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El Río Grande as Pedagogy: The Unruly, Unresolved Terrains of the Chamizal Land Dispute

Alana de Hinojosa

When they dispersed our community,
it was as if they had cut off the hand or the arm
but that you could still feel the fingers.
You would look down and there was nothing there,
but you could still feel it. And that's how we still feel.

—María Eugenia Trillo, August 2016

When María Eugenia Trillo recalls her family's displacement from their South El Paso home following the 1964 settlement of the Chamizal Dispute, she references the body. To be displaced, she suggests, is to be corporeally severed from the land; it is to know that land and body are not as distinct as we may think; that they are intersecting terrains that can become so with emotions and memory that they “speak back” in ways that remind us that “despite the limitations of remembering through trauma and semantic and spatial confusion, the violence of loss is unmistakable, mnemonically traceable, and corporeally inscribed.”¹ More than fifty years have passed since Trillo and her family were among the recorded 5,600 mostly Mexican American residents displaced from their homes within internationally disputed land known as “el Chamizal” in the El Paso–Ciudad Juárez borderlands. Yet, even now, Trillo is haunted by a phantom limb that refuses oblivion.

Multiple South El Paso residential barrios were affected by the Chamizal Treaty of 1964. Yet those displaced from these barrios collectively call themselves the “Chamizal residents” and have referred to their experience postdisplacement as the “Chamizal diaspora”: the forced dispersal of their communities and their recognition of a shared historical trauma and “homeland” (el Chamizal) that is now, literally, across the border in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.² US-Mexico borderlands historiography often relegates this history to just a few fleeting sentences that typically overlook those displaced by the Chamizal Treaty. Instead, the literature replicates US and Mexican state narratives that insist

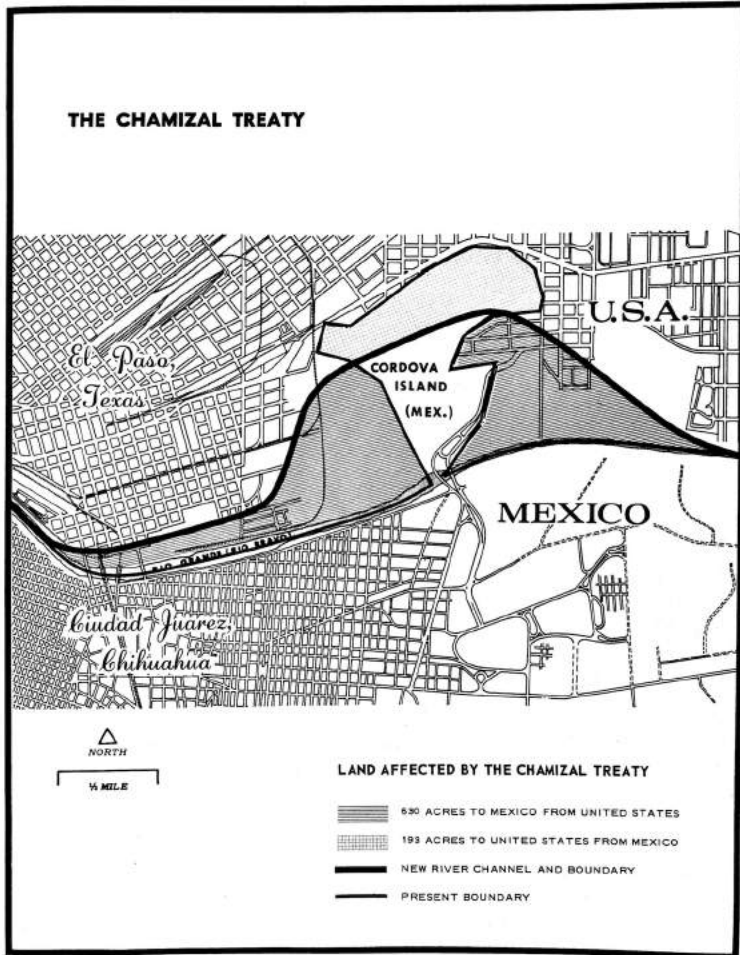
this conflict was wholly resolved with the Chamizal Treaty, which is memorialized as a “borderlands beacon” to US-Mexico diplomacy in eliminating the Río Grande’s unruliness that caused this land dispute to begin with.³ I argue, however, that this dispute and this region’s unruly river are still unfolding, unresolved stories.

Throughout history and well after the river’s designation as the US-Mexico boundary in 1848, the Río Grande has done as it has always done: move back and forth across the landscape according to its own needs and desires. State records identify this river’s refusal to stay “in its proper place” as the source of the century-long Chamizal Dispute—wherein, in 1864, one particular southward shift in the river’s channel relocated el Chamizal north of the river/boundary into what is now El Paso, Texas. It is from this moment that the Chamizal story officially begins. One hundred years later, President John F. Kennedy announced that he would bring this story to a close by virtue of the Chamizal Treaty, which streamlined the Río Grande through a concrete canal along a newly agreed-on boundary between El Paso and Cd. Juárez—thereby demonstrating how disobedience must be kept submissively “in place” to (re)secure colonial spatialities. In the redrawing of this boundary, the Chamizal Treaty returned land to Mexico for the first and only time in US history. This land, which consisted of 630 acres meant to represent el Chamizal, was the land from which Trillo’s family and thousands more were displaced between 1964 and 1970—recalling the Chicana/o Movement’s *dicho*, “We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us.”

Despite the insights the Chamizal story has to offer us about the intersections of power and geography, the power relations that ruptured and reshaped this region of the borderlands and the lives of those displaced continue to go unseen. In this essay, I work through these power relations and their effects by engaging el Chamizal, the Chamizal Dispute, and the Chamizal Treaty as instances in which three white settler societies (Spain, Mexico, and the United States) accumulated land (el Chamizal) through multiple constructs of property and the ongoing displacement and dispossession of racialized difference. Though there is only so much we know about el Chamizal’s exact location and boundaries due to “the Río Grande’s stubborn tendency to meander,” what we do know is this: el Chamizal is composed partly of an 1818 Spanish land grant deriving its name from a prolific saltbush known as *chamizo*, and falls within

Figure 1.

Map showing the redrawn boundary between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez and land affected by the Chamizal Treaty. Source: Southwest Vertical Files, El Paso Public Library.



lands the federally recognized Tigua / Ysleta del Sur Pueblo First Nations People identify as stolen by multiple colonial powers.⁴ The Chamizal story, then, is not the reconciled story of an US-Mexico land dispute, as dominant narratives would like us to believe. As I show, it is the story of overlapping native and colonial sovereignties, inter-ethnic/racial (Tigua, *Mexicano*, Mexican American, and Anglo American) relations and land claims, as well as unfinished stories, displacements, and resistances from an unruly terrain known as el Chamizal.

