeva 1982 p.4).

The abject is created not through identification, but rather through exclusion. It
therefore “does not succeed in differentiating itself as other, but threatens one’s own and
clean self, which is the underpinning of any organization constituted by exclusions and
hierarchies” (Kristeva 1982 p.65). Quoting Georges Bataille, Kristeva argues that it is
“the inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding”
(Kristeva 1982 p.64). Therefore, the abject is the result of the “weakness of the
prohibition” necessary to constitute the social order (Kristeva 1982 p.64):

In this sense, abjection is coextensive with the social and
symbolic order, on the individual as well as on the
collective level. By virtue of this, abjection…is a universal
phenomenon; one encounters it as soon as the symbolic
order and/or social dimension of man is constituted, and
this throughout the course of civilization. But abjection
assumes specific shapes and different codings according to
the various “symbolic systems”…[T]he danger of filth
represents for the subject the risk to which the very
symbolic order is permanently exposed to the extent that it is a device of discriminations, of differences. A threat issued from the prohibitions that found the inner and outer borders in which and through which the speaking subject is constituted...(Kristeva 1982 p.68-69).

She once again turns to the relationship between the inside and the outside:

One then is led to conceive of the opposition between pure and impure not as an archetype but as one coding of the differentiation of the speaking subject as such, a coding of his repulsion in relation to the other in order to autonomize himself. The pure/impure opposition represents (when it does not function as a metaphor) the striving for identity, a difference (Kristeva 1982 p.82).

In *Geographies of Exclusion*, Sibley follows Kristeva in arguing that “the urge to make separations, between clean and dirty, ordered and disordered, ‘us’ and ‘them’, that is, to expel the abject, is encouraged by western cultures, creating feelings of anxiety because such separations can never be fully achieved” (1995 p.8). He argues that this is a fundamental attribute of consumer culture and an important criteria for the success of capitalism. He explains that “the sources of bodily defilement are projected onto others, whose world is *epidermalized*” (Sibley 1995 p.18). He continues by quoting Iris Young, who is also drawing on Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror*:

> When the dominant culture defines some groups as different, as the Other, the members of these groups are imprisoned in their bodies. Dominant discourse defines them in terms of bodily characteristics and constructs those bodies as ugly, dirty, defiled, impure, contaminated, or sick (Young quoted in Sibley 1995 p.18).

He offers T.S. Eliot’s *Wasteland* as an example of the metaphorical mapping of sociospatial relationships through notions of defilement. Here, “defilement occurs in the form of litter, corpses, fog – the residues which invade the social world of the bourgeoisie and disintegrate class boundaries” (Sibley 1995 p.60). The exclusionary practices that
seek to establish the (always porous) boundaries between us and them often reinforce the physical marginalization of some groups from urban space (as with the ragpickers of Paris (Sibley 1995, pp.100-102).

The exclusion of the abject from the space of the city is also taken up by Popke (2001), who argues that, in Durban, South Africa, “one such space became a repository of larger fears about the changing nature of identity and alterity within the city, as the ambiguity of industrial modernity became embodied in racialized spaces and subjects” (p.738). In the case of South Africa, one facet of modernism was “an engagement with a discourse of urban planning, and its associated concerns with the orderly management and control of industrial growth and productivity” (Popke 2001 p.737). For Popke, Cato Manor in Durban represents the spatial nature of exclusionary practices and of processes of abjection. This area was seen and represented as chaotic and disease ridden, beyond the control of the modern city. In this way, the modernization of Durban required targeting and transforming, “the ‘premodern’ subjects and spaces of the city” such as Cato Manor (Popke 2001 p.737). Its residents were not involved in the daily life of the city as “citizens” but rather as “laboring subjects” (Popke 2001 p.742). Following Lefebvre, Popke argues that the power of abstract space to dictate, control and dominate other ways of living explained the “spatial dispossession” of those on the periphery of Durban. At the same time, however, this “attempt to manage the subjects and spaces of an emerging industrial order” was threatened by the “troubling ambiguity of identity” embodied by Indians and Africans in the city. In other words, the threat posed by the abject was significant to both insider and outsider identities, and much of the social
policy that followed was an attempt to reinscribe the border of difference in a more permanent manner.

The (new) politics of garbage and citizenship

Beatriz González Stephan has developed an approach to the study of citizenship in Latin America that focuses on the disciplining of bodies through popular and pedagogical texts produced by elites. Her Foucauldian genealogy of modern citizenship emphasizes the practices through which certain norms of behavior in public space and personal hygiene became the standard for identifying citizens and non-citizens in Latin America. Again, this process was centered in urban areas, on the “subjects of the new bourgeois society, the required prototypes for the utopia of progress and modernization” (González Stephan 2003 p.189). This process “assumed a new relationship between power and a body founded on discipline, productivity and hygiene” (González Stephan 2003 p.189). She identifies a set of “specialized technologies” of subjection including constitutions, grammars and manuals through which “the identification between words/discipline/power and surveillance ran parallel to the creation of citizenship” (González Stephan 2003 p.189). This process was uneven and there were “tensions and a struggle, not always comfortably resolved, between the universes postulated by the ruling words and the dynamics of reality” (González Stephan 2003 p.191). She continues:

Nevertheless, it is a fact that the concepts of “nation” and “citizenship” were the idea of a minority, a project postulated to be expansive which could include and domesticate different communities that offered resistance to difficult negotiations. The dual task (centripetal and centrifugal) of written disciplines – including constitutions – was to incorporate and shape social groups and to expel those who could not adapt to the norms (p.191).
Constitutions delimited the public sphere and who could inhabit it, but manuals were the chief indication of how the physical body of the individual should be controlled, even within the private and familiar spaces. Numerous behavioral and hygienic rules followed the individual into and out of the home through pedagogical institutions and the press:

Filth...represented one of the metaphors that complemented the great axiom of “barbarism”. The asepsis and cleanliness of streets, language, body and habits appeared as the panaceas of progress and materialization in a modern nature – to cleanse the public res of transient “unproductive groups”, of insane and sick people...In this sense, the “other” appeared as an illness and it was feared because it could be contagious (González Stephan 2003 p.196).

It was therefore necessary to sanitize the city, that is, to expel the abject bodies and other “filth” from the area in order to allow for the health and modernization of urban areas. Because they were so essential to obtaining or maintaining the purity of cities and their citizens, hygienization policies were pursued with, “irrational zeal” (González Stephan 2003 p.201). González-Stephan’s work shows how what Rodriguez calls “acts of cleansing” (2001) were historically important in disciplining the modern Latin American citizen, such that, “the desired model of civilization demanded by the new urban space [was]...predicated on compliance with behavioral rules as yet unknown to illiterate users, whose unrestrained habits must be inhibited...which demands silence and a sensibility that looks down on the public expression of intimacy and manifests phobias against dirt, disease, and bodily contact” (Rodriguez 2001 p.28).

As the research presented in the following chapters shows, this is still an important area for struggle over modernization and citizenship. Garbage politics, in this
way, are one manifestation of the “new cultural politics in Latin America” (Alvarez et al. 1998) that Alvarez et al. argue go beyond formal liberal democracy. Rather, “emergent redefinitions of concepts such as democracy and citizenship point in directions that confront authoritarian culture through a resignifying of notions of rights, public and private spaces, forms of sociability, ethics, equality and difference and so on” (Alvarez, et al. p.10). The authors are arguing for a reconception of the political that would include such processes. Taking up Fraser’s (1993) critique of the Habermasian politics of the public sphere, they stress that such a critique is “particularly relevant” for Latin America because of the very restricted nature of formal politics in the region:

Because the subaltern historically have been relegated to the status of de facto non-citizens in Latin America…the multiplication of public arenas in which sociocultural, gender-based, racial, and economic…exclusion might be contested and resignified, then, must also be seen as integral to the expansion and deepening of democratization (Alvarez et al. 1998 p.19).

Additionally, popular movements have created the spaces in which conflicts gain visibility, certain collective subjects legitimate their stake in certain issues, and “rights structure a public language that delimits the criteria through which collective demands for justice and equality can be problematized and evaluated” Alvarez et al. 1998 p.20).

Evelina Dagnino argues that contemporary social movements in Latin America change the definition of democracy, in part by redefining the notions of citizenship and rights. This does not imply “a refusal of political institutionality and the state”, but rather “a radical claim for their transformation” (Dagnino 1998 p.47). Urban popular movements are often centered on the “very right to have rights” among marginalized populations as well as the “elaboration of new identities as subjects, bearers of rights, as
equal citizens” (Dagnino 1998 p.48). At the same time, notions of citizenship have also been challenged by neoliberal discourses and practices that emphasize “active citizenship” and “individualization” (Dagnino 1998 p.49). This dispute places debates over citizenship at the center of the new politics of social movements in Latin America. For Dagnino, an important part of this “new citizenship” is “the constitution of active social subjects…defining what they consider to be their rights and struggling for their recognition; it is even thought of as consisting of this process. In this sense, it is a strategy of the noncitizens, of the excluded to secure a citizenship “‘from below’” (Dagnino 1998 p.51).

Conclusion

Because of their potential to destabilize the state and other “established institutions”, the new politics of garbage are a site where what James Ferguson calls the “modernization myth” reaches its own endpoint (Ferguson 1999). Ferguson argues that modernization is a myth in both senses of the word. First, in the common usage (that myth is a widely believed, yet erroneous assumption) modernization, as such, does not really happen as we supposed. Second, in the anthropological sense of the term (myth as cosmological blueprint) modernization has become the goal of many societies whose members come to understand their lives through its terms. So, the daily lives of people often come into conflict with this imagined state of modernity (see also Bonfil Batalla 1996).

Despite efforts to produce modern, clean and ordered cities, garbage is a fundamental part of life, and the ability to distance one’s self from it a fundamental part of citizenship. Waste is a potential contaminant to the citizen body and a mark of abject
groups. To change one’s relationship to waste is to change one’s status. This is what makes stopping the flow of waste such a powerful tool in struggles over the right to the city. The next chapter sets the context of urbanization in which contemporary waste politics in Oaxaca take place. Then, Chapter Four describes and analyses the material and discursive practices through which the municipality sought to control garbage, to tame its threat to order and modern identities. Chapter Five examines the ways in which waste has been deployed in Oaxaca to characterize some groups as outsiders to the modern city. Chapter Five concludes by demonstrating what happens when that deployment is reversed and the city and its citizens are forced to live with their own waste. Chapter Six summarizes the findings of previous chapters and outlines the broader conclusions that can be drawn from this project.
Chapter 3: Garbage and Urbanization in Oaxaca

Oaxaca is, in many key respects, an exemplar for studying the politics of MSW in the global south. Oaxaca (population 256,000) and its 21 surrounding municipios (roughly equivalent to U.S. counties) form the zona metropolitana de la Ciudad de Oaxaca (the metropolitan zone of Oaxaca city) with a total population to 472,624 (INEGI 2000). The area has witnessed decades of rapid population growth, mostly due to rural-to-urban migration (Rees et al. 1991), often of indigenous populations who have been forced out of their communities by lack of employment opportunities or militarization in the countryside. Approximately 70 percent of migrants to the city come from their birthplaces, and the most-represented ethnic group is Zapotec (Murphy and Stepnik 1991; Clarke 2000; Consejo 2001; Torres 1986a). During the last few decades, city services, such as water, sewage, MSW collection and disposal, healthcare, electricity and transportation, have not kept pace with growth. The “chaotic” (Consejo 2001; Torres 1986a) nature of urban growth in the area is reflected in the colonias populares. These neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city emerge from squatting and land invasions, or in the case of the colonias surrounding the dump, the selling of ejidos (community lands) allowed by recent reforms to the Mexican constitution. Their integration into the city’s service infrastructure is achieved only after a long process that involves grassroots organizing, staged protests, and vote buying (Murphy and Stepick 1991 pp. 64-67; Francisco Segura 1999 p. 59). In the case of the colonias around the dump, their ability to block the city’s access to the dump is their primary leverage for demanding services from Oaxaca City and the neighboring municipio of Zaachila.
Municipal Solid Waste Management

Before turning to the specific case of waste management practices in Oaxaca, it is useful to discuss some characteristics of waste management in Mexico, characteristics that are similar to those of other countries in the global south. This will set the context in which the particularities of Oaxaca’s waste management practices have developed. While waste production and management statistics are notoriously difficult to collect, the following serves to give a broad picture of the situation.

In comparison with members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), organic matter makes up significantly more of the country’s waste stream (see Table 3.1). Globalization and consumerism have reduced the proportion of organic waste in recent decades, but it is still more than double that of the United States. Organic waste is more likely to attract disease vectors and to smell, so its significant presence in the waste stream is an important component of garbage politics. It is also ideal for public and private composting programs, which have not yet been successfully implemented in Mexico. Another important difference between Mexico and other OECD countries is that Mexico’s reliance on landfills for disposal is higher. Table 3.2 shows that Mexico has relatively less formal recycling and composting than the U.S., Japan, and France, but more than some OECD countries. This merits further discussion.

First, while Mexico may show less formal recycling than some developed countries, the federal government in Mexico claims that 33 percent of the country’s waste is recycled (SEDUE 2003). This number is based on the fact that most recycling in Mexico and other developing countries is done informally by municipal employees (who get the first pick of the garbage they collect) and scavengers who select items out of
garbage containers or municipal dumps. Second, since most of Mexico’s garbage goes to
dumps, the problem of waste becomes apparent when one compares the amount of
garbage produced in the country each year to the number of formal dumps (Table 3.3).
The average tonnage per landfill in Mexico is over 390,000, while each U.S. landfill (the
second highest average) holds only 54,000 tons (Table 3.3). Of course, the magnitude of
this difference is exaggerated by the difficulty of data collection in Mexico, the
immensity of the problem in Mexico City, and the non-inclusion of informal dumps
throughout the country, but the comparison is striking, nonetheless. Moreover, many of
these landfills are open to the air and there is little processing of the wastes that arrive
there. The wastes themselves can include, in addition to municipal solid waste, hazardous
and toxic materials, and medical waste. All of these factors combine to make the
management of waste in the country of Mexico a potentially divisive issue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1: Composition of Waste Stream by Percentage of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD 2004
Table 3.2: Disposal Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total (000 tons)</th>
<th>Population Served (%)</th>
<th>Recycled (000 tons)</th>
<th>Composted (000 tons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>208520</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>46068</td>
<td>11893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>51446</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>4428</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>30744</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3198</td>
<td>2590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>16950</td>
<td>98.7</td>
<td>6996</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>30733</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD 2004

Table 3.3: Landfill Usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Quantity (000 tons)</th>
<th>Waste Landfilled (%)</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Quantity/Landfill (000 tons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>119678</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>2216</td>
<td>54.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>10869</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2065</td>
<td>5.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>14776</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>7968</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>30009</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>394.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD 2004

The Case of Oaxaca

The population of Oaxaca increased 263 percent between 1970 and 1995. At the same time, the amount of garbage increased more than 400 percent (Ortega Castro 2001). Between 1995 and 2004, Oaxaca’s population increased by 12 percent and the amount of garbage increased by 72 percent (Mendoza 2004). This means that the amount of garbage produced per capita is increasing. The most obvious explanation for this is an increase in
consumption, particularly of packaged goods. More Oaxacans are choosing packaged food and soft drinks instead of having subsistence plots or purchasing locally grown and manufactured food. Today, the central city of Oaxaca produces 350 tons of MSW daily, while the surrounding areas produce another 300 (Sanchez García 2001b). This 1,300,000 pounds produced daily by 472,000 people means that the average per capita production of garbage each day is 2.75 pounds or about 1.25 kilos. This is near the average in Latin America (OECD 2002)\(^8\). The remainder of this chapter will discuss the political-economic history and the processes of urbanization that set the conditions for contemporary garbage management and politics.

**Urbanization in Oaxaca**

To better understand how garbage management and politics in Oaxaca developed, it is necessary first to review the history of urban development in the city. Oaxaca has operated as a regional center of commerce since the days of the Mixtec and Zapotec settlements on Monte Albán. At the end of the 15\(^{th}\) century, the Aztecs incorporated the area into their empire. They collected tributes, but also used the city as a gateway to other areas further to the south. However, the influence of the Aztecs in Oaxaca was mostly cultural and linguistic, rather than political-economic (Silva-Leyva 2003 p.17).

Spanish colonists, by contrast, had a much larger impact on the form of the city, its political-economic status and organization, and social relations within it. The city was officially founded in the name of the Spanish crown in 1521. During the colonial period, Oaxaca functioned mostly as an agricultural center and a military base for the Spanish. The colonists encouraged the development of urban areas as part of their network of

\(^8\) Because many colonias have their own illegal dumps, and since littering is abundant (Esteva 2001a), these official numbers are underestimates.
influence in the area. In Southern Mexico, this was facilitated, to a large degree, by Dominican missionaries who established a series of *casas* (missions) connecting Oaxaca with Mexico City (Silva-Leyva 2003 p.19). In 1576, Hernán Cortes announced a regional plan for the form of the city. In accord with what would later be changed to the “*Leyes de Indias*”, the city was built around a central square with a church on one end and the important government buildings on the other. Living areas encircling the square were provided for Spanish residents, while indigenous populations were located on the outskirts of town. The result of this organization was that high social classes (that often corresponded with Spanish heritage at this point) lived in the center and there was literally no room left for others. If a sufficient number of indigenous people did not voluntarily settle on the periphery, then they were forced to reconstruct their villages on the outskirts of the city (Silva Leyva 2003 p.20).

