

THE BORDER AND ITS BODIES

THE EMBODIMENT OF RISK
ALONG THE U.S.-MÉXICO LINE

EDITED BY

Thomas E. Sheridan and Randall H. McGuire



AMERIND STUDIES
IN ANTHROPOLOGY

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Series Editor, **Christine R. Szuter**

*with special assistance from Joe Wilder and
the Southwest Center of the University of Arizona*



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THE BORDER AND ITS BODIES

Introduction

The Border and Its Bodies

The Embodiment of Risk Along the U.S.-México Line

Thomas E. Sheridan and Randall H. McGuire

Ever since the establishment of the present-day border, borderland residents have crossed it as a way of life.

—Geraldo Cadava, *Standing on Common Ground*

Beginning in the 1990s, in response to an unprecedented surge of migrants from México and Central America, the United States has militarized its southern border and made it far more dangerous for those who try to cross it without documents. More than 6,000 individuals have died and hundreds of thousands more bear the scars of their passage as they suffer detention, deportation, or life as an “illegal alien” in the United States. National ideologies use citizenship to equate liberty with freedom of movement and to regulate the mobility of noncitizens based on country of origin, race, class, and gender (Kotef 2015). On the U.S.-México border, liberty becomes a bodily experience. Freedom of movement or the lack thereof privileges some and stigmatizes others. In all too many cases, that stigma serves as a death warrant. Thus, studying the border as embodied experience gives us intimate and profoundly human insights into the political, economic, and cultural dynamics of undocumented immigration and its relationship to transnational processes. Using the body as the site of analysis humanizes current political and policy debates about immigration and draws attention to the most basic human costs of calls for even greater militarization of the U.S.-México line.

To that end, a group of archaeologists and cultural and biological anthropologists met for four days in March 2016 to take part in an advanced seminar entitled “The Border and Its Bodies: The Corporeality of Risk Along the U.S.-México Line.” Cosponsored by the Amerind Foundation and the University of Arizona Southwest Center, the seminar explored how risk becomes embodied in the lives—and deaths—of

undocumented Mexican and Central American migrants. Our focus was on trauma, specifically the physical and psychological trauma of traveling to and trying to cross an increasingly dangerous border. For some, the trauma ends in horrific deaths from heat stroke and dehydration. For many others, the trauma continues to imprint itself on their bodies as they try to evade apprehension and build lives for themselves *al otro lado*—"on the other side." Anxiety, depression, hypertension, diabetes—migrants actually get sicker the longer they stay in the United States.

The seminar was held at the Amerind Foundation campus in Dragoon, Arizona, less than 50 miles from the international border. It is a harsh and beautiful landscape—one that has seen its share of migrant deaths; there is a red cross with green accents and white lettering commemorating "Omar García Herrera, Age 28, 06/26/18" on Dragoon Road near the Amerind campus. Amerind is also located in the same county where someone murdered rancher Rob Krentz in 2010 (Duara 2017). Even though most of our attention focused on migrants, seminar participants David Seibert and Tom Sheridan talked about the toll the migrant surge took on rural residents in southern Arizona. The seminar culminated in a public program at Amerind. There rancher Dennis Moroney shared what it was like to live and work in a place as hundreds of migrants crossed his ranch and several died.

In this introductory chapter, we lay the groundwork for understanding the corporality of risk on the border and introduce the chapters of the volume. Our studies take an anthropological approach to understanding the experience of border crossing. More specifically, we focus on how that experience becomes embodied in individuals, how that embodiment transcends the crossing of the line, and how it varies depending on subject positions and identity categories, especially race, class, and citizenship. All of this happens in a historical context that sets the prior conditions for the embodied experience of today. Those conditions include endemic poverty and enduring racism against Native people, collapsing rural economies because of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), civil war in Guatemala, gang violence in Honduras and El Salvador, the drug trade and corruption in México, and other "push factors" in México and Central America. We ask basic questions: Why do the migrants run such terrible risks—which for women include the probability of rape—to make their way through México and enter

the United States? Why are they afraid to return to their home countries? Why don't their own countries address the problems that drive them northward? And, above all, why are they dying on the border? The experience of border crossing is not a single event but rather a journey with lifelong consequences. At a larger scale, the embodied experiences of undocumented migrants on the U.S.-México line are part of a global process of immigration from the global south to the global north, a process that kills many more people in other parts of the world like the Mediterranean. We conclude our discussions by introducing the individual chapters of the book.

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH

Anthropology is both the most scientific of the humanities and the most humanistic of the sciences. (Wolf 1964)

Our seminar used an anthropological approach to understand the corporality of risk along the U.S.-México line. Unlike disciplines such as political science, economics, or sociology, anthropology does not focus on a specific aspect of the human condition but rather seeks a holistic understanding of the full sweep and complexity of human lived experience. Anthropology as a way of thinking, of seeing the world and relating to the world, captures the tensions that exist in that experience and among the many different ways to analyze it. These tensions bring a degree of critique and self-reflection that make anthropological understandings always incomplete.

We asked two basic questions about the corporality of risk on the border: (1) Why are people dying? and (2) What are the long-term consequences of migration for those who survive? Cultural anthropologists in the seminar examined themes such as the commodification of migrant bodies on the México-Guatemala border (Jason De León) and in private detention centers (Linda Green), how working-class people in northern México are affected by the drug trade (Shaylih Muehlmann), the protests against the arrival of unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents in Escondido and Murrieta, California (Olivia Ruiz Marrujo), how migrants link their emotional and physical suffering (Rebecca Crocker), how the recovery of bodies in the desert creates a particular border biopolitics that

often traumatizes the living (Robin C. Reineke), and the ethnographic poetics of uncertainty among rural residents in the U.S. borderlands (David Seibert). Several of these analyses shared an emphasis on the material conditions of lived experience that archaeological studies elaborated. Archaeologists applied archaeological thinking to understand how the physical militarization of the border separates undocumented from documented crossers and creates a different experience of crossing for each group (McGuire and Van Dyke). Finally, biological anthropologists used forensic analyses to discuss how the suffering of migrants—often years before they crossed—was etched in their bones (Soler et al.).

Anthropology necessarily entails a direct and personal engagement with the other. In all our studies, the authors base their analyses on fieldwork that put the researcher into contact with migrants, their families, or their remains. Every scholar brought to the discussion a special relationship to a place and to people. We talked about migrants not as numbers in a table or tabulations of responses to a questionnaire. This direct engagement with the other produces a distinctive anthropological space of self-reflection. Hierarchy and objectification require distance. Collapsing distance humbles the anthropologist and humanizes the subjects of our inquiries.

Cultural critique comes from such humbling. One of the major goals of anthropology is to make the exotic familiar and the familiar exotic. Our discussions of the corporality of risk consistently placed value in other ways of seeing the world. Cultural critique makes anthropology the most radical of disciplines because we challenge preconceptions and assumptions more than anyone else. There is no sacred cow that anthropologists have not butchered; we carved into several in this volume. Our discussions and the papers we produced dissected taken-for-granted assumptions about migrants and rural residents along the U.S.-México line.

EMBODIMENT

As noted above, the concept of *embodiment* is central to most chapters in this volume. It was also the underlying premise of the research seminar that generated this book. As the term implies, embodiment focuses on the bodies of individuals as loci of investigation—bodies embedded in and interacting with their specific biocultural environments. In the words

of Margaret Lock, “the biological and the social are coproduced and dialectically reproduced, and the primary site where this engagement takes place is the subjectively experienced, socialized body” (Lock 2001:484). Most of those bodies in this volume belong to poor people from México and Central America who try, and often fail, to cross the border between México and the United States. “The phenomenological theory of embodiment holds that the body is in constant dialog with its surroundings and relationships, and it follows that immigrants carry the intimate imprints of migration-related stressors in their physical bodies,” anthropologist Rebecca Crocker observes (Crocker 2015:2). But we also acknowledge the impact of the migrant surge on rural residents, especially ranchers, on the U.S. side of the border. With few exceptions, their embodied risks are not fatal, but those risks take an emotional, social, and financial toll.

Embodiment also has a strong historical dimension. Stressors experienced by individuals throughout their lifetimes burrow themselves into their bodies, affecting how they respond to present events. In the case of migrants, those stressors may include malnutrition and high rates of infection in infancy and childhood, so graphically expressed on their teeth and skeletal remains (see Soler et al. this volume). Among the hundreds of “undocumented border crossers” (UBCs) analyzed by the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner (PCOME), dental caries (cavities), antemortem tooth loss, and dental abscesses are much higher than in Mexican American populations. Evidence of dental restoration is also comparatively rare. Moreover, skeletal indicators of poor nutrition or chronic infection such as short stature, porotic lesions of the eye orbits and cranial vault, and dental enamel defects are much more frequent among migrants. Bodies, in this sense, are historical archives that reflect the life histories of individuals. Those archives, like all archives, are incomplete records of the past. Many stressors affect only the soft tissues of the body—organs, muscles, blood—and do not leave their signatures on teeth and bones, or at least none that forensic scientists can read yet. And as the chapters by Reineke and Soler et al. so vividly illustrate, dying along the U.S.-México border quickly reduces most bodies to bones and teeth, if, in fact, those remains are recovered at all (see also De León 2015).

But even the survivors—the fortunate ones who evade death and the Border Patrol to carve out precarious lives for themselves in the United States—carry their pasts with them, including the trauma of crossing the

border itself. Crocker (this volume) enriches our understanding of the “Mexican migrant paradox”—the well-documented phenomenon that the physical and mental health of Mexican migrants actually *deteriorates* the longer they remain *al otro lado* (north of the border)—by examining the “emotional assault of migration on the body.” Carrying out ethnographic research among undocumented migrants in Tucson, Arizona, Crocker reports, “I observed the unrelenting sources of stress that combined to churn up a perfect storm of emotional upheaval in the Mexican immigrant community. The 40 Mexican immigrants whom I interviewed reported feelings of trauma (50%), fear (65%), depression (75%), loneliness (75%), sadness (80%), and stress (85%) related to migration” (Crocker 2015). Such stress also manifests itself in high rates of hypertension, diabetes, and other so-called physical diseases. Fear of deportation—and the social isolation that accompanies it—haunts the bodies as well as psyches of undocumented immigrants, even in communities with large Hispanic populations and relatively friendly attitudes toward Latino newcomers (Sheridan 1986).

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Another key concept is structural violence or vulnerability (Carvajal et al. 2012; Duncan 2015; Farmer 2004; Galtung 1969; Quesada et al. 2011). According to Johan Galtung, who pioneered the concept, “We shall refer to the type of violence where there is an actor that commits the violence as *personal* or *direct*, and where there is no such actor as *structural* or *indirect*” (italics in original). He goes on to say: “In both cases individuals may be killed or mutilated, hit or hurt in both senses of these words, and manipulated by means of stick or carrot approaches. But whereas in the first case these consequences can be traced back to concrete persons as actors, in the second case this is no longer meaningful. There may not be any person who directly harms another in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances” (Galtung 1969:170–171). Paul Farmer emphasizes this last point: “Social inequality is at the heart of structural violence. Racism of one form or another, gender inequality, and above all brute poverty in the face of affluence are linked to social plans and programs

ranging from slavery to the current quest for unbridled growth” (Farmer 2004:317).

In other words, structural violence is embedded in the patterns of everyday life for poor and marginalized populations. Because they suffer from poor nutrition, absent or inadequate health care, toxic environments, and greater exposure to violent crimes, their morbidity and mortality rates may be significantly higher than those of more privileged members of their societies. The violence or vulnerability they face originates from the persistent patterns of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation that define them, the lack of educational and employment opportunities that limits their ability to improve their socioeconomic statuses, and the grinding realities of their daily lives that inflict cumulative psychological as well as physical harm on them. Recent research on historical or intergenerational trauma strongly suggests that the effects of such violence may also be passed down from one generation to another, trapping people in centuries-long cycles of despair (Brave Heart 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2003; Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998; Duran and Duran 1995; Duran et al. 1998; Fogelman 1988, 1991; Kidron 2003; Sack et al. 1995; Shulevitz 2014).

A common trope about undocumented migrants is that they *choose* to put themselves in harm’s way when they cross the border without the permission of the U.S. government. Such an assertion places the responsibility for their suffering and death on themselves. But as the chapters in this volume make clear, this argument obscures centuries of institutionalized racism and exploitation, both in the United States and in the migrants’ countries of origin. It also displaces responsibility for the ongoing crisis from the governments of México, Central America, and the United States onto their most vulnerable populations. Did thousands of poor Mexican corn farmers *choose* to come to the United States after highly subsidized corn from the United States flooded Mexican markets after NAFTA and destroyed their already precarious livelihoods (Fox and Haight 2010)? Do children from Honduras and El Salvador *choose* to brave La Bestia (a series of trains heading north from México’s border with Guatemala) in order to escape narco-driven gang violence in their home countries? Do women *choose* a greater than 50-50 chance that they will be raped in transit to reunite with their husbands or children north

of the border (Ruiz 2009)? Such brutal realities make a travesty of the word “choice” itself.

It is beyond the scope of this volume to recapitulate the centuries of corruption and exploitation that have made México and Guatemala two of the most unequal countries on earth (see Green this volume). Nor do we have space to do much more than sketch the contributions of U.S. policy to that exploitation and point out the enduring racism of many U.S. citizens who continue to view Mexicanos and other Latinos as people of color and therefore threats to their image of English-speaking, Euro-American nationhood. What we have tried to do instead is focus on the violence, both “natural” and institutionalized, that current U.S. border policy wreaks on the bodies of migrants and rural residents. As anthropologist Jason De León so eloquently testifies, “The terrible things that this mass of migrating people experience en route are neither random or senseless, but rather part of a strategic federal plan that has rarely been publicly illuminated and exposed for what it is: a killing machine that simultaneously uses and hides behind the viciousness of the Sonoran Desert” (2015:3–4).

The policy of “prevention through deterrence,” which began under the Clinton administration in 1993 in El Paso, Texas, clamped down on undocumented immigration in border cities like El Paso, Nogales, and San Diego. That forced migrants into borderland deserts and mountains, where they began dying by the thousands from exposure to the “elements,” particularly relentless, tissue-sucking desert heat. “The Border Patrol disguises the impact of its current enforcement policy by mobilizing a combination of sterilized discourse, redirected blame, and ‘natural’ environmental processes that erase evidence of what happens in the most remote parts of southern Arizona,” De León continues. “The goal is to render invisible the innumerable consequences this sociopolitical phenomenon has for the lives and bodies of undocumented people” (2015:4).

THE BORDER: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The militarization of the border was not inevitable. On the contrary, it is the result of political, economic, and cultural contingencies that often reflect deep-rooted fears rather than on-the-ground realities. The modern U.S.–México border did not exist until the mid-nineteenth century.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 ended the Mexican-American War and transferred more than half the territory claimed by México to the United States, even though much of this territory was controlled by Native, not Euro-American, nations. Then, in 1854, the United States acquired southern Arizona and the Mesilla Valley of New Mexico through the Gadsden Purchase to put the last piece of the land taken from México in place. The modern border now extends along the middle of the Río Grande 1,255 miles to El Paso, where mapmakers and boundary surveyors used lines of latitude and longitude to define the remaining 699 miles to the Pacific Coast.

This volume focuses on the border west of El Paso, although in recent years more migrants, many of them Central Americans, have been attempting to cross the Río Grande into Texas. The entire line—less than two-thirds demarcated by a river, the rest a purely political construct untethered by geography—is the busiest international boundary in the world. Approximately 200 million people and \$524 billion in goods legally crossed the U.S.-México border in 2016 (Bureau of Transportation Statistics 2017). We are concerned with those who try to cross without legal permission. And even though our emphasis is on people, not merchandise, the impact of the drug trade flows like a dark subterranean river through everything we write (Andreas 2009; Muehlmann 2014 and this volume).

The western border, from the Río Grande to the Pacific, runs through two of the four great North American deserts: the Chihuahuan and Sonoran. It is also, paradoxically, highly urbanized, with most of the people living on the Mexican side of the line. On the east is El Paso/Ciudad Juárez, with more than 2.7 million inhabitants. On the west is Tijuana/San Diego, with five million. In between are four transborder metropolises with 100,000 people or more: Calexico, California/Mexicali, Baja California Norte (more than 800,000, most of them in Mexicali); Nogales, Arizona/Nogales, Sonora (more than 300,000, most of them in Sonora); Yuma-Somerton, Arizona/San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora (nearly 300,000, two-thirds in San Luis); and Douglas, Arizona/Agua Prieta, Sonora (about 100,000, most in Sonora). It is important to note here that Mexican population statistics usually underestimate the number of people in urban areas.

Between these urban centers are the smaller border towns of Sonoyta, Sonora (about 13,000), the twin towns of Naco, Arizona, and

Naco, Sonora (about 7,000), the small communities of Sasabe, Arizona, and Sasabe, Sonora (about 2,500, most in Sonora), and Columbus, New Mexico/Puerto Palomas, Chihuahua (about 7,200). Like their larger urban neighbors, these communities serve as official ports of entry between the United States and México. But all the land between these cities and towns is sparsely populated desert punctuated by rugged mountain ranges with few roads, very little water, and temperatures that routinely climb above 100°F in the summer and drop below freezing in the winter. In western Arizona, the federally managed Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, Yuma Proving Ground, and Barry M. Goldwater Complex encompass an area about the size of Connecticut, with restricted access and no resident population.

The U.S. and Mexican officials who created the western border in the 1850s imagined that they could easily separate sovereign space, but the reality of the borderlands has always made the construction of a border much harder than the drawing of lines (St. John 2011:14). Between 1849 and 1857, the two nations put up 52 boundary markers. Then, in the early 1890s, they restored or erected 258 monuments (St. John 2011:91–96). For most of the nineteenth century, border residents crossed back and forth with little surveillance. Many were bilingual, with ties of family and business in both México and the United States (Cadava 2013; Sheridan 1986). Mexican labor was critical to the development of the economy in the U.S. Southwest, dominating workforces in copper mining towns, on ranches, and in the expanding agricultural centers of the Salt River Valley, lower Colorado River Valley, and Imperial Valley. Meanwhile, U.S. capital financed Mexican railroads, mines, and ranches (Truett 2008). Labor unions tried to restrict Mexican labor in the mines and smelters (Sheridan 2012), but it was not until the Mexican Revolution broke out in 1910 that anxieties about México and Mexicans became a general fear along the border (Ettinger 2009; St. John 2011).

Even then, U.S. Customs officials were more concerned with keeping out Chinese immigrants and enforcing Prohibition than restricting Mexicans. The U.S. Border Patrol itself was not established until 1924. During its early years, its mission to interdict undocumented immigrants was counterbalanced by the high demand for Mexican labor. But the Great Depression reversed that demand as mines shut down, agricultural commodity prices tumbled, and unemployment among U.S. citizens rose

above 25 percent. Between 1930 and 1935, between 500,000 and 1.8 million Mexicans were “repatriated” back to México, including many U.S. citizens caught up in the sweeps (Balderrama and Rodríguez 2006; Wagner 2017). By 1939, the Border Patrol had nearly doubled from its initial 472 officers to 916 officers (K. Hernández 2010:33). In 1929, Congress passed the first U.S. law (the Blease Act) to require immigrants to cross into the United States at a port of entry with documents (K. Hernández 2017). The act made “unlawfully entering the country” a civil misdemeanor, and unlawfully returning to the United States after deportation a felony. Current U.S. law incorporates these same penalties for undocumented entry. Four years later, the U.S. government merged two existing agencies to create the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to supervise the process of naturalization and to control undocumented immigration. In the process, the United States laid the foundations for the modern border control apparatus (St. John 2011:9).

It was also the start of what might be termed institutionalized schizophrenia regarding Mexican immigration to the United States. Demonized during the Depression, Mexican workers were welcomed under the Bracero Program during and after World War II. Between 1942 and 1964, braceros signed 4.6 million contracts to seasonally labor in U.S. fields. The Bracero Program legalized circular migration for millions of Mexicans, mostly men, who temporarily worked in the United States and then returned to their homelands. It was the largest guest worker program in U.S. history. In 1954, nativist fears resurfaced as federal policy in Operation Wetback, the largest deportation drive since repatriation in the 1930s. But a voracious demand for Mexican workers in agriculture, manufacturing, and the construction industry kept the Bracero Program alive and pressured Border Patrol officers in many instances to turn a blind eye to undocumented immigrants working in established businesses. México provided the United States’ most important army of reserve labor throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, embraced during times of economic expansion, expelled when times got hard (Cardoso 1980; Ettinger 2009; St. John 2011).

What did not change was the attitude toward transborder commerce. Following World War II, the United States and México adopted a “Good Neighbor Policy” that emphasized cooperation, modernization, friendship, economic growth, and cross-border ties (Cadava 2013:22–23). U.S.

and Mexican business leaders and politicians avidly sought to increase trade between the two nations. Both the United States and México improved and modernized border ports of entry and border cities. México initiated the Programa Nacional Fronterizo (PRONAF) to renovate the entire border and to make border towns showplaces of modern México rather than vice-ridden enclaves catering to U.S. tourists who wanted to drink and patronize the infamous *zonas rojas* (zones of prostitution) (Arreola and Curtis 1993:28; Cadava 2011:370). The leaders of PRONAF also proposed the Border Industrial Program (BIP), in part to compensate for the end of the Bracero Program in 1964. The BIP created the maquiladora industry, which allowed U.S. and other foreign companies to construct assembly plants on the Mexican side of the line. Utilizing much cheaper Mexican labor, the maquilas imported components from the U.S. duty-free and exported finished products back to the United States, paying only a value-added tax. Border towns and cities in México grew by leaps and bounds. In a 1962 love letter to his native state, Senator Barry Goldwater wrote, “Our ties with Mexico will be much more firmly established in 2012 because sometime within the next 50 years the Mexican border will become as the Canadian border, a free one, with the formalities of ingress and egress cut to a minimum so that the residents of both countries can travel back and forth across the line as if it were not there” (Goldwater 1962). By the late 1980s, some commentators even predicted that economic expansion, cultural mixing, and migration would erase the border altogether (Ashabranner 1987).

The Good Neighbor Policy, however, had started to fray by the 1970s. The maquilas, which drew so many Mexicans northward, primarily employed young women, marginalizing young men and others looking for work. The end of the Bracero Program removed tens of thousands of workers from the U.S. economy, but ranching, agriculture, and service industries still needed their labor. Consequently, undocumented crossings steadily grew in the last three decades of the twentieth century. During the same time period, the smuggling of drugs increased as Mexican cartels became the middlemen for Colombian cocaine while continuing to export Mexican-grown marijuana and heroin (Grayson 2010). More recently the trade has shifted more to Mexican-made methamphetamine (Ramsay 2015) and increasing amounts of heroin as prescription opioids get more expensive and harder to obtain (Partlow 2017).

CHANGING PATTERNS OF MIGRATION

The end of the Bracero Program and the growth of maquilas resulted in an immigrant surge unprecedented in border history. There is no direct measure of undocumented immigration, so Border Patrol apprehensions are the best proxy we have. Apprehensions began to climb in the 1970s, when the number went from 201,780 along the southwestern border (California to Texas) in federal fiscal year (FFY) 1970 to 795,798 in 1979. In 1983, the figure surpassed one million (1,033,974) for the first time. During the 1990s, apprehensions ranged from 1,049,321 in 1990 to 1,537,000 in 1999, with only one year (1994, 979,101) falling below the one million mark. They peaked the following year at the turn of the new century (1,643,679) and then slowly began to decline. There was an upsurge from 2004 to 2006, during the U.S. real estate boom, when apprehensions exceeded one million per year again. But when the boom went bust in 2009, apprehensions fell below half a million from 2010 (447,731) to 2017 (303,916) (U.S. CBP 2017a).¹

Until the 1990s, most of these migrants crossed in one of the border cities, such as San Diego, Nogales, El Paso, or Laredo. Once across, they could merge into the resident Mexican American populations in those urban centers. Only the young and fit braved the desert, where they walked during the night to be picked up by vehicles in the United States. Beginning with Operation Gatekeeper in 1994, however, the United States fortified urban boundaries in San Diego, El Paso, and Nogales with walls to force migrants out into “hostile terrain” where they risked dehydration and death. Operating in remote border regions also allowed the Border Patrol to minimize conflicts with Mexican and Latino citizens. This policy of “prevention through deterrence” was supposed to reduce the number of would-be crossers by funneling them into remote and rugged country. In the desert they were also supposed to be easier to capture than in crowded urban contexts (Haddal 2010:3; Henderson 2011).

As the figures above reveal, however, the policy did not deter migrants. By the late 1990s, at the height of the surge, the majority of migrants were crossing remote deserts and mountains. In 1986, only 29 percent tried to enter the United States outside cities. By 2002, 64 percent walked in the deserts. Before 1995, the Border Patrol apprehended 90 percent of undocumented migrants in Texas and California, mostly in urban areas

(Haddal 2010:36). From 1998 to 2012, the majority of apprehensions occurred in the deserts of Arizona.

And more of the migrants were dying. Stark figures from the Colibrí Center for Human Rights in Tucson tell the story: more than 7,216 migrant deaths were reported by the Border Patrol between FFY 1998 and 2017. These deaths averaged 12 a year in the 1990s, but jumped to 157 per year between 2000 and 2017 for southern Arizona alone (Colibrí Center 2019). Even though the number of migrants apprehended in the Tucson Sector for the same period declined from 616,346 to 38,657, a drop of 94 percent, the number of unidentified border crossers examined by the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner rose from 74 in 2000 to 128 in 2017, topping out at 222 in 2010 (PCOME 2017). By 2017, 57 percent (175,978) of the Border Patrol's apprehensions were "Other than Mexican." And 45 percent (137,562), many of them from Central America, were crossing in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, while only 17 percent still trekked through Arizona (Tucson Sector: 38,657; Yuma Sector: 12,847). But a higher proportion of them were dying terrible deaths on their journeys to the United States.

"Prevention through deterrence" may have been one of the factors reducing the total number of undocumented Mexican migrants, although the Great Recession and an improving Mexican economy probably had more to do with the decline. Nonetheless, the militarization of the border intensified. The 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon ignited a widespread fear of foreign terrorism, leading politicians to call for "safe and secure borders" (Henderson 2010). Congress passed the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002, which greatly increased the requirements for inspection and documentation at the border. The next year the federal government combined the U.S. Customs Service and the Immigration and Naturalization Service to form the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Then, in 2006, President Bush signed the Secure Fence Act. This legislation resulted in the construction of more than 650 miles of vehicle barriers and fencing of various types, most of it on the southwestern border (Ingold et al. 2017).

Those barriers are backed up by a system of "layered security," with surveillance equipment (sensors, floodlights, trip wires, cameras, mobile observation towers, radar, blimps, and predator drones) and active patrols

by agents in vehicles, ATVs, horses, and helicopters. In the early 1990s, Border Patrol agents tended to be from the border region and to have many years of experience. They were usually armed only with a pistol. Today the Border Patrol is one of the largest law enforcement agencies in the United States, a paramilitary force that routinely carries automatic weapons and wears bulletproof vests. The Border Patrol Tactical Unit is a Border Patrol SWAT team with military weapons and equipment.

In 1992, there were 4,139 Border Patrol agents. By 2004, that number had more than doubled to 10,189 agents, and it doubled again to 20,558 by 2010. By 2017, it had dropped slightly to 19,437 agents, 85 percent (16,605) of whom were in the Southwest border sectors (U.S. CBP 2017b). Such rapid growth meant that most agents had no previous experience on the border and relatively little time in service. At the height of the surge, the second-in-command of the Tucson Sector of the Border Patrol told a community meeting of the Altar Valley Conservation Alliance that he used to be able to partner rookies with agents who had 8 to 10 years of experience. Now he was lucky if the veterans had two years under their belts. The result was a marked increase in corruption (Nixon 2016), greater environmental damage by agents who did not understand the fragility of desert environments, and less cultural sensitivity to Mexican American and Tohono O'odham citizens of the United States. The Border Patrol claims that they capture 81 percent of undocumented border crossers. Other, independent studies suggest the apprehension rate is in the range of 45–50 percent (Ingold et al. 2017). Based on our own first-hand experience on the border and with undocumented migrants, we believe the lower figure is more accurate.

WHY MIGRANTS EMIGRATED

During the late twentieth century, a perfect storm of economic and demographic factors blew millions of Mexicans northward. The “Mexican agricultural miracle,” which transformed México from a food-importing to a food-exporting nation between 1940 and 1965, came to an end. New irrigation districts in the north reached their limits, and some, like Caborca and the Costa de Hermosillo in Sonora, even began to shrink. As México’s population soared from about 50 million in 1970 to 90 million in 1990, food had to be imported once again.

Concomitantly, the first in a series of peso devaluations occurred in 1976 because of México's growing balance of payments deficit. Enormous oil discoveries along México's Gulf coast triggered a burst of economic optimism in the late 1970s, when petroleum production surged and petroleum earnings skyrocketed. But that just triggered an irrational boom mentality infecting Mexican officials and international bankers alike, who made bigger and bigger loans at high interest rates as the Mexican government binged on infrastructure and social service spending. Everything was predicated on rising petroleum prices, which nose-dived in the 1980s. The peso plummeted. Capital flight intensified. Corruption spiraled to truly surreal heights. In the words of Meyer et al. (2014:511), "the oil miracle had become the oil nightmare." By 1987, the inflation rate was 159 percent, the exchange rate for pesos to dollars was 2,300 to 1, and México owed \$105 billion in foreign debt (Meyer et al. 2014).

In response, President Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988) and his successors embarked on a series of neoliberal reforms demanded by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Mexican workers and the middle class bore the brunt of those austerity measures as state-owned industries were privatized, jobs evaporated, and social services were cut. Real wages dropped and prices of basic commodities rose. In 1992, México even amended its famous Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution and abandoned its commitment to agrarian reform (Meyer et al. 2014).

Two years later, the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) allowed heavily subsidized U.S. corn to flood Mexican markets as the government eliminated its own price supports for small corn farmers. Corn and wheat production declined, and prices for Mexican corn fell by almost 50 percent (Fox and Haight 2010). Millions of Mexicanos from the poorer southern states no longer could make even a meager living on their small plots of land. So they moved north, where maquilas provided some jobs, particularly for young women (Massey et al. 2003). The explosive growth of México's northern states also coincided with the metastasis of the drug trade, as cocaine and methamphetamine joined marijuana and heroin to supply insatiable U.S. and European appetites (Andreas 2009).

By the second decade of the twenty-first century, however, far fewer Mexicans and many more Central Americans were trying to cross the border. Most came from the so-called Northern Triangle of Guatemala,

Honduras, and El Salvador. In 2010, they made up 13 percent of total Border Patrol apprehensions. By 2016, their percentage had risen to 42 percent. Neither the Obama nor the Trump administrations have considered them refugees deserving asylum. But as a recent report from Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) observed, “The violence experienced by the population of the NTCA [Northern Triangle Central America] is not unlike that of individuals living through war. Citizens are murdered with impunity, kidnappings and extortion are daily occurrences” (Medecins Sans Frontières 2017:8). Nearly 40 percent of the individuals surveyed by MSF personnel in México stated that they or members of their families had been attacked, extorted, or forcibly recruited into criminal gangs. An even higher proportion—43.5 percent—had lost relatives to violence in the past two years. Conditions were particularly brutal in El Salvador, where 56.8 percent had relatives killed and 54.8 percent had been the victims of extortion or blackmail (Medecins Sans Frontières 2017:5).

As Jason De León’s chapter in this volume reveals, risks do not diminish once these migrants enter México. On the contrary, their passage through México is often more harrowing than life in their home countries. The MSF report noted that 68.3 percent of the Central American migrants they surveyed had suffered some form of violence in México. About one-third of the women and 17.2 percent of the men had been raped or had endured other forms of sexual abuse, often at the hands of criminal gangs or Mexican police (Medecins Sans Frontières 2017:11–12).

Two contributors to this volume—Randall McGuire and Ruth Van Dyke—worked with the humanitarian aid group No More Deaths/No Más Muertes during this time period. No More Deaths places water in the desert along migrant trails. The group also runs an aid station in Nogales, Sonora, to assist individuals who have been deported from the United States. They provide calls to the United States and Latin America, help recover money and possessions that the Border Patrol confiscates from detainees, and help migrants get money sent by relatives and friends via Western Union. Ruth and Randy met one group of six Hondurans at the aid station who were preparing to cross the border. They had ridden La Bestia for 27 days to reach Nogales. Perched atop boxcars, they tried to stay alert but one of their party fell asleep and slipped off, falling under the wheels of the car behind. The wheels sliced

his right leg off at the knee. They were forced to leave him in a hospital in Guadalajara. They also found one person dead with his throat cut. Twice they were robbed, and once they had to pay a bribe to Mexican soldiers. Ruth and Randy told them that they were very brave to face such risks. They shrugged their shoulders and said no, it was something they had to do for their families.

Several days later, two brothers from the Honduran group returned. One of the brothers had cut his ankle on the train. The second day in the Arizona desert, the ankle became infected and swelled up, while his feet were a mass of bleeding blisters. He could not keep walking, so everyone but his brother abandoned him. The two were forced to flag down the Border Patrol, and ICE dropped them off in downtown Nogales the next morning at 3:00 a.m. No More Deaths gave them food, medical care, and used shoes, but they did not know what to do. To go home meant reversing the 27-day trip on La Bestia and facing gangs in Honduras. But the one brother was not in good enough shape to cross the border again, and they risked arrest by Mexican authorities if they remained in Sonora. They left the aid station to sleep under a bridge.

Over and over again migrants repeated the same story: they made the trip to help their families. Thirty-year-old Roberto had a wife, son, and three daughters in Guatemala. He could not get work at home and was hoping to join a cousin working in a stable in Texas so he could pay for his son to go to an after-school program to learn how to use computers. The Border Patrol picked up 15-year-old Enrique from Oaxaca, who stood about five feet tall and weighed less than 100 pounds soaking wet. Randy dialed his mother's number and handed him the phone. He could hear him telling her that he would try again and her begging him not to. When he handed the phone back, he broke into tears. Weeping, he said that he had failed his family.

Easily the saddest cases were migrants who had lived many years in the United States and had established their families there. Person after person told Ruth and Randy how U.S. police had stopped them for some minor violation—speeding in a car, jaywalking, throwing trash in a recycle can—and then turned them over to ICE to be deported. They yearned for the children and spouses they had left behind. They felt enormous responsibility for their families and were distraught about what

they would do now. Most indicated that they had no choice but to return to the United States.

Carlos had worked as a cook at a Marriott hotel in Denver for more than 18 years. His wife, Lydia, worked as a maid in the same hotel. They had three children, all citizens born in the United States; the oldest was 16, the youngest five years old. Aurora, Colorado, police stopped their car for failing to signal a right turn. When neither Carlos nor Lydia could produce a driver's license, the police called ICE, and ICE deported them to Nogales. They had no family in México other than Carlos's aged parents. The 16-year-old daughter took sole responsibility for her two siblings.

Someone they met on a Nogales street put them in touch with a coyote. They paid him thousands of dollars to guide them across the border. The trek in the desert did not go well. After two days, their feet were so badly blistered they could not walk. Luckily the coyote abandoned them on a well-traveled dirt road. Volunteers with Tucson Samaritans, another humanitarian aid group, found them and called the Border Patrol to pick them up. ICE medics cleaned their wounds, bandaged their feet, gave them a bottle of pain pills, and deposited them on a Nogales, Sonora, street corner at 4:00 a.m.

Carlos and Lydia's blistered feet almost killed them. Thousands of others left behind in the desert were not so fortunate. But death also awaited migrants in other places. José worked as a landscaper. He and his American family had made their home in Los Angeles for 35 years. The Border Patrol picked him up in the Arizona desert as he was returning from visiting his sick mother in Sinaloa. They loaded him into a patrol truck and sped down a dirt road at high speed. The truck bounced off the road and rolled, severely injuring José's back. When he refused to sign voluntary deportation papers, agents yelled at him, withheld food and water for 24 hours, and promised him pain medication and medical care only if he signed. When he did, they deported him to Nogales wearing a back brace and in extreme pain. The pain only got worse after he finished the handful of pain pills the Border Patrol medic had given him. He died soon afterward. When a No More Deaths volunteer called one of his daughters to ask if there was anything he could do, the daughter replied, "We do not know where our father is buried." On the border, many bodies of migrants are never found. And even if their remains are

recovered, many are never identified, leaving their families in a limbo that never ends (Reineke this volume; Soler et al. this volume).

PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRANTS

African Americans struggle to remind us of the slave ships that brought an estimated 12–15 million Africans in chains to the Americas. Irish Americans recall the “coffin ships” that carried nearly 2 million starving Irish refugees from the Potato Famine to the United States, Canada, and Australia between 1845 and 1855. But migration from México and Central America, so vital to the economic growth of the United States, has no Ellis Island or Statue of Liberty commemorating the millions of *braceros* and *mojados* who kept the trains running, dug the copper, ran the cattle, or continue to pick the crops in the extractive West. Aside from Woody Guthrie’s “Plane Wreck at Los Gatos (Deportee),” U.S. popular culture is largely mute about the experiences of Mexicanos who braved heat, thirst, rattlesnakes, and *la migra* (the Border Patrol) to work in the United States (T. Hernandez 2017). You have to understand Spanish to understand the *corridos* (ballads) about life and death *al otro lado* (Muehlmann this volume; Wald 2001). Those corridos have not yet caught the imagination of the non-Mexican American public.

This may change as the U.S. Latino population continues to grow. In her dissertation on the impact of migration on Organ Pipe National Monument on the Arizona border, anthropologist Jessica Piekielek notes that some staff members at Organ Pipe wondered if it might be renamed “Immigrant National Monument” in the future. “There may always be tire tracks out there, but at some point, the first Latino president will come out here and dedicate this area as a memorial for the place his grandparents walked through,” one speculated (Piekielek 2009:100). For now, however, many U.S. citizens view Mexican and Latino immigrants with suspicion and fear.

U.S. attitudes toward migrants—and U.S. immigration policy along the southern border—still reflect racist ideologies like Manifest Destiny, when Euro-American pioneers conquered a continent in the nineteenth century. The first sustained contact between Anglos² and Mexicans took place in Texas, where México, desperate to populate its northern frontier in the face of Apache and Comanche pressure, invited Anglos to

settle there as long as they swore a loyalty oath to the Mexican Republic (DeLay 2008; Hämäläinen 2008; Weber 1982). Anglos soon outnumbered their hosts, ignoring their oaths and looking down on the Mexican inhabitants as a “race of mongrels” whose Spanish blood had been defiled by miscegenation with Native peoples (De León 1983). After the Republic of Texas was created in 1836, pressure to annex Texas and seize more of northern México intensified in the United States. “Let the tide of emigration flow toward California and the American population will soon be sufficiently numerous to play the Texas game,” one New York newspaper trumpeted (qtd. in Weber 1982:179).

In 1845, the U.S. government upped the ante in the “Texas game” by granting statehood to Texas and sending a secret envoy to México to buy New México and California for \$30 million. When México refused, President James Polk ordered U.S. troops to occupy disputed territory between the Nueces and Río Grande Rivers. Mexican troops attacked, Congress declared war, and General Zachary Taylor invaded México and marched to Mexico City. Bankrupted by the War of Independence and crippled by two decades of civil war, México was forced to cede the Southwest and California to the United States under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 (Griswold del Castillo 1992). Six years later, the Gadsden Purchase added the Mesilla Valley and Arizona south of the Gila River, establishing the present border.

Meanwhile, the California gold rush sucked thousands of “argonauts” into its maw. Anglos quickly overwhelmed Californios, just as they had in Texas more than a decade earlier. Anglo entrepreneurs picked apart Spanish and Mexican land grants in violation of Guadalupe Hidalgo’s provisions, dispossessing and marginalizing Mexican inhabitants (Sheridan 2006). In many parts of the region, segregation and discrimination were institutionalized, and Mexican citizens fared little better than African Americans in the South (Acuña 2008; Camarillo 1996 [1979]; De León 1997; Montejano 1987). And even though Mexican middle classes developed in cities like Tucson and El Paso, Mexican immigration continually reinforced the perception that Mexicans were peons, disposable people who endured squalid conditions in migrant camps to pick the crops and move on (Cadava 2014; García 1991; Sheridan 1986).

But the modern West could not have been built without Mexican labor, which constituted much of the workforce in western mines, lumber

camp, railroad yards, and ranches, as well as fields. This led to the fundamental schizophrenia in U.S. policy toward Mexican immigration noted above. When the economy was growing, legal and extralegal restrictions on immigration loosened. When the economy shrank, immigrants became convenient scapegoats, and control clamped down (Cardoso 1980; Ettinger 2009; St. John 2011).

This schizophrenia intensified in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The real estate boom from 2005 to 2008 relied on Mexican construction workers in many regions. When the boom went bust during the Great Recession, states like Arizona passed legislation like the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act, better known as SB 1070. Among other provisions, SB 1070 required state and local law enforcement “to determine immigration status of individuals who they reasonably suspect to be illegal aliens, and for all persons who are arrested.” In the words of Russell Pearce, president of the Arizona Senate then, Mexican migrants were “Invaders. That’s what they are. Invaders on the American sovereignty [*sic*] and it can’t be tolerated” (qtd. in Sheridan 2012:387).

LIFE AND DEATH IN THE U.S. BORDERLANDS

U.S. citizens living in rural areas along the U.S.-México border were also affected by the migrant surge. The Altar Valley southwest of Tucson, Arizona, was one of the major migrant corridors during this period. At the surge’s height, agents from Grupo Beta, a service of México’s Instituto Nacional de Migración, told Randall McGuire that an estimated 3,000 migrants a day arrived in Altar, Sonora. Those migrants would then board vans with blacked-out windows and be driven 70 miles north to the border town of Sasabe, Sonora, along a graded dirt road. There, guides known as coyotes or *polleros* would lead them on a trek through sparsely populated desert grassland with little available water, where temperatures dropped below freezing in the winter and rose above 100°F from May to October.

On these trails, blisters kill because migrants with blistered feet cannot keep up and the coyotes abandon them. Trails crisscross the valley to pickup points on Arivaca Road (more than 20 miles from the border), Route 86 (45 miles from the border) north and east to I-19 (nearly

50 miles), and even to I-10 (more than 100 miles). Humane Borders, another humanitarian group that maintains water stations and assists migrants in distress, reports that prior to 2006, when the Secure Fence Act was passed, deaths clustered in the Altar Valley and Baboquivari Valley on the Tohono O'odham Nation to the west. Those clusters probably reflected migrants who had died on their third day of walking. During the hotter months, migrants simply could not carry enough water to keep themselves hydrated (Burgess and Park 2013).

Tom Sheridan and his wife and daughter lived at the north end of the valley during this period. They would regularly see migrants or their trash on the outskirts of their neighborhood. Occasionally, migrants would find their way to their home in the middle of the subdivision, where they would ask for food, water, medical assistance, or rides to Tucson or Phoenix. One migrant from Sonora, exhausted by his ordeal, asked them to call the Border Patrol so he could return home. Another couple from the southern Mexican state of Chiapas knocked on their front door, perhaps drawn by a tile image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. They had been abandoned by their coyote because the woman could no longer keep up with the group. After Tom and his wife, Christine, gave them food and water and treated the blisters on the woman's feet, the couple called a relative in Los Angeles who did not answer. They also had phone numbers from Florida and New York but had no idea how far away those places were. They set off again after resting a few hours but soon returned. Realizing they could not continue, the couple agreed to have the Border Patrol pick them up; the Border Patrol was everywhere in the valley, and knowingly transporting undocumented migrants is a federal crime punishable by up to 10 years in prison, a risk few people were willing to take.³ Almost everyone in the Altar Valley had similar stories about encounters with migrants during this time.

As David Seibert's chapter in this volume points out, few of those encounters were threatening. Most of the migrants were poor people looking for jobs. But everyone knew there were darker forces at work in the valley, millions of dollars of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine snaking their way north in backpacks, bicycles, vehicles, and ultralights. A rancher and his cowboys at the north end of the valley even found a group of starving horses with their shoes nailed on backward. These were pack horses for the drug trade whose tracks would have led

the Border Patrol in the opposite direction from the smugglers' route. The drug trade was capitalism at its most voracious, illegal supply irresistibly pulled northward by insatiable demand. For residents in the Altar Valley, this knowledge—and the rare encounters with drug smugglers or their material remains—created a sense of profound uncertainty, the destabilization and desettling of a place some of them had called home for three generations or more.

The surge had its biggest impact on the ranchers, who live in isolated homesteads scattered throughout the valley. The valley is their workplace as well as their residence, and more than anyone else they came into daily contact with the migrants and what they left behind. Like ranchers from Texas to California, for generations they had coexisted with the few migrants who crossed the border outside the cities. They had also minded their own business as smugglers plied their trade. The attitude along the border was a pragmatic live and let live as long as gates were closed and property respected. Every rancher had taken care of migrants in distress at one time or another. The ranchers worked outside, day after day. Heat, cold, thirst, spines, scorpions, rattlesnakes—more than anyone else, they knew how hard the country could be on bodies. And they were the ones who first found the bodies—or what was left of them—when the surge began to take its toll.

In a response to a questionnaire Tom Sheridan sent them, one woman whose family ranched at the north end of the valley talked about how the number of migrants increased during the 1990s, “cresting in the middle 2004-7 when the economy crashed.” “Until the early 1990s I was never concerned that the children would meet an illegal,” she continued. “They were usually on their way to Marana to work in the fields. If they needed food or help they would stay at the edge of the yard until we would go out and they would offer work for anything they needed. After about 1995 they would come into the yard and demand food or a ride to Phoenix.”

Another woman, who moved onto a ranch in the foothills of the Baboquivari Mountains in 1996, said, “In the early years of my time here, the numbers were huge with people traveling in all parts of the Altar Valley. Rarely would one drive to town without seeing people along the ranch road or the highway. As numbers reached their peak, the garbage was unbelievable—water jugs, clothing, personal items, food trash—and immense quantities.” Tom Sheridan remembers crossing a saddle at the

south end of the Cerro Colorado Mountains north of Arivaca while deer hunting. He found a small canyon filled with what looked to be at least 10 dumpster loads of trash. When migrants neared a pickup point, they were told to change into clean clothes and throw away their backpacks and any other items that would identify them as migrants.

The woman from the ranch in the Baboquivaris went on to say, “Many times we’ve had people wander in who are very dehydrated and weak. We provide water, and a chair with shade while they wait for the Border Patrol to pick them up.” Another rancher who manages two ranches in the valley while running his own ranch in southeastern Arizona noted that the migrants “have become more hostile. Maybe this is because they are involved in drug trafficking.” He contrasted migrants with drug smugglers: “We helped a female that was lost and appeared to have been abused by her coyotes. This and other encounters make me feel sorry for these migrants. My encounters with obvious drug runners have made me feel they are defiant and belligerent towards us.” The woman who ranches at the north end of the Altar Valley was more eloquent. “Imagine the desperation to travel through this country. Some were arrogant and demanding, others were terrified. We had two women come into the houses early one morning. They held each other’s hands with both hands and would not let go. We called Border Patrol and they came. We talked to the women and assured them they would be OK. They would not let go of one another. What must they have endured!”

All three ranchers mentioned that there had been break-ins at their ranches. The woman who lived at the north end of the valley said that they could no longer leave their ranch unattended:

Another time we all had to be gone so I asked a cousin to stay at the house. She did her laundry, washed her car in the yard, a bus from [Border Patrol (BP)] came in and picked up about 50 illegals. About 10 minutes later 3 men came to the gate and took a heavy stick from a tree to threaten the dogs. She came in the house and called BP. They told her they didn’t have anyone to send right then. The illegals broke into one of the other houses and stole a gun and 3 boxes of shells. They tore every mattress off beds, every closet was gone through, took food out of the freezer and left some melting on the floor.

The ranchers also described the damage done to critical ranch infrastructure, especially fences and waterworks. The rancher at the north end of the valley continued:

Our fences were ruined. Even the grass was trampled. The illegals would break the floats on the water troughs and drain thousands of gallons of water. When we moved the cattle to new pastures, we had to totally dismantle the plumbing on the troughs or the illegals would tear the pipes out of the ground. Every day my husband, son, and cowboy would go out to do ranch work and end up repairing damage done by the illegals. Every day! How would you feel going out to do work EVERYDAY to find fences torn, gates left open, cattle which have to be gathered back to their pasture, plumbing cut and destroyed, cattle standing at dry water tanks in 105 degree weather; and you must get someone to start hauling water from 6 miles away and the other two figure out where the pipeline is destroyed and gather the parts to repair it only to come back the next day and find the same thing happening again.

I worried because the men's anger grew and grew. I wrote letters to legislators and presidents but it was never going to end. I was almost relieved when the economy went broke.

The outrage of the ranchers was fueled not only by the damage done by migrants but by their sense that neither the Border Patrol nor county sheriff's deputies were making much effort to protect them. The woman on the ranch in the Baboquivari Mountains was complimentary. "As Border Patrol has become more effective (better strategy, wall & technology, road check points), we see the traffic predominantly in the mountains now. We rarely see individuals traveling along the ranch road or highway. When we do see people, they appear to usually be individuals who have split off from their group and wander into our buildings. We do see groups when riding in the mountains—and see sign very frequently." Then she added, "The groups seem to all be run by smugglers." The ranch manager had a different point of view. "I am not particularly impressed with the BP. I feel they make the problem worse," he said. "If they were not chasing the migrants and drug runners around we would have less

problems personally and with our business. To be effective they should be on the actual border. Right now it feels like I-10 is the border.”

The Altar Valley is home to these people. They feel they belong—a belonging not just based on some abstract sense of citizenship but because of an embodied history of work and family and place building. But their sense of belonging has been profoundly shaken. When asked, “What impact upon you personally has migration in the Altar Valley had over the last twenty years?” the ranch manager replied, “It has made me much more cautious in what should be a beautiful valley. It has made me feel less confident in our government and its ability to govern.” The woman at the north end of the valley was more personal.

[My husband], the kids and I, and many of the kids’ friends would go out on the ranch for work. Maybe moving cattle, branding, building fence, rocking in eroding arroyos. If they had to gather cattle they all would go first and I would follow with lunch which we would heat over a small fire. We would all work together, have lunch, then finish up and head for home but we all worked together. Suddenly I could no longer go. When the trucks with horses or equipment left and about a half hour passed, the dogs began barking and illegals were coming into the yard. We had fun all being together.

After that I sent lunches but I stay here. I miss those times working and joking together. When [another rancher] was overcome by heat and rushed to the hospital we sent the cowboy down to stay with the property because they had no one there.

To this day we do not leave the houses alone. If it means we miss something, then we do.

THE GLOBAL MIGRANT CRISIS

When we wrote this introduction, President Donald Trump was promising to build a “big beautiful” wall along the U.S.-México border and to make México pay for it. Trump also wanted to hire 15,000 more ICE and Border Patrol agents. Both these goals are political and fiscal pipe dreams. The land border between México and the United States stretches

for 1,954 miles, much of it through deserts and mountains. Estimates for a barrier along the entire 1,954-mile border range from the Department of Homeland Security's \$21.6 billion to Senate Democrats' \$70 billion. As México's economy improves and México's population stabilizes and ages, fewer Mexicanos are venturing north. México's birth rate has steadily fallen from nearly 22 per 1,000 in 2004 to just above 18 in 2016 (Moody's Analytics 2018). Its fertility rate is also dropping; the number of live births per woman was 2.18 in 2017 compared to 1.8 in the United States and 1.6 in Western Europe (Geoba.se 2017). And no evidence suggests that greater surveillance has put much of a dent in the amount of drugs entering the United States. The spreading legalization of marijuana may reduce cartel profits, but Mexican drug smugglers are already supplying most of the heroin and methamphetamines consumed in the United States. The "war on drugs" is clearly a failure, one that has corrupted and corroded both nations. No border wall—transparent, solar, or otherwise—is going to stop the flow as long as demand continues.