This essay focuses on the claims and experiences of the Mexican American Chamizal residents displaced by the 1964 treaty, the burial and denial of their stories, as well as whose needs the ongoing negation of these stories serves. I do so by contextualizing their claims and experiences within the overlapping sovereignties and racial geographies of this border region, and alongside what I identify as the Río Grande's haunting pedagogies of refusal.⁵ This unruly river not only produced el Chamizal; I argue its unruliness haunts both the El Paso–Cd. Juárez borderlands and the Chamizal diaspora. I demonstrate, for instance, how the Río Grande has haunted various ideological/geographic projects required to enact and anchor the United States and Mexico as settler possessions. While it does so most pointedly by disrupting and refusing the fixity and inevitability of geopolitical borders, it moreover “unmaps” or denaturalizes differential settler emplacements and constructs of property, racial capitalism, the spatial entitlements of exclusionary citizenship, and what Aileen Moreton Robinson calls “white possessive logics”: grammars and sensibilities that inescapably naturalize and tighten the grip of white possession, its racist underpinnings, and the myth of subaltern placelessness.⁶ More than this, I suggest that there is evidence of the river's haunting when Trillo describes her displacement as felt and remembered in and through the body as a phantom limb. In this instance, Trillo is not simply naming the brutality of the Chamizal Treaty or her community's distinct sense of place within el Chamizal; she is also articulating the Río Grande's haunting through its persistent, unpredictable unruliness felt across her body and flesh. While there is no single rendition of the Chamizal story, Chamizal residents so often reference the body and a haunting quality in their testimonies that when examined alongside the river's long-standing unruliness, together they evoke what I call el Chamizal and the Chamizal diaspora's *unruly geography of scars* wherein the Río Grande *throbs with both fists* along that “vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” and multiply hailed by the river's intimate and haunting interventions to psyche, body, land, and multiple colonial empires.⁷

In what follows, then, I demonstrate the instructiveness of analyzing the Chamizal story as this unruly geography of scars: a wayward, storied, corporeal, and haunted terrain of struggle not only inscribed with Trillo's phantom limb, or the open wounds Gloria Anzaldúa identified from "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds," but also entwined with the wounds, scars, and ongoing struggles of diverse social actors across the overlapping colonialities and claims to place that predate the imposition of the US-Mexico boundary and which collide along the El Paso–Cd. Juárez borderlands.⁸ I argue that this terrain's haunting quality is an extension of its "unwritten, unseen history of resistance" refusing domination as well as the Río Grande's colonial recognition as political boundary and the supposed permeance of white settler colonialism.⁹ Indeed, this haunting is the "relentless remembering and reminding" of an unjust settler colonial past and present wherein phantoms refuse to assure settler society of its innocence or offer reconciliation for participation in settler colonial processes and structures.¹⁰ "Haunting," insist the scholars Eve Tuck and C. Ree, "lies precisely in its refusal to stop."¹¹ This essay is therefore guided by the following questions: What are the implications of engaging the Río Grande as an active participant or deliberate social actor in this history rather than as a mere backdrop or bygone past? How do Chamizal residents underscore the river's unruly (haunting) knowability when they name the ongoing consequences of their displacement? And lastly, what might we learn when we study the residents' responses to the Chamizal Treaty alongside the insights of the Río Grande?

To answer these questions, I begin my analysis with a historical overview of the Chamizal Dispute that traces the socio-spatial production of el Chamizal and its evasive (unruly/haunting) qualities. I do so by beginning in 1680, and thereby diverge from this dispute's codified 1864–1964 time frame that temporally constrains this history in ways that conceal the Río Grande's haunting pedagogies of refusal long before 1864 and well after 1964. Following this overview, I draw on oral histories with Chamizal residents to explore their family stories and place-making practices that carved out dignified and livable spaces within this disputed terrain. Finally, I turn to archival sources that document the residents' *barrio* activism in response to the Chamizal Treaty. Here I demonstrate how their strategies to assert durable, legible scripts against their displacement both enacted and diverged from the Río Grande's pedagogies of refusal that disrupt and denaturalize white possessive logics. I am convinced that by applying the insights of the river's pedagogies to the residents' mobilizing strategy, the Chamizal story crucially contributes to the conversations we

need to have about power, land, and possibilities for working toward a more just world.

“Inability to Lay the Ghost of the Chamizal”

The Chamizal story reflects back the insights of Indigenous peoples and scholars who have long named, studied, and critiqued the core imperatives of what has emerged as settler colonial studies: principally, that white settler colonialism and dispossession are not historical events.¹² Rather, they are continually unfolding processes that (re)produce white domination and settler emplacement through (1) the constant (dis)placement and dispossession of Indigeneity and racialized difference and (2) the elimination of relations with and from land that are otherwise to colonial spatialities which hinge on mastering and reconfiguring landscapes to serve and reflect white possessive logics. While the Chamizal Dispute was officially anchored in the struggle over the sovereignty of the modern US and Mexican nation-states, the integrity of property on both sides of the boundary, as well as the idea that this dispute began in 1864, this conflict took place across the unceded lands of the Manso, Suma, Apache, and the more recent Piro and Tigua Pueblo People who were in 1680 forcibly brought to what is now the El Paso–Cd. Juárez borderlands as subjects and slaves of the Spanish Crown and Catholic Church.¹³ It was the Spanish captain Alonso Garcia who forced the Piro and Tigua People from their homes in what is now Ysleta, New Mexico. Garcia, having just narrowly escaped the 1680 Pueblo Revolt, took the 317 Indians he could and fled downriver to the Spanish Crown’s nearest stronghold in El Paso del Norte (later renamed Ciudad Juárez).¹⁴ This intertwined arrival between Garcia and his Indian captives marks the beginning of the Chamizal story.

When the Tigua arrived to this region and settled along the Río Grande in 1682 where the Isleta Mission and Pueblo of Ysleta del Sur remain today, perhaps a small comfort to their forced exile was that this region was not entirely unfamiliar to them.¹⁵ Like their home upriver, this new place was also along the Río Grande—a sacred ceremonial site for Pueblo traditions.¹⁶ Living in and tending to this place, they realized, would entail doing so as they had always done: in relation to the river that continuously reshaped the landscape in its unruly image. Although in 1751 the Spanish Crown gave the Tigua a land grant of thirty-six-square acres surrounding the Isleta Mission, the Tigua continued to tend to lands far beyond these boundaries (today covering land on both sides of the international boundary, including el Chamizal, and well into Presidio County) according to the river’s seasonal meanderings.¹⁷ The

months of May, June, and July were always the same: they brought with them mercurial deluges that moved the river back and forth across a four-to-six-mile alluvial plain that had developed over centuries of accumulative meanderings. When farming their land base, then, the Tigua left particular areas unoccupied for weeks or months at a time and cultivated them only after the river shifted its course.¹⁸

The missionaries and Spanish men who called themselves “explorers” were quick to observe this river’s changing locations in their dairies and to draw up maps—however futile in their temporality—depicting the Isleta Mission’s location in relation to this shifting landscape. A map completed in 1710 shows the Isleta Mission south of the river, while another drawn up three years later shows it north.¹⁹ Settlers’ insistence that they could build structures within the river’s floodplain only further marked them as both foreign and foolish. Though the river’s unruliness rarely alarmed the Tigua, perhaps one particular flood in 1740 brought some element of wonder when it swept the Isleta Mission away—destroying the house of their enslavers and what the missionaries thought to be the permanence of its structure.²⁰ When the deluge settled, however, and the river had determined its course, the missionaries announced the Tigua would rebuild the mission.