During the later colonial period, Oaxaca’s economy grew and its population increased. In fact, the area became one of the most important economic regions of Mexico, due mostly to its significant natural resources. The most valued of these was *cochinilla*, an insect that lives on local cacti and produces an intense red dye when squashed. The Spanish shipped the dye to European textile companies. Oaxaca’s importance to the colonial economy produced its “Golden Age” circa 1750-1810 (Silva Leyva 2003 p.130).

Oaxaca’s riches, though, were distributed extremely unevenly. The *peninsulares* controlled most of the important industries, including mining and *cochinilla* collection. This economic segregation was reflected in residential segregation. In addition to the fact that the center of the city was reserved for the higher classes, there were also different
entrances to the city for indigenous people and colonists (Silva Leyva 2003 p.19). As Mexican social scientist Silva Leyva notes, this segregation continues today:

The contemporary Mexican city is descended directly from these indigenous neighborhoods or barrios that grew along with the European center, these zones are what they had always been: huts of rural pueblos transported to the border of the city. The fact that housing is not permanent, given the nature of its construction has helped to perpetuate them. As the interior of the city, better constructed, extends towards the zones occupied by this type of accommodation, the huts are abandoned and reconstructed again in the new edge (2003 p.20).

The Preindustrial City (1900-1940)

Oaxaca was relatively isolated from Mexico City in the postcolonial period. There were no major highways connecting the city with other major metropolitan areas until 1940. Its colonial economy crumbled and the city grew very slowly. Additionally, the Mexican Revolution had little direct impact on the central city or the state’s economy (Velasco 1999 p.132; Silva-Leyva 2003 p.131). The results of post-war land reforms written into the Mexican Constitution of 1917 were also slow to reach Oaxaca. The most significant of these land reforms was Article 27 which established the ejido system. The ejido is “based on collective and/or individual use of lands that have been expropriated from haciendas or large landowners within the specifications of the constitution”, and was designed to aid the relatively landless peasant population that existed before, during, and after the Mexican Revolution of 1910 (Pisa 1994 p. 296). In 1930, ejidos represented 1.8 percent of total land use in the state of Oaxaca, but that increased to over 19 percent by 1940. From 1940-1950, the number of ejidos increased from 420 to 533, though its land area declined to 16.76 percent (Velasco 1999 p. 132). During this time, the city

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9 The Carretera Cristobal Colon connected Oaxaca with Puebla in 1940. Oaxaca was connected with Tuxtla Gutierrez (Chiapas) by highway in 1950 (Francisco-Segura 1999 p.64).
remained within the colonial plane, but was differentiated into 19 *poblados* (agencies, municipal authorities, police) with a total population of 33,000 (Francisco Segura 1999 p.59). The first six year plan established by the Mexican government in 1933 had as one of its objectives to stimulate population growth in cities around the country in order to augment the industrial labor force (Silva Leyva 2003 p.76). At the same time, “[the government] put into action…health and housing programs, openly manifesting the desire of the state to promote economic progress, especially through the reproduction of the workforce” (Silva Leyva 2003 p.76). Due, in part, to such government projects, the urban population of Mexico almost tripled between 1900 and 1940.

**Industrialization (1940-1980)**

Oaxaca today is the Mexican state with the most municipalities. By the 1940s, Oaxaca’s division into municipalities was already fraught with territorial and demographic tensions (Pérez Jiménez 1956 p.137). The 258th local decree of 1942 sought to lend order to the establishment and perpetuation of municipalities by regulating how and by whom such territorial divisions could be formed (Pérez Jiménez 1956). By 1960, however, it was evident that the “majority of governments commit[ed] grave irregularities” in this regard by changing place names, adding new municipalities arbitrarily, or preventing some legitimate municipalities from forming (*El Imparcial* 1960). In addition to setting up the conditions for territorial disputes, this also complicated census-taking (*El Imparcial* 1960a). Further complicating matters was the lack of municipal regulation over land development. Looking back over the prior decades, one observer described it this way:

> It would be ridiculous to think about a healthy and functional plan in Oaxaca, such that the *velis nolis*
introduction of intermediaries, many little gardens, will disappear, more or less quietly. More than this…a plague of ignorant and clumsy contractors with no more ethical support than their shamelessness and ambition are given to building houses that erode away before they are finished. The land brokers are no better. It is not unusual to buy a lot that has already been sold and that ends up with two or three owners (El Imparcial 1960b p.1A).

The completion of the Pan American highway in 1943 can be seen as the beginning of Mexico’s modern period, which was based largely on import substitution industrialization (Velasco 1999 p. 141; Ley de fomento industrial 1952 p. 145). By 1953, the national economy was heavily oriented to industrial production, particularly the manufacturing of durable consumer goods, but Oaxaca did not have the capital, technology or infrastructure to develop this sector. What little local production there was in the state was pushed out by national industries. Rather, an emphasis on agricultural production continued (Velasco 1999 p. 133). Oaxaca was involved in the national economy mostly as a labor supplier and as a source of raw materials, which declined by 60 percent during the period (Velasco 1999 p. 135) Because of adverse conditions for developing commercial agriculture (Torres 1986a) and few possibilities for industrialization, the Valley of Oaxaca has continued to be one of the three regions (of Mexico) with the highest index of marginality (Francisco Segura 1999 p. 57). For comparison, the nation’s economic growth from 1950-1960 was 6 percent, but Oaxaca’s was only 2.2 percent. Income in Oaxaca was also substantially lower than the national average. These trends continued into the 1970s (Velasco 1999 p. 149).

In the 1970s, the federal government elected to support Oaxaca’s development as a tourist location. The city was officially designated as one of the country’s 17 traditional tourist destinations (as opposed to planned tourist sites like Cancun and Huatulco) (Silva
Leyva 2003 p.55). Its lack of industrial development and its emerging identity as a cultural center led to a municipal economy based almost exclusively on the sale of goods and services to residents and tourists. It also produced a tourist city separate from the city where the needs of the population are met.\textsuperscript{10}

Despite (or perhaps because of) the state’s relative economic and social marginalization, the city of Oaxaca continued to grow during this period. The city’s urban character (\textit{la mancha urbana}) extended beyond its historical center and smaller isolated settlements began to consolidate into a contiguous area of city dwellers (Francisco Segura 1999). The city also made an attempt to ‘modernize’ its infrastructure, building an airport in nearby Xoxocotlan and constructing roads to connect the airport with other parts of the city. It began to supply basic urban services beyond the historic center, further consolidating the urban area. On the one hand, the \textit{Ley General de Asentimientos Humanos} (1976) was established at the federal level to, for the first time, code territorial organization and lay out the jurisdictions particular to each level of government. This was done in an effort to normalize urban growth. On the other hand, though, “[t]he scarcity of a land market accessible to common and ordinary people, made it such that land invasions became a common phenomenon. The city had entered into a process of expansion of its municipal jurisdiction over community and ejidal lands, supported by the construction of public services” (Francisco Segura and Pioquinto 2000 p.19). Dual processes of planned and unplanned growth began to shape the city in a significant way, as described by Jesús Jaime Francisco Segura and Ramos Pioquinto:

\textsuperscript{10} New initiatives to separate the space of public protest from that of tourism by turning the government buildings on the Zócalo and in the Llano (a local park) into entertainment venues and moving government functions outside the central city is a trenchant and timely example here.
In the 1950s the landscape of the city began to grow and new services were included, although there could also be observed at the same time the formation of spontaneous human settlements or of squatters in the periphery of the city and near the federal highway to Mexico [city] and Miahuatlán. At the beginning of the 1950s, various residents of scarce economic resources invaded the lands in the proximity of Río Atoyac and of the railroads to Ocotlán, given origin to what was the first of the squatter colonies of the city of Oaxaca: the *colonia* Miguel Alemán (2000 p.19).

Neoliberalism 1982-present

The year 1982 is considered by many to be the first formal entrance of Mexico into contemporary globalization and the beginning of the neoliberal era (Velasco 1999 p.122). During the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the national economy focused on petroleum exports. Oaxaca also tried to develop a petrochemical industry and refurbish ports in the Isthmus to facilitate that. This increased the disparity between investment in agriculture (still the major part of the state’s economy) and industry. When high inflation and lower fuel prices led to an economic crisis in Mexico in 1982, the currency was devalued and the banks nationalized. The International Monetary Fund intervened, pushing neoliberal reforms to eliminate mismanagement and inefficiency, which the IMF and the World Bank identified as the causes of the crisis (Velasco 1999 p.141). President Miguel de la Madrid signed a letter of cooperation between the Mexican government and the IMF, implementing a number of reforms. The objectives listed by the federal administration in the *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 1983-85* were in accordance with these reforms: “to conserve and strengthen the institutions, conquer the crisis, recuperate growth capacity, as well as to initiate the required qualitative changes in the structure of the country” (Velasco 1999 p.150). These “qualitative changes” were accelerated by the
earthquake that shook Mexico City in 1985 and the precipitous fall in petroleum prices in 1986 (from $23.7/barrel in December 1985 to $8.9/barrel in July 1986). More state businesses were privatized, inflation accelerated and public expenditures decreased. Oaxaca was affected by these national changes, especially by high unemployment and lack of support to rural areas. Many Oaxacans migrated to other parts of the country or to the United States.

In 1988, the new federal administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari established new goals for the country. Their *Pacto de Solidaridad Económica* outlined development goals including, “a) the defense of national sovereignty and the promotion of the interests of Mexico in the world, b) the growth of the democratic life, c) economic recovery with price stability, and d) the improvement of the quality of life of the population” (Velasco 1999 p.151). To achieve these goals, they proposed “national modernization”. The government tried to justify its limited involvement in the economic and social life of the country with the term, “neoliberalismo social” (Velasco 1999 p.152). Government support for and funding of local social and economic development projects were to be cycled through the new *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad* (National Program of Solidarity/PRONASOL). In Oaxaca this federal program contributed only one percent to the state’s GDP.

The governor of Oaxaca, Heladio Ramírez López (1986-1992) continued to invest in commercial agriculture and tourism development, but agricultural production was still low because of irregularities in land tenure, land use, and financing (Velasco 1999 p.153). The succeeding state administration, that of Licenciado Diódoro Carrasco Altamirano (1992-1998), had as its objective “to incorporate Oaxaca into the same rates
and levels of economic growth, social wellbeing and development that exist in the rest of the country in order to transition to modernity and to reclaim the wellbeing of Oaxacan society” (Velasco 1999 p. 153). The strategy to support this transition included the implementation of “equality and efficiency” (Velasco 1999 p. 153).

One step taken toward the neoliberalization of the Mexican economy was the 1992 reform of Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917. This revision made it legal to buy and sell ejidal land, which constituted about 54 percent of national territory at the time. Before the revision, ejido land could not be expropriated in any way from the ejidatorios to which it belonged. Therefore, recent reforms to Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917 are important in that they have allowed the city to (officially) take over ejido lands, which formerly belonged to community groups. This means that the “rural communities that were once protected from urban expansion by their agricultural or pastoral communal or ejido lands, now find themselves struggling to maintain their sovereignty and individual community identity against the burgeoning seams of the city” (Perez 2003 p. 344).

In 1994 Oaxaca City was finally connected by highway with the center of the country. This was seen regionally as an important step in the modernization of the state (Velasco 1999 p. 154). Just as Oaxaca was being further integrated with the rest of Mexico, however, the Mexican national economy experienced another crisis. This time under the presidency of Ernesto Zedillo, the peso was again devalued and a new national plan called for an evolution in neoliberal notions of the state and the citizen. The specific steps proposed were to:

1) strengthen the military at the level of national sovereignty as the supreme valor of our nationality and as the primary responsibility of the Mexican state, 2) consolidate a regime of social life directed by rights, where
the law would be applied to everyone equally and justice will be the way to the solution of conflicts, 3) construct a program of democratic development with which all Mexicans would identify and that is based on certitude and confidence of a peaceful political life and intense citizen participation, 4) advance a social development that covers and extends to the entire country individual and community opportunities for improvement beneath the principles of equality and justice, and 5) promote vigorous economic growth, sustained and sustainable for the benefit of all Mexicans (Velasco 1999 p.156).

The continuing imposition of neoliberal reforms throughout Mexico produced negative effects in the increasingly integrated state of Oaxaca. The state’s GDP fell at least 4.5 percent in the mid-1990s, engendering further unemployment and outmigration as well as social marginalization. According to national statistics, 89.4 percent of Oaxaca’s localities were classified as “highly” or “very highly marginalized” in 1995 and there were high levels of malnutrition (20-24 percent of the population had a calorie deficit, though in some areas this number was as high as 40 percent). The resulting unrest in the state was reflected in municipal elections in 1995, during which most of the incumbents were defeated (Velasco 1999 p. 158-9).

The City and its Margins: Urban Extension and Colonias Populares

In Oaxaca, as well as other parts of Mexico, urbanization was an important process shaping the state from the 1940s on. In 1940, the Mexican population was 35 percent urban, while in 1950 that number was 51.5 percent (Velasco 1999 p.134). As urban populations grew, municipalities began to expand onto ejidal and community land, though this was illegal at the time. Further, this urban growth impinged on the agrarian livelihoods and identities that had been dominant in Oaxaca (Ramírez 1990). Francisco Segura describes the process of urbanization in the last several decades like this:
The process of urbanization of medium sized cities like Oaxaca, Puebla and the majority of state capitals, began to manifest itself as an urban problem in the seventies. The rapid expansion of the city of Oaxaca…was achieved by incorporating rural lands as support for the new urban activities. This process, which has brought with it changes in social and economic relations in the agrarian villages as well as in the relationship between the country and the city, deserves attention in order to understand the changes in the human-nature relationship and the new conditions of life in which social groups develop in the city and the spaces that cease to be rural (1999 p.67).

The two main ways Oaxaca has grown include government planned communities and unplanned squatter neighborhoods (colonias populares). The latter is more common, a fact which has led to the characterization of the city’s growth as chaotic. Much of this growth took place in ejidal territories, even before it was legalized. As Oaxacan journalist Humberto Torres noted in the late 1980s, it was “necessary to confront the anarchic growth of the city, given that above all the mancha urbana has overflowed indiscriminately over ejidal lands, areas of cultivation… and zones that are difficult to communicate with and to provide basic services” (Torres 1988 p.1A). The city, state and federal governments were unable or unwilling to stop this illegal practice (Ramirez 1990). Francisco Segura and Pioquinto (2000) argue that “the appropriation of urban land was realized at the margin of the law and with the tolerance, and frequently the complicity, of agrarian and government authorities” (p.19). This irregularity created a tension between the new colonias and the municipality. The settlements lacked basic services, which could not be legally demanded from the city because of the absence of legal security in land ownership (Ramírez 1990a, 1990b). Due to their role in the politics and management of municipal solid waste in Oaxaca, the formation of these colonias populares deserves some elaboration here.
This type of *colonia* formation, *zonas urbanas ejidales* (Mahar 2000 p.71), has been studied mostly by anthropologists in the area who claim that colonias *populares* often illustrate a semi-cohesive and active community in the beginning because they are interested in attaining basic services (Mahar 2000 p.72). Community work projects, called *tequios* in Mexico, are often organized to build the neighborhood’s infrastructure. They develop into pressure groups that demand the regularization of their homes into private property and the provision of public services. When the majority of houses have running water and electricity, the government begins the process of normalizing land ownership (Francisco Segura and Pioquinto 2000 p.19). As the *colonia* begins to receive the basic services offered by the municipality, the neighborhood often becomes more individualistic. Over time, the *colonias* develop their own class and decision-making hierarchies (Mahar 2000).

The growth of these *colonias* has been rapid in the last several decades, but they are not evenly distributed throughout the periphery of the city. Moreover, the *colonias populares* represent different levels of integration into the service structure of the city, as well as different power relationships with respect to the municipality:

Wherever the urban stain grows, it increases its demand for public services, housing, light, etc., demanding moreover greater volumes of potable water, food and supply services. In recent years one observes that groups from the middle class as much as those of low earnings are inhabiting popular housing areas or irregular settlements in which the densities of population are higher...The social groups with low incomes form marginalized *colonias* with high populations and scarce basic urban services. In contrast, they are building residential zones with all of the public services and lower population density (Francisco Segura 1999 p.72).
Oaxaca’s pattern of growth has produced a relatively affluent central city surrounded by a poorer and more isolated urban fringe. It has also produced a large metropolitan area of 22 municipios conurbados (contiguous urban counties) which extends through much of the valley. As Oaxaca has by far the most municipios of any state in Mexico, there is a certain level of administrative fragmentation within the urban area. These counties are unevenly urbanized and there are still large expanses of less-densely populated agricultural land within them, though this is being changed rapidly in particular growth corridors.

One important growth corridor, characterized as lower-class and higher density, follows the route to the isthmus in southern Oaxaca, a popular area for international, national, and local tourists. Just off of the interstate that connects the city with the southern coast, on the outskirts of Zaachila, is the municipal dump (see Figure 3.1).