On the contrary, any further militarization of the border will only lead to more suffering and death for migrants and more civil rights violations for Mexican American and Latino citizens (Ingold et al. 2017; McGuire and Van Dyke 2017; Price 2017). ICE and the Border Patrol cannot fill their existing hiring goals with qualified people, and hiring less qualified agents to meet the president's targets will result in more corruption, incompetence, and abuse of migrants. A physical barrier with displays of U.S. military muscle will not stop people fleeing poverty and violence who have already traveled for weeks or months across México, braving rape, robbery, dismemberment, and extortion. A wall will also not stop those people who overstay their tourist visas (McGuire and Van Dyke 2017). The number of Mexican migrants has already plummeted, but Central Americans, especially from the Northern Triangle of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, are now embarking on even longer and more harrowing journeys. Fencing built in southern Arizona under the 2006 act forced more migrants to cross in western Arizona, some of the hottest, driest country in North America, where even more died (Duara 2015). Further increases in militarization will continue the trend. Migrants will walk even more days across the desert with minimal gear and little water, subject to heat stroke, dehydration, injury, and predation. Or they will take to the sea, as refugees in Africa and the Middle East have done.

The global north and the global south meet at the border between the United States and México. The destruction of bodies on the U.S.-México border is part of a larger global phenomenon of desperate people fleeing poverty and civil war. The killing fields of our southwestern deserts pale in comparison to the treacherous waters of the Mediterranean Sea, where people are dying in the thousands every year (UNHCR 2017). What has been called the European migrant crisis began in 2015 with a massive influx of refugees and migrants seeking asylum and opportunity in Europe. Undocumented entries to the European Union more than doubled from 106,800 in 2013 to 283,175 the following year. Then they soared to 1,822,260 in 2015, dropping to half a million in 2016 (FRONTEX 2017).

But the crisis is not limited to North America and Europe. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees reported more than 63.5 million displaced persons in the world, 40 million of these internally displaced in their own country (UNHCR 2016). These people from the Near East, Central Asia, the Americas, and Africa are forced from their homes by violence and persecution. Eighty-six percent of these refugees remain in the global south, while 14 percent have fled to the global north.

This global crisis of displaced peoples has several obvious proximate causes, particularly wars in Afghanistan, Somalia, and Syria (UNHCR 2016). However, the roots of the global migrant/refugee crisis go much deeper, anchored in structural inequalities in the world economy and aggravated by climate change, which is and will continue to devastate the global south far more than the global north, which is largely responsible for global warming (Abramowski et al. 2016; Clemens 2016; Moore 2015). The ultimate solution to the crisis does not lie in fortifying borders or in deporting migrants and refugees, turning the world into massive hemispheric gated communities. Rather it lies in reestablishing stability and increasing sustainable economic development in the global south. Easier said than done. But the current xenophobia and right-wing “populism” in the United States and Europe are zero-sum games that distract from the problem and offer demagoguery, not constructive programs for change.

ORGANIZATION OF THE VOLUME

Because the volume begins and ends with the materiality of the border, with all its walls, barriers, surveillance apparatus, and enforcement

personnel, chapter 1—“Crossing *la Línea*: Bodily Encounters with the U.S.-México Border in Ambos Nogales” by Randall McGuire and Ruth Van Dyke—explores “the increasing presence of walls at the boundaries of neoliberal nation states” where “a global economy with a free flow of goods and information paradoxically requires the control and exclusion of those the state deems to be ‘unruly’ people, lacking the rights of citizenship.” The authors focus on an “assemblage composed of interactions among three entities: the neoliberal state, the border wall, and the people who traverse the border, giving particular attention to the sensory, bodily experiences of those who cross illegally.” As in many of the chapters that follow, McGuire and Van Dyke concentrate on the major border crossing between Arizona and Sonora, the most active section of the U.S.-México line during the immigrant surge of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The volume then moves from the north to the south, reflecting the trajectory of migrants from Central America and southern México. Chapter 2, Linda Green’s “Seeking Safety, Met with Violence: Mayan Women’s Entanglements with Violence, Impunity, and Asylum” anchors the contemporary experiences of Mayan women, many of them indigenous, in “Guatemala’s inferno,” the monstrous counterinsurgency that claimed more than 200,000 lives and displaced more than a million people. After the Peace Accords of 1996, “the twin processes of dispossession and dislocation accelerated, forcing many Guatemalans, El Salvadorans, and Hondurans northward. The ones who survived the horrific trek through México and managed to reach the United States were then criminalized when they applied for asylum and commodified when they were detained.”

Chapter 3—“‘Como Me Duele’: Undocumented Central American Bodies in Motion” by Jason De León—complicates the traditional narrative of undocumented migration in two ways. First, he focuses his analysis on Central Americans, who represented 44 percent of those detained by U.S. immigration personnel in 2015, as they crossed the Guatemala-México line. Secondly, he pushes beyond the stereotype of the “economic migrant” who is “industrious, hardworking, and worthy of empathy” by carrying out rich ethnographic fieldwork among Honduran migrants who constitute “part of a disorganized and precarious transnational criminal network that preys on border crossers and exists on the edge of

life and death.” As he observes, “The tendency is to paint the world of clandestine movement in black and white, with the protagonists (i.e., economic migrants) doing battle with various evildoers (e.g., smugglers, gangs, Border Patrol). We have yet to use ethnography to understand the gray realities that characterize border crossings in Latin America.”

Chapter 4—Shaylih Muehlmann’s “Singing Along ‘Like a Mexican’: Embodied Rhythms in Mexican Narco-Music” —jumps the narrative to northern México, ground zero in the vicious violence among Mexican cartels over crossing routes into the United States. Here she tackles an apparent conundrum in Mexican popular culture: the enormous popularity of *narcocorridos* among working-class Mexicans who often find themselves victims of that violent world. She argues that *narcocorridos* have to be appreciated on an affective and embodied level as “part of a distinct local habitus. The latter is forged under conditions of structural violence yet emerges as a deeply felt, coproduced celebration of what it means to be Mexican—and feel powerful because of it—in the midst of unprecedented violence, censorship, and government corruption.”

The next three chapters explore what happens to migrant bodies during the time and after they cross the U.S.-México line. Chapter 5—“Necroviolence and Postmortem Care Along the U.S.-México Border” by Robin C. Reineke—documents “the journeys of bodies of those who have died.” Utilizing critical race theory, Reineke argues that the “dead bodies of Latin American migrants inform a continuing narrative about who belongs and who is disposable.” She contrasts the “profound acts of care and compassion,” especially by personnel in the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner (PCOME), with “the powerful and dominant forces of violence and erasure they contest.”

Chapter 6—“Etched in Bone: Embodied Suffering in the Remains of Undocumented Migrants” by Angela Soler, Robin C. Reineke, Jared Beatrice, and Bruce E. Anderson—examines what forensic anthropologists, most of them working at the PCOME, have learned about the more than 6,000 human remains recovered in the U.S.-México borderlands. “In this chapter we consider the ways in which collective experiences of marginality and structural violence, as experienced by those who leave their homes in México and Central American countries to migrate to the United States, are mapped onto individual bodies in ways that can be recognized even after death.” Those skeletal manifestations—“poor oral

health, short stature, skeletal indicators of stress and disease, and poorly healed fractures”—mutely but eloquently reveal conditions in the home countries the migrants were attempting to escape.

Both chapters 5 and 6 focus on the bodies of migrants who did not survive their crossing. Chapter 7—“Bodily Imprints of Suffering: How Mexican Immigrants Link Their Emotional Trauma to Sickness” by Rebecca Crocker—documents the toll that crossing has taken on the bodies of those who have made it *al otro lado*. Exploring the “epidemiological paradox” that the health of Mexican migrants and their children declines after they reach the United States, Crocker moves beyond the statistics in the public health literature to give voice to the migrants themselves. In addition to experiencing the trauma of crossing an increasingly dangerous and militarized border, these migrants in Tucson, Arizona, live in perpetual fear of arrest and deportation. Such trauma and stress are embodied in high rates of diabetes, high blood pressure, depression, and anxiety. Viewed through the lenses of Mexican traditional medicine and a holistic understanding of health, “migration may thus be experienced by Mexican migrants as a fundamental ungluing, a disembedding and reembedding of the body into unfamiliar and often hostile spatial and social worlds.”

The final two chapters shift the volume’s gaze from migrants to U.S. citizens in the Southwest responding to the immigrant surge. Chapter 8—“Narrating Migrant Bodies: Undocumented Children in California’s ‘Little Arizona’” by Olivia Ruiz Marrujo—compares and contrasts different rhetorical tropes about migrant bodies in Escondido, California, often described as California’s “Little Arizona.” In 2014, protests erupted over federal plans to build a shelter for unaccompanied migrant minors there. Those in favor of the shelter referred to the minors as “children” and invoked the narrative of the “innocent child.” Those opposed “described the minors as out of control, diseased, and dangerous—imminent threats to the residents’ physical safety, the well-being of Escondido, and, ultimately, the larger body of national civic values and institutions.”

Chapter 9—“‘War Stories’ and White Shoes: Field Notes from Rural Life in the Borderlands, 2007–2012” by David Seibert—gives voice to the unease of ranchers, range scientists, game wardens, biologists, and others working in the Altar Valley southwest of Tucson, as they saw a familiar landscape “changed irrevocably.” Through “war stories” about finding

objects that should not be there, including two white tennis shoes “up-right and spare, side by side and neatly arranged along the edge of a dirt road 28 miles north of the U.S.-México line,” rural residents “deploy the objects and stories as bulwarks against uncertainty and forgetting, even as their days and lives shift irrevocably.” When Seibert and an Arizona Game and Fish warden find the shoes in the middle of nowhere, they have the following conversation. “Do you smell anything,’ he asked quietly as he rolled down both windows. ‘No . . . ,’ I replied just as quietly, now less certain than ever of what we were experiencing, and why. ‘Sometimes they take their shoes off right before they die,’ he said. ‘I don’t know why.’”

NOTES

1. See Appendix A in De León 2015:298–299.
2. We use “Anglo” as a simplistic but convenient generalization to characterize settlers of European or Euro-American origin.
3. U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act, Sections 274(a)(1)(a).

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Crossing *la Línea*

Bodily Encounters with the U.S.-México Border
in Ambos Nogales

Randall H. McGuire and Ruth M. Van Dyke

It is through the prevention of movement that space enters
history.

—Netz, *Barbed Wire*

In June 2015, 28-year-old María Concepción Ibarra Pérez of Oaxaca desperately wanted to return to North Carolina to be reunited with her 10-year-old son (Echavarri 2015). First, she had to get over the 30-foot-high wall that separates the United States from México in the community of Ambos Nogales. She paid a smuggler to use the ladder he had placed against the wall on the Mexican side, but once at the top, she had no assistance to descend the northern face of the wall. María fell to the ground, fracturing her leg in multiple places. After emergency treatment in the United States, the U.S. Border Patrol deported her back to Nogales, Sonora.

In January 2012, we (Ruth Van Dyke and Randall McGuire) crossed the same border to do volunteer humanitarian aid work. It was a routine crossing that we had made weekly for several months as members of No More Deaths/No Más Muertes, a Unitarian-Universalist-sponsored group that places water in the desert for migrants and that assists deportees in Nogales, Sonora. At the end of the day, Randall discovered that he had forgotten his passport in Tucson. Bereft of any proof of his citizenship, Randall presented the ICE agent at the border gate with his driver's license and a heartfelt apology for forgetting his documents. After a few taps on the computer keyboard, we passed through the turnstile into the United States.

This volume focuses on the lives—and deaths—of undocumented Mexican and Central American migrants and rural residents along the U.S.-México border. The increasingly militarized U.S.-México border is

an intensely physical place, affecting the bodies of all who encounter it. The materialized border makes state power explicit and creates spaces of enclosure and violence, rupture and transgression. Through the physical border across Ambos Nogales, the U.S. state perpetrates violence against those whom it wishes to keep out of the country—like María Concepción Ibarra Pérez—and facilitates the passage of those whom the state privileges to enter. Walls, however, are simultaneously “barrier and face” (Baker 1993); they can enable agency that the builders did not imagine and can communicate meanings that they did not intend. Crossers continually create new ways to violate the state-sanctioned purposes of walls, and interactions with walls can subvert and even undermine the builder’s intentions. Such transgressions are all the more powerful because of the symbolic loads walls bear.

As humanitarian aid workers in Ambos Nogales, we have been witness to countless interactions between the border’s material infrastructure, the agents of the state, and the bodies of those who cross. As archaeologists, we are mindful of the wall’s materiality, and the ways in which it is bound up not only with bodies but also with neoliberalist ideologies. In this chapter, we deploy our archaeological tools to analyze the Ambos Nogales border.

We draw inspiration from phenomenological archaeology, which focuses on sensory, experiential interactions between human bodies and the physical world (see, e.g., De Certeau 1984; Tilley 1994). We also draw from current archaeological theory, which sees materials not simply as inert, passive substances, but as participants in larger, complicated, interactive entities involving humans and nonhumans (see, e.g., De León 2015; Hodder 2012; Olsen 2010). Deleuze and Guattari (2007 [1980]; see also DeLanda 2006, 2016) describe humans and nonhumans coming together as assemblages created by contingent, continually shifting relations.

In this chapter, we describe an assemblage composed of interactions among three entities: the neoliberal state, the border wall, and the people who traverse the border, giving particular attention to the sensory, bodily experiences of those who cross illegally. We begin with a discussion of the increasing presence of walls at the boundaries of neoliberal nation-states. A global economy with a free flow of goods and information paradoxically requires the control and exclusion of those the state deems to be “unruly” people, lacking the rights of citizenship. Next, we move

to a detailed description of the Ambos Nogales border wall, with its complicated history, collaborative agents, and official passageways. Then, we focus on the crossing points in Ambos Nogales and their interactions with the bodies of border crossers. We contrast the experiences of self-governing, or state-sanctioned, crossers with those of unruly, or undesirable, crossers. These contrasts demonstrate that the wall does not act as an impermeable barrier; rather, the wall is a violent extension of state power that terrorizes but does not prevent unruly crossers. We conclude our chapter with an illustration of how the Ambos Nogales border wall has itself facilitated resistance to U.S. state policies.

THE NEOLIBERAL PARADOX OF A MILITARIZED BORDER

The neoliberal state is the first component of our three-part assemblage. The militarized fortification that divides Nogales, Sonora, from Nogales, Arizona, is part of a worldwide wall-building movement (Brown 2010; McAtackney and McGuire 2019; Rice-Oxley 2013). In the neoliberal era, many nations are raising barricades of barbed wire, steel, brick, and concrete against terrorists, smugglers, and undocumented migrants. These walls express modern political systems' increasing interest in controlling the movements of human bodies (Kotef 2015). Paradoxically, wall building is expanding in a twenty-first-century world that claims to tear down barriers and break down differences. Neoliberal policies and global media have increased the cross-border flow of goods, capital, culture, ideas, and people to unprecedented levels, but these same forces have simultaneously initiated new kinds of exclusions, privileges, and limitations, further marginalizing the poor and the colonized.

In the neoliberal world, where nation-states no longer exclusively define global political relations, national border walls target nonstate, transnational actors rather than international enemies (Brown 2010; Jones 2012). Thus, Israel materializes its fear of the enemy within by building hundreds of miles of walls and highways to separate Palestinians from Jews and to appropriate land for the Jewish state (Weizman 2010). The United States fortifies its border with México to stop drug smuggling and the entry of undocumented migrants (Dear 2013; Dorsey and Díaz-Barriga 2010; McGuire 2013). Bulgaria, Spain, Greece, South Africa,

Morocco, India, Uzbekistan, Hungary, and Saudi Arabia erect border walls to keep out refugees from neighboring countries in turmoil (Rice-Oxley 2013; Taylor 2015).

These walls regulate, order, and discipline bodies, ensuring that “desirable” or “legitimate” people can permeate them with ease, while undesirables can pass only with great difficulty, if at all. The effectiveness of the walls depends on more than the physical barrier itself. Walls require the constant presence of collaborators, including armed agents, vehicles, helicopters, surveillance devices, drones, and airplanes. Together, this collective impedes motion through surveillance and the threat of force or violence (Netz 2004:xi). Without watchers on the walls, human bodies could freely transgress the barriers, and it is *freedom* of movement that constitutes the true political stakes.

As Hannah Arendt (2005:129) writes, freedom of movement is “the substance and meaning of all things political.” Neoliberal ideology equates citizenship with freedom of movement and regulates mobility based on nationality, race, class, and gender (Kotef 2015).

Nation-states allow people to have freedom of movement, but with constraints and caveats. For movement to be an empowerment (a freedom) that comes from the state, the person in motion must have property and citizenship. Privileged people in motion are considered self-governing; they carry their passports and return to their homes. Ungoverned movement by unruly people, by contrast, threatens the state and must be controlled or prevented. Unruly people include colonized subjects, the poor, refugees, the displaced, gypsies, travelers, and migrant workers; the state tends to characterize these groups as vagabonds, drifters, intruders, thieves, and criminals (Kotef 2015:9). When unruly bodies “illegally” cross the border, they demonstrate their inability to self-govern, reifying their position in the eyes of the state as unworthy.

Freedom of movement, or the lack thereof, defines subject positions and identity categories in the neoliberal world, privileging some and stigmatizing others. Nation-states create material borders to guarantee the freedom of movement of the privileged (and the mobility of commodities and capital) while simultaneously thwarting the movement of the stigmatized. Thus, the bodily experience for the privileged crossers is comfortable, routine, and efficient, while for the unruly crossers it is transgressive, physically challenging, dangerous, and erratic. The

material border can inconvenience the privileged, but it can kill the stigmatized.

THE U.S.-MÉXICO BORDER WALL IN AMBOS NOGALES

The border wall is the second part of our three-part assemblage—it is the materialized space where nation-states confront bodies. The border wall through Ambos Nogales came to be through a complex historical process spanning 135 years. As archaeologists, we are drawn to the story of the border's changing materiality as it has shifted from a symbol and facilitator of community cohesion and economic benefit to one of state-sanctioned intimidation and terrorization.

The U.S.-México border west of El Paso, Texas, consists of straight lines drawn through rugged terrain. Ironically, this artificially constructed borderline created Ambos Nogales (both Nogales) in 1883, at the point where the first railroad connected the United States with México. Here, railroad surveyors platted the twin towns of Nogales, Arizona, and Nogales, Sonora, to face each other across the line. It took 46 years before this growing depot and trading town was cleaved by a continuous barrier in the form of a two-meter-high chain-link fence erected in 1929. Between 1929 and 1994, there were elaborations and improvements to the fence, but for the most part, the relatively permeable, neighborly chain-link barrier defined the border and symbolized Ambos Nogales's neighborly relationship (McGuire 2013).

During the chain-link-fence period, across most of the twentieth century, Ambos Nogales existed as a space of cultural hybridity where two national cultures met to create transnational interactions (see McGuire 2015 for a detailed description). Residents on both sides of the border enjoyed ties of family, friendship, and business. City officials in both communities often acted as if Ambos Nogales were one city. The two municipalities shared a common sewage treatment plant. Police of either nationality, if in hot pursuit, would chase a suspect across the border. Arizona firefighters passed hoses through the border and drove their trucks into México to extinguish fires. Celebrations transcended the border with parades of bands and floats passing through the main gate. For the commemoration of the Mexican national holiday of Cinco de Mayo,

the cities took down a section of the border fence and replaced it with a platform for the coronation and throne of the queen of the celebration.

The economies of both cities depended on the border. In the 1950s, Nogales became the foremost port of entry for fruit and vegetables from México (Heyman 2004:223). Civic leaders on both sides had profound binational and bicultural knowledge, orientations, and social networks (Arreola and Curtis 1993:211). Merchants on the American side attracted Mexican shoppers with American goods of better quality and a lower price than in México. Merchants on the Mexican side attracted American day-trippers who would walk across the line to eat, drink, and buy craft items. In the early 1990s, Americans began to cross the border to buy prescription drugs and obtain dental work, both substantially cheaper in México. In 1997, more than 700,000 American tourists visited Nogales, Sonora (Arreola 2004:48). The populations of both Nogaleses soared, and the city developed a reputation in the United States as being the border town the most open to and coupled to México (Heyman 2004:223; Ingram et al. 1995:46-49).

This all changed dramatically when, concurrent with the implementation of NAFTA in 1994, the United States adopted a “policy of deterrence” to stop unruly bodies (undocumented migrants and drug smugglers) from crossing the border. The idea was to build walls through border cities, thus forcing would-be unruly crossers into the desert where they would risk dehydration and death, and where the Border Patrol could more easily capture them (De León 2015; Haddal 2010:3; Henderson 2011; Hernández 2010). And so, the U.S. government removed the all-too-permeable chain-link fence through Ambos Nogales, replacing it with a three-to-five-meter-high wall constructed of military surplus landing mats topped with an angled steel anti-climb guard (López 1997; Regan 2011) (Figure 1.1). In 1997, following complaints about the ugliness of this new wall dividing the center of the city, the federal government replaced a short section of the landing-mat wall with a “decorative wall” section made of washed concrete, with two rows of (barred and plexi-glass) windows, topped by a metal anti-climb barricade (López 1997) (Figure 1.1).

Following the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government ramped up efforts to “increase border security” by adding multiple human, animal, and technological layers to the border wall. Militarization increased exponentially



Figure 1.1 “Decorative” wall and landing-mat wall from Mexican side, 2006. The painted words read “Deport the Border Patrol” (photograph by Randall McGuire).

with the formation of ICE in 2002. The number of Border Patrol agents in the Tucson Sector of southern Arizona grew 15-fold. Border Patrol agents donned bulletproof vests and, rather than pistols, began to carry automatic weapons. The patrol expanded to include a fully militarized SWAT team. Active patrols included sniffer, or detection, dogs. The government installed vehicle barriers and surveillance equipment, including sensors, floodlights, trip wires, cameras, mobile observation towers, radar, blimps, P-3 Orion surveillance aircraft, helicopters, and predator drones (Ortega 2013). Not surprisingly, incidences of violent confrontations with crossers (self-governed as well as unruly) began to escalate.

But prevention through deterrence did not stop or even significantly slow migration. Despite the policy’s spectacular failure, American politicians (together with lobbyists for a burgeoning privatized prison system and border industrial complex [Dorsey and Díaz 2010]) continued to insist that the U.S.-México border be “sealed.” So, in 2011, Homeland

Security erected a newer, higher \$11.6 million bollard-style border wall through Nogales (McGuire 2013). The new 7.5–10-meter-high wall is topped with a 1.6-meter-high metal sheet to discourage climbers, and it is set in a 2–3-meter-deep concrete foundation to thwart tunnels (Figure 1.2). The wall itself consists of concrete-filled steel tubes placed 10 centimeters apart so that agents in the United States can see potential crossers or climbers on the Mexican side. In July 2017, the Border Patrol attached chain-link fencing to sections of the wall so that people could not pass objects through the gaps between bollards. In November 2018, U.S. Army troops hung concertina wire on the north face of the wall.

From the perspective of people on both sides, the bollard wall makes Nogales resemble a prison. The new, imposing wall is in some ways crueler than the old landing-mat fence. The barred, see-through barrier demonstrates to both sides that they are jailed, reliant on the state to grant them movement, even as the view through the bars entices them to imagine the world on the other side.

Unruly crossers—many of whom are leaving desperate circumstances—are not deterred by a wall, nor by displays of U.S. military might. The militarized wall has merely changed where migrants and smugglers traverse the border and has increased the number of migrant deaths due to dehydration, exhaustion, exposure, violence, and injury (Haddal 2010:36). Migrants continue to travel for miles into the desert beyond the wall to cross the border. They walk for days with no gear and little water across rugged terrain, braving unspeakable hardships, subject to predation by the very people they hire to guide them, to find subsistence-level jobs waiting for them *al otro lado*—on the other side. Since construction of the militarized wall, about 300 migrants per year die in the southern Arizona desert (De León 2015; authors in this volume). ICE, the Border Patrol, and other U.S. agencies continue to deport the unruly bodies they can catch back to México—often in the middle of the night.

CROSSING THE BORDER: EMBODIED ENGAGEMENTS

We met a young man named Juan (a pseudonym) while working with No More Deaths in Nogales. Juan's parents had carried him, as a three-year-old child, across the desert when they had clandestinely entered the United States nearly two decades earlier. Juan had lived the rest of his

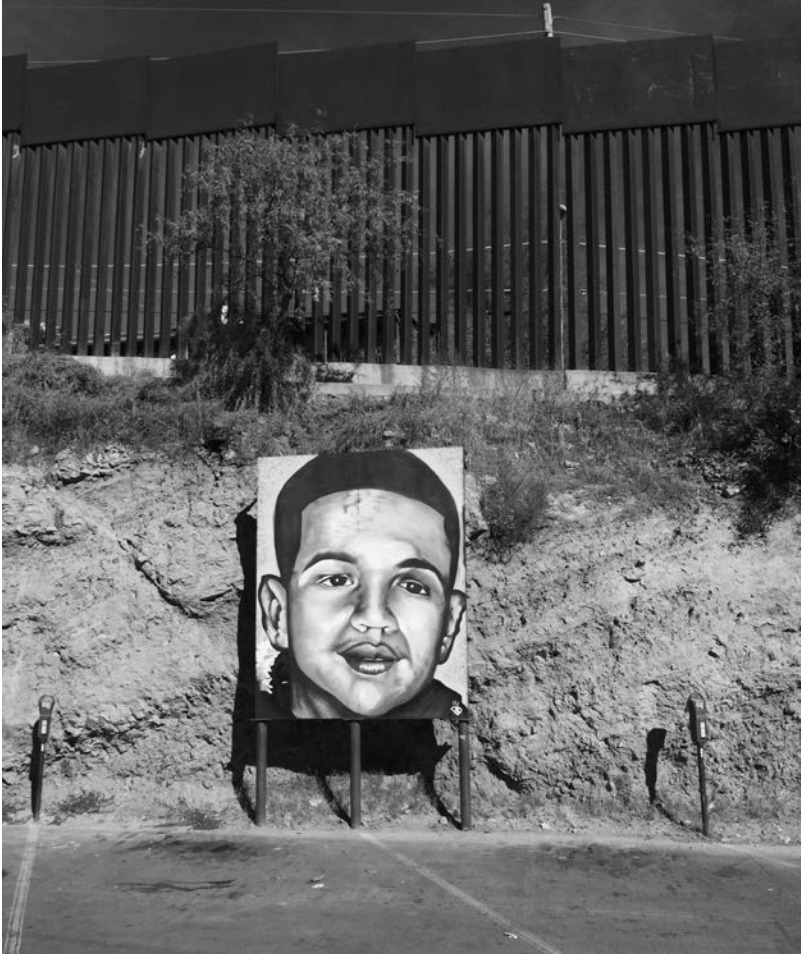


Figure 1.2 Bollard-style wall from Mexican side, with image of José Antonio, 2017 (photograph by Randall McGuire).

life in Arizona. Sixteen years later, when a Phoenix police officer pulled the young man over for failing to signal a right turn, the officer discovered that Juan lacked legal documents. The officer arrested Juan and turned him over to the Border Patrol, which promptly deported him to Nogales, Sonora. Juan had not seen México since he was a toddler and spoke only broken Spanish. Alone in a country that he did not know, Juan desperately wanted to get back home to his family in the United

States. He told us how he had first attempted the crossing by hanging on to the underside of a railroad car. Suspended under the car, his back was only inches above the rails and ties that whizzed below him. When the train stopped for an inspection several miles into Arizona, ICE agents released dogs to search beneath the railroad cars. One attacked Juan, and he showed us where the dog's slashing teeth had ripped the skin from his ribs. The agents patched up his wounds, gave him a bottle of painkillers, and dumped Juan back in Sonora that same night.

Of course, Juan's bodily experience was quite different from that of the self-governing bodies in cars, SUVs, pickups, and semitrailer trucks legally streaming through the Nogales ports of entry that same day. This contrast is obvious, but it is not trivial. The United States has carefully constructed the material border in Ambos Nogales to create very different experiences for bodies deemed by the state to be worthy or unworthy of freedom of movement.

The moment of inspection at international borders encompasses a space of exceptionalism, where both the state and individuals negotiate and perform sovereignty and citizenship (Andreas 2004; Chávez 2016; Heyman 2009; Jones 2009; Löfgren 1999; Salter 2008). Contrasting bodily experiences affirm how privilege, discretion, racial politics, prejudice, and theatrics shape the moment of inspection. Even for those who cross the U.S.-México border legally, the moment of inspection is fraught with obstacles. Crossing is a theatrical experience both for the government agents and for the crossers, as each plays their part (Andreas 2000). Racial politics pervades this experience and crafts both the obstacles and the theatrics of the experience (Chávez 2016:92).

At all ports of entry, crossers must present documents to pass through the gate. U.S. citizens must produce a passport or a passport card. Mexican citizens who do not plan to venture beyond Nogales, Arizona, can enter with a border crossing card. To go farther north than Nogales, they must have a passport with a visa to enter the United States. As our experience with a forgotten passport demonstrated, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents have considerable discretion in the acceptance of these documents (Heyman 2009). White, English-speaking U.S. citizens face different obstacles and must perform differently than brown, Spanish-speaking Mexican or U.S. citizens. Just as the agents could admit one of us without a passport, they can deny a Mexican citizen entry to

the United States, even if that individual has a passport and the necessary visa. The body of the person attempting a legal crossing has an impact on whether and how the agents apply their discretion (Chávez 2016). While the U.S. government does not condone racial profiling, we have observed that the browner the body, the higher the scrutiny. Inspection increases proportionally for those with darker skin or shabbier dress, or for those speaking nonstandard dialects of Spanish or indigenous languages.

Below, we provide detailed descriptions of the three gates that give legal passage between the United States and México. The history of the gates' materialities follows the history of the border wall, with twentieth-century internationalism and friendship replaced with twenty-first-century militarization and alienation.

We then focus on the third part of our assemblage: bodies. We describe what it is like to experience passage through each of these three gates as a self-governing body—a citizen of a nation-state, in possession of documents that confer freedom of movement. A phenomenological perspective focuses our attention on the interplay between the bodies of crossers and the architectural spaces through which they must pass. As the physical gates have been increasingly militarized, the experiences of self-governing crossers have become increasingly difficult and frightening. The militarized border at best inconveniences, at worst intimidates and threatens, even self-governing crossers, reminding them that the state can, at any moment, revoke or deny the freedom of movement.

Finally, we consider what happens to the bodies of unruly crossers as they attempt to traverse the border wall and evade the state's attempts to prevent their movement. Unruly crossers risk much more than a frightening or frustrating experience. Frequently, their bodies are damaged and broken by the wall; their transgressive movements can result in injury and death.

SELF-GOVERNING CROSSING AT THE THREE POINTS OF ENTRY

The Nogales Port of Entry is one of the busiest on the U.S.-México border. In 2017, 333,941 semitrailer trucks, 649 trains, 12,891 buses, 3,806,499 personal vehicles, and 3,349,123 pedestrians passed through the port of entry (U.S. DOT 2018). In total, 11,173,859 people legally crossed from

Nogales, Sonora, to Nogales, Arizona, that year. Self-governing border crossers with documents can cross from México into the United States at one of three gates. Two of these—the Morley and DeConcini gates—are at the center of Ambos Nogales, and the third—the Mariposa Gate—is located on the west edge of town. All three of these gates are subject to the same laws and procedures for crossing into the United States, but material differences make for a different bodily experience in crossing at each location.

The Morley Gate

The Morley Gate—the smallest of the three ports of entry—accommodates only pedestrian traffic. Located where Morley Street in Nogales, Arizona, meets Calle Elias in Nogales, Sonora, this gate primarily facilitates Mexican border crossers who cross to shop on Morley Street on the U.S. side. Until the end of the twentieth century, U.S. crossers routinely used this gate on their way to bars and restaurants on Calle Elias. With the construction of the border wall and growing fears of drug violence, today significantly fewer U.S. tourists cross to visit bars and restaurants. As a result, almost all of the bars and restaurants on Elias Street have closed, and many are in ruins (McGuire 2015). But even with a marked decline in U.S. tourists, crossings at the Morley Gate still number more than 10,000 people a day.

The history of the Morley Gate, like that of the border line itself, is one of increasing militarization. In 1929, the United States built a small, Spanish Revival-style gatehouse. Between 1952 and 1996, crossers passed through a gate in the chain-link fence to be met by an INS agent under a porch attached to the gatehouse. Following construction of the landing-mat (and then the “decorative”) wall in the 1990s, crossers had to pass through a short hallway to encounter agents under the porch. In 2010–2011, the United States expanded the reception area and the porch roof that covered it. In 2012, the government fortified the gate, placing large, heavy-duty, one-way, full-height turnstiles where crossers enter from México, and where they exit into the United States. In March 2013, the United States wrapped the Morley Avenue pedestrian crossing in a metal mesh. The new fortification of the Morley Gate has made it impossible to see into México from the U.S. side.

All crossers from the Mexican side, regardless of citizenship, must interact with a space that is threatening and potentially hostile at the Morley Gate. First, they pass through the “decorative” wall and the turnstile. They then encounter U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents who check their documents and allow (or do not allow) them to enter the United States. On any given day, there may be an agent stationed there dressed in full combat gear, with a helmet, body armor, and an automatic assault rifle. Crossers may be asked to put anything they are carrying through a luggage scanner. Ultimately, if they successfully navigate the interrogation, they will be allowed to exit through the second turnstile into the United States.

The DeConcini Gate

From 1929 to 1974, the DeConcini Gate served as the main port of entry in Nogales. The history of this gate, and changes in the bodily experiences of crossers, parallels that of the Morley Gate. However, at the DeConcini Gate the differences are more extreme, as militarization has diminished and obscured mid-twentieth-century architectural statements of transnational friendship and opportunity.

In 1929, the United States built a gatehouse similar to the one at Morley Street. In 1934, it added a two-story Customs House built in Spanish Revival style. In 1963, the United States and México jointly decided to rebuild the crossing to accommodate and increase interaction, trade, and traffic. The United States spent \$1.9 million on the project (Cadava 2011:367). They left the 1934 Spanish Revival Customs House standing. A Tucson architect designed a modern steel box covered in glass and green tile that extended over the roadway with the traffic passing below through inspection stations. México, by contrast, spent \$12 million to make the port of entry a showcase for their country (Cadava 2011:370). The government hired one of the foremost architects in Latin America, Mario Pani, to design the project. He built two massive, white, concrete arches resembling the wings of a bird flying north. He hung a large bronze national seal of México on the north face of structure. South of the arch he placed a circle of flags with banners for every nation in the Americas. From the Mexican side, the DeConcini Gate was a celebration of international friendship, cooperation, and opportunity.

Since 1994, the United States has substantially remodeled the DeConcini Gate, expanding and fortifying it with steel doors, tire rippers, and bars, installing the original landing-mat wall and the subsequent “decorative” wall. Around 1997, the United States covered the exterior of the building with pink-painted stucco to match the “decorative” wall. The glass-and-steel box remains the core of the building, but the clean modern lines of the original building are now lost in the fortification. This remodel now obscures the great white north-flying bird on the Mexican side of the gate. Crossers from the United States into México pass through gates, bars, and walls, but at no point can they see Pani’s grand vision of internationalism. For crossers arriving from the south, the hardened U.S. gate building and wall visually overwhelm the white concrete wings of the Mexican gate.

The DeConcini Gate has a well-earned reputation as the most congested port of entry in Arizona (ADOT 2009:11). Self-governing crossers here weigh various probable inconveniences when deciding when to cross, and whether to cross on foot or by car. Crossing times can range from 5 minutes to 1.5 hours on foot, or from 15 minutes to 3 hours in a vehicle, depending on traffic and CPT staffing (Wilbur Smith Associates 2012:12).

Vehicles coming north from México first pass under Pani’s white wings and then must choose between eight lanes. Beggars, and people hawking a wide variety of goods and snacks, move among the waiting lines of cars. Once in the United States, a CPT agent with a dog moves between the cars. As it approaches the inspection kiosk, the vehicle encounters various sensors and cameras, and it passes over tire rippers placed in the pavement to prevent the vehicle from going back. In the lane to the north of the kiosk are open large metal gates and a tire ripper hidden in the pavement that agents can raise if a driver tries to run through the lane. At the kiosk, a CPT agent questions and examines the papers of the car’s occupants; sometimes a second agent will walk around the vehicle using a mirror on a long pole to examine the undercarriage. The agent may direct the driver to pull the vehicle into an inspection bay. There the agents may ask a few questions, open doors, examine luggage, or in extreme cases remove door panels, seats, and other parts of the vehicle.

Pedestrians walk around the west side of the white bird and pass through a security gate controlled by Mexican agents. Usually crossers have to queue up outside the door to the U.S. gate. The vast majority

of the people in the queue are Mexicans or Mexican Americans, with a handful of Anglos returning from a short excursion for tourism or dentistry. The U.S. agents can and usually will allow crossers over 65, disabled people, and individuals with a note from a dentist indicating they have had dental surgery to move to the front of the line. Everyone must wait in a covered walkway that has been recently fenced in with steel mesh to prevent noncrossers from harassing, hawking, or begging from crossers. The entrance to the U.S. gate building has bars, a heavy-duty, full-sized, one-way turnstile, and a glass door covered in steel mesh. An armed CBP agent wearing body armor stands at the glass door. He/she allows elderly people, the disabled, and dental patients to enter through the door, and he directs others to enter in small groups through one of the turnstiles.

Once in the building, crossers queue up again in one of six pedestrian lanes. Each lane has a CBP agent sitting at a desk. Before getting to the desk, the crossers encounter scanners where they will scan their documents. They then pass through a waist-high turnstile to talk to the agent, who may ask travelers to open any packages, bags, purses, or luggage they are carrying. If the agent decides there is any type of problem with the documents or bags, an armed agent will take the crosser to an adjacent room. As at the Morley Gate, there might be one or more agents dressed in full combat gear, with a helmet, body armor, and an automatic assault rifle, and the crossers may be asked to put anything they are carrying through a luggage scanner.

The bodily experiences of both vehicular and pedestrian self-governing crossers emphasize to them that movement between the two countries is a privilege granted by the militarized U.S. state. Although self-governing crossers are usually accorded this privilege, they must cope with considerable uncertainty, hassle, and in some cases fear and intimidation.

The Mariposa Gate

In 1974, México and the United States opened a second port of entry at Mariposa on the western edge of Ambos Nogales. Unlike the Morley and DeConcini gates, the Mariposa Gate is not on the actual borderline but about 200 meters inside the United States. The planners designed this port primarily for commercial traffic, but Mariposa slowly came to be the principal gate for private vehicle traffic as well. (In its original conception,

the Mariposa Port of Entry did not include dedicated pedestrian facilities; would-be foot crossers followed a dirt path from the Mexican side to reach a portable U.S. station manned by a CBP agent.) By the early 2000s, the volume of commercial, private vehicle, and even pedestrian traffic had far exceeded the capabilities of the port. Today, Mariposa is the fourth busiest port of entry on the entire border with México.

To accommodate the flood of self-governing crossers, between 2009 and 2014 the U.S. government rebuilt the Mariposa Port of Entry at a cost of \$187 million (Karaim 2014). The new construction covers 56 acres—more than double the size of the original area. At its completion in August 2014, an estimated \$26 billion of goods flowed annually both ways through the port (GSA 2015). The modifications greatly increase the number of commercial trucks and private cars that the port of entry can handle, and they speed up crossing times (U.S. DOT 2018). The new port allows the facility to process up to 4,000 trucks daily (totaling 333,941 trucks in 2017), nearly three times the 1,600 a day before the project. The majority of the 3,806,449 private vehicles that crossed the border into Nogales, Arizona, in 2017 used the Mariposa Gate.

The designers of the new port embraced an aesthetic of internationalism. “Located just west of Nogales in southern Arizona, the Mariposa Land Port of Entry is a study in balancing security with a dignified welcome . . . the new Port of Entry strives to be a cultural connection—rather than a division” (Jones Studio 2016). Inspired by the poem “Border Lines” by Alberto Ríos, the architects imagined a port of entry for self-governing crossers that would connect, not separate, the two countries (Karaim 2014). They designed massive, spacious steel, glass, and concrete shelters. The architects hoped that open spaces, natural colors, and a sense of ordered progression would help relieve the tension and sense of dislocation that comes with border crossing (Karaim 2014). They engraved Ríos’s poem onto a prominent wall, set life-sized footprints at various points in the concrete, and used art installations that embrace travel and cross-border relations. The port has received several awards, including an American Institute of Architecture (AIA) Honor Award and a LEED® Gold certification by the U.S. Green Buildings Council.

Nonetheless, militarization at the Mariposa crossing creates bodily experiences that are similar to those experienced by self-governing crossers at the other, older gates. Commercial trucks bear right at the border

wall, while private vehicles bear left to queue up for one of 12 primary inspection booths. As at the DeConcini Gate, self-governing crossers in vehicles must navigate tire rippers, various sensors, dogs, agents with mirrors on poles, an interview by a CBP agent, and the possibility of being sent to a secondary inspection area. Delays generally range from 15 to 70 minutes, but can rise to several hours during holidays. Passage for self-governing bodies from the U.S. to the Mexican side is similarly straightforward. The entry road to México passes along the west side of the Mariposa port. Vehicles stop at one of five outbound inspection booths where CBP agents check for contraband (primarily weapons). The road then runs about 300 meters to a metal gate in the border wall.

Following the Mariposa remodel, pedestrians crossing from México to the United States first pass through a barred, one-way, heavy-duty turnstile. They walk beneath a rusted metal canopy with a large video monitor playing one of the art installations, then follow a concrete sidewalk for about 200 meters to reach an open, airy, glass-and-steel pedestrian inspection building. However, the sidewalk is flanked by stone walls with anti-climb barriers, so that once bodies have passed through the turnstile, they can only proceed to the inspection building. The pedestrians queue up and pass through inspection lanes similar to those at the DeConcini Gate. Because fewer pedestrians use this crossing at the edge of town, there are rarely significant delays.

When navigated successfully, the Mariposa Port of Entry offers a relatively dignified welcome to the self-governing bodies that the United States awards freedom of movement. But the gate treats unruly bodies very differently. Along the open sidewalk connecting the inspection building and the turnstile, a barred passageway runs along the west side of the road, flanked by a stone wall on the west and a steel-and-mesh wall on the east. This passageway is for the deportation of unruly crossers who have been apprehended on the U.S. side. But this is no mere walled sidewalk—the passageway is roofed by sloping bars forming an anti-climb barrier. The effect is of a cagelike tunnel, or a cattle chute built for animal bodies that must be constrained and controlled. Buses disgorge deportees at the U.S. end of the chute. ICE agents herd the unsuccessful unruly bodies through a heavy-duty, one-way turnstile. The deportees then must walk for several hundred meters, quite possibly on feet torn and blistered from days spent in the desert, down the cagelike tunnel,

before they are ejected into México via another heavy-duty, one-way turnstile.

UNRULY CROSSINGS

As the preceding example illustrates, forced ejection of unruly crossers from the United States into México maximizes the bodily discomfort and humiliation experienced by these people. Unwanted bodies are discarded through the Mariposa chute like refuse. In our close look at the materiality of the Nogales border gates, we have seen how even self-governing crossers are subjected to intimidation, inconvenience, and displays of U.S. force designed to underscore the power of the state over all bodies. In the following section, we explore what happens to the bodies of the unruly people who—despite the presence of this mighty militarized border wall complex—attempt to traverse the border.

Unruly undocumented crossers—those bodies for whom the state does not permit freedom of movement—must pierce or evade the wall and the layers of support behind it. They have numerous options, but all of them are dangerous. Some choose the risks imposed by the policy of deterrence, heading outside of Nogales into rugged rural terrain, where coyotes, usually in the employ of drug cartels, usher them through the wall and into the desert. The work of our colleague Jason De León (2015) focuses on this type of passage, so we do not replicate his work here, choosing instead to focus on the crossings of those who make the attempt within Ambos Nogales.

Some attempt to pass through one of the three official ports of entry using forged or altered documents (Chávez 2016). This type of unruly crossing minimizes the risk of bodily harm from the extreme desert environment and the violence that desert crossers frequently experience from coyotes and others. However, it increases the threat of severe legal sanctions for those who are caught. Crossing the border with no documents, or crossing outside an official entry port, are both Class II misdemeanors, but using forged documents to cross the border is a felony. If detected, these unruly bodies will be arrested and, rather than merely being detained and deported, they may serve prison time in the United States.

Many attempt to transgress the border wall within Ambos Nogales. These attempts increase particularly between May and September, when

temperatures frequently exceed 100°F and the risks of a remote desert crossing are clearly very high (Echavarri 2015). Unruly crossers who seek to move across the border wall within Ambos Nogales have many options. They can do as Juan did, hiding beneath a train or in a private or commercial vehicle as it crosses through a port of entry. They can try to go over the wall, or they can try to go under it. All of these options come with tremendous risks of bodily harm. The Juan Bosco shelter for migrants in Nogales, Sonora, reported caring for more than 200 injured migrants in the first half of 2015 (Echavarri 2015).

Crossing in vehicles as hidden human cargo is unpleasant at best, fatal at worst. Juan's experience hanging under a train is one terrifying example. Bodies wedged into the trunk of a car or under a seat must stay silent, in cramped, uncomfortable positions, often enduring the intense desert heat, for hours at a time. There is no possibility of food, drink, or relieving bowels or bladders. These unruly crossers risk suffocation, asphyxiation from carbon monoxide poisoning, and the possibility of heatstroke. Migrants have died from these causes in the trunks of cars (Perry and Marosi 2014). Even more have been injured or killed in vehicular accidents. And, bodies who cross the border as human cargo have a high risk of detection as the vehicle passes through the port of entry. In addition to sniffer dogs, ports of entry have surveillance devices that can detect concealed compartments or hiding places created within private vehicles and the loads of commercial trucks.

Some unruly crossers use their bodies to confront the border wall directly, seeking to pass over it, under it, or through it at an unsanctioned breach. All these methods can break the crossers' bodies, resulting in injury or death. The new bollard wall is seven to nine meters high (about the height of a two-story building) and very difficult to climb. Nonetheless, crossers still scale it, and some succeed. Young men with backpacks full of drugs have been observed scurrying over the bollard wall in broad daylight in under 30 seconds (Johnson 2014). But for most would-be immigrants, particularly those who are not muscular young men, such a feat is extremely difficult. Smugglers erect ladders on the Mexican side of the wall and charge potential unruly crossers, like María Concepción Ibarra Pérez, for the right to climb them. Once at the top of the wall, however, migrants are faced with the difficult task of descending the bollard wall without assistance on the U.S. side. Because of the height

of the wall, a slip inevitably results in bodily damage. At least three migrants have died from injuries received when they fell off the wall (Lara 2018). Many crossers have suffered multiple fractures of ankles, feet, and legs, and spinal injuries from falls (Echavarri 2015; Jusionyte 2018). The Mexican government has posted signs with an image of a person falling off the wall, with the warning “*NO TE ARRIESGUES DETENTE: Saltar el muro puede causarte heridas y/o fracturas graves. No pongas tu vida en peligro*” (DO NOT RISK—STOP: Jumping the wall can cause you severe wounds and/or fractures. Do not put your life in danger). This type of encounter with the border wall is very likely to result in bodily harm.

Rather than attempt to go over the wall, some unruly bodies choose to go under it. Fortification of the border wall in Ambos Nogales has inspired a tunnel-building frenzy, creating a clandestine rematerialization that allows drug cartels, human traffickers, and migrants to move beneath the wall (McCammack 2015). Dating from the time of community integration, networks of drainage tunnels carry water and sewage from Nogales, Sonora, to an Arizona treatment plant. For decades, *fayuqueros* (smugglers of goods such as small appliances) used the drains to cross the border. Today, drug smugglers have expanded the system, integrated their own tunneling with the sewers and drains. Since 1995, CBP agents and police have located 110 illicit tunnels connecting Ambos Nogales, but the actual number is, of course, unknown (Garcia 2018). The simplest tunnels are less than a meter in diameter, and crossers crawl through them on their stomachs with packages tied to a leg as they breathe humid, oxygen-depleted air. The Border Patrol has also found tunnels large enough for several people to walk upright, equipped with lighting, ventilation fans, support walls, joists, and even a rail system (Higginbotham 2012).

Human traffickers charge would-be unruly crossers a steep fee to use the tunnel network. In the *Los Angeles Times*, Richard Marosi (2006) vividly describes the passage of a group of migrants through the drainage system. As with other types of unruly crossings, migrants risk bodily harm that involves, at best, unpleasantness, at worst, death. People must wade through raw sewage and beat off the rats who dwell in the drainage system. Heavy rains can unexpectedly flood the tunnels, and migrants have drowned. Criminals hide in the labyrinth, waiting to rob or rape unruly crossers. In 2007, in the two main drainage tunnels, the U.S.

government installed gates, surveillance cameras, and devices to remotely fire pepper spray at people. Use of the drainage system by unruly bodies subsided, but the Sinaloan drug cartel responded to these deterrents by simply digging new tunnels (Higgenbotham 2012). Twice, in August 2010 and in December 2015, passenger buses north of the DeConcini Gate dropped beneath the street when the pavement suddenly collapsed into clandestine tunnels (Banks 2011; Prendergast 2015).

Rather than going over it or under it, some unruly crossers continue to simply breach the wall along the U.S.-México border. These bodies are not deterred by the forbidding design of the barricade and its attendant, exponentially increased militarization. They ram the wall with vehicles, cut it with saws, or smash it with axes. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (2011) reported that in the fiscal year 2010 there were more than 4,000 breaches along the entire southern border that cost \$7.2 million to repair. The CBP justified the 2011 bollard-style wall in Nogales in part by claiming that it would be more resistant to breaches. Nonetheless, breaches have continued. In June 2014, flood waters took out a 20-meter-long section of the wall just west of the Mariposa Port of Entry; the gap remained in the fence for more than a month (Hechanova 2014). In that same month, someone cut a hole the size of a garage door in the bollard-style wall east of downtown Nogales (Prendergast 2014).

Deployed by the U.S. nation-state, the Ambos Nogales border wall is the materialization of force meant to control the movements of self-governing bodies, and to prevent the movements of those whom the state deems unworthy of the privilege of freedom of movement. The wall has transformed the ways all bodies experience the two Nogales. Even for people who do not seek to cross, the high bollard fence with its parallel bars emphasizes that, as in a prison, all bodies are under close supervision and state-sanctioned control. For self-governing bodies, crossing the border has become an ordeal, as they must waste hours waiting in lines, suffer interrogation from border agents, and display fortitude in the face of an intimidating military presence. But for unruly bodies, crossing the border means risking imprisonment, injury, and death. Through this wall, the state has not succeeded in stopping the movements of the stigmatized, but it has succeeded in inflicting on them tremendous pain and suffering.

USING BODIES TO PROTEST THE WALL

In the preceding sections, we have described how the state, the wall, and the bodies of crossers come together in Ambos Nogales as three parts of an assemblage. But assemblages always transcend the sum of their parts, creating unexpected relationships. In the case of the border wall, although we have seen how it controls and impedes bodily movements, there are many ways in which the edifice simultaneously fosters transgressive acts, creativity, and resistance. In this final section of our chapter, we describe how people use their bodies to protest the wall, which paradoxically enables relationships and fosters unexpected actions.

Many people in Ambos Nogales and throughout Arizona oppose the militarized border. Protests frequently focus on the border wall as the most obvious materialization of the violence perpetrated by the state, and as a powerful symbol of separation (McGuire 2013). The original flat landing-mat wall was an ideal attractive surface for graphic statements of protest. Border Patrol agents could prevent modification of the wall's north face, but they could not control what happened to the south face. People hung art installations, spray-painted graffiti, painted folk art, and placed placards on the Mexican side of the wall. One reason cited for replacement of the landing-mat wall with the bollard wall was that the open bars would allow U.S. agents to reach between the bars and remove things mounted on the other side. Another reason cited is that the gaps between the bars would facilitate apprehension of unruly crossers because it would allow the Border Patrol to see them as they approached the wall. The new bollard wall has accomplished those things; however, it also has created new forms of protest.

