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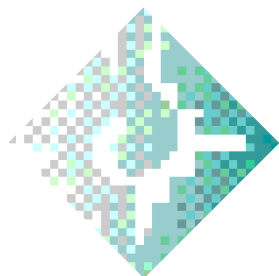
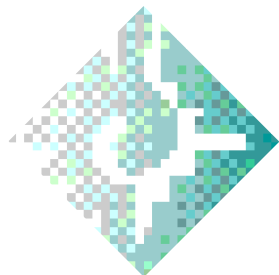
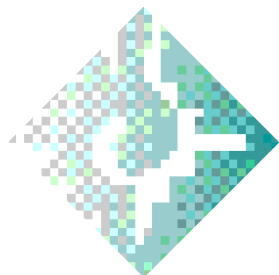
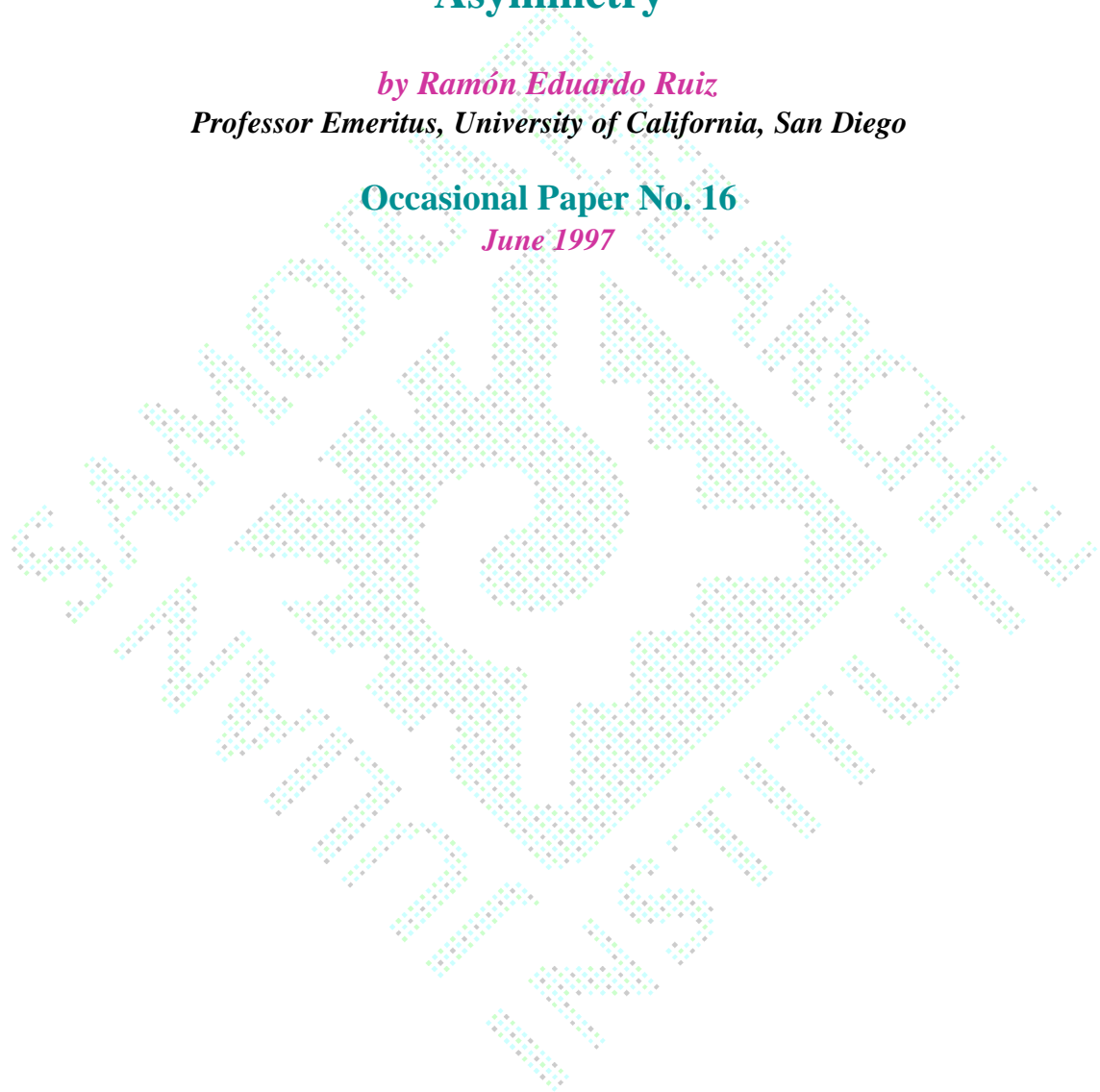
Asymmetry

by Ramón Eduardo Ruiz

Professor Emeritus, University of California, San Diego

Occasional Paper No. 16

June 1997



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Asymmetry

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Artwork by
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The Julian Samora Research Institute is the Midwest's premier policy research and outreach center to the Hispanic community. The Institute's mission includes:

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- *Development of Latino faculty, including support for the development of curriculum and scholarship for Chicano/Latino Studies.*

Asymmetry

Chapter I

At the Mexican border, two nations colossally unequal in wealth and military might, face off in a modern version of David and Goliath. Nowhere else in the world does the asymmetry loom greater, as the huge gap in per capita income and production between the two neighbors verifies. The border is an “open wound,” writes Gloria Anzaldua, “where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds;” or, in the words of a Mexican, where persons fleeing from ubiquitous poverty, the ceaseless search for jobs, and the bane of political thuggery are drawn northward by the mirage of the First World.

Distinct heritages and cultures clash at the border, one Catholic and Spanish, a society resting on Roman law, and the other, by language and values, Protestant and, despite its surging minority population, English at heart. South of the Rio Grande lies Latin America, the *Ariel* of Enrique Rodó, the essayist from Uruguay and, to the north, his *Caliban*, Anglo-America. With Canadians, Americans share one of the world’s two longest international borders and with Mexico the other, but the differences between the two neighbors of European origin shrink when compared to those that separate mestizo Mexico from Rodó’s colossus. For nearly two centuries the overwhelming presence of the United States has been a sword of Damocles for Mexico; little of importance occurs north of the border that does not intrude upon the life of Mexicans.

Economics dictate this asymmetrical relationship. But for the distorted capitalism of Mexico that confronts the financial and industrial capitalism of the United States, the trade and commerce that joins them together would not exist. The disparity stimulates economic exchange, giving rise to border cities that handle dissimilar exports and imports. The United States provides the finished products and the financial capital, while burgeoning populations in Mexican border enclaves serve as markets and as reserve pools of cheap labor for factories and farms on the other side. The transnational economy is anything but equal, given Mexican reliance on the United States, due largely to the absence of wealth-creating alternatives.

Unequal development spurs the border economy, which includes the movement of people and capital, the exchange of goods, commercial relations that fluctuate according to the value of the peso, and the pools of cheap Mexican labor waiting to cross the border. At best, Mexican municipalities have only one-fifth the per-capita income of their American counterparts, though twice that of their sisters to the south. In 1992, the wage rate for Ford production workers in the United States was \$16.50 an hour, but the Ford plant in Hermosillo paid less than one sixteenth of that.