Living in relation with and according to the Río Grande’s will and sense of time was either lost on or willfully dismissed by settlers arriving to this region. When Mexico achieved independence from Spain in 1821, for instance, Mexican settlers began seizing and settling the “vacant” Tigua lands the tribe had put aside in anticipation of flooding, as would Anglo American settlers—particularly after an 1849 shift in the Río Grande placed the Tigua Pueblo north of the river and the newly declared US-Mexico boundary.²¹ Making the US-Mexico border was both a boundary- and identity-making process critical to the production of an emplaced white settler “self” and a nonwhite (displaced/placeless) “other.” Indeed, when the binational boundary survey commission arrived at the Tigua Pueblo in 1852, so did Anglo American settlers arrive who had been following the commission and seizing lands along the survey route by pretending to be commission employees.²² The commission’s arrival therefore brought with it a devastating period of land loss and disruption to daily Tigua land practices.

It was only a matter of time, however, until the river made itself known to the settlers who dismissed it: no sooner would they settle and begin farming the land than the river would rise and flood them out. It “was like a mad dog at their heels . . . refusing to let them remain in one place,” one man named

the Chamizal Land Grant in 1866, he and the other Mexican citizens whose land had shifted north of the river demanded the state of Mexico intervene on their behalf.²⁶ Meanwhile, subsequent floods added more terrain to the river's northern bank; at some point, these individually owned disputed lands became collectively known as "el Chamizal"—which only continued to grow with the river's meanderings through the 1890s. El Chamizal's exact size and location is therefore highly contested and perhaps impossible to define, though estimates suggest it is anywhere between 590 and 1,200 acres.²⁷

It was not until 1889, following the binational establishment of the International Boundary Commission (IBC), that Garcia del Barrio filed his first official claim against the United States.²⁸ In 1895, the IBC concluded that the issue of el Chamizal was an international land dispute in which Mexico was claiming on behalf of Garcia del Barrio hundreds of acres within El Paso del Norte's Chamizal District.²⁹ The commission tabled the case until a tribunal could meet at a later date to resolve the dispute. By the early 1900s, however, Anglo American land speculators operating under the Campbell Real Estate Company began seizing tracts of land within el Chamizal and displacing *Mexicanos* who lived there.³⁰ In what was perhaps an act of defiance in 1907 to this Anglo encroachment, several hundred *Mexicanos* asserted their claim to el Chamizal by building more than two hundred adobe cabins north of the river.³¹ Almost immediately the cabins were demolished. Yet this was not the end of *Mexicano* protest, as those who were tenants to Anglo-American landowners within el Chamizal were known to successfully negotiate their rents (sometimes reduced by nearly half) by refusing to pay at all on the ground that the land's title was faulty.³² This notably upset land values, Anglo American profit, and real estate business within el Chamizal's riddled boundaries.

In 1911, after months of debating the location of the 1864 Río Grande channel, a trinational tribunal committee composed of Mexican, American, and Canadian appointees submitted arbitration in favor of returning el Chamizal—which they had defined as all land south of the 1864 channel—to Mexico.³³ The United States, however, refused the ruling on the grounds that it was impossible to determine exactly where the river channel had been in 1864. This refusal left Mexico to unrequitedly demand el Chamizal's return for another fifty-three years. As Anglo-Americans continued to settle within this disputed territory, what had once been the Chamizal Land Grant eventually became El Paso's Chihuahueta and what had been El Paso del Norte's Chamizal District became El Paso's Segundo Barrio.

The evasiveness of the Río Grande's 1864 channel location and el Chamizal's boundaries continued to haunt Mexican and US officials, puncturing

Enlightenment logic that everything can and must be knowable and within white possession. In 1934, for instance, the *El Paso Times* ran a story with the headline “Persons Born in Chamizal Zone May Be Citizens of Two Countries,” which suggested that because no one knew where el Chamizal began and ended, the boundaries of US citizenship were not as concrete as they seemed.³⁴ El Paso officials labored ceaselessly to nullify this wrinkle to US citizenship and sovereignty. Three years later, they tried again to survey and map the 1864 channel—this time with the added objective of implementing a South El Paso slum clearance program. But the “inability of American and Mexican officials to lay the ghost of the Chamizal,” explained the *El Paso Times*, “has barred the slum clearance program from the area, as governmental regulations prohibit federal participation where ownership is in question.”³⁵ For Anglo El Paso, the ghosts of el Chamizal and the Río Grande were a constant, intertwined presence that not only disrupted the spatial entitlements of US citizenship and the US state’s racist capitalist drive, but also announced the unthinkable: a relentless opacity that blazoned this terrain’s right to remain unknowable in ways that were self-determined. The Hoover and Truman administrations also tried to *lay to rest the ghost of the Chamizal* through a set of proposals that insisted the 1864 channel was indiscernible.³⁶ Both proposals were unsuccessful. This terrain’s evasiveness, its *turning away* from circumstances where the river’s 1864 coherent legibility was demanded and needed to perpetuate white possessive logics, illuminates this terrain refusing to participate in colonial spatialities, rupturing their apparent inevitably, and subsequently mobilizing (even if only momentarily) different geographies to white settler colonialism.

This terrain so plainly ruptured white possessive logics that it required both domination and concealment. On July 18, 1963, President John F. Kennedy announced that he would be the one to finally put the ghost of el Chamizal to rest by approving a memorandum that proposed to resolve the dispute “by giving effect in today’s circumstances to the 1911 international arbitration award.”³⁷ This meant agreeing on the location of the 1864 channel despite disputed documentation to its location. Nonetheless, for the settlement to proceed and to finally discipline this evasive river, a newly agreed-on, streamlined, and in no way certain location for the 1864 channel was mapped and solidified in place through a concrete canal. In turn, this location for the boundary determined what acreage went to Mexico. Not at any point was Tigua claim to el Chamizal considered in the writing of the settlement.³⁸

By 1964, and under the direction of President Lyndon B. Johnson, the Chamizal Treaty was finalized. The United States would receive 193 acres

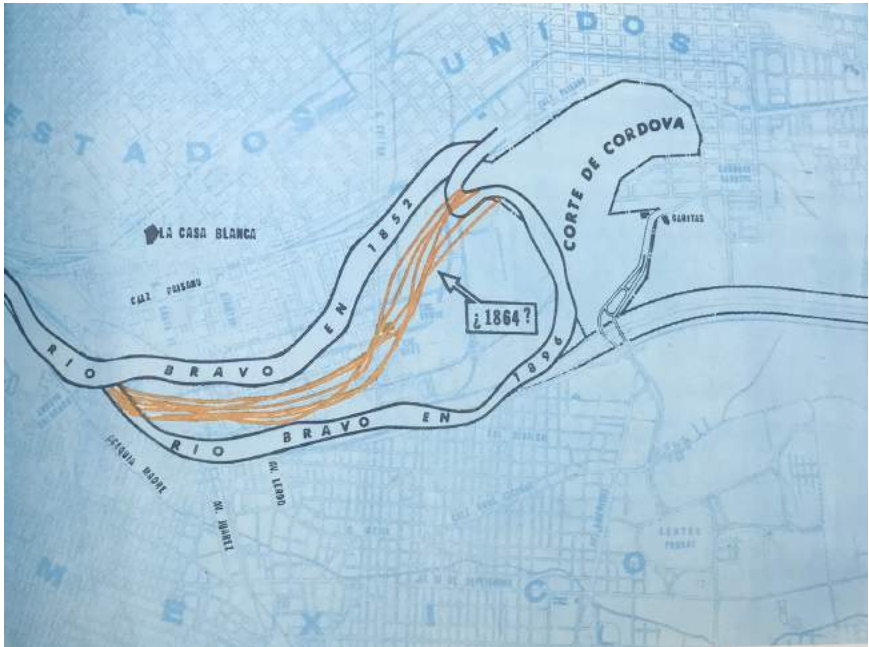


Figure 3. Map showing the unknown location of the 1864 river channel across el Chamizal. Source: *El Chamizal, solución complete: Album gráfico*, by M. Quesada Brandi.

