Globalization and Transnational Place Identity Along the U.S.-Mexico Border

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The U.S.-Mexico border represents a regional laboratory in which to study the processes of culture clash and ethnic intersection in an era of globalization. One way of understanding these processes of globally- driven cultural integration is by exploring place identity. In this chapter, I explore some of the dimensions of what I term "transnational place identity" in the bi-cultural setting of the United States-Mexico border region. This 2000 mile zone along the border between northern Mexico and the southwestern United States is a vibrant place that is constantly being reinvented. I will argue that the place identity of this region is best understood by analyzing slices of the "transfrontier metropolis," a prototype for the bifurcated urbanized culture regions that have formed along this giant international frontier.[1]

It is generally accepted that a critical driver of global change is economic. If regions are able to develop economies that can compete in the global economic system, those regions will prosper. In a globalizing world, economic space is dramatically shifting, changing the economic landscape. Along the border, those shifts have to do with the injection of specific kinds of border space(commerce, tourism, etc.) into the global economy.

Seen from above, the U.S.-Mexico border evokes a hard landscape of arid desert, mountains, canyons, and plateaus, suddenly interrupted by two distinct cultures that have slowly imposed their will on the natural environment.

The border is a study in contrast– a place that for centuries was what one historian called the "land of sunshine adobe and silence,"[2] yet suddenly in the modern age, this border became a zone of attraction, growth, industry, and cities. This rapid transformation, in some ways, serves as a defining measure of the border's identity– a place of change, experimentation, and hybridization.[3] These changes express themselves continually across a range of measures– art, music, literature, architecture, and the informal or vernacular landscape. In fact, one distinguishing feature of the U.S.-Mexico border is the prodigious outpouring of creative expressions of its meaning as a place.[4]

The border is, above all, a life space; it is not merely a transition zone between two nations whose center lies somewhere else, – the border has become its own center– of production, trade, and the formation of cities. The border has its own unique culture.

One feature of the transnational border landscape lies in the different ways in which urban space and territory are created north and south of the border. On one side (south), the periphery is a social landscape largely defined by uncertainty, inequality, spontaneity, and lack of formal government intervention. Across the border to the north, the landscape is more formal, orderly, framed by laws and codes and planning permits, a far less spontaneous place, a product of modernist urban planning. The quality of place north of the border is mediated by privilege, and tends to be dominated by private interests. The quality of place south of the border is defined by struggle, chaos. North of the border, the periphery tends to house the upper end of the social ladder. South of the border, the opposite is true—the periphery is where the poor, marginalized residents live in spontaneous squatter conditions.

These differences also define the place identity of the U.S.-Mexico frontier region. However, despite different socio-economic conditions, culture and politics overlap here. The global economy has increasingly brought north and south together into a single daily urban system . To grasp the essence of this global transnational space, I will argue that we need to view the border region

through the lens of a set of "ecologies" that increasingly define it as a place, and increasingly also define its fluid, constantly changing landscape. Several of these ecologies are explored below.

Ecology of the Global Factory

The idea of a global factory– or export processing zone, dates back to the 1960's, but its legacy along the U.S.-Mexican border took hold in the 1970's, 80's and 90's. In many ways, the global factory is a metaphor of sorts– for the idea of a region inherently shaped by outside forces– industrial investors or national governments negotiating treaties, deals, and tax breaks. As a whole, they form a kind of exogenous decision making that would remake the lives of millions. This inherent dependence on outside forces is a legacy of the border. Historically, the border has been a place shaped by outsiders—from its early transformation by outside investors, later by immigrants, and then by a variety of global economic forces in the modern era. This has also made the U.S.-Mexico border region a place in a constant state of flux– and subject to cycles of change and new forces, which, like the *maquila (*assembly plant*)* can take shape, adjust, reinvent themselves and move on. This makes the border region an inherently malleable if not quixotic place.