A story published by the *Los Angeles Times* illustrates well one of the consequences of this asymmetrical reality. In Sunland Park, New Mexico, just a skip and a jump away from El Paso, Mexican “bandits,” were, in the time-honored tradition of the Wild West, plundering the cargoes of Southern Pacific trains. After robbing them, the “bandits” scurried back to Mexico, in some spots just steps away. The *Colonia Anapra*, from where they emerged, is a squatter’s camp of cardboard and wooden shanties, mostly discarded junk from the United States, where 40,000 unemployed and hungry Mexicans live without running water, electricity, sewers or police. “Its residents,” reported the *Times*, “store drinking water in 55-gallon drums encrusted with chemical residue and cook corn tortillas over burning tires.” Many of the children had “rotting teeth and gum disease,” probably from drinking polluted water. When the Border Patrol closed down the gates to jobs in El Paso, the Mexicans turned to robbing American trains in order to survive. Only Los Angeles and Chicago suffer more “train robberies.” The “bandits,” poor Mexicans fleeing from Mexico’s latest economic crisis, improvise a livelihood by robbing their wealthy neighbors.

Every Mexican city from Tijuana to Matamoros lies next-door to the United States, a condition that distorts border society. As Graham Greene once wrote, “the border means more than a custom house, a passport office... Over there everything is going to be different.” For years, officials in Mexico City have spoken of the need to integrate the border with the rest of the nation, more so now in these days of a global economy spearheaded by American transnational giants. They dream of reducing the satellite status of border cities without losing the economic benefits of proximity.

Nationalists worry that border Mexicans, in their supposed fondness for imitating Americans, will lose their Mexican identity. That subject, which bears careful scrutiny of its own, I leave for later; at this juncture, it suffices to say that there is cause for worry. Research indicates that while Americans along the border are almost always “inflexibly ethnocentric” and give a scant hoot for Mexican culture and language, Mexicans sometimes look to the United States for a source of fresh values and ideas. This goes beyond economic advantages and technological benefits derived.

The examples are obvious. Border Spanish, for example, has incorporated countless English words into its vocabulary, giving them a peculiar spelling and pronunciation. Students of language refer to the results as “Spanglish.” Border residents know these words by heart: *lonche* for lunch, *troca* for truck, *breca* for automobile brake and *quequi* for cake, plus a myriad of others. In all Mexican communities, English language classes are compulsory, in Ciudad Juárez, for instance, students beginning in the seventh grade. Adults studying English more often than not belong to the upper tiers of society and once enrolled in American schools in El Paso. San Diego, the city near Tijuana, boasts of well-off Mexican residents, especially after the collapse of the peso sent them fleeing from their country. An expatriate colony dubbed “Taco Towers” by unkindly neighbors inhabits a part of the Coronado shoreline across the bay; its inhabitants live in San Diego for social prestige, convenience and the fear of kidnapping at home. Many children of the border *burguesía* (bourgeoisie) are born on the American side; their parents covet United States citizenship for them. In his novel *El gran pretender*, Luis Humberto Crosthwaite, one of the best known of border writers, has Johnny, an affluent “junior,” living in San Diego with his parents and going to school at Southwestern College. He spends Sundays in Tijuana, visiting his friends and driving his father’s Ford LTD.

Crossing the border is anything but an equal experience. It depends on where you come from. Citizens of the United States can enter freely any Mexican city so long as they stay within 12 miles of the border; on the Baja, California peninsula, they can travel to Ensenada, 60 miles south of Tijuana. With passport or birth certificate, it takes Americans just a few minutes to acquire a tourist visa that permits travel and residence in Mexico for up to six months. But Mexican

nationals, who endure long waits by auto at the border, must possess a permanent United States residence permit, referred to as a “green card,” a visa or other valid documentation obtained in advance. As early as 1903, United States’ immigration officials at El Paso, depending on their whims that day, fumigated persons arriving from Mexico. My mother, a proud member of a respected family of Parral, never tired of telling how she feared, upon entering El Paso, having her hair disinfected for lice. As Alicia Castellanos says, these inequities come about because of the power of the almighty dollar.

Chapter II

The Mexico-United States border has 31 ports of entry. How far north and south the border region stretches is a subject of heated debate. Miguel León Portilla, a distinguished Mexican historian, claims it extends out at least 60 miles in both directions. By his calculation, the border region exceeds in square miles the territory of nations such as Spain and France. For Jorge Bustamante, how you define it rests on what you are looking for. The “operational extension north and south of the region,” he believes varies according to the yardstick being used. The spatial definition is not the same if the focus is economic, as opposed to ecological concerns. The social and economic expanse of a binational zone is not determined by a geographic boundary but by the interaction of the people who live on both sides of it. It makes more sense, argues another Mexican writer, to define the region as the sum total of the 49 United States border counties and the 39 municipalities on the other side. Others say that given the changing character of the region due to the growing economic and cultural importance of the American Southwest which, undoubtedly, has repercussions on the Mexican side, a more flexible and spatially broader definition of the region is necessary.

Geographic proximity alone, as experts recognize, does not by itself shape the character of a border region; clearly economic factors, as well as improvements in communication (the information highway) and transportation determine the nature of the relationship. Thus, as the American Southwest changes, so does the geographic and economic scope of the border region. Two examples of this interaction, which altered drastically the nature of Mexican border society since early in the century, stand out: one is the growing need in the American Southwest for cheap Mexican labor and the other the never-end-

ing American demand for tourist facilities and commercial services south of the border. Both expand as well as dramatically alter the scope and character of Mexican borderland society.

No matter what the impact of these transformations, for Mexicans any definition of the border region starts with the recognition that its location next door to the United States largely determines its historical, economic, and cultural outlines. That fact dates from the War of 1847 and the Gadsden Purchase of 1853, which, by the boundary survey of 1849-1855 carried out by John Bartlett and William H. Emory, gave form to the present demarcation line between Mexico and the United States. Relations between the two countries were initially fleeting; then, with the coming of the railroad, neighboring cities sprang up. The obvious examples are Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, the two Laredos, both Nogales and Brownsville and Matamoros. Until then, it was impossible to distinguish on the Texas-Mexican frontier one cowboy from another in this sparsely-populated, semi-barren region. The railroads, and changes made possible by them in the early 20th Century, transformed this marginalized territory and its population, changes that came to fruition in the Sunbelt with World War II and its aftermath. Until then, the boundary between the two countries retarded development; as scholars point out, regions on the edge of borders tend to develop at a slower pace compared to similar interior areas.

For those who live next to each other but on opposite sides, the border is both a surreal as well as a material reality. From one end of the border to the other, to cite the *Brownsville Herald*, two battles go on. "In one, U.S. businessmen are practically begging for more Mexican customers to cross the border; in the other, politicians are demanding that we put up an assortment of fences, walls and human blockades to keep Mexicans out." Reality tends to side with the businessmen: the border is increasingly porous.