of Mexican territory in exchange for 630 acres returned to Mexico as “el Chamizal.” But the settlement’s underlying achievement was the declaration of the 1864 channel in a now knowable and fixed place, which allowed the United States and Mexico to insist that the fundamental conundrum of the Chamizal Dispute had been wholly resolved and that the terms of the settlement simply reconfigured El Paso and Cd. Juárez to how they had been in 1864. “Neither country lost or gained anything in the settlement,” insisted Mexico’s international boundary commissioner. “The boundary merely reverted to where it had been before the Rio Grande changed its course during the 1864 floods.”³⁹ This version of the Chamizal story was central to US and Mexican state narratives that not only inscribed reason, linearity, and settler domination onto this terrain, but which “devise[d] formulas to repress the unthinkable and to bring it back within the realm of accepted discourse.”⁴⁰

While Mexico celebrated the announcement of the settlement, Chamizal residents prepared for the uncertainty of what was to come. “We didn’t want to

know what would happen,” recalled Angie Rivera Nuñez, who was fifteen years old when she and her family were displaced by the settlement. “Whatever they were saying about the Chamizal, even if we believed it was going to happen . . . it never did for such a long time that the thought of losing our homes became a callus.”⁴¹ But when residents received front-page news that treaty negotiations had been finalized and displacement proceedings would follow, “everything started happening,” said Nuñez. The US federal government spent \$44.9 million to execute the details of the settlement.⁴² This included constructing a 4.4-mile-long concrete canal to “corral [the river’s] wandering,” as well as relocating 1,386 commercial, public, and residential properties south of the now-established 1864 channel.⁴³ These residential properties were those of five working-class, mostly Mexican American South El Paso subdivisions—Rio Linda, Cotton Mill, Cordova Gardens, El Jardin, and the two most southerly blocks of Segundo Barrio—that *Time* magazine described as “ratty firetrap tenements” and a “thicket of slums.”⁴⁴

While the federal government prepared for the evacuation of the Chamizal residents, El Paso mayor Judson Williams seized this opportunity to simultaneously prepare his administration to push through his “Four Point Program”: a series of urban planning initiatives tied to the Chamizal Treaty with the explicit goal of modernizing the city of El Paso.⁴⁵ One of those initiatives was the Cesar Chavez Border Highway, which was designed to facilitate commerce from and across Cd. Juárez and El Paso’s agricultural valley downriver. So closely associated were the Chamizal Treaty and the Border Highway that many preliminary reports reference the proposed highway as the “Chamizal Memorial Highway”—though it would not officially take on this name.⁴⁶ Even so, today it is known by locals as the “Chamizal Freeway,” and runs directly through where some of the Chamizal barrios once stood.

It is telling, then, that Chamizal residents were displaced amid the US’s most pronounced decade of highway construction through urban renewal and seizure of properties through eminent domain.⁴⁷ Even more telling is that while the federally reported number of 5,600 displaced by the Chamizal Treaty is widely accepted, it is at best a conservative estimate, and at worst outright misleading given an additional fifty-six acres in South El Paso were seized to make room for Williams’s Four Point Program.⁴⁸ Both this program and the Chamizal Treaty therefore fall within an established tradition of displacing and reorganizing minoritized peoples in favor of more “productive” geographies. The costs of which are consistent: the rupture of existing resources and cultures of community and the dispossession of assets and wealth—however modest—

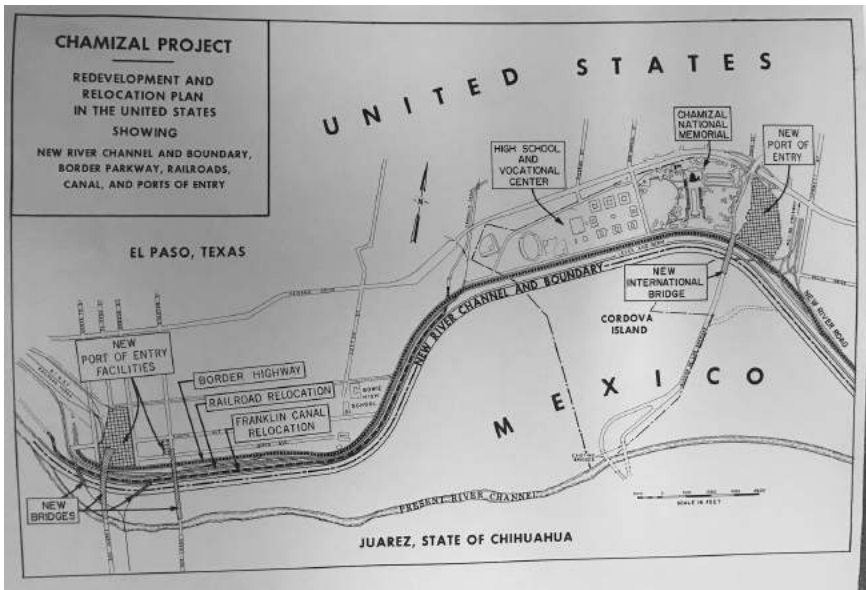


Figure 4. Map showing the location of the proposed Border Highway. From “Hands across the Border: The Story of Chamizal” (1967). Source: Frank Ortiz Papers, Chamizal National Memorial.

who was a boy when he and his family were displaced from Cordova Gardens by the construction of the Border Highway.⁴⁹ The Chamizal Treaty “was the first sign of chaos,” he said, shattering any sense of security his family once had. Worse still, Patino recalled, they “hatched up the Rio Grande up too, and scarred it again and again, and tried to move it through another direction. That river has a lot of scars. I see it as a big, big *cicatriz*: that big canal running along its face.” It took excessive force—miles of concrete—to redirect the Río Grande in “its proper place” and thereafter pursue the US state’s racist capitalist drive for urban renewal. And yet, despite the treaty so clearly falling within urban renewal’s playbook, this international land and boundary settlement did not meet the legal definitions of urban renewal, which, among other criteria, cannot involve properties with clouded titles.

The Chamizal Zone was officially ceded to and became incorporated into the Republic of Mexico on October 28, 1967. Today remnants of the natural Río Grande riverbed—now south of the boundary—permeate east Cd. Juárez.

that leads to further marginalization. “I went through the system, the process of eminent domain, of being brutalized, the way it tore up the fiber of my family structure,” explained Michael Patino,

Initially, Mexican urban planners proposed converting the dry riverbed into a paved boulevard; instead, today portions of the riverbed are used as parking lots and unofficial dumping sites.⁵⁰ Adjacent to this riverbed is Parque Chamizal, a public park made up of the land returned to Mexico. At the park's 1967 grand opening, Presidents Johnson and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz planted a "friendship tree" to commemorate the treaty and their making of a submissive, legible terrain in service of both country's needs.⁵¹ Indeed, in a matter of months, the treaty's reconfiguration of Cd. Juárez opened up the city to industrialization and soon thereafter, in the 1970s, the maquiladora industry.⁵²

On the northern side of the border, directly across from Parque Chamizal, is the Chamizal National Memorial. This memorial provides a flattened historical narrative that memorializes the Chamizal Treaty as an example of friendship, goodwill, and progress between the United States and Mexico.⁵³ Opened in 1973 as a national park to honor "wild rivers and reasonable men," the memorial is moreover founded on scripts of the frontier that tie indigeneity to a savage wilderness and whiteness to rationality.⁵⁴ Though the Chamizal residents are briefly mentioned, their experiences and voices are muted. There is no mention of the residents' struggle and activism to receive fair property compensation; no mention of the government's dissemination of wrong or confusing information about residents' rights in settlement proceedings; no mention of the misleading Spanish translations some residents received during property sale negotiations; nor is there any reference to the widespread harassment residents received if they prolonged buyout negotiations or outright refused to accept the government's offer on their properties.⁵⁵ The Chamizal Memorial, then, is a place where we can both "see" and "site" who has been removed according to settler logics that reproduce the inevitability of subaltern placelessness and erasure while securing white settler innocence, dominance, and emplacement.