For more than a century, however, the border region remained distant from the political and economic centers of power in the U.S. and Mexico, and thus was viewed as somewhat marginal region, a risky place for investment. But, by the second half of the twentieth century, new global actors legitimized the region as a place for serious investment.

It has been argued that assembly plants forever changed the region's image as the "red light district" on the edge of the U.S. Perhaps. But maquilas are a risky strategy to build a region's economy around, since they are tied to the global economy, and to the whim of investors. They also depend heavily on

lightly regulated labor and environmental laws, which are part of the attraction to outsiders. The recession of the late 2000's demonstrates the fragility of the border region's export- based economy. With massive unemployment on the U.S. side, and less industrial inventory being produced by U.S. companies, the attractions of cheap labor enclaves in Mexico have diminished for now. The border economy once again struggles.

But one has to acknowledge that the "global factory" is one of the great global shifts of late 20th century world capitalism. As labor costs impinged on profits among multi-national firms in the 1950's and 1960's, the idea of global cheap labor enclaves emerged. Firms discovered they could simply move the factory floor to a less developed nation. Third World countries suddenly loomed as the new industrial labor pools for global industrial giants. Thus was born the global factory.

Mexico quickly became a key player, through the so called "twin plant" or *maquiladora* (assembly plant) project. In the 1960's, Mexico's government hatched a new federal office to promote border economic expansion—it was known as PRONAF, the National Frontier Program. The biggest plank in the PRONAF development strategy was reduction of unemployment through industrial growth. In 1965, the Border Industrial Program (BIP) was introduced. It built on the emerging "off shore" production concepts that U.S. manufacturers had already started in places like Hong Kong or Taiwan. The BIP project envisioned foreign owned (mainly American) factories relocating their labor-intensive assembly operations to the Mexican border.

In 1970, there were 160 *maquiladoras* in Mexico, employing around 20,000 workers. Some 25 years later, there were an estimated 2,400 assembly plants in Mexico, employing nearly three quarter million workers, with a value-added estimated at roughly three billion dollars. All of these plants are foreign owned; the majority come from the U.S., Japan, South Korea, Canada and Germany.

The construction of assembly plant complexes served to anchor the real estate and development boom of the late twentieth century, bringing road, sewerage and other infrastructure to outer lying areas of the cities. *Maquilas* created an alternative labor source for millions of Mexican immigrants heading north. Their multiplier effects in generating linked employment clusters in services further expanded urban growth. The sheer numbers of workers amplified pressure on cities like Tijuana to find ways to absorb new migrants.

The factories themselves leave a distinct mark on the landscape of Mexican border cities. They appear as modern industrial parks, not unlike the counterpart U.S. suburban industrial parks to the north. As in the U.S., the dominant feature is the use of uniform lot sizes and street setbacks, as well as controlled landscaping. There are also sophisticated systems of screening and security, as well as large scale parking facilities. Many *maquila* zones lie in the "suburbs", like modern day Mexican haciendas, where workers provide labor to the "*patron"* (the industrial giant) in return for a modest salary. However unlike industrial parks in the U.S., *maquila* parks are surrounded by poor *colonias,* low-income settlements that typically house many of the assembly workers.

Transnational Consumer Spaces

The border's history is defined by consumerism, dating back to its liberation in the 1920's as an outlet for American consumers seeking a place where the morality laws north of the border from that era could be avoided. The result in Mexico was the proliferation of bars, brothels, and distilleries, in the 1920's, and the eventual birth of a border commerce economy. One can say the the border's role as an edge between two cultures—historically generated a certain buzz in defining comparative advantages for products and services across those distinct cultures. Over time, this "edge" has also pushed entrepreneurs to experiment with different kind of marketing strategies, leading to innovation.

But the border's intense focus on consumerism also has a down side. As sociologists have pointed out, giant corporations (fast food, coffee, soft drinks, etc.) benefit from building a "culture ideology of consumerism,"[5] in which, through advertising, safe, homogenous products are sold all over the planet. Part of the success in marketing these commodities globally can be traced to corporate strategies to homogenize consumer tastes. By constructing globally uniform consumer behavior (through advertising and construction of recognizable images) multinational corporations can better control the marketing of their products.