That is logical; an international border must be, on the one hand, an obstacle that separates two peoples but, on the other, porous, in order to allow a relative free exchange of goods, people, and capital. The emergence of cities, to cite one more opinion, "is a barometer that measures the degree of transformation," of the region's integration. As both sides become more populated and their economies diversified, the transborder swells in size and complexity. As Carey McWilliams wrote, from El Paso to Brownsville, the Rio Grande does not separate peo-

ple; it draws them together." In El Paso, a Mexican-American recalled, during the 1930's and 40's, "I can't remember the family not going to Ciudad Juárez every Sunday. I don't remember" eating out in a restaurant in El Paso. "Ciudad Juárez was our life."

Each year in Cochise County, Arizona, officials get together with their counterparts from Sonora for a day of sports and pleasure. They have christened it "A Celebration of Nation to Nation," a day when officials on both sides proclaim mutual goodwill, putting aside daily problems of drugs, pollution, and smuggling. The *abrazo* or embrace is the sign of the day, symbolized usually by a game of volleyball with conventional rules. Yet there is something amiss: the net is not a cloth mesh stretched between two poles; the 7-foot chain-link fence separating Mexico from the United States serves in its place. But, how do you celebrate the end of a game, asks Tom Miller, who tells this story, with a handshake with a wire fence in the way? You don't; you extend fingers through the fence, rubbing them against the fingers of your opponents.

As any Texan can tell you, the term U.S.-Mexican border is a misnomer; its weight, in actuality, falls on Texas. When population and cities are considered, you have to conclude that it is a Texas-Mexican border, with a few miles of New Mexico, Arizona, and California added on as an afterthought. New Mexico, moreover, has no international ports of entry of any importance. About 9 million people live alongside the border, with perhaps 5.5 million of them on the Mexican side. One could add people in cities outside the perimeter of the geographic border that play an important role in border life, such as Los Angeles, San Antonio, and Tucson, all on the American side, and Monterrey, Hermosillo, and Chihuahua, that are Mexican.

Geographically the region is hardly homogeneous. On the Mexican side, this vast territory is defined more by its administrative and legal characteristics than by its geographic, historical, social, and economic homogeneity. The lush landscapes of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, as well as parts of the Imperial Valley of California, stand in sharp contrast to the miles upon miles of desert expanse that separates them. The urban depots run from big cities, such as El Paso, to the rustic towns of Douglas (Arizona), Roma (Texas) and Palomas, Chihuahua, a town that has hardly changed since Pancho Villa rode through it on his way to attack Columbus, New Mexico, its neighbor.

Chapter III

Since their independence at the beginning of the last century, most Latin American nations, including Mexico, tend to measure themselves by the progress and order of the United States. Even today, Mexicans tend to evaluate their state of development by American standards, as Octavio Paz did in his famous *Laberinth of Solitude*, retracing the steps taken by Rodó as well as the Cuban José Martí in *Nuestra América*. By this standard of measurement, the Mexican border fares poorly. But, as in life, things are more complex.

On both sides of the boundary line income levels drop as one travels south and rise as one goes north, as they do from west to east. The high family incomes on the Pacific Coast fall by as much as one half on the Gulf of Mexico; counties on the Lower Rio Grande in Texas enjoy less than one half the income of San Diego's. On the Mexican side, Tijuana boasts the highest per-capita incomes while Matamoros the lowest; Ciudad Juárez straddles the middle. On the average, living standards are higher in the Mexican north than to the south; some two-thirds of Reynosa's population lives above the minimum income level. Yet, we must not forget that the cost of living is also higher, though access to cheaper goods across the border offsets that somewhat.

In the United States, there is one automobile for every 1.9 persons; but only one for every 16.3 in Mexico. In Baja California Norte, where Tijuana and Mexicali lie, there is one for every 3.8 inhabitants, many with California license plates, their owners whom, according to an irate letter writer to the newspaper *Zeta*, do not pay their share of taxes. Televisions sets are commonplace on both sides of the international boundary. In 1991, some 97% of U.S. border residents had a TV set, compared to 87% of their Mexican neighbors.

A binational paradox exists: Mexican average income rises as you near the border; on the United States' side, it falls off. If affluent Tijuana, that is affluent by Mexican standards, were a state, its per-capita income would rank fourth in the nation, after

the Federal District, Tabasco (petroleum) and Nuevo León (heavy industry). The six northern states of Mexico top the literacy rankings. But while per capita income in El Paso is low by United States standards, that of Ciudad Juárez is much, much lower, a symbol of the asymmetrical relationship that exists between the countries. The gross product of San Diego, California, is 25 times greater than that of Tijuana, its neighbor. San Diego would have tasted rapid economic growth even if Baja, California had not, but the same cannot be said of Tijuana if Southern California were underpopulated. Yet the development of such cities as El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, as well as the two Laredos, are the result of a symbiotic relationship. Between Tijuana and Mexicali there are three highways; Route 8 on the United States side is a divided, multi-lane freeway; on the Mexican side, the public highway is a winding and narrow road that drivers avoid taking, while the much-better private toll road is outlandishly expensive.

Mexican border cities, to underline once more, feel every fluctuation of the American economy, particularly those in Baja, California, given the overwhelming presence of Los Angeles and San Diego. In the 1930's, they suffered most from the effects of the Great Depression, reeling from the massive decline in the number of American tourists with the subsequent rise in unemployment among restaurant cooks, bartenders, waiters, street vendors, and even prostitutes. Simultaneously, thousands of jobless Mexicans were driven out of the American Southwest and congregated along the border, adding to the woes of city fathers. However, the opportunity to earn dollars through tourism, entertainment or auto repair, to name a few of the channels, fuels the well-being of Mexican border cities. Exceptions exist, nonetheless, one being Matamoros, probably the most "Mexican" of the border cities, where tourism and the Prohibition era of the 1920's had less impact on its development. Today, the industrial plants of Matamoros are one of the largest producers of auto parts in all of North America, which includes wiring assemblies for car factories in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Chapter IV

When we speak of a Mexican border we speak of cities. Not until one reaches the Lower Rio Grande Valley do farmers inhabit the expanses between cities; the one exception is Mexicali. West of Nuevo Laredo, virtually empty, arid lands greet the occasional visitor. This is a unique development; in few of the international boundaries of the world do cities loom as large. Today, 80% of border residents reside in localities of more than 100,000 people. They are no longer border towns that conjure up images of dusty streets, girlie joints and cantinas. As Rick Cahill says in *Border Towns of the Southwest*, the cities gleam with neon lights, here and there a highrise building dots the horizon and automobiles rumble down at least a few tree-lined avenues.

Urbanization started early in the 19th Century, first in the northeast due largely to an export agriculture and the steel industry of Monterrey. The arrival of the railroad and migration northward from central Mexico further stimulated urban growth, as did the tourist and service industries, offshoots of the “Golden Years” of the Volsted Act in the United States. As sin palaces blossomed, so did Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez. The Great Depression slowed urbanization but World War II and the Korean conflict ignited it once more. Until the coming of the *maquiladora*, foreign-owned assembly plants, the service and tourist industries were the backbone of Mexican border urbanization. Spectacular urbanization walks hand in hand with the arrival of the *maquiladoras*.