These narratives remind us that stories of colonial conquest that consistently reframe subaltern displacement as "progress" require not only a great deal of labor to maintain but also ongoing modes of erasure. In his 2012 article "Chamizal Blues," historian Jeffrey M. Schulze perpetuates these codified and entwined stories of erasure and progress when he argues that Chamizal residents benefited from their forced relocation because they "had been ill-suited to life in the Chamizal in the first place and found in their new neighborhoods freedom from the informal, often 'stifling' lower-class norms within el Chamizal."⁵⁶ But perhaps most telling is when Schulze cites the testimony of Chamizal resident Juventino Felipe Orozco, who emotionally describes the evacuation of Cotton Mill and the hyper police presence and control of movement in and out of this

barrio. “They would stop you,” Orozco recounted of the police, “and we would have to prove all the time that we lived there.”⁵⁷ “There,” Schulze summarizes Orozco’s testimony, “was the Chamizal, and the Chamizal was no more.” When Schulze suggests that *the Chamizal was no more*, he replicates national coverage that emphasized that the Chamizal barrios and the unruly Río Grande were “no longer detectable.”⁵⁸ In doing so, he inescapably reaffirms contemporary settler colonial sensibilities that insist subaltern and otherwise geographies can be utterly obliterated without trace or consequence.

Chamizal residents, however, disagree. They argue that consequences persist, that traces remain, and that efforts to silence the Chamizal story have failed. “I don’t think the silence helped any because el Chamizal is still there,” Nuñez explained as a woman of sixty-nine years from her El Paso home. “We’re still talking about it now. It was not erased.”⁵⁹ To those displaced, the Chamizal story is not a historical event; it is the unfinished story and failed endeavor of ongoing settler colonial processes.

“Their Loss Will Be El Paso’s Gain”

It is hard to say when exactly the Chamizal barrios became the communities their former residents remember them as. A 1940 census map of the region represents these areas of South El Paso as blank. A decade later, the census map shows Rio Linda and Cordova Gardens as developed, though Cotton Mill and El Jardin have not yet made it on the map. Nonetheless, these maps confirm what residents often insist about the origins of these barrios: that they can be traced back to a postwar period when their fathers and uncles returned to El Paso from World War II or the Korean War, and with the support of the GI Bill and VA loans purchased property south of the “Tortilla Curtain,” a derogatory term for Paisano Boulevard.⁶⁰ For many of them, this was the first time they had come into land ownership, and the promise of having done so felt like the world was finally opening up for them. By the cusp of the 1960s, thousands of Mexican Americans had moved into what would, in 1964, become the Chamizal barrios.

Historians would come to call this period the postwar housing boom.⁶¹ Suburbs and their race-restrictive covenants accounted for more than half of this boom and would become the foundation of America’s white middle class.⁶² But this housing growth was also a period in which “millions of Mexican Americans participated in some semblance of upward mobility and were able to leverage that position into action” primarily through homeownership.⁶³ It was a time when the federal government insisted that a new era of liberalized race

relations was imminent, as thousands of Mexican American soldiers returned to the United States.⁶⁴ Indeed, in 1951, Trillo's father, Manuel, a World War II veteran, made his claim on the American Dream when he purchased an empty lot on Twelfth Street in Rio Linda for \$580.⁶⁵ Two years earlier, Louis Rivera, also a veteran, did the same when he purchased a house just down the street for \$5,160.⁶⁶ As Manuel built his home from the ground up, Louis began adding a second story to his home along with a second bathroom, a walk-in closet, and a private kitchen. Louis was known for whistling while he worked. His favorite song: "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands."

Louis had a daughter named Angie who was Trillo's age, and the two girls became inseparable. As freshmen at Bowie High School, Trillo and Nuñez walked home together and sometimes made a "detour" to the Ramos house on East Twelfth Street in Rio Linda. There, outside the living room window, they sat among Carmela Ramos' mimosa trees watching whatever Carmela had playing on the TV.⁶⁷ Carmela was the wife of Pete Ramos, a World War II veteran and carpenter who had purchased this lot in 1955 for \$1,610.⁶⁸ In a matter of years, Pete built the house that Trillo and Nuñez would remember as the big yellow house with one of the few televisions in their barrio. Peter Ramos, the only son of Carmela and Pete, would remember his family home through the image of his mother as she watered her cherished weeping willow that she had planted in the front yard in 1955. "She would sit on the front porch all day," Peter recalled, "calling to the neighborhood women who passed by, and then the ladies would come sit down and talk to her, and she would spend most of the day talking. I think she really enjoyed her house." Carmela was no different from her neighbors who were proud to be part of the broader Segundo Barrio community of mostly first- and second-generation Mexican Americans who "transformed South El Paso into a place that provided them with a sense of belonging in a city that continuously hid their presence."⁶⁹

While Rio Linda residents considered themselves part of Segundo Barrio, residents of the Second Ward did not always agree. To them Rio Linda was a kind of "rich man's land," an isolated oasis whose working-class residents had "jaitón," or middle-class attitudes.⁷⁰ Perhaps this was so because most Rio Linda residents owned their homes, lived in nuclear households, or because many homes were made of cinderblock or brick instead of adobe. Sometimes all three were true for Rio Linda families. But while Rio Linda may not have been as poor as the rest of Segundo Barrio, it was still south of Paisano Boulevard and firmly situated within the stigmatized lower ranks of El Paso's social geography. Rio Linda residents never once forgot for a moment the racism and disdain



Figure 5. Ramos family home at 1413 E. Twelfth Street in Rio Linda (1965). Source: William E. Wood Papers, Chamizal National Memorial.

for Mexicans that made Segundo Barrio, including Rio Linda, what it was. They understood that their place south of Paisano Boulevard and adjacent to the Río Grande was indicative of an established relationship between Anglo El Paso and urban planning designed to keep racial otherness at bay and maintain uneven socio-spatial relations.⁷¹ There were markers of this everywhere: the train tracks running between Rio Linda and Cotton Mill that every now and then hit a dog or even a child; the mine and smelter machinery facility on Eleventh Street; the soft drink bottling factory; the molasses plant; the freight truck station; and the Payton Packing Company, a meat house factory, just east of Rio Linda.⁷² Likewise, residents

of Cordova Gardens and El Jardin called their neighborhood “Dizzyland” because of the stink from the city’s sewage disposal plant.⁷³ Even among the structural waste, decay, and danger that shaped daily life in South El Paso, these residents carved out dignified and livable places. And like Segundo Barrio, it was not lost on Rio Linda residents that their neighborhood was built within el Chamizal’s disputed boundaries, and that unclear property titles were just another commonality between the two barrios. It mattered little, then, that Rio Linda in many ways belied codified narratives of slum and poverty; all that was legible to the writers of the Chamizal Treaty was that it was south of Paisano.

