Title: Border: The Labyrinth of Opportunity

Author: David Schmidt

Source: Journal of Transborder Studies - Research and Practice Winter 2013

Border: The Labyrinth of Opportunity

By: David Schmidt

"El problema…es el de saber qué clase de ser histórico es lo que llamamos América. No es una región geográfica, no es tampoco un pasado y, acaso, ni siquiera un presente. Es una idea, una invención…América es una utopía…" [1]
– Octavio Paz, "*The Labyrinth of Solitude"* (1997)

Labyrinth or Maze?

An ancient labyrinth lies deep in the desert of California. Located four hours from San Diego, the labyrinth stretches across a plateau overlooking the Colorado River—the arbitrary boundary which divides the states of California and Arizona. The labyrinth is composed of a series of winding paths, created from thousands of stones, which snake back and forth across the dry desert floor.

This ancient mystery was created by the indigenous Pipa Aha Macav ("Fort Mojave") people centuries ago. According to historians, the "Topock Maze", as it is referred to in contemporary documents, was likely used for ceremonial purposes (Musser-Lopez, 2011). Native shamans and warriors would walk up and down the pathways of the labyrinth to purify themselves. The Pipa Aha Macav people were one of the many ancient nations of this arid landscape that lived a migratory lifestyle, following the cycles of flood and drought, moving back and forth across the imaginary line that we now call a "border" according to the seasons. For this indigenous nation, the act of walking the labyrinth was intended to provoke a meditative, heightened state of consciousness.

The Pipa Aha Macav natives are not the only community of humans who developed this practice: labyrinths are one of many elements that can be consistently found in spiritual traditions across the world. Labyrinths are a ceremonial tool that has existed for millennia, from the ritual paths which Zen Buddhists rake in the gravel of their rock gardens to the underground labyrinths carved beneath the medieval cathedrals of Europe. It should be emphasized that a labyrinth is the opposite of what we would consider a "maze": the difference is one of purpose. A maze is intended to disorient the participant, to provoke a sense of confusion and perdition. A labyrinth, on the other hand, has a specific goal attached to it—one walks up and down the ritualistic path to clear her or his mind, to attain a higher state of consciousness.

The U.S.-Mexico border, in stark contrast with the ritual labyrinths of Mojave spirituality, Zen Buddhism and medieval Christianity, often functions as a maze—something that seems to have been deliberately designed to confuse, disorient and bewilder those who navigate its twists and turns.

For years, this fact was illustrated in brilliant, material clarity in the form of a physical labyrinth which spanned the San Ysidro port of entry. Pedestrians crossing from the U.S. into Mexico were required to walk up a tightly looped, disorienting concrete walkway. The pedestrian bridge snaked upwards, stretched across a walkway which stretched over vehicular traffic lanes, and then coiled downwards towards Mexico. The effect was more than disorienting—it often felt like one was entering a different metaphysical dimension. Individual pedestrians were spun in circles several times by this walkway, losing all sense of north and south, only to be finally shoved in the general direction of the imaginary line dividing Tijuana from San Diego. The physical pedestrian bridge seemed to have been designed in order to communicate a metaphysical message about the border itself.

For decades, the U.S.-Mexico border region has been viewed as a land of opportunities. Conventionally, these opportunities have been described in economic terms—job opportunities, the chance for a better life, the opportunity to earn enough money to provide for one's family. But this is not the only sort of opportunity presented by the border. By its very nature, the border region provides diverse and conflicting opportunities to all of us who inhabit it. On the one hand, those of us who live close to the border have the singular opportunity to walk up and down this incomparable region in a meditative, contemplative state of mind, as if we were walking a sacred labyrinth. On the other hand, we can let the border confuse and baffle us.

I intend to explore, in this essay, the unique physical and metaphysical attributes of the Mexico-U.S. border. I will consider the dual nature of the border in light of certain sacred traditions, including the tradition of the labyrinth and the concept of paradox. I will examine the unique opportunities which the physical and metaphysical space of the border offers us all. The border region provides us with the opportunity to gain a greater appreciation for our interconnectedness; alternately, it provides us with the opportunity to have our eyes shielded from reality. Depending on how we interact with the border, it can open our eyes or close them; it can bring us together or drive us apart; it can bring us to a place of wisdom or hold us in ignorance.

