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Mobility and Morality at the Border – A Lefebvrian Spatio-Temporal Analysis in Early Twentieth-Century Ciudad Juárez and El Paso

Robert Fischer*

Abstract: »*Mobilität und Moral an der Grenze – Eine raumzeitliche Analyse von Ciudad Juárez und El Paso im frühen 20. Jahrhundert nach Lefebvre.*« In the late nineteenth century the U.S.-Mexico border region of Ciudad Juárez and El Paso experienced the capitalization of the economy and an unprecedented population growth. The gateway-cities were dependent on each other – El Paso was in need of labor supply and Ciudad Juárez was desperate for investment capital. With the intensification of the Mexican Revolution during the 1910s, the threat of violence and epidemics in the region disturbed this symbiotic relationship. The following consolidation of the border, the regulation of Mexican South El Paso, and finally the Prohibition movement were expressions of an asymmetrical moralization at the border. Using the Lefebvrian trialectic approach, I describe the daily experiences of commuters and entertainment seekers. On a second level, I investigate the conception of the self and the other as well as the establishment of a spatio-temporal order in the cities resulting in the carnivalesque use of Ciudad Juárez as a tourist attraction/"vice zone". The third level will explore various appropriations of spaces and times that, as expressions of resistance, subverted the border regime. I will analyze the bath riot as a response to the border quarantine in 1917 and the development of nearby Cordova Island as an irregular "vice zone" during Prohibition due to the federal limitation of the bridge hours.

Keywords: Border, Mexico, United States, time, space, rhythm, Henri Lefebvre.

1. Introduction

On Sunday, January 28, 1917 hundreds of Mexican women and men marched to the international bridge from Ciudad Juárez towards El Paso in order to protest against the humiliating practices of the recently intensified U.S. border regime. The protests blocked the bottleneck of the two cities, inhibiting especially the U.S.-Americans from crossing into Juárez in order to pour into the gambling halls and establishments. With the making of the border, spaces of

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transfer and encounter like the international bridge quickly became contested spaces where mechanisms of pressure in the form of temporal restriction played a decisive role in the politics of the twin cities – time and space surfaced here as closely intertwined. In order to outline a history that captures the spatial and temporal concepts and practices in the bordering twin cities, I will refer to examples of contested time and space in the daily life of the border people by applying the theoretical considerations of three scholars (Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Michel Foucault) about time and space. Exemplarily, I analyze Ciudad Juárez and El Paso at the U.S.-Mexico border during the early twentieth century, concentrating on the border and the red-light districts in the two cities with the analytic crosshairs being represented by notions of morality and mobility: Who left and went to a certain space at a certain time; who actually was allowed and who was not allowed to do so; how were those regulations/practices received, and in what ways were they subverted? With regard to the concept of morality, I follow approaches that treat the conventions of moral norms as a matter of social negotiation (Lukes 2008, 62). Mobility is conceived in this article solely as a spatio-temporal practice of movement (Merriman 2012).

Although Henri Lefebvre is often considered as an advocate of spatial matters, he does not separate time and space in his analysis:

Time is distinguishable but not separable from space. [...] Times, of necessity, are local; and this goes too for the relations between places and their respective times. Phenomena which an analytical intelligence associates solely with 'temporality', such as growth, maturation and aging, cannot in fact be dissociated from 'spatiality' [...]. Space and time thus appear and manifest themselves as different yet unseverable (Lefebvre 1991 [1974], 175).

As an example for the correlation of spatial and temporal changes in society, Lefebvre refers to the domination of linear times during industrialization and the paralleled predominance of constructing spatial axis in urban areas. With the historicization and the localization of time and space, Lefebvre breaks with the concept of the *a priori* container of time and space. "Time *per se* is an absurdity; likewise space *per se*. The relative and the absolute are reflections of one another: each always refers back to the other, and the same is true of space and time" (ibid., 181). He puts forward a constructivist theory of the social production of space and time that, in his Marxist argument, strongly relates them to their material sphere – not only economic products but also the living human body.

Though focusing on the material sphere, Lefebvre does not omit the mental realm. As with the effort to overcome the separation of time and space, he wants to move beyond Descartes' dualistic considerations of body and mind.

All of which gives us some sense of how and to what degree duality is constitutive of the unity and the material living being. Such a being carries its 'other' within itself. It is symmetrical, hence dual – and doubly so, for its symmetry is both bilateral and rotational; and this state of affairs must in turn be

viewed through the dual lens of space and time, of cyclical repetition and linear repetition (ibid., 176).

In this citation, Lefebvre's notion of rhythm as repetition and a trialectic system appear: The duality constitutes unity and thus reflects social life as a whole. Lefebvre developed a trialectic system of analysis that, as a general system, is applicable to any subsystem (Lefebvre 1980, 144). As Christian Schmid (2008) points out, Lefebvre based his three-dimensional system on three scholars: Karl Marx (materialism and social practice), Georg Hegel (thought and language) and Friedrich Nietzsche (creative, poetic act). The three elements are best described with the Greek concepts of *praxis* – *doxa* – *poiesis* – or in Lefebvre's spatial conception: the physical – the mental – the social (Lefebvre 1991, 11f.).