There are only a handful of narratives about those who lived in the Chamizal barrios, how they arrived and settled there, or the immediate as well as residual consequences of their forced relocation on their livelihoods, families, and communities. These include a song, two poems, a twenty-minute documentary, a 1973 sociology report, a 1994 university oral history project, a 2002 linguistics dissertation, and one peer-reviewed article. Yet national and local newspapers at the time covered the Chamizal Treaty’s Relocation Project extensively—principally by applauding the condemnation of the Chamizal barrios. “No one will be sorry to see these slum dwellings disappear,” declared the *Los Angeles Times* in 1964 only months before the *El Paso Times* announced, “Their loss will be El Paso’s gain.”⁷⁴

Figure 6.

Color-coded zoning map showing classifications of land affected by the Chamizal Treaty. Rio Linda and Cotton Mill additions are coded as residential zones in yellow. They are located directly above the text “(Rio Bravo)” as shown on the map. They are also surrounded by gray industrial zones to the west, east, and south. Cordova Gardens and El Jardin are shown directly adjacent and east of Cordova Island. They are coded as residential zones. Industrial zones and blue public land zones surround Cordova Gardens and El Jardin to the north, east, and south. Source: Chamizal Collection, MS243, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

“What Better Way Is There to Show We Are Good Americans?”

While most records note that Chamizal neighborhood activism was led by men living outside the condemned barrios, fleeting newspaper reports indicate that women residents not only spearheaded their community’s mobilization but also held meetings inside their homes, typed letters, and collected signatures for petitions sent to Washington, DC.⁷⁵ Cotton Mill resident Elvira ‘Vila’ Escajeda (formerly known as Lacarra) was one of these women. Her vision—both its possibilities and limitations—for protecting her community must be firmly situated within a genealogy of US barrio activism, not only because Escajeda mobilized Chamizal residents on the brink of what would soon be known as the Chicano Movement, but because in doing so she enacted a gendered site

ACQUISITION OF PROPERTIES



EL PASO - JUAREZ EXISTING LAND USE

- RESIDENTIAL
- COMMERCIAL
- INDUSTRIAL
- AGRICULTURE
- PUBLIC & QUASI - PUBLIC

of agency and intervention against Mexican American displacement. This intervention would take the name of the Chamizal Civic Association and cannot be separated from the Río Grande's pedagogies of refusal that underwrite el Chamizal's unruly terrain of struggle.

From the very beginning, Escajeda refused the inevitability of her community's displacement as part of the Chamizal Treaty. She countered local reports that claimed residents "will be glad to do their part" or that they "appear unemotional about what may come" because "what will be will be."⁷⁶ In August 1962, two months after Presidents Kennedy and Adolfo López Mateos met to discuss settling the Chamizal Dispute, Escajeda wrote a letter to the *El Paso Times* arguing that el Chamizal should be seen and protected as a memorial to the Chamizal residents who fought in World War II, the Korean War, and who were still abroad fighting in Vietnam. "We are trying to build a memorial for our war dead, that we may remember and never forget," she begins her letter:

Some of them were lucky and made it back to the States they love and where they were born. Land in the Chamizal was sold to a lot of them, that they might start a normal life. Even with wages as low as they are in El Paso, they were able to build their homes. They are older and not often remembered but they have their security and pay their taxes.

Now we hear this land is to be given away, that they will be paid, but can they buy another home with what they will get? I doubt it.

I speak for one veteran, and I know there are many here. Let's remember this living, also, and let this Chamizal be their memorial. They paid for this land after World War II.

We want to stay Texans, although we may be of Mexican-Spanish descent. I, too, am a property owner, born here in the Chamizal, and proud of being a citizen of the United States soil.

The veteran of who I speak is my brother.

—Elvira Lacarra, 1232 Algodon Place⁷⁷

When Escajeda underscored her brother and neighbors' military service, she was making masculinist and militaristic claims on American citizenship that historians of this postwar period have described as Mexican Americans' diminished tolerance of second-class citizenship and their "growing willingness to resort to public protest" as a result of Mexican American war experiences.⁷⁸ These politics certainly shaped Escajeda's response to the treaty, but they were not the only politic informing her strategy. In writing her letter to the *Times*, Escajeda demonstrated the beginnings of her pedagogy of refusal emerging within and from el Chamizal's unruly terrain.

A month later, Escajeda was reading her local newspaper when she became furious: Thomas Mann, the US ambassador to Mexico who had come to El Paso to meet with constituents about the proposed Chamizal Treaty, had met with local business leaders and obtained support from the El Paso Chamber

of Commerce to proceed with the settlement; in turn, Mayor Williams had declared that 100 percent of El Paso approved of the treaty—thereby leading Mann to announce his return to Washington, DC.⁷⁹ Escajeda fumed: Mann and Williams had done all of this without once visiting or contacting the affected communities. Worse still, the federal government had announced that condemned properties would not be evaluated at fair-market value but at tax value, which is typically a far lower assessment. The following day, then, Escajeda left early from her job at the Hicks-Ponder Manufacturing Company and made her way to the Hotel Paso del Norte where Mann was staying; he refused to see her. Determined, Escajeda called the *El Paso Herald-Post* and left a statement refuting the mayor's recent announcement. As reporters arrived at the hotel, Mann agreed to meet with Escajeda “What is going to happen to us?” she pointedly asked him. “In the paper it has said that you are planning to pay us tax value. And *that's* not going to happen.” As Escajeda explained why her community would not accept a tax value appraisal, she evoked legacies of displacement that have been the basis for marginalization and disempowerment, and insisted that she and her neighbors would not bend to the will of the state that demanded their easy removal:

We have humble homes, but they belong to us. I mean, that's an insult to me and to all of us because whatever we have is not much according to your eyes, but to us it's our future. I planned my future and you're destroying my future. You're destroying my father's future, my brother's future, my neighbors'! You're throwing us out into the cold, giving us something to go and buy a house and then end up in debt and lose it. So, we're not gonna accept that, and we're gonna fight.⁸⁰

By 1963, Mann and other politicians were meeting regularly with Escajeda and the Chamizal Civic Association—an advocacy group organized by Escajeda and made up of Chamizal residents and allies alike who met regularly in a school room of Sacred Heart Church.⁸¹ There they began drafting their demands: treaty negotiation transparency, resident inclusion in treaty decisions, and that details of the redrawn boundary and who would be affected be made clear well before ratification. In making their demands known to those who assumed their obliging removal, the association enacted a pedagogy of refusal that rejected the logics of white possession that insist on the inevitably and ease of subaltern placelessness.