But, it is now clear this ideology is not merely product driven, but place-driven as well. Along the border, this place-driven, consumerist ideology has threatened to obliterate the local, and replace the border landscape with corporate spaces controlled from beyond the region. Place-based homogeneity can be seen in the form of border shopping malls, fast food restaurants, hotels, resorts, and other urban spaces. Shopping mall designs in China, Ireland, Peru or Mexico tend to have identical designs. Malls have a standardized site plan and design concept, which includes "anchor" stores, public areas for walking and sitting, food courts, movie theaters, and restaurants. Further, there is a growing trend in renting space to global chain stores that sell clothing, electronics, and other consumer goods. Hotels and resorts often use standardized designs as well. Indeed, many corporate hotel chains believe that travelers like the predictable, familiar designs of hotel chains in the United States and Western Europe, and thus seek to replicate those designs in other cultural settings.

These designs are not merely limited to buildings. The new public spaces of the 21st century are generic designs reproduced along the border-- privatized streets, festival marketplaces or giant mall complexes. Increasingly, these consumer spaces seek to replace the traditional downtown as the primary pedestrian-scale gathering place for post-modern city dwellers.

Along the international border, the dominance of the U.S. culture-ideology of consumerism has been particularly intense. In the early 1990's, the invasion of

fast food outlets in border cities occurred virtually overnight. In the span of one or two years, every major food outlet—McDonald's, Carl's Jr., Burger King, Domino's Pizza, etc.—burst onto the urban landscape. Around the same time, small, medium and large shopping centers began appearing along commercial boulevards and highways. In border cities like Tijuana, Mexicali, or Nogales, these mini-malls served to interrupt the pedestrian scale of the downtown, since buildings were set back from the sidewalk, while parking lots stood in front.

U.S.- style mega- shopping malls sprouted on the Mexican side of the border. Corporate interests have little trouble selling consumption to border city residents. An enormous, captive Mexican audience can be reached by advertisers on California channels. Mexican buyers learn how to consume through the U.S. controlled media, American movies, television, magazines, and web sites. As a result, Mexicans living along the border have proven to be highly motivated customers on the U. S. side. Studies in California, have shown, for example, that Mexican consumers have similar, if not better information and a slightly better understanding than California residents of locations and qualities of stores and products in the San Diego region.[6]

In border cities we find what landscape writer JB Jackson once called "other directed space", that is, places that are constructed not for local city dwellers but as stage sets for outsiders (visitors).[7] Border commercial streets are set up to create an ambience American tourists expect to find– a place where they can let their imagination run loose about what Mexico might mean to them. This stage set is purposefully artificial as a way of playfully creating an open canvas for outsiders.

Universal Studios in Los Angeles has packaged the idea of commodified streets into a new fake mall called City Walk, where a shopping center is disguised as a series of real streets. However, lest we imagine that even the sacred colonial, historic centers of Mexico are free from global commerce, we would be wrong. Mexico City's historic center, and its surrounding

neighborhoods are also filled with examples of consumerist penetration– in the form of Blockbusters, 7-11, etc.

Global Tourism Districts

Tourism poses an important global ecology in the border region. It is a force that inherently implies the creation of separate enclaves, theatrical spaces of consumption that are defined, not always by the real identity of the place, but by an imagined identity that is manufactured and marketed by global advertising firms to pull in the largest market of consumers.

A central premise of tourism design is the manipulation of visitors' experience of place to maximize profit. Global tourism investors and corporate decision makers tend to view regions as stage sets for generating profit, rather than as genuine places whose identity should be protected. Thus the "sense of place" produced by architecture for the visitor industry tends toward what one writer calls the "tourism gaze", in effect, a landscape socially constructed for a targeted population. It has been compared to Foucault's "medical gaze," a strategy of controlled design aimed at a different economic interest group—consumers of medical services and facilities.[8]

Tourism developers seek to create homogenous, readily distinguished, easily consumed built environment experiences for their client populations. Controlled resort structures with recognizable designs (oceanfront boardwalks, small clustered, shopping and restaurant complexes, hotels, fast food outlets, global boutiques) have become the central pillars of tourism landscape design. The value of tourist space is measured by its marketability for short- term tourism visits, rather than by its cultural uniqueness or environmental purity.