The municipality of Zaachila is located 13 miles south of the center of Oaxaca City. It has been a population center since the time of Zapotec dominance in the 14th century. In the last two decades it has been the scene of a series of often violent political contests between the PRI and the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) (Ramos Ojeda 2004; Gómez and Rosas 2004; Marcial 2002; Las Noticias 1992, 1991; Bracamontes Ruiz 1990,1991; Girón Méndez 1990; Cruz Garcia 1987a). The relationship between the municipal government of Zaachila and that of Oaxaca is complicated by disagreements over the management of the dump, where the municipality often takes the side of the colonias against the city of Oaxaca (Ramos Ojeda 2004; Ramírez 2004; Gómez and Rosas 2004; Bracamontes et al. 2004).
The dump itself is on former *ejido* land. Though the city of Oaxaca had established the practice of dumping at the site in the early 1980s, neither it, nor Zaachila, could legally own the land until the 1992 revision to Article 27. The area around the dump has experienced significant population influx and the establishment of many *colonias populares*. Most of these *colonias* were first established in 1992, when it became legal to buy and sell *ejidal* land. Many of the first to move to these areas were city residents who could no longer afford to rent in the city or to buy property there. The low prices also attracted a number of rural to urban migrants whose *ejido* or communal land was also being privatized.

So, like many of the marginalized colonias of Oaxaca, *Guillermo González Guardado* was formed by groups seeking the “imagined promise of the modern city” (Perez 2003 p.345). But, the completion of this promise is often based on access to land, as Low (1999) makes clear:
Citizenship and political participation are often related to land ownership, in that land gives a person literally a ‘place’ in society, creating a new form of identity that no longer rests solely on genealogy and inherited rights to land but remains firmly entrenched in land ownership (p.170).

Put differently,

[1]and does not only provide an economic value, but it is also related to questions of identity, legitimacy and power. Neutral land does not exist. In the rural setting of Oaxaca a piece of land is always a piece of territory. Although it is appropriated individually (my parcel, my ranch), land is inserted into a collective universe (the territory of the community, of the municipio, of the ranchers) on which it depends. Land, in this sense, is part of society and not a separate object (Francisco Segura and Pioquinto 2000 p.72).

This view of the importance of land tenure in defining citizenship can, of course, be exclusionary, but the untwisting of citizenship and race, though incomplete, has allowed the residents of some colonias, like those of Guillermo González Guardado, to change their views of themselves from “relative ‘outsiders’” to those who claim the rights and interests of urban citizenry (Mahar 2000 p.70).

Problems and research questions

“Attention marginal neighborhoods: In Oaxaca there are no second class Oaxacans”
-Governor Heladio Ramírez López

The above declaration was made by the governor of Oaxaca in 1992. He pledged to bring services like sewage, electricity and garbage collection to all of the neighborhoods of Oaxaca City (El Imparcial 1992a). In making this promise, he was acknowledging the responsibility of the government to provide for the citizens through basic services. He was arguing against (but also playing into) the idea that a lack of such
services was a mark of less-than-full-citizenship. It was a sign of a chaotic, backward, marginal existence at the physical and metaphorical edge of the city.

It is in this context that the question of environmental justice in Oaxaca must be considered. The garbage crises described in the introduction are a response to this material and discursive division between the inside and the outside, the modern and the backward, the clean and the dirty, the ordered and the chaotic, the citizen and the abject other. In order to understand struggles for environmental justice in this case, we must heed Laura Pulido’s call for uncovering the larger socio-spatial and historical processes through which people and places are marginalized. More than this, we must interrogate the markers of citizenship and non-citizenship in Oaxaca. The pertinent question, then is: how and why does garbage become a site of struggle over the right to the city? This larger question will be pursued in the following chapters through two more specific questions. Chapter Four asks how Oaxaca City’s relationship to waste was shaped through material and discursive practices of waste management during the latter part of the 20th century, and how this shaping has led the groundwork for the effectiveness of the garbage crises as a political strategy since 1999. Chapter Five addresses the question of how the presence or absence of waste marks and produces the modern citizen-subject and its abject other, an articulation crucial to the success of a politics of manifestation and reversal enacted by the people of Colonia Guillermo González Guardado.
Chapter 4: A Clean City is a Beautiful City

This chapter examines the discursive and material practices deployed by the municipal government (and its state and federal counterparts) in the management of waste in Oaxaca City. In its efforts to modernize, the city focused on cleanliness and sanitation. At the same time, economic development and increasing consumerism encouraged by this modernization effort changed the nature and quantity of garbage in the city as well as its meaning for urban development. I argue that while city officials engaged in the production of an “imaginary” Mexican city (Bonfil Batalla 1996), waste management practices were increasingly inadequate to produce this clean and modern city on the ground. Partly, this is the result of contradictory processes and logics of modernization, as the imperative to cleanliness and order competes with a certain type of development dependent on the production of waste. It is also the result of the inability of city managers to engage with quotidian waste management practices at odds with the technocratic solutions the city imposed. Further, the contradiction inherent in the city’s constructed imaginary and other practices and representations of waste management laid the foundation for the politics of garbage to be discussed in Chapter Five.

This argument is supported by archival data in the form of newspaper articles and photographs, planning documents, newspaper editorials, legal documents and histories (both popular and academic) of the city, as well as interviews and surveys. The history of solid waste practices in the city is presented chronologically. I first briefly review the period from 1950 to 1970 when the city began to voice a preoccupation with the “industrialization” of waste management. The bulk of the description covers the period from 1980 on, when government agencies began to focus on “modernization” and
neoliberal development strategies. At the end of the chapter, I relate this history to the theory and analytics discussed in Chapter Two.

1950-1980

Cleaning services were first instituted as part of the municipality’s responsibility in Oaxaca during the first half of the 20th century (Ortega Castro 2001). In the 1950s the city had seven garbage collection trucks run by 21 employees and 48 barrenderos. These barrenderos had no uniforms or safety equipment and made their own brooms. The garbage collected by these city workers was taken to an open air dump in the areas of what are now the Unidad Habitacional Benito Juárez and Unidad Modelo. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the municipal government of Oaxaca became more preoccupied with the cleanliness of the city (El Imparcial 1960c). An observer remarked that, “The success of the [cleanliness] campaign depends on the energy with which the authorities intervene to disinfect (sanear) the city work” (El Imparcial 1960d). The city directed its energies toward acquiring a “modern” mechanized sweeper for street sweeping (El Imparcial 1960d, 1960e, 1960f, 1960g, 1960h, 1960i) as well as locating dumpsters and transfer sites in the major market areas (El Imparcial 1960c). They acquired four more garbage trucks, bringing the total to eleven. Labor relations with the sweepers were also more formalized, though poor working conditions and low salary resulted in high rates of absenteeism (Ortega Castro 2001). At the same time, the city was involved in a debate with its residents over increasing taxes for street sweeping.11 The proposed 10 peso charge for sweeping the front of residences and stores, with an additional 30 centavo charge for every extra meter was characterized as “excessive” by some (El Imparcial

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11 Maintaining clean sidewalks in front of a private residence or business was a legal obligation, enforced by fines.
Citizens were not accustomed to paying for this service, which they thought should be provided by the city: “It is absurd not only to permit a city service to exist on taxes, but rather to intend to increase compensation for what was born before as something voluntary” (El Imparcial 1960k p.2A). Whereas previously some people had simply tipped the city sweepers to clean their sidewalks, every citizen now had to pay the fee whether or not they used the service, an obligation seen by some as an “abuse of authority” and as a money-making scheme on the part of the municipality (El Imparcial 1960k p.2A). The debate over the role of the municipality in sanitation and the rights and responsibilities of citizens with respect to this can also be seen in public advisories at the time:

The government of the city expresses that is has the greatest interest in keeping our capital clean, for which, apart from the services that the city provides in this respect, the dedicated cooperation of all residents that can contribute to this end is needed, only by abstaining from throwing out the garbage that comes from your respective houses in the event that the garbage trucks do not come by, making it known at the same time that any infraction of this will be energetically sanctioned until it is ensured that the city is always kept clean (El Imparcial 1960l p.1A).

The municipal government was subtly shifting the burden of waste from the public to the private sphere, while at the same time enforcing participation through sanctions. Despite these efforts, the city’s ineffectiveness at convincing citizens to participate in this campaign was evident a few months later with the appearance of the headline: “The municipio suffers because of lack of attention to the cleanliness campaign” (El Imparcial 1960m p.1A). The article elaborated: “The city’s program for cleanliness is not having as good results as hoped for because of the total lack of cooperation on the part of the citizens. Some people are throwing trash in the street…”
Indeed, people were putting much of their house trash in new public dumpsters, resulting in an “unhealthy” environment that was “beyond imagination” (*El Imparcial* 1960n p.1A). Dumpsters continued to be a site of conflict over waste management through the next several decades, as I discuss later.

In the 1970s, Oaxaca continued to try to solve the “grave problem” of garbage (*El Imparcial* 1974a) through new technologies. In 1974, the city was convinced (or was trying to convince the public) that “the acquisition of a compactor [would] resolve 98 percent of the problem with garbage” in the city (*El Imparcial* 1974b p.1A). The 350 horsepower, 35 ton compactor would be used to prevent the 150 tons of garbage that reached the (unofficial) municipal dump each day from spilling over. This was a part of the city’s plan to “industrialize” (*El Imparcial* 1974b p.8A) waste management. The plan also included measures to reduce the amount of waste collected by scavengers, partly because such materials collected in one place were seen as a fire hazard and partly because the significant presence of scavenging labor in the waste management system marked it as “backward” (*El Imparcial* 1974a p.1A). The administration also added new trucks for the collection of garbage, bringing the total to 19. These technologies were intended to produce a modern and efficient system of waste management, which would, in turn, contribute to the modernization of the city as a whole.

In addition to adding such new technologies to its repertoire, government officials found themselves in the situation of having to revise their relationships with the traditional *barrido* services. With the support of local university students, the sweepers formed the union 3 de Marzo, which still represents them today. In the month of May, 1974, they went on strike to protest their low wages and bad working conditions. This led
to the build-up of solid waste in the city (El Imparcial 1974c; 1974d) and, though they claimed it was not their intention (El Imparcial 1974c), they were accused by the citizenry of doing harm to the populace: “…[T]he group of municipal workers decided to suspend their daily activities without thought of the damage that this will cause to the Oaxacan citizenry…” (El Imparcial 1974e p.1A). Other residents put it this way:

> What has been a serious problem in this city…the case of garbage, has been accented in greater proportion in the last 48 hours, where the personnel that attend to this necessary service, paying attention to other matters, have not completed their obligations toward the citizenry even though they are receiving a salary from the same population (El Imparcial 1974d 8A).

During the strike the city encouraged “emergency brigades” based on private vehicles (El Imparcial 1974f) and tried to make citizens aware of this option. They also stressed the use of “sanitary measures” to avoid “dangers to the public health” (El Imparcial 1974f). As they explained:

> The coordinated services of public health in the state consider[ed] it necessary to recommend to the inhabitants of the city of Oaxaca de Juarez sanitary measures that they should adopt to avoid the development of a grave problem of public health while the collection of garbage by the cleaning services of the government of this city is not resumed (El Imparcial 1974f p.1A).

For its part, the state government “took measures to prevent disorder” by making “a call for conscientiousness and sanity…to the members of the sweepers’ union” to enter into negotiations with the city administration (El Imparcial 1974g p.8A).

While appeals to the barrenderos (sweepers) did little good, the response among other residents was more positive. An article headlined, “We will all care for the city” described the efforts of private citizens and business owners alike to try to keep the city...
clean (*El Imparcial* 1974h p.11A). The city expressed its appreciation towards the citizenry who demonstrated the “conscientious responsibility of our Oaxacan citizenry in keeping the city clean and avoiding some illness that could have directly affected the health of the *pueblo*” (*El Imparcial* 1974h p.11A). This meant that the “city [would] suffer at the smallest level, the problem caused by garbage, as the understanding of the citizenry and its personal support [was] extraordinary” (*El Imparcial* 1974i p.1A). But even celebratory pieces on the cooperation of residents with the city made it clear that, “according to the federal and state codes and coordinators of public health services, the city administration is the applicable entity in whose province is the collection and final disposal of the garbage” in Oaxaca (*El Imparcial* 1974g 8A). The strike was lifted on May 18, 1974 after the city agreed to a pay increase for the *barrenderos*.

The municipality, in this case, claimed continuing responsibility for public health, which was dependent upon the elimination of waste from the social body. But, as is true of any modernist engagement with cleanliness and order, this process is always incomplete. Because of this incompleteness, some argued that, “Oaxaca has changed, but it is still dirty and full of garbage” (*El Imparcial* 1974j p.8A), despite the resumption of city cleaning services. One observer exclaimed the situation to be “disastrous in every sense” adding that the condition of the city “reflected the way that the current so-called municipal, sanitation or governmental authorities conduct their business” (*El Imparcial* 1974j p.8A). This was because it was the province of these groups to “maintain clean conditions” in a city “projected beyond our borders as of great importance touristically” (*El Imparcial* 1974j p.8A). While this might be acceptable in some places with fewer services, it was not acceptable for a city of Oaxaca’s importance. Further, it was argued
that, “it is essential that this type of service not fall into neglect as above all we should understand that cleanliness is fundamental for good health of family members and of a place” (El Imparcial 1974j p.8A). Some residents were not satisfied with the city’s progress in sanitation and hygiene, because city managers failed to produce a purified urban environment.

The two other major issues affecting the city’s garbage practices at this time were also related to the modernizing municipality’s responsibility for purification of the city and the public health of its citizens. First, demands started coming from colonias that their neighborhoods should be cleaned up by the city. Second, neighbors of the centrally located municipal dump in colonia Lomas de Donaji argued for and secured its relocation. They solicited the help of city health officials to move what they called “a focus of unhealthiness” (El Imparcial 1974k p.1A). They also complained about the smoke that was produced by the constant fire at the dump. They asked that the “focus of constant infection be moved somewhere that would not result in harm to the health of man,” and argued that it was against public health regulations to have the dump in their neighborhood (El Imparcial 1974k p.8A). The dump was moved about one mile to the north of the existing site and the mayor was able to claim that “with the disappearance of the current dump from the zone where many years ago it began to appear, we anticipate the elimination of insects and other types of plagues that although fewer in quantity in recent times, caused serious problems to the residents of that sector of the city” (El Imparcial 1974l p.1A). Moving the dump represents a transition in city policy from informal to formal siting of dumps, expanding the purview of the municipality into public health and waste as a public issue.
While this neighborhood achieved its goal of relocating the dump, other areas were still struggling to keep their neighborhoods clean. According to people along the street Felix Diaz, the area was a “focus for the proliferation of illnesses” (*El Imparcial* 1974m p.6A). Those around the *Alameda de León* (*El Llano* – a central plaza in the city) were concerned about growing piles of garbage there (*El Imparcial* 1974n p.6A). They claimed not to know who was leaving garbage in the area but complained that hundreds of flies were hatching there and dispersing to nearby areas. To some, the *Alameda* was being converted into a dump (*El Imparcial* 1974o). The proximity of the mess to the officials whose responsibility it was to keep the city clean led some to ask, “how could they not have perceived the development of the mentioned garbage?” (*El Imparcial* 1974o p.8A). This did not reflect well on the city administration.

On the other hand, the problem for residents in *Colonia Reforma* at this time was not the piling of garbage in a particular place per se, but rather the negligence of the *barrenderos* in completing their jobs:

For 15 days, the extent of the zone of *Colonia Reforma* of this city has found itself without being attended to by those who are responsible for carrying out the cleaning of our streets…. This is what the *barrenderos* want – they are already well paid, enjoying vacations and other benefits and as things are they have abandoned their jobs…[W]e are seeking help from the city administration [because] there is emerging an illness or epidemic that for us we will be affected the same with our children because of the lack of attention to this problem (*El Imparcial* 1974p p.8A).

Here, the residents of *Colonia Reforma* invoke public health (as freedom from waste or contamination) in an effort to spur the municipality into action. They do this by characterizing the municipal workers, the *barrenderos*, as lazy, a characterization that is still made today (see Chapter Five).
By the end of the 1970s Oaxacan officials had led efforts to industrialize MSW management, relying on technological advancements to do so. They also began to establish spatial control of garbage practices by siting dumps and regulating cleanliness. These processes laid the framework for a stronger push towards “modernization” in the 1980s.

1980s

In 1985, the city took a number of steps to “modernize” garbage management in the city (Torres 1986b; El Imparcial 1985a; Cruz Garcia 1987b). In addition to computerizing labor records for municipal employees (El Imparcial 1985a), the city initiated three more steps that decided the path of MSW management through the 1990s: it installed more transfer stations for garbage, designated a new open-air dump in the municipio of Zaachila and constructed a processadora (an automated garbage-sorting plant) (El Imparcial 1985a; 1985b). These three practices of garbage management produced unexpected and contradictory results, as is true of many modernization projects (Beck 2000). Coupled with neoliberal policies that affected municipal functioning and modalities of citizenship (see Chapter Three), these unanticipated consequences also brought about a second, “reflexive” phase of modernization (Beck 1999).