In October 2015, Mexican American artist Ana Teresa Fernández deployed the bars against the bright blue Sonoran desert sky to create an art piece that erased the bollard wall. With the help of volunteers, she coated about 15 meters of the bars in front of the Nogales municipal bus terminal with electric blue paint. The paint matched the sky behind them, and this section of the wall, as seen from México, seemed to disappear, visually reuniting the communities of Ambos Nogales (Pineda 2015).

The bollard wall allows people to maintain day-to-day interactions that unify rather than divide their community. Families separated by the wall, whose members live on both sides of Ambos Nogales, meet at the

bars. They talk, share picnics, pass mementos to each other, hand children's schoolwork through the openings, touch hands, and continue to maintain the social bonds that the wall has tried to disrupt (Regan 2011). Lovers cannot kiss through the four-inch gap between the bollard tubes, but they can hold hands and look into each other's eyes.

In June 2013, three young immigrants traveled to the Nogales border wall to meet their mothers, who had been deported to México (Zemansky and Preston 2013). They were part of a movement of immigrants called "Dreamers." The Dreamers had come as children and grown up north of the border. They had not seen their mothers for many years. They talked through the bars, held hands, hugged and cried. In July of the same year, nine Dreamers dressed in graduation gowns crossed from the United States to México, and then sought to reenter the United States at the Morley Gate. The design of the Morley Gate blocks the line of sight from the United States to México, hiding the protestors supporting the Dreamers on the Mexican side of the gate. The U.S. Border Patrol detained the Dreamers for several weeks but ultimately released them in August (Foster 2013).

Cardinal Sean O'Malley of the Boston archdiocese and a group of U.S. bishops traveled to Ambos Nogales in April 2014 (Mejia 2014). They had come as part of the Catholic Church's "Mission for Migrants" that seeks comprehensive immigration reform in the United States. As part of the visit, the cardinal celebrated mass at the border with more than 500 people in attendance. The cardinal and bishops set up the altar on the north side of the fence, and hundreds of worshipers participated from the south side. These worshipers reached through the bars of the wall to receive communion.

The School of the Americas Watch came to Nogales November 10–12, 2017, to protest the existing wall and President Trump's plan to build a wall along the whole border (SOA Watch 2018). They erected stages on each side of the wall. The program shifted back and forth between the two grandstands, and the participants symbolically passed objects through the bars. A Nogales, Sonora, *paleta* (popsicle) salesman sold his wares to gringos on the U.S. side, exchanging paletas for dollar bills through the bars (Figure 1.3).

Sadly, the gaps between the bars have also allowed U.S. agents to wreak violence on bodies in México. On October 10, 2012, 16-year-old

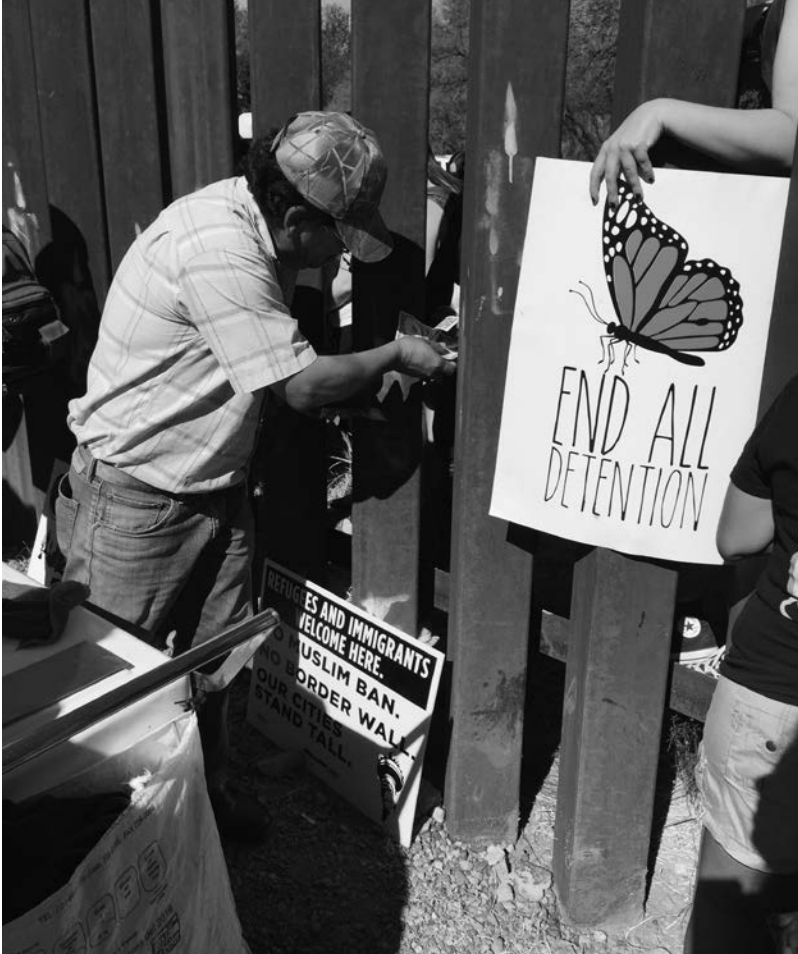


Figure 1.3 School of the Americas Watch protest in November 2017. Mexican *paleta* vendor in México, selling to protestors on U.S. side of wall (photograph by Randall McGuire).

José Antonio Elena Rodríguez died in a hail of Border Patrol gunfire (Morin 2018) (Figure 1.2). Mexican police found his body, shot 10 times in the back and head on Calle Internacional, a Nogales, Sonora, street that runs parallel to the border. His family said that he was walking to a convenience store where his brother works when he was killed. The Border Patrol claimed that he was part of a group videotaped throwing

rocks at agents attempting to arrest drug smugglers on the U.S. side of the border. What clearly did happen was that one or more Border Patrol agents stepped up to the wall and fired through the four-inch gaps to kill José on a Mexican street. In September 2015, the U.S. Justice Department brought charges of second-degree murder against CBP agent Lonnie Swartz for the death of José (O'Dell 2015). In April 2018, a jury found him innocent of second-degree murder but was deadlocked on two lesser charges of voluntary or involuntary manslaughter (Morin 2018). In November of the same year, a second jury found Agent Swartz not guilty of involuntary manslaughter (Trevizo 2018). As of January 2019, Swartz still faces a civil suit brought by José's family.

José died a couple of weeks before *Día de los Muertos*. On the evening of the holiday, protestors gathered at the place of his killing and transformed the border wall into a giant *ofrenda* for him (Woodhouse 2012). They placed candles, sugar skulls, pictures, and other offerings on its base. As protestors gathered on both sides of the border, Guadalupe Guerrero stepped up to the north face of the wall. Border Patrol agents had shot and killed her teenage son, Carlos LaMadrid, scaling the border wall in Douglas, Arizona, in 2011. Mother and son are/were U.S. citizens. She met José's mother, Araceli Rodríguez, standing at the south face of the wall. The two bereaved mothers talked and hugged each other through the bars.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have considered the border in Ambos Nogales as a three-part assemblage involving the neoliberal state, the material wall, and the human bodies of those who attempt to move across the U.S.-México boundary. As archaeologists and scholars of the material, our attention has focused on the physical wall and its complicated history. Phenomenological perspectives have inspired us to explore the bodily experiences of those who traverse the border.

On the U.S.-México border, as in many places around the twenty-first-century world, the neoliberal state has deployed a militarized barricade, complete with attendant human, nonhuman, and technological collaborators, to forcefully monitor, control, and thwart the movements of particular kinds of bodies. The state grants freedom of movement to

the self-governing bodies of those it deems citizens, but it denies this freedom to the unruly bodies of those it considers threatening.

The Ambos Nogales border was once a place for commerce and community collaboration, as characterized by the chain-link fence and by the 1960s construction of celebratory passageways such as the DeConcini Gate. Since the 1990s, however, the neoliberal state has transformed the Ambos Nogales border into a threatening militarized zone and, at times, a killing field. Border-crossing gates are no longer places to celebrate international cooperation—they are arenas where self-governing bodies may, if they pass state-sanctioned scrutinies, be allowed to pass. Unruly bodies, by contrast, must risk injury and death in attempts to move across the border wall into the United States.

Despite the violence and suffering experienced by many along the Ambos Nogales wall, however, people are using the material fabric of the barrier to protest its existence and to continue to build community between the two Nogales. Walls not only cleave and separate—they can also join and unify people in collective action for change. As an anonymous graffiti artist painted on the remnants of the Berlin Wall, “Many small people, who in many small places do many small things, can alter the face of the world.”

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Seeking Safety, Met with Violence

Mayan Women's Entanglements with Violence,
Impunity, and Asylum

Linda Green

REFLECTIONS: LA VIOLENCIA

SEEKING ASYLUM—2014–2017

The cases of rural Mayan women seeking asylum in the United States are achingly similar. Young, and vulnerable, 19–35 years old, most have little or no kin or community protections. Few have had any schooling; their lingua franca is *one* of the 22 Mayan indigenous languages particular to Guatemala. Many speak Spanish haltingly, if at all. They are regularly assaulted, abused, and exploited with near total impunity by partners, kin, neighbors, gang members, and local authorities. Most come from rural Mayan villages that were the sites of documented massacres during the counterinsurgency war. It was ruled genocide.¹

GUATEMALA CIRCA 1980S

These women were born during *la violencia* or soon after it subsided. They know little of what happened then. And much as with the bodily and emotionally felt violence that they experience in their own lives, silence prevails in regard to that time; memory is in abeyance, fear the arbiter. The brutality inflicted represents in part an intensification of more ruthless expressions of local conflicts based not solely on micrologics of power—gender, class, ethnicity—but also reconfigured by impunity. Many of the perpetrators have blood on their hands. They are the faces of those who committed crimes during state-sponsored repression; some were indigenous youth forcibly recruited and abused as the foot soldiers of Guatemala's inferno, and now long abandoned. Alongside them

are civil militias, the spies, the collaborators, the opportunists joined by today's youth, trying to survive. Now vying for power and profit, they participate in Mafia-led criminality; they, too, seem to have no memory or concern for past atrocities. This violence has cut a wide swath of chaos that now runs through a number of regions in the altiplano, the western highlands where the majority of the Mayan peoples live. As indigenous women, they exist on the very bottom rung of an enforced hierarchy of social worth.

DISLOCATIONS

The first exodus: The first extensive displacement of Mayan people during the twentieth century happened during the genocidal war. One million displaced internally; tens of thousands, seeking asylum in the United States, mostly refused.² "Economic refugees," Ronald Reagan called them.

The second exodus:

Month by month millions leave their homelands. They leave because there is nothing there, except their everything, which does not offer enough to feed their children. Once it did. This is the power of the new capitalism. (Berger 2007:24)

After negotiated Peace Accords (1996), the twin processes of dispossession and dislocation accelerated, wreaking havoc. The "free market" came to the altiplano; now most everything is commodified; the country returned to "democracy" with redressed generals in civilian guise in charge. Austerity, impunity, and extractive industries were called the backbone of "development." Young, able-bodied men fled first—those with access to cash or collateral for their lands. Then middle-age men, youth, women alone all heading to El Norte. *El sueño americano* is not so much to live lavishly, in the American consumerist sense, but to survive with dignity, without fear. Many have made it; others have not, disappearing while crossing México or dying, mostly of thirst, in the Sonoran Desert or drowned in the Río Grande in southwest Texas. For indigenous peoples this is an ethnocide, as they are torn from their history and their kin.

The third exodus. A "surge" the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) called it. By summer 2014 tens of thousands of women, children,

and youth from Central America were streaming across the U.S.-México border. In 2016 there continued to be a slow yet steady flow of those seeking refuge. By 2017 another surge was building. As a result of agreements between the United States and México, Mexican authorities detain and deport record numbers of people in transit, involving escalating human rights violations by state authorities. For women alone the trek is extremely dangerous. At the U.S. borderlands, women, children, and youth are met by uniformed men with guns; a number of Border Patrol and CBP (Customs and Border Protection) agents do not speak Spanish. It is not a requirement for employment, even though these agents are charged with making the first determination of whether or not someone has a credible fear of persecution if they are returned to their home country. Moreover, there have been serious accusations of abuse (rape, extortion, robbery) while in custody: in the desert, at holding stations, in detention. Most remain under-investigated, and thus unresolved.

RULE OF LAW

Asylum seekers, refugees, or immigrants, the law is ambiguous, but the American state response to the crisis, with few exceptions, is singular—detention and deportation. Treated as “illegal” migrants or, in official parlance, “unauthorized border crossers,” the women, their children, and youth alone are sent back to their countries of origin. In separate public statements, then president Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton supported deporting them “to send a message” to other Central Americans not to undertake such a dangerous journey—or to “send [their] children in the hands of smugglers.” The implicit message is that no matter your circumstances, do not seek asylum in the United States. This, even though immigration lawyers have documented a well-founded fear of persecution in more than 50 percent of the cases reviewed. Moreover, it is not a crime to ask for asylum at the U.S. border. And the United States, under international law, is charged with taking those claims seriously.

Since taking office in January 2017, the Trump administration has intensified the policies and practices begun during the earlier Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama eras.

ALLIANCE FOR PROSPERITY

The Alliance for Prosperity, an Obama administration 2015 initiative, with its \$1 billion five-year funding to Northern Triangle countries, was designed to stem the tide of refugees, both women and unaccompanied youth. But the plan failed to address the underlying poverty and violence that drives “surges.” Rather its emphasis is on the tried litany of economic growth, infrastructure projects, foreign investment, and security initiatives in partnerships with Central American leaders. More than half the funds go toward security, military initiatives, and military training, with little accountability, particularly with regard to human rights. Alliance for Prosperity echoes an earlier initiative, the 1960s Alliance for Progress.

CRITICAL JUNCTURES

Violence . . . refers to not only acts of individual physical aggression but also to social and linguistic systems of exclusion and collective coercion, degradation or destruction of property, persons and the environment. Violence is any harm or destruction of life, whether intended by individuals or enacted by a system of language, policies, and practices. (Pahl 2010:15)

In what follows I explore the contradictions inherent in this seemingly disproportionate response by the U.S. state to a humanitarian crisis at its southern border—that is, the *de facto* criminalization of the very people seeking refuge. To do so, I interrogate how violence, fear, and impunity have been crucial mechanisms in furthering particular configurations of power across the contours of the mid-twentieth century to the present in both Guatemala and the United States. As such, I draw attention to the historical shifts of power that refigure modes of domination and exploitation. Interrogating prior conditions, internal dynamics, and legacies of historical formations brings to the fore some of the processes that go a long way in the production of the hydra-headed violence of the present (Smith 1999). These processes have left many of the most vulnerable rural Guatemalans, the majority of whom are indigenous women, besieged and bereft as they struggle to survive.³

In what follows I highlight three critical historical junctures (Kalb and Tak 2005) that have reconfigured in significant ways how the majority of Guatemalans live and die: (1) the immediate postcoup era (1954–early 1960s) that set the stage for a political and economic framework of violent extraction justified through a rule-of-law ideology, what Matei and Nader (2008) call plunder; (2) the architecture and implementation of a counterinsurgency state (1960s–1996); and (3) a post–Peace Accords national security state that mirrors similar dynamics at work in the U.S.–México borderlands (late 1990s–present). It is to these institutional and tactical arrangements that I want to turn my attention, in particular to what Eric Wolf (1999) refers to as structural power, which in the Guatemalan case organizes and orchestrates domination through processes of dispossession and dislocation.

In this chapter, I focus on long-standing U.S. foreign policy initiatives in Guatemala and their convergence with current U.S. immigration policies and practices in the borderlands of the American Southwest that are embodied in the lived experiences of Mayan women seeking refuge. As such, I interrogate some of the ways in which these interstitial webs of power and of profit have operated both materially and discursively for over a half century. These webs have gone a long way in producing the contemporary conditions of lawlessness and brutality in both places. What has consistently been the case with regard to U.S. foreign policy in Guatemala and now at the U.S. borderlands is the privileging of U.S. political-economic interests (and those of global capitalism) over respect for international human rights protections, including the imperative to suppress any popular struggles for justice and equality. As the opening vignette portends, ICE, under the auspices of the U.S. DHS, uses tactics of fear—nighttime raids or arbitrary arrests and disappearances in public spaces: worksites, schools, hospitals—that harken back to the Central American “dirty” wars of the second half of the twentieth century.

The rule of law as a civilizing discourse has been fundamental to shoring up the ideological dimensions of U.S.-style democracy and development based on tenets of free market prosperity and equality of opportunities (Mattei and Nader 2008; see also Grandin 2004; Harvey 2003). In this way, the poverty produced by neoliberal capitalism is understood to be a result not of particular political-economic and social arrangements,

but rather entrenched in the lifeways of culturally backward Indians. Further, “American exceptionalism” with its claims to both superiority and beneficence, repeatedly deployed and largely directed toward the American public, has rendered mostly invisible the dire social consequences of U.S. foreign policy in Guatemala and across Central America.

At the U.S.-México borderlands similar underlying premises pertain. Asylum seekers are labeled as “illegal aliens.” The language of war dominates discourse and practice: “protecting the homeland from terrorists,” “securing our borders,” confronting the onslaught of the “war on drugs.” Couched in the language of the law, impunity reigns, with little to no accounting for state-sponsored crimes committed and no accountability by those responsible. Moreover, the militarization of the borderlands—the 2,000-mile strip that separates México from the southwestern United States—has been very good for business, as the security/corrections/surveillance industries have flourished. In these circumstances, the profits generated are not from the productive labor of these migrant men, women, and youth, but rather from their bodies as commodities (Green 2011).

Thus, the motivation for this chapter is twofold: first, to chronicle the plight of many rural indigenous women from Guatemala who, along with tens of thousands of other Central American women, alone or with their children, and unaccompanied minors from communities in the Northern Triangle, undertake the arduous trek across México to the U.S. border.⁴ Today, the three countries that make up the Northern Triangle region of Central America are internationally recognized as some of the most violent in the world not officially at war (UNHCR 2015). For many, quotidian life is circumscribed by intractable levels of chaos, vulnerability, and brutality.⁵ Homicide and femicide rates have soared since the signing of the Peace Accords in Guatemala (1996), as have levels of food insecurity, Mafia-controlled criminality, and environmental devastation (U.S. Department of State 2015, 2016). Secondly, I examine refugee entanglements with the U.S. border security apparatus to explicate how a legally contested reading of immigration policy based on “general deterrence”—that is, a policy of detain and deport as “prevention”—provides an expedient political basis for the exclusion of people fleeing harm. In 2014 then DHS secretary Jeh Johnson (2016) stated, “We must and will enforce the law in accordance with our enforcement priorities.” Even though the Obama administration continued to claim that its priorities remained the deportation of convicted criminals who were residing in the United

States “illegally,” disproportionate numbers of people with no criminal record were being deported, including many asylum seekers. These practices have only intensified under the Trump administration. And this disjuncture between rhetoric and practice was utilized repeatedly by the Obama administration from the beginning of the surge. In doing so, government officials created an ambiguity that allowed the DHS to herald the success of domestic immigration policies through “deterrence,” even as they have proven to be mostly ineffective. Moreover, any serious responses to the humanitarian crises in Guatemala in particular and the Northern Triangle more generally were rendered mute. Public officials justify “zero tolerance” as a “rational” response, promoted as common sense by media pundits and presumably sanctioned by a mostly quiescent U.S. population. However, such policies are in violation of international laws that protect the rights of refugees, human rights guaranteed under the Geneva Convention and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Despite this, the DHS continues the deportation of women and youth in significant numbers even when their sheer numbers are insignificant.

In what follows I relate the story of a young woman I first met when she was being held in ICE detention facilities in Arizona in 2016. Her compelling story exemplifies some of the processes and forces at work that produce the untenable situation in Guatemala for many. As they flee across México and into the United States legally seeking refuge, they are met by some of the same policies and practices of violence and exploitation from which they fled, although the violence is hidden under the guise of “the rule of law.”

MARIELENA'S STORY—2014

Marielena was just 22 years old when she left her small mountain village in the department of Huehuetenango, under the cover of darkness, alone and afraid. Her village high in the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes of western Guatemala is an hour's walk away from the municipal town center. During the counterinsurgency war, there were a number of documented massacres, disappearances, extrajudicial killings in this region. Many of those involved in human rights violations now hold positions of political power. Drug cartels, gangs, and mega-development projects and environmental devastation contribute to a level of social instability that was unimaginable just a generation ago.

Mari met Juan when she was 15 years old. She had just finished eighth grade and wanted to continue her studies to become a nurse. Yet, her family did not have the money for tuition and fees. Mari was one of 10 children in a family that struggled to get by. Her father was a subsistence farmer who in addition to corn grew potatoes for sale at the local markets. Otherwise making enough money for even the most basic necessities required finding some kind of wage work on a daily basis. Juan was a few years older and from another village about an hour's walk from her family home. They would meet in the town when her mother sold potatoes on market day. Juan gave Mari a phone; then he asked her to come live with him at his family's home. One day she left with him without telling her parents. Juan, his parents, and Mari returned to her home the next day to formally ask permission of her parents for the "marriage."

Soon after Mari became pregnant the beatings began. As Juan drank more and more, the severity and the frequency of the beatings intensified. He punched and kicked her even while pregnant. She left him twice when the attacks became vicious. Each time Juan came begging forgiveness. The second time he came with a minister who promised oversight. The third time he beat her so badly that she lost consciousness. This time she knew she could never go back. Mari hid for months at her parents' home, afraid to leave the house. Juan would come by and shout obscenities and promise to harm her and their son.

Mari left without saying good-bye to her then four-year-old son, who stayed behind in the care of her parents. She was afraid to leave him, but even more uncertain of what the journey across México might entail. She had heard stories of children being snatched out of their mother's arms. Before leaving, Mari changed out of her traje, a Mayan woman's traditional woven dress, into a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt. In recounting her story, Mari always notes that this was the first time she had ever worn anything other than her traje. Now it has been more than three years since she last wore her handwoven corte and huipil, an important signifier of her indigenous identity.

HISTORIES OF VIOLENCE

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY—GUATEMALA CIRCA 1950—PRESENT

The heavy hand of the U.S. state in the internal affairs of Guatemala is perhaps no more starkly rendered than by legacies of the now infamous

CIA-sponsored coup d'état of 1954 that overthrew the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz (1951–1954). Although the reasons behind the coup are multifaceted, one major motive was to defend American capital, whose usual way of doing business was increasingly at risk under Arbenz (Glejises 1991; Jonas 1991; Schlesinger and Kinzer 2006 [1982]).⁶ Other scholars have stressed the machinations of the CIA, with its Cold War ideology of rooting out Communists, pointing to members of the PTG (Guatemala Workers Party) as close advisors in the Arbenz government (Glejises 1991; Handy 1994; Immerman 1982). Jim Handy in *Revolution in the Countryside* (1994) identifies a third crucial element of the nexus: growing alarm in the face of ongoing and intensifying organizing among indigenous peoples, campesinos, and other rural workers.⁷ The rural organizers presented a potential threat to the status quo, challenging how power operated—with demands for an inclusionary, social democracy—and how profit accrued—with calls for an end to brutal labor exploitation and land dispossession. U.S. officials, too, were concerned that Guatemala would set a dangerous precedent, with agrarian reform and political inclusion acting as catalysts for other peoples in the region, notably in El Salvador and Honduras (Jonas 1991).

Although the Mayan people of Guatemala are the majority population, for centuries they have lived under minority rule in which they have been subjected to the long-term systemic violence of gendered, ethnic, and class oppression. With the topple of Arbenz, the newly installed “liberalist” government, under the direct tutelage of the United States, began what was to be the first of many waves of state-sponsored repression that rolled back by violent means gains made by campesinos and urban workers alike. The Arbenz years had provided a framework for challenging the inequitable social conditions in which most Guatemalans lived; the counterrevolution backed by the United States reinstated those conditions with a vengeance (Glejese 1991). In its place a “soft” democracy with its underbelly of violence enforced through a repressive security apparatus would ensure a safe investment climate for both foreign and domestic capital.

Soon after the coup, U.S. officials and private sector surrogates formed a “shadow” government—in part housed in the National Palace—and parallel government ministries that established the institutional, legislative, and policy framework for plunder to operate (Jonas 1991).⁸ In fact, World Bank staff wrote Guatemala’s first Five Year Plan (1955–1960).

By the mid-1960s, just 10 years after the coup, 90 percent of the rural population were either landless or without sufficient land to subsist; they had what Eduardo Galeano (1983) characterizes as a “plot of land the size of graves.” By the early 1970s more than a million highland residents were forced by the exigencies of survival to migrate to the south coast to provide the cheap, exploitable workforce undergirding export-led growth.

The coup reverberated well beyond Guatemala’s borders: the U.S. military and defense establishment considered Operation PBSUCCESS, its CIA cryptonym, a model that could be used for other regime-change interventions across Latin America (Cullather 1999). The rub is that regime change came with a very steep price. In Guatemala the coup unleashed more than a half-century reign of terror and brutality against a majority indigenous population and other laboring peoples that continues today.

Perhaps the more insidious legacy of the 1954 coup, however, was the formation of a counterinsurgency state. Three defining features of Guatemalan state terror stand out: its scope, its intensity, and its duration, whether as selective killings, outright massacres, or the rape and overkill of women (Ball et al. 1999).⁹ Although fear, repression, and surveillance as mechanisms of social control were not new to Guatemala (McCreery 1991), the United States played a pivotal role in shaping the institutional and operational framework of state terror beginning in the 1960s (Ball et al. 1999; Doyle 2000). By the time war officially ended on December 27, 1996, with the signing of the Peace Accords, more than 200,000 people were dead or disappeared. The majority of the state-sponsored murders, 80 percent, took place between 1980 and 1984 in the western highlands where the majority of the Mayan people live (Ball et al. 1999). The war’s toll, including genocide and crimes against humanity, were well-known to U.S. authorities in real time, as declassified State Department and CIA records clearly document (Doyle 2000).

In fact, the U.S. militarized footprint is visible across several decades of Guatemalan history. A few examples suffice to underscore the impact: in the 1960s Green Beret advisors fresh from Vietnam coordinated bombing campaigns, including napalm, in the eastern provinces against an incipient guerrilla movement; the United States trained an elite officer corps first at the Panama Canal Zone and later at the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, infamous for its torture manuals of cold-blooded brutality (see Gill 2004). Many of the graduates would

go on to become the intellectual architects of state terror in the western highlands. At the same time, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Public Safety programs were responsible for funding and training the National Police in law enforcement, but also tutored them in urban counterinsurgency (Weld 2015). Sophisticated surveillance networks, death squads, and disappearances became the signature tools of militarized power. These forces of political terror were unleashed first in urban areas and later and more extensively in rural highlands not only against an armed insurgency but also against any and all popular mobilization.

The signing of the Peace Accords in Guatemala (1996) brought an end to the war between the military and the armed insurgency that had claimed almost a quarter million lives. Another one million were internally displaced for some period during the 1980s, while more than 600 villages were completely destroyed and countless others partially razed. Hundreds of thousands more fled Guatemala itself, some to the United States.¹⁰ The accords by design did little to redress the marked social inequalities that permeate Guatemalan society or the virulent racism directed against the Maya people, two wrongs that underpinned both the insurgency and popular movements' demands for social justice. The negotiated settlement put into effect two conditions favorable to the continuation of war against the poor, mostly indigenous population: impunity for the crimes committed in the name of counterinsurgency and a neoliberal economic model of austerity. Two decades after the signing of the accords, sectors of the military, both active and retired, retain *de facto* power. Not surprisingly, there is ongoing persecution of activists who make any attempt to hold the state accountable to its own rule of law.

William Robinson (2003) argues that state terror delivered what economic measures alone failed to do—the full capitalization of indigenous lands and social relations. For many rural indigenous families, the loss of milpa lands has had a deleterious impact.¹¹ That loss—even of the small plots so aptly described by Galeano—whether the result of counterinsurgency, hurricanes and droughts, or failed development schemes that substitute cash crops for export in lieu of corn and beans, has resulted in mounting food insecurity, in a country where in rural Mayan communities more than 80 percent of the population suffer from chronic stunting.¹² Guatemala has the sixth highest rate of chronic malnutrition in the world.

For centuries, the production and consumption of corn has been the material basis of Mayan survival. And given that survival was a collective enterprise, corn has been critical to kin and community social formations. Moreover, these political and economic arrangements provided the spaces where Mayas wove the social threads that connected them to one another through their history—as their *antepasados* inhabited the natural world around them—at the same time the spaces created a future through their children (Green 1999). More recently, lands have been utilized to secure loans—to pay the cost of migrating to the United States in search of work, or in the case of the refugee women and children the necessity of hiring a smuggler for procuring a modicum of protection en route. Local loans are made at usury rates. The current cost (2016) of a coyote from Guatemala across México to the U.S. border is \$5,000–6,000.

Impunity, too, has permeated the social fabric in the rural countryside. At the community level some men who actively participated in the earlier reign of state terror now hold positions of power in local institutions.¹³ Fear continues to be an effective mechanism of social control of everyday life, and where calculations of whom to trust can have lethal consequences when guns, gangs, and criminal enterprises rule.¹⁴ So, many have decided to migrate in hopes of creating a future for themselves and their families. As James Dunkerley (1994:46) argues, the term “economic refugees” may hide a much more complicated reality, where the “‘push factor’ is far more complex and nasty than simple privation.”

NO EXIT: GUATEMALA

One of the most inescapable features of violent pasts is that they will not be left behind because they exist in the perpetual present of the struggles and cleavages it spawned. (Argenti 1992:32)

The vast majority of the rural Mayan women seeking asylum were born in the 1980s and 1990s, either during or just after the peak of state-sponsored terror. They are the children and grandchildren of counter-insurgency. Most are from rural, isolated communities in the western provinces bordering on México that were some of the hardest hit during

the reign of state terror: Huehuetenango, San Marcos, Quetzaltenango, and Quiché. More than 50 percent of the massacres that happened during the counterinsurgency occurred in remote, isolated communities, yet little is known publicly about what happened (Ball et al. 1999). Many of the grandmothers, mothers, and aunts of these young women lived in communities where they witnessed forced disappearances, torture, rape, murder. Yet, impunity reigns, and silence is the currency of power. Most of the youth and young adults in the region have not heard systematically or in detail what happened during the counterinsurgency war and who was responsible, even as they live every day with its brutal legacies. The profound emotional and social consequences of past state-sponsored terror on the kin and communities is not considered, nor is the trans-generational suffering of these young women and their children given register (Kirmayer et al. 2014).

One of the more pernicious strategies of counterinsurgency was the use of rape and overkill of women as weapons of war. A number of international reports identify three main social indicators of high femicide rates: general levels of violence in the society, high rates of domestic abuse, and organized crime. Little is known about the femicide rates for Guatemalan indigenous women who live alone in rural, isolated villages, as reporting is almost nonexistent. Yet they are some of the most vulnerable to gender-based violence. Although domestic violence in Guatemalan society is nothing new—violent patriarchy and misogyny can be traced across the contours of history (see Carey and Torres 2010)—this most recent and lethal iteration of violence against women is unprecedented in its scope and intensity and duration.

In their declarations, they recount tales of abuse, of being beaten, sexually assaulted and raped repeatedly, of being held captive, of fear of leaving their homes. Their individual stories, of course, are unique, yet they share a number of factors: they usually live in rural, mostly mountainous communities far from the nearest pueblo (town). In some cases, the nearest town with a clinic and police station is hours away by foot. They have few resources and little recourse to change the circumstances of their lives. Most have had only the most basic of formal education (sixth grade). They may not have any kin near where they are living; their partners are abusive or have abandoned them, yet the men continue to

threaten the women, especially if children are involved. Their fate, too, hangs on the discretion of local gangs. In many cases neighbors are either unwilling or too afraid to offer assistance. The police are widely known as brutal and corrupt.

Yet the everyday violence of domestic violence, child abuse, and rape does not exist simply as individual misfortunes or isolated instances, but rather is linked to larger social and historical forces and processes that undergird the post–Peace Accords era of the last two decades. The plunder that is taking place on the ground with its attendant violence is inextricably tied to a complex web of national and international policies and practices in which neoliberalism and impunity have permeated the social fabric. At the local level the realities of everyday violence are stark and brutal. I highlight the convergence of several social currents that foster a climate where everyday violence can flourish.

Many of the communities from which the young women and youth flee sit at the crossroads of three explosive currents that have been crucial in the formation of the contemporary period. The legacies of the counterinsurgency war are many; the deaths, disappearances, dispossessions, and dislocations have reworked community social relations, where very real aftershocks of state terror sit uneasily below the surface of everyday life. Impunity is its linchpin. At the local level, there has been little to no public accounting of what happened, and few have been held accountable for crimes in the present or in the past. As such, communities are fractured where there is fear, suspicion, and silence about who is doing what to whom. This is not post-traumatic stress disorder in the classic sense, but rather the looping effects from political processes to individual experiences and back again (Kirmayer et al. 2014:301). All women are potential victims, but most especially so young indigenous women without any male protection. Secondly, and closely related, is the blood on local people's hands from counterinsurgency (Green 1999), where today scores are settled either by the barrel of a gun or the blade of a machete. The rule of law is nonexistent, and law enforcement has little incentive to address the problems. Corruption among officials is endemic, extortion is the rule, and impunity ensures their continuance.

Secondly, the departments of San Marcos, Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, and Quiché in the western highlands of Guatemala, those that border on or are in proximity to the Guatemalan-Mexican border

or along the Pacific Ocean, are the regions from where many are fleeing harm. Not coincidentally, it is also the terrain of international criminal cartels, where drug cultivation and trafficking corridors abound, even though the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency has been operating in Guatemala since 1983 when opium poppy production first began. By 1989 Guatemala was third in the world in production of opium poppies. Cultivation is extensive in the provinces of Huehuetenango and San Marcos, the two departments from where the largest number of women and children flee. As with the violent, failed war on drugs in Colombia, the Guatemalan military and U.S. special forces are fighting a war without end and with little substantive effect on its purported targets. And what is also well-known to the U.S. government is that former and active Guatemalan military and intelligence agency personnel as well as active-duty police are implicated in participating in and profiting from trafficking.¹⁵ Third, this region is the site of mega-development projects like the Marlin gold mine in San Marcos or the Xalalá hydroelectric dam project in nearby Huehuetenango. These projects, financed with a combination of loans from international financial institutions such as the World Bank and private corporate funds, are in direct violation of ILO Convention 169, with its obligation to respect the rights of indigenous people, including the protection of their traditional territory and natural resources (Cultural Survival 2017). Notwithstanding, community referendums that have rejected the validity of the operations have been ignored both by the Guatemalan state and corporate interests despite the fact that the Guatemalan state is a signatory of the convention. The Marlin mine is exemplary in that it is one of the earliest, violent examples of dispossession of indigenous lands, after the Peace Accords were signed. The Marlin mine was built in the early 2000s by international mining corporation Goldcorp in the province of San Marcos, financed in part by the World Bank (in violation of its own policies with regard to consultation with affected communities) and approved by the Guatemalan government. A number of investigative reports, including by an independent consulting firm hired by Goldcorp, found that the mining operations went forward without the express approval of the affected indigenous communities. For most of the last decade the population of 18 affected villages have complained of environmental contamination of their land and water sources, and have staged protests that have often

been met with violence by military or corporation security forces, including assault, kidnapping, and murder.¹⁶

In this context of individual suffering and violence and socially produced chaos and criminality, young women beg and borrow what they can, use their family's land or house as collateral for loans at usury rates, and when possible, with the children in tow, they run.

CROSSING MÉXICO 2014

The night she left, Mari traveled by bus with her coyote (guide) and several others to the Guatemala–México border. After they crossed the Suchiate River, another coyote with more women and children met them. All twelve of them set out on the arduous trip across México by train, bus, and on foot. Crossing México is notorious for its violence against most everybody. According to human rights organizations in México, few women crossing escaped being assaulted and raped at least once on their journey. The migrants, especially women with children and unaccompanied youth, are easy prey for those with power and guns: the Mexican military, the police, gang members. Moreover, the U.S. military and DHS have been substantially underwriting the militarization of the México–Guatemala border. Not surprisingly, reported human rights violations against migrants have soared in México.

As they get closer to the U.S.–México border, the coyotes, themselves workers in a criminal syndicate, often force women to stay in “casas” for an undisclosed period of time. There most everyone is subject to some configuration of assaults, beatings, rape, robbery, and extortion.

After 10 days Mari's group reached such a safe house, where all the women were placed in a large room and restricted in their movements day and night, with little more than crackers and water to sustain them. Mari is unsure how long she was there—perhaps five days—then they crossed into the Arizona desert at night. After they had walked for three days, a Border Patrol helicopter flew low and close, kicking up a whirlwind. Everyone scattered. When the dust settled Mari was alone, lost, without food or water. She walked for days not seeing anyone. Finally she spotted a small isolated house. She approached it with trepidation. An old Mexican woman greeted her and offered Mari refuge. Unknowingly Mari had crossed back into México. She stayed there several months, recuperating until she was strong enough to travel again.

U.S. IMMIGRATION POLICY—THE BORDERLANDS OF THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST CIRCA 1990S—PRESENT

In 1996 the U.S. Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), coming two years after the free trade agreement, NAFTA. As anticipated, there was a significant rise in the number of mostly Mexican migrants without authorized documents crossing and dying along the U.S.-México border. By 2005 many Central Americans had joined their ranks (Nevins 2002). In anticipation of a surge, the U.S. Department of Defense assistant secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict H. Allen Holmes promoted a border strategic plan (1996) that advocated “prevention through deterrence.” The strategy was to force migrants to cross the border using more isolated, dangerous routes, what Christian Parenti (1999) calls “preventative counterinsurgency” (Massey et al. 2003; Nevins 2002). Militarization of the border and criminalization of migrants became the twin pillars of this strategy.

For more than a decade the Sonoran Desert of southwestern Arizona has been “ground zero in the immigration wars,” as hundreds of thousands of migrants every year walked in the punishing summer 110°F-plus heat in the hopes of a future. Many have died trying. More than 2,000 remains have been recovered in the Tucson Sector of the Sonoran Desert over the last 15 years. Yet, no one really knows for sure how many people have died there, as most of the bodies and human remains are found by happenstance. The Colibrí Center for Human Rights based in Tucson, Arizona, has more than 25,000 reports of missing people last seen crossing the U.S.-México divide. This is the U.S.-México border’s version of Central American disappearances.

Created in 1924, for the next half century the Border Patrol served as a gatekeeper monitoring the flow of cheap, exploitable labor and contraband from México (Behdad 1998; Ngai 2004). In the early 1980s, at the height of counterinsurgency in the Northern Triangle countries, then president Ronald Reagan declared that “this country [U.S.] has lost control of its borders.” Within a rhetoric of fighting Communism, undocumented migrants were defined as a national security threat. Ironically, the majority of those crossing the border in the early 1980s were refugees fleeing state terror financed in part by U.S. tax dollars.

Between 2000 and 2015 the Tucson Sector of the southwestern borderlands was increasingly militarized through its tripartite mandates: the war on drugs, national security, and the *zero tolerance* initiatives directed especially toward “unauthorized illegal aliens.” Blackhawk helicopters, surveillance and video technologies, sky towers, unmanned drones, ground-based sensors, real and virtual fences, and checkpoints are now the standard components of acceptable militarism in the borderlands. Not only has the number of Border Patrol agents swelled, from under 5,000 agents in 1993, the year before NAFTA, to more than 20,000 in 2012, the vast majority of whom are stationed along the southwestern divide, the border itself has expanded geographically. The ICE “border enforcement jurisdiction” now reaches 100 miles into the interior of the United States—what the ACLU has labeled “Constitution-free zones.” Likewise, the militarized border has moved southward to the México-Guatemala line, funded by the U.S. Mérida Initiative, and more recently to the Guatemala-Honduras border through Plan Maya Jaguar, joint U.S.-Guatemalan military antinarcotics exercises carried out since 1998 in the Northern Triangle.¹⁷

As it has become more dangerous to traverse México and to cross the border into the United States, the necessity and price of securing a coyote has risen accordingly. U.S. border policies and practices have created a climate where multibillion-dollar criminal enterprises for human, drug, and gun smuggling flourish. And the price of the services continues to rise with each new iteration of militarized border security. In effect, such policies have become a price-support system that continually raises the profit margin for the smugglers. As Todd Miller, a Tucson-based journalist, poignantly notes, “the border [is] a graveyard of bones and sadness” (2016). Here, too, fear, violence, and impunity reign.

Criminal prosecution of individuals who have violated federal immigration law turns in on itself, used as a justification for more militarization. Their initial transgression—crossing the border without authorization—is simply a violation of inconsequential immigration rules. However, in a one-two punch migrants apprehended by the Border Patrol are processed through Operation Streamline in U.S. federal district court, where felony charges of illegal entry are reduced to a misdemeanor in exchange for a guilty plea. Every weekday in Tucson, Arizona, 40–70

migrants, hands and feet chained and shackled at the waist, shuffle into district court where they are transformed into “illegals” with a criminal record. These cases made up the bulk of President Obama’s much hailed zero tolerance policy of deporting “criminal aliens.” But they are not deported immediately. Instead they serve time in for-profit prisons for 30–180 days at \$124 per night. Here is where the rule of law merges with power and profit.

Migrant illegality has created a growth industry in private immigration detention centers, as punishment and containment policies are implemented through public/private partnerships (see Andersson 2014). Over the past decade the ICE detention system has grown by more than 45 percent, and 9 out of 10 of the largest immigration detention centers are run by private for-profit prison companies. GEO Group and Correction Corporation of America (CCA, now rebranded as CoreCivic) are the largest companies who hold contracts with ICE for confinement of noncriminal detention populations. Between them they have contracts for 62 percent of detention beds. Even in the midst of declining immigration rates after the 2008 financial crisis in the United States, Congress passed legislation in 2009 mandating a guaranteed bed quota of 34,000 daily at \$124 per bed. As detentions have increased, profits have risen accordingly. Since 2014 both CCA and GEO Group have expanded their detention facilities for families, with projected capacities of upward of 5,000 people. The exponential rise in the number (and revenues) of for-profit immigration (and family) detention facilities is but one example of plunder unbound, as migrants and now asylum seekers are recast simultaneously as both disposable (Bauman 2016) and as commodities before their inevitable deportation.

Moreover, there is little to no meaningful ICE oversight of these private facilities, in spite of confirmed reports of abuse and human rights violations, ranging from poor food, inadequate medical care, and deplorable living conditions to sexual assault, rape, and unexplained deaths (National Immigrant Justice Center 2015).

The construction of migrant illegality is not simply a lucrative material practice but also a discursive one. A crucial dimension of this dynamic is the bombardment by the mainstream media of innumerable examples of migrants’ violations of the rule of law (Chavez 2008). This notion is reinforced by the now hackneyed but useful framing of human beings as

illegals. Thus, the logical response to migrants' seemingly blatant transgressions of American law and order necessitates their increasingly brutal punishment and containment. Jon Pahl (2010:16) argues that "discourse and symbols are crucial forms of violence and the foundation on which other acts and practices are built."

CROSSING ARIZONA 2015

The second time Mari crossed into Arizona she was captured by Border Patrol within a few hours of crossing. Although Mari told the Border Patrol agent she was afraid to return to Guatemala, she did not say why. Mari was referred for an interview with an asylum officer.

In 2004 Border Patrol agents were given the authority to make the first determination of whether a person should be referred for a credible-fear interview with an asylum officer. Prior to that, only an asylum officer could decide. Now Border Patrol agents can order an "expedited removal" without further review. When the asylum seekers are placed in expedited removal, they are remanded to a detention facility to await deportation from the United States.

Critics of expedited removal have identified a range of due process and implementation concerns. Although the women have a right to appeal if they are deemed ineligible, most have no idea of their rights. Without an attorney they have no chance of obtaining asylum. They are sent back to meet their fate in Guatemala, where they are indebted and in fear of retaliation now that they have run.

The women who have lawyers for an asylum hearing are the lucky ones. With legal representation their chance of obtaining asylum grows exponentially. Without a lawyer the chances of asylum are less than 1 percent; with legal representation it climbs to around 20 percent. Yet lawyers who have worked with the refugees estimate that 88 percent of people who come through the detention centers for women and children meet basic criteria for asylum.

And like the migrant detention system as a whole, these women are commodified—and not only during their stay in detention. If they are allowed to leave detention, they must pay bonds that range from US\$5,000 to US\$20,000 for their temporary freedom.¹⁸ In some cases they must rent ankle bracelets, in addition to their legal fees. With each iteration

of their journey, they go further into debt. It may take years for their case to be adjudicated in an immigration hearing. They wait in limbo, not knowing what will happen to them next. Indeed, these women and their children are living what Sartre meant by “no exit.”

Mari entered a private for-profit detention center in Arizona in fall 2015. She was unable to meet the \$20,000 bond the judge imposed, declaring inexplicably that she was a flight risk. Her first hearing was to be held in June 2016, but due to an outbreak of measles the facility was placed on lockdown for six weeks. In the end it was the staff, not the inmates, who had not been adequately vaccinated. Mari's hearing was canceled and rescheduled for November 2016. That day, with the hearing under way, lightning struck the detention center, and the electrical grid shut down. Operating with only an emergency generator, the computers in the courtroom were not working. Hearing canceled. Mari's hearing was rescheduled for February 2017. Still the judge refused to lower her bond.

Finally, a full hearing took place in February, and within a month the judge had ruled favorably: Mari was granted asylum. More than two years after fleeing Guatemala—over a year of it in detention—Mari was free. Now she could turn to the long, arduous task of arranging for her son, now seven, to join her.

Mari's case is far from exceptional. What is exceptional about Mari's legal case is that she was granted asylum. Well over 90 percent of women and unaccompanied youth from Central America seeking asylum are denied their claims and deported, most without any legal representation.

CONCLUSION

In 2014 ICE and Corrections Corporation of America (now CoreCivic) signed a no-bid, four-year \$1 billion contract to provide family residential centers (detention centers) for Central American asylum seekers. Then Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson commented that the only way to cut down on the surge of migration is “by demonstrating that asylum seekers wouldn't receive leniency” (Harlan 2016). Secretary Johnson's statement is stunning in two aspects: first, as an utter dismissal of international law with regard to the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, and secondly, as a public official with a seeming moral indifference to the plight of others.

In the first instance, refugees like the “illegals” are a problem to be dealt with, a managerial problem to be solved efficiently and effectively through militarization and criminalization. Rendered disposable by an economic system that no longer needs them, although they are profitable as commodities, the violence directed against them is understood as necessary to reestablish order. By removing the migrants from sight, the state is let off the hook. There is no accountability for breaking one’s own laws.

Secondly, the moral indifference to the plight of other people is produced in American society through the language of difference—“illegals,” “outside of humanity,” “terrorist threats”—and historical amnesia. Through the denial of the humanity of others, we can justify the denial of even the most basic of human rights. Thus what is done to “them” is neither morally nor ethically relevant. They are dispossessed of what it means to be human—their dignity and their autonomy.

A lead editorial in the *New York Times* (July 4, 2016) rightly criticized the Obama administration’s policies that failed to recognize the rights of those seeking refuge from the Northern Triangle and called on President Obama and Homeland secretary Jeh Johnson to tackle the root causes of the problem by “pressing Central American governments to restore the rule of law, strengthen institutions, and build the economy.” Although at first glance this may seem like a reasoned response to seemingly intractable problems, the proposed solutions paper over a long history of U.S. dominance in the region that has gone a long way in facilitating the violent circumstances that circumscribe the lives of ordinary peoples today. In fact, rule-of-law rhetoric, promoted as the necessary backbone for democracy and free markets, has usefully masked ongoing plunder. A rule-of-law rhetoric has become a powerful tool of domination. U.S. foreign policy remains impervious to public accountability for the costs of its catastrophic failures in Guatemala and Central America even now as they are re-created anew at the U.S.-México border. Impunity is the crucial linchpin in keeping the systems of repression and exploitation afloat in both the United States and Guatemala.

The women may have thought that the violence and chaos that permeated their lives in Guatemala were place specific. But as they enter the quagmire of U.S. immigration and refugee politics, they begin to understand that the brutality is aimed directly at them. As we strip them of their humanity, concomitantly we lose our own.

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NOTES

The first version of this chapter was written in 2016 in the waning years of the Obama presidency. The motive for the chapter, at the time, was to critique the cruel, wholly unnecessary, and perhaps criminal immigration policies and practices that emerged most visibly after the 2014 surge of Central American women, their children, and youth seeking sanctuary from the violence in their home countries. These ongoing policies and practices have violated one of peoples' most basic human rights, the right to a dignified existence. Drawing on the insights of historical political economy, I trace the linkages of the current exodus of Mayan people to the brutal counterinsurgency war waged in the 1970s–1980s in which hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans, mostly unarmed civilians, were massacred by the security forces. This war was waged with sustained support—economic, military, and political—from the U.S. government even as there was clear evidence in real time of the substantial human rights violations.

Now in 2019 as this chapter goes to press, the Trump administration has intensified and extended the brutality with a vengeance with its current version of “zero tolerance.” The forcible separation of thousands of children from their parents by ICE shocked the nation. In effect many of these children have been “disappeared.” Yet without attention to the sordid history of U.S. intervention in Central America, our “shock” only reinforces a historical amnesia that is pervasive in U.S. mainstream society. As such, the United States is not held accountable for its ongoing crimes against the region's population.

This essay serves as a guidepost to index recent historical moments crucial to understanding the political-economic relationship between Guatemala and the United States. Violence in its myriad forms—physical, structural, political—suffuses the everyday lives of so many in both places. While it is easy to see these issues as isolated, albeit unfortunate, individual or even country-specific struggles, This essay punctuates how the cascading effects of violence and impunity are central in configuring for many Mayan people the U.S.-Guatemalan version of Sartre's *No Exit*.

The campaign of state terror in the rural highlands of Guatemala during the 1970 and 1980s was referred to in public discourse simply as *la violencia* (the violence) of *la situación* (the situation).

1. Both the Commission for Historical Clarification's report, *Guatemala: Memories of Silence*, and the Human Rights Office of the Guatemala Catholic Archdiocese report, *Guatemala: Nunca Mas*, found evidence that the Guatemalan military had committed crimes against humanity and genocide. General Efraim Rios Montt took power by coup in 1982 and presided over some of the worst massacres during his 18-month reign of terror. He was convicted of genocide in a Guatemalan court of law in 2013. Although his conviction was annulled by the Constitutional Court less than two weeks later, that verdict was based on a legal technicality.

2. Many did not even bother to apply. They have lived in the shadows for decades. Of those who did remain in limbo, some were still waiting for an asylum hearing 30 years later.

3. Notably, Guatemala has some of the highest rates of poverty and inequality especially among the indigenous population. It has the sixth highest rate of chronic malnutrition in the world, and the face of hunger in Guatemala is young, female, indigenous, and rural (World Food Program USA 2014).

4. The Northern Triangle consists of the countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras; all were sites of U.S. military interventions of various sorts—training, equipping, advising, funding—in the 1970s and 1980s and are now again under the banner of the war on drugs and the war on terror. The crossing of México is particularly dangerous for women; most experience some combination of sexual assault, rape, and extortion (see Vogt 2013, 2015).

5. Gerald Sider (2003, 2014) defines vulnerability as the increasing inability of (indigenous) peoples to completely secure their social reproduction utilizing their own social, cultural, and material resources.

6. The proximate cause was, in part, pressure exerted by the Dulles brothers on behalf of the United Fruit Company (UFCO).