As Escajeda's 1962 letter to the *El Paso Times* foreshadowed, however, the association's members would simultaneously work within white possessive logics by solidifying their strategy around the fraught, ideological scripts of recognition that were available to them: participation in US wars abroad and US citizenship. In one of their earliest campaigns, for instance, the association asked

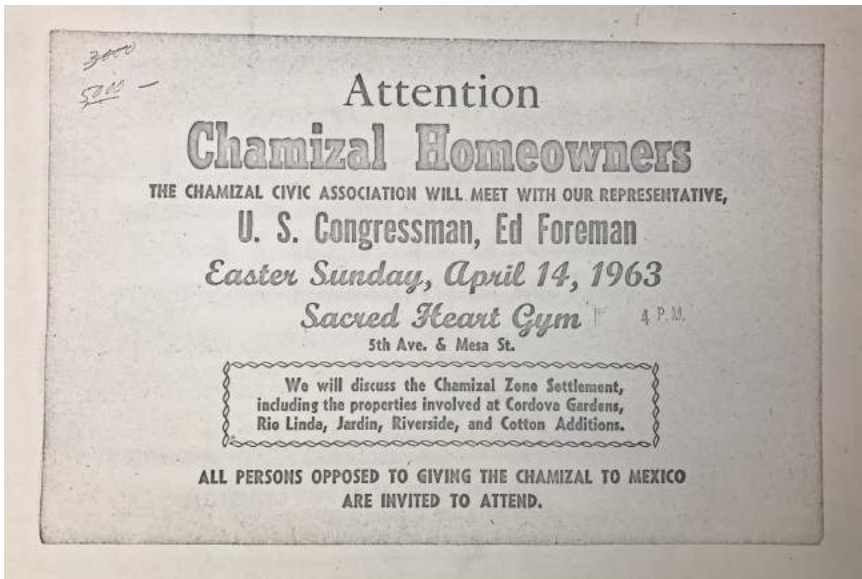


Figure 7. Flyer advertising a Chamizal Civic Association Meeting at Sacred Heart Church. Source: Cleofas Calleros Papers, MS213, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

residents to fly the US flag outside their homes until the settlement was ratified. “What better way is there to show we are good Americans?”

Escajeda explained to a reporter in 1963.⁸² If defining and asserting themselves as good Americans was the strategy Escajeda believed to be the most effective, there is no way to know if she felt secure in this strategy or if she questioned whether she and the association knew what was best. What we do know, however, is that this strategy was widely accepted in the early years of this postwar period, and that the association continued to build on this sentiment of practicing good citizenship.⁸³ In an April 1963 letter addressed from Escajeda’s home, the association’s members emphasized their feelings of national sacrifice as a military community:

When the U.S. was at war the sons of the Chamizal answered the call to fight and die for the Chamizal as well as for Washington, and they will fight and die again if called.

As sovereign citizens of the United States of America, who for the first time in history are being told that we must sacrifice our homes for the national welfare, we feel that the nation as a whole should assume the responsibility of sharing this sacrifice for our national prestige.⁸⁴

That same month, however, the US Senate and House of Representatives passed the Chamizal Convention Act—thereby ratifying the terms of the Chamizal Treaty. The association in turn announced revised demands along four points: (1) that the federal government ensure relocated residents have their property evaluated at fair-market value, (2) that residents be given replacement of their property in an area acceptable to them, (3) that no one end up with more debt than they already had, and (4) that residents have all moving costs covered.⁸⁵ In the meantime, association members committed not to sell their properties until each homeowner was offered fair compensation for their homes.

The Chamizal Civic Association and those it represented understood that their displacement had been dictated and necessitated. They understood, in other words, that the needs of the US and Mexican settler states required them to be organized along a new uneven geography—one that government officials argued would secure El Paso and Cd. Juárez as cities of the future. In a handwritten letter dated September 23, 1963, and addressed to President Kennedy, sixty-one-year-old Josefina Chavez identifies the logics of white settler colonialism when she argues against the settlement “not only for the moral and physical sufferings of the people who will have to abandon their homes, but also for the terrible consequences the return of el Chamizal will bring”:

Once el Chamizal is returned, businessmen will not rest until they have obtained all of South El Paso. This is to say that those of us who live there will have to abandon our homes . . . This is to say that we will be without land and most importantly without our beloved neighbors. . . . The businessmen call all of this Progress and Community Improvement. . . . This is not progress [or] the improvement of the people, but the improvement of businessmen's pockets.⁸⁶

Chavez's letter confirms that residents had a keen and sophisticated grasp of the role of their displacement in larger uneven processes, and that they refused to succumb to these processes passively. Indeed, on December 9, 1963, the County Commissioner's Court of El Paso entered into the record a letter written by the association. This letter demonstrated that Chamizal residents saw similarities between their displacement and urban renewal events taking place across the country.⁸⁷ The letter included an article from *Reader's Digest*, “Bulldozers at Your Door,” that criticized the government's use of eminent domain to push through highway construction and urban renewal. In citing this article, the association argued that legislative changes to present and future condemnation laws should be formalized to meaningfully accommodate the myriad losses of displacement. These changes, the association insisted, “should be made applicable to all cases where private property is taken for public use,

because otherwise we may find ourselves in the path of other planning, and some of us have already been affected by construction on Doniphan Drive and Paisano Drive, so we know what can happen.” Accounts like these illuminate the Chamizal barrios as a terrain of struggle wherein residents identified and denounced the logics of white settler colonialism.

By December 1963, the association’s members no longer outright rejected the Chamizal Treaty; instead, they sought to make the injustices of their displacement legible to the US state by *turning toward* grammars of white possessive logics that argued for the sanctity of property and homeownership. Though it is difficult to establish when this shift in strategy first took place or if there is a clear connection between this shift and the treaty’s finalized terms for residential relocation, Chamizal

residents did eventually achieve some semblance of dignity. The federal government, for instance, agreed to finance all moving costs, reimburse owners and tenants for losses and damages

incurred, and reevaluate the value of Chamizal properties at fair-market value.⁸⁸ But if fair-market appraisals (an average of \$8,000) felt like a win, it quickly became apparent that such appraisals would not always garner the property values residents felt were merited or needed in order to find comparable housing and thrive post-removal.⁸⁹

Under these conditions, Chamizal residents *turned away* and denied the US federal government any easy or comfortable removal of their communities—so much so that four years after the settlement’s ratification the Chamizal barrios had yet to be fully evacuated. On September 1, 1967, a federal report announced land acquisitions and relocations were nearly complete aside from fifteen homes whose owners refused to vacate and thus had been acquired through eminent domain; but it would take excessive force to evict these residents.⁹⁰ Federal deputies, for instance, physically evicted one woman by carrying her out of her Chamizal home. The woman had refused to vacate, explained a bystander who was contracted to appraise the woman’s property, “and the day when it came to move, the United States Marshals picked her up bodily and put her in a car and drove her off.”⁹¹

The materiality of forced displacement was often illegible to local and federal officials who would later quantify the “success” of the Chamizal Relocation Project through monetary models, and who often concluded that residents

Figure 8.

Letter Addressed to President Kennedy from Josefina Chavez. Source: James Connor Papers Ms143, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

El Paso, Texas
Sept. 23, 1963

Se. Presidente John F. Kennedy
La Casa Blanca
Washington, D. C.

Respetable Señor Presidente:
Mucha parte de mi vida la he vivido en sus El Paso
y he llegado a amar este lugar de la Ciudad.
Hay una de las personas que se oponen naturalmente
a la entrega de El Chamizal tanto por los sentimientos
morales y físicos de las personas que por ello
tendrán que abandonar sus hogares como por las
terribles consecuencias que traerá la entrega
del Chamizal.

