El Paso-Juárez
El Paso-Juárez

- Industrial urban centre straddling the US/Mexico border
- US side is split between Texas and New Mexico
- Divided territoriality
BIENVENIDOS A CIUDAD JUÁREZ, MÉXICO
El Paso-Juárez

• A complex border
• Fortified and policed
  – Yet porous to capital, goods and some workers
• Poverty, danger on the Mexican side
• Greater prosperity on the US side
  – Plus greater economic control
Darby 2012

• Tells us about the difficulties in managing heavy metals contamination in the region
  – Esp. lead and arsenic from the ASARCO smelter in El Paso
Figure 1. *Paso del Norte* geography.
Darby 2012

- Uses ASARCO to demonstrate that the geography of environmental contamination does not match the geography of governance
  - Scale of government does not match the scale of the problem
  - There is a scalar dimension to environmental justice
ASARCO

- Smelter operates 1887-1999
- Gross air & soil contamination forces evacuation of workers housing in Smeltertown, some soil cleanup
- Company goes bankrupt 2005 leaving huge soil cleanup unfunded
- Partial soil cleanup limited to immediate area
Scalar Factors

- US, Mexico apply different health & soil standards
- TX more active than NM
- US leaves soil cleanup to TX once federal funds run out
Scalar Factors

- Air, soil, water contamination all connected
- But separate government agencies treat them as separate
  - Excavated soil generates dust
- Soil testing used as a substitute for blood testing
Morales et al 2012

- Deals with a foreign-owned chemical company in Juárez
  - Norfluor/Solvay
  - Makes HF for the US refrigeration market

- Products, processes, working conditions hazardous, dangerous to the community
Figure 1. Map showing the location of Solvay on the US–Mexico border.
Figure 2. A view of Solvay and the surrounding semi-rural area. Source: Benaly Chavez.
Figure 4. Homes located near Solvay’s waste pile.
Source: First author.
SE VENDE
625-8310
CEL. 645-49-40
Y 656-94-71
Morales et al 2012

• Seems to accept the scalar factors argument, applies it
• Pushing a “structural violence” terminology
  – Adds rhetorical excitement without necessarily adding understanding
Solvay

- Morales cites a catalogue of awful events
- Plant opens 1979
- By 1983 has killed 13 children, poisoned, and blinded hundreds
- Repeated releases and spills of chemicals, no proper disposal
  - Mexican regulators assist with cover-up
Solvay

• A messy, dangerous operation producing items essential to the US economy
  – Mexicans do the work cheaper than in the USA
  – Plant avoids awkward environmental regulation
Morales et al

- Interviews with former employees 2007 onwards
- Much of the documentary research done from inside the US
- Photos have a drive-by quality
- Research by remote control?
Figure 5. Solvay’s waste pile, known locally as “plaster mountain”, located on-site at the plant.
Source: First author.
Murder City
Murder in Juárez

- 5000 women and girls murdered since 1993
- 10,000 drug-related killings since 2008
Morales et al

• Treats neglect of Solvay by Mexican authorities as culpable
  – Which may be fair

• But the place is in the grips of a drug war
  – May distract environmental enforcement
American Unease

• **Realization in El Paso that Solvay might have a major accident**
  – And its train traffic passes through downtown El Paso

• US would close border if major accident triggered exodus from Juárez
Both papers

- Connect scalar justice issues to Environmental Justice
  - Morales *et al* add ‘structural violence’
- Both cases display clear symptoms of Environmental injustice
  - And exciting rhetoric
Both papers

- But how fundamental is the environmental injustice?
  - Cause or effect? Symptom or disease?
- Does talk of ‘structural violence’ add much that is essential?