7. The population of Guatemala in 1950 was three million. More than 80 percent of the population lived in rural areas.

8. In the decades after the coup, U.S.-backed initiatives in Guatemala funded the institutional framework for plunder; labor and tax codes, industrial and extractive regulations, agrarian policies, and changes to the penal system were revised to favor the ruling coalition of U.S. and domestic capital. The agro-export industries of coffee, sugar, and cotton were the backbone of sustained economic growth from the 1950s to 1980s. The profits generated from these endeavors, however, accrued to only a few. The mostly indigenous seasonal workers and their poor Ladino counterparts, who labored on these plantations under slavlike conditions, lived lives of increasing precarity. State-sponsored violence was the arbiter of this imposed social order.

9. Overkill is the mutilation of a woman's body after she is dead.

10. Out of a population of about eight million at the time.

11. Plots of land on which Mayas have traditionally grown their subsistence crops: a combination of rain-fed crops of corn, beans, and squash.

12. Loans to finance the growing of nontraditional crops for export to the United States were first introduced as a USAID strategy in the late 1970s in lieu of agrarian reform. Yet rather than alleviating land inequality, this strategy did little to address the situation, and even today Guatemala continues to have one of the most unequal land distributions in all of Latin America. Moreover, this neoliberal “comparative advantage” strategy undermined even the modicum of food security that subsistence crops of corn and beans provided. Free trade agreements, such as CAFTA passed in 2005, further undercut the domestic (local) market for these crops and has led to increasing precarity. With climate change, these rain-dependent crops now suffer the vagaries of droughts. By some estimates rural people’s subsistence production has declined by 75 percent over the past two decades. The main cause of stunted growth is lack of essential nutrients during the first thousand days of life—the period between conception and age two.

13. Civil patrols were created in 1982, and by 1985 constituted a rural militia of more than one million men, more than half of the highland male population over 15 years of age. Their primary purpose was to provide vigilance of and control over the local population. Although disbanded, they reemerged in some areas as Civil Defense Patrols. Some have been implicated in ongoing human rights abuses.

14. Deborah Levenson makes the important connection between gangs, the fall of social movements, and rise of neoliberal political economic policies.

15. Illicit activities include illegal drug transporting, cultivation of opium poppies and marijuana, human and antiquities trafficking, kidnapping, extortion, money laundering, arms smuggling, adoption, and eco-trafficking.

16. From January to June 2018, 18 human rights defenders were murdered in Guatemala. Thirteen of those killed were working to defend land and territories, and the majority of those murdered were indigenous members of peasant organizations.

17. Recent reporting shows an increase in human rights violations by Mexican military and law enforcement charged with enforcing Plan Merida.

18. Release from detention on bond has now been suspended by the Trump administration.

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“Como Me Duele”

Undocumented Central American Bodies in Motion

Jason De León

WELCOME TO THE PLEASURE PALACE

A disheveled group of Central Americans tries to not make eye contact with the road agents. They nervously pass them on their way toward the heavily fortified front door of the migrant shelter. Maynor is shirtless and profusely sweating.¹ This godforsaken humidity doesn't mix well with cocaine. He is perched on a plastic bucket and surrounded by garbage and abandoned construction debris. A wiry hand grips his cheap cell phone that is tethered to an illegal power outlet someone has jerry-rigged onto the side of an electrical pole. He gives the slow-moving group a hard stare while tinny horns and squeaking clarinets accompany Valentín Elizalde's *banda* declaration, “Como me duele” (How it hurts me). Maynor holds a bifurcated plastic soda jug against the cell phone's speaker to amplify the sound. “Como me duele.” Ana reclines on a weathered piece of cardboard under the shade of a nearby tree. She clutches her angelic three-year-old daughter Dulce and pretends to ignore the group. From the corner of her eye she tries to assess who is traveling alone, who looks gullible, who looks scared shitless. Marco scrambles toward the passing crowd to intercept a teenage *pareja* before they reach the door. “Oye papi,” he says to the young man in the couple, “go inside the shelter. The door is right there. They are going to serve lunch in a little bit.” The kid naïvely thanks him for the information. As they turn away, the smile on Marco's face turns to a grin. He gives Ana a quick knowing glance.

Chino is in too much pain to take stock of this newly arrived clutch of potential clients and victims. He winces as his running partner, Chimbo, drags an erratically functioning homemade tattoo gun across his left forearm. With drops of jet-black ink, intended for computer printers, Chimbo fills in the giant hand-scribbled outline of the word “Catracho.”

Honduran. *Hondureño. Compa.* The machine grinds into his brown flesh. The cell phone battery powering the gun keeps cutting out; a hard shake until it starts rattling again. The mechanical pencil casing that holds the tattoo needle, a guitar string someone found on the ground, starts to clog with blood. Chimbo wipes the needle's tip with two stained fingers and dips it into a capful of *caña*, the hangover in a bottle that everyone around here drinks when they can round up 20 pesos. "Como me duele. Como me duele."

Welcome to the "Pleasure Palace"—a 30-foot patch of dirt and gravel in front of a religious-run migrant shelter in southern México where people eat, sleep, kill time, kill each other, drink, do drugs, sell drugs, talk shit, and involve themselves in various activities associated with clandestine movement. *Aquí todos son Catrachos.* The crowd at the Pleasure Palace left their homes in Honduras, one of the most violent countries in the world, and now find themselves eking out a violent living in the working-class colonia of Pakal-Na, on the outskirts of Palenque, Chiapas. Palenque is where thousands flock annually to see the ancient Maya ruins of the same name. If you Google it, you are greeted with photos of impressive ancient pyramids surrounded by lush jungle. If you Google "Pakal-Na," which in Maya means "House of Pakal" (a reference to Palenque's most famous ruler), the first image to come up is a blood-covered corpse, the victim of a stabbing. Separated by only a few kilometers, the Pleasure Palace is several circles of hell removed from the world of camera-wielding tourists gawking at jade-rich tombs and stelae covered in ancient Maya glyphs. Recent shifts in migration patterns between Central America and the United States have turned this part of México into a popular route for those heading north. To get here from the Guatemala border, people will cling to the deadly freight trains known as La Bestia (The Beast), hitchhike, take combis (where they are overcharged by unscrupulous drivers), and occasionally walk the almost 300 kilometers. Pakal-Na is home to one of the few humanitarian shelters in the region and is hence a popular way station. The running joke is that it is now a distant colonia of Honduras.

If you asked them, Maynor, Ana, Chimbo, and Chino would tell you that they are migrants, and in many ways they fit this label. They have left their home country. They are undocumented in México. They are homeless (for the most part) and in a constant state of movement.

They are subject to abuses by Mexican immigration officials and locals. They are poor, vulnerable, and desperate. Their flesh bears the markings and bruises of the migration process. But while they are caught up in the undocumented migration stream, they are also fundamentally different from their paisanos entering the shelter today. The Pleasure Palace crew is part of a disorganized and precarious transnational criminal network that preys on border crossers and exists on the edge of life and death.

I argue three related points about these people I initially came to know in the summer of 2015. First, the tendency to focus on (and perpetuate) simplistic notions of who migrants are, and what they do en route, has limited our understanding of the complexity of this social process. Second, embodied approaches to undocumented migration have largely ignored those who are involved in everyday violent activities that make for less than sympathetic character sketches. Finally, I posit that a focus on the bodies of those caught up in migrant extortion, assault, and smuggling can tell us much about how border enforcement and clandestine movement are physically experienced. It can also shed light on the ways that the body is utilized as a tool of survival and how it functions as a site of accumulation of unique forms of capital that are used during the migration process.

PLAN FRONTERA SUR

In the summer of 2014, a tidal wave of migrants from Central America, most of them unaccompanied minors from Honduras, crashed at the U.S.-México border. A July 2015 report written by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2015:x) noted: "The recent [Central American] migration increase was likely triggered, according to U.S. officials, by several emergent factors such as the increased presence and sophistication of human smugglers (known as coyotes) and confusion over U.S. immigration policy. Officials also noted that certain persistent conditions such as violence and poverty have worsened in certain countries."

Decades of political instability and neoliberal economic reforms, along with the crime and inequality that spawn from both, have long made the Northern Triangle of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador an important source for America's undocumented labor pool (e.g., García

2006; Pine 2008). It is only recently, though, that *centroamericanos* have come to rival Mexicans in terms of who the U.S. Border Patrol most commonly arrests along the southern geopolitical boundary (U.S. CBP 2017). The spike in Central American migration in 2014 was by no means surprising given the current murder and poverty rates in the region (Martínez 2016). What was shocking to most were the images of scrawny brown children being arrested by the Border Patrol and then stuffed into overcrowded detention cells. For a brief moment in time the phrase “humanitarian crisis” was used to describe America’s decades-old and often hidden undocumented migration problem. However, just as quickly as this “crisis” appeared in south Texas and on the front page of the *New York Times*, it vanished from sight.

Under political pressure from the U.S. federal government (coupled with its economic support), the Mexican government began to step up its own immigration enforcement to stop the forward progress of Central American migrants through its country. On July 7, 2014, México unleashed Plan Frontera Sur, a nationwide program whose stated objectives were to bring order to the clandestine movement of Northern Triangle migrants entering the country and to ensure the protection of this population’s human rights while in transit (Boggs 2015). This resulted in the tremendous growth of government activity focused on stopping migrants. Ironically, México now arrests and deports more Central Americans than the United States (Speck 2016).² In southern Chiapas alone, there are dozens of temporary immigration inspection points, along with an industrial-sized permanent checkpoint and detention facility in the town of Catazajá. Southern México is starting to look a lot like southern Arizona’s immigration enforcement archipelago. More troubling, Plan Frontera Sur has been accompanied by a sharp rise in reports of abuse at the hands of local, state, and federal officials, as well as by savvy criminal organizations seeking to profit from this shift in migration patterns.

In the summer of 2015, two dozen researchers associated with the Undocumented Migration Project spent six weeks conducting fieldwork in a range of locations in Palenque, Pakal-Na, and the nearby town of Tenosique.³ We interviewed hundreds of Central American migrants who were en route and recorded a mix of ethnographic and archaeological data from humanitarian shelters, the train tracks that pass through Pakal-Na, and other locations that border crossers frequent. Researchers

also interviewed local community members and state and federal agents about the impacts of Central American migration on the region. This included talking to vendors who sell goods and services to migrants (e.g., cheap hotel rooms and food) and employees of agencies charged with assisting those in transit. I spent the bulk of my six weeks of fieldwork hanging out in the Pleasure Palace and on the nearby train tracks with the eclectic mix of Central Americans who could not enter the shelter either because they had overstayed their welcome or were involved in various activities that included alcohol and drug consumption, human smuggling, human trafficking, drug dealing, robbery, and extortion. My goal was to understand how these individuals fit into the Plan Frontera Sur world and what their day-to-day experiences could tell us about aspects of clandestine migration that are typically ignored or avoided in academic discourse.

“COMO ME DUELE”

Two intellectual frameworks have largely shaped how social scientists view the undocumented migrant body in recent years: *migration-specific habitus* and the *critical phenomenology of illegality*. The first builds on the work of Audrey Singer and Doug Massey, who in 1998 outlined a predictive model for border crossing that they characterized as a “well-defined social process whereby migrants draw upon various sources of human and social capital to overcome barriers erected by U.S. authorities” (1998:562). They argue that things such as age, physical strength, prior crossing experience, access to cash, and other factors determined a person’s ability to sneak past *la migra* at the U.S.-México border. The more human and social capital you have, the more likely you will be successful during a border crossing. Sociologist David Spener later added to this model (and built on the work of Bourdieu [1977]) by arguing that a crucial component of the crossing experience was the development of a migration-specific habitus or a disposition for high levels of pain and suffering that generally accompany this process. Spener argues that the ability to tolerate the brutal conditions that characterize a border crossing is partly shaped by the often impoverished lives that migrants are fleeing. If you grow up in a world where hunger, pain, and violence are the norm, you are likely better equipped to handle these phenomena while migrating clandestinely (e.g., see Chavez 1998; De León 2013).

In a related approach, Nicholas De Genova (2002), Sarah Willen (2007), and others (e.g., Talavera et al. 2010) have focused attention on how notions of “illegality” shape people’s way of “being-in-the-world” (Willen 2007:838). These scholars highlight how the unstable and unprotected status of undocumented people is a source of great anxiety that impacts how they go about their daily lives. The looming specter of the state and its potential to deport people at a moment’s notice means that immigrants (and their families) are always looking over their shoulder and making daily adjustments to avoid unnecessary encounters with law enforcement. This process of hyper-vigilance both constrains how people exist in the world and is the source of psychological and physical stress (Boehm 2012, 2016; De Genova 2002). This “critical phenomenological approach” has brought much-needed ethnographic attention to the everyday lives of undocumented people. Combined, these two frameworks demonstrate how the physical processes of clandestine movement and relocation impact people’s bodies in violent ways both while in motion and once settled in new countries. Migrants might be predisposed to dealing with difficult social environments because of their upbringing, but their precarious juridical status in receiving and transit countries means that their pain and suffering doesn’t end once they cross an international boundary.

A focus on the physical/embodied nature of migration has provided new insight into what is involved in the clandestine movement (e.g., see Köhn 2016). However, these frameworks when applied to North American migration have tended to overgeneralize about the process in several key ways. First, the discussion of “undocumented” Latino migration typically focuses on Mexicans to the exclusion of people coming from farther south (see Coutin 2005 and Vogt 2013 for some exceptions). Although in previous decades Mexicans made up as much as 98 percent of those apprehended by U.S. immigration officials (e.g., in 2000), the recent spike in outmigration from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala (non-Mexicans represented 44 percent of apprehensions in 2015) suggests that more attention needs to be paid to these changing demographics.⁴ More importantly, it has long been understood that migrants from Central and South America face more obstacles than Mexicans and have significantly different types of experiences (e.g., Pribilsky 2007). This population must cross numerous countries before getting to the



Figure 3.1 Pakal-Na, Chiapas, México, June 2015 (Fuji XT-1, photograph by author).

U.S.-México border. As a result, they have developed their own unique migration-specific habitus that is often shaped by having to deal with corrupt Mexican government officials, transnational gangs that rob, kidnap, and extort migrants, and the American Border Patrol, whom they must convince that they are Mexican nationals (see discussion in De León et al. 2015). Many ride *La Bestia*, the Mexican cargo trains that are equal parts free transportation and potential human meat grinder (Martínez 2013). The viciousness of the crossing experience for Mexicans generally starts at the political boundary with the United States, but the Central American gauntlet can span thousands of kilometers and multiple borders.⁵ Migration-specific habitus is thus diverse and inextricably connected to nationality and geography.

A second issue that is often overlooked in the discussions of both the habitus and phenomenological experiences of border crossers (Mexican and non-Mexican) is the tendency to focus on those who fit the traditional mold of “economic” migrant. By this I mean people who are viewed as industrious, hardworking, and worthy of empathy. A great deal of the literature on undocumented migration focuses on people who embody

(or seemingly embody) the idea that border crossers are generally good people whose circumstances have forced them into difficult and pitiable situations. These caricatures of a noble migrant type are visible both in the language used to describe people and the general framing of border crossers as the often passive victims of structural violence (Nevins 2005; Vogt 2013). Spener expresses this value judgment when he writes, “Migrants learn to expect and then bear bad conditions as a matter of course in their lives, including as they make heroic efforts to improve their condition by heading north” (2009:227).

Few attempts have been made to shine a light on the everyday crime and violence that people engage in when they find themselves caught up in the social process of undocumented migration (see Slack and Whiteford 2011 for a rare exception). The tendency is to paint the world of clandestine movement in black and white, with the protagonists (i.e., economic migrants) doing battle with various evildoers (e.g., smugglers, gangs, Border Patrol). We have yet to use ethnography to understand the gray realities that characterize border crossings in Latin America. This is partly because much of the research on this topic has emphasized what happens within the relatively “safe” confines of humanitarian shelters (see discussion of this methodological issue in De León 2015:313n30), while outside these bounded spaces remains *terra incognita*. Here I draw on recent work focused on the “local ethics” that shape how interpersonal violence is used in relationship to historically contingent political economies (Karandinos et al. 2014). In what follows, I explore what the lives of Central American migrants who are trying to “improve their conditions” via efforts that would never be characterized as “heroic” can tell us about the complicated, dynamic, and brutal moral economy (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Levi 1989) of undocumented movement. I also seek to understand how bodies impacted by the migration process can become productive sources of contextually dependent biosocial capital (Miah 2013). In simple terms, How is the migrant body simultaneously a resource and a liability?

RACIALIZED BODIES

“Hey Chino,” I ask, “how you gonna pass for Mexican if you have that ‘Catracho’ tattoo on your arm?” He laughs and then makes a measuring



Figure 3.2 Catracho. Pakal-Na, Chiapas (Fuji XT-1, photograph by author).

motion with his thumb and forefinger. “Well, everyone knows, especially the ladies, that Hondureños have a little bit extra compared to Mexicans. You know what I mean? This way, the ladies know what to expect. This way the *paisas* know I’m one of them.” This extreme form of nationalism is largely unneeded in Pakal-Na. Everyone knows you can pick a Honduran out of a crowd of southern Mexicans. They tend to wear the fashion of Central American urbanness that starkly contrasts with Chiapan ruralness. Men may have regional hairstyles, which you can get touched up at the local Pakal-Na Honduran barbershop. Catrachos are also phenotypically distinct from local Mexicans. They may be taller and more fair skinned than Chiapans, who have a high degree of indigenous ancestry. Or they may be significantly darker because of the higher rate of African admixture in Honduras. For those that “look Mexican,” they still may struggle to hide their accents and avoid using Honduran slang, which is quite distinct from the regional Spanish spoken in Chiapas. “¡Aha vos! ¿Que pedo mai?” Adding to this situation is the simple fact that those hopping off the train or staggering into town are usually scrawny from malnourishment, physically exhausted, bruised, and covered in either machine grease or jungle grime. Like the dust-covered

and dehydrated migrants who emerge from the bowels of the Sonoran Desert of Arizona (De León et al. 2015), Central Americans wear their experiences on their sleeves.

Unfortunately for Hondurans and other non-Mexicans, there is often very little local compassion for those landing in Pakal-Na from south of the border. Taxi and bus drivers, store vendors, and restaurant owners racially profile newly arrived migrants and are quick to overcharge this easily identifiable population. The implementation of Plan Frontera Sur has led to an increase in harassment of migrants by local police and daily arrests and deportations by federal immigration officials. Newcomers are always looking over their shoulders. Because of their inability to blend in, the movements of Central Americans are largely restricted to the train tracks and the neighborhood around the migrant shelter where people can run and hide in the surrounding jungle. Only the most brazen (or uninformed) venture out onto the streets of Pakal-Na, where they risk being profiled and arrested. Even fewer set foot in the nearby tourist town of Palenque.

Ana, whose job it is to size up newly arrived migrants in hopes of finding people to kidnap or swindle, would often complain to me that she was unfairly discriminated against by locals because of what she called her “Honduran appearance.” Ana rented a room nearby, and was always able to shower and wash her clothes. She did not fit the stereotype of a haggard-looking border crosser. Her identification as a Honduran was largely because of her daily association with arriving migrants and her tendency to affiliate closely with Honduran gang members on the tracks who spent much of the day in a thick cloud of marijuana smoke. When necessary to attract clients or sympathy, Ana would exaggerate her accent and loudly complain that she and her daughter were living the impoverished lives of migrants and thus worthy of pity and economic help. This declaration would often happen when Mexican and foreign humanitarian aid workers walked by Ana when she was in front of the shelter. She would play up her “dire” circumstances by lying on the ground and complaining about some untreated medical condition or illness. Her living situation, clean attire, and the income generated by her hustle (and that of her drug-dealing boyfriend) enabled Ana to move freely through Pakal-Na with little worry. She displayed her “Honduraness” when it was advantageous to do so and downplayed it when she needed to blend

in with locals. Similar to what Chaney’s (2012) study of newly arrived Honduran Garifuna in New Orleans finds, the identities that people like Ana accentuate or downplay in Pakal-Na has much to do with whom they encounter and where.

Although many of those we interviewed commented that brutal immigration raids occurred primarily at night while they were sleeping in the woods near the tracks or on the dirt in front of the shelter, we observed two raids that occurred in broad daylight. In one instance, police were seen beating migrants who had been dragged off a stopped train. In another case, immigration vans attempted to enter the neighborhood where the shelter is located. Dozens of migrants scrambled to get away, while members of the Pleasure Palace armed themselves with rocks and charged after the vehicles. Chino stood in the middle of the unpaved road and screamed at law enforcement to come get him. He raised his arms high in the air so that everyone could see his new “Catracho” tattoo.

Chino left Honduras when he was 17. He was the wildest of many children being raised by a single mother and figured he was more help to everyone if he was out of the house. He spent much of his teen years getting into trouble on the streets of San Pedro Sula and later riding the rails across México. He has just recently reached his twentieth birthday. We are sitting on a rickety bench next to the train tracks when he starts talking about the cyclical and seemingly endless journey he has been on:

Chino: I’ve ridden the train a lot. Coming and going. Coming and going. If they catch you, they send you back to Honduras. You learn and go around that place the next time.

Jason: How many times have you tried to cross [the U.S.-México border]?

Chino: Man, like five times. . . . Once I got across and was hiding in a tree in Laredo, Texas. It was incredible. I climbed up and put some wood up in the tree to lay on. I had my bottle of water and my backpack tied up there. I had my cigarettes and my lighter and I was in my little house. I slept up there at night. I was sleeping in that fucking tree for eight days [laughing]. Seriously. Immigration would come through but they couldn’t find me. They didn’t see me. Chino was up there [laughing]! . . .

They caught me at a 7-11 when I was coming out of the store. . . . I was [in Texas] for like a month but the problem is you get across the border and then what? Where you going to go? On the street. That's where.

After failing to join America's undocumented labor force, Chino (like his partner Chimbo) fell into working the train tracks as a soldier and guide for MS-13, the transnational gang that largely controls Central American migration across México. He had developed the necessary skills for this type of work during his involvement in various gang and criminal activities in Honduras. He became disillusioned with the violence he was surrounded by in his home country and the abject poverty his family was living in. He explained to me why he left: "I could go back to Honduras if I wanted to, but I would have to kill people. I could go back and I would have women, cash, and drugs, but I would have to kill people whenever they told me to. I don't want to live like that anymore." Although he was fed up with his lifestyle in Honduras, Chino found that his ability to mobilize violence served him well on the tracks, where he is respected and feared by both his comrades and the many migrants he comes into contact with daily. As a gang enforcer and guide, he must do a balancing act between being scary and charismatic. Charisma helps him attract possible clients. His ability to intimidate and deliver blows functions to protect the gang's various interests in Pakal-Na and while en route.

One of the racial stereotypes that Mexicans have about Hondurans is that they are violent and not to be trusted (e.g., see De León 2015:122–124). Chino and the crew play up these stereotypes, and it is generally understood by local residents that they are *malandros* who should be given a wide berth. Unlike new arrivals, who may try to downplay or hide their nationality for fear of being profiled and arrested (e.g., see Coutin 2005), Chino and company wear their *Catracho* identity like a badge of honor. Their overt expressions of national identity and racial difference (sometimes hypersexualized) help them to connect with migrants needing guides while instilling fear in Mexicans. For example, smugglers would often party on the train tracks, which was also the backyard of various houses in Pakal-Na. Families would be eating dinner on their patios within earshot and inhalation range of the reggaeton and enormous

clouds of weed smoke that followed the Pleasure Palace crew. It was obvious that residents did not approve of these *pachangas* in such close proximity to their living quarters, but few ever complained. Most were too afraid to confront the sketchy-looking group of Honduran smugglers.

Perpetuating a Catracho identity in Pakal-Na is a defense mechanism but also serves as a point of pride. This group of displaced people caught up in the smuggling business can't seem to get to the United States themselves, nor can they realistically return to their home country. Many of them struggle to hide their identity (especially their accents), and most have been repeatedly arrested and deported by Mexican and American immigration authorities. This inability to pass for Mexican can be frustrating, and some opt to hyper-identify with their nationality (see Chaney 2012) as a form of resistance (Scott 1985). In contrast to migrants who are running scared and trying to avoid detection, Chino sees his racialized body as a source of cultural capital and pride on the tracks.

BATTERED BODIES

Those who reach Pakal-Na often show the physical wear and tear that one would expect of a population that leaps on and off moving freight trains, hikes dozens of kilometers through dense jungle in cheap sneakers, and has periodic encounters with bandits and corrupt law enforcement. Exhaustion, dehydration, malnourishment, and blistered feet are the norm. In June 2015 I listened in while federal agents lectured migrants on the importance of filing formal complaints with the police if they have been abused while traveling. A young Honduran man quipped, "What if it was the police who robbed you?" The room erupted in a combination of laughter and verbal confirmation that *la policía* are not to be trusted. The two officials who gave this lecture would later be fingered by several people as the men who kidnapped them and tried to extort money from their families.

As Mexican law enforcement cracks down on migrants, the corporeal traces of Plan Frontera Sur are becoming more visible. There is the young Garifuna kid sporting two broken ankles being pushed around the shelter in a wheelchair; he was injured when he jumped off a train while trying to escape a raid. His traveling companion's skull is wrapped in gauze after almost losing an eye during the raid when he ran into the woods and took

a tree branch to the face. Ask these migrants about Mexican immigration and they will show you an empty wallet and bruises. Some will reveal sets of small burn marks on various parts of their bodies, evidence that the stun gun is now the shiny new weapon of choice for Mexican border patrol who want to subdue uncooperative *Catrachos*. Those who come through Pakal-Na (“economic” migrants and migrants turned hustlers) often bear similar markings on their bodies. Because people like Chimbo and Chino are going through the same experiences as those they are guiding through México, they, too, look spent and road weary. What sets the Pleasure Palace crew apart, though, is that they have various ailments, wounds, and markings that reflect activities beyond train hopping and running from the police.

With a scar-riddled hand, Chimbo runs a lighter across the plastic wrapping on the barrel of his tattoo gun. The flame softens the scotch-tape that holds the contraption together, which allows him to adjust the battery connection to increase electricity flow. He is a migrant bricoleur (Lévi-Strauss 1966). “Your ability to fix things with whatever you find laying around is pretty impressive,” I tell him. “Well, they call me Chimbo because I’m really good at making guns out of pipes [called ‘chimbas’ on the street]. You just need a couple of pipes, a nail, and a cartridge. I can make you whatever you want. I can even make a revolver version. When I was in jail in Honduras I learned how to make *these* machines,” he says, referring to the tattoo gun.

All morning I have watched him work on different clients with the same needle. He is currently tattooing Buki, who has just arrived and has requested his girlfriend’s name on his left forearm. Carlos, Buki’s partner, sits quietly and watches. I can’t help but stare at Carlos, who has a deep purple bruise around his eye and the bloodiest eyeball I have ever seen. It looks like someone hit him in the face with a pipe. No one bothers to ask what happened, and he doesn’t volunteer any information. Two people will later point him and Buki out as the men whom they fought off after they tried to kidnap them while walking on the train tracks. Later that same day, Chimbo shows off a series of thin, evenly spaced marks cut in parallel lines on both of his forearms. They look purposeful and meticulous. Hash marks to keep score in some vicious game. “I was kidnapped by the cartels on the northern border. They locked me in a room and tortured me with a knife. They tried to get me to call my family



Figure 3.3 Pleasure Palace, July 2015 (Fuji XT-1, photograph by author).

to ask for money, but I had no one to call. I finally escaped.” For someone now involved in robbery, extortion, and smuggling, this experience is on-the-job-training, a lesson in suffering and the practice of extracting information (Scarry 1985). Chimbo’s kidnapping left a physical mark on his body that functions as both a macabre memento for him and a clear signal to others that he is no stranger to pain. Hyperactive Chino is busy admiring the new ink he has recently acquired. In addition to “Catracho,” he has a Batman logo on his calf and some initials of family members on his left hand that are starting to scab over. His right arm is a catastrophe of twisted flesh populated by giant centipede scars. These markings are the result of a near fatal attack in Honduras when two assailants mistook him for someone else and ambushed him with machetes. Because of this injury, several fingers on his right hand incessantly twitch. It is impossible for him to hold still long enough to tattoo that arm, and besides, there is very little unblemished real estate for an artist to work with. On numerous occasions Chino has told me and anyone within earshot that he killed his attackers in self-defense. Everyone usually nods in solemn approval. Justifiable homicide is not difficult to sell in this particular milieu. This boasting functions as a verbal message to all that he can get

crazy when he needs to, which is probably not necessary. His scars are so intense and obviously machete derived that they speak for themselves. They are intimidating and impossible to ignore. Newly arriving migrants quickly take note of this disfigurement and either avoid him or speak to this young man with great deference.

In the context of clandestine movement, these markings of brutality are a source of what Andrew Miah calls *biocultural capital*, or modifications to the body that people can exploit to “more adequately pursue their life goals” (2013:296). Unlike the people Miah discusses in his development of this concept—those who willingly undertake corporeal modifications (e.g., cosmetic surgery)—Chimbo did not choose to be tortured and Chino did not elect to have his body mutilated. However, after surviving these moments of trauma, both men were able to convert their wounds (i.e., biological modifications) into biocultural capital on the train tracks. Survival for smugglers and hustlers in a place like Pakal-Na is often based on the ability to intimidate and quickly engage in physical attacks. Having a scarred body is thus a productive enhancement in this specific context (Miah 2013:300) that marks the Pleasure Palace crew as unique players in the crowd of those who come and go daily through Pakal-Na. Their bodies symbolize their elevated status as either the people to steer clear of or the ones to seek out for protection from others who wish to do you harm. This also illustrates how context and a person’s social role in the migration process influence the (re)constructions of the body into various forms of capital.

SEXUALIZED BODIES

One of the least researched elements of the migration process is the rampant sexual assault that people, primarily women, experience while en route. While some have attempted to document the high levels of rape (Falcon 2001; Ruiz 2009), this troubling phenomenon is still poorly understood and often clouded in problematic rhetoric. Those seeking to raise awareness about this issue frequently fall into the trap of perpetuating gendered and racist stereotypes about the perceived vulnerability of women and the aggressive and base nature of Latino men (see discussion in Gokee and De León 2014:156). This is compounded by the fact that women migrants are often viewed through the hypersexualizing male

gaze. For example, American men falling in love with or raping a Latina migrant are two pervasive tropes in popular culture production. Bruce Springsteen's song "The Line" tells the story of a white Border Patrol agent who arrests a Mexican female border crosser and then becomes enamored with her. Springsteen's protagonist eventually leaves his job after unintentionally helping this woman (who seduces him) to cross drugs into the United States. The porn website www.borderpatrolsex.com produces videos that show actors dressed as federal agents arresting female migrants and then raping them in the woods. The numerous reports of sexual assault at the hands of federal agents (Falcon 2001; Lee 2015) indicate that the pop culture male fantasy of raping an undocumented woman is based on a brutal reality. It is largely accepted that female migrants are subjected to physical harassment and sexual assault at high levels (Ruiz Marrujo estimates 80–90 percent). Still, more data are needed to understand both how these phenomena articulate with the overall social process of undocumented migration and how migrant women (of differing nationalities) specifically navigate issues surrounding their bodies, sex, and sexual assault. Although the bulk of the smugglers and train track hustlers I interviewed in 2015 were men, some of our conversations shed light on issues of sex, sexual violence, and the experience of women.

"Those guys aren't *migrantes*. They're guides. They move people. Chino and Chimbo can't do nothing until El Ciego [the Blind Man] gets here. He tells them what to do. He brings the groups up from the south that they will have to move. Those guys move a lot of people." Marco and I are standing on the train tracks when he makes this declaration. He says it to me as if he has just revealed one of the great mysteries of the universe. Of course, Chino and Chimbo are smugglers. They have both made this clear on numerous occasions, although they have always tried to soften the nature of their occupations as if to save face or protect me from getting a full view of their worlds. Both of them often accentuated the good parts of their jobs (i.e., they were helping people by providing a service) while avoiding discussions of the swindling and rape that border crossers, the Border Patrol, and the media often associate with coyotes. On a few occasions, however, Chino did hint at the sexual violence that pervades the world of smuggling. Once when he was using an abandoned train car to show me the proper way to jump on and off, he offhandedly remarked: "Sometimes women are traveling by themselves and they want

protection. Someone might say to them, 'I will take you and protect you, but you have to do whatever I want, whenever I want.' Do you understand what I am saying?" He says this last line to me while grinning ear to ear. Chino doesn't want to say out loud that he is the "someone" who offers women "protection" for sex, but he makes it clear that this is part of his job and he derives pleasure from it. This is one way for people to pay him for his services.

I finally meet El Ciego at the end of our summer field season when Chimbo takes me to the outskirts of town, almost a kilometer away from the Pleasure Palace. El Ciego stands tall and imposing in the middle of the tracks. He is in the midst of rolling an enormous blunt when I walk up on him and the group of women he is traveling with. Chimbo introduces him: "Jason, this is my friend who I met on the train tracks. I am going to help him and his wife move farther north." It is unclear which of the young girls in the group is supposed to be El Ciego's wife. Chimbo tells me this bullshit as if protecting me from something. I am introduced as the *investigador* who is writing about Honduran migrants. El Ciego immediately warms up to me, probably because he knows I am harmless and am likely to pitch in for food if asked. He lights his blunt and starts telling stories about his own migration experiences and how hard it is to be on the train tracks. This wide-grinning man is funny and disarming. At 32 years old, he is a respected elder in this world. His laughter and friendly gestures cut through the swirl of dense marijuana smoke and the bright Chiapan sun. He passes his blunt to his cronies and chats as if we are sitting on some jungle veranda enjoying a summer day. As we talk, everyone in the crew quietly gets his approval before they do anything. Most just listen to him tell stories. It's like being in the company of a brown-skinned, tattooed Colonel Kurtz—equal parts magnetism and terror.

The women in the group all look exhausted. One is a teenager pushing the six-month mark of pregnancy. With indifference they watch the men smoke marijuana and talk shit to each other. The pregnant woman says she wants to take a nap, but there is nowhere to lie down on the tracks. Her friend tries to cheer her up with a bottle of soda and some chips. Chino waves me over and introduces me to Larissa. She shakes my hand and smiles. Chino giggles and puts his arm around her. She hugs him back. The blunt makes its way to Larissa, who steps up and takes an

enormous hit. She French inhales. The powdery smoke billows from her mouth as she smirks at all the men.

The odd demographic makeup of this group, six young women and three tattooed and scarred gangbangers, means that they can't go into the migrant shelter and have to stay out of sight or risk arrest for smuggling and potentially trafficking. Everyone seems to be willingly with El Ciego, Chino, and Chimbo, but the circumstances of their traveling arrangements are vague. "How do you know Chino?" I ask Larissa. "We met on the tracks when I was walking. I was alone after my friends got arrested by immigration," she tells me. It is clear that she and Chino are now a couple, at least for the time being. It is common for women traveling alone or those separated from their companions to team up with men, who may be migrants heading north without a guide or someone like Chino who is involved in smuggling. These men offer "protection" with the understanding that there is the potential for engaging in a sexual relationship. Larissa will later comment that she started traveling with Chino because he sweet-talked her and she subsequently fell in love with him. "I wasn't really thinking that much about it," she told me a year later back in Honduras. "I just thought he was good looking and that it would be fun to go with him north. . . . I know I should have been more scared, but I wasn't. I don't know why. I wasn't scared at all. It was more like an adventure." Their relationship was largely based on mutual attraction and not Larissa's perception that Chino was a resource to be exploited or that she felt particularly vulnerable on the migrant trail.

In general, sex (of all different forms) is a common occurrence on the train tracks at night. This was confirmed by both migrants and the numerous used condoms we came across during archaeological surveys. Under the cover of darkness, migrants may engage in consensual and transactional sex (Cole 2004) with other migrants or local citizens. Participation in the informal sexual economy on the migrant trail is a way for people to make a little extra cash in order to continue their journey north. Chino remarked that Mexican men in Pakal-Na were known to pay male migrants for sex, especially Hondurans who (according to him) were known to be better endowed. He also hinted on numerous occasions (to me and Larissa) that he may have sold his own body to men when he needed the money. In addition to these forms of sex, rape and the threat of rape is a constant concern for women, especially at night on the

tracks. Many spoke of only traveling in groups after sunset and avoiding poorly lit areas of Pakal-Na. Because of their undocumented status and the difficulty of filing a formal complaint against a Mexican assailant, Central American women are often targeted by rapists on the migrant trail (see Martínez 2013).

While the female migrant body is a hypersexualized target in both popular discourse and during the migration process, little attention has been paid to how women themselves may use sex and their bodies as a form of capital. In her honor's thesis, University of Michigan undergraduate student Anna Forringer-Beal (2016) documents how female migrants at a shelter in Tenosique commented that they often used makeup and particular types of clothes to "emphasize femininity and intentionally use gender-based stereotypes to illicit sympathy from *combi* drivers or officials who can provide goods or safety." These women played with "traditional gender roles, ones in which women were cast as vulnerable and men their saviors." Forringer-Beal cautions against researchers painting migrating women as vulnerable subjects with no agency. Her preliminary work suggests that in the context of migration, exploiting various forms of one's gender, sexuality, and body for protection and economic support are common practices that defy simple moral critique and require more in-depth ethnographic inquiry.

In this particular instance, it is difficult to know whether the women in El Ciego's group are being smuggled or trafficked (see discussion of this type of ambiguity in Brennan 2014). Larissa would later confirm that she was simply in love with Chino, which is why she joined him and his companions. According to her, though, other women in the group had been coerced with false promises by El Ciego, who was likely going to hand them all off to kidnappers farther up the train tracks. He had apparently even tried to broker a deal with the pregnant girl whereby she would give him the baby in payment for passage across the U.S.-México border. In the end, rather than continuing north, Larissa and Chino decided to break off from the group and stay in Pakal-Na.

A few days later Chimbo and I were sitting on the dirt in the Pleasure Palace while El Ciego and the women were still hiding on the tracks. Larissa and Chino were renting a room nearby. Chimbo had his backpack with him and started organizing his clothes and his tattoo equipment. He pulled out a small blue Bible and started reading. "What are you doing?" I ask. "I always read the Bible before I leave. My favorite is the Book of

Revelations. I read it for luck and for strength so that nothing happens to me." After a few minutes of staring at a page, he got up and walked off. The next time I heard from him was when he sent me a Facebook message to let me know he made it to the northern Mexican border town of Piedras Negras. He offered no news about the women he was traveling with.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have proposed some different ways of thinking about the bodies of those involved in human smuggling and migration-related crime. Much has been written about the physical abuse that border crossers experience en route. These analyses, however, have tended to generalize about this population, often painting this social process as simple working-class struggles against the various actors who seek to slow (or profit from) their movement. By focusing on the bodies of individuals such as Chino, Chimbo, and Ana, I seek to complicate our understanding of what constitutes a migrant and undermine the generalizations about a "migration-specific habitus." The bodies of migrants are not monolithic or static. People differentially experience racism, sexism, pain, suffering, and abuse while en route. Context and social roles subsequently determine how individuals conceptualize and use these physical experiences.

By dividing the migrant body into the categories of race, trauma, and sex in this chapter, I have seemingly avoided a discussion of the intersectionality of the diverse components that make up a person's identity. My goal has not been to avoid dealing with this interplay, but rather to temporarily parse out some of the key bodily attributes that people must constantly negotiate. Future analyses of the corporeality of the undocumented migration experience will have to address the complex and dialectical nature of one's overlapping identities and how those identities shape the roles that the body plays in different moments. Furthermore, additional attention is needed to understand how the migrant body feels the brunt of various structural forces while simultaneously being an evolving site for the accumulation of human, social, and biocultural capital. The bodies that I have described here speak to aspects of the morally and socially complex world of migration that are often overlooked or easily judged. Clandestine migration is not as cut and dried as some would have us believe. Rather than focusing exclusively on those who fit

the sympathetic mold of “economic migrant,” we need to spend more time understanding the other players who shape this process (e.g., smugglers who are undocumented). A close-up look at the “violated bodies” (Karandinos et al. 2014:3) of smugglers and those they seek to exploit tells us much about localized ethics and elucidates the production of biosocial capital in the dynamic “gray zone” (Levi 1989) of the train tracks.

In 2008, anthropologist Jon Wolseth wrote, “In escaping to the United States, the supposed land of opportunity for these young [Honduran] men . . . [they] would also escape their imminent deaths, the physical death of murder or the social death of not being able to make something of themselves” (2008:328). In the eight years since this publication, the rates of murder and out-migration from Honduras have skyrocketed. Estimates by the United Nations in 2012 calculated murder rates at 90.4 per 100,000. In 2014, the British news agency the *Telegraph* reported a rate as high as 169 per 100,000. Although the reliability of these statistics is debatable, there is no question that Honduras is a dangerous place, especially for young males. I do not highlight these statistics to further the naïve assessment that countries like Honduras are dangerous places that breed dangerous migrants. Instead, we cannot begin to understand the violent and morally complicated world of Central American migration without recognizing that the governmental instability and economic turmoil in sending countries has shaped people’s difficult lives and encouraged them to migrate. These “push factors” are directly linked to decades of American interventionist political and economic meddling coupled with the impacts of America’s insatiable appetite for imported drugs and the ongoing massive deportation of Central American gang members (who honed their skills on U.S. soil) back to the Northern Triangle. There are many global structural forces at play in Honduras and on the train tracks of Pakal-Na that have left people like Chino, Ana, and Chimbo with few chances or options. If we look behind the curtain to see the linkage between American foreign and domestic policies (including the outsourcing of southern border enforcement to México) and the lives of Central Americans, it becomes difficult for anyone (especially U.S. citizens) to judge these migrants on the basis of simplistic notions of “good” and “bad.” When we focus on what life is like on the migrant trail, we see that the categories of “economic migrant” and “criminal smuggler” become blurry and lose some analytical power.

NOTES

1. All names are pseudonyms.
2. The *Guardian* reported that México apprehended 190,366 migrants in 2015, a 120 percent increase compared to government statistics from 2013 and more apprehensions than what Border Patrol reported for non-Mexican migrants in the same year along the U.S.-México border. In 2015, México also deported 155,418 people, almost doubling the 80,902 deportations recorded in 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/feb/12/human-rights-group-sue-immigration-mexico>.
3. The Undocumented Migration Project is a long-term anthropological study of clandestine migration that I have directed since 2009. The group that worked in Pakal-Na in 2015 consisted of a mix of senior scholars and undergraduate and graduate students who were associated with a semiannual field school that is organized through the Institute for Field Research (see www.ifrglobal.org).
4. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/media-resources/stats>.
5. This is not always true. Many impoverished (often indigenous) Mexican migrants ride La Bestia and are sometimes subject to the same abuses as non-Mexican nationals.

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Singing Along “Like a Mexican”

Embodied Rhythms in Mexican Narco-Music

Shaylih Muehlmann

It was late at night, and I was sitting with a few friends by a can fire, listening to songs known as *narcocorridos* in a working-class village in northern México. As on many such occasions, we were singing along to the fast-paced rhythmic music, whose lyrics often depict the adventures of narco-traffickers, usually portrayed as heavily armed men ready to kill. We all sang along, “With ‘goat’s horn’ [an AK-47 automatic rifle] and a bazooka at our necks / Sending heads flying if anyone tries anything.” But then my friend Ruby, a woman in her thirties, abruptly stopped me in the middle of our singing. She shook her head disapprovingly and said to me, “You’ve got to learn how to sing along to corridos with your hands.” “Like a Mexican!” she added. She grabbed my hand: “This is the way you do it.” She pumped her fist along with her thumb, pinky and index finger out and the other fingers tucked. While I had seen people gesture their arms and hands along to corridos this way on countless occasions, this music was relatively new to me, and as I had been socialized in Canada and the United States, this movement did not come naturally for me. And while I tried mimicking her obediently, more than once she had to correct my bad fingering—tucking my two middle fingers slightly in and showing me again, repeating the up-and-down rhythm with her hand. While trying to learn to move along with the rhythm of the music the way locals did, I was often puzzled by the ways in which this rhythm seemed inseparable from its celebration of narco-violence. This chapter examines ethnographically and conceptually the complex relationship between the embodied, affective, and discursive dimensions of this music genre in northern México and the violence it depicts and partly performs.

Narcocorridos are a genre of folk song that narrate the history of men and women living the “illegal” lives of migrants or drug dealers on the

border of the United States and México. Over the more than 10 years that I have been conducting research in the region, mostly in poor, rural fishing villages along the coast of the Gulf of California, I have seen men and women of all ages sing, dance, and gesture along to songs glorifying the lives and deeds of drug traffickers. On many occasions, as in the opening vignette, I have sung along myself. One of the most immediately salient aspects of these songs is the appeal of their violent and bloody lyrics, something that much of the scholarship on this genre has struggled to understand (Astorga 1995; Edberg 2004; Muniz 2013; Yeh 2014). In this chapter, I analyze the embodied experience of listening and dancing to narcocorridos in an attempt to understand how people whose lives are often negatively impacted by narco-associated violence nonetheless generate positive, joyful gestures from the experience of listening to this music. I argue that an important aspect of people’s affective attachment to narcocorridos is the repetitive movements they inspire, which have the power to expand the body’s capacity to act amid a context of extreme poverty and violence in the U.S.-México borderlands, a context created by the neoliberal policies of the past two decades.

The embodiment of narco-cultures provides a compelling way of understanding the affective materiality of the U.S.-México border. This topic, in particular, helps us bring together long-term legacies of violence around the vantage point of the body. It is in the body and its social rhythms that the histories of inequality and political formations of structural violence on the border coalesce to reveal the story of how border lives and bodies have gone through experiences of poverty and social suffering. The free-trade policies of NAFTA had a destructive impact on millions of peasants all over the country, whose livelihoods were compromised by cheap imports of corn from the United States and Canada. Free-trade globalization simultaneously created a constellation of factories in the cities lying on the border, such as Tijuana, Mexicali, Nogales, and Ciudad Juárez, which have attracted some of this population. In the Gulf of California, many communities and families that used to depend on artisanal fishing have suffered as a result of environmental degradation and fishing rights regulations imposed by the federal and state governments. In a context of poverty, corruption, and inequality, it is therefore not surprising that the rural poor are often lured by the promises of easy money and prestige made by narco organizations, and

that many people romanticize them as outlaws who outsmart not only the Mexican government but also the U.S. government.

A focus on the bodies of men and women who regularly move along to the rhythm of songs that celebrate narco-traffickers such as “El Chapo” Guzmán hints at the different ways in which the violence that has been generated by the U.S.-México border has become part of the cultural and affective landscape of people’s everyday lives. The violence depicted in the narcocorridos, in this regard, is not separable from the violence materialized in border walls and fences and the policing of those fences; or from the experience of the migrants who lose their lives to deadly border crossings through rugged terrain in the desert, and that of the drug mules who are imprisoned for carrying loads across the border, or from the dramatic rise in the number of women murdered in border cities, whose bodies are often mutilated and dumped in the desert (De León 2015; Nevins 2005; Wright 2011).

While many of the chapters of this book illuminate the tragic stories lived out among those people trying to cross the U.S.-México border, in this chapter I take a look at the lives of people who never got a chance to cross, never had the desire to leave in the first place, or who crossed and were deported back to México. For these borderlands people, especially those in the lower economic classes, the violence of the war on drugs is an omnipresent dimension of everyday life. And the narcocorridos have become part of what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) would call a *habitus*, a bodily disposition that structures and informs action, and not in necessarily conscious ways. This borderland habitus has conscious and public dimensions, which allow working-class residents to assert a Mexican, subaltern, and nationalist identity critical of U.S. imperialism, of Mexican elites, and of the negative impact of the “war on drugs” and its militarization on their lives. But this habitus also has dimensions that are not purely conscious and identity-based, and that mobilize affective and bodily rhythms. The rhythm of narco-music in northern México, I argue next, is inseparable from the bodily rhythm created by the militarization of the border and its efforts to stop the mobility of bodies determined to cross to the other side and transport illegal drugs into the U.S. market.

As other authors in this volume describe, the escalation in border enforcement mandated by the U.S. federal government in the mid-1990s made the border crossing a much more difficult and dangerous journey

(see De León 2015; Reineke this volume; Soler et al. this volume). This resulted in thousands of migrant deaths in the rugged, desolate terrain of the desert. The deaths associated with narco-trafficking and its repression have also increased as a result of the escalation of border enforcement. And the U.S. government has justified this militarization in part by linking illegal immigration with “the war on drugs.” “Narco” deaths and migrant deaths are by no means equivalent. But the bodies that become casualties of the drug trade and of illegal migration to the United States share a particular political genealogy. Both types of casualties emerge through historical legacies of violence, where long-term inequalities of power between the United States and México—and between elite and subaltern actors in both nations—have negatively affected local bodies living in rampant poverty. This has left the lower classes in México with very few options for subsistence and survival, aside from migrating north or seeking involvement in low-level narco-trafficking. And the allure of narco-trafficking in the areas where I did my fieldwork has redefined the local affective and aesthetic dispositions toward music and dancing.

NARCOCORRIDOS, VIOLENCE, AND RHYTHM

Narcocorridos have long puzzled journalists and academics. Many authors find their fast-paced, cheerful rhythm to be a startling counterpoint to the increasingly brutal violence that has overtaken the region. Since former president Felipe Calderón (2006–2012) launched his military offensive against the drug cartels in December 2006, more than 235,000 people have been killed nationwide, and many more have disappeared (SEGOP 2017). The violence associated with the drug war often takes elaborate and gruesome forms, frequently involving displays of decapitated heads and strewn body parts. For this reason, it seems counterintuitive that these songs celebrating the stories of drug traffickers are so popular in the same areas heavily hit by death and suffering.

Scholars, journalists, and government officials have tried to interpret and make sense of the appeal of this music from multiple perspectives. Some have argued that they are a form of “resistance” against state corruption and the oppression of the local poor (Edberg 2004; Wald 2002). Others contend that they are a symbolic resource of the Mexican poor to heal from the trauma and violence that has been inflicted on the border

(McDowell 2000). Some claim that the songs are merely “propaganda for the cartels,” recruiting more youth to work in their ranks (Campbell 2012). Others, by contrast, maintain that narcocorridos are an ad hoc journalistic genre that makes public the truth of events censored by the government and the media (Quinones 2001; Valenzuela 2002; Villalobos and Ramírez-Pimienta 2004:129) and legitimize figures that do not have official authority (de la Garza 2013). Some scholars have therefore argued that these corridos are popular because many people think that they speak *la pura verdad*, “pure truth,” and are *la voz del pueblo*, “the voice of the people” (Dávila 2011; Villalobos and Ramírez-Pimienta 2004; Wald 2002).

Government authorities, for their part, have long banned and censored narcocorridos on the grounds that they “promote” and even “cause” drug trafficking. In most public places in many parts of México, it is now illegal to play this type of music. This means that narcocorridos are generally listened to in the intimacy of people’s homes, while driving, or in the company of people who also love the music, enhancing the sense of defiant solidarity that singing along promotes. While the relationship between this music and the violence it chronicles has provoked intense public debate, often from a moralizing perspective that condemns the genre, academic discussion on this topic has, for the most part, criticized the idea that music “causes” violence for oversimplifying a complex collective experience. But the academic discussion has not moved much beyond the question of what relationship the songs have to such violence. In part, this is because the majority of scholarly research on the songs has focused on the linguistic narratives articulated in the lyrics and the topics they chronicle.

In what follows I argue that the challenge in analyzing narcocorridos is to account, first, for local people’s enthusiasm for the genre without discrediting their experience as false consciousness in the face of cartel propaganda. Second, I seek to show that understanding the appeal of this music demands much more than simply historically contextualizing it, for this gesture risks losing sight of the affective and bodily apprehension of this music by listeners and dancers. In the paragraphs that follow I examine the immanent link between narcocorridos and everyday life on the border by moving beyond the referential content of the lyrics and considering, instead, the affective experiences generated by this music. Drawing on thinkers of affect such as Spinoza (1951), Massumi (2002),

and Gordillo (2014), I argue that these songs coproduce an affective and embodied habitus that operates at the limit of linguistic narratives, while embodying a visceral protest against the suffering that negatively affects the bodies of subaltern populations struggling to survive along a militarized border.