Una vez entregado El Chamizal los hombres de negocios
no discursaran hasta haber obtenido toda la parte de sud
El Paso. Esto quiere decir que los que en ella vivimos
tendremos que salir dejando nuestros hogares
bien sea que queramos o que no queramos.

Quisiera decir que seremos destruidos hasta de lo mas
querido como son nuestros vecinos, nuestros amistades,
nuestras tradiciones y por semate a lo mas terrible
nuestras Templos que con bastantes sacrificios hemos
ayudado a construir. Todo esto lo llaman los hombres
de negocios Progreso y Bienestar Del Pueblo. Esto no, se
progresar esto es atropellar los derechos humanos
y al menos de los pobres y humildes.

Esto no es bienestar del Pueblo, esto es bienestar
de los bolsillos de los grandes Comerciantes.

Apelamos al Gobierno de los Estados Unidos para que
nos proteja, como es la obligación del Gobierno, contra
los que nos quieren desampar de nuestros hogares y
de nuestros Templos, nuestras escuelas, de nuestros
amables comerciantes en pequeño, de nuestros amistades
de nuestros vecinos.

Atentamente,
472 Charles Rd.
Isregorio Chavez
Josefina Lantz

benefited from their displacement because “they have better homes than they did before.”⁹² “Like the saying goes, there’s nothing bad that doesn’t then bring good,” explained Ana Parra, a former Rio Linda resident, nearly thirty years after her displacement.⁹³ “For us, we were better off here than there, we ended up better,” she continued. “But at first, they [Chamizal residents] didn’t agree, they didn’t want to leave, we didn’t want to. They told us they would pay us for all our losses, but it wasn’t like that. They only sent the truck so we could leave.” Even today, Peter Ramos finds himself returning to the memory of his mother sitting on the porch of her new home in Cielo Vista Park, a neighborhood north Paisano Boulevard and the I-10 Highway—two crucial markers of race and class in El Paso. Because most Cielo Vista Park residents in the 1960s did not speak Spanish, and because Carmela did not speak English, Ramos recalls his mother spending her afternoons sitting alone on her new porch.⁹⁴ Two months after leaving Rio Linda, on a Sunday in November 1965, Carmela passed away.⁹⁵ She was fifty-three years old. Her obituary revealingly named her residence as 1413 E. Twelfth Street in Rio Linda, thereby declaring the persistent presence of this place despite its demolition. “That still sticks with me,” said Ramos as a seventy-eight-year-old man. “Would my mom have lived a little bit longer if we had stayed in the Chamizal?”⁹⁶

Conclusion

While the Chamizal story is a distinct history with discrete teachings, it is not exceptional. For one, it is a story like so many that illuminates how minoritized people made dignified places for themselves where they were not supposed to turn out well; and yet, there in South El Paso they “thrived as an extended family unit.”⁹⁷ It is the familiar story of the deliberate destruction of these dignified places. And it is also an instructive story where the efforts of those who struggled to assert durable scripts against this destruction did not outright fail. Yet, the Chamizal Civic Association’s strategy was also constrained by participatory possessive logics and scripts of colonial recognition that have always been tied to the exclusion of and contempt for nonwhite peoples. In this way, the association’s strategy both refused and inescapably reinscribed white possession. All this is to say that the Chamizal story is entwined with unruly, strategic, meaningful, and sometimes conflicting languages, acts, expressions, and experiences that remind us, as Tiffany Lethabo King has argued, the “endeavor to survive under conditions of conquest is never clean.”⁹⁸

I call attention to these underlying implications not simply to demonstrate the impossible location of racialized nonwhite subjects in a white settler colonial

imaginary. Rather, I do so to situate the association's strategy alongside the pedagogies of the Río Grande and therefore emphasize how their pairing clarifies the transformative potential of *turning away* from white possessive logics that do not—and cannot—transform the conceptual underpinnings of white settler colonialism. The Río Grande intervened in the geographic knowability of multiple and supposedly secure white settler colonialities by disrupting and haunting settler colonial borders, multiple constructs of property and settler emplacement, racial capitalism, exclusionary citizenship, and white possessive logics more broadly. In turning away from these differential and shared colonial projects, the river *turns toward* an otherwise geography: unruly spaces other than what we may know, reference, or expect, but which are already present and underwritten by the river's pedagogic, haunting, decolonial endeavor (not merely resistance) to denaturalize settler spatialities. The Chamizal story, in other words, is a haunted story wherein the river's pedagogy is critical to larger decolonizing processes because it illuminates "there already exists a terrain through which different stories and geographic knowledges can be and are told."⁹⁹ Land *is* an instructive source of insight; and el Chamizal's unruly geography of scars encourages us to fight for the clarity that we already have the capacity and power to change the cartographic rules of settler colonialism, and that an otherwise present does not mean participation in or full integration into the settler nation-state. Rather, it entails committing to a pedagogy of refusal that turns away from settler sovereignty and the lure of colonial recognition.

For these very reasons, the Chamizal story is one of the US state's best-kept secrets, as the story of an unwieldy river-border cannot—must not—exist in a world built on the assumed permanence of colonial spatialities. When the writers of the Chamizal Treaty proposed to streamline the Río Grande through a concrete canal, they sought not only to *lay to rest the ghost of el Chamizal* but to foreclose any imagining of this river's unruliness and render this terrain a hidden geography. But the river's canalization does not signify a wholly subdued, concealed landscape—just as the Chamizal residents insist that the razing of their barrios does not signify a wholly eliminated or absented place. Rather, they remind us that the Río Grande cannot be beaten into total submission because "there's only so much control a man can do on a river," Trillo once explained to a reporter. "Sooner or later, I personally think that river is gonna do what Mother Nature taught it to do—to move."¹⁰⁰

Perhaps, then, this river's unruliness—its refusal to stop—is why several years after Ramos's displacement, he unexpectedly found himself in Parque Chamizal standing beside his mother's weeping willow:

I used to hangout in Juárez quite a bit . . . and I remember one time just out of curiosity they had a road . . . they called it the Malecón back in those days . . . and we drove down there. I was with some friends of mine and . . . I said . . . “You know I think we’re about the area where I used to live.” And then I saw that there was a park. It was called Parque Chamizal. So, we went in and I spent quite a bit of time wandering up and down. And I got to the point where I could . . . you know . . . “This is where my house used to be.” That weeping willow was still there.¹⁰¹

Ramos being pulled to his mother’s tree is indicative of a haunting land-body tetheredness—one that reminds us that violence inflicted on land is often directly connected to the body (and vice versa) and that displacement is directly experienced as both spatial and corporeal.¹⁰² To be sure, it is a land-body tetheredness where the seemingly unintelligible or supposedly erased (el Chamizal, Carmela’s weeping willow, the Chamizal barrios, the unruly Río Grande, phantom limbs, scarred landscapes, and this history’s unjust past) intervenes in the world’s knowability by producing space (el Chamizal) other than what we may know, reference, or expect in the present. And *this* is the thing: Ramos being pulled to el Chamizal is this land’s haunting politic demanding we *turn toward* its unruly, scarred site of memory that teaches what it has always offered: that colonial spatialities are neither natural, permanent, complete, nor without consequence; that space is malleable and perpetually unfinished; and that different spatialities to white settler colonialism are not only possible but already exist. Even now, el Chamizal’s unruly site of memory refuses oblivion because “the haunting is the resolution, it is not what needs to be resolved.”¹⁰³

Notes

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