Over time, the character of urbanization has changed. Some of the cities, formerly tourist havens, underwent transformations with the onset of the *maquiladoras*. As the fate of Avenida Revolución and the downtown of Ciudad Juárez testify, old core areas, where tradition holds forth, were relegated to the periphery by suburbs replete with their own shopping malls. Both cities retain their tourist attractions – restaurants, nightclubs, and curio shops – but the heart of the local economy no longer beats there.

During the last three decades, the border emerged as one of the most urbanized regions of Mexico. In 1950, its population totaled less than one million, but today it is millions more. In the last 60 years, the population multiplied over 14 times, with growth centered in the largest cities, each with over 100,000

inhabitants. In rank order, the six largest are Ciudad Juárez, Tijuana, Mexicali, Matamoros, Reynosa, and Nuevo Laredo; only Nuevo Laredo shows signs of population stagnation. The others are among the fastest growing in the Western Hemisphere. Ciudad Juárez, Mexicali, and Tijuana house half of the total border population. If current projections hold up, by the year 2,000, Tijuana alone will have over 1.2 million inhabitants; its population growth rate is beyond the national average of 3.5% a year. Tijuana, unlike other the border cities, never went through an agricultural or mining phase; it was urban from the start. In 1996, northern Mexico, with the border municipalities leading the way, was the most urbanized region of the Republic. Cities are the heartland of the border, and that is becoming increasingly so. In 1940, for example, 71% of border residents were rural; today the percentages are virtually the reverse. Of Baja California Norte’s inhabitants, 90% are urbanites. This process parallels world developments; from 60 to 70% of the population of this earth now lives in cities.

Migrants play a huge role in the population of the border enclaves. In Tijuana, for instance, over half of the population is of recent origin. Its inhabitants have a saying: “We are all immigrants. Our only difference is that some of us arrived earlier and some of us later.” Mostly poor, the migrants settle largely on the outskirts of cities, in shacks or *jacales*, as they are known. Urbanization encircles the cities with slums, beltways of poverty and misery, in the pattern of the Third World.

Middle-class people, a symbol of the economic changes occurring, increasingly inhabit border cities. Until recently, these cities were largely administrative centers, custom depots, and tourist meccas. More and more, with the arrival of the *maquiladoras*, they are becoming industrial bastions. Their tertiary activities, while still important, no longer set the tone. According to official statistics, which largely equate middle class with urban residency, 37.9% of Mexicans fit this category. By this definition, the urbanized border has a high percentage of middle-class residents, surpassing the figure for the Republic as a whole. Topping of the list of middle-class cities, according to Bustamante, stands Tijuana, based, as he explains, on distribution of income, years of schooling, and levels of health. No other city in the Republic, he maintains, is more middle-class, a pragmatic society that worships capitalist values and is highly individualistic.

Be that as it may, the old survives alongside the new. On the Coahuila frontier, a state that borders Texas, agricultural settlements continue to play a role. Guerrero, Hidalgo, and Jiménez are largely agricultural towns; the absence of cities on the United States side permits them to develop on their own. Agriculture also survives in the hinterlands of Ciudad Juárez and Nuevo Laredo, and it employs more people than industry does in Matamoros and Reynosa. Eagle Pass and Del Rio, both Texas cities, live off Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña, their Mexican cousins.

Chapter V

On the Mexican side, municipal subservience is much in order. At the top of the political hierarchy sits the federal government in Mexico City; next comes state authority; at the tail end of this system lies municipal politics. Except for Baja California Norte and Chihuahua, where the *Partido Acción Nacional* wrested political control from the PRI, local political officials, the presidente municipal included, require the blessings of the Priista hierarchy; their election, until recently, was a foregone conclusion. Political manipulation and chicanery even include the PRI financing campaigns of opposition party candidates – in order to give elections a veneer of democracy. “When I ran for the job of president municipal of Tecate” (a town not far from Tijuana), Crispín Valle Castañeda recalled, “though I was the candidate of the PAN, the campaign cost me not a penny – though I lost.”

For all intents and purposes, local budgets are made and unmade in Mexico City. Some 80% of municipal revenues come from federal and state coffers. Conversely, federal authorities collect nearly 80% of local income but return just over 20% of it to the states and municipalities. Rural municipalities often do not even have funds to hire a town clerk. Of the nearly 3 million public employees in Mexico, only 150,000 serve *municipios*. The power of *ayuntamientos* (city councils) to levy taxes is virtually non-existent. Federal intervention dictates even the nature and location of public services such as water systems and street lighting, and municipal services must also await state decisions. Despite the reforms of 1983, which theoretically granted more local autonomy, the centralization of power in the hands of the federal executive remains steadfast like the Rock of Gibraltar.

This structural underdevelopment stems from the long-standing relationship of powerful federal authorities in the economic affairs of states and municipalities. Undemocratic and bureaucratic interference by federal officials reaches extremes in the border provinces. In the rest of the Republic, only far-off Yucatan endures similar travails. Decentralization, the catch-word of current political reform, seeks to expand municipal control of public monies for use on local projects. The platform of the PAN, which has captured voter support along the border, highlights local autonomy. Municipal independence also means freedom from the intervention of state governors, though not all of them dictate in identical ways. Municipalities in the State of Sonora, for example, are freer to act on their own, followed by those of Coahuila, Baja California Norte, then Chihuahua and Tamaulipas.

From Ciudad Juárez to Matamoros, one bone of contention, which mirrors the differences between municipal and federal demands, is the collection of tolls on the international bridges. The City of El Paso receives 20% of its budget from these tolls, which it uses to pay police and repair streets, among other services. At the opposite end of the bridges, Ciudad Juárez keeps none. Federal officials collect the revenue. In the spring of 1995, with a municipal budget on the brink of bankruptcy, the Panista presidente municipal of Ciudad Juárez decided to challenge this inequity. To the surprise and anger of Mexico City, and to the applause of local residents, he installed municipal toll booths at one of the bridges, thus preventing federal officials from collecting the revenues. For this audacious usurpation of federal prerogatives, the presidente spent days in jail but, in elections later that year, the PAN retained control of Ciudad Juárez.

Chapter VI

Diverse factors explain the development of these border cities; the coming of the railroad is one of them. Between 1882 and 1892, the iron horse joined Ciudad Juárez, Nogales, Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo, and Piedras Negras to Mexico City and the United States. Another line linked Reynosa to Monterrey by way of Nuevo Laredo, and then to Mexico City. All connected these Mexican border enclaves with their counterparts across the border and, interestingly, by opening up jobs, halted, at least temporarily, the flight of Mexicans workers to the other side. As in

the case of El Paso, these railroads also converted American cities into important commercial depots by joining them with Mexico City. Nevertheless, the railroad networks of both countries were quite different; while El Paso had intercontinental links to both the west and east coasts of the United States, the railroad from Ciudad Juárez ran to the south, which made it economically subservient to El Paso. The trains that ran out of Ciudad Juárez encouraged the export of minerals and raw materials from Mexico but, conversely, opened the Republic to a flood of imports from the United States. The railroad failed to join together the Mexican north. Mexican passengers had to travel on trains equipped with wooden benches and brave hostile customs and immigration agents at the border while Americans on the other side rode on upholstered seats and took pleasure in clean coaches.