Lefebvre relates this basic scheme to space on two levels: On the linguistic level he describes the three elements as spatial practice, spaces of representation and representational spaces. The spatial practices refer to the "networks of interaction and communication" (Schmid 2008, 36) in everyday life and are associated with the production and reproduction of each social formation (Lefebvre 1991, 33). Spaces of representation represent the mental order in space. These are the products of scientists and social engineers and include maps, definitions and theories about the conception of space. Lefebvre refers to this as the dominant space. The third element of representational spaces is described as "space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'" (ibid., 39). This space makes use of complex symbolism and is found in art as well as in "the clandestine or underground side of social life" (ibid., 33). In light of this definition, I side with interpretations of Lefebvre's work that focus on the "labyrinthine and subversive" (Bridge 2005, 17) of representational space (Merrifield 1993; Milgrom 2008).

These three spaces interact in a dynamic fluid way, overlap and change and influence each other over time. The Marxist circle of affirmation – negation – negation of negation is enriched by the element of creation which unites an affirmative act and a regulative thought into a creative act. This creative becoming triad can also be seen in his phenomenology of perceived – conceived – lived space: Again, whereas the realm of the perceived is linked to everything material that can in a bodily sense be touched, seen, heard or smelled/ tasted, the sphere of the conceived is associated with philosophical thought, and the third element represents the individually lived experience. Thus, the trinity is individual and social at once (Schmid 2008, 39).

Through this interpretation, the third Lefebvrian element of spatiality attains a practical and resistant stance that connects to de Certeau's concept of tactics. The user of this space is regarded as an actor that is not only behaving in a certain way but that is also creatively producing in the sense of *poiesis* (cf. Füssel 2013, in this Special Issue). In addition, Foucault's concept of hetero-

topics can be applied to produce heterochronotopies that entail other spaces and their “slices in time” (Foucault 1986, 26). In this way, the resistant and subversive practices in the heterochronotopic places at the border and in the red light districts of El Paso/Ciudad Juárez become an integral part of the symbolic genesis of the place – entailing a meaning that reflects on the social practices and the spaces of representation in these specified locations.

All in all, this perspective renders Lefebvre’s notion of space workable for historical analysis of space and time, consisting, firstly, of an element of socio-economic practice as perceived space, secondly, of an element of ordering thought and practices as conceived space, and lastly, of an element of creation of subversive meaning as lived space. For a better conceptual understanding, I attempt to separate the three elements which ideally would be fused together. On a second level, I want to concentrate on the contested fields of rhythms and analyze the regulation and appropriation of spatialized time/temporalized space.

2. The Making of a Border Town

The urban area of the twin cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez situated at the river Rio Bravo/Rio Grande is a major gateway to the “Other” in the middle of the Chihuahuan desert, the third largest desert on the Western Hemisphere: Water is scarce and the Rio Grande is the main source for water supply. Summers are relentlessly hot and winters can be freezing and windy. During the 1880s the railway cut through this “naked land” and brought capitalism into the region, connecting it to a globalizing market. Despite the rather forbidding climate, many people populated the cities looking for work and wealth. Between 1900 and 1920 the population of Ciudad Juárez increased from 8,000 to 20,000. El Paso even exceeded these numbers by growing more than five-fold between 1900 (15,000) and 1920 (77,000) (Wood 2001, 494).

The growth of the two cities was greatly connected to the economic development and the migratory patterns on both sides of the border. Until the turn of the century, migration in this area was predominantly Anglo-American and El Paso had become an Anglo town. With the engagement of North American companies in the erection of the Mexican and American railroad system and heavy investments in the mining industry in Northern Mexico and the American Southwest, the migration of Mexicans departing from the central plateau intensified. The workers moved north with the construction of the tracks (Gonzalez 2004). They were tightly connected to their mobile work and lived in train wagons. Thus, they moved northward to work and at the same time passed through the borderlands in search for better work or when returning home while unemployed (Dinnerstein and Reimers 2009, 85). In addition, many of the U.S.-American capital investors in the region had dependencies or even

their headquarters in El Paso and thus frequented the city often on their business trips.

Accordingly, the growing cities would function, in the first place, as a gateway for the majority of U.S.-Mexico border crossings. Thus, many people just stayed temporarily in the urban area, using the cities as a liminal space from which to quickly move on (McNely 2007). Secondly, the urban area had the role of a harbor in the middle of the desert as it absorbed those waiting for employment, waiting for relatives, or waiting for an opportunity to cross. Last but not least, the cities were also home for those who established themselves in a “metropolitan” border area. Most of the people moving back and forth were Mexicans or Mexican Americans as they also constituted the majority of the population. Whereas at the turn of the century El Paso was considered an Anglo-American town, by 1930, 70 percent of the 100,000 *paseños* were of Mexican descent (Martínez 1978, 74).

In addition to the mostly economically determined migration to the two cities, the border region was also subject to the perils of the Mexican Revolution. Especially in 1911, 1914 and 1917, when due to battles in Juárez many Mexicans fled to El Paso, the city functioned as a safe harbor for the Mexican refugees. Mexicans would cross the Rio Grande to find refuge in El Paso whereas *paseños* would literally watch the acts of war safely from the roof tops of the other side of town (Dorado 2005, 86). By 1920, 60 percent of the Mexicans in El Paso had settled down in South El Paso in the *barrio* of Chihuahuaita, totaling around 25,000 inhabitants. Consequently, in the wake of the Revolution this place marked the poor and “crowded district of El Paso” (El Paso Herald, 8/23/1913), with Mexican style adobe houses situated geographically at the very heart of the border cities, and surrounded by the border and downtown Ciudad Juárez in the south, the El Paso train station to the east, and downtown El Paso to the north (Perales 2010, 47).