Ethnomusicologists and anthropologists have long recognized the importance of the affective and embodied dimensions of musical apprehension. For example, Hymes argues (1965) that the so-called nonsense vocables in Navajo song-poems lacked semantic content but needed to be studied in their own right. Authors have subsequently argued that such semantically empty features of these songs conveyed shared affective stances that are socially important (Frisbie 1980) or were used to express “lack of control” (Mitchell and Webster 2011). Similarly, David W. Samuels (2004) writes about the power of meaningless words such as “rang tang ding dong” in the 1957 doo-wop hit “I Am the Japanese Sandman,” by the Cellos quintet. Greg Downey (2002), in turn, analyzes the power of capoeira music to make the body susceptible to specific sounds, quite apart from textual content.

Attentiveness to these affective dimensions, it is important to note, does not mean denying the referential content of the narcocorrido lyrics. Unlike the “nonsense vocables” studied by Hymes and others, these songs do indeed have ample semantic content that people orient to, even if this is not always their focus of attention. This orientation to the content of the lyrics is a reminder that we cannot assume a strict dichotomy between affect and ideology (Porcello et al. 2010). The songs tell stories of violence, sometimes righteous, sometimes senselessly vulgar. The lyrics very often offend many sensibilities even if their content is also clearly implicated in people’s enjoyment of the music. Most importantly, the stories the songs chronicle often evoke a long history of violence that has returned in cycles to the U.S.-México borderlands.

THE NARCO-ALLURE IN THE BORDERLANDS

The people I have interacted with over many years in different parts of the Gulf of California tend to share the perception that part of the appeal of this music is that it publicly speaks about “truths” that are hidden by officials and the media. Many corridos, for instance, take a political stance

in relation to migration and drug policies, highlighting the political and social conditions that create the opportunity for narco-trafficking and the necessity of migration. Local people appreciated this political stance. And while narcocorridos glorify the trafficking of drugs, they rarely celebrate their consumption. Instead, they stress the role of the United States in creating the drug trade in the first place, often pointing out that this country avidly and mechanically consumes the majority of drugs produced and shipped from Latin America. For example, in one popular narcocorrido, the protagonist sings that he will continue working as long as there is demand in the United States, where “they buy one hundred kilos of dust as if they were buying flowers.”¹ The songs also emphasize the poverty from which many narco-traffickers emerge and underscore the injustice of economic inequalities on the border. For people unfamiliar with the genre, however, the most salient aspect of these songs is that they almost always describe violence in graphic and often gory detail. In their most commercialized form, the violence is often gratuitous, celebrating the power of narcos to ruthlessly kill their enemies.²

The people I interviewed on this topic were all long-term informants whom I knew in the context of my larger work on the effects of the “war on drugs” on rural people in northern México (Muehlmann 2013). The majority of my informants were rural and working class, either fisherman or construction workers. Some had also worked for the drug cartels in very minor ways, although few identified as *narcotraficantes*. Some had carried a load of drugs across checkpoints, worked as spotters, or *halcones*, or even occasionally smuggled shipments of drugs or money across the border. For my interviews on narcocorridos, I also sought out people who distance themselves more explicitly from drug activity. Most people I met in northern Baja California have lost family members or acquaintances to drug-related violence or to drug abuse, or have relatives serving time in jail for drug-related offenses. Many of these people have also traveled illegally to the United States to work for months, sometimes years, on end. Some came back because they could not find their way in the United States or had been deported back (cf. Sheridan 1996).³

When I asked people what they thought of narcocorridos and whether they “liked” them, the conversations that followed were invariably vexed with contradictions and ambiguities. Sometimes, people would say that

they “didn’t like” the songs but that they are “important” because they tell “true stories” that are censored in the news. What was interesting about this ambivalence, however, was that it only emerged in contexts where I asked people to articulate their thoughts and feelings about the music. In these instances, forced to rationalize a response, people were inclined to acknowledge the violent lyrics of the songs, since this is the element salient on a conscious level and the characteristic that receives the most attention in public controversies. But as I soon learned, the lyrics are not the only element of the songs that people are listening for.

The notion of affect is important for analyzing the prelinguistic dimensions of social action because, as noted by Spinoza, affects are intersubjective phenomena because they point to how bodies are affected by other bodies, or in this case by the rhythms of a particular song. These affects are interpersonal, felt, and embodied but also hard to describe and narrate (Deleuze 1988; Gordillo 2014; Spinoza 1951). Theorists of affect have therefore distinguished prelinguistic affects, for instance the resonant viscosity of a body dancing to a corrido, from the after-the-fact attempt by that same body to narrate that experience as a verbalized “emotion,” for instance, as a “passion for the music” (cf. Massumi 2002). Emotions, in other words, are the names we try to give to hard-to-represent affects. During my fieldwork, in this regard, it was common to hear people explain their enthusiasm for the music in terms of emotions such as the “joy” it elicited in them. But this was an attempt on their part to name something prediscursive, as was clear, for instance, in the rhythms that my friend Ruby wanted to teach me by replicating a particular hand gesture.

The popularity of narcocorridos also responds to the bodily aesthetics promoted by their performers, who often wear some of the distinctive clothing styles of the “narcos.” While this clothing style is permanently evolving, and adapting to new fashions, in the first decade of the century it often included alligator boots. As I analyze elsewhere (Muehlmann 2013), for many men involved in the lower echelons of narco organizations, this type of boot embodied the allure of the trade and they would therefore wear them to mark their status and instill respect. The clothing style worn by narcocorrido bands, in this respect, draws from but also reproduces subaltern perceptions of the narcos’ prestige.

“EVEN THE KIDS LIKE THEM!”

The affective and bodily dimensions of the narcocorridos' popularity were particularly noticeable among the children of the families I met during my fieldwork. Perhaps unsurprisingly, children also sang along and danced to this music but were the least likely to even attempt to answer my questions about what they “liked about the songs.” In other words, children were rarely able to articulate linguistically their affective connection to the music. When I asked about it, they would most often say, “I don't know.” Some said they liked them “because they're about narcotraficantes.” Others said, “I just like them!” confirming that they were drawn to the music in ways that were hard to put into words, and that its appeal therefore had nonlinguistic dimensions.

The first time I observed the extent to which some children participate in the rhythms created by corridos was at a visit to the home of my friends Rafa and Elsa. They live in an impoverished village with high levels of unemployment, where many people fish part of the year in the Gulf of California and others occasionally do odd jobs for narcos, usually as mules. I was sitting in front of the house talking to them and a few of their neighbors. Four children, including Rafa and Elsa's two, were on Rafa's cell phone, huddled around watching a video that he had downloaded. The video was of a song by the group Rígido called “6 Impactos,” or “Six Hits.” Before the music starts, the video has a long dramatic interlude in a restaurant. In the scene, assassins come in and shoot a young man, who falls to the ground. The police arrive and inspect his body. As the police officer examines the corpse, the music starts. The policeman, describing the crime, mouths the lyrics as the song begins: “Six shots in the body of the boy.” The children huddled around Rafa's phone started singing happily along to the lyrics as well, which continued, “Hooded assassins wanting to kill.” The kids sang along, “Hooded assassins wanting to kill.” Even four-year-old Camilla sang the lyrics. Their parents, I noticed, seemed to think that this enthusiastic singing by a young girl was cute.

There were several aspects of this incident that struck me as particularly revealing of the affective dimensions of the popularity of narcocorridos in northern México. Most evident was the degree to which the song's depiction of assassins “wanting to kill,” murder “a boy” with “six

shots,” was treated by everyone around me as harmless and unremarkable. The children’s enthusiasm for the music and their knowledge of the lyrics, as well as their more general fascination with narco-traffickers, was not noteworthy to the parents. It was also interesting to watch as the children sang along to the songs. While they clearly knew the songs and many of the words, the younger ones (and especially the four-year-old) missed whole phrases. Some of the words would come out garbled or mispronounced, as is typical in young children’s linguistic development. But the younger children were drawn into the energy and the collective expression of play more intensely than the older ones. Their bodily language while singing and dancing showed greater awareness of what they were acting out and that they were being watched by grownups. While the children may not understand the intricacies of the stories they heard chronicled in this music, they are indeed aware, as anyone in this region is, that the “war on drugs” waged by the government has not only failed to defeat the cartels but has in fact empowered them. In the context of the enduring failure of official forms of power, the narcotraficante becomes alluring as a powerful figure able to challenge the state and so appears triumphant to some children.

In attempting to historically contextualize the appeal of narcocorridos for local people, scholars have often traced the genre to previous cycles of violence in the U.S.-México borderlands. The narcocorrido emerged from an older form of Mexican ballad that used to celebrate the heroes and social bandits of rural México and especially those who participated in the 1910–1920 revolution (Paredes and Bauman 1993; Ramírez 1990; see also Hobsbawm 1969). In the current context of widespread drug-related violence, narcotraficantes have repositioned the old imaginings of the social bandit, adapting it to the economic and political conditions of the border. The long-term forms of domination organized by the tension between the United States and México and between elite and subaltern actors within México have turned the image of the narcotraficante into a subversive figure with tremendous agency and countercultural allure. In other words, that the narcotraficante can draw from the cultural power of old revolutionary heroes and rural bandits indexes the generative power of legacies of violence that run deep in the region.

When I asked people why they liked the songs and why they are so popular, they did not speak of the legacy of revolutionary heroes but

consistently pointed to the more affective dimensions of the songs. Amid conflicting attitudes, people also said: “They get you excited.” Or as Rafa said, “They make you feel powerful.” In short, they saw the music and its rhythm as expanding their bodies’ joyful capacity and power to act. And as the children’s engagement with the songs shows, this expansive bodily enthusiasm registers powerfully even for participants who have only a vague understanding of the political dynamics in which the songs are produced.

HOW TO SING ALONG LIKE A MEXICAN: RHYTHM AND EMBODIMENT

An important aspect of people’s experience of narcocorridos is that the affects generated by the music are mediated in significant ways through repetitive bodily movements. Music is often experienced through bodily modes of sensing that are constituted through habituation (Downey 2002). This is most clearly exemplified in forms of dance but sometimes also through more subtle modes of physical engagement with the music. In the case of narcocorridos, the bodily ways that people apprehend the songs, what Csordas (1993) has called “somatic modes of attention,” are most evident in how people gesture along to the music with their hands. Significantly, such gesturing is primarily oriented to the rhythm of the songs rather than to the content of the lyrics.

Ironically, some of the public critique of narcocorridos has picked up on the fact that the power of the songs goes beyond the violent narratives by pointing to “the rhythms” that propel this type of music. National security spokesman Alejandro Poiré explained in 2011 in a blog post on an official government website that banning the songs was a key part of the cultural fight against drug trafficking because “the rhythm they dance to is that of the violence that harms many families in Mexico” (Valdez-Cárdenas 2011). The idea that the rhythm of the narcocorridos is propelling such unprecedented violence in the region highlights, in this case from a deterministic lens, that there is something powerful in the songs that is not primarily located in the lyrics.

But what is this “rhythm” that this official speaks of? To start, we can consider rhythm in the strict musical sense. Corridos are in the tradition of norteña music popular in northern México, whose roots can be traced

back to the polka music of Czech and German immigrants who settled in the region in the 1800s (Simonett 2006). The style, which is sometimes characterized by the press as “rollicking” and “cheerful,” is often somewhat ironically referred to as “gangster polka” (Simonett 2006).

The typical style of dance associated with corridos is done in a closed bodily embrace, the man drawing his partner in close with one hand. The rhythm is usually in a 2/4 or a 3/4 meter, and the dance step is similar to a basic country two-step—with two steps taken to the front and one back, integrating turns and repeated patterns. One of the noteworthy elements of the dance in contemporary settings is that it is very common for the man to cradle a *caguama* (the 32-ounce bottle of beer common in the region) in his free hand—such that both his beer in his right hand and the woman in his left are tucked intimately next to his body. This detail adds an idiosyncratic character to the dance, which is often commented on by foreigners for its distinctly masculinized posturing.

While this style of dance is the most obvious rhythmic and bodily manifestation of the music, we can also think of rhythm in a broader sense as the repetitions of movement in everyday life. Henri Lefebvre advances such a concept of rhythm in the last book he wrote, *Rhythmanalysis* (2004). Lefebvre specifies that for rhythm to exist there must be repetition in a movement, but not just any repetition. The monotonous return of an identical noise, he wrote, no more forms a rhythm than a falling stone (Lefebvre 2004:78). While Lefebvre emphasizes that there is no rhythm without repetition in time and space, he also insists that there is no rhythm without the body: “Rhythm appears as regulated time, governed by rational laws, but in contact with what is least rational in human beings: the lived, the carnal, the body” (2004:9).

Interestingly, the most salient kind of bodily engagement with narcocorridos that I noticed among local people during my fieldwork involved gestures far more quotidian and informal than the style of dance described above. As noted earlier, these daily gestures consist of repeated hand gestures. The importance of this more informal bodily engagement was underscored that night by the fire when, as I described in the opening vignette, Ruby corrected my bodily gestures while singing. One might certainly note all sorts of ways that a “gringa” such as myself (born and raised in Ontario, Canada, to U.S. parents) does not sing along to corridos “like a Mexican.” So I initially assumed that Ruby interrupted

our singing to correct my accented Spanish. As a non-native speaker of Mexican Spanish, I found it particularly challenging to understand the heavy slang that characterizes most lyrics. For instance, it took me a while to learn that *machín* means *más chingón*, “most badass,” or that *puro pa'lante* was a contraction for *puro para adelante*, “let’s do it,” or “full speed ahead.” In short, much as the young children would miss the full linguistic structure and content of the words, I also tended to swallow the complicated phrases and felt awkward about my skills in singing along.

Despite my sloppiness with the lyrics, however, Ruby’s intervention was oblivious to my pronunciation. Indeed, she seemed indifferent to the words. Instead, Ruby was attending to my lack of bodily engagement with the songs, policing my tendency to drop the beat rather than my tendency to drop whole phrases. In particular, she focused on the motion of my hands. Ruby’s attentiveness to my bodily participation in a collective singing aligns well with Lefebvre’s specification that at no moment can the analysis of rhythms lose sight of the body, for “the living body is always present, a constant reference in any analysis of rhythm” (Lefebvre 2004:67).

At times, the body also becomes for local people a reference for the denotational aspects of the songs. For instance, it is common for people to slap the parts of their bodies that are referred to by the narration (commonly featured items are boots, hats, bulletproof vests, and body armor). This indicates that listeners are orienting to the words of the songs as well as the bodily rhythm. But these forms of engagement are not part of the regularized and everyday engagement with the music the way that keeping the rhythm of the song with one’s hands is. In other words, in music it is the rhythm that dominates, for it “supplants melody and harmony (without suppressing them)” (Lefebvre 2004:65).

The other noteworthy element of Ruby’s intervention was that by singing without the correct hand gestures I was not singing like a “Mexican.” It was not that I was singing “incorrectly,” but that I was singing like a foreigner estranged from México’s everyday cultural rhythms. This is significant because the concept of singing corridos “like a Mexican” can be seen as tautological. Who else sings corridos but Mexicans? As many scholars have pointed out, the rural associations of the music, as well as its strongly culturally local particularities, means that it has not reached any kind of crossover audience beyond the strong popularity among

Mexican Americans in the southwestern United States (see Simonett 2006). When Ruby made this specification about the non-“Mexican” nature of my hand gestures, she seemed to be appealing to the intensity of the enthusiasm conveyed by those gestures. It is often observed that people sing corridos as if they are “anthems,” that is, as an expression of a solemn, national, and emotionally charged identity. What makes such songs consciously nationalistic among the people I met in northern México is their positioning against the U.S. and Mexican military occupation of the region. But for Ruby this nationalism was manifest in the enthusiasm and the bodily apprehension of the songs rather than simply in their lyrical content.

These hand gestures are partly inculcated by the commercialization of the songs as well. When performing onstage, *corridistas* gesture along to the songs while the fans do the same. And music videos also feature these characteristic posturings and hand movements. This bodily participation forms the focal point for the everyday engagement with the songs, and underscores the way the music is affecting people at a habitual level, and infusing their quotidian experience of the music in—to me—unexpected situations.

For example, on a few occasions in one fishing village I saw a truck full of muddy fisherman on their way home, corridos playing from their stereo. The men pumped their hands out their windows to their neighbors as they passed. In a context in which the public dissemination of this music is banned by the government, the sonic and rhythmic emanations coming out of the truck and toward the streets and homes around it created an unspoken but clear solidarity, made physical in those hand gestures. And in the privacy of people’s homes, listening to corridos also affected daily routines. I would regularly see Ruby, for instance, slapping through a batch of tortillas in the kitchen as she listened to corridos. Every dozen slaps, she raised her hand to sing along to the corridos “like a Mexican” while skillfully handling the tortillas.

CONCLUSIONS

The everyday rhythmic repertoires produced by narcocorridos are central to the way people experience this music in the U.S.-México borderlands. But the fact that this affective engagement is also part of a broader

context of extreme violence in México poses a question, coming back to the statement made by that security spokesperson, about the nature of the connections between the songs and violence. My own initial reaction to the sight of young children singing along to the gory lyrics of the corridos and posing so realistically as assassins was distinct discomfort. My reflex was to interpret their comfort with these songs as an endorsement and naturalization of the violence, or worse, a warning of how these children might get pulled into the trade and eventually into violence. Their parents, however, did not share these assumptions.

As noted earlier, since many officials see narcocorridos as a corrupting influence on youth, attempts to ban narcocorridos have grown more forceful in the last decade (Astorga 2005).⁴ The logic of censorship is very close to the reasoning that underpinned my own first reactions: that the music helps create even more violence. The censorship of narcocorridos assumes that the violence is, in part, culturally determined and that the songs celebrating the narco world will attract more people to the trade. But this interpretation overlooks that the extreme violence triggered by “the war on drugs” has multiple causes and is thereby profoundly overdetermined. The main factors creating extreme violence are certainly not the songs but the prohibition of the use and trafficking of illegal substances by both the Mexican and U.S. governments, the huge demand for drugs originating in the United States, and the widespread conditions of poverty that make many people take risks and participate in the trade (Muehlmann 2013). But pointing out these multiple causes does little to illuminate the more subjective and bodily relationship between the violence that narcos participate in and the affective appeal of the songs for the people most vulnerable to this violence: the borderlands poor.

It is also in this context that we can better understand the connections between the histories of illegality that corridos chronicle. While many of the original corridos were about the heroes of the Mexican Revolution, they also became a genre for chronicling the experience of migration. The connections between migration and narco-trafficking here are important. Jeremy Slack (2019) argues that violence associated with the “war on drugs” and violence experienced by migrants are interlocked because migrants are particularly vulnerable to narco-associated violence. Migration and narco activity also both emerge from the structural conditions of marginalization experienced by the borderlands poor and so are often

featured in corridos. Martha Chew Sánchez (2006) argues that corridos shape migrant memory and identity through the figure of the hero who confronts structural injustice against all odds and also become a way for different migrant communities to share in experiences and customs across militarized nation-state boundaries (Chew Sanchez 2006).⁵

But as I have tried to show, the allure of the music can be better understood when the affective and embodied nature of people’s participation in the music is placed in the context of everyday life on the U.S.-México border. From this perspective, the enthusiasm people express for the music can be seen as part of a distinctly local habitus. The latter is forged under conditions of structural violence and yet emerges as a deeply felt, coproduced celebration of what it means to be Mexican—and feel powerful because of it—in the midst of unprecedented violence, censorship, and government corruption.

This is why it is important to place these violent cycles of history within the rhythms of borderland experience: in the narrow sense, as a musical beat that resonates with people at home or fishermen riding in a truck, and in a wider sense, in the repetitions of everyday life generated by the repetitions and cycles of history (Lefebvre 2004). These are the cyclic historical rhythms that folklorists of the corrido genre have consistently pointed to. If anything, it is the rhythm of corridos and the bodily engagement with them, rather than outbursts of spectacular violence, that propel everyday routines: preparing tortillas, driving back from the fishing camp, hanging out with children. The brutal violence created by “the war on drugs,” in contrast, profoundly *disrupts* these rhythms: the roadblocks of soldiers inspecting vehicles for weapons and drugs; the road closures set up as the police collect body parts discovered on roads; the drug-related arrests splintering families and disrupting the composition and daily rhythm of households.

This is why an excessive focus on the violent lyrics of the narcocorridos has distracted analysts from appreciating this genre’s more subtle and affective repertoires. It is certainly more challenging to orient the analysis of music beyond its lyrical narratives in narcocorridos than in other types of music because their violent referential content is so immensely diverting for some. But what is clear from the reactions and comments of the people I have described here is that cultural forms of production related to violence, such as the performance and consumption of narcocorridos,

are not solely meaningful in relation to physical violence. In analyzing these songs as “texts” that are disembodied and extracted from the everyday, we miss that most local people experience corridos as markers of a joyful, subaltern nationalism amid conditions of social suffering. Rather than positing a deterministic relationship between narcocorridos and violence, I have argued that it may be more useful to think about the generative capacity of these songs. Narcocorridos generate a range of affects and emotions: pride in being Mexicano and norteño; defiance in the face of Mexican and U.S. militarization. More importantly, moving your body along to the rhythm of these corridos asserts power, if only fleeting, over your body and life. And this is joyful power amid a shared sense of community, which means that narcocorridos and the rhythms they generate make everyday life more bearable in a region steeped in violence.

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NOTES

1. From the song “Clave privada” (Private Key) by the group Los Tucanes de Tijuana.

2. There is considerable variation in the kinds of corridos now available, which range from traditional ballads, commissioned for and by local people and sometimes never recorded, to highly commercialized productions that are widely disseminated. There is also significant variation in how violent the songs are (“corridos pesados” is the term used to denote the “heavy corridos” in México). While all of the songs I describe here are popular and commercialized corridos, I don’t make a distinction in this chapter between the more or less violent in the genre because this was not a distinction that became relevant for local people in their engagements with the songs along the lines I analyze here.

3. I talked to both men and women about their experience of listening to narcocorridos. I explore these gendered differences in Muehlmann 2013.

4. While there have been attempts to ban corridos from radio and television, usually censorship is more indirect. Instead of laws against playing the music, there are agreements between the state governments and the radio and television programmers so that the latter decide to “voluntarily” not play them. Sinaloa issued a law in 2011 threatening to rescind the liquor licenses of bars that play corridos (Valdez-Cárdenas 2011). The state has since then fined and banned popular commercial bands such as Los Tigres del Norte from playing within city limits.

5. Songs such as “Despedida de un norteno” tell the story of the migration from México to the United States and focus specifically on the internal journey through México.

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Necroviolence and Postmortem Care Along the U.S.-México Border

Robin Reineke

In June 2010, the decomposed remains of a man were found by the U.S. Border Patrol on the Tohono O'odham Nation in Arizona. The man was found under a tree, with a backpack containing about \$200 in Mexican pesos, a few bus ticket stubs, and a prayer card for Pope Benedict. His body was transported to the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner (PCOME), where forensic investigators, pathologists, and anthropologists began the work of trying to identify him. During their examination, a Honduran identification card was found in the man's shoes.

Nearly two months passed with no leads on this man's identity. Then, in August, a woman called to report her brother, Miguel, missing. A volunteer took the missing person's report. Miguel's full name matched the name on the Honduran ID card. Miguel also was reported to have a tattoo—a homemade letter *M* on one of his forearms. Although the external examination, autopsy, and forensic anthropology examination had all been completed, there was no note of a tattoo. To see if there was indeed a tattoo on the body, investigators used infrared photography to photograph the highly decomposed flesh of the arms of the unknown man. The photographs revealed what could not be seen with the human eye—a light, hand-drawn letter *M* on the right forearm. The unknown remains were identified as Miguel's.

Miguel had lived and worked in the United States for decades. He was a gardener. In the spring of 2010, he was apprehended by ICE after being pulled over for speeding, and was deported to Honduras. Shortly after, in the summer of that year, Miguel hired a coyote to guide him across the Arizona desert. He was desperate to get back to his family and his job. He attempted the crossing in June, one of the hottest months of the year in the Sonoran Desert, when temperatures regularly reach into the triple digits.

When the volunteer called to notify Miguel's sister that he had died in the desert from heatstroke, she wept and expressed confusion. "How could someone die just from walking? He was a gardener; he was used to being in the sun. I think someone murdered him," she said. The volunteer assured her that there were no signs of trauma, and explained that, sadly, hundreds of people die each year attempting to cross the border through Arizona. The volunteer then explained the next steps: the family would need to choose a funeral home, and then have the funeral home contact the medical examiner's office to arrange to pick up Miguel's remains.

About a week later, the volunteer got to her desk one morning and noticed that her voicemail box was full—28 messages. They were all from Miguel's family, who were distraught, confused, and angry. The family had been calling from the funeral home, where they had just seen Miguel's remains. They were convinced that they had been deceived about the cause of death, because the body they were looking at was a horrifying sight—a blackened, decomposed, headless corpse whose hands had been cut off. Clearly, they said, Miguel had been murdered.

Although the official manner of death was accidental, not homicide, they were right. Miguel had been murdered by the U.S. federal government, using the Sonoran Desert as a weapon, and his body showed the signs of this violence.

INTRODUCTION

What happened to Miguel and his family was a complicated injustice, with layers of violence occurring along a protracted timeline. First, Miguel had likely been racially profiled by police. He was then deported to a country he hadn't called home in more than 20 years, which separated him from his small children and his only means of income. Then, in an attempt to get home, Miguel had followed the path created for Latin American workers by decades of U.S. immigration and border policy, which cuts through remote regions of the Sonoran Desert. The desert conditions and arid heat took its toll, and Miguel died from exposure to the elements. His body was not found for several weeks because of the isolated area where he had been traveling. By the time Miguel was found, his body had endured the same brutality of the desert conditions that had killed him.

On arrival to the medical examiner's office, Miguel's body was unrecognizable due to decomposition, and would require special examination techniques for there to be any hope of finding his family. During autopsy, his inner organs and brain had been removed for examination. During the forensic anthropology examination, his skull had been detached, along with portions of his pubic bones. His body was so decomposed and desiccated that investigators had to cut off his hands so that his fingers could be rehydrated for fingerprinting. When his family finally saw his remains, they were looking at the effects of violence, but they were also looking at attempts to care for Miguel and his family.

The volunteer who had first taken the missing person report for Miguel, who had then called his sister when his remains were identified, and who had heard the distressed voices of the family when they were looking at what was left of his body, was in some ways ill-equipped to handle the situation. She was young, she was in over her head, and she was scared. That volunteer was me.

At the time, I was a graduate student in the School of Anthropology at the University of Arizona. The same semester I started graduate school, in the fall of 2006, I began interning and volunteering under the guidance of Dr. Bruce Anderson, forensic anthropologist at the PCOME. I was interested in the ways that a cultural anthropologist might be able to support the work of forensic anthropologists, and Dr. Anderson was eager to have my help. At the time, Dr. Anderson was examining about 150 cases per year—far more than any other single forensic anthropologist in the nation, likely in the world. On top of this, he was also managing calls from families of the missing. The families were calling the medical examiner's office directly because they had nowhere else to go. The standard mechanism for reporting and pursuing the investigation of a missing person in the United States is through law enforcement. However, families of missing migrants generally struggle with this system: because they are afraid to contact police for fear of deportation, they do not live in the United States, or they are turned away by law enforcement officials when they try to file a report for a missing foreign national. So they call the medical examiner's and coroner's offices along the border directly. When I approached Bruce in 2006, he suggested that I help him with missing person reports, and with speaking to the families—work he had taken on voluntarily despite being already overwhelmed with the caseload.

Gradually, these volunteer efforts grew into a nonprofit, the Colibrí Center for Human Rights, which I cofounded in 2013. My graduate research became focused on the social and scientific process of identifying the remains of migrants who had died attempting to cross the U.S.-México border into Arizona (Reineke 2016). That summer, when on the phone with Miguel's family, I had cautioned them against opening the body bag. I explained that viewing his remains would be difficult and that I didn't want them to remember Miguel that way. But when the body bag containing Miguel's remains arrived at the funeral home, the family wanted to see him. They needed to confirm that it was indeed Miguel, and to understand for themselves what had happened to him. What they saw was evidence of violence, but not the kind they assumed. There is no good language for the kind of violence Miguel's body had gone through.

In this chapter, I consider the journeys of the bodies of those who have died while crossing the U.S.-México border. Because of the primary forms of violence experienced by Latin American immigrants during life, such as racism, exploitation, structural violence, or deportation, the bodies of those who die during a desert crossing go through a unique process that often involves further forms of violence, including what Jason De León has termed "necroviolence" (De León 2015). While there are those, such as forensic scientists, who attempt to care for these dead bodies with compassion, their work is limited and fraught due to the severity of the violence already endured by the deceased, both prior to and after death. Unfortunately, attempts to care for the dead can be experienced by families as further violence. From disposition at the scene of discovery to condition upon release for final burial, the bodies of deceased migrants along the U.S. side of the border with México reveal a particular border biopolitics of the dead that has heavy bearing on the living. Drawing on anthropologies and social histories of the dead body, this chapter centers the materiality of the border dead and considers how their disposition constitutes and is constituted by the political border itself.

THE BORDER AS RACIST SPECTACLE

Since the mid-1990s, a large but unknown number of migrants have died or disappeared in attempts to cross the U.S.-México border. Although

the U.S. Border Patrol reported 7,216 border deaths between fiscal years 1998 and 2017 (U.S. CBP 2017), these numbers most likely vastly undercount the true number of fatalities.¹ The factors pushing migrants into dangerous geographies have been discussed at length in the academic literature on migration and border security (Cornelius 2001; Martínez et al. 2014; Rubio Goldsmith et al. 2006). In essence, the U.S. federal government has used the geography and ecology of the desert Southwest as a weapon against those who would cross the border outside official state-sanctioned mechanisms, which are essentially nonexistent. This strategy, labeled “prevention through deterrence” by its authors, was ostensibly designed to discourage would-be migrants from attempting an illegal crossing. On closer examination, however, what the deployment of the desert as a weapon actually accomplishes is not to prevent or deter undocumented border crossings, but rather to make such crossings more terrifying and more destructive to migrants than ever before. Taken along with the history of a century and a half of U.S. dependence on exploitable migrant labor (Ngai 2004), it is more responsible to think of the U.S.-México border not as a security system designed to keep people out, but as a policing system designed to create conditions for a particular kind of social control within borders.

I follow the approach of critical race theorists in understanding immigration policies as both rooted in and productive of American racism (Johnson 2003; Romero 2008). The dead bodies on the border are a particularly brutal and degrading aspect of immigration policy. Rather than occurring on an individual level, these deaths and disappearances are socially structured and have meaning and effects at the social level. The dead bodies of Latin American migrants inform a continuing narrative about who belongs and is considered worthy of being “protected,” and who are thought to be outsiders, considered to be deportable, disposable, or sacrificial in the name of border security. Nicholas De Genova (2002, 2013) argues that the law should not become a “neutral framework” against which social processes are analyzed; instead, the law should be seen as a social process that produces further effects. The socially and historically constructed “laws” of the border produce “illegal” and deportable migrants and produce a border spectacle that provides a constant performance of the racialized borders between citizens and others (De Genova 2002).

The law also produces dead bodies. The material presence of the dead and their postmortem treatment is not independent of the broader social and historical factors at play along the U.S.-México border. As Soler et al. (this volume) discuss, a significant portion of those who have died along the border are indigenous Americans—from communities that have survived at least 500 years of abuse and exploitation. Both the introduction to this volume and Linda Green's chapter discuss the centuries-long history of dispossession, exploitation, and genocide carried out against the very same indigenous communities who are now migrating north. This history now includes the history of the wall. Before there was a border wall, there was a social wall that was performed physically on the bodies of immigrants with brown skin. By 1924, European immigrants arriving at Ellis Island did not have to go through line inspection, yet Mexicans at the southern border were subjected to nude medical inspection, forced shaving, delousing, and fumigation (Ngai 2004). During the Bracero Program (1942–1964), in what was called “drying out the wet-backs,” employers went around the labor protections placed on braceros by forcing workers to go to México and cross back into the United States as undocumented immigrants with fewer rights (Ngai 2004). From its beginnings under the Department of Labor in 1924, the U.S. Border Patrol was a police force specifically designed to monitor, control, and repress Latin American bodies. This traditional focus on the *body* of the Latin American worker at the border is significant, and can be seen today in the language used by Border Patrol agents when discussing those they police. It is common for Border Patrol agents to refer to those they chase and apprehend simply as “bodies,” or worse, “tonks,” which is the sound a MAGLITE apparently makes when brought down with force over the head of a human being.

Symbolically, the specter of the threatening Latino migrant body has become a stand-in for any perceived threat facing the homeland, such as crime, terrorism, disease, or culture change (Chavez 2008). Leo Chavez describes this as the “Latino threat narrative,” which is a fear-based discourse that Latin American immigrants are “part of an invading force from south of the border that is bent on reconquering land that was formerly theirs” and in the process “destroying the American way of life” (Chavez 2008:2). The Latino threat narrative creates threatening “virtual characters” of Latinos, which stand in opposition to “proper” citizens

(Chavez 2008). Social anxieties about disease, sexuality, and crime are placed disproportionately on Latino immigrants, who are blamed for various social problems (Chavez 2008). Such scapegoating is socially productive, as it does work to define who is part of the nation-state and who is seen as external, dangerous, and/or polluting. Similar to the strategies of policing and control at the border, such narratives of threat often emphasize the *bodies* of immigrants.

National immigration policy has long been understood to display dominant ideas about who is included and who is excluded in the “imagined community” of the nation (Anderson 2006; Brubaker 1990; Ngai 2004). Immigration policies are powerful tools of governmentality, whereby subjects are disciplined through processes of registration, inspection, and inscription (Foucault 1980; Inda 2014). “The border,” an arbitrary line that has become naturalized, has become a spectacle where a “never-ending war” (Grandin 2013) violently performs citizenship on the bodies of migrants, both in life and in death.

The destruction of dead bodies has been used throughout history during war and peace to publicly mark the bodies of outsiders or criminals (Crossland 2009; Sappol 2002; Scheper-Hughes 1992). To leave bodies unattended or uncared for is a profound act of violence that terrorizes the living and marks the dead and members of their community as threatening outsiders who are essentially subhuman. In the case of the U.S.–México border, the specific processes of criminalization and exploitation of Mexican workers is bound up with the colonial context within which the border was constructed. Building on the work of Frantz Fanon, Joseph Pugliese has discussed how the postcolonial American state, which has never reckoned with its genocidal past, continues to kill and re-kill colonized peoples whose very existence poses a sovereign threat to the nation-state (Pugliese 2014). Pugliese describes the “double death” of colonized peoples, who are killed “in order to silence questions about the sovereign legitimacy of the colonial nation-state” and who, “even when they are long dead,” are symbolically killed again (Pugliese 2014:5). As exploitable workers, migrants crossing the border are useful for U.S. capitalism. As indigenous Americans, however, migrants pose a threat to the historical amnesia needed to define America as white and to legitimize the existence of the border as a political and legal barrier between the United States and Latin America. The systematic erasure

and destruction of the bodies of Latin American immigrants, migrants, and refugees defines them as literally disposable while geographically marking the border as a racial filter. Some bodies are allowed into the nation unimpeded, while others are subjected to the brutality of the desert and to border bureaucracies that do not accord them basic human dignity, even in death.

NECROVIOLENCE ALONG THE U.S.-MÉXICO BORDER

Katherine Verdery has demonstrated that “because the human community includes both the living and dead, any manipulation of the dead automatically affects relations with and among the living” (1999:108). Historian Thomas Laqueur has similarly argued that “the living need the dead far more than the dead need the living . . . because the dead make social worlds” (2015:1). This view of the social significance of the material dead is a guiding framework for the discussion that follows. Critically, *any* action upon the dead has social effects. Not all of the actions around the remains of the dead in the borderlands are negative—there are profound acts of care and compassion that are of critical significance. However, these efforts are best understood alongside the powerful and dominant forces of violence and erasure they contest.

The elements that define disrespectful treatment of the dead are diverse and depend on local cultural, political, and historical factors. In general, however, mistreatment of the dead is any disruption in the usual or traditional way of caring for the body and spirit after death. Any disposition of the dead that disrupts the ability for the living to ease the deceased into the world of the dead is troubling, especially when death occurs on a collective level, such as in conflict or disaster. A death can be culturally defined as a “bad death” either through the nature of the death itself or because of the condition of the body after death (Metcalf 1982). Communities need to do the work of emplacement—to integrate the dead into their new setting as peacefully as possible so that they do not come back to harm the living (Goody 1962; van der Geest 2004). Laqueur discusses the ways in which the dead demand a different treatment from other objects. The “overwhelming materiality” of the dead, Laqueur (2015) writes, contrasts with the social, cultural, and emotional excess of meaning embodied within the corpse. The reintegration of the dead into

the natural and material world must be accomplished by the work of the living rather than by natural processes alone (Laqueur 2015). The dead “are not refuse like the other debris of life; they cannot be left for beasts to scavenge” (Laqueur 2015:4).

Jason De León’s book *The Land of Open Graves* is an important contribution to the study of violence in the U.S.-México borderlands. De León contributes the concept of “necroviolence,” which he defines as “violence performed and produced through the specific treatment of corpses that is perceived to be offensive, sacrilegious, or inhumane by the perpetrator, the victim (and her or his cultural group), or both” (2015:69). De León argues that this violence is “generative” in that it can produce further forms of violence and social fracturing. And, this violence “can be easily outsourced to animals, nature, or technology” (De León 2015:71). I will add to and continue this conversation about necroviolence along the U.S.-México border by discussing three temporal phases where such violence occurs: while dead bodies are in the desert borderlands, when they are forensically examined and investigated, and upon final release or burial.

DESERT BORDERLANDS

The necroviolence occurring in the desert borderlands has predominantly taken the form of inaction. After 20 years of deaths in the hundreds following a spike clearly linked to increased U.S. border enforcement, there is still no federal-level policy change to address the loss of life. In fact, during both the Obama and Trump administrations, the federal government has doubled down on the same policies that have led to thousands of deaths. Migrants are allowed to die trying to cross the border, and, in one of the most heavily surveilled landscapes in the world, they are allowed to disappear. The bodies of the dead are left in the desert for weeks, months, or years.

By the time the remains of migrants are found, they usually have already been brutalized by desert conditions. The same heat that kills migrants on their journey through the desert destroys their bodies after death. The Sonoran Desert is known for its aridity and extremely high daytime temperatures, which range from 100°F to 110°F in the summer months. Attempting to go around checkpoints, migrants travel through the most remote parts of the desert Southwest. Those who suffer the

effects of hyperthermia (heatstroke) often become disoriented and wander deeper into the desert. Even before they die, their bodies begin to cook from the inside, accelerating decomposition after death. A single summer day in the desert can render faces unrecognizable. And most of the dead are not discovered after a single day, but after several months. One study estimated that the average length of time that migrant bodies remain undiscovered in the desert is six to eleven months (Martínez et al. 2014). Bodies rapidly become skeletal, and the effects of insect and animal activity can reduce a body to just a few bones and teeth in a matter of weeks.

The desert is vast, with thousands of miles of rugged terrain. It is likely that remains are not reported early because they are not seen or discovered for months or years. In a landscape where thousands of people have already been found dead in the past 20 years, however, organized search and recovery efforts are sorely lacking. Border Patrol Search, Trauma, and Rescue (BORSTAR) is the official search agency for the desert borderlands. The calls of those who dial 911 from the desert are routed to BORSTAR, which is known to deprioritize search and rescue in favor of apprehension (Lo 2015). As BORSTAR agent John Redd explained to a reporter, “A lot of what we do is enforcement. The rescue part is secondary, not the main objective” (Lo 2015).

Ely Ortiz’s story demonstrates the weakness of official search and rescue operations in the Sonoran Desert. Ely’s brother, Rigoberto, called, saying he was lost in the desert. Rigoberto then called 911 for assistance and was transferred to BORSTAR (Lo 2015). Agents conducted a helicopter search for a few hours before Rigoberto’s cell phone battery ran out. Agents ended the search with no success. Ely then struggled for months to get permission to search the federal land where his brother had disappeared. When he finally got approval, he combed the area for a day on foot and found the decomposed remains of his brother and another migrant (Lo 2015). A surveillance agency with helicopters, cadaver dogs, drones, miles of video surveillance, and an annual budget of \$13.6 billion could not find Rigoberto’s body, but Ely could go out with little to no resources and find him in a day. There have been several cases like this. In 2005, the father of a missing woman searched the desert, discovering three bodies before finding the remains of his own daughter, Lucrecia (Rubio-Goldsmith et al. 2006).

Several civilian search crews have emerged in recent years that scour the desert for the missing with very little funding or external support.² Their requests to Border Patrol for assistance are rarely honored (Glionna 2016; Lo 2015). In addition, there are reports of Border Patrol agents seeing human remains and not reporting them. In 2010, I spoke with a former Border Patrol agent who explained that bodies were often left behind in the desert by agents who knew they would be scolded by superiors for reporting them. Luis Alberto Urrea (2004) writes that Border Patrol agents understand that a dead body means paperwork and time wasted when they could be apprehending people and meeting quotas. The absence of a body can be one of the most destructive forms of necroviolence because of the suffering it inflicts on the family. Failing to report or recover human remains is a serious offense, and also illegal. In addition to providing food, water, and medical care to distressed migrants, No More Deaths has added search and recovery to their work in the desert. In one six-month period, the small volunteer-led organization discovered 11 sets of human remains (No More Deaths 2017). Shortly after this time, 10 volunteers from No More Deaths were arrested and charged with federal crimes, including a felony charge (Ingram 2018). Federal officials are not only failing to provide adequate care for those dying and disappearing in the desert, but are actively criminalizing those who do provide aid. This is another piece of evidence that these dead are threatening to the state apparatus at the border. These dead must firmly be defined as outside the reach of care, lest their status as less than human be challenged.

The word used to describe the migrant dead in southern Arizona is usually “remains,” rather than “bodies,” not only because such language is more respectful but also because it is more accurate. Many of the dead recovered from the desert are no longer “bodies” but fragmented, decomposed, or skeletonized pieces of bodies. When one sees these remains in person, it is very hard to see them as anything other than the result of violence. For this reason, I believe it is important to have at least a vague sense of what most of the remains recovered from the desert look like. What I have seen is blackened skin stretched thinly around bone. I have seen bodies without faces, without arms, without feet. I have seen mummified remains where the skin is as hard as leather. I have seen the teeth marks of animals. I have seen bones that are bleached, gnawed on, dismembered, or crumbling.

It is critical to remember that the discomfort of those who happen to see the dead is minimal compared to the pain and suffering of the families, for whom these remains are all that is left of a person they loved. I have had to delicately explain to mothers of the missing why they could not simply see photographs of the faces of the dead to find their sons. Colibrí staff generally caution families against opening caskets upon receiving remains. Although it is the family's right to view the body, it can cause additional pain and suffering to see remains that bear no resemblance to the person they knew and loved. Sometimes, the visual appearance of the deceased is so traumatic and so different from a family's memory of the person that a family will reject the identification, casting them back into the ambiguity of the search for a missing person. Special work and care must be taken during the identification and notification process so that families are prepared for what they will see.

I have made mistakes in this area. I was once comparing information about a missing man from Guerrero, México, to highly decomposed remains. The man's brother had described the exact clothing found with the unidentified man—a blue button-up shirt, black Dickies pants, and red and black tennis shoes. When I noticed the similarities, I called the brother and explained that I may have found a match. With his permission, I emailed him photos of the clothing found with the deceased to see if he recognized anything. He called back immediately and confirmed that the clothing was indeed his brother's. Furthermore, he had recognized his brother's handwriting in notes on a prayer card found with the remains. His most urgent question, though, was about the shirt in the photographs—why was it torn? Had his brother been murdered? I instantly regretted having sent him the photograph of the long-sleeved blue button-up shirt, where you could clearly see that one arm of the shirt was in tatters. I explained to him that no, his brother had not been murdered, but had died from heatstroke. In focusing on identification, I had overlooked the fact that the shirt had been torn by the teeth of the animal that had eaten his flesh after he died. I told the brother in vague terms that the shirt had been damaged by desert conditions. He wept uncontrollably. I never forgave myself. Practices of care are challenged in a context where so much damage has already been done.

In addition to the natural taphonomic processes in the desert, including the effects of the sun, arid climate, animals, and insects, there

is also human activity that affects the dead. I know of no examples of direct or intentional efforts to harm the bodies of the dead in the desert. There are, however, many examples of care. Migrants have reported coming across remains in the desert and taking the time to bury them (De León 2015). Passersby have also been known to place items with the dead, such as crosses or scapulars, or to take items, such as valuables or phone numbers.³ The man from Guerrero discussed above (wearing the blue button-up shirt that had been torn by animals) was found with several rosaries around his neck. When I asked his family about this, they said that the rosaries must have been placed on the deceased by fellow migrants. Some have refused to leave the dead behind, even physically carrying the body to a place where it could be cared for. In one case, a man crossing the border found a skull in the desert. Rather than leave it behind, he placed the skull in his backpack, brought it with him all the way to a major U.S. city, and then called police from a pay phone to tell them where he had left it so that they could find it, and hopefully return it to a family for burial.

In several cases, groups of migrants have made stretchers to carry the remains of fellow travelers. In one case, the group fashioned a stretcher from branches torn from palo verde and mesquite trees, bound together with their own belts and shoelaces to carry the dead body of a woman. They had been traveling with her until she fell down an embankment and died from her injuries. Rather than leave her body behind, they carried her through the desert until they arrived at a road, where they flagged down Border Patrol. They chose apprehension and deportation rather than leaving her body alone in the desert.

Those who discover remains are also affected. One of the more neglected areas of study in the borderlands is the effect of such massive human death and suffering on local inhabitants, or those sharing the same space with a different purpose. A notable exception is David Seibert's (2013) dissertation on landscape and social memory in the borderlands. Seibert's interviews included a few with cowboys and ranchers who had found the remains of migrants. Emotionally exhausted, one man noted the tragic normalcy of such discoveries, saying, "If you haven't found one yet, you will" (Seibert 2013:146). The regularity of death in the desert is disturbing, whether one is directly witnessing it or not. I remember reading a case report where a family had found decomposing remains in their



Figure 5.1 Stretcher made by migrants to carry the body of a fellow migrant (photograph by Michael Hyatt).

own backyard. Others had called police when the family dog came home carrying a human skull. In another case, Border Patrol agents stopped the vehicle after hearing a loud crunch, only to find a human skull under one of the tires. Although the Border Patrol has demonstrated itself time and time again to be a deeply violent agency that operates with extreme impunity, agents are nonetheless individual human beings. Many agents are young, and many of them are Latino. They are undoubtedly affected by the tragedies they witness.

In the summer of 2008, I joined about 100 others on the annual Migrant Trail Walk, a five-day memorial pilgrimage in honor of those who had lost their lives while crossing the border. The 77-mile walk, which continues annually, begins at the border town of Sasabe and ends in Tucson. Participants carry crosses bearing the names of deceased migrants. During our final day of the walk in 2008, as we were approaching Tucson, a truck pulled over about a mile ahead of us and stopped, waiting. There were worried whispers and mumbles as the group approached the truck. In past years, participants of the walk had been met by counterprotesters. When we caught up with the truck, however, a Tohono O'odham man

and his young son were waiting for us. The man was carrying a staff adorned with red ribbons and small cloth pouches. He explained that he had traveled all the way from the western reservation that day to greet us and to thank us for honoring the dead. He wanted his son to see that there were those who cared. He had brought a sacred staff and tobacco that had been blessed. He told our group, “We used to clean the earth each time we found a dead body. Now, we find so many dead that we don’t even know how to clean the earth anymore. It hurts us, and it hurts the land.”

EXAMINATION AND INVESTIGATION

Although the investigative work of forensic autopsy and anthropological examination are necessary to identify the dead, they are quite destructive to human remains. Less destructive forms of human identification, such as visual recognition by family or fingerprint comparison, are often not possible due to the effects of the desert. Forensic practitioners at the PCOME have been unable to identify between 30 and 40 percent of decedents believed to be migrants each year (Reineke 2016). With nearly 900 cases as of 2014, Arizona ranked third among states (Mejdrich 2014). At the time of this writing, there were more than 1,100 unidentified. Although this chapter is not about all the factors leading to such a high number of unidentified remains, it is important to note that the risks migrants face during their journey, such as dehydration, deportation, or abuse, can affect the ability of forensic practitioners to identify the remains of the dead (De León 2015; Reineke 2016). The vulnerability of migrants in life contributes to their erasure in death. Forensic practitioners must use special methods for migrant cases to produce the biometric data that can assist in identifying them. Although these efforts can be seen as destructive, they are ultimately acts of care. As Bruce Anderson often says, “I work on the dead, but I work for the living.”

All unidentified remains found in the desert borderlands of Arizona and sent to Pima County undergo thorough examination, usually beginning with an autopsy. Most are then examined by a forensic anthropologist. Though standard for medicolegal cases,⁴ the autopsy is quite destructive. The main objective is to establish the cause of death, and this is done by dissecting the body. Following external examination and photography, a Y-shaped incision is made along the trunk of the body.

Shears or a scalpel are used to cut open the chest cavity. An electric saw is used to cut through ribs on either side of the sternum, so that the chest plate can be removed to allow access to the heart and lungs. The organs are removed individually, examined, and dissected. The stomach and intestinal contents are removed and weighed. The brain is then examined. An incision is made across the crown of the head, and the scalp is pulled aside. The top of the skull is then cut with a circular saw, and the “cap” of the skull is removed to reveal the brain. The brain is then observed, and in some cases removed. When the autopsy is complete, all elements are returned to the body, the Y-shaped incision is sewn closed, the cap of the skull replaced, and the incision along the top of the head sewn closed.

Because the PCOME receives so many remains that are mummified by the extremely arid conditions of the Sonoran Desert, investigators have innovated a way to successfully obtain fingerprints from desiccated hands (Shaheed 2014). In these cases, the hands are removed from the body and soaked in a solution that rehydrates them to the point where the fingertips can be rolled in ink and printed on fingerprint cards. Many successful identifications have come about because of fingerprint matches that would not have been possible without this process, and the technique is now used in other contexts. However, this procedure is one more step in the further disarticulation of the dead.

Generally, forensic anthropologists are asked to assist in the United States in cases where the cause of death or the identity of the deceased cannot be determined through autopsy and external examination. Forensic anthropology examinations are typically required in cases where remains are decomposed or skeletal. It is rare for a county the size and population of Pima County to have a full-time forensic anthropologist, yet as of this writing, the county employs three. The chief medical examiner for the office, Dr. Gregory Hess, emphasizes the disproportionate number of skeletal remains cases for Pima County by saying, “The year I trained in Milwaukee, we had one set of skeletal remains received that entire year, and we had a good idea of whose remains those were. That is compared to Pima, where we have an average 100–120 unidentified remains cases per year, the majority of which we have no idea who they are.”⁵

Most cases of deceased migrants require the expertise of a forensic anthropologist to produce biometric data, including the individual’s physical characteristics and approximate time since death, which then

may be compared against missing person reports to identify the decedent (Anderson 2008; Reineke and Anderson 2016). The forensic anthropology examination procedure at the PCOME depends on the condition of the remains and the presence or absence of skeletal elements that can aid in the assessment of the biological profile. The elements most commonly relied on include the cranium, the pubic symphysis, the femur, and the fourth rib. If the remains are already skeletal or nearly skeletal, the process to separate out these elements for analysis has already been largely completed by nature, and the work to resect (cut out) elements is easier and less destructive. After all of the bones are placed on the examining table for documentation and photography, the elements needed to construct the biological profile are cleaned in a liquid solution and then examined closely. If, however, the remains are not skeletal, but instead fleshed, the resecting process is much more involved. The head must be removed and cleaned completely to enable a detailed examination of the cranium and dentition. The pubic symphysis is resected, along with the fourth rib, both of which are used in the assessment of age. In all cases, a bone sample is taken from either the tibia or the cranium, which is then sent to a laboratory for DNA sequencing and comparison with family reference samples from relatives of the missing.