The railroads ushered in an era of transformation in the life of border towns. There were jobs for their clerks, telegraph operators, and track workers and, through the expansion of commercial activities, in warehouses, construction and the service industries. Because of the railroad, all built by American capital, the population of the border enclaves multiplied. Ciudad Juárez and Nuevo Laredo blossomed into the major Mexican ports of entry. The railroad helped Reynosa weather the hard times brought about by the end of the “zona libre,” a green light to import American goods.

Agriculture, too, had a hand in this drama. Despite the paucity of arable land (only 1 million hectares out of a total of 13.1), in the hinterlands of cities such as Mexicali, San Luis Río Colorado (Sonora), Matamoros, Reynosa, Ciudad Juárez, and Miguel Alemán, a dusty but thriving metropolis across from Roma, Texas, agriculture became one of the pillars of the economy. Early in the century, cotton drove agricultural enterprise; in the Mexicali Valley, Americans invested millions of dollars on irrigation projects and planted cotton. With the advent of World War II, Mexicans in northern Tamaulipas and Mexicali, free of the American presence, continued to do so. Water from the newly-constructed Bolder Dam on the Colorado River and, later the binational Amistad and Falcon Dams on the Rio Grande, helped spur this green revolution. Conversely, in the Valley of Juárez, the lack of adequate supplies of water blunted the cotton boom. Nearly all of the cotton, a wartime necessity, was sold in the United States, with American

companies controlling its ginning, sale, and financing. When Americans stopped fighting, and a plague labeled *pudricion texana* by Mexican planters killed off crops, and scientists developed synthetic fibers, the bottom fell out of the cotton market; by 1970, cotton sales represented only a third of the value of all agricultural production.

Large quantities of Mexican produce still find their way to markets in the United States. Mexicali, once an oasis for cotton, now produces vegetables for California, principally onions, broccoli, celery, and asparagus. Much of the farming is done by Americans, who rent the land from *ejidatarios* (farmers on communal plots) and employ cheap Mexican labor. A handful of Mexicans, financed by American dollars, participate in this activity, labeled *agromaquila*, or assembly-line farming, where a few, mostly foreigners, come away with the profits, which they gain by exploiting land that is not theirs and water subsidized by Mexican taxpayers. In 1990, the *agromaquilas* used up the equivalent of water consumed in two years by the cities of Mexicali and Tijuana. Mexicans claim that because of its historic reliance on agriculture, Mexicali is unique, home to “self-made” men.

From Matamoros to Ciudad Miguel Alemán, corn, alfalfa, sorghum, wheat, and cotton are farmed while fruits and vegetables are shipped by truck to Hidalgo, Texas. From Sonora and Sinaloa, vegetables destined for households in the Southwest enter the United States. During the winter months, up to 3,000 trucks daily pass through Nogales; the highest monthly volume of shipments occurs in March, the peak of the tomato harvest. The people of Ciudad Juárez buy virtually all the vegetables they consume from American farmers: potatoes, cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes, onions, cauliflower, carrots and, spinach. Merchants of the city, say critics, are the culprits. By buying and reselling left-over crops from nearby farms in Texas and New Mexico, they make impossible their cultivation in the Valley of Juárez.

The fruits and vegetables, and some cotton, derive from modern, largely privately-owned farms. In Sonora and Sinaloa, some of the big growers are Americans who finance their crops through United States banks and supermarket chains. Their seeds, fertilizers and pesticides come from there. In the north, *ejidos* take a back seat to private property. It is not uncommon for *ejidatarios* in Tamaulipas, most of

whom cultivate less than 10 hectares, to rent out their lands and walk over the border to work on American farms. Only large, private farms can cultivate sorghum, the chief crop of the region, at a profit. A similar pattern characterizes farming in Mexicali, where 80% of the *ejidos* are rented out. In these regions, agriculture, by providing jobs and attracting hundreds of thousands of migrants from the interior of Mexico, encouraged the growth of cities. Yet today agriculture engages only a quarter of the population of the border states. At Las Palomas, a Chihuahua border hamlet, and Agua Prieta in Sonora, and particularly at Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña, both in Coahuila, ranching, too, is a key of the economy. At the turn of the century, mining also helped lay the foundations of Nogales, Agua Prieta, Ciudad Juárez and Piedras Negras.

Chapter VII

On opposite sides of the border, cities face each other, their destinies inextricably linked together. As neighbors, they depend on each other, rather than integrate into the social and economic fabrics of their nations. One American, a man by the name of L. M. Holt, was the founder of two such cities. Known as “Limpy” because of a game leg, he baptized both Mexicali and Calexico, combining in the names of both Mexico and California.

The key twins are El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, the two Laredos, and Brownsville and Matamoros. Some wrongly add Tijuana and San Diego, forgetting that San Diegans never think of themselves as a border town. Of these cities, only San Diego is bigger than its Mexican sister. Since the 50’s, economic growth has been impressive on the Mexican side, due largely to proximity to the United States rather than to internal dynamics. The response to demands and circumstances from across the border mainly explain Mexican demographics.

Tijuana, the youngest of the border cities, symbolizes this axiom. The machinery of American tourism originally drove its tertiary economy; the saloons, restaurants, and curio shops on Avenida Revolución stood at the end of the highway from San Diego. Since the late 1960’s, the *maquiladoras*, also sporting an American label, are, more and more, Tijuana’s bread and butter. Although dating from colonial times, Ciudad Juárez, too, has a tourist past,

as do other Mexican border enclaves. Tijuana’s past, present, and, most probably, its future are linked closely to the ups and downs of the California economy, more so than to that of the Mexican Republic. The health of Nuevo Laredo took a turn for the better with the arrival of railroad connections to the United States which, by the 1930’s, transformed it into the most profitable Mexican port of entry.

The tertiary economy suffered a setback with the advent of the Great Depression and the repeal of Prohibition in 1933. The number of border crossings plummeted, while a peso devaluation and the demise of gambling in 1936 led to rising unemployment. To correct this disastrous turn of events, officials in Mexico City declared Baja California Norte a “free zone,” and two years later included the border towns of Sonora. Opening up the border to the importation of American goods restored life to the economy and, as a consequence, its population nearly doubled.

The story of these Mexican cities cannot be told without reference to the stationing of American soldiers along the border, beginning with El Paso’s Fort Bliss in 1848 and then the naval base at San Diego during World War I. Later, World War II brought millions of visiting soldiers, sailors, and Marines from military bases, welcoming years of phenomenal prosperity that, in the matter of urban growth, endures until the present. Mexicans from other regions of the Republic came as *braceros*, a lend lease program of cheap labor for the war effort in the United States. With the war economy in high gear and money to spend, war workers from San Diego, a major aircraft production center, and El Paso, a military bastion, as well as other border cities looked to Mexico for scarce silk stockings, chewing gum, hairpins, and gasoline, while local merchants accepted U.S. ration coupons for the purchase of shoes and meat.