The situation was pressing in the crowded Mexican *barrio* – particularly in 1915 – when the El Paso authorities started to “clean up” Chihuahuaita in an effort to eradicate the typhus disease that was being linked to Mexicans. Suddenly, racial barriers were not only erected but enforced to distinguish between white Americans and Mexicans or American Mexicans (Mckiernan Gonzalez 2012, 16). As a consequence of disease threats, not only were the Mexican spaces in El Paso supervised more tightly but also the methods of control at the border were intensified. This involved the establishment of a border hygiene regime in 1917, which subjected all persons desiring to enter the United States to medical examinations, disinfections and vaccination, and affected mainly the Mexican people (Stern 1999).

The intensification of the U.S. border regime and, by implication, the temporal prolongation of the crossing from Juárez to El Paso made it difficult in particular for the daily commuters to arrive at their jobs in one of the El Paso homes, factories or shops. Until the end of the 1910s, Mexicans were allowed

to cross the border nearly without restrictions. Due to the bad working and living conditions in Juárez, commuting to El Paso in order to work was a common practice for the *juarenses*. El Paso heavily relied on the Mexican work force. However, the abundance and the negative image of the Mexicans as “dirty” and “lazy”, “docile” and “backward”, lead to the domination of Mexicans in the unskilled and semi-skilled work sector. In the 1920s only 10 percent of all skilled jobs in El Paso were held by Mexicans, whereas already in 1916 more than 50 percent of the El Paso population was of Mexican descent (U.S. Bureau of Census 1916). Citizenship did not play a role as the line of division was of racial character between the Euro-Anglos and the Mexicans/ Mexican Americans (Perales 2010, 52, 107). Despite the hardship of being a Mexican in El Paso, by 1930, 1700 to 3500 Mexicans crossed the border on a daily basis. A large number of the commuters were women working as domestic servants (40 percent). The rest of the commuters worked as artisans (30 percent), store clerks (15 percent), and laborers (15 percent) (Martínez 1978, 81).

Another occupation that was profitable and used at least as a temporary solution to cope with financial shortcomings was sex work. Although regulation of prostitution existed in both cities, it was commonplace to cross the border in order to work as a what was then called clandestine prostitute (*clandestina* or *fichera*) on the other side in order to evade either U.S.-American or Mexican regulation, which included fines and medical examinations (Gabbert 2003). This was especially true after the suspension of prostitution in El Paso during World War I, when many sex workers from El Paso would cross the border in order to work in Juárez (Langston 1974, 56). Prostitution was part of a rapidly growing “vice” industry in the Mexican twin city consisting of gambling, consumption of liquor and drugs, and said sex work. With the transition from an agricultural into a service economy at the turn of the century, Juárez had developed into a place of entertainment with the construction of the bull ring (1903) and the race track (1904). The main targets of this economical redefinition were the inhabitants of El Paso and U.S.-American tourists and businessmen (Martínez 1978, 30).

From the 1920s onward an elaborate system started to develop which brought customers to the designated locations. Taxi drivers were used to transport the costumers to their suppliers. As a usual pattern, they would pick up the clients in El Paso or at the international bridge and drive them to their destinations in Ciudad Juárez. As connoisseurs of the “vice districts”, the taxi drivers were the connection between the clients and the (illegal) places of “vice” not just serving for prostitution but also for drug dens and gambling sites. Consequently, also clandestine brothels and gambling halls in El Paso were destinations. For less moneyed visitors, *ganchos* who were waiting on the Mexican side would take the job of escorting the clients to the requested establishments (Medrano 2009, 135).

The prohibition of alcoholic beverages in El Paso in 1918 intensified the process of Juárez' development into a "vice" center. Additionally, many U.S.-American soldiers who were stationed at nearby Fort Bliss followed the lead after the Mexican Revolution cooled down in the 1920s and discovered Ciudad Juárez as a place where they could drink, gamble and have sex. Only the closing of the border passage at night put an end to the regular visits of soldiers, as they had to return to their barracks. Also tourists rediscovered Ciudad Juárez after the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution. During the day families would visit the center of Juárez on Avenida Juárez – shop at the Mexican *mercados* and enjoy light entertainment at the race track or the bullring. At night the entertainment seekers would venture to the various attractions and supposedly indecent clients ended up in one of the bars or brothels in the restricted zone – just a block away from Avenida Juárez.

After the economic reorientation at the turn of the century and due to the progressive movement present in El Paso, with the prohibition of gambling, sex work and alcoholic beverages, Juárez had developed a "vice" industry by the 1920s that would flood significant amounts of money into the city's cash register. On a daily basis several hundreds of *paseños* would venture over to Juárez in order to delve back into times long eradicated by capitalist and reformist progressivism. On the other side many Mexicans crossed the border daily in order to benefit from the better working conditions in El Paso and set themselves apart from the employees in the "vice" industry. In Lefebvrian terms, a large part of the socio-economic practices of morality and mobility centered on the dynamic processes of the daily crossings at the border and the spaces of "vice" rendering these spaces as places where the "Same" and the "Other" could intermingle. Accordingly, in the sense of the dominant spaces of representation, these spaces were heavily symbolized and had to be supervised and controlled in ways that led to different senses of rhythm.

3. Sin City and Sun City – The Outsourcing of "Vice" and Meeting a Demand

In Lefebvre's last work *Rhythmanalysis. Space, Time and Everyday Life* (2004 [1992]) he elaborates a concept of rhythm:

[I]n the social sciences we continue to divide up time into lived time, measured time, historical time, work time, and free time, everyday time, etc., that are most often studied outside their spatial context. Now concrete times have rhythms, or rather are rhythms – and all rhythms imply the relation of a time to a space, a localized time, or, if one prefers, a temporalised space (ibid., 89).