The Metaphysical Paradox of the Border

Like the practice of ritual use of labyrinths, the concept of "paradox" plays a central role in many spiritual traditions. Sages have long instructed their people to meditate on paradoxes—to tolerate the concept of paradox, to accept concepts that are beyond temporal human comprehension—as a way to learn humility. By tolerating paradox, we learn to inhabit a universe that is much bigger than the individual human. Meditating on an apparent contradiction has long been a practice that allows us to appreciate the complex nature of existence.

Zen koans are traditional stories, poems and riddles which focus on paradox. They are puzzles without an answer. They invite us to consider something that appears to be two things at once—the sound of one hand clapping; the sound of a tree falling in the woods when nobody is around. As the old joke goes: "How many Zen Buddhists does it take to

change a light bulb? Two—one to change the light bulb, and one to not change the light bulb.” Taoism, likewise, suggests that the essence of a wheel lies not in the spokes, but rather in the empty space between the spokes—that a wheel is defined not by that which is, but by that which is not. Christianity presents the concept of the triune God—a Deity who is one yet three at the same time. These traditions, and others, teach that wisdom can come from accepting the paradoxes, the inherent “contradictions”, which are part of life.

Long a mainstay of spiritual traditions, the concept of “paradox” and “contradiction” has recently been introduced to scientific circles as something inevitable. Quantum theory teaches that light functions as both a wave and a particle; Schrödinger’s cat illustrates the principle of this paradox inherent in physics. Like the light bulb in the Zen Buddhism joke, Schrödinger’s cat must be “both dead and alive at the same time” in order for physics to function.

Paradox—in whatever tradition it may be found—may bring us to a place of humility and enlightenment. It may provide us appreciation of that which is sacred, mysterious, and incomprehensible. There are other paradoxes, however, which are manmade and artificial. These paradoxes—a crude parody of the wisdom of the ages—serve to obfuscate the truth, to bring about arrogance instead of humility, ignorance in place of wisdom.

The artificial paradox of many border regions consists in the contradictory fact that, on the one hand, residents of the border region live physically close to each other; meanwhile, they are kept light years away from each other in a metaphysical sense. International boundaries in general are, by their very nature, unique physical spaces. For decades, Germans living on the East and West sides of the Berlin Wall had no idea how those on the other side lived. To this day, the 38th parallel does the same thing to the Korean people—the “demilitarized zone” separates people who share a common language, customs and history, whose roots interlock with each other thousands of years back into human history. These people are now unable to communicate with each other because of the manmade line which divides North and South Korea from each other. People who share so much with one another, who live mere minutes from one another, are not able to see each other. In the context of international borders, the manmade paradoxes that vex residents of the border region have one central purpose: to keep us from seeing our connection with our fellow human beings.

Savages: “Those People Over There”

The manmade paradox of the U.S.-Mexico border can be boiled down to one simple statement: the border both exists and does not exist.

According to Armendariz and Becker (2012), a sizeable number of the residents of the San Diego-Tijuana region come and go as they please, crossing the border on a weekly or even daily basis. Recent data indicates that, each year, roughly 30 million people cross through the San Ysidro port of entry alone (Dibble 2010). Those who are able and willing

to do so have the most full understanding of the integral, comprehensive reality of the space that we inhabit—these are people who truly appreciate the entire border region. As a friend from Mexico City remarked when he visited this area, “It’s a wild thing to see. I met people up there who would cross the border on a whim, just to go shopping in San Diego. They treated it as casually as we would a trip from Mexico City to Toluca [*in Mexico State, a 45 minute drive away*].”

Not all residents of the border region enjoy this free movement, however. In the case of Mexican citizens, most of the people who do not cross the border are unable to do so—they lack the documents required by the U.S. government to enter San Diego. In the case of U.S. citizens who do not cross the border, however, the barrier is more psychological than physical.