Although the impact of forensic postmortem examination can be experienced by families as a further layer of destruction of their loved one's remains, the process is necessary for there to be any hope of identification. Without identification, families continue to suffer the deeply traumatic experience of ambiguous loss and severe anxiety as they search for the whereabouts of a missing loved one (Boss 1999; Reineke 2016). Forensic scientists at Pima County work diligently to identify the dead with care and respect. The effects of immigration policy, desert conditions, and the lived experience of structural vulnerability of the migrants themselves have taken such a toll on the remains that the forensic scientists often start with so little that they must disarticulate in order to reconstitute. Their goal is not to cause harm, but to return the remains to families so they can be mourned as individual persons. This is restorative work, moving in the opposite direction from the dominant forces of violence and erasure that occur along the U.S.-México border.

In addition to investigating the highest number of migrant remains cases in the nation, Pima County also models some of the best practices

found among medicolegal offices along the border (Binational Migration Institute 2014; Jimenez 2009). The former chief medical examiner of Pima County, Dr. Bruce Parks, describes the ethical approach of the office simply and compassionately: “We treat people like we would want our family members to be treated” (McCombs 2011). Unfortunately, this ethical stance appears to be somewhat rare along the border, where too often migrant remains are treated with an appalling lack of respect for human rights and due process. The gap between ethics and law in the treatment of dead bodies in the United States is wide: there is both a lack of legal protections for the dead and their families and a lack of oversight by authorities who could enforce the laws that do exist (ProPublica 2011).

Up until 2013, remains discovered in remote areas of several counties in southern Texas were barely investigated at all before burial. Remains found in Brooks County, Texas, were transferred to the management and oversight of two private funeral homes, Elizondo Mortuary and Howard Williams Funeral Home, the latter of which is owned by the largest mortuary company in the United States, Service Corporation International (Frey 2015). Howard Williams would pick up the remains from the scene and take them to Elizondo Mortuary, which was contracted by Brooks County to collect DNA samples, identify the dead, and store remains before burial (Frey 2015). After investigation, unidentified remains were transferred back to Howard Williams for burial (Frey 2015).

In 2012, lawyers and community organizers in Texas began to pressure Brooks County to clarify the examination and investigation process for unidentified remains believed to be those of migrants (Kovic 2013). They discovered that remains were not being autopsied, examined by an anthropologist, or sampled for DNA before burial (Kovic 2013). Without these steps, it is very unlikely for decomposed or skeletal remains to be associated with missing person reports and identified. At least two families of missing migrants were told they would have to pay the funeral home to complete the portions of the exam that were not done initially, despite these funeral homes charging the county for the same work.

Marta Iraheta, the aunt of a missing Salvadoran man, Elmer Esau Barahona, shared her story with me, as well as with Texas human rights advocates who published her story in a report (Kovic 2013). Elmer crossed in June 2012. After injuring his leg and becoming ill after drinking water from a cattle trough, Elmer was left behind in the desert by the group with

whom he was traveling. Before leaving him, a traveling companion wrote down phone numbers for Elmer's family and tied his own shirt around Elmer's injured leg. When the man made it to safety, he called Elmer's family and told them what had happened. He described the shirt he had tied around Elmer's leg as a plaid brown-and-white, long-sleeved, button-up shirt. When Marta visited Brooks County in search of Elmer, she was shown photographs relating to several cases of unidentified human remains. In one set of photos, she noticed a plaid brown-and-white shirt.

Marta saw these photographs at the Brooks County Sheriff's Office, in Falfurrias, Texas. When she asked the deputies where the remains for this case were, they referred her to Elizondo Mortuary. Upon contacting Elizondo, Marta was told that she would have to pay thousands of dollars for the body to be exhumed, sampled for DNA, and stored each day the body was in a cooler. If the body was not Elmer's, the mortuary told Marta that she would have to pay for the remains to be reburied. By working with a number of organizations, including Colibrí, Elmer's family was finally able to get answers and bury Elmer's remains at no cost. The process involved a large project overseen by a forensic anthropologist at Baylor University to exhume all unidentified remains buried in Brooks County's municipal cemetery; an equally large forensic anthropology examination project (Operation Identification) at Texas State University in San Marcos; and finally, the collection of antemortem information and DNA from Elmer's family, overseen by the Colibrí Center for Human Rights and the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF). It took several years for Elmer's remains to be identified and, due to bureaucratic hurdles between funeral homes and consulates, several more years for his body to finally be released to the family.

Like the violence in the desert and borderlands context, the necroviolence that can occur during examination and investigation often takes the form of inaction rather than overt direct action. If not carefully translated and explained, the work of forensic scientists to identify the dead can be experienced as further violence done to the remains of a family's loved one. Rumors circulate in Latin American communities that forensic scientists in places like the medical examiner's office in Pima County are doing research and experimentation on the dead, or taking pieces of the dead to sell in organ trafficking. Even with adequate explanation, however, it is generally very painful for relatives to imagine their loved

one going through an autopsy or a forensic anthropology examination. Furthermore, many of the families of missing and dead migrants are Catholic, and experience the disarticulation of the dead as a second death, even if they do understand that the work was necessary to identify the dead body. Ultimately, it is not the job of the forensic scientist to help the family heal. That is work the family must do on their own or with support from social workers, psychologists, clergy, or other local systems. When remains are not adequately examined and identified, there is no chance of healing at all. However, this healing is extremely difficult, as it is not just that someone has died, but that their remains have also been harmed, often repeatedly.

FINAL DISPOSITION

In 2010, Marc Silver, the director of the award-winning documentary *Who Is Dayani Cristal?* (2013), was retracing the steps of a man who had died while trying to cross the U.S.-México border. He had accompanied sheriff's deputies to the scene on the day the man's body was found in the desert, just 20 minutes from Tucson. Silver then spent weeks in the PCOME following every step of the identification process. When the remains of the Honduran man, Dilcy, were positively identified, Silver received permission from the family to accompany the body to the funeral home, and then onto the same flights from Tucson to Atlanta, and Atlanta to Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. On arrival in Tegucigalpa, Silver greeted Dilcy's family, who had traveled eight hours from the countryside to pick up Dilcy's body from the airport. After the family waited for the passengers and cargo to exit the plane, an airline representative informed them that the casket containing Dilcy's remains had not made it onto the flight from Atlanta to Tegucigalpa. Luggage took priority over caskets, the representative explained, and with a full flight, Dilcy's body had stayed on the tarmac overnight in Atlanta.

Marc Silver later asked, "Could there be a clearer demonstration of what is happening to migrants in the Americas? Literally cargo is more important than human beings."⁶ What happened to Dilcy's body that day is a microcosm of what is happening to hundreds of thousands of migrants, living and dead, in the Americas today. Consumers, products, and businesses move across borders relatively unimpeded. The working

poor, however, cannot even cross when they are dead. This impediment to “crossing” holds true not only in the sense of the geopolitical crossing of borders, but also in the sense of crossing over from the world of the living to the world of the dead. On the day Dilcy was buried, the family erupted into crisis before lowering his body into the ground. They were unsure if the remains were truly his, and they wanted to open the casket to be sure. Having seen the condition of Dilcy’s body, Silver strongly discouraged them, but respected their need to view the remains. In the end, the only thing that prevented them from opening the casket was the lack of a proper tool to pry it open. So, on that day, which should have been about remembering Dilcy and mourning his loss, there were still serious doubts about whether the body being buried was indeed his.

In this final part of my discussion of the postmortem “lives” of migrant dead along the U.S.-México border, I consider the ways in which these human remains are often assaulted yet again when they are released from forensic medicolegal offices for burial or cremation. Once again, there are actions and inactions impacting the dead that can harm the living.

There are two general trajectories remains take once they are released from forensic examination facilities. If the remains have been positively identified, they are transferred to a funeral home, which, in collaboration with the consulate of the country of origin, makes arrangements with the family to receive the remains. If not identified, but instead released from the medicolegal office as unknown, human remains are usually considered the property of the county in which they were discovered, and are buried, cremated, or stored, depending on state law and county procedure.

Until 2018, for those cases where the remains were found in Pima County, Arizona, the unidentified were released to the Pima County Public Fiduciary from the medical examiner’s office once all procedures of the postmortem examination were completed. The Public Fiduciary then contracted with a private mortuary to cremate unidentified remains. In 2018, the PCOME took over the indigent burial program for the county. Most unidentified are still cremated, with the exception of those cases that were already skeletal when discovered. These remains are now stored at the PCOME. The cremated remains are deposited in niches in a columbarium located at the county cemetery in Tucson. Prior to 2004, Arizona state law did not allow for the cremation of unidentified remains. The law was changed in large part because of Pima County’s

struggle to bury the high number of unidentified remains (Medrano 2006). In 2005, the county spent \$110,000 to purchase more land in order to bury the dead, only to see the space fill up again (Medrano 2006). Cremated remains not only take up much less space, but they also cost the county much less than burial; in 2006, a cremation cost the county \$475, while a burial was about \$1,800 (Medrano 2006).

The cremation of unidentified remains is generally understood to be a bad practice, both according to standards established in forensic science as well as those under international humanitarian law. After cremation, it is impossible to retrieve additional information that may have been missed during the initial examination. If the examination facility did not collect DNA, or if a sample was collected but was then lost or did not yield results, there is no possibility of collecting another sample after cremation. In addition, whether or not the survivors of the deceased would have chosen cremation, it is damaging for the choice to have been made by someone other than the family or community. While the burial of remains can be repeated indefinitely, allowing the family and community to perform funeral rites, the process of cremation can be done only once. Cremation denies families the chance to ritually incorporate the deceased person into the world of the dead. In addition, Latin American families of migrants are predominantly Catholic, and they place critical importance on the burial of physical remains both for the spirit of the deceased to enter heaven and for the continued collective remembrance of the dead, which is dependent on the material presence of a grave (Lomnitz 2008). The few times when I have notified families in cases where the remains were identified after they were cremated, the fact of cremation was like a second death. The family mourned anew when they learned that body and bones no longer were intact, but instead were ashes.

According to the 1949 Geneva Convention, “Bodies shall not be cremated except for imperative reasons of hygiene or for motives based on the religion of the deceased” (IFRC 2016). The authors of a 2014 report on best practices for the investigation and examination of migrant remains on the U.S.-México border made the point that “the notion that unidentified remains should be available for families to reclaim is an internationally held principle. It is adhered to even in the course of active war-time conditions, when the dead may not be retrievable for the period of armed conflict. In the case of mere economic constraints, as opposed to

conditions of active combat, international requirements for the treatment of the dead during war should be considered a basic guideline for those responsible for releasing unidentified decedents” (Binational Migration Institute 2014).

The cremation of the unidentified human remains of migrants is one example among many of how international human rights protections established in postconflict settings fail to protect migrants and their families at borders. Even worse, there are at least two counties along the U.S.-México border that not only cremate the unidentified but also scatter the ashes. An official in Imperial County, California, told me that the county had contracted with a company called Burials at Sea, which scatters the ashes into the ocean.⁷ Similarly, an official from Pinal County, Arizona, explained that cremated remains of the unidentified are kept in a storage locker with limited space. Each time a new box of ashes is added to the collection, the oldest case is removed and scattered in the Superstition Mountains.⁸ In these cases, if and when these dead are identified, their families will receive no physical remains.

In several counties in southern Texas where the deaths of migrants spiked in 2012 and 2013, the unidentified remains of migrants were buried, but they were buried improperly. Jason De León’s definition of necroviolence bears repeating, in that such violence is present when the “treatment of corpses . . . is perceived to be offensive, sacrilegious, or inhumane by the perpetrator, the victim (and her or his cultural group), or both” (2015:69). Excavations of a cemetery in Brooks County, Texas, in 2013 and 2014 revealed poorly marked and unmarked graves, often containing multiple individuals, with bodies and bones buried in trash bags, milk crates, or in no body bag or coffin at all (Collette 2014). There were cases where investigators had thrown their latex gloves and other garbage into the body bag or coffin along with the body.⁹ Forensic anthropologist Lori Baker told a reporter that she had found a skull in a plastic bag with the word “dignity” on it (Sacchetti 2014). Graves contained up to five bodies (Sacchetti 2014). Police reports and forensic records were misplaced, unavailable, or did not correlate to gravesites for individual burials (Collette 2014). Following pressure from civil rights lawyers and community organizers, the Texas Rangers initiated an investigation into Brooks County. After just two days of investigating, the Texas Rangers submitted their findings in full to the Texas state legislature, absolving the county of any wrongdoing (Frey 2015). Their investigation relied almost exclusively on

the testimony of those who would have been held liable in the event of any malpractice (Frey 2015).

At the time of this writing, forensic scientists and border human rights organizations continue the painstaking work of recovering valuable information from the dead, and trying to match the unidentified to the missing. The Texas Ranger investigation has been the only official, legally binding inquiry to date into practices involving unidentified remains in Brooks County, despite the fact that forensic anthropologists have publicized substantial data and evidence that the Texas Criminal Code was repeatedly violated. Although the behavior of Brooks County officials is disturbing, the fact that there has been no oversight and accountability is even more problematic. It is indicative of the broader problem along the U.S.-México border, where migrants and their families can be treated without respect to the law, due process, or human rights protections with complete impunity. Thanks to the efforts of community organizations and forensic anthropologists, Brooks County finally stopped sending remains to private funeral homes for examination in 2013. Instead, it now contracts with the Webb County Medical Examiner's Office, where these remains are investigated and examined thoroughly. However, the chief medical examiner of Webb County largely refuses to work with any nongovernmental organizations along the border, including the Colibrí Center for Human Rights and the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team. As these organizations manage the largest amounts of data pertaining to missing persons on the border, this refusal to collaborate likely impacts the ability of the Webb County medical examiner to identify some of the dead.

The harmful treatment is not restricted to those cases in which the remains are unidentified on release from the medicolegal facility, but also occurs in cases when the remains have been positively identified. I have limited experience in observing and participating in the release and repatriation part of the process. However, I have observed some problems. Staff at the Colibrí regularly receive calls from families in México or Central America who do not believe the remains they received are those of their missing loved ones. Often, they explain that they got a call from an official who told them that their son was dead, but that they did not understand what the person was saying and were given no documentation or means to follow up. Recently, a family in Chiapas who did not speak Spanish was notified by an official from the Tucson office of the Mexican consulate, in Spanish, with no translation.

The family of Dilcy, the Honduran man mentioned at the beginning of this section, was finally able to receive his body for burial. Many families do not have this option because of the expense of transporting the dead. The Mexican government provides some financial aid to families for repatriation, depending on income (Pinkerton 2007). In general, however, the amount provided by the Mexican government does not cover the full cost of shipping a body in a casket internationally. In 2007, the cost to prepare a body and ship it on a commercial airline to México started at \$3,500 (Pinkerton 2007). Even before shipping, the cost of exhumation for those bodies that were buried can be up to \$10,000. Families first find out that their loved one is dead, and then find out that unless they can come up with significant funds, the body will remain in Arizona, or be cremated and returned to them as ashes.

CONCLUSION

When one considers the disposition of the dead along the U.S.-México border, it becomes clear that migrants are *exposed* in multiple ways. During the crossing, migrants are exposed not only to the blistering sun, but also to abuse from coyotes (human smugglers), drug cartels, bandits, border vigilantes, and the U.S. Border Patrol. After death, their remains are exposed to the destructive effects of aridity and heat, animals and insects. If what is left of their body is found, the dead are then exposed to uneven forensic practices along the border, where they may be buried without forensic investigation, or in a common grave, or even cremated and scattered at sea. All of this impacts the ability of families to find the remains of their missing loved ones and mourn them after death.

The brutalization of the remains of migrants is also part of a historical process where the U.S.-México border has been used to violently define the terms of legitimate membership in the U.S. nation-state. That hundreds of dead bodies continue to be found each year in several U.S. states in various stages of decomposition speaks loudly about who is considered worthy of protection and who is thought to be expendable. The tragedy of the loss of life on the border is compounded by the degrading and dehumanizing ways in which the dead are left to be consumed by nature. Historically, the treatment of dead bodies has been a lightning rod for political and racial violence. And, as Carole Nagengast argues, “when some categories of people are reduced to a less than human status,

it becomes easier for those higher in the hierarchy to imagine that those lower somehow deserve to be brutalized” (2002:330). In addition to paying attention to the number of fatalities, it is critical to be aware of the treatment of the dead. While violence against the dead may be felt more intimately by the families, it is symbolically powerful on a social level and may be predictive of further forms of violence against immigrants, refugees, and migrants.

NOTES

1. Border Patrol numbers are likely quite low because (a) the geography in which migrants die is remote and vast and many of the dead likely have not been found, (b) the dead are being recovered in border counties that are not keeping track of the number of migrant deaths versus other deaths, and (c) U.S. Customs and Border Protection has been unclear about the methodologies behind these numbers, which likely represent only those cases where Border Patrol agents were involved in discovery.

2. Organizations like No More Deaths and Coalición de Derechos Humanos regularly organize search and rescue operations.

3. These phone numbers are sometimes used to call the family and offer them the kindness of knowing that their loved one has died. The phone numbers are also used by organized crime groups to extort money from families.

4. Cases are accepted by the medical examiner for medicolegal investigation if the death was violent, suspicious, sudden, or unexpected.

5. Personal communication with Gregory Hess, January 2013.

6. Personal communication, January 2013.

7. Conversation with Norma Saikhon, Imperial County public administrator, October 19, 2012, in collaboration with the Binational Migration Institute.

8. Personal conversation with Bruce Anderson, February 27, 2016.

9. Personal communication with Kate Spradley, January 2014.

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Etched in Bone

Embodied Suffering in the Remains of Undocumented Migrants

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I unzipped the body bag and took a cursory inventory of the contents: the sun-bleached skeletal remains of a woman; a pair of jeans with glittery rhinestone pockets; a pink-striped polo shirt; and white running shoes. The clothes were faded and wrinkled, and I had to shake off the desert dust before spreading them out on the morgue table for a closer look. I reached into the right pocket of the jeans and pulled out a Virgen de Guadalupe prayer card, some Mexican currency, and a piece of paper with the name "Margarita" and a few phone numbers. The left pocket held a worn photograph of a little girl, maybe four or five years old, with pigtails and a big, toothy smile. I wondered if it was her daughter or a niece. I emptied all the other pockets, but found nothing else. No identification card telling me her name, age, or where she came from. I sighed and went back to inventorying the contents of the body bag. There was nothing really but her clothing, a few personal effects, and her skeleton to lead me to her identity. Only her bones could tell me about her life and what ultimately led to her death in the desert and her final arrival here on my laboratory table.

I carefully laid out her skeletal remains in anatomical order on top of the morgue table. Her cranium and mandible placed on one end, followed by the bones of her torso and arms, down the spine to her pelvis, lower legs, and the small bones of her feet. Her bones were stark white, sun-bleached from months of exposure to the desert sun, and I could tell that she had been out there for some time before anyone found her. The death investigator told me that her skeletonized remains were discovered in a very remote part of the desert, and it was no surprise that she hadn't been found until now. I wondered if she had a family that was searching for her.

I began an anthropological analysis of her age, ancestry, stature, and identifying features. The last bone in her body had yet to mature, and I realized she was quite young, likely in her early twenties. The shape of her skull and facial bones told me she was probably of Hispanic descent. Calculations of her

leg bones indicated that she was only about 4'8" to 5'1" tall, remarkably short for a young adult who had already grown to her fullest height. Aside from her short stature, her body further spoke of a difficult life lived in her brief twenty-some years. Childhood stressors, such as possible malnutrition, intestinal parasites, or periods of extreme illness marked her cranial bones and teeth. She likely struggled to get enough nutritious food as a little girl and may have battled intense infections. These experiences left an indelible mark on her body, discernible even in her twenties.

Her current dental condition didn't indicate an improvement in her economic circumstances in recent years. Multiple cavities filled her mouth, a few teeth were missing, and she had no dental fillings, telling me she likely had never been to a dentist. I had experienced the discomfort of a small cavity once, and I could only imagine how painful it would have been with the large cavities she had. She also had a healed fracture of her left arm that looked like it had never been properly set, and I wondered if she ever saw a doctor about it.

While her skeleton revealed plenty about her life, it wouldn't relinquish the secret of how she had died. There was no visible skeletal trauma, and it was most likely that she perished from any one of the desert's invisible yet deadly hazards. There were plenty of them: hyperthermia, dehydration, hypothermia, poisonous animals, and sharp, spiny plants. The vast majority of death certificates of migrants examined at the office read "Environmental Exposure, Accident."

I finished my analysis, carefully placed her bones and clothing back into the body bag, and sealed it. Her bones had revealed as much as they could. I estimated that she was a young Hispanic female in her early twenties who stood approximately 4'8" to 5'1" tall. She had likely endured a poverty-stricken childhood as evidenced by the stress markers on her bones. Based on her personal effects, her skeletal health, and where she was found in the remote desert, I surmised that she was likely an undocumented border crosser and had died an early death in the Arizona desert. Based on the state of her bones, she had been out there for quite some time. It was time to compare her profile to the thousands of reported missing migrants and hope for a match. I knew I couldn't bring her back, but perhaps I could finally bring her home.¹

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 20 years, more than 7,000 bodies or skeletons of known or presumed undocumented migrants have been recovered from the

U.S.-México border region. An average of 300–400 undocumented migrant remains are found in the border states of Texas, Arizona, and California each year (U.S. Border Patrol 2017). The deaths of migrants along the U.S.-México border increased dramatically in the mid-1990s following an escalation in border enforcement mandated by the U.S. federal government. Beginning in 1994 with Operation Gatekeeper in California, the presence of Border Patrol agents and surveillance technology along the border increased rapidly, making the border crossing a much more difficult and dangerous journey (De León 2015; Rubio-Goldsmith et al. 2006). Despite increased border surveillance, migrant workers continued to cross through the borderlands in increasingly remote locations and began to die in large numbers. From 2002 to 2012, the Border Patrol's Tucson Sector in Arizona recorded the largest number of undocumented migrant deaths, averaging between 150 and 250 each year (Martínez et al. 2013; U.S. Border Patrol 2014). Over the years, the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner (PCOME), in Tucson, Arizona, has been responsible for investigating the deaths of the vast majority of these individuals. Although patterns of undocumented migration have shifted in recent years, and since 2012 the state of Texas has recorded the highest overall number of deceased migrant bodies, the remains of more than a hundred individuals continue to be recovered from the Tucson Sector and investigated by the PCOME each year (U.S. Border Patrol 2016).

In this chapter, we examine the interdisciplinary approach utilized by the PCOME to identify the significant number of migrants whose remains are recovered from the southern Arizona desert each year. Through this analysis we consider the ways in which collective experiences of marginality and structural violence, as experienced by those who leave their homes in México and Central American countries to migrate to the United States, are mapped onto individual bodies in ways that can be recognized even after death. At the PCOME, the considerable number of migrant remains necessitated an innovative forensic approach to determine who is suspected of being a migrant and who is not. Through their analyses, forensic anthropologists at the office began to realize that physical effects of lifelong poverty and marginalization were some of the most remarkable characteristics distinguishing the bodies of migrants from those of nonmigrants. These specific features are integrated into the physical body through the life course and provide evidence of

socioeconomic status and health from childhood through adulthood. This “life history approach” is well-known in bioarchaeological studies of historic and prehistoric populations, and in forensic anthropology (Larsen 1997, 2002; Martin et al. 2013).

At the PCOME, the remains of individuals with poor oral health, short stature, skeletal indicators of stress and disease, and poorly healed fractures were more often coded as undocumented migrants, while individuals with improved oral health and dental work, taller stature, and without any skeletal evidence of stress and disease were more commonly coded as U.S. nationals. Our objective here is to better understand these observations in light of literature on embodiment and structural violence or structural vulnerability. This chapter will demonstrate that within the southern Arizona border context, scientific observations of the remains of undocumented migrants suggest lifelong biological manifestations of poverty, marginalization, and structural violence.

BACKGROUND

Since 2001, the PCOME has examined the remains of more than 2,600 suspected undocumented border crossers; the office continues to investigate the largest number of migrant deaths in the United States (PCOME 2016). Nearly 1,700 of the 2,600 undocumented border crossers have been identified, with the overwhelming majority coming from México, followed by Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras (Martínez et al. 2013, 2014; PCOME 2016). Undocumented border crossers, or “UBCs,” as defined at the PCOME, are individuals of foreign nationality who died while crossing the border clandestinely (Anderson and Parks 2008). The PCOME has responded to the large number of UBC deaths by developing innovative approaches to distinguish individuals as migrants and identify them, so that they may be repatriated to their families. The “Undocumented Border Crosser (UBC) Profile” was created in an effort to differentiate the remains of undocumented foreign nationals from U.S. nationals using situational context, personal effects, and biological characteristics (Anderson and Parks 2008). Specific features of the UBC profile include the geographic location where the body is found, biological indicators of admixed Native American and European or African ancestry (Southwest Hispanic), and personal effects that indicate Mexican

or Central American nationality (Anderson 2008; Anderson and Parks 2008; Birkby et al. 2008).

The basic concept of the UBC profile loosely originates from forensic anthropology, the analysis of unidentified human remains, and what is known as the “biological profile.” The biological profile includes the estimation of ancestry, age, sex, height, and any individualizing characteristics such as pathology or past injuries noted on skeletal remains. The biological profile is strictly limited to observations made of the physical remains and does not include contextual factors, such as where the individual was found, the cause and manner of death, or personal effects. The UBC profile, however, combines all physical *and* contextual factors into an assessment unique to the contemporary borderlands. Noting a difference from the biological profile, several forensic anthropologists at the PCOME described the nonbiological observations making up the UBC profile as the “cultural profile” of Hispanic border crossers (Birkby et al. 2008). However, in 2010 cultural anthropologist Robin Reineke and forensic anthropologist Bruce Anderson noted the danger in subsuming all nonbiological observations under the umbrella of “culture,” arguing that “the placement of sequelae caused by poverty under the heading ‘cultural’ is inaccurate and puts blame on Mexican or Latin American culture” (Reineke and Anderson 2010). Instead of labeling one set of observations “biological” and the other “cultural,” Reineke and Anderson proposed using the biocultural theory of embodiment to understand evidence of lived experiences of poverty, racism, and overall marginalization as expressed in the remains of migrants. Building on this framework, Angela Soler and colleagues introduced a biocultural approach that uses embodied life stress and culturally specific body modifications to differentiate the remains of undocumented migrants (those dying while crossing the border, as well as those who have died while living within the United States) from those of American nationals, which can be especially useful in the absence of situational context or personal effects and culturally identifying items (Soler et al. 2014).

Although the goal of human identification is to connect an individual set of human remains to a family searching for a particular missing person, the assignment of “UBC” status to remains at the PCOME is a collective-level assessment. Forensic practitioners take observations from their experience with other cases of deceased migrants and predict

that an unidentified individual is likely a migrant. While categorization is always problematic, we argue that this is done at the PCOME for legitimate humanitarian and practical reasons. Without such profiling, the counting of migrant deaths in southern Arizona would be fewer by one-third, which would vastly underreport the number of fatalities. In nearly 15 years of coding more than 2,500 individuals, only five instances of miscoding a U.S. citizen as a UBC have been revealed. In addition, the curation of a complete list of unidentified remains believed to be migrants enables forensic comparison against missing person reports managed by organizations that specifically aid families of missing migrants, such as foreign consulates, the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team, and the Colibrí Center for Human Rights. In short, failure to categorize in this case would result in a damaging “color-blind” understanding of who is and who is not dying at the border, and would reduce the number of migrants identified and returned to their families. Finally, this grouping of individuals who die while crossing the border has enabled a collective understanding of the structural forces that leave their mark on the bodies of these individuals and that may compel an individual to cross the border clandestinely in the first place.

EMBODIED STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

A growing body of literature in public health and the social science of medicine criticizes biomedical approaches that place blame or responsibility on individual persons for poor health outcomes rather than social, economic, and structural factors that constrain individual choices (Holmes 2007; Krieger 1994, 2001; Poundstone et al. 2004). Johan Galtung defined structural violence as “the indirect violence built into repressive social orders creating enormous differences between potential and actual human self-realization” (Galtung 1975:173). Victims of structural violence may perish from curable diseases, face disproportionately high levels of toxins in their environments, or live in environments where they experience higher levels of interpersonal violence. Paul Farmer, who has contributed heavily to the literature on structural violence, argues that a disproportionate amount of risk is distributed along social axes of marginalization: “Social factors including gender, ethnicity (‘race’), and socioeconomic status may each play a role in rendering individuals and groups vulnerable to extreme human suffering” (2005:42). Quesada et al.

(2011) contributes the concept of “structural vulnerability” as a more flexible mechanism to understand the ways in which social obstacles come to affect individual outcomes. They define structural vulnerability as “a positionality that imposes physical/emotional suffering on specific population groups and individuals in patterned ways” based on “class-based economic exploitation and cultural, gender/sexual, and racialized discrimination, as well as complementary processes of depreciated subjectivity formation” (Quesada et al. 2011:341). Of particular importance to our project is their observation that “when translated into healthcare practice, the concept of structural vulnerability can become a productive tool for contextualizing diagnosis and informing critical praxis” (Quesada et al. 2011:342).

In a sense, what practitioners at the PCOME are doing when they are “coding” for probable UBC status is providing a diagnosis. The language they use to describe this assessment, “undocumented border crosser,” emphasizes the *act* of crossing the border, rather than any particular social, cultural, or economic identity. The categorization has more to do with cause and manner of death than with an identity. In the United States, forensic pathologists must determine the manner of death for individual cases by selecting from five categories, including natural, accident, homicide, suicide, or undetermined. Although the majority of migrants examined at the PCOME were determined to have died accidental deaths due to exposure to the elements, migrants in southern Arizona have died from all five manners of death. With the use of the UBC profile, however, forensic practitioners at the PCOME are rendering a diagnosis much more complex and nuanced than the five traditional manners of death. They are observing that those who die while crossing the border “look” different, in patterned ways, from those who die in similar geographies who were not crossing the border. One of the key characteristics of their diagnosis is evidence of embodied social suffering on a level less commonly seen in U.S.-born populations.

The biocultural concept of embodiment is useful for understanding the ways in which social and environmental stressors, including the effects of structural vulnerability and structural violence, come to play out corporeally. As Nancy Krieger writes, embodiment “refers to how we, like any living organism, literally incorporate, biologically, the world in which we live, including our societal and ecological circumstances” (2005:351). Of critical importance in the study of embodiment is that measured differences between populations do not imply innate biological differences

between populations (Krieger 2005). Instead, such differences may point to disparate environmental, social, and economic contexts that impact the growth and development of individual biologies on a large scale. Lack of access to clean drinking water, nutritious food, and restful sleep, for example, are all factors that negatively affect individual health outcomes for entire populations. The concept of embodiment is a critical intervention in epidemiology because it encourages public health involvement to be targeted where the problem exists, which is at societal- and structural-level conditions, rather than with individual behaviors and actions.

It is no surprise that migrants who die during their attempt to cross the U.S.-México border come from impoverished backgrounds. Although the Mexican economy was improving in the early 2000s when the crisis of migrant death on the border began to increase, neoliberal economic reform during the 1990s had the long-term effect of displacing hundreds of thousands of campesinos throughout the country (Garcia 2009; Wise 2009). The most notable of these reforms was the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The aim of NAFTA was to reduce trade barriers between the United States, Canada, and México, most notably in the agricultural sector. After the elimination of agricultural tariffs and quotas between the United States and México, U.S.-based producers continued to receive government subsidies, which allowed these producers to flood the Mexican market with cheap agricultural goods, a process that ultimately displaced hundreds of thousands of Mexican farmers and agricultural laborers (Wise 2010). Despite the optimism surrounding NAFTA, neoliberal economic reform had devastating consequences for Mexican campesinos as well as others tied to the agricultural sector of the economy. A recent report published by the Center for Economic and Policy Research found that NAFTA contributed significantly to the loss of an estimated 1.9 million jobs in the Mexican agricultural sector between 1991 and 2007 (Weisbrot et al. 2017). The link between neoliberal economic reforms and increased out-migration has been well established in the academic literature (Delgado-Wise and Márquez 2008; Nevins and Aizeki 2008). This structural transformation forced many people to leave rural communities throughout México in search of work.

While it is broadly understood in the literature on migration in the Americas that those crossing the U.S.-México border are migrating for economic reasons, this chapter demonstrates the extent of the socioeconomic vulnerability experienced by those who die in the borderlands.

Although our findings are limited to those who have perished in their attempt to cross the border into southern Arizona, our results are compelling in that they demonstrate with physical evidence just how frequently and, in many cases, how severely those crossing the border are experiencing structural vulnerability. We believe that these results reveal how greater structural- and societal-level factors, rather than individual-level behaviors, directly contribute to the causes for migration. The following sections review the dental and osseous findings suggestive of poverty and marginalization in the remains of UBCs and discuss the ways in which skeletal indicators of stress reflect the collective experience within the Hispanic undocumented migrant community.

POOR ORAL HEALTH

The visibly poor oral health of Hispanic foreign nationals examined at the PCOME, especially in comparison with their Hispanic American counterparts, has been noted for decades. It was first published by Birkby et al. in 2008 and began to be quantified by Anderson et al. in 2009. Anderson et al. (2009) found that nearly 45 percent of the identified Mexican nationals in their study exhibited dental caries (cavities). Furthermore, 66 percent of all sampled UBCs exhibited antemortem tooth loss, which is the loss of a tooth most often caused by periodontal (e.g., severe gum) disease, extensive caries, or untreated abscessed infections of the tooth root. Even more striking was the fact that these prevalence rates were significantly higher than those observed in Mexican Americans, who exhibited antemortem tooth loss and caries in only 23 percent and 39 percent of individuals, respectively. Moreover, 78 percent of individuals in the Mexican American sample had dental restorations in comparison with only 35 percent of Mexican nationals, indicating more regular access to dental care in the American individuals.

More recent data demonstrate that these indicators of poor oral health continue to be prevalent among undocumented migrants (Soler and Beatrice 2016). Out of a sample of 200 UBCs examined at the PCOME, 68.5 percent of individuals had caries. Many of these individuals had relatively severe caries, with 42 percent exhibiting at least one tooth with more than half of the crown destroyed by caries and 14 percent exhibiting at least one tooth crown completely destroyed by caries. Notably, out of the 200 individuals included in the sample, only 25 percent had any dental

work at all. While not everyone included in the sample was in need of dental work, a large majority of those who exhibited caries and/or antemortem tooth loss had not had any dental intervention.

In addition to a high caries prevalence, antemortem tooth loss was a relatively common finding, with 41.5 percent of individuals exhibiting at least one tooth missing antemortem (excluding third molars). Dental abscesses were also relatively common, with 19 percent of UBCs examined at the PCOME presenting dental abscesses, or infections of the alveolar bone surrounding the tooth root (Soler and Beatrice 2016). Abscesses can develop secondary to carious lesions, trauma to the tooth, or poor dental work (Shweta and Prakash 2013). They may be quite painful and may lead to significant health complications, such as septicemia, infections of the brain, heart, or lungs, shock, and in extreme circumstances, death (Robertson and Smith 2009; Shweta and Prakash 2013; Walsh 1997).

The findings at PCOME are unsurprising considering that access to regular, affordable, or adequate dental care is not prevalent throughout México and Central America, but especially within more rural or indigenous communities. It has been estimated that there are fewer than two to three dentists per every 10,000 inhabitants in México and Guatemala, a majority of whom are concentrated in urban centers, leaving most rural communities without access to any dental care (Masuoka et al. 2014; PAHO 2012). Furthermore, a large percentage of the dentists in México work within the private sector, and it is likely that the vast majority of low- and middle-income families cannot afford to utilize their services (González-Robledo et al. 2012). Consequently, many individuals in México and Guatemala may never see a dentist or may receive dental care only sporadically. Research has demonstrated that a very low proportion of school-aged children throughout the region have ever been to a dentist and that socioeconomic inequalities, such as a lack of health insurance and whether the family owns a vehicle, are major factors preventing regular dental visits (Jiménez-Gayasso et al. 2015). Moreover, many individuals who have access to publicly funded dental health services do not obtain the dental care they need due to a lack of education about the importance of oral health (Medina-Solís et al. 2006). Given this, it is not surprising that multiple studies have found relatively high levels of periodontal disease and caries prevalence in Mexican and Guatemalan individuals of varying ages, especially in comparison with their North

American counterparts (Casanova-Rosado et al. 2005; Pérez-Domínguez et al. 2010).

Despite increased opportunity for regular and improved dental care in the United States, many undocumented migrants who have been living within the country still do not receive the oral or medical care that they need. Many barriers, including fear of deportation, poverty, or language, prevent undocumented migrants from seeking care, even when they are in pain (Alexander and Fernandez 2014; Armin 2015; Berk and Schur 2001). These impediments also affect the children of undocumented immigrants, noncitizens and citizens alike, as they are less likely to get dental or medical treatment, even in emergencies (Guendelman et al. 2005). Studies have demonstrated that undocumented immigrants and even naturalized citizens and temporary guest workers are less likely to use dental services than U.S. citizens. As few as 20–25 percent of individuals of undocumented status ever visit a dentist in the United States (Quandt et al. 2007; Wilson et al. 2016).

In addition to the physical and psychosocial effect on individuals of poor oral health, the World Dental Federation points out that it is associated with more serious, chronic health ramifications such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and respiratory disease (FDI World Dental Federation 2015). Children are also adversely affected by caries and tooth loss, not only as a result of the pain and disruption in sleeping and eating patterns, but also because of the negative effects on nutrition and metabolic processes (Acs et al. 1992; Sheiham 2005). As a result, in 2008 oral health was added to the United Nations declaration of noncommunicable diseases as “a major health burden for many countries” (United Nations 2011). While personal choices such as diet may affect one’s overall oral health, many external factors, including poor living conditions, low education, and lack of access to clean water and sanitary conditions, are outside the scope of personal responsibility (FDI World Dental Federation 2015) and are greatly influenced by socioeconomic status.

SKELETAL INDICATORS OF STRESS

Evidence in the form of skeletal conditions also suggests that UBCs examined at the PCOME frequently experienced developmental stress during their childhood years. Physical anthropologists assess stress from

the skeleton based on the potential for internal and external stressors to produce physiological responses that disrupt normal bone metabolism and, in children and adolescents, cause disturbances in growth and development (Goodman and Armelagos 1988; Goodman et al. 1988; Klaus 2014; Martin et al. 1991). External stressors may include environmental constraints that prohibit an individual or a community from accessing basic resources, such as clean water, adequate nutrition, and shelter (Goodman and Martin 2002). Social stressors, including one's gender, socioeconomic status, political and social disruptions, and racial or cultural stigma, can exacerbate these environmental constraints. Even self-perceived stress associated with these examples may contribute to physiological disruption (Dressler 2015; Goodman et al. 1988).

Because bone is a dynamic tissue that responds to physiological demands, prolonged exposure to systemic stress that overwhelms biological and cultural buffering systems may be manifest as permanent or semi-permanent indicators on skeletal remains (Goodman and Martin 2002). The frequency and skeletal distribution of these indicators, which may have specific or nonspecific causes, allow physical anthropologists to reconstruct life stresses such as nutritional deprivation, metabolic diseases, infections, and psychosocial stress. Skeletal changes associated with generalized physiological stress—the focus of this section—are important sources of data with which the health status and living conditions of a group of individuals may be evaluated. Examples of skeletal indicators that reflect episodes of physiological stress experienced during growth and development include short stature, dental enamel defects such as linear enamel hypoplasias, and porotic lesions of the cranial vault and eye orbits.

SHORT STATURE

Stature is defined as the measured physical height of an individual and is determined by a combination of genetics and external factors, such as nutrition, environmental contaminants, and access to clean water and sanitation. While genetics plays a large role in adult stature, proper environmental conditions and adequate nutrition allow populations to meet their maximum growth potential. Epidemiological studies have demonstrated a correlation between short stature or growth stunting and various environmental factors, including malnourishment, illness, and parasitic

infections (Dewey and Mayers 2011; King 2010). These environmental factors begin affecting the fetus in the womb, and thus poor maternal health, nutrition, and short stature likely predispose an infant to growth stunting later in life (Solomons et al. 2015). Low socioeconomic status and poverty contribute indirectly to shorter stature because they influence access to adequate nutrition and medical care (Groeneveld et al. 2007; Lee et al. 2010; Nyström and Vägerö 1987; Steckel 1995). As a result of the negative impact of environmental factors on stature, the World Health Organization includes growth stunting in their evaluation of health status in developing countries (de Onis and Blössner 1997).

Short stature has been used as a possible indication of UBC status at the PCOME for many decades, starting with the office's first forensic anthropologist, Walter H. Birkby. Dr. Birkby noted that the average stature of adult undocumented border crossers was significantly less than that of American-born individuals and that, in conjunction with other features, stature could be helpful in differentiating the bodies of these two groups (Birkby et al. 2008). Various anthropological studies have confirmed Dr. Birkby's initial observations; Soler and Beatrice have found that the average stature of deceased border crossers examined at the PCOME is approximately 65 inches for males and 61 inches for females (Soler and Beatrice 2016). These findings agree with a previous study by Anderson et al. (2009), who report that the average height of foreign-born Mexican males is approximately 66 inches, which is significantly shorter than their Mexican American male counterparts, who average approximately 69 inches tall. In addition, Spradley et al. (2008) demonstrate that a forensic sample of Hispanic individuals from México and Central America (mostly from the PCOME), as well as Puerto Ricans, shows that they are the shortest in stature when compared to American and Cuban individuals.

LINEAR ENAMEL HYPOPLASIA

Linear enamel hypoplasias (LEH) are linear bands of missing or reduced enamel observable on the tooth crowns. They are the result of a disruption in enamel development during acute and chronic episodes of stress (Goodman et al. 1984). Because tooth enamel does not remodel subsequent to its formation, LEH are permanent and, when present in adult

teeth, represent a record of growth disturbances from birth to adolescence (Larsen 1997). The position of each LEH on a tooth marks the extent of crown development when enamel formation was interrupted (Goodman and Rose 1990). LEH can be indicative of various childhood stressors, such as starvation, episodic stress, extreme illness, parasites, congenital infections, or any combination of these factors (Lewis and Roberts 1997).

While oral health and short stature have been utilized by forensic anthropologists at the PCOME for many years, linear enamel hypoplasias are a more recent addition to the set of biocultural factors used to differentiate the remains of migrants and American-born individuals. In the course of working to identify the remains of people who died while crossing the border, Soler noted that many UBCs exhibited LEH on their teeth—an uncommon observation in the dentition of American-born individuals she examined at the office. A publication by Beatrice and Soler (2016) indicates that undocumented border crossers at the PCOME are approximately three times more likely to exhibit LEH than individuals in a mixed American comparative sample. In



Figure 6.1 Maxillary (upper) teeth of an undocumented border crosser examined at the PCOME. All anterior teeth exhibit multiple linear enamel hypoplasias (black arrows) (photograph by Angela Soler).

this study, 30.4 percent of UBCs exhibited LEH, in comparison to just 10.9 percent of the American-born comparative sample. An expanded PCOME sample of undocumented migrants confirms these findings, demonstrating that 33 percent (43/129) of individuals exhibited at least one hypoplasia on an anterior tooth (Soler and Beatrice 2016). Furthermore, approximately 37 percent of those affected exhibited at least two hypoplasias, and an additional 11 percent exhibited at least three hypoplasias per tooth, indicating that many individuals experience multiple episodes of stress during childhood that were severe enough to disrupt enamel growth.

POROTIC CRANIAL LESIONS

Porotic lesions of the cranial vault (porotic hyperostosis) and the orbital roofs (orbital lesions) are also strong indicators of childhood stress and can result from a variety of intersecting nutritional and disease factors. Porotic hyperostosis is a thinning of the outer table of the skull with associated diploëic expansion, resulting in pitting and porosity on the external cranial vault. Its most severe form results in exposure of the trabecular bone (Walker et al. 2009). Orbital lesions, traditionally referred to as *cribra orbitalia*, appear as a similar expression of porosities and trabecular expansion on the superior surface of the eye orbits. Although adults rarely exhibit active orbital lesions or porotic hyperostosis, the presence of healed lesions in adults can highlight a childhood history of malnutrition/metabolic disorders, illness, and/or high pathogen loads.

The exact causes of porotic hyperostosis and orbital lesions are not yet agreed on. Nonetheless, it is increasingly clear that porosities of the cranial vault and the orbits may occur independently and may have distinct etiologies (Rothschild 2012; Rothschild et al. 2005; Walker et al. 2009). They are both linked to multiple causative factors (Larsen 1997) such as high pathogen loads and a poor diet (Facchini et al. 2004; Holland and O'Brien 1997; Lallo et al. 1977), bony inflammation (Wapler et al. 2004), vitamin B₁₂ or folate deficiencies (Rothschild 2012; Walker et al. 2009), vitamins C and D deficiencies (Ortner 2003; Ortner et al. 1999), chronic parasitic infections (Ubelaker 1992), prolonged infant diarrhea (Walker et al. 2009), and endemic malaria and hereditary conditions such as sickle cell anemia or thalassemia (Rothschild 2012; Smith-Guzman 2015;

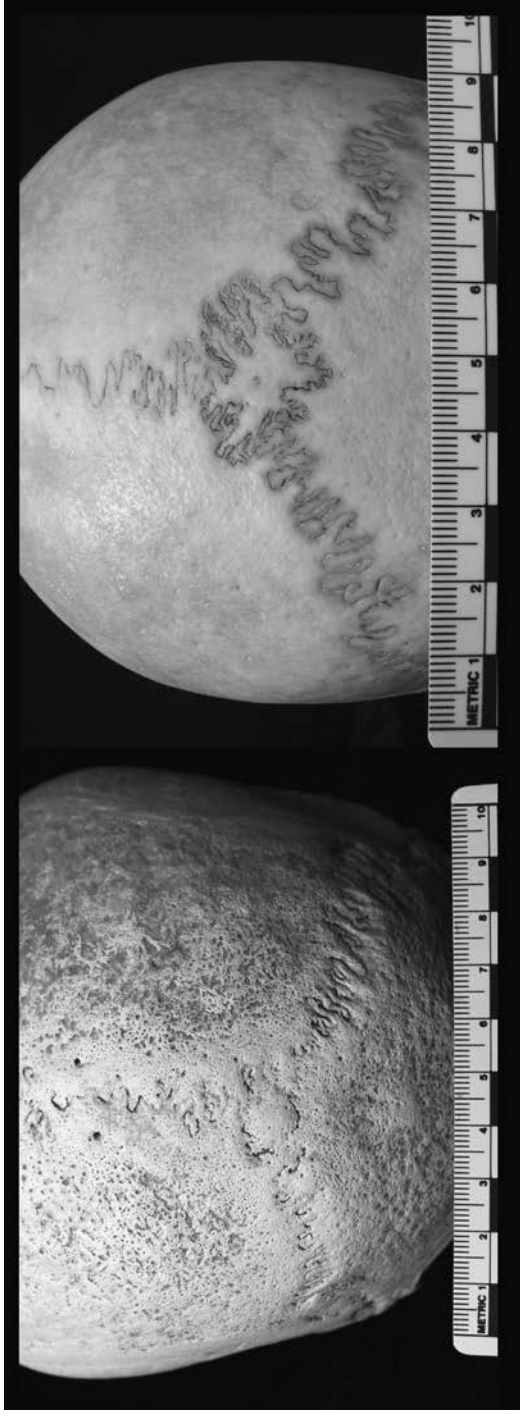


Figure 6.2 Porotic hyperostosis. Left: Undocumented border crosser examined at the PCOME exhibiting lesions on the posterior cranium (photograph by Cate E. Bird). Right: Absence of lesions in an American individual from the Maxwell documented collection (photograph by Jared Beatrice, courtesy of the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, University of New Mexico).

Sullivan 2005; Walker et al. 2009). In most instances, the appearance of porotic cranial lesions is probably due to synergistic interactions between more than one of these factors. For example, several studies have linked parasitic infections such as malaria, schistosomiasis, and hookworm to the malabsorption of multiple key nutrients into the gut, acquired hemolytic or megaloblastic anemia, and the subsequent formation of orbital lesions and/or porotic hyperostosis (Buzon 2006; Lagia et al. 2007; Rabinov et al. 2000; Ubelaker 1992).

Results to date by Soler and Beatrice reflect moderate to high levels of physiological stress, with 58.1 percent of individuals exhibiting porotic hyperostosis and 10.3 percent exhibiting orbital lesions. A majority of the cranial lesions are minor, with 59 percent of individuals with porotic hyperostosis exhibiting slight porosity or pitting and only 6 percent exhibiting more severe porosity and pitting of the cranial vault. On the other hand, individuals exhibiting orbital lesions were more evenly split between those exhibiting only slight porosity (50 percent) and those exhibiting more severe orbital lesions with porosities that have coalesced (49 percent). All individuals in the sample are teenagers or adults, and all affected individuals except one exhibit healing or healed lesions.

Beatrice and Soler (2016) compared a subset of this sample of undocumented border crossers from the PCOME to a sample of American-born individuals and found a significant difference in the prevalence of these indicators of stress. Only 15.4 percent of American-born individuals in the sample exhibited porotic hyperostosis, and UBCs were 7.91 times more likely to have porotic cranial lesions. In addition, only 1.5 percent of American-born individuals exhibited orbital lesions, and UBCs were 5.98 times more likely to exhibit orbital lesions.

INTERPRETATION OF SKELETAL INDICATORS OF STRESS IN THE REMAINS OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS

Of the suite of physiological stress indicators outlined above, short stature and LEH are utilized in anthropological and epidemiological studies of both living and past populations. Among living groups, these indicators are strongly associated with factors such as poverty, marginalization, poor nutritional status, and adverse living conditions (Bogin et al. 2002; Chaves

et al. 2007; Goodman and Rose 1991; Goodman et al. 1991; Hoffman and Klein 2012). The addition of porotic cranial lesions, which are normally studied in archaeological skeletal samples, provides an additional unique line of evidence with which the health status of undocumented migrants may be examined. The appearance of these conditions in the skeletal remains of migrants demonstrates that physiological disruption is commonplace during the early stages of the life course of those who ultimately attempt to cross the U.S.-México border into southern Arizona. Briefly considering likely causes of each stress indicator improves our understanding of the biological implications of structural violence and structural vulnerability in this context.

The results for stature are in line with the most recent WHO estimates, which demonstrate that an average of 48 percent of children in Guatemala, 23 percent in Honduras, 21 percent in El Salvador, and 16 percent in México exhibit growth stunting (World Health Organization country profiles). As a comparison, only 2 percent of children in the United States exhibit growth stunting according to the World Health Organization United States country profile. Significant progress has been made in terms of child nutrition and a decrease in growth stunting in México and Central America, and Latin Americans generally exhibit less growth stunting than populations in Asia or Africa. However, more work needs to be done in both México and Central America to meet the standards of the United States and other first world countries. Interestingly, studies have found a correlation between children who have a family member who migrated to the United States and slightly lower prevalence of growth stunting, presumably due to increased food security and decreased morbidity (Carletto et al. 2011). Furthermore, the disparities in the prevalence of growth stunting between urban and rural children need to be addressed, as rural children exhibit growth stunting approximately 10–25 percent more frequently than urban children in México, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala (UNICEF 2015). Moreover, indigenous children are disproportionately affected by these disparities, and the poorer growth status of indigenous children has been correlated with marginalization, isolation, and inaccessibility of resources to indigenous communities (Peña et al. 2010; Servan-Mori et al. 2014). Although there have been increases in stature over time, reflecting improved health and nutrition in the last few decades, indigenous individuals in these

communities are still significantly stunted in comparison to U.S. reference samples (Malina et al. 2010, 2011).