The unidades de transferencia (transfer stations) were intended to reduce garbage on the street, particularly in the major market areas, and to make the collection of garbage more efficient. They were essentially large dumpsters into which the collection trucks would dump the garbage they had collected. The entire unit would then be hauled to the dump, where the garbage would be sorted in the processadora, before the remains were dumped. This was part of the process of the “industrialization” of the waste management
system, as mentioned above, and the city was optimistic that it was a “solution to the problem of garbage” (El Imparcial 1985c p.3A). Individual businesses and residents were encouraged to use these transfer stations in order to prevent the deterioration of streets into “basureros” (garbage dumps) (El Imparcial 1985c). In only two years, though, the transfer station had become a “source of infection” in the commercial zone in which it was located. It was nearly impossible, given the large volume of traffic in the area, for the transfer stations to be moved from its location behind the market to the municipal dump (Ortega Castro 2001).

The mechanized processing plant that the city built on the new dump site did not fare much better. Initially there were partisan divisions and uncertainty over whether the plant would even be built. Members of the National Action Party (PAN) demanded that the city complete the plant as rapidly as possible. At the same time they asserted that the municipal president (who was from the PRI) was apathetic towards the completion of the processor and the problem of garbage that it was intended to solve (El Imparcial 1985d). The city administration, speaking through the secretary of cleaning services, announced that the plant would be functioning in June of that year, two months later than initially expected (El Imparcial 1985e). They blamed the delay on the business that was building the plant and, indeed, seemed very optimistic about its future success:

The plant will process approximately 60 percent of the wastes that are collected daily...The product of the plant will serve as fertilizer for growers and city gardens and the housemothers who want it...These will be traded at more accessible prices than those fertilizers sold by fertilizer companies (El Imparcial 1985e p.1A).

The administration was confident that the 90 million pesos it had invested in the processor would be recuperated through the selling of fertilizer and recyclable materials
in five years. Only a few days later, the municipality enthusiastically announced that the processor would be up and running the following March, rather than June. The mayor had this to say about its importance:

> The administration has special interest [in the processor] that this work will be completed in the shortest time possible given the benefits that it will have for not only the cleaning services of the city of Oaxaca, but also for the chemical product that can be obtained from it for the benefit of agriculture in the central valleys (El Imparcial 1985f p.1A).

Moreover, the plant was described as something that would set Oaxaca apart from other cities: “Oaxaca will be the first city of the southeast to soon have a processadora de basura that among other things with avoid pollution and change all types of wastes into fertilizer…” (El Imparcial 1985b p.3A). In other words, it would signal Oaxaca’s modern nature. This was true not only in terms of waste management and economic development, but also in ecological and social arenas. As one city official claimed: “[the processor] has an ecological goal…and in addition to that it will resolve a social problem like that of the garbage pickers” (El Imparcial 1987g p.3A).

In February of the following year it became clear that the plant would not be ready in March, so the opening date was pushed back to May. The administration, however, continued to argue that the plant was the solution for the current garbage problem and that, moreover, “it will resolve future problems since its capacity is to process up to 350 tons of garbage a day” (El Imparcial 1985h p.A21, see also El Imparcial 1985i). Inspections in April led the administration to delay the opening of the plant until after June because it was only 20 percent completed (El Imparcial 1985j). In 1987, reports of the malfunctioning of the processing plant began to circulate (El
Imparcial 1987c, 1987d, 1987e). In the end, the plant project was abandoned due to bad construction and vandalism (Ortega Castro 2001). The failure of the recycling plant meant that the new dump was to receive all of the garbage collected by municipal workers, which, in turn, led to the dump exceeding its capacity much sooner than planned. I will return to this point later in this chapter.

Throughout the process, the city administration persisted in their argument that this would be a successful step in the modernization of the urban area, despite all evidence to the contrary. This insistent invocation of an imaginary Mexican city of “progress” and “modernity” (Bonfil Batalla 1996) happened at the expense of realistic solutions to major problems in waste management. The persistent assertion spilled over to a new cleanliness campaign with the theme, “A clean city is a beautiful city” (El Imparcial 1985k, 1985l, 1985m), developed to raise consciousness among the residents. City and private leaders claimed that the campaign simply asked all “citizens” to “concern themselves with keeping the capital city of the state decent” (El Imparcial 1985n p.1A). Others acknowledged the work of the city administration in the area of garbage management because this “represent[ed] the hygiene and health of the Oaxaca people” (El Imparcial 1985n p.1A). The mayor, Jorge Fernando Iturribarria Bolaños, recognized the contributions of the Oaxacans who “responded favorably to the campaign initiated against garbage because they are aware that ‘a clean city is a beautiful city’” (El Imparcial 1985o p.6A). Another time the mayor explained the objective of the campaign thus: “To make the capital of our state one of the cleanest cities of the republic” (El Imparcial 1985p p.11A). He went on to describe the rational behind the campaign:

We produce one kilo of garbage per person and it costs the administration one peso and 70 centavos to sweep, collect
and dispose of this garbage, which is the most difficult process and which has obliged the city to take measures for the modernization of the city...A clean city is not one in which we sweep more, but rather one that we litter less...One lives better in a clean city (El Imparcial 1985p p.11A).

In this respect, the modernization of the city is explicitly linked to the practices of MSW management. At the same time, the burden for waste management is shifted towards that private sphere, since “dirty” here refers to keeping waste in the household, rather than reducing overall quantities. The tension between public and private responsibility or the city and the citizen was exacerbated by the always incomplete nature of purification, represented in this case, by the expelling of waste. Despite the city’s efforts to “industrialize” garbage management and to enlist the aid of citizens, city residents were still concerned over the quality of the urban environment (El Imparcial 1985q, 1985n, 1985r, 1985s, 1985t, 1985u, 1986). An editorial from November of 1985 summed up many of these concerns:

...given that the mountains of waste can constitute and in fact are real foci of infection that not only give a bad appearance, but also constitute the cause of many illnesses that can cause epidemics that cause serious suffering among the residents of a place: because of this in all places, especially in large populations or in cities that are growing like Oaxaca, garbage is the fundamental reason for concern for municipal authorities, who have as an obligation procuring the cleanliness of the city....One cannot deny the effort made by municipal authorities who direct a large part of the municipal budget to the cleaning services, but it is not sufficient and because much garbage remains daily which makes the participation of the citizens indispensable...Oaxaca should be a clean city, something that it has achieved, but it still needs a lot more because some people devote themselves to throwing garbage anywhere they go, above all in the markets that should be very sanitary, nonetheless, the ignorance, the negligence, and above all the insane desire to litter nullifies many of the
efforts to confront the knack that some show for throwing garbage everywhere. The question of cleanliness cannot remain the sole responsibility of the administration; it is up to all who live in the city to collaborate so that Oaxaca will be a clean city, not just for visitors, but rather for ourselves, for the idea that we have to live in a clean city...(Las Noticias 1985a p.1A)

Throughout the 1980s, the city continued to emphasize the importance of keeping the city clean, while at the same time making it clear that the responsibility for doing so should be shared between the municipality and the citizenry:

One of the most serious problems of the city is, without room for doubt, that of garbage. One day without sweeping stains the impeccable image that the Oaxacan capital maintains at the national level. But, how much does it cost and what can we do to keep the city beautiful? Confronting this problem is the most difficult. Not all of the population cooperates to put garbage in its place. If everyone helps out, the resources devoted to this area could be lower (Cruz Garcia 1987b p.1A).

The modern fix for this problem required the disciplining of citizens, on the one hand, and the attainment of certain markers of progress on the other. Referring to one of the principle markers of modernity – efficiency – the municipal president of the city of Oaxaca proposed to contract women to sweep, because they were “more efficient” and would “do the job better” (Cruz Garcia 1987b p.1A). Women were already responsible for the management of garbage in the private sphere, so the notion here was to bring their expertise into public waste management.

This is not to say that the city could always implement the newest technologies and practices. For example, the city also began to use mule-drawn carts to offer service to the areas most difficult to reach. The goal was to expand service coverage from 130 colonias to all 150 (El Imparcial 1987f; Cruz Garcia 1987). But, “[t]he mayor indicated
that this service has been implemented as a result of the petitions made by the residents of these areas of the city” (*El Imparcial* 1987f p.1A). This was all done to sanitize the environment of the capital city and to make sure that the population had better living conditions to avoid sources of infection (*El Imparcial* 1987f). The mule-drawn carts were paraded through the major streets of the city so that, “the *ciudadania* would perceive this initial action that will benefit the marginal zones of this capital” (*El Imparcial* 1987f p.1A). But the city then claimed that it was hard to meet this goal given the bad condition of the city’s collection fleet (*El Imparcial* 1988a). The only thing, in fact, that the administration seemed to feel was going according to plan was the municipal dump, “which was well located, such that it does not affect the citizens as a center of infection” (*El Imparcial* 1988a p.2A).

Before the garbage could be taken to this site, however, it had to be collected. To this end, in 1987 the city initiated the “cleaning service through dumpsters for garbage (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2) (*El Imparcial* 1987g p.3A). The city explained the new dumpster system this way:

> Dumpsters…are metal boxes painted olive green that are located in strategic locations; those with low capacity…are situated one for each street…larger ones are located in residential areas, or near schools, commercial centers and markets. The first ones are totally full in a week are emptied by a specially adapted unit and planned by those responsible for municipal services who return as many times as necessary to empty the dumpsters. The larger sized ones have to be removed directly to a municipal dump and equally the necessary precautions have been taken so that as much as with the first type, in the second type of dumpster wastes don’t accumulate on their outsides and become a source of infection (*El Imparcial* 1987g p.3A).
Despite the above plan for effective use of the dumpsters, citizen reaction tuned negative very quickly, just as it had in the 1960s and 1970s. Complaints focused on the fact that, rather than improving the cleanliness of the city, the dumpsters were having the opposite effect:

The dumpsters that the administration of the city installed since the middle of the month of September have been converted into new messes that, far from serving to keep the city clean, have provoked further contamination…. Before, the neighborhood was clean, but since the installation of these dumpsters, apart from representing a serious hazard to drivers…[they are] now full of garbage inside [and] have attracted dogs as well as scavengers who fight over what they want…. In the Mercado de Abastos [the city’s largest market], the merchants asked that the authorities responsible for the cleanliness of the city not permit that garbage remain for long periods in the dumpster, as it generates more contamination…(El Imparcial 1987h p.3A).

Figure 4.1: Garbage: A cancer that must be eradicated (El Imparcial 1987a p.3A)
Given the consistent unpopularity of the dumpsters, one might imagine that the city would have abandoned this technology. While the municipality did try, as the above opinion suggested, rationalizing its routes and hiring more employees, it also continued to install dumpsters in other parts of the city. This was done with unwavering faith in the technology on the part of the municipality. One official remarked that the “dumpsters [were] the most viable solution to the problem of garbage in the city” and went on to explain that they would be located in all parts of the city, particularly in outer areas where garbage trucks were unable to pass (Torres 1988 p.1A). More complaints followed:

In the different areas of our city, we have seen an abnormality generated by the installation of the garbage dumpsters that, more than representing a very significant investment of the current municipal administration, do not justify, in operating terms, their presence in our
streets….Only a few weeks after having been installed, they are becoming real centers of infection and the least that one can think is: what will happen when the hot season and then the rainy season come?...This is not important for the health of the people? It is not worth the effort to replan the measures taken?...It has been mentioned that one of the supposed priorities for the next year is the health of the public….Our city is fundamentally touristic and it should be taken into account that even if we do not want to accept it, or if it costs us a lot to have to do so, we sell the image, comfort, health and tranquility in addition to our cultural treasures….The residents of the city prefer that the traditional cleaning service be made more efficient, with more trucks, more personnel with better job incentives for those that complete the, of course thankless, but highly useful job, that they improve the schedules, in sum: that we do not invent solutions that come from the best intentions in the world, but that do not work in practice (El Imparcial 1987i p.2A).

Rather than trying to find a more ‘traditional’ and, perhaps, more feasible way of solving the garbage problem, then, the administration insisted that it was the responsibility of the citizenry to adapt to the technology:

It is up to the citizens themselves to cooperate and to bring the garbage and to dispose of the garbage in the dumpsters, for which reason the education and orientation of civil society is imperative, as it is fundamental in these cases that it be the citizens themselves who cooperate in keeping the city clean (El Imparcial 1987j p.3A).

A different official explained that “the system of dumpsters, whose second phase of operation is being undertaken, especially in the peripheral zones of the city, is turning out to be very efficient for the necessities of Oaxaca” (El Imparcial 1988b p.2A). He continued by demanding that the citizens cooperate to take care of the dumpsters, asking for “conscientiousness about the management of garbage” (El Imparcial 1988b p.2A). Citizens, however, still resisted this view, as this editorial shows:
Given the opinions that we frequently hear from the citizens, we return again to the theme of those such hailed, but not efficiently operated, dumpsters that were brought to our city after they were, as say the people who know, rejected in the city of San Luis Potosí. They insist on the recommendation that the users of these metal messes separate their organic and inorganic waste with the goal of facilitating their processing, nevertheless, we have received information to the effect that these are indiscriminately mixed in the municipal dump, given this, what cause do they have to ask the citizenship for their cooperation in separating it?...The problem of garbage is one of the fundamental ones of the entire municipal administration and serious and responsible methods should be implemented to control it. Among these is principally the rationalization of the resources, though they are limited, belong to the city….The separation of the garbage does not resolve anything if it is just done on the part of the citizenry and is recombined in the dumps. If moreover, there is no real treatment, with the constant supervision of those who are responsible for public health…the rest is rhetoric, publicity, demagoguery (*El Imparcial* 1988c p.6A).

During the 1980s, the municipal government of Oaxaca made a number of attempts to modernize waste management through the imposition of various technologies. Behind these attempts was an “imaginary” Oaxaca, one based on technocratic understandings of urban space that erased garbage from the picture. All of these technologies failed because they were implemented from this point of view and did not account for the daily practices of waste management undertaken by the public. The city’s insistence that “Oaxaca [was] a clean city” set the city up for continuous critique by its residents, who were producing a different image of the city through editorials. This tension continued into the 1990s.

1990s

The 1990s began with further debate over the role of dumpsters in MSW management in Oaxaca (*Las Noticias* 1990a). The *municipio* also started to discuss other
solutions to the problem of garbage. The local business community, for example, was recognized for helping out by paying the new barrido tax. As they put it, this was in their best interests:

Oaxaca is basically a tourist city and we want that those who visit us take with them a good impression. For this reason, we reiterate the support of Oaxacan merchants for the actions of the municipal and state governments that have to solve these multiple problems (García 1990a p.1A).

While the merchants had voiced their willingness to pay the new tax, the administration was still trying to convince other residents to cooperate (García 1990a, 1990b). At the same time, there were complaints about the government’s ineptitude in resolving the problem of garbage in the city. One angry observer claimed that the government’s neglect was “criminal” and that its insufficient waste management was a major factor in environmental pollution. For many observers, the blame, however, did not stop with the city. Rather, the situation was also the fault of inconciencia ciudadana, that is, thoughtlessness by citizens. Solid waste management was increasingly becoming a negotiation between the public and the private sphere. Like other city services under neoliberal restructuring, waste management placed a significant financial burden on cities struggling with federal and state funding cuts. In response to this, the municipality tried to privatize waste collection outright during the early 1990s. It had already created a Grupo Corporativo de Empresas Paramunicipales (Corporate Group of Para-municipal Businesses) in order to transfer part of the burden for city refuse collection and disposal to private entities. Then in 1995, a plan to contract with this group to collect and process MSW was unanimously approved by the state legislature. The municipality was given 90 days to designate a business to receive the concession. This right was granted to the
municipality in recognition of the fact that MSW management “require[d] a very serious investment” from the city (Romales 1995 p.3A). The municipality, however, was never able to come to an agreement with any private firm and thus remained legally responsible for the collection and disposal of solid waste in the city (Ortega Castro 2001, p.88).

It was therefore up to the city to maintain a site for the disposal of its waste. Though the city and its associated municipios had been dumping waste at the site in Zaachila for more than ten years, the land was ejidal property, and as such was not officially owned by Oaxaca City. The eventual ownership of the dump by the city was facilitated through changes to Article 27 in 1992. After meeting with the ejidatorios and the mayor of Zaachila, Oaxaca City’s municipal president explained:

For purposes of public use, the administration of the city of Oaxaca has expropriated an area of 16 hectares of land…located in the ejido San Maria Zaachila that will be dedicated to the improvement and construction of a processing plant for garbage, with the approval and help of the Secretary of Agrarian Reform (Las Noticias 1992 p.5A).

The ejidal committee of Zaachila was paid 180,895,975 pesos for indemnification of the land. By the time the dump was legalized, there had already been a number of complaints from the neighborhoods of Vicente Guerrero and Emiliano Zapata, near the site, that the environment and their health had been threatened by the dump (Bracamontes Ruiz 1991). They were also upset about the lack of city services in the area, a common complaint in colonias populares (see Chapter Three). Even those who had derived subsistence or supplemental income from the dump were asking for its removal. As one garbage scavenger described it:

Well yes, it is true that the dump has served us in a certain way as a source of work, although with ridiculously low
earnings, but it is preferable that it be moved to another area, in view of the serious health problems that it has caused us (quoted in Bracamontes Ruiz 1991 p.2A).