Thus, of importance is the interference of rhythms and cycles of nature by linearly quantified time that is ignorant about day and night (Lefebvre 2008 [1981], 130). Both aspects of time, the linear and the cyclical, consist of ele-

ments of repetition. But whereas linear time relates to an identical repetition which is associated with processes of industrialization/ mechanization, the cyclical time pertains to repetition linked to nature/ bodies and a resulting slow change through repetition (Lefebvre 2004, 76; Lüdtke 1993). Accordingly, this rhythm entails repetition and becoming, the “Same” and the “Other” at once:¹

While mechanical repetition works by reproducing the instant that precedes it, rhythm preserves both the measure that initiates the process and the re-commencement of this process with modifications, therefore with its multiplicity and plurality. Without repeating identically ‘the same’, but by subordinating the same to alterity and even alteration, which is to say to difference (Lefebvre 2004, 79).

The commodification and moral cleansing of El Paso led border people to complain about the progressivist/industrial development. In his 1925 ode to old El Paso, journalist and writer Owen P. White lamented the loss of the innocent and “primitive” frontier town:

Where life was once cheerful, filled with alarms and worth living, it is now flat, decorous and commonplace; where men were once publicly and delightfully naughty and openly bellicose they are now only surreptitiously so; where the leading citizens once wore six-shooters and Winchesters they now wear wrist watches and golf sticks, and where – God save the race! – the communal sports, in days past, were wont to drink hard liquor out of the original carboys and to play poker with the North Star as the limit they now absorb coca-cola with a dash of tequila in it and bet on mah jong at a twentieth of a cent a point (White 1925, 3).

According to White, before the “civilization had arrived” people bathed nakedly in the irrigation rivers, and “did practically nothing except watch for dust clouds along the mesa rim”. He paints a picture of harsh but lovable old days that were irretrievably lost with the arrival of the capitalist newcomers who had to be restrained by rules and regulations and strict enforcement (ibid., 5f.). White uses metaphors and stereotypes of the old cowboy tales to emphasize his concerns about the loss of the frontier atmosphere that was connected to cyclical repetitions of a more natural bodily rhythm. With the arrival of linear time in the form of wrist watches and capitalist efficiency, people were disconnected from their heritage and put under the influence of capitalism. Thus, El Paso became a contested space of polyrhythmia. Certain *paseños* longed for the return of the “old days” and tried to evade the new time by regressing into the amusement resort across the river.

This difference between the pre-civilized past and the capitalist future was supported by a discourse about modern El Paso as described in the opening page of the “Skyscraper-Edition” of the *El Paso Herald* from January 12, 1910.

¹ Cf. de Certeau’s concept of strategy and tactics which likewise enables the incorporation of the “Same” and the “Other” (Buchanan 1996, 490).

It depicts a representation of the city with high storied modern business and apartment buildings with large illuminated windows, as well as a lively street scene where people crowd the sidewalk lighted by electrical street lamps, whereas the roadway is filled with different means of transportation. All these elements illustrate the modern dynamics of the city. In the first page article the author praises the 1909 building of numerous skyscrapers ushering El Paso into the “Skyscraper Era”.

Image 1: Opening page of the *El Paso Herald* from January 12, 1910



Source: Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park

Within this dynamic argumentation, El Paso tried to seek newcomers targeting U.S. territory. In an ad campaign in the 1920s initiated by the El Paso chamber of commerce the border town was regarded as the western city of sunshine (El Paso Chamber of Commerce 1930, 5). Advocating year-round access to Juárez,

the favorable climate, and the economic growth, the city was presented as the right choice for tourists, health seekers and businessmen alike. For the tourists, El Paso was thought of as the hospitable place all roads lead to and the “gateway for cross-country travel”. As such, the Mexican experience was very present in the advertisement. A representation of a smoking skeleton-like traditional Posada figure was depicted in the top left corner as an easy-going Mexican. Another ad with the same texturing shows in the bottom left corner an old, presumably poor Mexican woman coming down the stairs of an ivy covered building carrying a sack on her head (Chicago Daily Tribune 12/9/1922, 10). Ciudad Juárez was described in a romantic fashion as an old, violent, uncivilized and exotic other: “Old Mexico, place of ancient missions, quaint, battle-scarred adobe buildings, bull-fights, old Spanish-Mexico scenes and customs”. The health seeker on the other hand was presented with a favorable climate full of sun and fresh air and an El Paso where everything was in its morally right place: “beautiful homes, spacious parks, wonderful schools, handsome churches, metropolitan stores and hotels” (Kansas City Star 12/22/1922).

El Paso’s imagined self in contrast to the Juárez “Other” was the product of the fierce reformist movement of the 1900s and 1910s, as certain groups in El Paso constantly tried to push towards a moralization of the urban space. After a year-long battle of public figures like *El Paso Herald* owner J.A. Smith and influential organizations like *The Women Christian Temperance Union*, the last gambling license expired in El Paso on November 12, 1904 at 3:00 a.m. The effort marked an important step for El Paso’s changing imagination from the Sin City to the Sun City. Around 1900 El Paso seemed ready to develop from a “backward” frontier town into the advertised major trade center and clean and modernized city. Nevertheless, gambling continued for the *paseños* – illegally in underground clubs and across the border (Langston 1974, 56).