As the stories of Ciudad Juárez and Tijuana testify, WWII and its aftermath spurred the economies of Mexican border communities. The tourist trade exploded in El Paso when the number of soldiers at Fort Bliss and Biggs Field multiplied many fold. Similar experiences were shared by Tijuana, invaded by legions of sailors and Marines and, to a lesser extent, by Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa, and Matamoros, also neighbors of United States army camps. The Ciudad Juárez of adobe buildings began to crumble, replaced by one of marble mansions, a Casino Juárez that catered to rich Mexicans, plush movie houses

such as Cine Plaza and Cine Victoria, and, for the first time, suburbs. The military bases and wartime industries of El Paso provided jobs for *juarenses*. For Tijuana, the bonanza years meant massive invasions of poor people from the south, who moved into “spontaneously settled *colonias populares*,” conferring on the city a chaotic character. The well-off occupied the downtown *colonias* of Chapultepec, Bolaños Cacho, and Hipódromo. After 1965, especially with the advent of PRONAF, a federal program to beautify border communities, the Zona del Río became the new business district, the renovation of Avenida Revolución followed next, and the suburb of Playas de Tijuana appeared. With this growth and the changes it wrought, old inhabitants of Tijuana found themselves a minority. As one of them confessed in *Puente México*, “I am saddened when I cannot find an old friend from those early days. The city I knew then no longer exists.”

The war and what followed in its wake integrated the economies of the communities that straddle the border more closely. The classic examples are Ciudad Juárez and El Paso. Residents of the two cities speak of a binational metropolitan area that, by 1990, had nearly 2 million inhabitants. The three international bridges, the first dating from 1882, weekly ferry one million El Paso-bound Mexicans, as well as nearly 300,000 vehicles. In 1994, over 750,000 trucks passed through Laredo. At times, traffic backs up for hours.

There are antecedents for this development. As early as 1926, Ciudad Juárez residents, with their purchases of fruits, vegetables, clothing and other necessities, were spending \$15 million in El Paso. From 1882 until 1935, when a Mexican concern replaced it, El Paso’s Electric Company furnished the electricity used by the people of Ciudad Juárez, while another American enterprise took the telephone there. In 1882, a trolley began to run between the two cities, first pulled by mules and later by electricity. At the time of its demise in 1973, the trolley carried 13,000 passengers daily. Rivalry between business groups, each eager to discourage shopping in the other city, led to the close of the trolley line. During the days of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, Ciudad Juárez banks deposited their funds for safe keeping across the border, while the rich and prominent saw fit to move there.

A population explosion is one more phenomenon of this era. The growth can be attributed to tides of migrants from the south, especially after the appearance of the *maquiladora* industry in 1965, lower mortality rates, and fecundity, the survival of the newborn. According to the census of 1990, more than half of *tijuaneses* were born in another state. One other factor bears mentioning: the appeal of living next-door to a wealthy neighbor who may, under favorable circumstances, provide dollar-paying jobs for Mexican who commute to work in the United States. Until 1975, the population grew by as much as 3.36% a year, then tapered off to about 2.10%. What this meant was that between 1930 and 1980, while the population of the entire Republic grew by 4.2% annually, from 16.6 million to nearly 70 million overall, that of the border increased 10.5%, from 276,000 to 3.7 million inhabitants. Today, the United States-Mexico border is the most heavily populated international region in the whole world.

Ciudad Juárez and Tijuana, with nearly half of all Mexican border residents, lead the urban population explosion. In 1940, Tijuana had just over 16,000 people, today nearly 1 million. Whether Ciudad Juárez is really bigger than Tijuana is debatable. Whatever the truth, the population of the Ciudad Juárez-El Paso metropolitan area has quadrupled since 1950. Ciudad Juárez, however, is twice as large as El Paso, and is projected, like Tijuana, to have up to 1.2 million people by the year 2,000. The two cities of Ciudad Juárez and El Paso represent one of the fastest-growing urban regions for both Mexico and the United States. By 1980, Tijuana had grown to over 10 times its size in 1950; until the 1970’s, annual growth rates had reached an incredible 12%, putting Tijuana alongside of the fastest-growing cities of the Western Hemisphere. Of the 15 largest cities in Mexico, three were on the border; only Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey had more inhabitants than Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez. Even Reynosa, which fronts on one of the poorest areas of the United States, had 750,000 inhabitants by 1995. None of the American border cities, despite their own impressive population explosions, kept pace. The population of these cities is young; according to a recent census, more than half of the residents of Ciudad Juárez, a mirror of the demographic picture along the border, is 18 years or younger.

Demographers predict that 10 million people will inhabit the transnational border by the turn of the century. For Mexico and the United States, this presents policy implications of the first order. As a binational region, it is a source of revenue for both Mexicans and Americans – at the local, state and federal level. Decisions on the environment, crime, drug enforcement, migrants and trade, just to mention heavyweights, are international matters. Even national issues may be matters of foreign policy. As Lawrence A. Herzog writes, the border “is one of the few places in the world where urban and environmental planning are elevated to the level of foreign policy.”

Chapter VIII

This distorted propinquity, to bring to the fore this point once again, plays out in the urban enclaves that lie between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. Its roots, as the pageant of the 1920’s, for the most part an American melodrama featuring American actors performing on a Mexican stage, bears out, are not always deep. The historical legacy of these towns and cities ranges from the seventeenth century to the twentieth. The oldest, Ciudad Juárez, known originally as El Paso del Norte, dates from 1659, while San Ysidro, which faces Tijuana, did not exist until the 1920’s. Both Laredos, as well as Reynosa and Matamoros, go back to the early years of the eighteenth century; Piedras Negras to 1849, and others to the turn of the last century. With the exception of Brownsville, their United States’ equivalents began life at the same time. From the start, they were sister towns.

Ciudad Juárez, *la mejor frontera de México*, boast its eulogists, was born as a Spanish mission, as was Ojinaga, on the edge of the Big Bend country of West Texas. The Misión de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, what is now Ciudad Juárez, served as a strategic gateway to the Spanish towns of New Mexico. The mission, which still stands and the brainchild of a Franciscan monk, Fray García de San Francisco y Zúñiga, is a symbol of mission architecture, with thick adobe walls and hand-carved beams. Paso del Norte became Ciudad Juárez in 1888, named after the patriot president who took refuge there during the French occupation of Mexico in the 1860’s. As late as the 1920’s, Ciudad Juárez was, to quote one account, “a poor and dirty little town, full of saloons and whores.” El Paso, by the same token, was only slightly less

bawdy. But Ciudad Juárez always possessed one advantage: it was the principal gateway, even more so after the coming of the railroad, for the exchange of goods between Mexico and the United States.

The old downtown core of Ciudad Juárez still shelters bars, hotels, discotheques, and curio shops, as well as the *plazuela*, better known as the *plaza de los mojados*, where the jobless congregate. On the east side, which expands rapidly, rise modern shopping malls, luxury hotels, and the homes of the rich, garish mansions sitting behind walls of one kind or another and landscaped in the American style. On the west side, out of sight of tourists, the contrast could not be greater: *jacales* or huts of adobe.