Mexico’s customs department requires no visa from U.S. citizens who cross the San Diego-Tijuana border by foot or by vehicle. U.S. citizens are able to freely travel throughout the border region of Mexico; in order to travel further than 30 kilometers south of the border, they must purchase an easily obtainable permit from Mexico’s Department of Immigration. Despite the relative ease with which any U.S. citizen can cross into Tijuana, however, many refuse to do so for one reason—fear.

On the U.S. side of the border, distorted images of Mexico fill the popular consciousness. Despite their physical proximity to the neighboring nation, millions of San Diego residents have never crossed the border due to their fears of an imaginary Mexico that is defined by lawlessness and chaos *ad absurdum.* The perception of Mexico as a place where “violence reigns supreme” is encouraged both by sensationalistic yellow journalism and by Hollywood’s nearly exclusive depictions of Tijuana—and Mexico, by extension—as “violent, brutal and dangerous”.

The recent Oliver Stone film *Savages* is a telling example. The heroes of the film are two Anglo drug dealers from the United States. The main characters are presented as noble, even altruistic, human beings. Mexican drug dealers, by contrast, are depicted as brutal and sadistic. Beneath the flimsy progressive veneer of the film lies the central message of “violence as a foreign phenomenon”. Drug violence is presented as endemic to Mexico, even Mexican culture. The Anglo heroes of the film are reluctantly forced to participate in this “foreign” cult of violence, on an outsider basis.

When Hollywood fails to play the violence card, it typically reverts to stock depictions of Mexico which were established in films *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. The 1948 film starring Humphrey Bogart depicts Mexican bandits as silly, feckless, comical characters. The famous line, “Badges? We don’t need no stinking badges!” illustrates the North American perception of Mexican culture which is present in the film (Blanke & Huston, 1948). Other Hollywood depictions have followed suit. The early 21st century television show *Arrested Development* depicts “border towns” as collections of adobe huts, dirt streets, donkey-drawn carts, and men in sombreros. The Mexican side of the border is presented with imagery which bears a closer resemblance to an Old West movie than it does to the actual cities of Tijuana, Hermosillo or Matamoros.

It is not remarkable that the entertainment industry resorts to tired, hackneyed stereotypes in its depictions of Mexican border communities. What is truly remarkable, rather, is the fact that so many residents of the U.S. side of the border believe these images to be accurate. The fact that millions of residents of the border region continue to imagine Tijuana as an anarchic war zone—or a backwards town of adobe houses and burros—serves to reinforce the economic function of the border. While the fence hides the reality of life on the other side of the boundary line, the actual commercial integration of both sides of this region is also hidden from view by this towering, opaque wall.

Border: A Semi-Porous Membrane

An acquaintance of mine once described his experience in immigration court. The strongest impressions were left on him by the judge who was reviewing his deportation proceedings. As my acquaintance told me:

> "At the end of the court hearing, the judge told me, 'Do you know what that fence is there for, anyway? That fence is there to protect both of us. It's there to protect our jobs, to keep someone from coming and taking our jobs.' I just couldn't believe that a judge could be so ignorant. Does he not know about the maquiladoras? Does he not realize how much of the products that people in the U.S. buy were made by Mexican labor?"

The border, and all its accompanying militarized apparatus, all serve to reinforce a very functional illusion—the illusion of two separate economies. Like the brilliant sleight-of-hand by a skilled magician, the border "pulls a fast one" on an audience of millions. The institution of the border tricks us into believing that it truly divides two nations, that the jobs and economy of the U.S. side have little relation to the economy on the Mexican side of the line.

This serves to propagate the myth that, if Mexico's economy "isn't working", if Mexicans can't find work in Mexico's economy, there must be something wrong with Mexico. The tandem myth teaches that the U.S. economy does, indeed, "work". The implication is that there must be something inherently just, fair and functional about the way things are done on the U.S. side of the border—and that this is very different from the way things are done in Mexico. Far right radio personality Rush Limbaugh illustrated this mentality in 2006:

> "[L]ook at it from Vicente Fox's point of view. I mean if -- if you had a renegade, potential criminal element that was poor and unwilling to work, and you had a chance to get rid of 500,000 every year, would you do it?" (Uwimana, 2012)

The border, as an institution, backs up the lie that teaches that the economy of San Diego has nothing to do with that of Tijuana; that the economy of El Paso has nothing to do with Ciudad Juárez.