The situation with gambling was paralleled in the business of sex and the consumption of alcohol. Sex work in El Paso was regulated and restricted from two sides: Since the 1880s prostitutes in El Paso were subject to various regulative measures including license fees, registration and weekly medical examinations. In addition, they were confined to a designated area – the red-light district located at Utah Street. Furthermore, the municipal government limited their movement temporally, as they were only allowed to do business at night time. Around 1900 the red-light district was being marginalized. It had to move from north of the commercial center of downtown El Paso to the notorious southern district of Chihuahuita, thus linking prostitution to the Mexican *barrio*. Moreover, the number of sex workers was decreased and limited. The 1904 campaign achieved the eviction of all “colored women” (Mexicans were then considered white) and banned all other prostitutes from the streets into the houses (Gabbert 2003).

The prohibition of gambling and the parallel tolerance of prostitution marked a compromise and showed the inability of the municipal government to put moral arguments in front of monetary ones. However, with the entrance of the United States into World War I the U.S. military, which maintained the world's biggest cavalry unit at Fort Bliss, prohibited prostitution and the selling of alcoholic beverages in the vicinity of military bases. The goal was to improve the quality of the soldiers' performance by protecting the soldiers from all possible threats – including “vice” and in particular prostitution as the alleged bearer of venereal diseases (Garna 1980, 56). In 1915 the El Paso authorities, with the help of the *El Paso Associated Charities* and the U.S. military, initiated a clean-up campaign which can be seen as a predecessor to the measures at the military bases and the border. The objective was to clean the city from “disease, criminality, and sloth” which all was connected to the Mexican *barrio* of Chihuahuita, where sex work was prevalent after its marginalization. With General Pershing's help, colonial strategies and practices appeared at the U.S.-Mexico border (Stern 1999, 56). But whereas prostitution was ruled out in the U.S. national context during the Prohibition Era (Ditmore 2011, 71), a quasi-legal regulation system was reinstated in El Paso in the 1920s that was not different from the system before the military engagement. In the process of these eugenic measures, disease and immorality were linked together in the Mexican people, thereby racializing, medicalizing and moralizing South El Paso and the border with the quarantine regime in 1917.

Due to the unfavorable public image of Ciudad Juárez by the *paseños* and the pressure of moral initiatives within the city, officials of Juárez likewise tried to regulate and restrict the “vice” business in their city. As a matter of fact the municipal government saw the regulation of “vice” as the only opportunity to maintain respectability and at the same time keep alive the monetary opportunities the “vice” industry offered. With its turn to a profitable tourism business around 1900 Juárez was forced to set moral standards in order to attract upright, well-to-do customers. Sex work in Juárez was henceforth regulated in a similar fashion as El Paso had done in the late nineteenth century – including registration, fees and medical examinations. In addition, the *Reglamento para el ejercicio de la prostitución* regulated the public conduct of prostitutes by trying to make them behave as ordinary as possible so as not to disturb the public. In 1914 sex work was restricted to certain areas where it was legalized – namely in the *zona de tolerancia* at Calle Mariscal y Urgate. Moreover, sex workers were only allowed to leave the *zona* twice a week at certain times. Prostitutes who had children living outside the *zona* had to apply for extended hours of leave. Despite the regulation, the location of the *zona* and the presence of the *clandestinas* never ceased to pose a problem and were closely intertwined (Medrano 2009, 27).

A similar attitude was expressed regarding gambling. Gambling was practiced in Juárez throughout the years in various places close to the international

bridge. It was an important source of revenue to the city and even funded the reconstruction of the town after the devastating years of the Mexican Revolution. Modernization projects were realized, such as the pavement of the streets, public buildings, and installation of street lights, but also English-speaking officers were employed and the city center was cleaned of trash and “vagrants”. As the *El Paso Times* wrote in the mid-1920s: “Juárez has taken on the air of an American city” (cited in Martínez 1978, 60). Gambling constantly disappeared and reappeared in the city as concessions were made or withdrawn by the federal government. Different opinions regarding the share of the revenue between municipal, state and federal government led to these irregularities most of the times. El Paso also played a role in the temporary suspension of gambling in Juárez. As the majority of the gamblers were U.S.-Americans, El Paso’s religious groups, newspapers and the municipal government blamed the gambling halls in Juárez for draining money out of the city – a debate that intensified with the beginning of the Great Depression (García Pereyra 2010, 230).

In order to counter the “vice”-ridden image of Ciudad Juárez, two local English promotion campaigns were started in 1926 to boost the entanglement of amusement between the twin cities but also adopted and highlighted the different rhythms in El Paso and Juárez. The anonymous pamphlets that were passed around in the cities’ cantinas were attributed to saloon keepers in Juárez and Judge Landis in El Paso, but also reflected the regulative action of the local government. The first pamphlet appeared in January 1926 and, inspired by an “Eastern capitalist”, promoted Juárez as “the biggest resort center of the world”. The authors appealed to the citizens of El Paso to “cease their criticism of normal recreation” in the Mexican border town. Juárez, on the other side, was advocated as the “natural playground [...] where the romance of the Spaniards and the colorful customs of the people of Mexico still prevail.” Furthermore, the Juárez amusement was advocated as being wholesome and counteracting corruption, contrary to the suppression of “vice” in El Paso:

Normal recreation and entertainment does not mean the importation of any dehumanizing values. Corruption does not result from recreation. Rather it comes from the lack of wholesome recreation and play. Public recreation never has and never will be a menace to youth – suppressed and clandestine recreation can be, and is. It is not what our boys and girls do in public while in Juárez, but what they do away from Juárez in private that constitutes the menace to the youth of the country. We can teach morality, but we cannot legislate it into the lives of our people.²

² “El Paso and Juárez should be the biggest resort in the world”, 1926: National Archive and Records Administration (NARA) Archives II, College Park, RG 84, Ciudad Juárez Consular Post Files, 1922-1935, decimal file 610.1, 1926.