As with product marketing, global companies want to standardize the tourism experience. Large- scale tourism resort developments, based on uniform design criteria, are not crafted with the local environment in mind, which is why they are often not sustainable.[9] The tourism industry, controlled from

international command centers in wealthy nations, tends to promote distorted images of Third World nations like Mexico, the main destinations of their clients. Global tourism firms have little interest in portraying nations as they really are. For example, it is almost always the case that poverty is minimized or ignored, as are many local customs and practices.

Along the U.S.-Mexico border, the rich cultural integration of Mexican and U.S. are compromised by the corporatized control exerted over tourism development. In Tijuana, Mexico, for example, the main commercial street in the old downtown tourism district—Revolution Avenue—is a striking example of a manipulated, commodified space. Revolution Avenue is to Tijuana what Main Street, U.S.A. is to Disneyland—an artificial promenade that sets the mood for a carefully choreographed experience. In Disneyland, the visitor parks his/her car, and walks across the parking lot, through the entrance gates, and onto Main Street, a theatrical stage set, built at 4/5 scale, and lined with costumed characters, from Mickey Mouse to a Barbershop Quartet. In Tijuana, tourists park their cars in vast lots just north of the border, cross the pedestrian entrance into Mexico, and move along a path that leads them into Revolution Avenue.

Mexicans laugh at the choreography and scenography of this electronic corridor of tourist destinations. In boom times, it is crowded and hyperactive. Mexican architect friends of mine in Tijuana call it "arquitectura del chiste". In post-9/11 borderlands, it has struggled. At the edge of Revolution Ave. sits an abandoned theme park, Mexitlan, perhaps a victim of border entrepreneurialism gone wild. Mexitlan was a theme park created to celebrate Mexico in miniature. It did not work. Many have wondered why. Perhaps Americans did not want to think they were coming to a theme park, they prefer to create their own fantasy of what Mexico is or of what the border is, and not be given a map or a guide by someone else. When it opened, the entrance fee was close to 20 dollars, then lowered to 10, 8, 5, and finally it shut down completely after only a few years of existence.

Tourism breeds "enclavism," the creation of isolated zones for visitors, buffered from the everyday city, to allow the outsider's fantasy of the place to remain distinct from its reality, which is usually less exotic. Along the beachfront, just south of Tijuana lies an excellent example of an enclave-- the village of Puerto Popotla**,** near the town of Rosarito. Popotla was once a small fishing village of less than 100 residents. The Hollywood film company Twentieth Century Fox leased land adjacent to the village to build a major studio-- Fox Baja Studios-- for film production in the mid 1990's The first film was "Titanic;" it's enormous global success has had ripple effects on this zone of Baja California. The Titanic facilities consisted of imposing, massive, ugly gray metal warehouses, and a giant concrete wall surrounding the site, which townspeople have dubbed "the Berlin wall." The film production facilities completely dwarf the fishing village, and evoke the feeling of a prison: security around the site is extremely tight, with high walls and a guardhouse. Here "enclavism" takes an interesting form— a "movie maquiladora," or an assembly plant for film making."[10] This enclave has also brought environmental degradation to the Tijuana/Baja coastline. During construction, underwater explosives may have been used to grade the beach area and build several giant pools for the Titanic filming, causing destruction of marine life for kilometers around the site. Further, according to some observers, during filming the company dumped chlorine into the pool, and emptied its tanks in the ocean, allowing the chlorine to seep into the kelp beds and nearby ecology.