The enormous border apparatus hides—from the eyes of those who remain exclusively on the north side of it—the fact that much of San Diego's economy is subsidized by Mexican labor on the south side of the border. Even if the issue of immigration is sidestepped entirely, this remains the case: the consumer economy on the U.S. side of the border is kept alive through the exploitation of cheap labor in northern Mexico. The maquiladora assembly-line factories which are located in northern Mexico provide assembled goods and aggregate value, filling the coffers of the U.S.-based corporations running these corporations. The gargantuan stretches of agricultural land which exist south of the border—in San Quintín, in Maneadero, and elsewhere—provide cheap fruits and vegetables for U.S. supermarkets. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 69% of fresh vegetable imports and 37% of fresh fruit imports in the United States come from Mexico (Karst, 2013).

This dynamic was exacerbated by the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, but it was already in place before NAFTA was signed. The economic relations of the border region were illustrated by Ramón Eduardo Ruiz in an essay written in 1992 (Ruiz, 2000):

> "…but for the distorted Mexican capitalism that confronts the dynamic financial and industrial capitalism of the United States, the trade and commerce that joins them together would not exist. Disparity stimulates economic exchange, giving rise to border cities that handle dissimilar exports and imports" (p. 65).

At the time of said writing, average income in Mexican border towns was one fifth of the income of the per capita income in the towns' U.S. counterparts. The wages of workers at plants for the Ford automotive company were $16.50 per hour in U.S. based plants, while wages for workers in Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico were less than a sixteenth of that amount (p. 65 – 90). The disparity between incomes has only grown in the past 20 years since NAFTA was signed—despite the fact that these workers are servicing the same companies, participating in the very same global economy.

This dynamic of unequal, exploitative trade is long-standing. It was referenced in the 1970's by Mexican journalist Armando Salgado, in an investigative report on the conditions of tourist destinations like Acapulco; I have provided my own translation of Salgado's description below (Salgado, 1990):

> "(In the tourist areas) …there is an abundant supply of warm water in the swimming pools; in the neighborhoods and slums there are prolonged periods of drought. The hotel lobbies are kept extraordinarily clean while the streets are full of trash and filth…soldiers protect the beaches to keep people from bothering the tourists, while anyone without U.S. dollars is subject to inattention, looting, abuse, fraud and more…" (p. 103).

As far back as the eve of the Mexican Revolution in 1908, U.S. author John Kenneth Turner wrote an exposé on the very same conditions. Titled *Barbarous Mexico,* Turner's book described the horrors of the henequen plantations, the agricultural fields, the thousands of men and women exploited to fill the coffers of corporations (then called "trusts") in the United States and other foreign nations.

This dynamic is not limited to the United States and Mexico, nor is it new—the colonial relationship between nations has existed for centuries. Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano described it quite well in his book which was devoted entirely to the subject, "*The Open Veins of Latin America*". When describing the exploitation and abuse of the natural resources and labor of Latin America's nations, Galeano (1971) writes:

> "Nuestra derrota estuvo siempre implícita en la victoria ajena; nuestra riqueza ha generado siempre nuestra pobreza para alimentar la prosperidad de otros..." [2]

Colonial economics are nothing new on this planet. Neither are the philosophies which justify economies of exploitation—the idea that a country has the right to bleed another nation of its resources has existed for millennia, from the "civilizing" missions of the Roman Empire to the philosophy of American Exceptionalism in recent centuries. This dynamic is poignantly brought to our attention, however, in the border regions of the 21st century. Precisely by virtue of our physical proximity to each other, it would stand to reason that we should become mutually aware of how integrated (on very unequal terms) our economies are. The border itself, however, serves, to hide this fact from us. Especially in the case of those of us who live on the northern side of this border, we are left to believe that our wealth is the result of our virtue, not the fruit of exploited labor on the southern side of this seemingly impenetrable wall.