The pamphlet clearly underscored Juárez' connection to an inprogressive past and promoted a "normal" and controlled recreation instead of its total prohibition due to moral concerns. The attitude of a clean and regulated entertainment industry was generally reflected by the actions of the Mexican authorities. Thus, Juárez was conceived in two ways that were connected to each other. Both were closely linked to the city's development into the amusement center of the region. On the one hand, Juárez was conceived as the sin city where gambling, alcohol and prostitution flourished. Especially U.S.-American newspapers spread that their fellow citizens coming to the city of Juárez would have their money being squeezed out of their pockets. On the other hand, the Mexican town was a known and advertised tourist attraction where Americans could slip into times of the old frontier towns with its luxury and its romantic decadence. *Paseños* and tourist alike were drawn into the city in search of the old El Paso experience of life reproducing a bodily rhythm of past cyclical times in Juárez and constituting a carnivalesque anomaly.

In this understanding, Juárez was the place where one could travel back into the region's past and into the subconscious fulfillment of the self's desire for the "Other". El Paso, on the other hand, was conceived as the clean and economically dynamic city where one could live safely, be cured, and make money. In Lefebvre's terms, the arising polyrhythmia of the urban agglomeration at the border due to capitalist development was divided into prevailing cyclical rhythms of the heterochronotopic carnivalesque in Juárez and linear rhythms of capitalism in El Paso, in a manner which conceives the two extremes as closely linked together and representing the desired "Other" on the opposite side of the river.

But according to Lefebvre, rhythms do not exist in sequence but overlap, parallel and contradict or influence each other. "Polyrhythmia always results from a contradiction, but also from resistance to this contradiction – resistance to a relation of force and an eventual conflict" (Lefebvre 2004, 98). Lefebvre identifies as a major conflict the struggle of peripheral endogenous polyrhythmia against the domination of a measured, imposed and external time of the center. On an individual basis crisis breaks out when external and internal rhythms are made impossible to align in order to produce a pursued isorhythmia, but lead ultimately to an arhythmia (ibid., 99).

4. Resistance to Regulation – Protests and Anomalies at the Border

With the notion of a subversive representational space, time comes into play through lived experience:

Representational space is alive: it speaks. It has an affective kernel or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or: square, church, graveyard. It embrac-

es the loci of passion, of action, and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time. Consequently it may be qualified in various ways: it may be directional, situational, or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic (Lefebvre, 1991, 42).

Time conceived as “lived situation” also closely relates to de Certeau’s notion of space as a place filled with movement and social relations, a space that is experienced by its users and that is creatively appropriated (de Certeau 1984). As a matter of fact, Lefebvre sees representational/lived space as a starting point for (re)uniting dissociated space and time (Lefebvre 1991, 175). Lefebvre further develops this concept in his notion of rhythm, which he considers in representational spaces as rhythms lived subjectively. He continues that rhythm is always related to living beings:

Every rhythm possesses and occupies a spatio-temporal reality which is known by our science and mastered so far as its physical aspect (wave motion) is concerned, but which is misapprehended from the point of view of living beings, organisms, bodies, and social practice. Yet social practice is made up of rhythms – daily, monthly, yearly, and so on (ibid., 206).

The above described model of an upright, modern and clean space of El Paso and a morally questionable and “backward” Juárez culminated in the intensifications of the U.S. border regime in 1917 which decisively changed the rhythm between the two cities and affected single bodies crossing the border. After the quarantine was erected at the border by the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) in the night of January 27-28, 1917, all persons desiring to cross the border from Mexico into the United States were regarded as potentially infectious and had to be cleaned before entry. They were separated into male and female groups. While their clothing was being sterilized, they had to strip naked in order to undergo a shower and an examination for lice, a vector of typhus. If positive, the hair of the men was cut short and the hair of the women was bathed in kerosene. If deemed necessary, a vaccination against small pox was carried out. In addition, the immigrant had to submit to an interrogation. The aim was to exclude any person with mental or physical defects (Stern 1999, 45f.).

Already before the quarantine was erected the rumor spread that pictures of naked women that were being passed around in Juárez saloons included snapshots from women in said baths at the quarantine station. This rumor was especially widespread under the Mexican domestic servants (*domestica*). On Monday January 29, 1917 the El Paso Morning Times subtitled their heading about the Bath Riots from the previous Sunday as follows: “Rumors among Servant Girls That Quarantine Officers Photographed Bathers in the Altogether Responsible for Wild Scenes”. The riot started early Sunday morning when Mexican *domesticas* were heading to the bridge. The women were ordered to get off the street car in order to undergo the quarantine measures. The majority refused and became indignant after the money they had paid for the street car was not

refunded. In addition to the alleged humiliation with public exposure of the body, it was rumored the women were being insulted in the bathrooms of the quarantine station. By 8 a.m. the crowd filled half the bridge and the women were shouting and throwing little rocks at the officers on the bridge and the U.S.-Americans who desired to walk over into Mexican territory. Cars passing through the crowd were covered in mud and hit by thrown stones. The ticket inspectors of the street cars were carried away by the women and thrown off the bridge into the Rio Grande. At this time everybody intending to enter Juárez was forced back. Cars trying to pass through the crowd were stopped and damaged by taking off removable parts such as mirrors or covers.