In spite of such concerns, the municipal dump is still on the same site and has grown in size and area of contamination. Now 22 municipalities (the city of Oaxaca along with its 21 contingent municipios) dispose of their waste there. There is still no processing and only minimal attempts have been made at mitigating the contamination it causes.

2000-2005

While the city and state governments still have not adequately addressed the issue of disposal, they continue to expand collection service (both in area and frequency) and look for better ways to “modernize” MSW management and make the system more efficient. The development and implementation of the “Integrated System of the Management and Use of Solid Wastes” (SIMARS), which came into effect in January of 2004, is the best example of this. SIMARS is a program proposed for the municipio of Oaxaca by a consulting firm based in the state of Puebla. Noting that MSW management has led to high levels of dissatisfaction among the public, the firm suggested the reorganization of routes, an increase in the frequency of collection, the use of dumpsters (again) and other transfer units, an increase in the number of mechanical barrenderos (see Figures 4.3 and 4.4), and especially, the implementation of recycling and composting programs at the community level. All in all, such recommendations departed very little from the initiatives undertaken by previous city administrations. Having implemented the program, city representatives remain optimistic about the ‘progress’ of SIMARS including: 1) the attainment of the resources, tools, planning and operation to fulfill 100
percent of the demand for services, 2) decrease in complaints per week (to the office of the *Coordinadora de Servicios Urbanos*) from 63 to 12, 3) acceptance of dumpsters among the population, including an increased demand for them in certain areas, 4) total restructuring of the collection system, 5) reduced costs of waste management, and 6) the personal training of Oaxacans in the operation of SIMARS. The administration also declared that the “project of the systematic closure of the municipal dump is a real alternative with the acceptance of the people of *Guillermo González Guardado* and the other surrounding neighborhoods, which has gained the approval of many institutions” (H. Ayuntamiento de Oaxaca, 2002). While it may have become a “real alternative” the city has yet to close the dump. In the next section, I discuss how residents of the city view waste management and the cleanliness of the city. While residents in some areas view the city as relatively clean, residents in all areas still list garbage among the main ecological problems the city faces.

**Figure 4.3: Mechanical Barrendero in Zócalo**
Survey Regarding Contemporary Waste Management

In a survey conducted in three areas of Oaxaca in 2004, respondents were asked their views of Oaxaca’s contemporary garbage problem and current MSW management in the city. The following tables describe how citizens view the problem of MSW in Oaxaca and its management. Table 4.1a shows how all respondents, regardless of location, ranked garbage as the top ecological problem in the city. This was the first question in order to prevent influencing the response unduly with questions focused on garbage.
Table 4.1a: What is Oaxaca’s main environmental problem?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Problem</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garbage (G)</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>40.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G and S</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>13.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Shortage (WS)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WS and G</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of these</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewage (S)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (O)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Combinations</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>&lt;1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results, as stratified by area:

Table 4.1b: What is Oaxaca’s main environmental problem?\(^{12}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Problem</th>
<th>Central City %</th>
<th>Outer City %</th>
<th>Zaachila %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water Shortage</td>
<td>41.58</td>
<td>25.15</td>
<td>37.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garbage</td>
<td>72.27</td>
<td>66.87</td>
<td>91.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewage</td>
<td>20.79</td>
<td>22.09</td>
<td>55.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>14.11</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Forty percent of respondents listed garbage alone as the primary environmental problem in the *municipio* of Oaxaca. An additional 24 percent listed it in the top two environmental problems (WS+G; S+G). Thirteen percent of respondents listed garbage as one of the top three environmental problems (All). The second highest percentage of responses fell to water shortages, which was listed as the primary environmental problem.

\(^{12}\) Percentages do not add to 100 because of the possibility of combined answers.
by 11 percent of respondents. Sewage was the third most named response, with six percent. The prevalence of the garbage problem belies the municipality’s inability to erase waste entirely from the city. Both waste and expectations of cleanliness, though, are uneven distributed through the metropolitan area.

When this data is stratified by location (Table 4.1b), it reveals that residents of Zaachila (including Guillermo Gonzalez Guardado), are relatively more concerned about garbage than residents of other areas. What is more surprising though, is that a larger percentage of residents of the center city listed garbage compared to residents of the outer city, despite the fact that collection is more frequent in the center.

Table 4.2: How often do garbage trucks come through your neighborhood?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Citywide</th>
<th>Central City</th>
<th>Outer City</th>
<th>Zaachila</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1 time/week</td>
<td>37.12</td>
<td>27.72</td>
<td>56.44</td>
<td>16.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 times/week</td>
<td>44.88</td>
<td>24.75</td>
<td>40.49</td>
<td>73.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 3 times/week</td>
<td>14.40</td>
<td>39.60</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>9.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>7.92</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several of the survey questions concerned contemporary MSW management practices and how they affected different locations and populations within the ZMCO. Table 4.2 shows responses about the frequency of garbage collection in the surveyed colonias. In 38 percent of the total cases, the respondent said that garbage trucks pass less frequently than one time per week. Approximately 45 percent of respondents said that the trucks pass between one and three times per week and 14 percent said that garbage was collected in their area more than three times each week. This would be true mostly in El Centro, where the garbage trucks pass some areas four times each week, including Sundays. About 40 percent of people in the center said that trucks pass more than three times per week, compared to less than one percent in the periphery of the city and less
than ten percent in Zaachila. The majority of respondents in the outer city said that the trucks pass less than one time per week while the majority of respondents in Zaachila (73 percent) said that the trucks pass between one and three times per week.

Respondents from all areas were more consistent in the amount of garbage that they estimated that their household produced each week (see Table 4.3). This holds across different survey sites. Most of those surveyed (64 percent) thought that their household produced between 3 and 7 kilos of garbage each week. Thirty-one percent of respondents estimated higher amounts, or more than 7 kilos each week (see Table 4.3).

According to the survey, there was always someone home when the garbage trucks passed in 67 percent of cases (see Table 4.4). This is important in Oaxaca, in that garbage is usually taken directly from the house to the truck. It is against local regulations to leave garbage in the street for later collection. Only four percent of respondents said that there was never anyone at home when the trucks passed, while 27 percent said that there was sometimes someone at home. In Table 4.5, a related practice is shown in that 89 percent of respondents answered that they disposed of garbage in the garbage trucks, rather than the street or another location. Again, this hold true across the survey sites.

Table 4.3: How much garbage does your household produce each week (in kilos)? (In percent of Responses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Central City</th>
<th>Outer City</th>
<th>Zaachila</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>32.69</td>
<td>48.52</td>
<td>29.45</td>
<td>21.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>31.30</td>
<td>33.66</td>
<td>33.74</td>
<td>24.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-10</td>
<td>17.73</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>20.25</td>
<td>25.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>14.96</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>14.11</td>
<td>26.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.4: Is someone home when the garbage trucks pass? (In Percent of Responses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Citywide</th>
<th>Central City</th>
<th>Outer City</th>
<th>Zaachila</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>67.31</td>
<td>55.44</td>
<td>65.64</td>
<td>82.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>26.59</td>
<td>33.66</td>
<td>29.45</td>
<td>14.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>9.99</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They don’t pass</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5: Where does your household dispose of your garbage?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Citywide</th>
<th>Central City</th>
<th>Outer City</th>
<th>Zaachila</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trucks</td>
<td>89.20</td>
<td>80.20</td>
<td>92.02</td>
<td>93.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>10.89</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6.09</td>
<td>6.93</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three survey questions were aimed at people’s perceptions of garbage and the cleanliness of Oaxaca City. Table 4.6 shows that 35 percent of respondents perceived that their neighbors produced more garbage than they did. Only 13 percent felt that their neighbors produced less garbage than they did and 40 percent said that the amounts were equal. Similar trends are apparent in all three locations where very few people were willing to say that they produced more garbage than their neighbors did. When asked if their household produced more garbage than in the past (Table 4.7), the majority of respondents (57 percent) insisted that they produced the same amount that they had before, while another 35 percent thought that their household produced more garbage than they had previously. This trend held across areas, but respondents in Zaachila were relatively more likely to claim that their household garbage production had increased.
Table 4.6: How much garbage do your neighbors produce a week?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative Quantity</th>
<th>Citywide</th>
<th>Central City</th>
<th>Outer City</th>
<th>Zaachila</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than we do</td>
<td>35.46</td>
<td>38.61</td>
<td>32.51</td>
<td>37.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than we do</td>
<td>12.47</td>
<td>11.88</td>
<td>15.95</td>
<td>7.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal to us</td>
<td>39.61</td>
<td>46.54</td>
<td>28.83</td>
<td>50.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>12.47</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>22.70</td>
<td>5.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7 How much garbage does your household produce now, compared to the past?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Citywide</th>
<th>Central City</th>
<th>Outer City</th>
<th>Zaachila</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less</td>
<td>7.20</td>
<td>6.93</td>
<td>9.82</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More</td>
<td>57.06</td>
<td>58.41</td>
<td>52.76</td>
<td>62.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same Amount</td>
<td>35.18</td>
<td>34.65</td>
<td>36.20</td>
<td>34.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8 Is Oaxaca a Clean City?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Citywide</th>
<th>Central City</th>
<th>Outer City</th>
<th>Zaachila</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>58.17</td>
<td>32.67</td>
<td>73.00</td>
<td>59.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>41.00</td>
<td>64.36</td>
<td>26.99</td>
<td>40.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked if Oaxaca was a clean city (see Table 4.8), the majority (58 percent) said that it was not, forty-one percent said it could be considered a clean city. Differences can be seen in this variable between the outer-city and the central city. Central city respondents were more likely to claim that the city was clean, than were residents of outer areas of the city. Zaachila residents were more closely divided, but still tended toward claiming the city was not clean. These responses can be compared with how respondents in each area ranked garbage as an environmental problem. In the case of the outer city residents, the proportion that ranked garbage as one of the biggest environmental problems (67 percent) is fairly similar to the number of respondents who answered that Oaxaca was not a clean city (73 percent). This is not true for the other
areas. Respondents from Zaachila listed garbage as the main environmental problem at a much higher rate (92 percent) than they said that the city was not clean (60 percent). On the other hand, even though the majority of respondents in the center said that Oaxaca was a clean city (65 percent), a majority (72 percent) still listed garbage among Oaxaca’s main environmental problems. This apparent contradiction can be directly related to the mismatch between the production of the image of a clean and modern city, and the inadequacy of waste management to match those expectations. It could also come from the fact that while collection is more effective in the center, it is also the area most affected by any disruption of the waste management system.

Discussion

In this chapter, I have reviewed the municipal solid waste practices implemented by city managers in Oaxaca from 1950-2005. I have also indicated the emergence and circulation of certain discourses of waste and modernity that affected and were affected by these practices. In this concluding section, I discuss the relationship between these discourses and practices and the theoretical and analytical points that emerged from Chapter Two.

The processes of modernization in Oaxaca produced unintended consequences, which are now undermining the legitimacy of modern institutions involved in environmental management and urban development (see Beck 1999). One of these was the emergence of garbage as a serious risk to public health and the environment. The emergence of waste as risk is related to processes of modernization in several ways. First, as Beck explains, risks are historically contingent quasi-objects that should be considered as actors in the networks that produce, manage, define, and live with them. Beck also
insists that these risks are the objects that resist and threaten modern orders. In these ways, waste is constructed as a risk through discourses and practices that seek to eliminate it from the modern city. It is, in Mary Douglas’s terms, matter out of place. It is the uncontainable and uncontrollable threat to the integrity of the modern city, as well as its citizens. The more city managers attempted to guard the “public secret” of waste, the more obvious its existence became. When the city’s sanitation department installed the dumpsters, for example, they expected that these would provide a more efficient way of eliminating waste from the city. Instead, these contenedores became public nuisances and were viewed as foci of disease. Rather than make waste invisible to residents and tourists, this technology made it more visible as it piled up in certain locations.

Additionally, at the same time that Oaxaca was staking its modern reputation on its image as a unique, beautiful, and clean cultural center, budding tourism and growing consumerism combined to produce more waste (see Chapter Five). Oaxaca became dirtier, precisely because of modernization projects, like the extension of highways to connect it with the rest of the country and the pursuit of more industrial development. Concomitant process of urbanization, involving rural-to-urban migration was an additional factor. Add to this the invasion of modern (clean/hygienic) materials (see Chapter Five).

Moreover, it was the very modern technologies that were intended to ameliorate problems with garbage that continued to bring it to the fore. In addition to the dumpsters discussed above, the installation of a mechanized garbage sorter was also a failed attempt at “modern” waste management. It turned quickly from an example of Oaxaca’s progress and status as a clean city into a useless, abandoned building, contributing only to the
“chaos” of the dump. A similar case can be made about the municipal dump. Once an informal dumping point on the outskirts of the municipal area, it is now a large and central place in the midst of the urban area. It was supposed to be sufficient for several decades, but it has already almost exhausted its potential and contaminated its surroundings. As the Counselor of Ecology of Oaxaca told me, it was simply insufficient to the “unimaginable” growth of the metropolitan area and the changing quantities and qualities of MSW (interview with Jacqueline Mariana Escamilla Villanueva 9/29/04).

It is more than just the contradictory processes of ordering and waste production, however, that set the conditions for the garbage crises (see Chapters One and Five). It was also the processes of political-economic exclusion and marginalization that led to both the dumpsite and new colonias being established in the same place (see Pulido 2000). The city of Oaxaca and a few other municipalities were dumping their waste on unused land for a long while before they owned it. This was because the “chaotic” nature of urban development (see Chapter Three) meant that there was little land available for either those who came to the city to find employment in the burgeoning cultural center or for municipal uses. At the same time, land prices in the city rose, which meant that people directly from rural areas, or from the city itself, began to settle on the ejido land around the dump. Additionally, within the village of Zaachila itself, political conflicts forced many people to flee to its outskirts. These various tendencies toward urban expansion and political-economic exclusion produced the area now known as La Ciudad de Basura (see Chapter Five).

In some sense, Oaxaca was successful in its modernization projects. The service economy, based on tourism (which is, in turn based in part, on Oaxaca’s image as a clean
city), is a significant income-earner for certain individuals in the city. But, with increased affluence comes increased garbage production (see Chapters One and Six). The inability of city administrations to produce this imagined clean and modern city on the ground undermines the legitimacy of the municipality and opens the way for the “subpolitics” (Beck 1999) of the garbage crises. At the same time, a process of individualization, characteristic of reflexive modernization (Beck 1999) begins to have effects on the way that waste is managed and perceived in the city. This process, wherein individuals take responsibility for socially produced risks, has led to a particular relationship between garbage and the modern citizen-subject. I take this up in Chapter Five.
Chapter 5: Garbage and the Citizen-Subject

Chapter Four argued that the city of Oaxaca undertook many waste management projects during the latter half of the 20th century in an effort to produce a “modern and clean” city, one that took the public health of its citizens and visitors seriously. The expulsion of waste from the city was essential to this project, though complete purification of the city was (and is) ultimately unattainable. In this chapter I analyze how, when and to what effect citizenship is mediated through physical and metaphorical relationships to garbage. The analysis centers on representations of people who produce, work with, or live with garbage. I argue that the production of difference in and between citizens and non-citizens is mediated through the politics of garbage. The ability to separate oneself from garbage, to expel it, is one marker of the modern Oaxacan citizen. On the other hand, proximity to garbage often marks otherness and is used to restrict access to full citizenship. That is to say, the politics of garbage is a site of struggle over the “right to the city”, not only because of the implications of garbage management in peoples’ daily lives, but also because of the abject nature of garbage and its symbolic pollution of those associated with it. Before I turn to the ways that garbage has been associated with particular groups, I will first discuss the meaning of garbage in Oaxaca and representations of how the proper citizen should relate to it.

The Meanings of Garbage

[T]he cultural economy of waste can work on different strata: symbolic, affective, historical and linguistic. All these strata extend the ... assessments of waste emerging out of the dominant scientific/environmentalist discourse on waste, where the highest values tend to lie in pious and unrealistic assumptions about purity (Hawkins and Muecke 2003 p.xvi).
The meaning of garbage is constructed. As Mary Douglas’s definition of waste as “matter out of place” implies, the identification of an object as garbage is largely dependent upon the spatial and historical context in which it is found (Douglas 1966). To paraphrase a popular refrain, what is garbage for one person, might be valuable for another. This is especially true in the context of Mexico where most of the 30 percent of wastes that are recycled (SEDUE 2003) are divested by scavengers who make their living selling materials they find in trash cans, dumpsters, or on the dump itself. Despite its potential as a resource, however, in the context of modernizing cities, garbage is most often perceived and represented as a threat to urban order and public and environmental health.