Post-NAFTA Neighborhoods

The traditional social geography of Mexican border towns reveals an inverse model of the U.S. pattern. In Mexico, wealthy residents cluster in older established neighborhoods adjacent to downtown, or along a commercial corridor leading out of the central business district. Middle class, working class,

and poor neighborhoods are arrayed concentrically around the core, with the poorest residents living farthest from the center.

Globalization exacerbates this social geography; at the same time, it adds new twists to it. The biggest changes are the addition of new residential enclaves for transnational investors and visitors. In Tijuana, the valuable coastline just beyond the city offers comparatively inexpensive real estate for U.S. residents, either in the form of second homes, or permanent dwellings for retirees. Some 25,000 Americans reside in the coastal corridor between Tijuana and Ensenada, and that number will grow.[11] Global real estate projects are aiming to create golf resorts, beachfront condo complexes and luxury marina housing enclaves for foreign residents. These high paying land users routinely outbid Mexicans for coastal properties; the result is that the social ecology of the coastal strip is global—it is dominated by foreign residents.

Meanwhile, U.S.- style condominiums and suburban housing developments for Mexicans have accelerated across Tijuana. Mexican consumers are familiar with U.S. housing, both from crossing the border, or through the print and visual media. Global advertising has altered their taste in housing. Wealthy consumers want condominiums with jacuzis, sunken bathtubs and satellite television. Even poor migrants aspire to U.S. house-types.

A former border architect speaks of his frustration with people who, despite incredibly limited incomes, refuse to live in houses that could be technically designed to fit their budgets. "My clients don't want to live in a house designed with recycled metal or junk parts, even if it is excellently constructed. They want a California tract house, with a picture window and a garage. A lot of people can't afford to buy a house in the United States, but they buy the magazines, and then they find a photograph of a house they like. They bring it to the architect in Tijuana, and they say 'I want a house like this.' But they forget that in Mexico our lot sizes are smaller and narrower. We don't have the space to design with ideal lighting and ventilation. To meet their needs, we end up designing caricatures of American-style houses in miniature."[12]

As mentioned earlier, worker housing has been dispersed around the *maquila* zones. Migrants to Tijuana live on the edges of the city, near or beyond the zone of *maquila* workers, in squatter communities of sub-standard housing, also known locally as *colonias populares*. This class of marginal, disenfranchised urban poor may not ultimately benefit greatly from globalization, but they respond to its seductive pull. The struggle of the urban poor to survive in booming, globalizing cities constitutes a key debate underlying the globalization protest movements around the globe.

A Return to the 19th Century? The Danger of Post-9/11 Border Landscapes

"Si el de Berlin cayo, el de Tijuana porque no?" (If the one in Berlin fell, why not the one in Tijuana?).
-- graffiti on the international boundary fence at Tijuana-San Diego.

For more than a century, Mexican border cities' existence was defined by their link to the physical boundary. Their existence was schizophrenic, in that they struggled to balance their economic ties to the United States, with cultural loyalty toward their ethnic home-- Mexico. The physical boundary—the wall, the fence—stood as a constant reminder of this double identity.

Today, in a post 9/11 world, globalization along the border evokes a critical debate —does the region's future lie with perpetuation of the wall, and all that it symbolizes—national security, sovereignty, defense against the threat of international terrorism, and militarization, -- or does it reside in the propagation of a world of transparent boundaries and trans-frontier cities? This theme shapes an underlying tension embedded in the built environment of border cities, a tension that is manifest by the conflicted landscapes of the immediate boundary zone where the two nations meet.

The popular global icon of militarized boundaries is the Berlin wall – a landscape of bleak, gray images of barbed wire, concrete barriers, soldiers in watch towers peering through binoculars, and bodies of failed border- crossers draped across the no man's land between East and West. The German wall, before its destruction, ran 66 miles in twelve- foot high concrete block, 35 miles in wire and mesh fencing. It had over two hundred watch- towers, and blinding yellow night lights mounted on tall poles.