And thus, we are left with a maze—a maze which obfuscates the truth from us, leaving us misinformed and confused. We are left with a twisted paradox—we are so physically close to each other, so economically linked to one another; and yet, in this "Information Age", we are surprisingly unable to truly see one another.

Using the Border Region to our Advantage

The Tijuana International Airport is literally located a stone's throw from the U.S. border fence. Despite this fact, many San Diego residents are shocked to learn that Tijuana has an airport. When mention is made of the Tijuana International Airport, it is often met with the response, "What? There's an airport in Tijuana?" Not a few San Diegans have described their imagined perception of a "Tijuana airport" to this author. These incredulous U.S. citizens picture a dirt runway; a propeller plane taken straight from an "Indiana Jones" film set; a wooden shack where passports are stamped by a slouching, inept customs agent. There are centuries of racist images behind this perception, of course—centuries of films, books, cartoons, and popular beliefs in the United States which have depicted Mexico and Mexican culture in unfavorable terms. These

preconceived notions of Mexico have implications for Mexican citizens and people of Mexican descent living in the United States as well, of course—they go hand in hand with a restrictionist immigration policy which views Mexican immigration (and U.S. Latino population growth) as a threat.

Needless to say, this perception of Tijuana is held in place by the border—as long as individuals in the U.S. don't cross the border, the will not see the reality of the Mexican side of that border. The only remedy for this grossly inaccurate image is for people to experience the Tijuana airport for themselves. Indeed, the best remedy for all the myriad manifestations of ignorance—for our failure to see each other, because the border stands in our way—is for us to connect with each other across the border.

Individuals and organizations in the San Diego-Tijuana area have long pushed against the negative effects of the border. The physical border holds back migration and exchange; activists have fought for a change in immigration policies. In the context of this historic struggle against the selective divisions caused by the border, an increasing number of groups are fighting to produce manifestations of cross-border solidarity here and now—prophetic visions of our connection to each other, despite the artificial separations caused by the border. For, while the border itself may hide reality from us, the conceptual idea of the border *region* offers us myriad opportunities to gain a deeper appreciation of our reality. Our proximity to each other offers us the chance to encounter each other, to get to know each other, to communicate with each other, and to seek more humane, respectful, fraternal ways of relating to one another—economically, personally, culturally, socially, and spiritually.

Cultural Understanding: One of the best ways to use the border region to our advantage is to simply seek mutual cultural exchanges. Here in the San Diego-Tijuana region, organizations like "*Turista Libre*" exist which seek to offer U.S. citizens the opportunity to truly experience all that Tijuana has to offer. PBS has recently begun to air a travel program on television, "Crossing South", which has the same purpose—the show provides viewers in the U.S. with a greater appreciation of the diverse, varied landscape of Mexico's northern border region.

The organization "*Border Encuentro*" offers similar binational encounters to San Diego and Tijuana residents. Some of these encounters are fashioned as "language exchanges"—participants gather at a public space, coffee shop, private residence, or park on one side of the border or the other, and learn more about each others' languages. In some of the most inspiring examples of these language exchanges, the exchange is not limited to two languages. English and Spanish speakers have been brought together with indigenous people who speak the Mixtec language (a native Mexican language with at least 2 million speakers), creating a space where the three languages—Mixtec, Spanish and English—are shared and appreciated on an equal footing.

Some of these gatherings take place at Border Field State Park (Friendship Park), a singular physical space where people can see and touch each other across the international boundary. In addition to "*Border Encuentro*", several organizations and

groups have gathered at this binational park to practice yoga, participate in salsa dance lessons, learn sign language, and engage in ecumenical religious communion services. For nearly twenty years now, a gathering of Catholic and Protestant congregations has come together on both sides of the fence every December to observe "Las Posadas", a ritual commemoration of the Holy Family searching for a place to give birth.