Just as nutritional status plays a critical role in childhood growth and adult stature, it is clear from anthropological and epidemiological studies of disadvantaged groups in México and Central America that even moderate levels of malnutrition can produce developmental enamel defects (Goodman et al. 1987, 1991; Infante and Gillespie 1974; May et al. 1993; Sweeney et al. 1971). More recent epidemiological assessments worldwide continue to emphasize associations between nutritional stress, growth stunting, and developmental enamel defects (see Chaves et al. 2007; Massoni et al. 2009). Because the development of tooth enamel is sensitive to many forms of physiological disruption (Goodman and Rose 1991), it is not possible to link the presence of enamel hypoplasias in the remains of undocumented migrants to specific causes (e.g., specific nutrient deficiencies or diseases). Nevertheless, there is little doubt that they reflect systemic health problems such as nutritional deprivation and episodic illness.

The LEH data collected by Soler and Beatrice on permanent anterior teeth reflect physiological disruption experienced between birth and around five years of age. Many of the enamel defects likely correspond to stresses experienced during the transition from breastfeeding to weaning foods, which may occur as early as two months of age (Lipsky et al. 1994). While weaning is a biologically stressful process in any population, it is often especially so among impoverished communities. In addition to nutritional problems that may arise owing to weaning foods having inadequate nutritional content to support rapid growth, supplementary foods are often contaminated when weaning occurs in an unsanitary environment. When combined with the gradual loss of immunological factors contained in breast milk, infants and very young children are susceptible to infections and, subsequently, to additional nutritional losses associated with diarrheal diseases (Marino 2007; Motarjemi et al. 1993). Maternal health is important in this equation as well. Infants breastfed by mothers with nutritional deficiencies are themselves at risk (Allen et al. 1995; Stabler and Allen 2004; Villalpando, Shamah-Levy et al. 2003), and evidence of intrauterine stress such as low birth weight and intrauterine growth retardation has been linked to enamel defects in primary teeth (Lunardelli and Peres 2006; Massoni et al. 2009).

National nutrition surveys, along with smaller-scale studies of Mexican and Central American communities—those carried out recently and those published years ago that report on conditions when current adult migrants were children—attest to the marked prevalence of certain nutritional problems, especially among low socioeconomic status groups. One example is anemia, which despite advances in food and nutrition programs continues to be a widespread condition disproportionately affecting children and women. A national nutrition study published in 2003 found that nearly 50 percent of Mexican children under two years of age included in the survey exhibited anemia (Villalpando, Shamah-Levy et al. 2003). Infants in southern México and those from indigenous communities exhibited even greater prevalence. The most recent nationally representative data from the World Health Organization reports the prevalence of anemia in children less than five years of age and in pregnant women to be 23.7 percent and 20.6 percent, respectively (Oliaiz-Fernández et al. 2006).

Among factors that contribute to anemia, deficiencies of iron (Martínez-Salgado et al. 2008; Villalpando, Shamah-Levy et al. 2003) and vitamin B₁₂ (Allen et al. 1995; Casterline et al. 1997; Stabler and Allen 2004) are routinely implicated in the clinical literature on nutritional status in Mexican and Guatemalan communities. Especially in poor rural areas, these nutrients may not be consumed in large enough quantities because of a maize-heavy diet and low intake of more expensive animal foods (Barquera et al. 2006; Chávez et al. 1995; Iannotti et al. 2012; Martínez-Salgado et al. 2008; Stabler and Allen 2004). However, as previously discussed, insufficient diets are only part of the problem. Clinical studies have also demonstrated that impoverished mothers in these communities often have depleted stores of iron and B₁₂ (Allen et al. 1995; Casterline et al. 1997; Villalpando, Montalvo-Velarde et al. 2003; Villalpando, Shamah-Levy et al. 2003). In these conditions, infants and young children may become trapped during the weaning process in a cycle of dietary micronutrient deficiencies (even while breastfeeding), decreased resistance to disease, and problems with nutrient absorption as a result of infections. It is unsurprising, then, that previous studies of Mexican and Guatemalan children report a robust association between enamel hypoplasias in the permanent teeth and both malnutrition and infections (see especially Goodman et al. 1987, 1991; May et al. 1993). The

synergistic effects of those factors remain the best explanation for the presence of LEH in undocumented migrants from México and Central America.

Many of the factors contributing to LEH would also explain the appearance of porotic cranial lesions. The striking prevalence of porotic hyperostosis in particular is consistent with the clinical evidence for widespread chronic anemia acquired during childhood in the region. Currently, there is debate within the paleopathology community over whether most examples of porotic hyperostosis reflect anemia resulting from deficiencies of iron or vitamin B₁₂ (see Walker et al. [2009] and Oxenham and Cavill [2010] for contrasting views). The fact that both forms of deficiency are common among women and children from México and Central America would seem to support the possibility that each may contribute to the bone marrow expansion responsible for the condition. Regardless of the proximate cause, the porotic hyperostosis results reported by Soler and Beatrice are in line with what one would expect to observe in a skeletal sample from a context where chronic anemia is very common. The modest prevalence of orbital lesions may be attributed to anemia, but could also represent vitamin C deficiency. The latter has been a surprisingly frequent clinical observation in Mexican women and children, especially among those of low socioeconomic status (Villalpando, Montalvo-Velarde et al. 2003).

In addition to dietary insufficiency and nutritional losses associated with diarrheal disease, intestinal parasites are often implicated in porotic cranial lesions. This is due to their capacity to create or exacerbate specific micronutrient deficiencies including of iron and vitamin B₁₂ (Crompton and Nesheim 2002; Rothschild 2012). Intestinal parasitic infections are a public health concern in poor, rural areas of México and Central America because of problems with access to clean drinking water, adequate sanitation, health care, and education on hygienic practices (Jensen et al. 2009; Morales-Espinosa et al. 2003; Quihui-Cota et al. 2006). Common infections include helminths *Ascaris lumbricoides* (roundworm) and *Trichuris trichiura* (whipworm), and protozoans *Giardia* and *Entamoeba* spp. (Gutierrez-Jimenez et al. 2013; Jensen et al. 2009; Morales-Espinosa et al. 2003; Quihui-Cota et al. 2004). Trichuriasis has been associated with poor iron status and low height for age in children from rural Sinaloa (Quihui-Cota et al. 2010). In extremely marginalized areas of Chiapas,

children suffering from malnutrition have been found to exhibit high prevalences of *A. lumbricoides* infection (Gutierrez-Jimenez et al. 2013).

Clinical studies frequently report, among the most disadvantaged groups, high rates of infection by multiple gastrointestinal pathogens. For example, Jensen et al. (2009) found multiple intestinal pathogens in 43 percent of children with infections in a sample from the Guatemalan highlands. Similarly, Morales-Espinosa et al. (2003) reported infection by multiple parasites in 60 percent of sampled children from poor communities in Chiapas. Given the association between heavy parasite loads and outcomes such as poor nutritional and growth status among children in the region, it is likely that parasitic infections contribute to the appearance of cranial lesions—as well as to short stature and LEH—in undocumented migrants.

It should be noted that while the stress indicators described in this section largely reflect childhood health conditions, there is good evidence that this is not the only physiologically stressful period in the life history of undocumented migrants. While not typical, orbital lesions that are not completely healed have been observed by Soler and Beatrice in the remains of young adult individuals. This strongly suggests that, in at least some cases, nutritional problems acquired during childhood are carried over into adolescence. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that physiological disruption experienced during growth and development may predispose individuals to health problems throughout the life course. The presence of LEH, for example, has been linked to reduced life expectancy in archaeological skeletal samples (Armélagos et al. 2009; Goodman 1996; Goodman and Armélagos 1988). Additionally, low birth weight and poor childhood growth have been correlated with long-term negative health outcomes such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease (de Boo and Harding 2006; Kohler and Soldo 2010).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we have outlined a number of skeletal and dental conditions whose prevalence provides insight into the health of undocumented migrants who died while crossing through southern Arizona. These conditions represent episodes of life stress that result in poor oral health, nutritional deficiencies, and growth disruption, and thus augment

the clinical evidence for those types of health problems in impoverished areas of México and Central America. It is critically important, however, that these skeletal pathologies are understood not just as markers on bone, but as reflections—however imperfect—of individual lives and the forces that shaped them.

In addition to assisting in the identification of migrant remains, anthropological analysis informs our understanding of migrant lives and deaths in two key ways. First, it demonstrates the extent to which physical and social distress may be integrated into biology and recorded on migrant bodies. This means that the life experiences of migrants who die along the border are to a degree measurable—even for those who remain unidentified. Missing or untreated infected teeth, for example, may have mundane causes; however, as research has demonstrated, these dental ailments affect quality of life and can result in chronic pain and altered dietary patterns and can even have larger psychosocial effects (Locker et al. 2000; Quandt et al. 2007; Shieham 2005). Examples of severe dental caries and abscesses likely reflect the challenges faced by migrants from rural and indigenous communities in gaining access to dental care. In these cases, highly preventable oral health issues may have become more serious systemic health problems or, at the very least, sources of long-term discomfort.

It follows that the analysis of embodied stress in the remains of migrants examined at the PCOME also throws into sharp relief the consequences of structural vulnerability and structural violence. While it is helpful to identify proximate causes of the skeletal indicators of stress described above (e.g., poor diets, diarrheal disease, and parasitic infections), it is important to bear in mind that the ultimate causes are poverty and marginalization, which directly influence access to basic resources, living conditions, and quality of life. With this in mind, it should be emphasized that the effects of structural violence are not limited to physiological outcomes. Consider the long-term consequences of chronic anemia or repeated childhood infections that are likely causes of linear enamel hypoplasias and porotic cranial lesions. Children who grow up in marginalized communities and experience malnutrition and prolonged infections have been demonstrated to exhibit both physical and cognitive deficits that result in poor social development and school performance (Chávez et al. 1995). Even in adults, iron deficiency anemia has been

linked to reduced levels of physical activity and diminished work capacity (Bender and Dufour 2013). Because these problems limit social and economic productivity, structurally vulnerable population groups from which migrants often originate are predisposed to cycles of poverty, malnutrition, and poor health.

Skeletal indicators of stress on the bodies of undocumented migrants are examples of life history recorded in biology. In this way, the physical bodies of individuals who have died while crossing the border into southern Arizona may reveal the structural forces that compelled them to cross in the first place. While these findings are specific to the Arizona borderlands and migrants examined at the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner, it is possible that similar patterns would be exhibited in those dying along migrant trails in Texas and throughout México. It is estimated that fewer than 50 percent of the 7,000 migrants who have died at the U.S.-México border have been examined by a forensic anthropologist intent on recording their life histories. Furthermore, a large majority of migrants who cross through the desert end up reaching their destinations. It is unclear what these individuals' bodies may reflect about their origins and vulnerabilities. However, for the more than 2,600 migrants whose journey tragically ended in the borderlands of southern Arizona, forensic anthropologists have been able to read the bones to reveal a history of poverty and marginalization dating back to the womb. These histories have been etched into their bones and teeth.

NOTES

The views and opinions expressed in this chapter are the authors' own and do not reflect the opinions of the New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner or the City of New York.

1. This vignette was constructed based on the daily casework experience of author Angela Soler analyzing the remains of undocumented migrants at the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner. The descriptions do not reflect a specific individual or forensic case.

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Bodily Imprints of Suffering

How Mexican Immigrants Link Their Sickness to Emotional Trauma

Rebecca Crocker

It's only 8:00 a.m., but Tucson's July monsoon air is so thick with pressure that my temples are already pounding. I pull into the parking lot of the church that serves as a de facto sanctuary for a largely undocumented community of day laborers who live from job to job, hand-to-mouth. I come to teach a weekly English class, an effort that is less about language acquisition than it is about helping to pass the frustrating hours of waiting the workers face each day. Today I find Enrique anxiously waving the worker center's flag in a vain attempt to attract potential employers. His eyes are fixed intently on the passing cars. He greets me warmly but repeats a familiar refrain—he hasn't worked in days. He complains of a headache and touches the nape of his neck, saying he can feel the stress creeping up his body. "Do you know what depression is, teacher?" he asks me. "It's like a stress, a sadness. I want to work because when I work I don't think about all the other things. It's a distraction. When I don't work I have too much time. And so I cannot sleep now, and I am up almost all night."

I leave Enrique to his morning duty and head inside to the church's community room for class. But there, too, the air feels heavy and tense. The day laborers are stretched out horizontally and draped over the small schoolroom chairs, some sleeping and others listening to music. They say there has been no work at all today. The desperation and tension in the room are suffocating. I have to cajole the men to come to the table for class, and even then they are distracted. "How are you feeling?" I ask them, and they are quick to respond: frustrated, sad, angry, stressed. Jaime, a Sonoran whose life has weathered him well beyond his 52 years, is very groggy and nods in and out of sleep. "I just feel so exhausted and faint," he explains. With ease, the other men around the table also chime in. Jesus takes out a vial of pills for his cholesterol, and Juan says he uses raw garlic and exercise to manage the nausea and dizziness stemming from his cholesterol problem. Others share complaints and natural

remedies for high blood pressure, diabetes, blurry vision, and insomnia. Today it feels like everybody is sick.

INTRODUCTION—HOW ARE EMOTION AND HEALTH INTERWOVEN?

In this chapter I explore the ways in which Mexican immigrants in southern Arizona connect their poor overall health and well-being to their migration-related emotional suffering. The current anthropological interest in emotion ranges from cross-cultural comparisons to the hunt for linguistic universalisms, from interpreting emotion as natural instinct to viewing it as a performed response to changing conditions of gender, power structure, and social hierarchy (Lutz and White 1986). Meanwhile, the study of emotion from an evolutionary standpoint dates all the way back to Charles Darwin, who viewed emotions as a universal aspect of human taxonomy that played a heavy hand in the individual's chances for survival. While emotions can be studied from various vantage points in anthropology, my primary interest lies in what they can tell us about social structure, specifically, their role as "occasional or potential sources of correct knowledge about the social world" (Lutz and White 1986:409).

The social world of Mexican immigrants in the highly contested international border region where I live and conduct research is ripe with emotional insults stemming from increased border militarization and enforcement. These forces have drastically augmented the dangers of the crossing and the pain of long-term family separations (De Genova and Peutz 2010; Golash-Boza 2012). Once in Arizona, immigrants face the constant threat of arrest, imprisonment, and deportation, as well as structural barriers to accessing basic civil and human rights such as employment, health and education services, and a safe and secure family life (Chavez et al. 1992; Dreby 2010; Horton 2004; Kretsedemas and Aparicio 2004; Mize and Swords 2010; Warner 2011). These "psychic costs" of Mexican migration have been widely charted in academic articles, popular literature, movies, poems, and songs (Massey and Riosmena 2010:297). The theory of structural vulnerability holds that such "systemic social marginalization inflicts pain" in the Mexican immigrant community, with very real impacts on community health (Quesada et al. 2011:340).

The negative health repercussions of migration from México to the United States have been widely documented. Though Mexicans arrive in the United States with surprisingly good overall health, they have been shown to experience widespread health declines the longer they remain in the country (Markides and Coreil 1986). Foundational work in epidemiology has documented these health declines in multiple areas affecting the life course of wellness, including birth outcomes (Cervantes et al. 1999; Fleuriet 2009), obesity and diabetes (Barcenas et al. 2007; Hamilton et al. 2011; Van Hook et al. 2012), and mental health (Alderete et al. 2000; Breslau et al. 2007; Kaestner et al. 2009; Vega et al. 1987). By the second generation and beyond, the health of Americans of Mexican descent declines and begins to mirror that of other marginalized American minority groups (Hamilton et al. 2011). These health inequalities, patterned along lines of race, social class, and ethnicity, are similar to those widely documented throughout the developed world (Braveman et al. 2011; Gravelle 2009; Hertzman and Boyce 2010; Marmot 2005). While immigrant health declines have been widely studied, no clear causal mechanisms have been identified to explain this phenomenon, leaving it an “epidemiological paradox” (Hunt et al. 2004; Viruell-Fuentes 2007).

My personal research interest lies in the potential power of immigrant testimonies to narrate the emotional assault of migration on the body. Immigrants’ firsthand experiences of migration-related stressors make them uniquely suited to speak on this issue. Moreover, many Mexicans espouse embedded concepts of health, in which it is assumed “that the body is an extension of one’s day-to-day experience” (Finkler 1994:36). This embodied knowledge prepares them to address the critical question of how emotional distress and health are interwoven in this community. To explore this wellspring of body knowledge, in 2013–2014 I conducted 14 months of ethnographic research on emotional stress at local organizations serving a very poor and largely undocumented community of Mexican immigrants in Tucson, Arizona. In the course of this research, I observed the unrelenting sources of stress that combined to churn up a perfect storm of emotional upheaval in the Mexican immigrant community. The 40 Mexican immigrants whom I interviewed reported feelings of trauma (50 percent), fear (65 percent), depression (75 percent), loneliness (75 percent), sadness (80 percent), and stress (85 percent) related to migration (Crocker 2015). While an emerging body of research affirms

the debilitating weight of emotional burden in Mexican immigrant communities (Duncan 2014; Gonzales 2012; Orozco and Lopez 2015; Ramos Tovar 2009), I believe that immigrant voices remain a highly under-sourced authority on migration-related health declines.

Guarnaccia et al. (1996) argue that in order to understand the experience of emotions we must first look at the societal forces that “provoke” them. My research participants identified several common experiences that generate emotional stress for themselves and their communities: pre-migration stressors, the undocumented border crossing, undocumented status, experiences of deportation and detention, family separation, and extreme poverty. Such traumas permeated the lives of my research community. On the far south side of town, a grief-stricken mother waited anxiously by the phone for news of her deported husband who had been kidnapped en route northward. One man was detained on a minor traffic violation while leaving the hospital following the birth of his daughter. Several others took sanctuary in local churches fearing arrest, forced expulsion, and years of separation from their families. A man cried with impotence at not being able to provide for his family. And in a dilapidated apartment with cold air seeping in through gaps in the doorframe, an older woman who had been left alone with a rebellious teenage son following the sudden deportation of her husband wept uncontrollably from loneliness.

While recognizing the sources of such suffering is a crucial step toward engaging in the question of how to reduce its incidence, it is likewise paramount that we come to understand the potential impact of migration-related emotional stress on individual migrants. The majority of immigrants I interviewed connect such intensive periods of trauma and long-term suffering with declines in their health and well-being. They draw conclusions such as “this stress is killing us” and “this pain makes us sick.” They adeptly use their body memory to describe the physical sensations produced by days of life-threatening exposure during the desert crossing, unabated fear of police arrest, and the sudden loss of freedom and social support following arrest and detention. Fifty-five-year-old Ivis believes that her husband’s sudden deportation last year severely affected her physical and mental health. “This separation is why my blood pressure goes up; it’s not because of any other reason,” she explains. She places her hand squarely over her heart and continues: “I



Figure 7.1 Forced separation is an ever-present threat to undocumented immigrants (credit: Melo Domínguez).

feel it mostly here in my chest. And I can feel my veins swelling and the pressure. And a pain runs down my left arm, and it hurts so badly. And sometimes it will run all the way up to my face and the left side feels paralyzed.”

The theory of embodiment—or how people “literally incorporate, biologically, the social and material world in which we live”—meshes neatly with such embedded definitions of health and offers a means to unravel the web of interrelatedness between structural vulnerabilities and immigrant health (Krieger 2001:672). By marking the ways in which the biological body is intimately connected to its social world, the lens of embodiment has the potential to highlight the often hidden and intricate processes by which each person mirrors his or her lived reality. Indeed, the body is our key informant to lived experience, revealing the “fingerprints” of threats and insults new and old. It is increasingly being proven at the cellular level that the individual embedded body reflects

“the dynamic social, material, and ecological contexts into which we are born, develop, interact, and endeavor to live meaningful lives” (Krieger 2005:350). Recent scholarship in the science of emotional pathways to disease confirms the seminal importance of emotion in individual health, reminding us that the mind is in fact part of the body (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008; Cole 2010). The evidence is now decisive that “stress *can* make you sick because the hormones and nerve pathways activated by stress change the way the immune system responds, making it less able to fight invaders” (Sternberg 2000:131). Moreover, this research indicates that the enormous life transitions encompassed by the process of migration—physical dislocation, losing loved ones, adapting to novel environments—can work together to overactivate the stress response system and leave lasting marks on the body (Kaestner et al. 2009; Sternberg 2001).

I argue here that the emotional distress related to the daily, lived experience of migration is a powerful contributor to illness in this community. My goal in this chapter is to let immigrant illness narratives fill in some blank spaces in our understanding of the causal factors behind immigrant health declines. I first explore Mexicans’ own embodied health concepts and what this body knowledge can tell us about how emotions are experienced and internalized. I then present the illness narratives of two immigrants, Faustino and Laura, who reveal the intricate details of how migration has affected their bodies. I work to support their firsthand narratives with emerging scientific findings highlighting the damaging health impacts of negative emotions common to immigrant life, including fear, trauma, loneliness, sadness, and stress. Taken in concert, these embodied illness testimonies and the science of emotion make a powerful argument that emotional stress is literally making Mexican immigrants sick. This finding “lay[s] bare how societal relations produce the forms of and distribution of sickness,” moving us one step closer to unraveling the putative paradox of immigrant health declines (Lock 2001:479).

WHAT TRADITIONAL MEDICINE SAYS ABOUT SUFFERING AND HEALTH

In order to appreciate what the testimonies of Mexican immigrants can contribute to a conversation about health declines, it is necessary to first understand the influences that shape how Mexicans view health and

disease. While a great diversity of perspectives about health exist in México today, the holistic medicinal ideologies known collectively as Mexican traditional medicine (MTM) continue to be a relevant and vibrant part of México's pluralistic healing culture (Martinez 1993; Napolitano 2002). Drawing from a syncretic blend of precontact indigenous spiritual and herbal practices and the European theory of humors, MTM assumes the individual to be inextricably tied to his or her environment via the immaterial substance of the soul. To ground my work, I asked the immigrants about what it means to be healthy or sick and the relationship between lived experience and the body. Thurston and Vissandjée maintain that "the experiences of migration must be understood and acted on within the old schema, for these are the tools at the migrant's disposal" (2005:234). I also found this to be true. Immigrants tended to espouse an integrated vision of wellness based on the harmony of body-mind-spirit. Over half of my sample utilized traditional etiologies, and 75 percent of them cited herbal remedies as being a valuable part of their healing arsenal.

The slow and incomplete extension of public health services into México's vast indigenous and impoverished countryside served to entrench practices of MTM during the colonial and national periods (Lanning and TePaske 1985; Nigenda 1997). Self-care and the work of *curanderos* and other traditional healers offered accessible, affordable, and oftentimes efficacious treatment relying on a fusion of precontact indigenous herbal and spiritual traditions with European botanical knowledge and Catholic healing rites (Finkler 1994; Knaul et al. 2003). Moreover, MTM endured even following the institutionalization of allopathic medicine via social security programs in the mid-twentieth century and subsequent creation of public health insurance in 2002. Martinez-Cruz argues that MTM's "healers are crucial to the delivery of a type of care that is respectful of millennial native cosmology and the centrality of community relationships to the conception of wellness" (2011:75). In short, MTM persists because it fills a gap that allopathic care does not address.

MTM defines illness as a fundamental state of imbalance borne from the body's psychosocial embeddedness (Cajete 1999; Trotter and Chavira 1981). Its central tenet is that the person is an open system and as such is "inseparable from the physical and social environments in which he or she lives" (Velásquez et al. 2004:4). This openness renders the individual vulnerable to environmental insults and the emotional suffering resulting

from stressed relationships, social isolation, spiritual transgressions, and other factors. Daniel spoke to me from the confinement of a local church where he was taking sanctuary. He remembers the terror that set in when his deportation order arrived: he got tension headaches, lost weight, and had nightmares that he was lying out in the desert, ready to die. Before long his sense of humor dulled and stress became his constant companion. He says: "Psychologically, the brain controls everything, if you are thinking bad thoughts your body is also declining . . . so automatically you can't sleep well. And if you can't sleep then you can't eat. And if you can't eat, then your body will be more vulnerable to illness and colds, because your own body doesn't have the defenses it needs to attack an illness because it is so weak from thinking about all those bad things."

When viewed through this lens, the experience of migration is a singularly disruptive life event. New immigrants are displaced into what Fadiman (1997) describes as an unknown world where, due to their sheer novelty, new threats may dwarf prior hardships. Migration may thus be experienced by Mexican migrants as a fundamental ungluing, a disembedding and reembedding of the body into unfamiliar and often hostile spatial and social worlds. As Mayra explained to me: "Things are so hard now, that is why my health is bad. This is my cage. It's the frustration of not feeling free, of feeling like you are somewhere where you don't belong."

The desert crossing itself was experienced as a total assault to mind, body, and spirit. Over half of those I interviewed reported facing threats from nature, police, criminals, and the physical limitations of their own bodies. Many said their lives flashed before their eyes. Thirty-seven-year-old Lalo recounts how when Mexican drug runners came looking for him with guns drawn, he fell to the ground, hugging the earth tightly and "calling in all the saints, praying they would not find me." He explains that "crossing the desert is not about walking. It is about your emotional capacity to have all your senses totally alert for days on end, to never let your guard down."

According to MTM, the daily context and nuance of life gets translated to the body via the emotional experience of the soul. In precontact México, the soul was understood to be "some entity or life force [that] conveyed human identity and was at the same time more than the body" (Furst 1995:3). Indigenous knowledge in México held and continues to hold that the body is never separated from the spirit or emotions or

the mind (Gonzales 2012). Many immigrants whom I interviewed spoke freely about this link, such as Juan, a laborer in his late thirties from the southern state of Oaxaca. Juan believes that his lack of freedom and joy in the United States has contributed to his health problems:

If you are not spiritually strong, you also won't be healthy. I think it's 50-50. My life in México was much more fun. There were limitations in the material things, but in terms of happiness as a person, I was more complete and happier because there wasn't so much stress. Here I have more material things: I have enough food, I can buy clothes and shoes. But my life in México had more personal satisfaction, more fulfillment.

The immigrants I interviewed tell of the many indignities the soul suffers in the process of migration. Irma, a Tohono O'odham Mexican woman in her thirties, believes her various medical problems—including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and being overweight—stem from her depression. “I think that since I have been a very depressed woman, the only thing that I have gotten is sickness,” she explains. “Emotionally, I know that when something happens to you, your head will hurt a lot, or you will feel a lot of pain in your stomach. Sometimes ones swallow their emotions.” Pancho, an undocumented day laborer in his fifties, feels that the anti-immigration laws in Arizona place so many barriers to working and feeling at ease that it is impossible to have a balanced and healthy life. “I think we eat about the same [as we did in México], but the stress is what's really different. For residents and citizens they can just watch their diet in order to be healthy, but for us [without papers], it's just exhausting and erodes our health and everything.”

The immigrants often referred to the isolation of loneliness as being a central facet of life in the United States. Scholars have theorized that the Mexican migrant in the United States is caught in the lonely space of *Nepantla*, “the Nahuatl word for the place in between” (Gonzales 2012:151). Napolitano Quayson (2005:354) holds that “the space between homeland and host country is a ‘stuck place,’ it is a gap. That gap becomes not only individual but also a space of social suffering.” Many immigrants in my study voiced a loneliness borne from their inability to trust, participate in, and integrate themselves into their new community,

largely stemming from exclusionary legislation. And some connected their separation from family in México with physical illness. Alondra explains that the deportation of her son “is what all of my problems come from—my high blood pressure and my thyroids. Psychologically I am not well. There is not a single day that goes by when I don’t cry and feel desperate. I was almost at the point of losing my mind.”

Over half the immigrants I interviewed told me that migration’s cumulative toll of environmental, social, and political insults to the spirit caused them to experience the traditional etiological diagnoses of *susto* (soul loss) or *nervios* (nervous disorder). *Nervios* is one of the most common traditional diagnoses in Latin America, and is understood to be “a generalized condition of distress” related to myriad life circumstances and reflective of low social status (Salgado de Snyder et al. 2000:454). Those in my study considered *nervios* to be a very serious condition, generally caused by long-term and anxiety-inducing stressors over which one has no control, such as ongoing underemployment, constant fear of arrest, and the inability to report crimes to the police for fear of identifying oneself.

Enrique, a man in his midfifties from the northern state of Sonora, describes his experience of *nervios*: “Here you need to worry about everything—it’s like a trauma because so much has happened in my life. So, yes, there are many, so many, problems and that is why the *nervios* come.” Yesenia, with whom I spoke many times over the course of the months she took sanctuary in a local church, also experiences *nervios*. She says that the stress of working two jobs in the United States plus the relentless fear that consumes her every time she sees the police began to do real damage to her body: “At one point a couple of years back, I felt like I could barely drive because my vision was being covered with the tension. It was like my heart was popping out of my chest and my ears were buzzing, like a plane engine about to explode. I held so much tension in my stomach and everywhere that my whole body hurt and I couldn’t sleep.”

Equally common was the experience of *susto*—the body’s response to a frightening event or intense stressor that results in the dislodgement of the immaterial substance of the soul. *Susto* can be associated with depression, inertia, debility, nausea, irritability, and diarrhea. While not considered a disease in itself, *susto* is a systemic and often debilitating response to life disjunctures and pressures. Green’s work amid the massacres of indigenous Guatemalans during the 1990s argues that

susto is “situational, an embodied understanding of complex social and political relations—one that links the lived experience of the physical body with the social, cultural, and body politic” (1994:248). The body politic of Arizona in the early twenty-first century has likewise been ripe ground for generating trauma. Gonzales (2012:209) says that “Indigenous midwives and traditional healers from México and the United States have diagnosed and treated Indigenous migrants for *susto*, fright, or soul loss caused by various forms of structural, spiritual, social, and physical violence,” later adding that many of these healers describe *susto* as “inhabiting Mexican migrants.”

Indeed, almost half of the immigrants I interviewed cited suffering from *susto* stemming from a wide variety of experiences including car accidents, police stops, painful memories of discrimination, or being detained. Many cited that experiences during the desert crossing—such as seeing a dead body or a rattlesnake or having near-death experiences—resulted in *susto*. Enrique relates *susto* most closely with the experience of deportation. “When the *migra* kicked me out I felt traumatized and it made my body a little sick,” he explains. “Because here I am in the country where I have lived most of my life: I came when I was 15 and now I am 52. This is my home more than México. One feels weak, with stress. . . . Yes, it is a trauma and one that lasts for a long time, it doesn’t go away easily.”

Some of the Mexicans I interviewed said their *susto* precipitated the onset of other conditions, including diabetes, high blood pressure, weight changes, and extended depression. Forty-three-year-old Mayra recalls: “I got the *susto* of my life when the *migra* took me. I got diabetes—three years later they told me I had it. And I think it was from that *susto* that was so strong, because I didn’t cry the whole way with them, but when I got home I burst into tears and I couldn’t stop crying.” *Susto* has been identified as a precursor to many physical and mental health symptoms as well as to specific disease outcomes, particularly type 2 diabetes (Godina et al. 2004; Poss and Jezewski 2002; Weller et al. 2002, 2008). Moreover, research suggests that *susto* not only predisposes immigrants to contracting type 2 diabetes but also affects disease management by threatening glycemic control and acting as a barrier to self-management, leading Flaskerud and Calvillo (2007:822) to conclude that “diabetes cannot be successfully treated without also treating the person’s *susto*.”

The high incidence of *susto* and *nervios* in the immigrant community speaks both to the continued relevance of traditional etiologies among immigrants as well as to the high incidence of deep emotional trauma related to migration. Immigrants' embedded conceptualizations of their bodies as they move over and across the border and settle into new environments provide fresh insight into the primary triggers of emotional stress and the concomitant embodied responses to life in *el norte*.

ILLNESS NARRATIVES: ME TIENE ENFERMA ESTA VIDA

In this section, I relay the illness narratives of two Mexican immigrants, Faustino and Laura, who speak of the ways in which migration-related emotional suffering has marked their bodies. The immigrants whom I interviewed reported suffering from a variety of ailments, including diabetes and being overweight, high blood pressure and cholesterol, anxiety and depression, as well as a host of other issues such as unregulated thyroids, hernias, chronic pain, arthritis, and gastritis. But Green argues that “simply to categorize [traumatized people’s] sufferings . . . as either manifestations of clinical syndromes or culture-bound constructions of reality is to dehistoricize and dehumanize the lived experiences” (1994:247). These narratives offer a nuanced and contextualized portrayal of how daily challenges that immigrants face in Tucson—such as undocumented status, deportation and detention, and family separation—engender deep emotional pain. Faustino and Laura use their intimate body knowledge to narrate how the trauma of loneliness and fear, stress and sadness travel from the heart and spirit to weaken and sicken their physical beings. I complement these narratives with data from the science of emotion in order to highlight how these emotional pains are embodied on a cellular level.

FAUSTINO

I see Faustino almost every week at my English class for day laborers—whenever he doesn’t have work he is there at the church, waiting. Tall and lanky, with a big-toothed smile and dancing eyes, Faustino is at once a joker who loves to draw a laugh and also a very self-possessed 40-year-old

indigenous man who is extremely cognizant of how his life conditions impact him. One day as we stand talking outside the church, I watch him cleaning the dirt from under his fingernails with a shard of broken glass. Without thinking, I take the glass from him and throw it aside, and he catches my eye with a grin. “I have always had nervios and picked at my fingernails and bitten them because I’m anxious,” he explains. “My wife says sometimes I do it in my sleep. I think it’s about work. When you are suffering from too low resources you feel a lot of worry and stress, and from those worries come illnesses. . . . Because to be healthy, you need to have work. Having work means that the worries end because you have a way to keep going.”

Faustino knows firsthand what it feels like not to have enough. Growing up on a Yaqui *ejido* (commonly held land) in western Sonora, he was the youngest of seven children, the first three of whom died in infancy. Town was many hours away by bike or burro, Faustino explains, and “by the time they got to the town where they could be cured, my [first] brother was already dead. The second one was in the hospital but since they didn’t have money they couldn’t get the medicine that he needed. For the poor people there you barely earn enough to feed the family.” Faustino’s family lived off the beans and vegetables his father harvested, and oftentimes there were barely enough corn tortillas to go around. He never had what he needed for school, and by fourth grade he had tired of borrowing notepaper from his classmates and felt embarrassed showing up with no shoes to the humble schoolhouse. One day his cousins let him work with them, though he was barely big enough to carry their tools. “I will never forget how they gave me five pesos, which at that time was a lot. I went off to the store and bought a bag of flour and corn flour! I got home and my mamá said, ‘How do you have so much money?’ I said, ‘Because I helped my cousins,’ and she said I needed to focus on my studies, but I said, ‘No. We don’t have a lot and I want flour tortillas.’ It felt so good.”

Duncan argues that “particularly for the undocumented, premigration vulnerability intersects with marginalization and discrimination in the United States to provoke or exacerbate emotional distress and sickness” (2014:2). This has been the case for Faustino, whose childhood deprivation drove him to make several dangerous desert crossings in search of greater financial stability in the United States. Each crossing

has exhausted his physical stamina and emotional strength. On one journey his group was attacked by hooded bandits who used a live scorpion to intimidate and rob the crossers. On that trip he recalls: “When we crossed the border, we saw little kids’ bodies already decomposing, and old people. . . . It was a real *susto* that gave me fear and sadness, because I thought ‘what if I end up like them out here?’” When Faustino crossed again later with his wife, he held her hand and carried her to make sure she wasn’t left behind. Then days later, after running out of food and water, it was his wife who supported him through the final miles. “At the end I didn’t have any more strength, but she gave me *ánimo*. I told her to just keep walking ahead with the others and she had made friends with them so they gave me encouragement too. I was really dragging my feet by then and I felt that my legs were so tired.”

The border crossing that Faustino describes closely matches Sternberg’s (2001) description of intensified short-term periods that push us to the edge of our physical and emotional capacities. She states: “Strenuous, unaccustomed, and prolonged physical stress . . . or chronic physiological stresses, such as lack of sleep and food, will all deplete the stress hormone reserves. At first such chronic stresses keep the response switched on. . . . But if such extremes persist, the response can fail, reach exhaustion, and finally burn out” (Sternberg 2001:113). Indeed, although Faustino arrived in Tucson prepared to take advantage of the opportunities available to him in the United States, he was also thoroughly exhausted, and the stressors did not abate on arrival. He recalls: “I felt lonely and sad here because I felt like my hands were tied, like I couldn’t really be a good person here and work like I wanted to work. Here I felt like I was nobody—that is how you feel when you arrive.”

A key facet of the social alienation that Faustino experienced was the ever-present fear that prevented him from fully participating in his new community owing to his lack of legal status. “I felt afraid even going to the store. I felt like the police or immigration would get me and I was always trying to take precautions and I didn’t feel at ease. Because you think ‘what will I do if they kick me out with my family? What will I do in México?’” Ongoing and pervasive fear has been scientifically linked to the onset of anxiety, depression, and other mental disorders in addition to physical health problems, such as weakened immune function, hypertension, and insulin resistance (Rodrigues et al. 2009; Sapolsky et al. 2000).

And unfortunately for Faustino, his fears came true soon after he arrived. On the night his wife was in the hospital giving birth to their second child, Faustino was at home with their toddler when immigration officials knocked on his door and asked him for his papers. When he could not produce them, he was promptly taken into custody and deported.

Though Faustino was able to make it back to his family, his lack of papers made finding stable employment nearly impossible, and he began to feel the impact on his body. He remembers that “in the past I had so much stress that my mouth was frozen from stress and worry. Because from stress comes paralysis, like attacks that paralyze the whole body. Before when I had no work I came to the clinic here [at the church] and they examined me and they said my blood was really sick. [The doctor] said I should massage my nerves and my head, because I had headaches and nervios.”

The kind of relentless stress that Faustino describes here has been found to be pathogenic (Sapolsky 2004). Moreover, such unabated and excessive release of hormones and chemicals into the bloodstream ultimately compromises the immune cells’ capacity to respond to new invaders, thereby predisposing the body to disease (Sternberg 2001). One of the most commonly measured biomarkers is cortisol, a glucocorticoid hormone released by the adrenal glands and central to the stress response system. In a study specific to a largely Mexican farmworker community in Oregon, Squires et al. (2012) found elevated levels of cortisol in response to several chronic psychosocial stressors and conclude stress to be an important health determinant in this community.

Stress reached traumatic levels when Faustino was detained along with three fellow day laborers after getting lost near a Border Patrol checkpoint west of Tucson. The officials spoke accusatorily to the workers, and Faustino lost his patience. “I told them, ‘I am indigenous, I don’t know why you are talking to me like that.’ I told him that he was wrong about us having crossed the border—I told him I didn’t cross the border, that the border had crossed me. ‘Why are you saying that to me?’ he yelled. ‘I’m sorry,’ I told him, ‘but I am indigenous and that is why I’m telling you that you are wrong about what you are saying and you are disrespecting me. We indigenous people don’t want this [border].’”

The subjective experience of anti-immigrant discrimination and stigma that Faustino experienced during his arrest and throughout his interactions

with American authorities has been found to increase stress, depression, and chronic illness in the Mexican immigrant community in the United States (Flores et al. 2008; Kaester et al. 2009; Viruell-Fuentes 2007).

Faustino remained in immigration lockup for a week, fighting hunger and freezing temperatures in the detention unit that Mexicans in Tucson ubiquitously refer to as “la hielera” (the freezer).¹ After that, he was transferred to federal prison in Eloy, Arizona. While detained, he worked to control his nervios, well aware of how fast things could spiral out of control. “I felt sad because I was thinking about my family and how I was going to pay the rent for my wife and what would they eat and how would they pay the bills,” he recalls. “So I asked myself, ‘How will I get out? How will they do?’ But I also told myself not to be too worried because if I thought about it too much it would lead me to commit something bad, it could lead me to do something to myself, so I better control my nerves and not think too much about my family.” Kris Olsen, a doctor who works in an Arizona federal prison, says she regularly sees intense physical manifestations of the emotional stress immigrants face during detention. She believes that their high levels of hypervigilance lead to dramatic spikes in blood pressure and blood sugar, upset stomachs, and diabetes. “We see more diabetes that is unlike what I see out here—it is much harder to control and so it probably is stress,” she explains. “[In jail] they are exercising and they are not heavy, but still the diabetes is out of control and they end up on insulin” (Kris Olsen, personal communication 2014).

Faustino’s community in Tucson raised bail for him, and he was released just one week after getting to Eloy. He says: “When I got [home], I felt so free. It’s like when a squirrel or other little animal gets stuck in the corral, and when it gets out it runs and jumps and leaps . . . that is how I felt when I got to the house! I said ‘I am free now, I am free,’ and I hugged my kids and my wife.” His euphoria was tempered only by the painful awareness he now carried of all his *compañeros* who were still locked up. Then just a few days later Faustino saw on the news that one of the men he had known in jail had committed suicide, the fifth suicide at Eloy since 2003. Faustino remembers his *compañero* like this:

His adrenaline ran really high and he was always thinking too much . . . and was desperate about how he would get out, he was



Figure 7.2 The pain of detention is visible on the inside and out (credit: Melo Domínguez).

always so worried. I tried to calm him. I tried to control my own nervios when I saw him so out of control. “I am in the same position,” I would tell him. “I have my family too and I am also wondering how they will support themselves out there.” Your head is just spinning. But if you think too much you can go crazy—you have to control your nervios so you don’t do something bad. You have to have faith in God that you will get out and that things will be OK.

LAURA

“My immune system attacks my skin,” Laura tells the therapist the night I first interpreted for her in the small cramped office of the free clinic. At 50, Laura is heavysset, with frizzy dyed blond hair, fair skin, and a distinct warmth about her. She suffers from a rare autoimmune disorder called pemphigus, a condition in which the immune system turns against the body, producing antibodies that attack healthy skin cells rather than foreign invaders. After months of physical pain and discomfort caused by the skin blisters that broke out along her face, scalp, chest, and back, Laura was advised by her doctor to go to counseling. “One of the doctors told me that stress and sadness could affect [my condition],” she begins, explaining how she landed in mental health counseling, a rare occurrence in the undocumented community. And Laura agrees: “I do believe that the soul is related to our health—that is exactly what loneliness has to do with this [illness]. In terms of eating, I eat well. I am working. In terms of being with my daughter, I am with her. But in terms of how I feel . . . I feel empty. This loneliness is what has most marked me.”

Originally from the large metropolis of Guadalajara, where she sang with a band, competed as a beauty queen, did martial arts, and worked on and off in a factory, Laura came to Tucson 15 years ago to work as a housekeeper for her brother’s company. He immediately warned her not to go out or expose herself to arrest, and she heeded his advice, avoiding the immigrant-dense south side of town and largely keeping to herself. During her years in Arizona, she has had no boyfriends, very few friends, and has been unable to return to see her family, all of which have contributed to her deep sense of loneliness. “It would have been better for me if I could have gone back to México to visit my family during these years. It’s like what you have to do with telephones; I needed to go back there to recharge my batteries. I was running out of charge little by little without my sisters,” Laura explains. Sad and alone, Laura gradually sank into depression, a condition that has been linked to systemic dysregulation of primary metabolic, immuno-, and adrenal functions, potentially hastening morbidity related to cardiovascular disease, stroke, and obesogenic co-morbidities (Penninx et al. 2013).

According to Velásquez et al. (2004), a deeply embedded sense of community identity and responsibility at the levels of both family and

ethnic group are of central importance in traditional Mexican world-views. Thus, as in the case of Laura, experiences of loneliness grossly disrupt life balance and harmony. Scientific investigation has revealed individual, relational, and collective loneliness to be dangerous states of perceived isolation, with health consequences rivaling those of smoking and alcoholism. Visible on an MRI as clearly as physical pain, loneliness produces immune deficiencies and disrupts key cellular processes, cardiovascular functioning, and complex cognitive functioning (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008). The embodied effects of loneliness among Mexican immigrants have been documented elsewhere to lead to a weighted down and fatigued body (Napolitano 2006), mental health problems (Duncan 2014), and risky sexual practices (Muñoz-Laboy et al. 2009).

Laura says her loneliness stems largely from her undocumented status, which pins her in a vicious cycle that always leads back to nowhere. She is wary of whom to trust, feels manipulated by a boss who takes advantage of her undocumented status, and is too fearful to even honk her horn in traffic, wary of calling any attention to herself. And although Laura is an extremely capable woman who is equally at ease with power tools and performing on stage, all the efforts she has made to actualize a more stable and full life have led her nowhere. "I wanted to sing again like I used to, so I got in touch with a woman who brings concerts here to Tucson," she explains. "They go to Sonora and Coahuila, and they just come and go, come and go. But I can't do that. And so she said to me: '*Mira, bella*, you sing real nice, but if you can't leave [Tucson] then I can't really use you."

She currently has no identifying documents, since Arizona state law no longer allows her to renew the driver's license she had when she first arrived. Meanwhile, her Mexican license also expired and she cannot return to renew it, and the consular identification card available in Tucson would mark her as an undocumented Mexican. She has no choice but to drive to work and to take her daughter to school, so she prays to God for safekeeping every day when she leaves the house. She asks:

What if I go out and they arrest me . . . what's going to happen with my kids? They won't know where I am! For me, fear has had the most direct impact on my condition. Fear of leaving the house, or of not returning, that at any moment we could be captured and

identified as what we are, as immigrants. Even though I have a [legal resident] application in now, it is not yet a legal condition, so I am still dealing with the fact that I am here, not illegally, but I am still in limbo. I'm still not anybody. I'm not a being, as we say, I'm not somebody.

Green's work with traumatized Guatemalan Mayan women led her to conclude that "one cannot live in a constant state of alertness, and so the chaos one feels becomes infused throughout the body. It surfaces frequently in dreams and chronic illness" (1994:231). For Laura, it surfaced along her skin, at first as small bumps, which then became deep lesions that stung like hot oil burns and formed blisters along her chest, back, and scalp. Laura explains how the pemphigus erupted one year ago: "One day I went out to clean [a house] that had been abandoned, so there were lots of spiders. Then three to four days later I felt something on my back and I thought I'd been bitten by a spider, but it felt like a burn. I put some cream on it, but then another one just like it popped up on the other side. And then one appeared on my chest." Despite Laura's best efforts to heal herself, more lesions kept appearing. She remembers it as an extremely stressful time, because work was very busy and her daughter was having serious problems at school. Within the week, her upper body was full of blisters. She remembers that one night "my son walked in [while I was changing] and I was half naked and he said 'mamá, what do you have?' And I said 'I don't know, these have just appeared all over.' And he said to me, 'Get dressed, I am taking you to the hospital.'" Over her protests against the high hospital costs, her son took her in that night and soon after Laura received a diagnosis of pemphigus.

It has been argued that emotional stress may play a role in the onset of pemphigus, and that mitigation of such stressors has the potential for therapeutic benefits (Cremniter et al. 1998; Ruocco and Ruocco 2003). It was with this possibility in mind that Laura followed her doctor's advice to see a therapist some six months before we first met. "When I started to talk to the counselor, she asked me what would my solution be? And it was either to wait another few years for my papers to come through and just return to my daily life of loneliness and anonymity where I am nobody . . . or it was to go back to México and be able to do something, like help my sister. So I said to myself, 'I am going, I am not going to stay in this cycle

of just lamenting all the things I cannot do.” According to Duncan (2014), mental health practitioners in the Mexican state of Oaxaca treat migrants who, like Laura, opt to return home in search of escape from the stress and pain of migration. Commonly treating conditions such as general psychosis, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and social trauma, these practitioners have determined that “migration is a main determinant of poor mental health among their patients” (Duncan 2014:11).

In the weeks after Laura decided to return to Guadalajara, I could see her face lighten. She said her fears had lifted and she felt empowered to speak her mind. At one point she wept with joy at the idea of feeling useful again to those around her, of feeling fully realized as a woman. And her skin condition slowly improved. But then her teenage daughter fled the house for the freedom of the streets, and within a matter of days Laura’s options once again caved in around her. When she next went in for therapy, she was visibly despondent and was worried sick about her daughter. With an open Child Protective Services case against her, Laura cannot leave the country without abandoning custody of her daughter. Now for the first time, she lifts her shirt to show us the visible marks of this pain, and it hurts to see the newly raw patches of red skin pushing up against the scars of earlier blisters, just barely beginning to heal.

CONCLUSIONS—AVENUES TO HEALING

While Laura was at least fortunate to have a counselor to help guide her on this painful journey, the majority of immigrants in my study lacked access to basic mental and physical health care, meaning that most of their ailments went untreated and often even undiagnosed. Mexican immigrants face a complex web of obstacles to accessing medical care, particularly preventive care and mental health, including lack of insurance, undocumented status, cultural and linguistic barriers, and high costs of care (Chavez 2012; Crocker 2015; Horton 2004; Quesada et al. 2011; Waldstein 2010). In Tucson, fear of the very real risk of apprehension at medical facilities blocks many sick and injured immigrants from accessing even emergency services (Armin and Reineke 2010). Often when I asked immigrants about their health, they felt incapable of properly responding. Thirty-five-year-old Carla, for example, who suffers from deep anxiety, stress-induced headaches, and dizziness explains: “I haven’t gone to the

doctor because they will not see me anywhere here. So I haven't checked myself, and the truth is I just don't know if I have high cholesterol or whatever. The truth is I just don't know." Many immigrants just endure their symptoms until the situation becomes untenable, at which point they check into the hospital emergency room or an immigrant friendly clinic presenting wildly unregulated medical issues. Medical professionals shared with me many stories of immigrants walking through the door with issues such as deep depression, acute appendicitis, explosive levels of blood pressure, blood sugar of 600 and above, and severe bleeding.

The enduring discomfort and stigma of emotional health problems in Mexican origin communities further compounds the tendency for mental health challenges to go unaddressed (Mora-Ríos et al. 2013; Nadeem et al. 2007). Juan explains it to me like this: "Our culture doesn't let us cross that boundary [of emotion]; so when people ask us how we are, even if we are nearly dead, we won't say that we are doing poorly. If we are going through something really hard, it just stays there. We don't communicate about it, because we feel like if we say something, it will get worse." A similar sentiment is echoed by several health-care professionals who express concern about immigrants' reticence to access the few available behavioral health services in Tucson and to use prescribed medication, saying most immigrants seem to swallow their problems until they reach a point of explosion. Herbalist and masseuse Elena Burgos (personal communication 2014) says she sees that among Mexican immigrants in Tucson: "There are many emotional problems that the body is having to hold, and that is causing a lot of sickness because they don't let go and they don't let go and their head holds all of it and finally it can't tolerate it anymore and they can fall into a deep depression. And often they don't find the help they need to get out of that hole."

To some immigrants, Mexican traditional medicine may offer an accessible and affordable means of healing certain physical and emotional pains. León (2004) calls the enduring practices of spirit-based natural healing known collectively as *curanderismo* a "borderlands religion" because of the relentless isolation and institutional abandonment of this region that have necessitated its continued usage. This need springs not only from a lack of access to allopathic care, but also that type of medicine's inability to address the emotional insults of migration that may precipitate the onset or worsening of mental and physical disease.

Gonzales argues that *sustos* and emotional pain will carry on and stay in the body unless healed, and that “indigenous healing models provide distinct ways of understanding the impact of trauma and emotional and spiritual dislocation on the human body” (2012:4). Spiritual healings have the capacity to resocialize a traumatized person (Arrizaga, qtd. in Cajete 1999), reconstitute the social worlds broken by migration (Nordstrom 1998), and provide a culturally sanctioned respite from social roles that allow for healing (Weller et al. 2008). Moreover, herbal and natural medicine usage has been shown to strengthen family and community ties (Waldstein 2010). In these ways, the continued practice of MTM may help to lay the foundation for what Sternberg (2009) says are the two essential elements of healing: hope and social support.