Along the U.S.-Mexico border, a similar wall can be found. It appears in different forms, some of it is built from corrugated metal landing mats recycled from the Persian Gulf War. Other walls appear as barbed wire, while recently constructed barriers are 18- foot high concrete "bollard" pilings topped with tilted metal mesh screens put up by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Whatever their form, the walls are frequently punched full of holes by migrants.

For more than a decade, landscapes along the Mexico-U.S. boundary explode with messages of danger and conflict. The border is reduced to a cliché, a war zone, a place controlled by national governments and their police forces. Signage on fences and along the line reinforces an underlying theme-- that only the governments can decide who enters and who crosses. An example lies in the 1994 "Operation Gatekeeper" project, described by one official as an operation that would "restore the rule of law to the California-Baja California border."[13] This general theme of "militarization" along the border, has remained as part of the landscape, always threatening to move to the forefront each time a crisis looms. The September 11, 2001 terrorist event in the U.S. had the immediate effect of resurrecting the policing, enforcement-oriented functions of the international border.

But this landscape cannot hold. It bumps up against the resounding voice of a great global acronym—NAFTA. Mexican and U.S. presidents publicly celebrate globalization, and the goal of a less restrictive boundary. Along the California-Mexico border, eight million inhabitants share an economy with the potential for 10 billion dollars in annual trade. Some have said that this corner of

North America could be a great global boom area like Hong Kong. Yet, to poor immigrants huddling at the taco stands along the boundary fence, these dreams lie thousands of miles away in the national capitals. The boundary remains well guarded, and sovereignty, in a 9/11 world, is alive and well. The wall will not disappear.

Invented Connections in a Transnational Border Space

While nations continue to militarize borders in some regions of the world, a parallel universe of relatively stable border regions has evolved. On these borders new kinds of transnational community spaces are forming. The creation of community spaces and places near international borders runs counter to nearly two centuries of history, where cities were organized as physical entities that lie territorially within the boundaries of one sovereign nation. This is no longer the case today. In a number of global boundary zones, most notably Western Europe and North America, we find community spaces that sprawl across international boundaries[14].

Today, globalization is creating new possibility to bring citizens on either side of the Mexico-U.S. boundary together; in an ideal world, old differences would be set aside as urban neighbors become part of a common transnational living and working space. The building blocks of these new transnational communities lie in the social and physical linkages that connect settlements across the boundary. Such linkages in Tijuana-San Diego include the existence of international commuters, transnational consumers, global factories, cross-border land and housing markets and transnational architecture.

Nearly 300,000 workers legally travel across the border, from the Mexican to the US side of a transfrontier metropolis, to work in the United States on a daily or weekly basis. Countless thousands of others cross illegally with a border resident card (which permits Mexican border residents to cross into the US for non-work purposes, but which is frequently used illegally to get to work).

Billions of dollars in cross-border commercial transactions take place annually. Several hundred million border crossings also occur each year, primarily between the partners that form the transnational metropolis. Consumers constitute the most active group of legal border crossers, and are perhaps the primary population that ties together the two sides of the Mexico-US transfrontier metropolis. Collectively they form a complex regional network of flows north and south across the border. The existence of this volume of flows is leading to the emergence of what we might term "transnational citizens," people who exist on both sides of the border.

But, of course, globalization continues to generate challenges to the formation of stable cross-border bi-cultural landscapes. Transnational drug smuggling and associated violence, as well as the threat of terrorism, continues to cast a shadow over any long term transformation of the U.S.-Mexico border as a more socially, culturally and economically integrated place.

For more than a century, the image of the border as a place of violence and chaos left the region devoid of investors, a built- in form of redlining. Border uncertainty and risk depressed the value of land around the line for most investors. As a result, many boundary zones attracted only low rent land uses, such as warehouse storage facilities, parking lots, or currency exchange houses. Properties frequently remained vacant or abandoned, while landowners waited to see what governments have planned for the future. This legacy, once thought to be on its way out, has returned as a result of 9/11 and the backlash against attempts to curb the power of transnational smugglers.