Inasmuch as increasing numbers of people take part in these binational gatherings, all of us will profit from a greater appreciation of the cultural diversity of our shared border region. It goes without saying that this diversity is something far greater than the Anglo culture of southwestern California and the Hispanic culture of northern Baja California—these gatherings invariably involve the migrant communities who have come to Tijuana from central and southern Mexico and other Latin American nations, as well as the migrants from Europe, Africa and Asia who live in the San Diego area.

Awareness of unfair trade: The border region also offers all of us the invaluable opportunity to learn from those who work in the sweatshops and sun-baked fields in northern Mexico—as these are integrally connected to the U.S. economy.

The "San Diego Maquiladora Workers' Solidarity Network" provides regular tours to people from various parts of the U.S. and Canada. During these tours, participants are given the opportunity to learn more about the exploitation that occurs in the maquiladora assembly line factories. These factories, which are servicing corporations in the U.S., Canada, Korea, Japan, and other countries, often violate the labor rights of those who work there, as well as polluting the environment nearby. Participants in these tours learn about the struggles of maquiladora workers to form unions and defend their basic rights as workers and humans.

Likewise, the organization "C.A.F.E. – Creating Alternative and Fair Enterprise" – offers tours to the Ensenada – Maneadero region, where participants meet people who work as migrant agricultural laborers. The massive tomato, zucchini, eggplant, flower, and strawberry fields in Maneadero are a part of the U.S. consumer economy, despite the fact that they are located 100 miles south of the border. Participants in this tour meet families who have given birth to babies with birth defects, organizers who are working to improve conditions in the fields, and indigenous farm workers from southern Mexico who live in the most sparse conditions imaginable.

Changing the way we do trade: Sometimes, an awareness of how integrated our economies are will inspire us to live and buy at a more local, immediate level. Sometimes, when we see how much exploitation happens to bring cheap consumer goods to our supermarkets, we are inspired to opt for the local option—the farmer's market, the community garden, the coop farm near our residence. Often, this awareness will inspire us to get involved with local coops that seek to keep agriculture local and sustainable.

Other times, however, we are inspired to reach out.

The border provides us with greater awareness of how unequal and exploitative our current trade model is—this should inspire us to seek alternative models. There are worker-owned coops in the Tijuana region which are seeking alternatives to the abuse that takes place in the maquiladoras and the factory farms that are spread across the border region. The "Mujeres Mixtecas" coop in the Valle Verde region of Tijuana is made up of Mixtec indigenous women who have their own textile business. These women, forced to migrate to northern Mexico by lopsided free trade agreements which have bled rural towns in southern Mexico of their wealth, are developing a worker-owned model of business. They have created their own sewing coop and are always on the lookout for new clients. "Ollin Calli" is another example of a worker-owned, democratically run coop which seeks an alternative to exploitation-based trade. Many of the members of "Ollin Calli" used to work in the maquiladora assembly line factories, and have firsthand experience of the labor conditions in these factories.

Residents of the border region would benefit from meeting worker-owned coops like "Mujeres Mixtecas", "Ollin Calli", and others. These encounters will inspire people to get more deeply involved in alternative models of trade. As residents of the border region navigate this labyrinth in which we all live, work and breathe, we will be motivated to search for global ways of developing alternatives to the inequality that is the norm here.

Some of these options involve the following:

1. Buy produce from local farmers' markets rather than corporate supermarkets;
2. As individuals, choose to buy "Fair Trade certified" products—coffee, bananas, chocolate, textiles, etc.;
3. Increase awareness in our schools, churches, communities about where the products we buy come from, giving presentations and talks;
4. Launch focused campaigns on our campuses, parishes, colleges, schools, neighborhoods, etc., to "make the switch". Work to pick one product—uniforms, coffee, or something else—and change to a Fair Trade-certified version of that product. And get to know the people who produce the Fair Trade version of the commodity;
5. Get involved in a campaign to have San Diego (or another city in the region) declared a "Fair Trade Town", as per the global campaign for "Fair Trade Towns";
6. Call on the U.S. Congress to change our trade policy. Call on Congress to renegotiate NAFTA based on principles of Fair Trade and the right to organize unions.