It was further reported that attempts by the Mexican armed forces to disperse the crowd were creatively repelled: As soldiers “drew their sabers threateningly [w]omen laughingly caught their bridles and turned the horses aside, holding the soldiers sabers and whips.” During the day the Mexican forces even paraded along the Avenida Juárez mocking the quarantine campaigns in encouraging the protests with their own inactivity. The women were also supported by Mexican youth: U.S.-American guards under the bridge preventing Mexicans from taking a shortcut off the bridge over the Rio Grande banks to the other side were covered in mud and stones by a Mexican boy gang. By late morning the crowd had swelled up to 1,000 participants blocking the traffic particularly into Mexico until afternoon. They moved as far as to the tollgate at the American side “railing to cheer their compatriots who entered the bathhouse to comply with the regulation.” But as more and more Mexicans were passing through the quarantine station without complaint or harm, the crowd slowly dispersed in the early afternoon.

The responsible surgeon of the USPHS in El Paso, C.C. Pierce, was quick to report to the General Surgeon in Washington, D.C., promptly denying the alleged production of the nude pictures and promising private investigations into the origin of the pictures. His reference to the Mexican edition of *The El Paso Morning Times* reveals the reason for the unusual actions of the Mexican army: Parallels were drawn between the protests at the bridge and the failure of the U.S. Punitive Expedition when General Pershing unsuccessfully tried to capture the Mexican revolutionary Francisco “Pancho” Villa. Thus, the incident was symbolized as an act of resistance against the U.S.-American border regime ridiculing their quarantine actions. According to the newspaper, the Mexicans would stand firm in their demands to letting the women pass into U.S. territory without undressing and being disinfected.³

The incident shows how Mexican *domesticas* vigorously tried to define themselves apart from the “loose” women in the bars and brothels. Instead of being passed around like the pictures of prostitutes, they tried to defend their

³ Letter Pierce to General Surgeon, 29 January 1917: NARA, RG 90, USPHS, Central File 1897-1923, #1248.

honor at the border and express their anxiety by blocking the bridge. Accordingly, the Spanish version of the El Paso Morning Times focused on the indignities felt and the rumors heard by the Mexicans rather than on the portrait of the action of the mob: Pointing to the rumored nude pictures, it was considered “natural” that the Mexicans were outraged in this situation. Unlike the Spanish version of said newspaper, the English version pointed out that all amusements resorts from race track to gambling houses stayed closed that Sunday obviously lacking U.S.-American visitors as they were not allowed to cross into Mexico due to the protests. The bath riot uncovers how with the making of the actual border regime the bridge as a bottleneck between the two cities became a contested space and how protests could easily disrupt the daily crossings. The incident also shows how the Mexican women temporarily appropriated this space in order to find a sympathetic ear for their cause and evade the humiliating act of undressing at the quarantine station. In this way, they tried to set themselves apart from the “vice” practices of certain *juarenses*.

Likewise, the U.S. and the Mexican federal governments used restrictions concerning the bridge in concordance with the local authorities in the 1920s in order to put pressure on Mexican local, regional and federal institutions. The offending object was the “vice” in Ciudad Juárez that since the beginning of Prohibition had developed into an industry responsible for a great deal of tax revenue but also into a source for numerous complaints. Whereas the *juarenses* lamented the moral implications of “vice districts” close to residential areas, the *paseños* criticized the enormous losses of possible investment capital that would vanish into the Juárez cabarets, opium dens and especially the gambling halls. On various occasions in the early 1920s the U.S. had limited the opening hours of the bridge and even closed the tollgates for the period of a whole day (Langston 1974, 152). The additional restrictions were limited to U.S.-citizens most of the times so that the Mexican commuters would be able to return home from their work in El Paso.

In 1927/28 the conflict resurfaced with the granting of a new casino concessions and following U.S. muscle flexing in the form of limiting bridge hours to 9 p.m. During this period also the Mexican federal government used the restriction of the bridge various times even to 5 p.m. in order to apply pressure onto the local government sharing the revenue of the gambling business. The U.S.-American consul of Ciudad Juárez, John W. Dye, noted to this restriction in his monthly report in February 1928: “When the bridge is closed at 5 p.m. gambling always stops as the patrons are practically all Americans who cross over from El Paso.”⁴

The uncertain situation at the bridge and the unabated desire of the U.S.-citizens to escape from the capitalist routines in El Paso into the past of an

⁴ Monthly Report February, 1928: NARA, RG 84, Ciudad Juárez Consular Post Files, 1922-1935, decimal file 800, 1928.

unregulated bodily rhythm led to the development of an anomaly at the border – the heterochronotopic place of Cordova Island. The so-called island was situated only a couple of blocks away from downtown El Paso and even connected to the public transportation system of El Paso. The island originated from a change of the Rio Grande in the early 1920s which moved further south. Thus, Cordova Island was surrounded by the Rio Grande on the south side and the U.S.-Mexico border on all three other sides and was hence accessible to U.S.-Americans without crossing the river. The island was not easily reachable from Mexico as no bridge existed. In addition, the city of Juárez had no jurisdiction over the strip of land and there was no police presence. Cordova Island comprised the whole spectrum of the so-called “vice” from Juárez: from the sale of alcohol, over gambling to prostitution, but without any of the temporal restrictions due to limited access.