In a globalizing world, the border zone's best prospect for the future may be to reinvent itself as more than just a "pass through" space. It could become a connector for the regional economy, and even an important destination in its own right**.** Thousands of transnational citizens utilize this space each day. Trade and tourism flourish here.

Speaking of the Tijuana-San Diego border crossing, one San Diego city council member stated: "Few would disagree that its iron bars, concrete walls

and blighted surroundings are an unsightly disgrace to our regional dignity."[15] A member of the Planning Commission in the late 1990's commented, "The border entrance is a very seedy kind of place. There is no elegance to it. When you cross the border into Mexico, you feel like you are going into a second rate place. And it really shouldn't be."[16]

This zone is ripe for an "invented connection", a new ecological space created when global investors or entrepreneurs seek to alter the built environment. Before the recession of the late 2000's, large- scale privately funded development projects at boundary crossings were in various stages of completion along the entire two thousand- mile boundary. These projects envisioned a number of different types of developments, mostly mixed use, and medium density. Many were private development spaces, with partnerships maintained with relevant public border monitoring agencies.

On the San Diego-Tijuana border, adjacent to the San Ysidro crossing, a private firm purchased large tracts of land, and with the Redevelopment Authority of the City of San Diego government, put together a new, large- scale project called "Las Americas." Their initial idea was to create a complex of mixed uses, a public plaza, a landmark pedestrian bridged linked to a new pedestrian crossing, a World Trade Center, a market facility, and links to the existing trolley, as well as across the border to Revolution Ave.[17] The investment plan imagines a new future for Mexico's boundary--an integration of pedestrian walkways, gardens, and plazas with private retail, entertainment, hotel and office buildings. What is novel about this vision is its recognition of the boundary itself, as a space of community life, rather than a space of instability, conflict, and smuggling.

This "invented connection" would transform the zone at Tijuana/San Ysidro into a destination, where more tourists and local residents would simply come to the border, and not necessarily even cross it. To the north, San Ysidro, and the surrounding "south bay" region, would become a surrogate for a "Mexican"/border cultural experience, where consumers would feel comfortable

coming to the border, without having to deal with the perceived inconveniences of crossing into Tijuana. If pedestrian bridges and other new infrastructure make it easier to cross back and forth into Tijuana, the invented "border urban village" would benefit the economies of both sides.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have sought to explore the changing place identity of the U.S.-Mexico border. I have argued that this region offers a metaphor for the process of ethnic and cultural integration, disintegration and reintegration that may be occurring in North America. The border zone offers some interesting lessons about the dynamics of U.S. and Mexican cultural mixing in a globalizing era.

One idea that has been floated along the border is the theme of cultural hybridity, the notion that the border creates an unusual, locally based form of integration. I would argue that the hybridity of the U.S.-Mexico border is one based on different forms of creative expression, both those that speak to the region's changing identity, and those that speak to inequity and struggle. These creative, hybrid forms were significantly interrupted by eight years of an American political approach (the Bush presidency, 2000-2008) to the boundary in which the old divisions and defensive notions of 19th century borders were resurrected, and the border was reconstituted as a place of danger and fear.

But, in the end, that legacy cannot hold. Markets cross the border, people cross, and creative flows cross, and, it is this idea of globalization that has the strongest future. This approach represents the new foreign policy outlook of the Obama presidency in the U.S. A new era of transnational cooperation was publicly announced by the presidents of the U.S. and Mexico in the spring of 2009.

Some years ago, in the border city of Tijuana, there was a call for artists and architects to design a new symbol of the city's future, which had, for a long time, been associated with negative images– prostitution, gambling, drug smuggling, and illegality. Many residents complained that the money might be better spent on infrastructure badly needed. But city leaders argued the image of the city was vital to its future, and this vision won out. In the end, an arch was constructed—and was seen as a symbol of reaching out, the endless curve that stretched toward the north and toward the west, the two futures of Mexico in a global era.