This means that garbage has a constant presence in urban development practice as the abject that threatens the order of modernity. As shown in Chapter Four, the total elimination of waste from a city is impossible. Further, the type of consumption-based development being pursued in Mexico and other places inevitably adds to the waste stream. At the same time that the expulsion of waste becomes imperative, more waste is being produced, leading to a constant threat to modern order. To call garbage the abject product of development is not to deny that waste has affective qualities, “for waste can touch the most visceral registers of the self – it can trigger responses and affects that remind us of the body’s intensities and multiplicities” (Hawkins 2003 p.xiv). It is rather to think through how these bodily impulses link with practices and discourses of modernization to produce the “risks” garbage poses to the environment, public health, and modern urban identities. The agreed upon nature of garbage as risk in the context of Oaxaca allows for certain demands to be made with respect to its management. For
example, Magdalena Loaeza Cruz, neighborhood president of the Colonia Guillermo González Guardado, framed the issue of the dump’s location in these terms: “We do not want the dump anymore, every day our children and older people are sick because of the wastes that are in the ground” (Sánchez García 2004). This argument resonated with the General Coordinator of Urban Administration and Municipal services, who said that “it is important to note that [the problem of garbage] is very serious, that perhaps the majority of citizens do not perceive the magnitude, because the overflow of wastes kept in this site harms not only the environment, but also the people that for necessity live on the outskirts of this dump”(Sánchez García 2004).

The idea that garbage is a threat to the health of the populace is also supported by the rhetorical (and sometimes physical) separation of garbage in Oaxaca into “Dirty Waste” (Basura Sucia) and “Clean Waste” (Basura Limpia) (El Imparcial 1988c, also see Figure 5.1 below). Dirty waste includes anything that smells and is seen to attract and sustain disease vectors such as rats, flies, mosquitoes, and street dogs. This means that organic garbage, almost 50 percent of the city’s waste, is considered dirty. On the other hand, materials that do not smell, like plastics and aluminum cans, are considered clean garbage, despite the fact that they will not decompose in the dump and that they release toxic fumes when they are burned. These definitions have changed over time, of course, and owe much to the changing composition of garbage and growing consumerism.
Garbage and the Citizen-Subject

Garbage as the abject product of development has a particular relationship to the proper modern citizen-subject. On the one hand, the proper citizen is one who contributes to the production of garbage through work and consumption. On the other hand, the proper citizen employs appropriate waste management techniques to separate him or herself from the waste he or she produces. This tension between the current culture of consumerism and the need to expel waste from the household and the city was a common theme among many of the environmental groups I talked to, but also among municipio, state, and federal officials. The head of SEMARNAT’s (Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources) Department of Environmental Management told me that “Garbage is a very big problem in all countries, but there is a special concern in developing countries
like Mexico. People are learning to be consumers and the stuff that is consumed comes in disposable packages and bottles” (Interview with German Morales 11/30/03; see also Figures 5.2 and 5.3). The local director for environmental education for the federal agency SEMARNAT said that consumption habits must change because people are focused on “the possession of things as the measure of development or success” (Interview with Rosío Olivera 11/4/03). Similar sentiments were expressed by the head of a local NGO, INSO (Institute of Nature and Society of Oaxaca). He argued that one of the problems with waste management was that while everyone knows that garbage is important, many think of it in terms of collection and disposal, rather than in terms of “our relationship with waste” (Interview with Juan Jose Consejo 9/12/03). He went on to say that “we have a model of development based in waste”, meaning that the development of commerce is based on the production of (eventual) waste. While he argued for the importance of the “Three Rs” (reduce, reuse, recycle), in managing Oaxaca’s waste, he felt that reuse and recycle got more attention because their “mode of development does not endorse reduction – it is in contradiction with it” (Interview with Juan Jose Consejo 9/12/03). For him, the problem was not just efficiency, but also the “sufficiency of our conception of waste” (Interview with Juan Jose Consejo 9/12/03).

The idea of integrated waste management involving the Three Rs was also suggested by Dr. Oliverio Gonzalez Alefita, a local expert in environmental engineering and consultant to PROFEPA (The Federal Ministry for Environmental Protection). He was quick to point out that this would indeed imply a reduction in consumerism (Interview with Dr. Oliverio Gonzalez Alefita 2/5/04). He is conducting research to determine the composition of waste in some of the smaller communities around Oaxaca.
and suggested that the different compositions found among these areas were related to consumerism promoted by radio and television. The General Coordinator of Urban Administration and Municipal Services traced this problem to the completion of the interstate from Mexico City to Oaxaca in the early 1990s. He continued by saying, “the garbage problem has really grown with the increase in shopping centers, consumerism, etc. The city has not been able to react adequately” (Interview with Fausto Porras García 10/4/04).

Figure 5.2 Pepsi in a Disposable Bottle (*Las Noticias* 1995a 16A)
Figure 5.3: Squirt in a Disposable Bottle (Las Noticias 1995b p.18A) These two advertisements show how the idea of disposable packaging is used as a selling point for products. The plastic bottles were supposed to be more practical, convenient and hygienic. They became available in Oaxaca in the mid-1990s. Before that, most soft drinks were sold exclusively in glass containers. This type of packaging is one of the reasons that plastic is considered to be a large contributing factor to the growing waste stream (despite its characterization as clean).
The Regent of Ecology of Zaachila argued that the problem of garbage and other environmental problems did not exist in “pre-western” societies. But, the attitude of the west has now “brought us to the point of a global environmental catastrophe” (Interview with Felimon Diaz 10/16/03). He elaborated:

This attitude to garbage comes from western culture. Before the conquest, these problems did not exist. Even though there were lots of people living in Monte Albán, they did not have this problem. The idea that you have to produce disposable items, and that that is the measure of development comes from western culture. Now, as mestizos, many of us have lost this knowledge – they no longer see consumerism as bad (Interview with Felimon Diaz 10/16/03).

For many interviewees, the solution to this changing relationship to waste brought on by consumer culture, is to raise consciousness among the public about proper garbage management. One of the municipal services directors told me that the two main problems
he faced were the lack of a culture of waste management and the lack of information about waste management. The General Coordinator in charge of waste management services echoed this when he named the lack of a culture of cleanliness and little consciousness about environmental pollution as the two main problems for managing garbage in Oaxaca. For this reason, he felt that the city should continue to meet its responsibilities in terms of collection, but that it should also work on raising awareness among citizens. The Chief of Environmental Management for SEMARNAT in Oaxaca also noted that the government should be involved in consciousness raising programs for school children. One of the environmental group leaders I talked to also felt that no one was really as worried about the garbage problem as they should be and that “for a tourist city, there ought to be more concern” (Interview with Mario Caballero Lopez 10/21/03). His group wanted to increase awareness about the separation of garbage. At the same time, they were concerned about the real results of such an effort. The separation of garbage is a popular concept in Oaxaca, but not one that is executed in any large way. Several of my interviewees told me that even when separation is done at the household level, all of the bags are still combined by the city when the trucks pick them up, so they all end up in the same place, anyway (Interview with Mario Caballero Lopez 10/21/03; Interview with Rosio Olivera 11/04/03; Interview with Felimon Diaz 10/16/03).

The Counselor of Ecology of Zaachila claimed that with respect to garbage “we are very unconscious of the conditions in which we live” (Interview with Merced Marcela Nunez Armengol 10/23/04). She continued:

The root of the problem is this lack of consciousness. Right now there is none. This problem is of an educational nature – education within the household and within the schools. This type of education is not going from parent to child,
it should, but in the reverse. While the instructors agree in principle, they are lazy and do not follow through (Interview with Merced Marcela Nunez Armengol 10/23/04).

The Counselor of Ecology of Oaxaca City voiced a similar thought when she said that there is a “need to increase consciousness of the public so that people know how this affects each person as an individual” (Interview with Jacqueline Mariana Escamilla Villanueva 9/29/04). She added that it is true that Oaxaca does not possess a culture of cleanliness, but the real problem is that they do not have the information to do so.

The notion of consciousness-raising is wrapped up in individual, rather than municipal, responsibility for waste management. The Counselor of Ecology of Zaachila makes this clear when she says “we want the municipality to solve the problem for us, but without us having a consciousness of how to do our part” (Interview with Merced Marcela Nunez Armengol 10/23/04). Oaxaca’s Counselor of Ecology also made it clear that the purpose of making the public more aware of problems associated with garbage was so that people would “do their part” (Interview with Jacqueline Mariana Escamilla Villanueva 9/29/04). The contemporary Oaxacan citizen is a producer of waste, someone who needs to learn to manage garbage better on an individual level to be a proper citizen. This individualization, or institutionalized individualism (see Beck 1999), with respect to the problem of waste is also evident in many of the cleanliness campaigns undertaken by governmental and nongovernmental organizations. The city of Oaxaca itself, as part of the SIMARS program, enlisted the slogan “Clean City, Pride of Oaxaca” and distributed many pamphlets telling residents that “It is better to recycle it!” (City of Oaxaca 2003). The pamphlet outlined proper recycling practices. SEMARNAT also ran a cleanliness campaign in the last few years called “National Campaign for a Clean Mexico”. Materials
promoting this campaign bear the slogan “México limpio, tarea de todos” (A clean Mexico, everyone’s responsibility). These materials emphasize that the government is “counting on you” to “contribute to the creation of the Mexico that you and your children want to enjoy” (SEMARNAT 2002). Part of this campaign was directed at school children who were instructed in proper waste management techniques. The general objective of the program was to “create, among the school community, a responsible attitude for the care and conservation of the environment in order to increase the separation of garbage and for the recycling of solid wastes, as well as to reduce the environmental and health impacts of an inadequate management of solid waste” (SEMARNAT 2003). The emphasis here was to change practices at home, and to orient them towards modern recycling projects.

A similar goal was expressed by all three of the environmental groups I talked to, INSO, Alternativa Ciudadana (Citizens’ Alternative) and a smaller, unnamed group of activists interested in waste management issues (Interview with Mario Caballero Lopez 10/21/03; Interview with Juan Jose Consejo 9/12/03; Interview with Rosa Maria Flores 10/7/04). All of these groups stressed the need to educate the public about their own waste management practices, particularly around the Three Rs. While these groups were critical of the government’s handling of solid waste, they all emphasized the role of individuals in resolving the problems. This emphasis on personal responsibility fits well with the type of individualized discourse of neoliberal citizenship, particularly in terms of the individual’s responsibility to bear the risks produced in modern society (Beck 1999). It also owes much to discourses of modern urbanism, particularly to the hygiene manuals and legal constitutions of the 1800s and 1900s that defined the proper citizen-subject
(González Stephan 2003; Stallybrass and White 1986). In contemporary Oaxaca, the citizen-subject, then, has a contradictory relationship to waste. As a participant in the dominant consumer culture, each citizen produces waste. But, the citizen is also expected to free him or herself (and the city) from the burden of waste and its polluting effects through proper waste management. The proposed resolution of this contradiction requires the disciplining of citizens into proper waste managers through promotional materials produced by governmental and non-governmental organizations. Once citizens are made aware of the problem and informed about proper waste management technologies, waste will no longer be a threat to them or to the city.

Figure 5.5 Civil Valor: By example (Rios 1995 p.8A). This Figure shows a state official “contributing to social harmony by putting garbage in its place”
Transgressing the boundaries through which the bourgeois reformers separated dirt from cleanliness, the poor were interpreted as also transgressing the boundaries of the civilized body and the boundaries which separated the human from the animal (Stallybrass and White 1986 p.132).

“We too are Mexicans” – Sign over the entrance to a Mexico City dump, populated by scavengers (Castillo Berthier 1990 p.12).

In contrast to this proper citizen subject who separates him or herself from waste through proper management, many groups have come to be discursively identified as “Others” to the modern Oaxacan citizen through a physical or metaphorical proximity to waste. This association operates unevenly across time and space, producing the differentiated bodies and subjects of the citizen and the non-citizen. This section will document and contextualize these moments in newspaper articles, editorials, and photographs.

In Oaxaca, an association with garbage is used to discredit and shame various groups at different points in time. I have identified three basic groups often associated with garbage, each with its own relationship to the modern citizen-subject. They are 1) “transient” outsiders whose association with the city is brief but significant for waste production and waste management, 2) the sweepers who are formally employed by the municipality to remove waste and 3) residents of La Ciudad de Basura (City of Garbage), as the whole area surrounding the municipal dump is popularly known, which includes both scavengers and neighborhood activists.
Transients

The first group of people rhetorically associated with garbage is transient residents of the city. Often, these are protestors who have staged a sit-in in one of the large public areas of the city, or who have blocked off important thoroughfares. During one such protest in the Zócalo, an observer remarked on the effect that these events have on the central city:

> It is lamentable the situation in which one finds *el centro*…. It is drowned in filth and garbage in all directions and as if this was not enough, in order to facilitate the protest this Saturday, the protestors constructed wooden latrines located directly across from the *Palacio de Gobierno* (Pérez Blanco 2004 p.2A)

This particular protest was conducted by indigenous groups concerned with their marginalization in the state. Many other groups also stage such sit-ins. These include the states’ teachers who regularly stage a protest in the Zócalo each summer. This annual strike by the state teachers union is often described in the papers as a problem because it produces “mountains” of garbage (Valencia 2004a p.1A). During one such event, the State Secretary of Health told the press that, “the protest of the teachers group could affect public health” in the city (Ramírez 2004a p.1A). He elaborated: “Considering that they initiated their protest eight days ago, the accumulation of garbage and human feces becomes a factor of contamination that could affect the food that the protestors themselves eat” (Ramírez 2004a p.1A). The teachers are often described as indifferent to the effects their protests have on the residents of the city:

> Among the crumbs, garbage and excrement, the teachers, those who educate the children of Oaxaca, wait lying about, as though they were at the beach….Here in the middle of the urban madness, or in the eye of the hurricane, time stands still. Teachers and union leaders remain blind and
deaf before an agitated society that screams to reclaim respect of their rights too (Valencia 2004a p.1A).

In a similar moment, an “indignant” mother helping her child navigate the garbage produced by the teachers declared, “Truthfully, it is not just what they do to us” (Valencia 2004a p.1A). At the end of this particular protest, the city estimated that the teachers left 120 tons of garbage in the *Zócalo* (Valencia 2004b). For some, the teachers’ apparent willingness to litter the central city with garbage implied incompetence, and there was concern expressed over their ability to educate Oaxaca’s youth (Valencia 2004b).

Another group accused of littering the center with garbage is politicians, particularly those supported by the institutionalized parties. While the politicians themselves are not necessarily transient, the political campaigns during which they produce waste are. In 2004, this came to the fore during the highly contested municipal elections. The municipal administration, made up of members of *Convergencia*, a coalition party that defeated the PRI in 2000, insisted that it was not their responsibility to clean-up after political campaigns, but it added more hours to its schedule and did so anyway (Bolanos 2004). The director of municipal services told the press that more than 50 tons of garbage was left by political campaigns that season (Notimex 2004). This is a topic of discussion every campaign season. In 2003, one editorial asked how the public could trust people who filled the city with such garbage to be in charge of the municipality, as it is the responsibility of the municipality to keep the city clean (*Las Noticias* 2003a). An opinion piece went further, declaring:

Democracy has turned out to be an efficient producer of garbage. How many tons of paper and plastic have the parties generated in these months? How many posters,
pamphlets, banners that are just awaiting their journey to the dumps? A face, a phrase and a symbol reproduced thousands of times in order to nourish the garbage dumps. The campaigns make us live among garbage. The physical garbage that took possession of our streets, the political garbage that hijacked radio and television. There is a lack of imagination in the parties to encounter clean bridges of communication with the citizens. There is also a lack of rules restraining the rights of these parties to fill us with filth. I understand that nothing can be done legally in order to change the content of these campaigns, but we can regulate the location of these objects meant for the garbage heap in our public spaces (Las Noticias 2003b 2A)

Another group often denounced for polluting the city is traveling vendors, who are disliked by the more permanent business community (El Imparcial 2004). Traveling merchants are described as damaging the city by producing garbage. During holidays scores of these vendors come to the city of Oaxaca. This means extra expenditures for the municipality, which complains that the vendors leave behind hundreds of tons of garbage that must be disposed of (Velez Ascencio 2002). In an effort to keep the city more clean and orderly, the former administration tried to cut down on the number of these vendors by restricting the areas to which they had access and by threatening fines for those without official licensing and permission (El Imparcial 2004)

The above groups pollute the city during their transient relationships with it. In doing so, their own legitimacy is undermined by their association with waste. Either by sitting in their own garbage, or by producing flyers and posters that litter the city, or by leaving the waste produced in their selling of goods to residents of Oaxaca, protestors, campaigns, and traveling vendors threaten the modern order of the city of Oaxaca and persecute its citizens by subjecting them to garbage. This marks them as dangerous others who cannot be trusted.
Barrenderos

The people charged with cleaning up the mess left by protestors and transients are the sweepers or *barrenderos* who work in three shifts, cleaning the streets and public areas of the city. Their work is celebrated each year with the *Día del Barrendero* when the mayor recognizes the “invaluable” labor performed by these municipal workers. In 2003, the mayor called the 220 sweepers “tireless” and described their importance in helping the *municipio* “guarantee a cleaning service that is in accord with the requirements of a city considered a *Patrimonio Cultural de la Humanidad*” (Valencia 2003 4A). The accompanying article, about the lives of the *barrenderos*, expanded on this, describing one worker as “a man of rough appearance whose skin has been roughened by time and work and whose brow has been wrinkled”, but whose eyes “reveal nobility, nonetheless” (Valencia 2003 p.4A). The article goes on to describe the kinds of indignities the *barrendero* experiences during his shifts. Cars almost hit him, groups of people laugh at or make fun of him, and the citizenry continues to leave garbage everywhere, making his job that much more difficult. One particular revealing situation is described like this:

> The afternoon is long and from 2 in the afternoon until 9 at night, another group of sweepers vigorously sweep the city. At the same time, in some point of the city, a women leaves her house and leaves a bag of garbage in the doorway of her neighbor while murmuring, “We’ll see if these filthy *barrenderos* come to pick it up” (Valencia 2003 p.4A).