On May 16, 1928 the mayor of El Paso, E. E. Thomason, reported the situation to the Secretary of Treasury in Washington, D.C. He elaborated that “all kinds of vice are flourishing and several hundreds of people visit the place every afternoon and night. The larger crowds are found there after the international bridge closes at 9 p.m.” Thomason called the inactivity of the U.S.-American authorities “indefensible”, but as a matter of fact they could only watch the spectacle from the American side and allow every U.S.-citizen to pass back and forth any time at either day or night.⁵ Thus, the erection of the place was directly connected to the restrictive bridge policy encouraging the *paseños* to circumvent the limitation creatively by appropriating Cordova Island. In the answer to Mayor Thomason’s letter, Secretary of Treasury Seymour Lowman saw no legal grounds for either blocking the shipments onto the island or inhibiting the U.S.-citizens from crossing the border. Furthermore, he also had to decline the proposed construction of a wired fence contemplated by Thomason.⁶

In short, the hands of the Americans were tied in this situation as they had to rely on Mexican actions. On the island, the Mexican saloon keeper and owner of the “Central Bar” and “Central Café” in Juárez, S.C. González, maintained the notorious bar “Hole-in-the-Wall” within 50 feet of the border line. The American consul described the establishment as “of the lowest type” and as being “patronized by hundreds of Americans from all classes from early evening to daylight.”⁷ Over detours González had to sell the “Hole-in-the-Wall” due to problems with the local authorities, and the premises ended in the hands of

⁵ Letter from Mayor Thomason to Secretary of Treasury, 16 May 1928: NARA, RG 84, Ciudad Juárez Consular Post Files, 1922-1935, decimal file 800, 1928.

⁶ Letter from Secretary of Treasury to Mayor Thomason, 27 June 1928: NARA, RG 84, Ciudad Juárez Consular Post Files, 1922-1935, decimal file 800, 1928.

⁷ Monthly Report, April 1928: NARA, RG 84, Ciudad Juárez Consular Post Files, 1922-1935, decimal file 800, 1928.

the Mexican commander of the local garrison, Francisco Martínez. Despite the resentments of the Mexican municipal government, Martínez was able to operate the establishment until his transfer in September. In October, 1928 by orders of the federal government in Mexico City the municipal government closed the “Hole-in-the-Wall” for the moment.⁸ As can be seen in this example, the border regime of El Paso/Ciudad Juárez and the reformist measures in El Paso were creatively subverted by the *juarenses* and the *paseños* with the appropriation of Cordova Island. In this heterochronotopic place the customers could evade the contested space of polyrhythmia in El Paso and temporarily regress into a desired isorhythmia with the carnivalesque recreation of former days by experiencing the now prohibited methods of achieving bodily sensations connected to immorality.

Image 2: Transportation Map of El Paso and Juárez



Source: NARA, RG 84, Ciudad Juárez Consular Post Files, 1922–1935, decimal file 715, 1927; Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park.

Furthermore, the amusement places in downtown Juárez were affected by the loss of income due to the situation on Cordova Island. But more importantly, the existence of this heterochronotopic place with its unregulated “vice” also crippled the moral reforms in Juárez. During the 1920s the municipal government in Juárez repeatedly tried to relocate the red-light-district from the city center to the periphery of the city and ultimately always failed (Medrano 2006,

⁸ Monthly Report, October 1928: NARA, RG 84, Ciudad Juárez Consular Post Files, 1922–1935, decimal file 800, 1928.

204). The drainage of U.S.-American customers and the so called clandestine prostitution in the bars on Cordova Island and in downtown Juárez made it virtually impossible to successfully relocate the “vice district” from Calle Mariscal and Ugarte. As a file on the “vice” situation in 1927 by the Secretary of the Federal Government shows, the *juarenses* opposed prostitution in their vicinity – especially in the center of the city – and were backed in this matter by the federal government. However, local animosities over the monopoly regarding this “vice” business between the municipal president Antonio Corona and Leandro Huerta, the man responsible for the construction of the new marginalized “vice zone” and the relocation of the sex workers, prevented the realization of the project.⁹ Thus, the establishment of Cordova Island as a heterochronotopic place for U.S.-citizens not only crippled the reformist efforts in El Paso but also hindered moralizing campaigns in the urban space in Juárez.

As could be shown, the citizens of the twin cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez were constantly negotiating and regulating spaces of “vice” as well as questioning the moral in the city and at the border spaces. Different attitudes about morality were shared in both cities and led, on the one hand, to prohibitionist measures influenced by progressivism in El Paso and, on the other hand, due to the economically deprived situation in Juárez, to the transformation of the Mexican twin city into a community dependant on regulated businesses of gambling, prostitution and consumption of alcohol which were provided mostly for U.S.-citizens. People ventured by the hundreds into the neighboring city after work, into their own past, in order to experience what the progressive movement had prohibited in El Paso. Juárez attended to the demand and was drawn into an image of “vice” and romantic decadence which, despite the extensive regulation and advertisement, was virtually impossible to escape. As a matter of fact, the officials of Juárez used the revenue from the regulated “vice” to rebuild and modernize the city.

In reaction, the U.S.-American authorities tried to inhibit the vices in Juárez by restricting and closing down access for the U.S.-Americans to Juárez at nighttime. The lack of business hindered certain moral reforms in Juárez. As another consequence, the *paseños* and *juarenses* created the heterochronotopic place of Cordova Island where the lawlessness of the Wild West returned for a short period of time. The modernized and regulated spaces of El Paso could be forgotten, creating rapture between the linear capitalist rhythm in El Paso and the cyclical bodily rhythm of the carnivalesque border anomaly. Thus, the citizens and the tourists of the twin cities subverted the spatio-temporal border regime with their every-day practices and appropriated an unregulated space

⁹ “Se queja que las autoridades fomentan el vicio de la prostitución en dicha ciudad”: Archivo General de la Nación, Ciudad de México (AGN), Secretaria de Gobernación, Departamento 2, File 015.7 (6)-1.

with few spatio-temporal restrictions until the grip of the Mexican state closed down the bars on Cordova Island.

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