Border identity may be encapsulated by the story of this arching ellipse, which transcends the moment, and reaches toward the sky and toward the future, one of unity across borders in a global age. But, of course, the story does not exactly end there. Border place identity, like the larger discourse of globalization, is a dance between two realities, often contradictory-- one old (the defended borders, walls, fences, and separated nation states), the other new (the end of walls and a new era of transnational identity and cross-border societies), one modern, the other post-modern, one planned, the other spontaneous, one rich the other poor, and so forth.

This is a useful point to conclude upon. U.S.-Mexico border cultural identity symbolizes a slice of the future in globalization discourse– a struggle with the virtues of transcending borders, while, at the same time, forces that seek to obliterate that project, and return to a world of national insularity, rigid boundaries, segregated spaces, and boxed-in thinking.

Photographs

By Lawrence A. Herzog

The San Diego-Tijuana border crossing: largest in North America

Concrete bollard fence along U.S.-Mexico border. Note older fence in background.

Arch in Tijuana symbolizes future of U.S.-Mexico border region

[1] The concept of the 'transfrontier metropolis' was first introduced in my 1990 book *Where North Meets South*. See Lawrence A. Herzog, *Where North Meets South* (Austin: University of Texas Press/CLAS, 1990).
[2] Charles Lummis, *Land of Poco Tiempo* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1925).
[3] The idea of U.S.-Mexico border hybridity is developed in M. Dear and G. LeClerc, eds. *Post-Border City* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
[4] For example, numerous art exhibitions have highlighted the U.S.-Mexico border region. They include a project called "InSite" along the California-Mexico border. A huge array of films has been made about this region.
[5] Leslie Sklair, *Sociology of the Global System*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).
[6] See Lawrence Herzog, *From Aztec to High Tech*.
[7] J.B. Jackson, "Other Directed Houses," in Ervin Zube, *Landscapes: The Selected Writings of J.B. Jackson*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970).
[8] John Urry. *The Tourist Gaze*. (London: Sage, 1990).
[9] Proponents of sustainable development point out that "bioregionalism"-- the relationship between settlement formation and nature-- must be one of the anchors of economic growth See, for example, Devon Pena, *The Terror of the Machine* (Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies, 1997).
[10]This idea is explored in the documentary "Factory of Dreams," produced by Paul Espinosa, KPBS- TV, San Diego, 1999.
[11] Mexican property law does not allow foreigners to own land; however post-NAFTA legislation makes it possible for foreigners to lease land through a trust or *fideicomiso* arrangement for up to 60 years.
[12] Jorge Ozorno, cited in Lawrence Herzog, *From Aztec to High Tech*: 206.
[13] Alan D. Bersin, U.S. Attorney, San Diego, cited in Joseph Nevins "The Law of the Land: Local-National Dialectic and the Making of the United States-Mexico Boundary in Southern California," *Historical Geography*, Vol.28, 2000: 41-60.
[14] Important European transfrontier urban agglomerations, with populations ranging between 300,000 and one million inhabitants, include Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg (Swiss-French-German border); Maastricht-Aachen-Liege (Dutch-German-Belgian border); the Geneva metropolitan area (Swiss-French border) and the Strasbourg metropolitan area (French-German border). In North America, one finds transfrontier urban regions housing between 250,000 and four million people along the Canadian-US border at Vancouver-Victoria-Seattle, Detroit-Windsor and Toronto-Hamilton-Buffalo, and on the Mexico-US border at Tijuana-San Diego, Ciudad Juarez-El Paso, Mexicali-Calexico/El Centro, Nuevo Laredo-Laredo, Reynosa-McAllen and Matamoros-Brownsville.
[15] Juan Vargas, "A Link, Not a Barrier, at the Border," *San Diego Union Tribune*, Opinion essay. January 10, 1999.
[16] Mark Steele, cited in Lawrence Herzog, "A New Tijuana Needs a New Image," Opinion essay, *San Diego Union Tribune*, March 1, 1998, G-4.
[17] Land Grant Development, *International Gateway of the Americas*, Project Proposal. (San Diego, 1997).