While the overall portrayal of the sweepers in this case is positive, it is clear from the previous quote that the city residents they serve do not always share this attitude. In fact, the celebration of the *barrenderos* by the city and in the newspaper represents a re-

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13 Oaxaca was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1987.
signing of the popular notions of *barrenderos* as dirty and lazy, as shown in survey responses that will be discussed later (see also Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6: A dump in the Zócalo. And the *Barrenderos*? (*Las Noticias* 1990b, p.4E). This is a photograph showing garbage piling up in the central square. It asks, accusingly, what about the *barrenderos*, who are supposed to be cleaning the city?

*La Ciudad de Basura*

The above examples show that in the case of Oaxaca people associated with garbage are often portrayed as dirty, defiled, dangerous outsiders (Sibley 1995; Prashad 1995; Mills 2000; Kwawe 1995). Moreover, “the metonymic associations (which trace the social articulation of ‘depravity’) are constantly elided with and displaced by a
metaphoric language in which filth stands in for the slum-dweller: the poor *are* pigs” (Stallybrass and White 1986 p.131). While the groups discussed above are affected by this association, the most drastic case is the people who live intimately with society’s waste – scavengers and residents of communities adjacent to garbage dumps. In Oaxaca, the whole area of the dump and the surrounding *colonias* is commonly referred to as “La Ciudad de Basura” (City of Garbage). Others describe the area as, “not a place made to live…not apt for humans” (Interview with Arquitecto Cutberto, 1/31/04). There are also more disparaging remarks made about the area and its inhabitants. The Regidora de Ecologia of Zaachila (Regent of Ecology of Zaachila), described the residents as ‘paracaidistas’ (squatters) and continued, “they are not people from Zaachila; they are people who have conflicts, people to be careful of, people who were thrown out of other places, and the majority of them indigenous” (Interview with Merced Marcela Nuñez Armengol 10/23/03). While not the direct focus of this dissertation, this racialization of the urban outsider is important as Oaxaca has the largest indigenous population in of any state in the republic, with 16 different ethnic groups represented. Indeed, the relationship between indigenous people and the environment is complicated by many factors. The popular notion that they are better stewards of nature and the symbolic importance of ‘traditional’ identities in the tourist industry, often serves to make indigenous people appear ‘out of place’ in the modern city. As the urban is, in this and many other places, the focus of citizenship (González Stephan 2003), this marks the ‘urban indigenous’ as less than complete citizens and, therefore, threatening.
Scavengers

The people most often associated with garbage in Oaxaca are *pepenadores*, scavengers who either roam the city picking up recyclables to sell or live next to the dumpsite itself. Those who roam the city are rarely discussed in newspapers and other documents, but have, during certain periods, been photographed with some frequency (see Figures 5.7, 5.8, 5.9). Often, these pictures appear with sympathetic captions that imply the state of the *pepenadores* is an exceptional example of the failure of development and modernization programs to provide for Mexican citizens. At the same time, however, these representations subtly other the practice of scavenging and its practitioners.

Figure 5.7: The collection of cardboard is the source of income for many people, above all the elderly (*Las Noticias* 1990c p.3A).
Figure 5.8: The economic crisis…makes some look for any serviceable item anywhere (*Las Noticias* 1988 p.3A).

Figure 5.9: Many Families Subsist on Waste (*Jimenez Leyva* 2002 p.6A).
These complex representations of *pepenadores* are further complicated by their almost complete absence from public discourses about recycling. While the head of SEDUE (Secretariat of Urban Development and Ecology), stresses the need for recycling programs, he also acknowledges that Mexico already recycles about one-third of its waste (Conference on Solid Waste Management, Mexico City 9/18/2003). That is a fairly impressive number given that the United States is estimated to recycle about 28 percent of its waste (Environmental Protection Agency 2005). Mexico’s relatively high level of recycling is accomplished through the work of *pepenadores*. This labor, however, is largely hidden from the public eye and is made virtually invisible in policy discussions about recycling. It is subtly acknowledged in other ways (see Figure 5.10).

Figure 5.10: Don’t dirty… your city. (*Las Noticias* 2004b p.16A). The copy at the bottom of this picture reads “Because these containers are recyclable, throw them in the trash can. Don’t pollute [by] throwing them in the street. Lend a hand to Mexico.”
The idea, expressed in Figure 5.10, that containers should be thrown in the garbage because they are recyclable, assumes the existence of scavengers, despite the fact that they are largely “out of place” in “modern” waste management. Despite this othering, several feature length stories describe the lives of the *pepenadores* on the dump. Sometimes they are portrayed as victims of circumstance, but they are also represented, or represent themselves, as something other than human (bare life in Agamben’s terms).

Garbage for some, [is] a source of income for others…. “We are like the vultures” [says one scavenger]…this unique naming derived for the use that they get from the wastes of others, in this case from the garbage, because of which their work is better thought of as a public service (Valencia 2004c p.6A).

Despite the fact that their work performs an important social function, they are not well respected outside of their own community, as shown in this child’s story:

Alejandra has always lived of garbage…although she is convinced that her work is very dignified, it hurts her that some people make fun of her daughter when they find out that her mother is a *pepenadora* (Esteva 2002a p.1A).

A focus on the lives of children at the dump is a common theme in the popular press (Esteva 2002a, 2002b; Ramirez 2002). Their innocence is contrasted with the filth in which they search for toys and food (see also Figures 5.10 and 5.11).

Before the visit by *Las Noticias*, Oscar, Uriel and little Edwin had already collected some action figures and basketballs. For them it hardly matters that the balls are deflated. It will suffice to patch them and put air in them….Beginning a new activity, Edwin is very enthusiastic. In wonder, he looks around without knowing where to start. Then he collides with his brother who seconds before found a CD copier made of plastic that he now shows to the other ‘little explorers’. The ear-to-ear smiles of the others manifest their happiness. But, more than just making them happy, this inspires them to continue
with their work, since they have the hope of finding such a spectacular object....The disagreeable odors that come from the dump are not an impediment for them because their desire to find toys in good shape is stronger.... Although there are also those that would, upon knowing what the children do, would look poorly upon it, this is not important to them because they have come to see it as a game. What they really want is to look and look until they find something that will light up their faces with a big smile (Esteva 2002b p.18A).

Figure 5.11: Toys from the garbage. The fruit of Luis Alberto’s Search (Las Noticias 1990d p.2A).
Some of the children who play on the dump are not children of adult *pepenadores*, but rather children from the other colonias around the dump, like that of *Guillermo González Guardado*. Most of the people in this *colonia* do not make a living from scavenging, but they are still closely associated with the dump in the popular imagination, as the place name *La Ciudad de Basura* implies. This has several meanings: first, that the neighborhoods have come from garbage, that is, the presence of the dump is what brought people to the dump; second, that the people who live there are themselves garbage, society’s waste. It also serves to lump together very different groups of people, with different relationships to garbage and to the municipality.

The *pepenadores*’ union, for example, has a strong relationship with the city, often making accords with it over the management of the dump (*Las Noticias* 2002a). During one fire season, the municipality equipped the scavengers with fire extinguishers so that they could snuff out any fires that may start. They also established an area of the
dump in which the scavengers could store their collected goods until they were able to sell them to the intermediaries who regularly come to buy them (Las Noticias 2002a). The General Coordinator of Urban Administration and Municipal Services of Oaxaca told me that the pepenadores do work that is very important for the municipio, but that this work is not valued by many people. He added that the city is trying to establish a system of credentials for them to figure out more precisely how many of them there are and to better understand their situation. He concluded, “They live day to day” (Interview with Fausto Porras Garcia 10/04/04). While some city officials expressed an interest in continuing to help the pepenadores on the dump, other people saw them as simply out for their own type of political power (Interview with Felimon Diaz 10/16/02). Environmental groups also blamed the pepenadores for contributing to pollution (Interview with Mario Caballero Lopez 10/21/03; Interview with Rosa Maria Flores).

*Colonia* Tactics: Differentiation and Reversal

Residents of the *colonia* have had an equally complicated, though more contentious, relationship with the municipal government of Oaxaca City, as colonias populares often do (as discussed in Chapter Three). Nonetheless, it is this physical and discursive marginalization from the central city, and its proximity to the dump itself, that has allowed *colonia* residents to develop effective political strategies for demanding rights to the city. They do this by separating themselves from the undifferentiated mass of chaos that is “The City of Garbage” and reordering the physical flow of trash and its discursive articulation with certain citizen-subjects. The garbage politics based on the closure of the dump by the neighborhood of Guillermo González Guardado reverses the relationship between insider and outsider by blocking the flow of trash and forcing those
in the center to live with it. However, while it may work to achieve certain development goals in the *colonia* of *Guillermo González Guardado*, it preserves and strengthens the association of *colonia* residents with garbage. I will first discuss the tactics that the *colonia* uses. I will then discuss the effect these tactics have on public opinion of the *colonia*.

Since the year 2000, there have been a series of blockades in which people from *Guillermo González Guardado* have closed off access to the dump, leaving the city of Oaxaca and the rest of the ZMCO with no way of disposing of their trash. During these blockades the city suspends collection and usually asks residents to keep the trash in their houses, though as mentioned earlier, this request often goes unheeded by the public.

As garbage piles up in the city center, particularly around markets, and begins to smell and get in the way, the city is forced into negotiating with the *colonias* to end the blockade. Because of the nature of public space and political protest in Oaxaca where, as mentioned previously, it is perfectly legal to block roads, occupy parks, etc., the city doesn’t have recourse to remove the protestors. The public in Oaxaca is fairly tolerant of, or at least accustomed to, their streets being filled with protestors and many of the protests are barely registered for this reason. However, the presence of garbage in the streets is considered a crisis that demands immediate attention.

To date, these blockades have resulted mostly in unfulfilled promises by the city to find a new location for a dump, to reforest, or to provide facilities or services for the *colonia* (Interview with Arquitecto Cutberto, 1/31/04). In the most recent crisis, the *presidenta* of *Guillermo González Guardado* expressed her frustration with the city’s failure to follow up on promises made in the last six accords. Through these efforts,
though, the *colonia* has secured a meeting center (2001) a medical center (2003), and electricity in part of the *colonia* (2003).

By using this tactic of blocking the flow of trash, the people of the *colonia* are able to make the abject product of development, garbage, visible, revealing the “public secret” (Hawkins and Muecke 2003) of waste. By forcing the citizens of the center to live with their own waste, they reverse their relationship to the abject, and also, to some degree, challenge their own abject status. They are claiming their “rights to the city” by demanding official recognition, services, and municipal responsibility for the health of their *colonia*’s residents. While their politics of manifestation (making waste visible) are effective in achieving some of their goals, the impacts of these politics on their positions as citizen-subjects are less clear, as I discuss in the next section.

Figure 5.13: Waste piles up around a popular market during a garbage crisis.
Strategic vs. Symbolic Reversal

In blocking the flow of garbage out of the city, the residents of Guillermo González Guardado have found an effective tactic to force the municipality of Oaxaca to provide services for the neighborhood. Despite the successes achieved by this strategic reversal of their relationship to waste, the cultural work these tactics perform is less clear. A symbolic reversal, a separation from abject status, would require a re-signing of the colonia in the public imaginary. In this section, I will consider how the colonia’s blockades are perceived and represented by other residents of Oaxaca and Zaachila in order to evaluate whether or not their abject status is changed through these politics.

The political tactics of people from Guillermo González Guardado are perceived differently from those of the union of street sweepers and garbage collectors who go on strike. While both groups cause garbage to pile up in the center, their actions are often viewed differently by ‘the public’. The following two tables (Table 5.1 and 5.2) are a measure of citizen’s perceptions of two groups intimately associated with waste in Oaxaca. The first table shows whether or not respondents support the colonias neighboring the dump when they block the access road. Fifty-eight percent of respondents answered that they would never support the colonia in this, while another 15 percent said that they might support it, depending on the particular circumstances. Only 11 percent said that they would always support the colonia. Table 5.2 shows responses to the question: “Do you support the barrenderos when they go on strike?” The results are similar to those in Table 5.1. Fifty-five percent of respondents said they would never support them, while 22 percent said that they might, depending on the circumstances. Another 20 percent said that they would always support the striking sweepers. The
acceptance of both actions shows differences across sites. Respondents in the central city were less likely than those in other sites to support either activity, but they were relatively less likely to support the *colonia* than they were the barrenderos. In both cases, respondents in Zaachila were more likely to support the action, that is, they were more likely to support the *barrenderos* when they were on strike, and they were more likely than respondents in other sites to support the *colonia* blocking the dump.

Table 5.1 Do you support the *colonia* when they block off the dump?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Citywide</th>
<th>Central City</th>
<th>Outer City</th>
<th>Zaachila</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>10.80</td>
<td>02.97</td>
<td>11.65</td>
<td>17.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>14.96</td>
<td>15.84</td>
<td>17.79</td>
<td>09.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>57.62</td>
<td>78.21</td>
<td>64.41</td>
<td>24.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>16.62</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>48.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 Do you support the *barrenderos* when they go on strike?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Citywide</th>
<th>Central City</th>
<th>Outer City</th>
<th>Zaachila</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>20.50</td>
<td>15.84</td>
<td>14.72</td>
<td>35.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>21.88</td>
<td>25.74</td>
<td>17.79</td>
<td>24.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>54.29</td>
<td>56.44</td>
<td>63.10</td>
<td>37.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

People’s reasons for supporting one or both groups or for not supporting either group varied, but some of the most common responses are listed in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Opinions of *Barrenderos* and *Colonia* Residents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do not support Sweeper/S do not support <em>Colonia</em></th>
<th>Support Sweeper/S support <em>Colonia</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They are lazy /They cause trouble</td>
<td>They ask for better services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They (both) cause more pollution</td>
<td>, lack of technological and technical support, and consciousness / Always and whenever they make their problems known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The dump can present contagions and illnesses for the <em>colonia</em> They provide a service to us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They are fighting for hygienity/ The city should be clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They are needy people/ They provide us a service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For the children that live there/ They help us separate the garbage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They know the danger in which they and we live/ They have the right to do so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We want that they do not bring garbage from other parts [to Zaachila] They collect the garbage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some respondents simply did not support any type of protest, or at least none that led to the accumulation of garbage in the central city. Other respondents, though, had different reasons for supporting or not supporting each group. “You can’t fix things that way” was one person’s response to the actions of the *colonia*. The same respondent did not support the *barrenderos* either, but this was because she felt that street sweepers and
garbage collectors were obliged to do their jobs, and that, “for this the special garbage tax is paid”. Another respondent who supported neither group said the colonia uses the dump “for this end [to get what they want].” On the other hand, his reason for not supporting the city workers was that he simply does not support strikes. Many respondents described striking barrenderos as “lazy”. Another felt that the blockades were, “a government issue”, while the strikes were provoked by the union.

The respondents who always supported both groups also made subtle distinctions between the two. “They ask for more services and lack technical and cultural support” was one person’s reason for supporting the blockades. This respondent also supports the city workers’ strikes “when they advise [the public] of their problems”. Another supporter of both groups claimed that the people who live near the dump, “are being harmed” while the city workers “fight for their rights”. An additional respondent said that “[the residents of the colonia] are within their rights to demand more cleanliness” and that municipal garbage workers had the right to strike, “because they are not paid well”.

Those who always or often supported the municipal garbage workers, but never the colonia residents, made distinctions between the colonia and the city itself, claiming that blockades harm the citizenry in some way. Many respondents also noted that the colonia residents made the decision to live near the dump and that this choice invalidated their claims. The fact that “the garbage dumps were put there first, [while the people of the colonias around the dump] arrived later” was a popular reason for not supporting blockades.