These are but a few of the opportunities which the unique border nature provides to all of us.

Redeeming the Border Labyrinth

The use of meditative labyrinths and the appreciation of "holy paradox" are two concepts which appear in spiritual traditions across history and across the globe. A third precept

exists across the spectrum of traditions as well—the belief that, on a very basic, root level, we are all connected to each other. Ancient traditions the world over stress the value of realizing our inherent interconnectedness—our intimate relation to other humans, to other animals, and to the earth itself.

Nowhere is this principle more immediately applicable than in a border region such as the one we inhabit in Tijuana and San Diego. If we allow this fact to work on us, if we allow it to percolate in our consciousness, we will find that the border will cease to be a maze which confuses and disorients us. We will find ourselves able to see beyond the manmade, artificial paradoxes which hide the truth from us.

If we come together with the purpose of seeking mutual understanding and solidarity, alternative economic models, alternative ways of interacting culturally and socially, we will find that we are able to transform the entire border region. We will find it transformed from a confounding maze into a meditative labyrinth, in the true spiritual sense of the word.

The border region—something so paradoxically wrought with both injustice and solidarity, disinformation and understanding, separation and community—will become something which brings us all to a place of greater wisdom and understanding.

The choice is ours to make.

Endnotes

[1] English translation of text: "This is the problem…to figure out what sort of historic entity this place we know as 'the continent of the Americas' really is. It is not limited to being a geographical region; it is not something from the past or even something belonging to the present. It is an idea, an invention…the continent of the Americas is a utopia…" From Paz, O. (1997) *El Laberinto de la Soledad y Otras Obras*. New York: Penguin Books.Translation mine.

[2] English translation: "Our defeat has always been implicit in the victories of others; our wealth has always been used to produce our own poverty and feed into the prosperity of others…" From Galeano, E. (1971). *Las Venas Abiertas de América Latina*. Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores. Translation mine.

References

Armendariz, A. and Becker, A. (2012, June 22.) California Border Crossing: San Ysidro Port Of Entry Is The Busiest Land Border In The World. *Huffington Post.* Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/22/california-border-crossing_n_1619067.html

Blanke, H. (Producer), & Huston, J. (Director). (1948). *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

Dibble, S. (2010, July 11.) Number of border crossings stabilizes. *San Diego Union-Tribune.* Retrieved from http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2010/jul/11/number-of-border-crossings-stabilizes/

Galeano, E. (1971). *Las Venas Abiertas de América Latina*. Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores.

Karst, T. (2013). Mexico dominates U.S. produce imports. [webpage] Retrieved from http://www.thepacker.com/fruit-vegetable-news/201449021.html

Limbaugh, R., quoted in Uwimana, S. (2012). 15 Of Limbaugh's Most Offensive And Controversial Comments Targeting Immigrants. *Media Matters for America*. Retrieved from http://mediamatters.org/blog/2012/03/10/15-of-limbaughs-most-offensive-and-controversia/186214

Musser-Lopez, R.A. (2011) "'Mystic Maze' or 'Mystic Maize': The Amazing Archaeological Evidence." [webpage] Retrieved from http://www.scahome.org/publications/proceedings/Proceedings.25Lopez.pdf

Paz, O. (1997) *El Laberinto de la Soledad y Otras Obras*. New York: Penguin Books.

Ruiz, R.E. (2000). Assymetry. In R. I. Rochín and D. N. Valdés (Eds.), *Voices of a new Chicano/a History* (65-90). East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.

Salgado, A. (1990). *Una Vida de Guerra.* Mexico City: Editorial Planeta Mexicana, S.A. de C.V.

David Schmidt is a freelance writer and multi-lingual translator in San Diego, CA. He is a member of "C.A.F.E.-Creating Alternative and Fair Enterprise", a group that works to promote immigrants' rights and fair trade. He can be contacted at davidschmidt2003@hotmail.com . His personal blog is www.donguero.blogspot.com