The Spaniards came across the site of Ojinaga in 1581; they baptized it Presidio, now the name of its American sister. Ojinaga was not settled until 1759, when it became a stopping point on the trade route between San Antonio, Texas and Chihuahua City. The building of the Southern Pacific railroad to El Paso and Los Angeles cost Ojinaga its geographic importance. Today, historic buildings cluster around a quaint central plaza; the tidy homes of the well-to-do stand on a paved side street, far from the colonias of dusty streets and eroding adobe homes. Ojinaga, wrote Tom Miller, is one of the last remnants of the Mexican West, where flour tortillas and cowboy hats are the vogue. Far removed from a big city, it is a “*pueblito* in Mexico’s interior rather than a town facing its northern neighbor.”

Far to the east, Palomas, the other border town in Chihuahua, and once the headquarters for a vast American cattle ranch, as well as the site of a gambling casino patronized by Americans during Prohibition days, is a place on the map that reminds one of the way border towns looked decades ago. For three months each year, the streets of Palomas, a shabby place of no more than eight square blocks, are filled with cowboys herding cattle waiting to be shipped by truck to U.S. buyers. Columbus, New Mexico, a barbed wire fence away, is 10 times smaller than Palomas. To the east, in the state of Coahuila, lies Ciudad Acuña. Named after a poet who wrote garbled verse, Ciudad Acuña is a neighbor of Del Rio, Texas, and was not linked by highway to Mexico City until the 1950’s. Piedras Negras, lying east of Ciudad Acuña, is six times larger than Eagle Pass; it bears the name of coal deposits in its vicinity; in 1900 it was the third largest Mexican border town.

Nuevo Laredo, which lies further east, holds a special place in the hearts of Mexican nationalists. When it was founded by José de Escandón in 1755, the city was located on the north bank of the Rio Grande. After the war of 1847, when the international boundary was shifted to the Rio Grande, its Mexican inhabitants moved their town to the opposite shore, rather live under Yankee rule. Its patriotic settlers baptized it Nuevo Laredo; the “old” Laredo, now part of Texas, stayed put. Since Nuevo Laredo’s early growth revolved around its Texas cousin, ties between families in the cities still survive. Nuevo Laredo became a major international port of entry with the coming of the railroad in the 1880’s. This was reinforced by the completion of the Pan-American highway to Mexico City in the 1950’s. By 1910, Nuevo Laredo was the second largest Mexican border town. The historic business districts of both Laredos face each other; Mexicans shop on the American side by walking across the bridge. Since the 1940’s, the city’s growth has been to the south, alongside of the railroad tracks to Mexico City and Monterrey, and to the west, where a third rail line joins Nuevo Laredo to Piedras Negras. In the late 1930’s it was a town of “dark and unsurfaced streets,” to quote Graham Greene; today it has 350,000 inhabitants who tolerate its hot summers and cold winters.

For years after the War of 1847, gangs of armed Americans invaded Tamaulipas, wanting to establish a Republic of the Sierra Madre and, in the pattern of Texas, annex it to the United States. Later, the American Civil War had a powerful impact on Tamaulipas, particularly Matamoros. Monterrey, the city in nearby Nuevo León, reaped a financial harvest. Trying to avoid the Union blockade, southern planters shipped their cotton through the ports of northeast Mexico, much of it out of Matamoros. The War brought prosperity to these Mexican towns; until then, their inhabitants, favored by climate, rainfall and soil, raised cotton and cattle, adding to their incomes by smuggling goods into Mexico.

The city of Matamoros, the biggest in Tamaulipas, honors a hero of the Mexican struggle for Independence. Its Spanish father, Captain Alfonso de León, was seeking a maritime port to give the region, eventually filled with small cattle ranches, access to the sea. The oldest town in the Lower Rio Grande, Matamoros’ first colonists came from nearby Camargo. Old colonial buildings dot its downtown. In 1928, a highway joined Matamoros to Ciudad Victoria, the capital of Tamaulipas, and with the cot-

ton boom of the 1950’s the city expanded rapidly after the establishment of cotton gins, cotton-seed oil plants, and warehouses. After the boom collapsed, Matamoros turned to commerce and tourists. Its latest phase, featured by explosive population growth, corresponds to the arrival of the *maquiladora* industry at the end of the 1970’s.

Reynosa, unlike Matamoros, has only a glimmer of a historical past. One does not see architectural reminders; colonial cathedrals are absent from the city’s central plaza. Only a tiny fraction of its residents have ties to families that lived there before the 1930’s. Founded in 1749, Reynosa became a border city with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Unlike Matamoros, which added population rapidly, Reynosa remained a small town until recently; in 1930 it had fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. In 1955, federal irrigation projects for large-scale cotton farming, and the coming of the PEMEX oil refinery, changed that. The region from Reynosa to Nuevo Laredo is rich in deposits of natural gas. Initially, the gas went to Texas but, with the rise of industry in northern Mexico, PEMEX began to ship more and more of it to the cities of Monterrey, Monclova, Torreón, Saltillo, and Chihuahua. PEMEX, which pays good wages and employs large numbers of men, is the cornerstone of the local economy. Until the arrival of the *maquiladora* industry in the late 1970’s, particularly Zenith, the economy of Reynosa, unlike that of the rest of Mexican border communities, had an internal dynamic of its own. Its geographic location did not dictate its economics.

An international bridge, inaugurated in 1926, joins Reynosa with tiny Hidalgo, Texas. But McAllen, the more important American city, lies just eight miles beyond. Each day, thousands of Mexicans wend their way to work over the bridge; hundreds of women, traveling on American-company buses, shop in Hidalgo or McAllen; and heavy trucks loaded with merchandise rumble back and forth. On weekends, countless Mexican-Americans cross the bridge, to shop, see dentists and physicians or visit relatives. The distance between Reynosa and McAllen helps keep at bay the cultural influence so pervasive in Mexican border communities. Reynosa, they say, is another city adhering closely to Mexican culture, partly because of its physical isolation from a big American metropolis, partly because it sits not far from Monterrey, one of largest and richest cities in the Mexican Republic, and partly due to the presence of

PEMEX. The availability of cheap, used autos bought across the border helps explain its chaotic, sprawling nature, a blueprint not atypical of other Mexican border cities. With the aid of the auto, Reynosa's residents overran *ejido* lands, overcame the absence of bridges across its numerous canals, and circumvented the installations of PEMEX.

Nuevo Progreso, Tamaulipas, the youngest city on the border, was born less than half a century ago, when a businessman in Progreso, Texas, who wanted to import Mexican vegetables, built a bridge across the Rio Grande river. By then, Mexican farmers had planted corn, broccoli, and tomatoes on former brushland. Soon Nuevo Progreso had streets of curio shops and restaurants serving American tourists. Some were "far younger" than the "Old Mexico" they had come to see.

Tijuana, Baja California Norte, lies miles away. Called the "most visited city in the world," its history is intimately bound up with that of San Diego, the California metropolis just eighteen miles beyond. Until 1957, no paved road connected Tijuana with the capital of the Republic, despite unwelcomed and repeated attempts by Americans to acquire the peninsula from Mexico. For all the overlap of historic events, a huge gulf separates Tijuana, a Third World City, from San Diego, a wealthy haven. To quote the editorial lament of the *San Diego Union and Tribune*, "the sad truth is... that, throughout modern history, our two cities have maintained a distinct distance from each other – a divide that is far greater than that separating most other cities along... the border." Half of the people along the entire border, nearly 5 million, live in these two cities.