A recent editorial similarly claimed that conflicts over the dump do not have to do with the dump’s location in Zaachila, but rather with the people who settled there: “The
problem is the fact that this zone has been settled by colonias of squatters with bad ways of living which leads to delinquency” (El Imparcial 2004a p.1B). While the point of this analysis is not to negate these constructions with ‘the truth’, it is fitting to note that many of the original settlers of this area, were expelled (like waste) from the township of Zaachila because of political conflicts and made to live near the dump (Bracamontes Ruiz 1990). The more important point to highlight here, however, is the failure to acknowledge that the same socio-spatial processes produce both marginalized “Others” and urban landscapes (Pulido 2000). This is highlighted by Oaxaca’s Counselor of Ecology’s claim that, as the dump was already there when they moved in, the residents have no right to complain about their environment. She added that the fact that they chose to live by the dump showed that, “they clearly do not care about their children” (Interview with Jacqueline Mariana Escamilla Villanueva, 9/29/04). The General Coordinator of Urban Administration and Municipal Services also felt that one of the problems with the dump was that the municipality had let people with few resources establish themselves in communal lands and that now they use the dump as “blackmail.” He continued by saying that the fact that they had been there for fewer than ten years and yet had electricity, water, pavement and property rights, meaning that they had a high degree of services for a relatively new colonia popular. His estimate of the amount of time that people had lived in the area does not match exactly the histories of residents of the colonia. While it is true that the population in the area has grown in the last several years, many of the residents have lived there 15 years or more (Interview with the Neighborhood Committee of Guillermo González Guardado 10/6/04).
These views are also supported by articles in the areas two largest newspapers, *Las Noticias* and *El Imparcial*. In a survey conducted by a research group after the most recent crisis, 65 percent of citizens said that the people of Zaachila, where Guillermo Gonzales Guardado is located, were responsible for the crises. The same survey also showed that 68 percent do not believe that the dump should be closed permanently (*El Imparcial* 2004b). Citizens echoed the opinion of the General Coordinator of Urban Administration and Municipal Services, who claimed that the *colonias* used the dump as blackmail: “We urge the people of these *colonias* to use other means in their struggle since in place of being supported, they inspire repulsion for causing and provoking a dirty city with waste everywhere” (*El Imparcial* 2004b). Another editorial argues that the dump is for some, “a rich source of gold to ask for what they want in exchange for allowing the disposal of wastes. This problem has caused serious headaches for citizens of the capital, businesses and tourism” (*Las Noticias* 2003b p.1A). In many of these responses, there is both the explicit assumption that these people do not count as urban citizens, despite living within the municipal statistical area, and the implicit suggestion that they (therefore) do not deserve to receive services. As described in Chapter Three, the process of *colonia* formation in Oaxaca is often one in which neighborhood groups organize against the city in some manner and stage public protests to demand services. This is, while sometimes characterized as chaotic, more or less ‘normal’. As one informant explained, however, “[the people who live around the dump] are somehow seen as worse than the other *colonias* that demand the same things that anyone else would; they are resented because they live with the garbage” (Interview with Juan Carlos, 9/1/04).
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that, while socially constructed and contested, the meaning of garbage in the context of modernization and development is largely agreed upon. Garbage is what is out of place, what disturbs order and threatens the integrity of social identity. In short, it is the abject product of the very development and modernization discourses and practices that would seek to eliminate it. The proliferation of a culture of consumerism that views citizens as buyers and, therefore, producers of garbage is combined with discourses of individual assumption of societal risks. Citizens must not just participate in the production of waste through consumption, but must also learn and enact proper waste management practices, expelling waste from their households and from the city. On the other hand, those people who litter the city as well as those responsible for cleaning it are often othered through their association with waste. In the case of the residents of La Ciudad de Basura, this association with waste contributes to their abject status as the vaguely identified, dirty, and threatening outsiders against which the clean modern citizen is identified. The tactics employed by the residents of Guillermo González Guardado reverse the typical physical relationship of the insider and the outsider to garbage by making those in the city live with their own waste. While this results in a public outcry and forces the city to negotiate with the neighborhood to provide services, it does not produce a symbolic resigning of colonia residents as citizens. Their inability to produce a symbolic reversal equal to the physical one is a product of the stickiness of abjection itself. Their association with garbage continues because they are blamed for dirtying the city, despite the fact that it is the residents of the city itself who actually produce and leave out the garbage that piles up. In
this way, the *colonia's* rights to the city are limited and undermined while those of other residents are preserved.
Chapter 6: Conclusions

In this chapter I will first review the arguments of the previous chapters. I will then turn to some broader conclusions that can be drawn from the politics of garbage in Oaxaca. These conclusions are in three areas. First, I argue that these garbage crises can be seen as “disturbances” in Stallybrass and White’s terms, that is, as a disruption in the everyday, taken for granted, order of things. Viewing garbage crises and the associated politics in this light allows us to interrogate this order in useful ways. Next, I argue that the case of garbage politics in Oaxaca also sheds light on the contradictory nature of the processes of modernization that help to produce urban space. Following this, I discuss the broader implications of the case for understanding processes of abjection. Then, I consider the utility of the concept of abjection for environmental justice research. I conclude with a few comments about the practical applications of this research.

Conclusions of the Case Study

The history of the city of Oaxaca shows that the modern city is not a naturally evolving phenomenon, but rather the result of an unevenly applied set of concepts and practices imported from centers of power and shaped by local contingencies. Colonial notions of order and progress shaped the city from the end of the 15th century on. These have been combined with the neocolonial development practices of international institutions and local elites in the last two decades.

One part of the project of modernization undertaken in Latin America since the colonial period entails the production of purified and ordered cities. In Oaxaca and elsewhere, this meant that garbage and filth had to be eliminated from the city. In the interest of expelling garbage from the city, Oaxacan officials implemented a series of
changes in the waste management system. The first wave of changes included formalization of sanitation labor and an increase in equipment like garbage trucks. The second phase instituted more radical changes in technology in the form of dumpsters and transfer stations. The third phase included the establishment and formalization of the current dumpsite in Zaachila and the building of a mechanical waste sorting facility, along with the spatial diffusion of transfer stations and dumpsters. The most recent phase has included the institution of the integrated waste management program (SIMARS) which calls for increased coverage and efficiency in collection and the promotion of new programs for recycling and increased citizen participation. This process of modernization produced some unexpected consequences. The transfer stations and dumpsters, instead of solving the problem and keeping the city clean, actually contributed to it by becoming foci of contamination throughout the city. The dump, while perhaps a reasonable solution at the time, was not adequate to handle the quantity and type of waste produced in the municipal area today.

In addition to an imperative of cleanliness, processes of modernization, as they have worked through Oaxaca, have also contributed to an increase in consumer culture and a concomitant change in the quantity and quality of waste produced in the area. Per capita waste production in Oaxaca has more than doubled in the last four decades and the wastes produced are increasingly inorganic ones that will not decompose on their own.

These contradictory impulses of modernization, toward purification and elimination of wastes from the social body, on the one hand, and toward consumption-based development on the other, produce a crisis of urban governance and proliferate environmental and public health risks. While city officials find it necessary to produce an
image of Oaxaca as a clean and modern city for residents and tourists alike, waste management practices are increasingly inadequate to produce this clean and modern city on the ground.

The production of a clean and modern city went hand-in-hand with the production of clean and modern citizen-subjects. This subjectivization entailed two processes. First, citizens were disciplined through proper hygiene and sanitation practices. These practices have changed over time, but are largely rooted in colonial practice. Currently, modern Oaxacans are expected to participate in development through consumption. Given the disposable nature of this consumption, this means that the modern Oaxaca citizen-subject is a larger producer of garbage than in the past. At the same time, city residents are also expected to take personal responsibility for their own and the city’s cleanliness. Governmental and non-governmental cleanliness campaigns emphasize citizen participation through such practices as separating garbage, recycling and refraining from littering.

The other process at work is the identification of those who did not follow these practices as dangerous, dirty outsiders. This is true in the case of protesters and nomadic merchants, as well as in the case of political campaigners. The strongest association of people with garbage, though, comes from those who live near the municipal dump, in “La Ciudad de Basura.” Representations of these people in the popular press, interviews, and surveys, while sometimes sympathetic, effectively set them apart from the clean and modern citizen-subject of Oaxaca. Their marginalization in the political economy of Oaxaca is both material and symbolic.
The garbage crises brought about by the tactics of the people of Guillermo González Guardado are effective in that they provide the colonia leverage to negotiate with the city for local improvements. Conversely, the association of colonia residents with garbage and therefore, their symbolic pollution, is strengthened through these actions. This means that their material relationship to garbage and to the city is easier to change than their symbolic one.

Garbage Crises as Disturbances

Disturbance in all its multiplicity...reveals the inestimable value of shit for understanding the contingency of “the political”. In other words, shit is “good to think with” because of the ways in which it can unsettle the boundaries between the body and its others, public and private, truth and concealment, state and environment, and, of course, pure and impure (Hawkins 2003 p. 42).

Garbage crises in Oaxaca are one example of what Stallybrass and White call, “disturbances”; that is, “what happens when the fantasy of absolute elimination and purity is abandoned” (Stallybrass and White 1986 p. 42). In Maria Kaika’s analysis of urban environments and politics, she uses the term “domestic network crisis” to denote times in which the flow of resources like electricity or tapwater is disrupted. Here, she argues that this disruption produces anxiety because it reveals something more fundamental about the nature of the economic and social relations that produce urban space.

One of the reasons why anxiety and discomfort is produced by a domestic network crisis is precisely because it forces us to reflect on the existence of things and social and economic relations to which the home is connected and which, when disrupted, render the normal function of our lives anomalous and reveal that the familiarity based on the supposed autonomy of the private space is itself a form of alienation (Kaika 2005 p. 70).
The analysis of these disturbances or crises is also methodologically useful as moments of transgression are more readily identifiable than is the normative socio-spatial boundary that they transgress (Cresswell 1996). This is also significant in terms of environmental justice because, “If we can grasp the system of extremes which encode the body, the social order, psychic form and spatial location, we thereby lay bare a major framework of discourse within which any further ‘redress of balance’ or judicious qualification must take place” (Cresswell 1996).

As Cresswell argues, “transgressive acts prompt reactions that reveal that which was previously considered natural and commonsense. The moment of transgression marks the shift from the unspoken unquestioned power of place over taken-for-granted behavior to an official orthodoxy concerning what is proper opposed to what is not proper – that which is in place to that which is out of place” (1996 p. 10). The political tactic available to the residents of Colonia Guillermo González Guardado, that of blocking the urban area’s access to the municipal dump, is an act of transgression that highlights the incomplete nature of the purification of the modern Mexican city. By forcing the people of the center to live with their own garbage, the activists help to expose the material effects of the process of urban development. This act also undermines the strategic absence and willful ignorance needed to support the ‘public secret’ that wastes do not just disappear magically. Moreover, these events bring to the fore broader conflicts over the sustainability of the urban area and issues of environmental justice because waste piling up in this city, designated as one of UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites, disturbs the citizenry. As it offends their senses of sight and smell, they begin to realize just how much of it there is and start to imagine where it all goes. While some turn away, there is
the possibility, as Stallybrass and White suggest, that such disturbances can affect real differences in the processes that produce both garbage and the marginalized populations that live with it.

What the disturbances discussed here – the garbage crises – reveal are the dual and contradictory processes of modernization and abjection that have produced contemporary Oaxaca, its citizens-subjects and the risks some of them are forced to bear. In the remainder of this chapter, I will first summarize the arguments about the production of modern urban areas that we can draw from the case of Oaxaca. I will then discuss arguments this case indicates about the nature of abjection. Finally, I will consider the political usefulness/role of the abject in “modern society”, how this links with environmental justice, and how it contributes to a new cultural politics of citizenship (as the right to the city).

Modernization

The always incomplete nature of the modern processes of ordering and purification means that there is always a remainder, something that lingers beyond their reach. This remainder can be conceived of as “risk” (Beck 1999). To some degree, then, it is the very processes of modernization themselves that produce these risks. One the one hand, modernization projects impose social, economic, polical, and moral orders. Objects that threaten this order, like waste, threaten the integrity of modern institutions and individuals. They are the historically constructed risks to which Beck refers in The World Risk Society. The uneven distribution of these risks produces what Beck calls a “subpolitics” in which the inability of government institutions to protect people from environmental bads undermines their legitimicy and authority.
Another process at work in this reflexive modernity is the individualization of risk (Beck 1999). In this case, socially produced environmental bads are made the responsibility of individuals through neoliberal discourses of citizenship. This means a rearticulation in the balance of public versus private responsibility for risk management. This is precisely what happens in the case of waste management in Oaxaca during the last two decades. As neoliberal reforms have decreased the symbolic role of the state and put pressure on dwindling municipal budgets, Oaxaca city officials have tried to discipline the citizenry into a new relationship with waste.

Abjection

The notions of the abject and abjection are relevant to this project in two senses. First, as the physical and symbolic threat to modern order, garbage is the abject product of development itself. It threatens the integrity of an urban order based on the principles of sanitation and hygienization. It is the other against which the modern city is imagined and produced. Representations of garbage in Oaxaca are often conflated with tropes of abandonment, desolation, backwardness, and lack of civic responsibility.

Additionally, the people excluded from the category of the modern hygienic citizen-subject, can also be characterized as abject. They are those people forced to live with the abject product of development through historical and spatial processes of marginalization. Their presence, as “others” coded as premodern, dirty, undisciplined and incompetent threatens the identity of the modern citizen subject, but at the same time shores up this modern identity by delimiting the boundaries of differentiation.

What this case reveals about the nature of abjection is the degree to which the position of the abject, because of its threatening nature, can be one of power. This is true
of both garbage and marginalized populations in Oaxaca. Only because it is the abject of development, does the presence of garbage in the city force municipal officials to act to remove it. Garbage crises force a revelation of the public secret of waste (and reverse the distribution of bads), which as long as it flows properly is largely ignored. When garbage (as the abject will) threatens the integrity of the social body or individual identities, it becomes a problem.

Similarly, it is only because of their abject location that the tactic of blocking access to municipal dump is both feasible and effective for the members of the colonia. By blocking the flow of trash, they are able to rearticulate the physical relationship between garbage and the citizen-subject, by making city residents live with their own garbage. This physical reversal has the effect of the temporary inclusion of the colonia in the processes of city building. They are given a forum for expressing their own development goals. Some of their local needs are met this way. They were successful in getting the city to build them a meeting center and provide electricity as well as formal ownership documents. This integration into the city is partial and uneven. Not all of their demands are met. The most glaring example of this is the fact that the management of the dump and the dump’s location remain basically the same. But, as neighborhood activists and city officials point out, the colonia itself does have more services than other ones of the same age, precisely because of their ability to leverage their spatial marginalization against the municipality.

The stickiness of the abject

The abject, then, has some innate political power as the threat to the imaginaries, practices, and disciplined citizen-subject of modernity. On the other hand, as the case of
the colonia residents shows, the political effectiveness of the abject is tempered by its cultural “stickiness”. That is to say, while the tactic employed by the people of Guillermo González Guardado is empowering because of its physical reversal of the flow of trash and its relationship to the city and the citizen-subject, it further contributes to their cultural marginalization by strengthening their symbolic relationship to garbage.

So, the political usefulness and the role of the abject in “modern society” are not always clear-cut. In the next section I discuss the implications of this conclusion for environmental justice. I then ask how this links to new cultural politics of citizenship (as the right to the city).

Environmental Justice and Abjection

I have argued that these garbage politics in Oaxaca constitute a case of environmental justice in the global south, since they emerge from the uneven and unjust distribution of risks in the area. Further, following Pulido, I argued that the most compelling approach to researching environmental justice issues must involve an interrogation of the categories of “difference” and an investigation of the historical and spatial processes that produce this difference and the environmental bads that are unevenly distributed.

I would argue that the process of abjection plays an important role in the production of the categories of “otherness” in modern societies. This is an othering that both requires and rejects the “unclean” to produce disciplined spaces and subjects of sanitation and hygiene. The incomplete nature of that rejection in turn requires the imposition of ever-more impenetrable boundaries between “modern” and “premodern”
spaces and subjects. It is the abject itself that disturbs those boundaries, while at the same
time leading to their reinforcement.

An understanding of this process of abjection and the work it does in urban
environmental politics should be a focus of environmental justice research. In the last
several years, some EJ studies have begun to focus on an interrogation of the categories
of race and class that have formed the basis for claims of environmental injustice (Pulido
2000). They have also begun to reconceptualize EJ claims and problems as a way to
challenge the assumptions and practices of development taking place around the world
(Harvey 1996; Heiman 1996). What they have not yet done is to take seriously the
socially constructed, yet materially effective nature of waste itself. It is not only the
mismanagement or unfair distribution of risks it poses, but also the very existence of
garbage, as abject to development, that threatens modernization products. This is
important to consider because it shapes our imaginaries and daily practices around
garbage in ways we do not always acknowledge. Garbage is both an actor and a social
relation.
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**Education**

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<td>1995</td>
<td>B.A. International Studies</td>
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<td>2000</td>
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**Anticipated Graduation May, 2006**  
**Dissertation:** The Politics of Garbage

**Awards/Grants/Fellowships**

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<td>1999-2002</td>
<td>National Science Foundation Graduate Student Fellowship, $18,500 / year</td>
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<td>University of Kentucky Daniel Reedy Quality Achievement Award, $3,000 / year</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant #0302575, “Socio-political Dimensions of Municipal Solid Waste Management,” $12,000</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>University of Kentucky, Office of International Affairs, Summer Research Scholarship $1000</td>
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**Teaching and Assistantships**

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Publications

In Print


Forthcoming

2005  “Forgotten Roots of the Green City: Subsistence Gardens in Columbus Ohio, 1910-1935” *Urban Geography*

Submitted

2005  “The Politics of Garbage in Oaxaca, Mexico” submitted to special issue (Environmental Justice Abroad) of *Society and Natural Resources*, June.

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