The economic boom of southern California fueled the transformation of Tijuana from a *ranchería* to an urban settlement. A Mexican by the name of Ricardo Orozco, formerly an employee of a Hartford, Connecticut real estate agency that developed the port of Ensenada, laid out the city plan for Tijuana; he placed its downtown adjacent to the boundary line. The tourist industry controlled its location and the land-use plan. The bars, cabarets, and restaurants, all owned by Americans, were on Avenida Revolución, and the residential colonias to the west around the Parque Teniente Guerrero. As San Diego expanded as a naval base, so did Tijuana. Tourism fed on the reformist movement in California between 1900 and 1929. Gambling, the mainstay of the local economy, began in 1908 and horse racing in 1915, both American

enterprises. When United States authorities began closing international gates at 9 at night, hotels sprang up in Tijuana. For Mexicans, recalled one of those who arrived in 1927, Tijuana inspired nostalgia *por mi tierra*; "the sight of the town plunged me into despair... everywhere houses of wood, unlike the adobe, brick, and stone of my hometown."

Tijuana is changing. You still see Mixtec women selling trinkets on the streets; striped donkeys still stand on Avenida Revolución; and nearly everywhere the fetid smell of poverty hangs heavy. But now there are also modern department stores, majestic hotels, elegant boutiques, condominiums for lawyers and physicians, banks and freeways. La Avenida de los Heroes, a boulevard lined with trees and green lawns, is the heart of the new *zona del río*, where high-rises darken the skyline. It includes a \$25 million shopping mall and a Cultural Center. To build it, "Bobby" de la Madrid, a callous governor with a heart of stone, drove out 5,000 poor families living in slums, an eyesore on Tijuana in his opinion, and spent millions of federal dollars to channel the flood plain of the river. On the east side of the city lies La Mesa, where American tourists in their shorts and polo shirts seldom venture. It is a dusty suburb of shops and apartment complexes. On the Mesa de Otay are the buildings of the *maquiladoras*; the campus of the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California lies nearby.

Middle-class Mexicans – maquiladora managers, government bureaucrats, businessmen and professionals – can be seen everywhere in Tijuana. It is not uncommon to find their wives, yuppies in dress and values, in restaurants with cellular phones pressed to their ears. Anthropologists, economists, and demographers staff the Colegio de la Frontera Norte, a think tank on the highway to Ensenada. *Tijuanenses* enjoyed bonanza years until the late 1980's, when the bottom fell out of the neighboring California economy. Border crossings, always an index of local conditions, dropped dramatically, hurting commerce and service activities associated with tourists. Lower levels of public and private investment limited the construction industry, halting expansion and laying off masons, carpenters and other tradesmen. Evidence suggests that per-capita income might have decreased between 1970 and 1990, undermining living standards as economic expansion lagged behind the population growth rate. According to one study, the golden years may be memory; "are we seeing," its authors ask, "the first signs of a bleak economic future for Tijuana?"

Mexicali, the only border city with a state capital, lies east of the coastal range, in one of the world's hottest and driest climates. Its citizens often drive to Tijuana to escape the heat; the better off buy homes along the coastal highway to Ensenada, largely an American paradise. Every year the poor die from the heat and during the winter from the biting cold. Tourists seldom visit Mexicali; it is a government town, replete with office buildings and bureaucrats. Once a tiny village of Cocopah Indians, Mexicali today has almost one million inhabitants, despite its inhospitable climate.

Like Tijuana, Mexicali owes its original existence to American enterprise, an offshoot of the Colorado River Land Company, which, due to the largess of Mexican authorities, enjoyed a monopoly on the land. Early Mexicali, a collection of wooden houses facing each other across dirt streets, was, for all intents and purposes, a cotton plantation. As late as 1930, its population was one-third Chinese, a legacy of the days when their American patrons imported thousands of them to till the fields. Principally from Canton province, they lived in the *barrio Chinesca* that stood on the international border. Another American company, the Jabonera del Pacífico, served as the only bank, sold the machinery and equipment and, as owner of the sole cotton baler, monopolized its sale. The Compañía Mexicana de Terrenos y Aguas de la Baja California, also American, held the rights to the water of the Colorado River. Less than 2% of the planters controlled 95% of the land. Few Mexicans resided in Mexicali, though they toiled planting and harvesting cotton. Even in 1929, recalled a visitor, Mexicali was a small town filled with cabarets and whore houses, patronized by Americans from the Imperial Valley.

Calexico, its neighbor, is the tail on the dog. Dating from 1902, when it was a United States customs house, it remains a small town. Mostly populated by persons of Mexican descent, its stores, which cater to low-income Mexican shoppers, line the main street that runs parallel to the international border. A branch campus of San Diego State University, with a student body largely of Mexican origin, sits at the center of town. Of the families in Mexicali, many have relatives in Calexico; visits across the border are commonplace. American tourists rarely visit Tecate, the third of the Baja California border communities, which lies 33 miles east of Tijuana and sits at 1,600 feet above the sea. For a long time it was principally known for its brewery, established in 1930, and its pottery, tile, and red brick industry.

Between Mexicali and Ciudad Juárez lie the Sonora border towns on the edge of Arizona: Nogales, San Luis Río Colorado, Naco, Sásabe and Agua Prieta. Of the five, Nogales, which straddles a deep canyon, is the most important and Sásabe the least. Naco, according to one observer, has “not stirred in 100 years.” At the turn of the century, it was a depot for copper trains from the Cananea mines of William C. Greene; now its corrals only seasonally hold cattle from Sonora ranches headed for Arizona feedlots. San Luis Río Colorado, a colorless town with a growing number of maquiladoras, acts as a service center for the cotton and sorghum hinterland. Agua Prieta, inhabited since 1897, faces Douglas, Arizona. Before the closing of the smelter in Douglas, the copper mines of Cananea and Nacozari used it to process their ore. Cowboys herd thousands of Mexican cattle north to markets. An international accord links together the power, water, and sewer systems of the two towns; fire departments respond to each other's calls. Agua Prieta is three times as big. Even less significant than Naco is Sásabe, which stands on cactus-covered hills; lacking a PEMEX station, its residents buy their gasoline on the other side.

Only a chain link fence separates Nogales, Sonora from Nogales, Arizona; eliminate it and the two would be one city. In 1990, Mexico's Nogales was over six times as large as its neighbor, with over 100,000 inhabitants. Without a decent book store or a library of note, or even first-class restaurants, Nogales is a homely commercial entrepot clinging to two hill-sides that abut a rail line and a highway.

Chapter IX

Scores of American pundits wax eloquently about binational economies but, surely, they must be disciples of G. G. Shaw who, in *Pygmalion*, asked: “Independence? That's middle class blasphemy. We are all dependent, on one another, every soul of us on earth.” The reply is yes — and no; not everyone is equally dependent, and certainly not on the U.S.-Mexico border where an asymmetrical relationship dictates the nature of life.