Yet whatever the potential for traditional healing to help stitch together the broken pieces of the immigrant body and soul, the only true remedy for this health crisis is a change to the structural factors that provoke the suffering in the first place. Thayer and Kuzawa argue that “since epigenetic markings provide a ‘memory’ of past experiences, minimizing future disparities in health will be partially contingent upon our ability to address inequality in the current environment” (2011:798). The situation today remains dire for immigrants like Laura and Faustino and the others featured in this chapter. Compounding the hardships inherent in moving to a new country and experiencing loss of connection to home has been the intensification of state and federal exclusionary and prejudicial legislation since the 1990s. These laws have had very real impact on daily realities in Tucson and beyond, creating the lethal hazards of the desert crossing, constant threat of deportation and arrest, multilayered barriers to employment, and the impossibility of returning home to refresh and maintain family and community ties. These hardships infuse daily immigrant life with toxic levels of fear and loneliness, sadness and stress, and create lasting wounds of trauma. Holmes (2013) likens such structural-level violence to Engels’s concept of social murder, calling it “the violence committed by configurations of social inequalities that, in the end, has injurious effects on bodies similar to the violence of a stabbing or a shooting” (1958:43). In the case of the sickening of Mexican immigrant bodies, there is blood on the hands of state and federal authorities responsible for anti-immigrant policies and enforcement.

NOTE

1. In 2015, this facility became part of a class action lawsuit based on rights abuses occurring in the U.S. Customs and Border Protection detention facilities in Arizona (American Immigration Council 2015).

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Narrating Migrant Bodies

Undocumented Children in California's "Little Arizona"

Olivia T. Ruiz Marrujo

Located in the hot, dry northeast of San Diego County, an area once known for citrus groves of lemons and oranges, Escondido, California, at first glance, looks like a quiet, inland town. Yet, for years the city has been in the eye of a national storm over immigration, a role that has earned it the moniker "California's Little Arizona" in reference to its harsh treatment of undocumented migrants.¹ Given that history, it came as no surprise when in the summer of 2014 protests flared over a petition from the federal government to build a shelter for unaccompanied migrant minors within the city limits.²

The petition landed on the desk of the town's planning commission, and on June 24 the commission convened to discuss the proposal in a meeting open to the public. More than 200 people attended, and there was strong opposition. Escondido's mayor likened the shelter to a prison (Phillips 2014), and a city councilman said he would "stand strong" against the federal proposal (Jones 2014b). Employing a similar tone, a communiqué declared that the city risked being invaded by foreign criminals if the shelter were built (Ocaño 2014).

Others, albeit a minority, were sympathetic to the project. They claimed the shelter would in fact house vulnerable children fleeing violence in their home countries. Meanwhile, representatives of the nonprofit organization Southwest Key, charged with running the shelter, tried with little success to explain how the center would work, field questions, and address apprehensions among those gathered.

In the end, the opposition won. The commission voted unanimously to reject the proposal. In July it met to reevaluate the petition and again dismissed it. A month later, in an attempt to intercept an appeal by the ACLU on behalf of Southwest Key, the city council approved a zoning code change to prohibit the construction of a shelter on the property

identified in the federal requisition. On October 14 the city council reviewed an appeal of the planning commission's decision and rejected it.

According to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (U.S. CBP) statistics, 2014 may well stand out as a watershed year for the arrival of child and adolescent immigrants to the United States.³ That year more than 68,000 crossed into the United States, twice the number in 2013 and four times that in 2011. More than 98 percent came from Central America and Mexico (U.S. CBP 2016, 2018).

The growing numbers of minors led to heated debates at all levels of government, especially at the U.S.-México border. The governors of Arizona and Texas called on the federal government to strengthen their borders with México. In contrast, California's governor, going over the heads of some members of the state legislature, put aside \$3 million to help cover the minors' legal expenses. Finally, in June, President Obama announced he would allocate \$4 billion to care for the children and adolescents, pay the costs of their detention, and expedite their legal processes.

Mobilizations in favor of and against the minors erupted in towns and cities throughout the Southwest. In San Diego, the Border Angels and churches of various denominations organized collections of food and clothing. Others denounced the mistreatment of the young Central Americans and Mexicans in detention centers. Meanwhile, the Federation for American Immigration Reform opposed any offer of aid. It was in this cauldron of support and opposition that the events in Escondido took place.

At first glance, the mobilizations that summer appeared to adhere to two competing narratives that have steered much of the debate concerning immigration in the country. While different in content and aim, both have drawn on perceptions of risk and vulnerability. One, hostile and exclusionary, has emphasized national borders, security, and identity and portrayed immigrants as a risk. The other, more welcoming and inclusive, has underscored immigrants' vulnerability and suffering. In that sense, the events that took place in Escondido reflected familiar struggles over immigration in the country at large.

The young Central Americans and Mexicans scheduled to go to Escondido, however, were also minors, making the dispute one about children and adolescents as well. It engaged, in particular, a narrative that has

dominated thinking about children and childhood in the United States, that of *the innocent child*. Those in favor of the petition to build a shelter portrayed the minors as vulnerable children fleeing violence in their countries of origin. Those protesting it rarely referred to the migrants' young age; some even argued that the group of minors included some more than 20 years of age. Ultimately, in rejecting the proposal, Escondido's planning commission yielded to the narrative of the immigrant as a risk. This chapter examines why.

I propose that we can begin to understand the mobilizations and their outcome by exploring the ways both narratives, about immigrants and about children, alluded to and employed the body to press their claims. While the narratives that surfaced in Escondido mirrored wider sociocultural themes about immigration and childhood, the scenarios of risk and vulnerability they portrayed referred in multiple and concerted ways to *the body*, in general, and to *specific bodies*, as both physical and metaphorical entities. Those protesting the petition described the minors as out of control, diseased, and dangerous—imminent threats to the residents' physical safety, the well-being of Escondido, and, ultimately, the larger body of national civic values and institutions. Those in favor, referring to the Central Americans and Mexicans as “children,” emphasized the immigrants' young age, vulnerability, and need for protection. In short, bodies played a central role in the dispute and, consequently, offer an epistemological starting point for understanding what happened in Escondido.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first focuses on the narratives of the immigrant threat and the innocent child, then turns to the process of embodying both. The second covers the arguments for and against building the shelter in Escondido and highlights salient themes. The third, a reflection, returns to the question of why the narrative of the immigrant threat prevailed over that of the innocent child. It suggests that in order to understand why, we need to understand what embodying the narratives did and how that embodiment unfolded. The last part, a final note, summarizes the plight of child immigrants at the U.S.-México border today.

The analysis is based on newspaper accounts from local and regional outlets that offered both press and online formats. I used the news stories both to document the protests and counterprotests, that is, to record the sequence of events, as they occurred between June 24 and October 22,

2014, and to register what those protesting the shelter's construction had to say and what counterprotestors said in response.

I also turned to news accounts because of the role they play in shaping what we perceive, know, and feel about our world. As part of the conglomerate that Boyer calls “technologies and circuits of mediated discourse,” media reflect and shape contemporary subjectivity, in this case, about immigrants, but also about childhood and adolescence (2011:88). As Boyer writes, “News media take for granted shared experience, shared language, shared territoriality, all these roots of modern conceptions of ‘culture.’ They may indeed address, in a formal sense, an audience of ‘strangers’ and ‘others,’ but they also assume and articulate a certain intimacy among these strangers under the sign of national culture,” in this case that of the United States, as reflected in the town of Escondido (Boyer 2011:90). In other words, news media inform contemporary “common sense,” making them a social force in the day-to-day of modern governance (Boyer 2011:87).

The media do their work by constructing stories, that is, by shaping facts into coherent and meaningful narrations of events (Santa Ana 2013:181). In the case of Escondido, the facts—the minors’ numbers and origins, for example—became intelligible and meaningful when they fit (or failed to fit) narratives already in circulation about immigrants and children.

As such, although news sources may not tell an audience what to think, they can and do set agendas and frame how subjects are presented to the public at large (Burroughs 2015:166–167). To paraphrase Lang and Lang, they call attention to issues and shape how we think and feel about them (cited in McCombs and Shaw 1972:177). Of course, some social groups are more susceptible than others to this kind of representation—undocumented immigrants, for example (Cottle, cited in Saeed 2007:444).

NARRATIVE AND BODY

NARRATIVES OF IMMIGRANTS AND CHILDREN

The Meaning of Narrative

In Barbara Hardy’s words, “we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize,

construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative" (1968:5). In our fictions and in our actions and thoughts, we are storytelling animals, to paraphrase MacIntyre (1981:216). Or, as Shenhav proposes, "humans have a natural tendency to think in narrative form" (2006:245).

According to White, a narrative is "a verbal structure in the form of a prose discourse . . . which [marks] off the events contained in [it]" from other events to recreate reality and put forward knowledge about that reality (1973:2). While a sequence of events need not include causal connections, without them it lacks cohesion (Shenhav 2003:247). Thus, an effective narrative sets off beginnings and comes to a close when actions and people so bracketed arrive at a resolution, often after passing through a culmination of some kind (White 1973:6). Another way of thinking about narratives is to see them as "trajectories plotted upon material reality by our imagination" (Cover 1983:5).

The process of emplotment, of selecting events as beginnings or endings and thus granting them significance, helps make the chain of events initiated and brought to an end intelligible (MacIntyre 1981:197). By enclosing a sequence, a narrative takes it out of the mass of facts composing a given reality and gives those facts order and coherence. In other words, narratives make life, both in its day-to-day materializations and in its longue durée, comprehensible and endow it with meaning. Indeed, Cover argues that they are "indispensable in the quest for meaning" (1981:4), or, as Shenhav writes, through narratives "people deal with a non-narrative reality" (2003:250).

Implicitly, an underlying telos drives an effective narrative (MacIntyre 1981:200). Telos, the moving force behind a story, is integral to causality. It links values, motives, and purposes to action, the possibility of control, and the attribution and acceptance of responsibility and blame (Edwards, cited in Bacchi 2000:45; Stone 1989:283). Guided by intentions of varying clarity and consciousness, stories "lead" us to imagined futures (Cover 1983:10).

As such, narratives lie at the heart of identity. Personal identity and narrative are mutually constituting, suggests MacIntyre, so that in posing the question "who am I?" and "what am I to do?," we imply another question, that is, "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" (1981:201). They are "templates for orienting and acting in the world," providing people with a means to understand their past and make sense of and direct actions in the present and the future (Jacobs 2007:205).

In this sense, narratives serve as moral guideposts, setting up good and evil, heroes and antiheroes, to weigh beliefs and values (Jacobs 2007:206). They may impel us forward or repel us; either way, each one builds on what Cover calls a “prescriptive point, its moral.” An effective narrative endows a view of the future and its potential with normative significance (Cover 1983:5–10).

As normative or moral “templates” orienting our actions, narratives articulate the personal with the collective and are, consequently, integral to the social fabric of neighborhoods, communities, towns, cities, and nations, where they shape social ties and relationships. They are, in this way, inherently about social relations. Not only do narratives say something about who “you” and “I/we” are, they also imply what may happen if and when we meet. In Escondido, the protesters’ narrative scripted the young Central Americans and Mexicans as dangerous immigrants, even before their arrival, and warned that their presence would harm “natives” of Escondido and upset their way of life.⁴ Counterprotestors, in turn, portrayed the minors as young children fleeing dangerous countries of origin for the safety of the United States where they hoped to find sanctuary.

To repeat, in the dispute over whether to approve the petition to build a shelter or not, two narratives—one about immigrants, the other about children—stood out. Both set out to define who the young Central Americans and Mexicans were and foretell the impact they would likely have (or not have) on individual residents and Escondido. While couched in the particularities of Escondido, those competing narratives also reflected larger national understandings and sentiments about immigrants and children. Thus, in order to understand their appeal, it helps to situate them in the larger national context.

The Narrative of the Immigrant Threat

The narrative of the immigrant threat is grounded in the belief that the presence of foreigners endangers the values, institutions, and identity of the United States. Rooted in a binary opposition of “native” and “foreign,” it portrays immigrants as inherently different and threatening to the well-being and interests of “natives.” As such, immigrants and immigration are imbued with risk, and everything “native” is inherently vulnerable in their presence.

Notwithstanding its contemporary appeal among many of those debating immigration today, the narrative of the immigrant threat dates to the early years of the nation's history. It gave birth to anti-immigrant political parties, such as the Know-Nothings in the 1850s, and led to demands to restrict the naturalization of foreigners in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Fehrenbacher 1969:101; Higham 1965:4, 97). Not surprisingly, it has gone hand in glove with racism and shaped ethnic-racial relations in the country. It drove the persecution of Chinese in the 1880s and efforts to put into law the Chinese Exclusion Act (Higham 1965:25) and set the course for the 1924 quota system restricting the immigration of southern and eastern Europeans and Africans and banning Arabs and Asians.

Racism and anti-immigrant sentiment drove the country's westward expansion in the nineteenth century and steered debate over how to incorporate territories conquered in the Mexican-American War. Ironically, it reined in U.S. efforts to colonize all of México; according to arguments of the time, the absorption of so many Mexicans into the North American union would stunt the country's development and progress (Horsman 1981:238; Noel 2014:9). In the twentieth century, racism and nativism inflamed anti-Mexican sentiments (de Leon 1983:150), stoked fears of "invasions" from south of the border, incited violence against Mexicans (massive deportations in the 1930s, the Zoot Suit Riots, for example), and created a breeding ground for draconian deportation laws and practices. Today, writes Newton, "the category 'illegal immigrant' has become a condensation symbol for an invasion of the American Southwest, fiscal crisis, welfare abuse, crime, and Mexican immigration" (2008:19–21).

The Narrative of Child Innocence

At the same time, the young Central Americans and Mexicans to be housed in Escondido were minors. Thus, narratives about children and adolescents surfaced as well during the days of protest and counterprotest. As I suggest below, one dominated—that of the innocent child.

Grounded in a biological and developmental approach to childhood and adolescence, the term "minor" refers to those under 18 years of age. When applied to unaccompanied children, it influences and conditions norms for their inclusion in or exclusion from the United States:

immigrants not yet 18 are housed separately from those 18 or older; some legal tools are applicable only to those under 18—“special juvenile immigrant status,” for instance; immigrants 18 and older, in the legal lingo, “age out.”

From the perspective of child innocence, the concept of “minor” is a negation: minors are nonadults and thus it is in relation to adulthood that the term acquires its particular meaning. Only adults have the capacity to think and act rationally and exercise full autonomy; full citizenship, with all its rights and obligations before society and the state, is possible only to them. Minors, in contrast, deemed not yet able to think and reason as adults, lack autonomy (Pasquerella 2004:490) and are dependent on adults, especially those in their immediate families. Thus, their identity is fundamentally relational and dependent (Pasquerella 2004:491; Wall 2006:526). Fathers and mothers are expected to act on their children’s behalf, or, in the words of Pasquerella (2004:491), “they are the child’s agents” (Wall 2006:526).

Given the minor’s dependence on family, his or her needs and fate are considered primarily a domestic and private matter and out of the hands of the state (Arneil 2002:73–74). Minors belong *to* and *in* domestic arrangements. Only in cases of negligence or abuse may the state intervene and override family authority.

At the same time, children and adolescents embody deeply held beliefs about moral goodness. In his classic study of childhood and family in Europe, Ariès writes that in the seventeenth century “an essential concept won acceptance: that of the innocence of childhood” (Ariès 1962:110), an attribute others see reflected later in the “sacralisation” of childhood and the notion of children’s inherent vulnerability (Meyer 2007:90; Neustadter 1992:71; Zelizer 1985). As the authors of an editorial in the journal *Childhood* note, “Childhood confronts one inescapably as a moral problem . . . [it] abhors and disallows moral agnosticism” (Cook 2017:3).

In a Weberian sense, infants, children, and adolescents are ideal types of human potential, reserves of “virtue” embodying intangibles such as hope, purity, and promise held up as models of human worthiness in the public eye. Despite the wide range of evidence that has worn down the border separating childhood from adulthood—child workers and soldiers, teen mothers, and street children—proof of a child’s authenticity still depends

largely on the degree to which she or he exemplifies innocence—that which sets him or her morally apart from adults.

Given this premise, what happens to children and adolescents who do not live with families or who hold jobs or commit crimes? Moreover, where do minors who do not exemplify innocence, as culturally defined, stand in the eyes of civil society and the state? I suggest that at best they become mired in ambiguity, their vulnerability suspect. At worst, they are seen as dangerous to the community. In other words, to varying degrees they are perceived and portrayed as transgressors. Their inability, or “failure,” to abide by the standards of the ideal child, to embody innocence, puts in doubt, or outrightly denies, their authenticity as minors. As Meyer argues, “if children and childhood are defined by innocence, then children who do not conform to this image are excluded” (Meyer 2007:94). Even worse, they may become trapped in what Valentine refers to as the “discourse of evil” (Valentine, qtd. in Meyer 2007:87); no longer vulnerable, they exemplify danger and are deemed unfit for society.

In this sense, children and childhood make a deep emotional appeal, what one observer refers to as the “the evaluation of children in terms of emotion” and another as “being *valued exclusively* in emotional terms” (Cunningham 1998:1207). On the one hand, the vocabulary of innocence portrays children as inherently vulnerable, dependent, virtuous, and in need of protection. On the other, those who appear un-childlike (street children, child soldiers, child immigrants, members of gangs and drug cartels) provoke moral unease, if not panic (Aitken 2001:123). Thus, contemporary understandings and sentiments about children scan a wide arc of possibility—from images of weak, tender, angelic creatures to dangerous, amoral predators (Katz 2008; Meyer 2007:87). Simultaneously endangered and dangerous, they incite anxiety about the adult world and, as Katz argues, become “readily available for mobilization around moral panics and the definition of social ills” (Katz 2008:7).

EMBODYING NARRATIVES

I have proposed that the narratives employed in *Escondido* were about bodies. In epistemological terms, emphasizing the body’s significance acknowledges that “every aspect of the human being is grounded in specific

forms of bodily engagement” and that “our sense of what is real begins with and depends crucially upon our bodies” (Johnson 2007:1; Lakoff and Johnson 1999:17). From the perspective of bodily engagement, or embodiment, the narratives that surfaced in Escondido, whether hostile or welcoming, were packed with understandings and sentiments about bodies. In short, they made claims about what an immigrant body is and does and about what makes a child childlike.

Acknowledging the importance of the body has critical implications, for if the body lies at the core of both narratives, as I suggest, it also offers a lens through which to explore the meaning and impact of those narratives. As Scheper-Hughes and Lock write, “insofar as the body is both a physical and cultural artifact, it is not always possible to see where nature ends and culture begins”—it is “simultaneously a physical and symbolic artifact, as both naturally and culturally produced, and as securely anchored in a particular historical moment” (1987:7).

In Escondido the narrated body of the threatening immigrant prevailed over that of the innocent child. I propose that examining how both narratives embodied unaccompanied migrant minors can shed light on the role and impact the narratives played in the dispute over the petition to build a shelter.

As a starting point, the body draws attention to aspects that might otherwise remain silenced or invisible. I am speaking here of *emotions* and *feelings*, especially those linked to risk and vulnerability. While recent research has raised greater awareness of the critical role emotions and feelings play in “our ability to experience the meaning of a given situation, action, event or utterance” (Johnson 2007:44) (and, thus, to know what to do from moment to moment), it is equally important to recognize the part the body plays in the origin and shape of feelings and emotions, that is, as a means to make sense of the world we live in (Johnson 2007:9). As Johnson argues, emotions and feelings are “bodily processes” anchored in “changes in our body state” (2007:60–61). Reading and hearing the protesters’ and counterprotestors’ narratives through the body offers a means to explore the way fear, empathy, dread, anger, and compassion gave expression to and energized the narratives and, ultimately, the actions people took.⁵

In that sense, the mobilizations in Escondido in the summer of 2014 were in no small measure disputes over which narrative the young Cen-

tral Americans and Mexicans embodied. Thus, in order to understand *why* the narrative of the immigrant threat prevailed, we need to examine *how* the minors were embodied. I begin that discussion with a review of the arguments used to reject and support the federal petition to build a shelter and, ultimately, whether to welcome or turn away the unaccompanied children.

PROTEST AND COUNTERPROTEST

PROTEST

Those objecting to the minors' arrival underscored their undocumented immigration status and "illegality." A city commissioner asked rhetorically if the children had violated a federal or local law; the answer was a decisive "Yes" (Ocaño 2014). Still others said that building a shelter for minors "who snuck across the border would send the wrong message" (Replogle 2014b). At the October 14 meeting an Escondido resident complained, "We're telling our children: If you don't like the law, then it's OK to break it" (Noriega 2015).

Demands followed to safeguard the community's security. At the June 24 meeting, fears spread that the minors would "run loose" in the city. In response, groups backing the proposal assured those gathered that the minors' movements would be restricted to the installation; they would not leave the premises save for religious or medical reasons, or for a few carefully supervised recreational and educational outings. In addition, the building proposal included a six-foot fence intended to enclose the facility and prevent the children from fleeing (Replogle 2014a). One resident, however, claimed the neighborhood proposed for the shelter was "already deteriorating simply upon the threat of this inappropriate facility," and observed a "proliferation of signs" going up in the area announcing "No Trespassing" and "Beware of Dog," as well as a "presence of firearms" (Jones 2014a).

Protesters insisted that crime would go up. A flyer warned that nothing would prevent the young migrants from jumping over the fence and making their way throughout the region and committing crimes (Jones 2014b). Escondido's mayor worried that the minors would not be properly vetted for criminal histories (Jones 2014a; Phillips 2014), and a man

attending the June 24 gathering announced that most of the minors belonged to Central American gangs and speculated that rape would increase in the city (Frank 2014). According to one resident, the shelter was in reality a federal detention center for youth (Phillips 2014), an opinion echoed by a resident of Escondido who argued that Southwest Key would turn the shelter into “a federal detention facility for juveniles” (Phillips 2014).

The immigrants were described as a health risk. The mayor worried the minors would not have to pass a health inspection before entering the city (Phillips 2014). The assistant planning director for Escondido said city residents had sent him letters and emails citing the risk of airborne illnesses if the shelter were built (Replogle 2014b). Striking a similar note, the state congressman representing the district containing Escondido declared the minors would spread tuberculosis and measles (Walker 2014).

Other objections, focusing on costs, claimed housing the young immigrants would strain the city’s finances. Some complained the shelter would lower real estate values (Jones 2014b). A county supervisor wanted confirmation that the minors’ presence would not depress the tax base and drain the city’s financial reserves (Replogle 2014b), and the San Diego County Board of Supervisors called on the Obama administration to reimburse any costs to the county if the shelter were approved (Walker 2014).

The young migrants’ arrival was compared to an “invasion” (Ocaño 2014). At the June 24 meeting a sign read, “Already too many! No more Illegals!” (Phillips 2014). According to one report, those in attendance at the June 24 meeting believed the children would inevitably escape the shelter, on average two a night (Ocaño 2014). Indeed, in a radio interview prior to the June 24 meeting, the mayor complained that Escondido already had been “disproportionately impacted in the past by illegal migration,” which had led city authorities “to take some policy measure to stop the influx of people” (Noriega 2015).

Demands to secure the city’s safety led to calls to fortify the nation’s borders and fix immigration policy. The minors’ presence was offered up as one more proof of the federal government’s failure to protect the nation’s borders against security threats and lax policies toward undocumented migrants in general (Fox News 2014; Replogle 2014b). A city official called the minors’ presence a disaster of the Obama administration (Ocaño 2014). In a similar tone, the mayor criticized President

Obama and his administration's inability to "resolve the immigration issue" (Jones 2014a).

Racial divisions and nativist sentiments surfaced throughout the days of protest. At the June 24 meeting, those against the proposal were mostly white, while the few in favor, approximately 20, were Latino (Jones 2014b). At the October 14 meeting, according to one account, "some people carried small signs. One, pointed at the side of the room filled with Latinos, read 'Go Home.' Another one, pointed at the mostly white anti-shelter crowd, read 'Go Back to Europe'" (Jones 2014d). Later that same day, rumors spread that those supporting the petition had not stood up at the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance (Jones 2014d).

COUNTERPROTEST

From the beginning, those in favor of building the shelter argued against approaching it as an immigration issue. Referring to the city's reputation and history, Olga Diaz, the only Latina on the city council, said, "There are some topics that come before us that are things we cannot logically discuss, and immigration is one of them" (Jones 2014a). In short, treating the petition as a project to house immigrants would deadlock any attempt to solve the dispute.

Instead, those in favor talked about defending children. A representative of Southwest Key said the "center was about helping children" and likened the failure to support it to ignoring "the humanitarian needs of kids" (Jones 2014b). A young Marine said he wanted to give the children a chance (Phillips 2014), and at the city council meeting in July, counterprotesters brought signs that said, "Don't be Afraid of the Children" (*Washington Times* 2014).⁶

Others tried to frame the shelter in humanitarian and moral terms. At the June 24 meeting, a representative of Southwest Key asked those attending to "stand on the side of humanity" (Jones 2014b); similarly, a man voicing his frustration told a reporter that those protesting the shelter didn't "understand that it's a humanitarian proposal" (Ocaño 2014). During the planning commission's July 23 meeting to ratify its initial rejection of the petition, counterprotesters held up signs that said "Shame on You" and "Migrant Lives Matter," echoing the call to end violence against African Americans (*Los Angeles Times* 2014). Later in September,

in its appeal of the ruling to reject the shelter, the ACLU argued that the children deserved to be treated with “compassion and dignity” and had the right to due process and legal protection (*Latin American Herald Tribune* 2014). As a young Marine argued, referring to Escondido’s punitive treatment of immigrants: “If you don’t pass this thing . . . Escondido is going to continue being the armpit of the immigration of the west coast” (Phillips 2014).

Finally, many denounced what they saw as openly racist attacks on the minors. Arguing the ACLU’s case, the legal director of the organization’s San Diego chapter said the opposition was based on “unfounded hostility and bias towards immigrant youth” and spoke of fighting “hostility, discrimination, and bias” (Jones 2014c). A resident of Oceanside denounced the city council for making decisions based on “racist thoughts” (Jones 2014d). Finally, a lawsuit, filed in May of 2015, accused Escondido “of manipulating local zoning laws to prohibit the facility and of citing unfounded land use concerns as a pretext to discriminate against the migrant children” (Noriega 2015).

REFLECTION

The title of this chapter refers to Escondido as “California’s little Arizona,” in reference to the city’s historically harsh approach to undocumented immigration. To be sure, it could be argued that opposition to the shelter won because many of the city’s residents and officials had favored, if not advocated for, punitive immigration policies in the past. In 2006 the city attempted to pass a housing ordinance that would have fined landlords who rented to undocumented immigrants, in effect making it almost impossible for the undocumented to live in the city (Jones 2014a).⁷ Soon after, local police set up checkpoints, ostensibly to catch drunk drivers but also to check driver’s licenses, in what many immigrant rights groups argued was a thinly veiled effort to apprehend undocumented immigrants. Around the same time, the city banned parking on front lawns and tried to push through a law to limit the number of cars parked in a predominantly Latino neighborhood. Then, in 2010, in an unusual and informal arrangement between Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Escondido city police department, ICE agents were stationed in police headquarters and allowed to accompany local law enforcement

on patrols through the city (Noriega 2015). In short, as a city known for its antagonism toward undocumented immigrants, Escondido was fertile ground for the mobilizations that took place in the summer of 2014.

That said, the shelter was intended to house children, and many came out to emphasize that point and support its construction. In other words, the government's proposal, put up for review and debate beginning in June 2014, was as much an issue about *minors* as it was about immigrants. Consequently, the mobilizations and their outcome hinged to a large degree on the question of whether the Central Americans and Mexicans should be seen and treated as children or immigrants. Not surprisingly, in determining whether they were one or the other and in framing arguments for and against the shelter, both sides in the debate looked to the children themselves. In the process they referenced the body time and again.

From the beginning, bodies were central to both narratives. They appeared in protesters' references to viruses and rape, to boys and girls jumping over fences and escaping into Escondido's neighborhoods, and in claims that some of the minors were over 20 years of age. Likewise, when alluding to vulnerable "natives" exposed to disease and sexual assault, those protesting the shelter made references to the bodies of Escondido's residents. To be sure, those favoring the petition also referenced bodies in their defense of the young immigrants—portraying them as "kids" in need of humanitarian aid.

Physical bodies became metaphors, especially in the narrative of the immigrant threat. In associating the young Central Americans and Mexicans with risks to Escondido and its residents, those opposed to the shelter transformed the minors into a metaphor for danger, as the embodiment not only of specific threats but ultimately of risk itself. Similarly, the bodies of residents became proxies for Escondido and, by extension, the United States, vulnerable and under potential assault, its epidermis breached by Central Americans and Mexicans crossing the border. Whereas among those in favor of the building the shelter, the minors symbolized humanitarian need, a metaphor for the "right thing to do" and a moral obligation to the vulnerable among us.

I suggest both sides drew on the body because of the power of such allusions, especially with regard to risk and vulnerability. Narrative embodiment lent itself to the protesters' and counterprotesters' conviction that what they knew about the minors was true and became the source

of the strength of those convictions. To be sure, both camps kept “redeploying” the body, endowing and re-endowing Central American and Mexican bodies with traits, drives, motives, desires, and interests to make their claims about who and what was at stake. In short, both sides embodied the narratives because of what embodiment did.⁸ Thus, in order to understand the successful rejection of the petition to build a shelter, we need to understand the role narrative embodiment played, especially with regard to the portrayal of the immigrant threat.

To begin, in referencing the body, protesters transformed the minors’ possible arrival from an abstract and hypothetical risk into scenarios that felt “real.” In effect, embodying the narrative made it possible to “sense” the minors. Once reconfigured, they became imagined subjects to be treated as if they were true to life. In other words, narrative embodiment made the young Central Americans and Mexicans palpable, rendering the possibility of assault and crime real as well.

Once embodied, the narrative took on a powerful subjective life. Embodiment tapped into emotions and feelings that infused the risks—viruses, sexual assault, youth prowling the streets of Escondido—with heightened urgency and danger. Through bodily engagement, the narrative “touched” those disputing the shelter, provoking dread, fear, anger, outrage, thus capturing the imagination and steeping it in feelings of vulnerability and living at risk.

As Walby, Spencer, and Hunt write, “emotions move between bodies, aligning subjects with some and against others. . . . Through the circulation of emotion, bodies and worlds materialize and take shape. Emotions are crucial to the way bodies become problematized in relation to other bodies, producing the effect of collectivities” (2012:5). Dominant emotions spread among those in opposition to the shelter and swept them up in the fervor of the moment, in essence enclosing them in a common emotional life centered around their fear, dread, anger, outrage. As Anna Gibbs notes, “bodies can catch feelings as easily as catch fire: affect leaps from one body to another” (qtd. in Ahmed 2007:125). I would add that once bodies “catch” feelings, those feelings “stick,” in Ahmed’s terms, leaving people under their influence for varying lengths of time (2007:127).

The protesters’ emotional focus, in turn, responded to and reflected the minors’ narrow portrayal, reduced to a handful of menacing traits

and actions. As Fassin writes: “Ascription is the foundational act through which racialization is produced” (2011:422), what Fanon describes as being “overdetermined from without” (qtd. in Fassin 2011:422). Thus, the minors’ reduction to distinct and disdainful “essences” led to the biologization of perceived differences (Maldonado 2009:1027), ultimately transforming the children into foreign objects of derision.

That racialization, of course, tapped into historical narratives associated with immigration and race in the United States, especially with regard to nonwhite bodies. As stated above, racialized narratives are present in the country’s foundations as a nation-state. Since the eighteenth century, nonwhite “others” have embodied racial inferiority and risk to the country’s integrity and future. In the specific case of migrants from México, white racism has used and depended on racialized epithets—“mongrels,” “criminals,” and “rapists” among them—to describe Mexicans, justify their exclusion, and incite violence against them (Horsman 1981:208–228). To this day, such imaginaries sustain exclusions of people viewed as “un-American” or “inassimilable” and continue to reinforce laws and practices that exclude and marginalize groups of people, among them immigrants (Johnson 1998:1114). In Escondido, opposition to the shelter drew on that history to anchor presumed risks to those who considered themselves authentically “American”—“natives” of Escondido—and to what made them “American.” As such, residents of Escondido needed only to seize on the young Central Americans’ and Mexicans’ “foreignness,” racialized “otherness,” and undocumented status to raise the specter of a threat to the country’s national security, sovereignty, and identity and to demand that the young racialized others be prohibited from settling in Escondido.

To the degree that criminality, sexual precociousness, and violence came to mark the young migrants’ bodies, defining not only who they were but their intentions (what they would most likely do and what would most likely happen, if they were allowed into Escondido), “native” bodies became increasingly more vulnerable, as narrative binaries came into play. Thus, to the extent that the young immigrants became dangerous and predatory, residents of Escondido became, by similar degree, susceptible to disease, violence, and threats to their way of life.

The plea of one city council member not to treat the proposal as an immigration issue but as a matter of child protection summed up

the challenge the counterprotesters faced. In order to overturn the city council's rejection of the petition, counterprotesters had to "dislodge" the federal proposal from its moorings as an issue about immigration and reframe it as a matter of child protection, that is, supplant the narrative of the immigrant threat with that of the innocent child. That meant replacing the body of the immigrant with that of the child—in other words, redefining the children themselves.

I have said that narratives (that of child innocence, for example) serve as moral guideposts, setting up binaries—right and wrong, good and evil, heroes and antiheroes—on which people draw to evaluate a given circumstance and decide what course of action to take. Given the definition of child innocence, counterprotesters faced an uphill battle in their attempts to place the minors within its parameters.

To be sure, as minors (and thus under the age of full legal responsibility) the young migrants were children in the eyes of the law. However, childlikeness, as discussed above, also carries cultural meanings, and what the young migrants had done to survive—leave their homes on their own, travel without adults to the border or in the company of other minors, cross into the United States—made their childlikeness suspect, since "real" children, their integrity intact, would not, could not, have endured the journey north. Without family and apparently homeless, they had survived and to some extent thrived (since they had made it to the United States) without adults. Given what they had done, why would they need the care and protection "real" children deserved?

In light of those realities, reframing the minors posed a difficult challenge. To begin, the struggle to determine which narrative best defined the young migrants made their identity a central point of contestation, adding complexity to an already volatile issue and moment. As importantly, the possibility that they could be one or the other, or both, rendered them ambiguous.

Generally conceived as unfinished and unrefined, bodies perceived as ambiguous carry multiple, even contradictory, meanings and provoke "confusion, or uncertainty" (Osterfield Li 2009; Sprague 2010:24). Likewise, as subjects who "transform or extend beyond the ordinary" (Osterfield Li, qtd. in Sprague 2010:24), they challenge the ordinary, and in that sense are generally considered destabilizing, if not subversive. In Escondido, the minors' ambiguity placed them in a categorical limbo,

from which one side attempted to rescue them, while the other pushed them into still more precarious margins. In either case, ambiguity denied them personhood. Instead, it hyper-visualized them, transforming them into what Jones describes as “anonymous and metaphorical” bodies as “spectacle”—innocent victims, according to one camp, criminals, according to the other—either to be saved or banished (2011:74). In the end, that ambiguity and the impasse it enabled did not last—neither could the young Central Americans’ and Mexicans’ identity as children.

The consequences were decisive. Their identity as children denied, the minors were remanded to the racialized narrative of the threatening immigrant and linked to threats to national sovereignty, security, and identity. That turn effectively confirmed not only their “illegality” but the illegitimacy of their plight and appeal for refuge, drowning out all pleas for adult protection.

In the words of Kennedy and Craig, “in any given historic, social, and political context, the legitimacy of pain is relative and ranges from legitimate pain (i.e., suffering seen as sympathy worthy) at one end . . . to the far extreme, of illegitimate pain where individuals are stigmatized—often to the point that their pain is viewed as ‘just punishment’” (2012:90). The confirmation of the minors’ identity as immigrants allowed and justified “native” moral and emotional distancing. It also normalized the plight of the children and adolescents. That, in turn, diminished, if not erased, their suffering in the eyes of those protesting the shelter. In the end, the young Central Americans’ and Mexicans’ pain didn’t matter; they alone were responsible for their suffering.

FINAL NOTE

Today, the future of children and adolescents migrating north looks uncertain at best. Driven by interests of its own and pressure from the United States, the Mexican government began to step up its pursuit of undocumented Central Americans entering México. Apprehensions had been growing steadily for some time, by approximately 13,000 a year between 2011 and 2014; however, they jumped almost 350 percent between 2014 and 2015, continued to rise in 2016, and climbed steadily in 2017. In the United States, apprehensions dropped between 2014 and 2015, began

to rise again in 2016, and grew steadily in 2017 (Kandel 2017; U.S. CBP 2016, 2018). They will most likely continue to grow so long as the causes driving the flight—poverty and societal violence, especially—continue to wreak havoc on these young people’s communities and families.

At the time of this writing, conditions in the United States do not offer much hope for unaccompanied youth. Public attitudes toward immigration reform and immigrants (especially if undocumented) reveal an entrenched hostility toward both. The results of the 2016 presidential election make any mention of immigration reform based on humanitarian principles almost impossible. Given those realities, migrant children will continue to be seen as suspicious ambiguous bodies at best and as dangerous bodies at worst, to be kept out of the United States.

NOTES

1. Recent years have witnessed a growing and often heated debate regarding how to refer to immigrants crossing into the United States without an appropriate legal document—whether to call them “undocumented” or “irregular,” for instance. While I acknowledge the implications of each term, I refrain from entering the discussion here and will refer to the immigrant children and adolescents, the subject of this essay, as undocumented.

2. The Department of Homeland Security, which includes U.S. Customs and Border Protection (U.S. CBP), uses “unaccompanied alien children,” or UAC, to refer to Central American and Mexican immigrant minors, the subject of this essay. I don’t use the term here, but it is the statistical category I referenced for this essay. The term “minor” in the United States is a legal demarcation referring to people not yet 18 years of age and so have not reached the age of full legal responsibility (except for gambling and alcohol consumption, for which they must be 21). It carries biological, sociocultural, political, and economic meanings as well, many of which have come under critical scrutiny in recent years (see González et al. 2012). I use “minor” here for the following reasons: it was the criteria U.S. CBP used to group a disparate assembly of young people already in immigration proceedings during the time period examined; it appeared, albeit alongside other terms, especially “children,” during the mobilizations in Escondido, and thus became contested ground and part of the dispute. The term appears in contemporary debates regarding newborns, children, and adolescents, if not youth in general. That said, I recognize the term’s limitations and the need to exercise caution when employing it.

3. Heeding Johnson’s observation that “the more we abstract” the more “we pay the price of losing connection with specific felt qualities of things,” throughout this essay I use the term “immigrants” whenever possible (with its emphasis

on people) instead of “immigration” and its allusions to social, political, and economic processes (Johnson 2007:93).

4. Mindful of the term’s underlying allusion to *nativist* and *nativism*, I use “native” in parentheses to refer to the residents of Escondido and to their sense of belonging to the city, region, and nation.

5. In this chapter I refrain from entering the discussion regarding what differentiates “emotion” from “feeling” from “affect,” a complex and lively debate in which there is much dissension (Spencer et al. 2012), especially with regard to unconscious attributes (Theodosius 2012:63–85). While no one disputes that emotion, feeling, and affect all have roots in the subconscious, there is little agreement as to which of the three is more or less conscious. As Feldman Barrett et al. argue, “the idea that emotion reflects a combination of conscious and unconscious processes dates back to the beginning of Western philosophy”; today “questions about the relationship between emotion and consciousness remain at the center of investigations (even if only to highlight that consciousness is *not* the defining feature of an emotional state)” (2005:1). Thus, while emotion is generally deemed more conscious than feeling and affect, the discussion is ongoing.

6. References to “kids” and “children” appeared to be a conscious decision on the part of counterprotesters, perhaps because “youth” and “juvenile” don’t carry the same sense of vulnerability and dependency as “child.” Also, “juvenile” is often associated with juvenile delinquents and juvenile hall and their connotations of criminal behavior and responsibility.

7. The ACLU contested the ban and the city repealed it, but resentment of the decision remained; the mayor of Escondido even accused the civil rights organization of “discrimination against the city” (Jones 2014d).

8. I am aware that this introduces a conscious intentionality, which may or may not have been the case. Both camps referenced the body, variously constructed (whether child, victim, predator, sexual aggressor), as conscious attempts to influence the decision against or in favor of building the shelter. That does not, however, necessarily imply a conscious reference of body, per se, for that purpose.

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“War Stories” and White Shoes

Field Notes from Rural Life in the
Borderlands, 2007–2012

David Seibert

AN INTRODUCTION TO SHIFTING FIELDS

When I suddenly discovered two bright white tennis shoes in the desert, that landscape and all notions of its logic and my place in it were permanently confounded. The shoes lay upright and spare, side by side and neatly arranged along the edge of a dirt road 28 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico line, as if their owner had disappeared somehow with other garments, and forgotten them.
(excerpt from field notes)

Those shoes had not been forgotten by their owner; nor were they randomly placed—a fact that I learned gradually and grudgingly during several years of natural resources fieldwork southwest of Tucson, Arizona. The sentences above represent an early attempt to render in words an experience that eludes logic and comprehension, much like the subjects of my writing attempts—distraught travelers seeking opportunity while learning that remaining alive in the desert had become a more immediate priority. Like the shoes, my words about them lay dormant but resonant at the margins of other topics in my early notebooks from the field, coincidentally at the height of the mid-2000s surge of human movement in the most active Border Patrol region in the country, the Tucson Sector. This zone encompasses the Altar Valley, a sparsely populated 600,000-acre desert grassland with little water or shade, and sprinkled with a handful of ranch houses and residents who struggle to incorporate into their working lives objects such as discarded protective footwear, along with the sometime presence, and sometime absence, of the traveling bodies who leave things for others to find.

Almost immediately on entering the Altar Valley in 2007, my memories of growing up in the region were challenged by encounters with people and objects that would force construction of a new version of the place I was about to inhabit. I would soon become a resident ecological restoration practitioner and cultural anthropologist intent on conducting habitat restoration with the Altar Valley Conservation Alliance, a strong group of ranchers focused on improving the rangeland habitat on which their livelihoods depend. However, when the alliance invited me to explore the potentials for restoration work, I was unprepared for the realities of living in the remote cabin where I spent several years, as opposed to visiting for data collection and returning to Tucson. I soon learned that for residents of the region, “work shifts” do not begin or end as they do for many who visit and depart. Those shifts continue through subtle and overt pulses of interaction, activity, and movement, and regularly remind residents that this is a place inhabited, managed, and utilized differently by day than by night, a place where hope, tragedy, fear, and beauty fuse in unexpected ways.

The field note format that makes up much of this chapter represents an attempt to report on that experience from the perspective of those who reside in remote rural areas. It attempts to capture the tenor of our shared experiences in place by deliberately mixing the found objects, the events of their findings by residents, and human ways of sorting, evaluating, and sharing experiences through story. The stories of discovery in the fields where we worked were insistent and unrelenting, features that were underscored when rediscovered at the margins of my own notes as I sought a means of gathering and curating them. They demanded a different kind of attention and a return to the storytellers with new questions.

My resident colleagues enthusiastically supported this return and our shared attempt to “tell the truth” and to “get it right” because the finding moments and intersections regularly forced the incorporation of barely comprehensible materials and experiences into what had been planned as a typical workday. As I learned in the field and began to surmise slowly over time, the findings also have significant emotional and political effects on the finders. As a response, people share stories with one another during impromptu comparative attempts at comprehension, cataloging, and orientation to emergent conditions, both for

themselves and for others. In this manner they deploy the objects and stories as bulwarks against uncertainty and forgetting, even as their days and lives shift irrevocably and unpredictably. As one colleague framed the experience of uncertainty, “You know something’s gonna happen” in this new version of the field of work. It was simply impossible to predict what that would be.

Assemblages of objects, stories about them, and their collection and curation contribute to the forging of cultural memory in place. My aim is to highlight, as my co-workers in the field did, the fact that this effort has as much to do with memory as it does with the potentials for forgetting the intensity and immediacy of lives lived under trying circumstances—for migrants, smugglers, and for residents who interact with them—and the potentials for such conditions to become acceptable or normalized as features inherent to border life. What follows is an attempt to convey this immediacy of experience by providing examples from the field, such as the original vignette above, that set the tone for my experience, and brief explanatory or theoretical pieces to frame them. However, it also seems appropriate to allow the objects, finding events, and people’s responses to them to stand on their own, as interstitial cracks always ready to give way to sudden eruptions into what had for decades been a more predictable set of circumstances on a shared landscape.

The research-oriented question, “What to do with all this stuff?” (field data and experiences), is lived daily by rural border residents. It’s a question that never seems to rest on comfortable answers for anyone. As a partial answer (both biased and incomplete) to this experiment in rural borderland inhabitation, the somewhat experimental narrative pieces below provide a sense of the contexts in which events continuously and relentlessly recur in the region, by requiring that readers participate explicitly in the project of meaning-making in ways akin to those who work and reside there. As such, this effort includes the horror, shock, despair, and tragedy that permeate life in the region. But an attempt at a more accurate form of accounting must also include events marked by grace, deliberation, care, and foresight that often go unreported. Finally, I have found it useful to consider the object-events that erupt at the interstices as metaphors, or conceptual bridges between disparate and seemingly unrelated terms, even as they retain a more concrete utility as figures of linguistic, social, and material practice. This perspective enables us to

entertain how intense and immediate object-event intersections initiate and hold potentials for change, both on the physical landscape and in the emotional lives of those who have found, and will continue to find, particularly resonant objects and enter situations for which they are often unprepared.

It is my hope that these accounts and methods of treating them honor in unique and accurate ways those who failed to move successfully across the desert, those who succeeded, and those who choose to dwell in a landscape of persistent uncertainty. But before continuing, we will complete the conceptual bridge with which we began through the story of the white shoes so that they, and the anonymous traveler who left them, might have a chance to hold more firmly a place in the region’s shared history.

INTERSTICE I—A PAIR OF WHITE SHOES, FOREGROUNDED

During my first fall of fieldwork exploration in 2007, I arranged a “ride-along” day with an Arizona Game and Fish Department game warden. I signed the necessary paperwork protecting the agency from liability, conducted some online research to orient myself to the agency’s mandates and goals, and happily hopped into my informant’s four-wheel-drive work truck. I immediately noted the presence of a shotgun and ammunition clips mounted onto the truck’s infrastructure, close at hand for the driver. Later during our discussion, I noticed that the driver wore a bulletproof vest. He explained that it was impossible to know what he would find in a day’s work. I made sense of the comment and the hardware by noting to myself that he surely confronted armed hunters during the course of his work enforcing game laws. I saw nothing unusual about that precaution, and we proceeded to drive remote dirt roads and to speak about his history and training, his length of tenure in the department, and the challenges he faced as a game warden.

After a few hours of exploring ranch roads, the driver slowed the truck and stopped. I noticed a small white glow on the tan road surface ahead and slightly to the right. We had stopped about 20 feet in front of what appeared to be, and then became, a pair of bright white tennis shoes. I stared for a few moments, trying hard to fit these objects into the version of the region that I had built internally over time and carried to the site. “Do you smell anything?”

he asked quietly as he rolled down both windows. "No . . .," I replied just as quietly, now less certain than ever of what we were experiencing, and why. "Sometimes they take their shoes off right before they die," he said. "I don't know why." We paused. He exited the truck, walked to the front, and stood looking side to side. In retrospect, I believe I was too stunned to get out with him; not fearful, just shocked into inaction as I furiously attempted to work on and within this unexpected, emergent field that now contained new information in the form of discarded shoes in the desert. He climbed back into the truck without further incident or discussion. But the borderlands had changed in that moment—violently, dramatically, and permanently. Sometimes I regret not taking a picture of those white shoes, but no matter, as it turned out. In the years ahead there would be plenty of objects, plenty of first-time finding moments, and plenty of stories about them that would prowl at the edges of my consciousness. Besides, those shoes are very much with me in any case. They cannot be otherwise.

The development of a theory of object-event intersections as physical metaphors helps explain what many borderland residents experience as they attempt to make sense of their findings and of their surroundings. I suggest that this approach contributes to the development of a radically honest form of accounting that many researchers who work at the intersections of social and natural worlds encourage (Collier and Ong 2005; Williams 1980). This form of analytics also points to the locations and the mechanisms through which borderland residents forge a particular form of cultural memory, and to how researchers might honor and attend to the dynamics of memory formation from the middle of an emergent situation as it continues to unfold.

After driving around in silence for some time after finding the shoes, I attempted to pick up the pieces of our encounter and direct conversation to the warden's daily life in the field and to how he made sense of his experiences. After starting and stopping in his explanations a few times, he practically yelled aloud, "I'm *out* here!" He did not have much to say after I acknowledged his words, and we finished the day as many do, without another remarkable incident of any kind.

In retrospect, that incident and claim coupled to the white shoes further clarified for me the importance not only of choosing what field samples to collect, and how, but how to represent them discursively. As I assembled my own "war stories" (a common descriptor) of life in the



Figure 9.1 A cross and clothing in the desert (photograph by the author).

region, I began to reflect on the fact that the warden’s exclamation, “I’m *out* here!,” indexed bodily exposure that didn’t necessarily include the possibility of bodily harm but psychological distress and exposure of different kinds. In other words, during work periods in the region he is not *in*, or inside a given space, and therefore not covered or otherwise protected from whatever is “out” there awaiting him—yet another inevitable meeting at the unwanted but extremely creative intersection of people and things on the move.

This experience and exclamation signal the implication of the human body in work activities in new and remarkable ways. As I noted, it was no surprise that the game warden wore a bulletproof vest and carried a small arsenal as part of his daily routine. I have no reason to believe that the white shoes signaled any kind of physical threat to our safety, but every reason to believe they signaled something to those who live through and within such experiences regularly, and who grapple with ways to respond psychologically and emotionally, both within themselves and outwardly to others.

INTERSTICE II—BODIES OF EVIDENCE IN A CHANGING REGION

A natural resources agency official with decades of borderland experience seemed pleased and intrigued by the chance to describe her work conditions from decades ago, when “the Gate” along the current border that divides ancestral Tohono O’odham lands between the United States and México was a simple barbed-wire contraption, often left open. During our conversation, reminiscences of (technically illegal) working relationships with ranchers, tribal members, agencies, and others gave way to anecdotes of new forms and objects on the borderlands landscape—one, a human body that she and her co-workers found in a bullet-riddled car in the desert. Another was a cluster of water bottles and guns that had not yet become ubiquitous landscape features at the time she found them, in the late 1990s. Her intended work was to monitor range conditions with ranchers, but she slowly began to feel that such objects and events were becoming the norm, rather than anomalies. She said that after two such encounters with objects, she asked herself for the first time, “What the fuck am I doing out here?!” In our interview, she did not have an answer to her own question, neither from the field nor from the comfortable office where we sat and talked. At that point the landscape and her relationship to it had changed irrevocably, not to be forgotten but elided in favor of other work, other priorities. After a few more stories, she ended the interview with the observation that, “A lot of this stuff doesn’t make the papers, ya know.”

This stuff does make the conversations of those who have plenty to talk about simply because they inhabit a region undergoing deep transformations. They struggle to relay that information without sounding sensitive or sensational, and yet have no reason to believe that the topics and reasons for telling their stories will ever subside.

From a woman whose family has owned land in the region for generations:

Family members head into the field to check fences on their property. They are gone for about half a day during the excursion. On the drive home, along the same dirt road on which they had just traveled, they find a dead man leaning on the side of a large water tank in the shade, apparently the victim of exposure. The woman laughs nervously as she relays this event to me, as if she cannot



Figure 9.2 Desert tree with cross (photograph by the author).

find another way to comment on the shock, another place to put it, another thing to do with it, and so she quickly moves on to other events in rapid succession.

After hearing what sounded like a gun battle in the middle of the night, two cowboys exploring the area the next day find a hidden cache of high-powered rifles and ammunition near the top of a hill on their private property.

During a routine check on cattle, cowboys find what is often called a “rape tree” displaying women’s undergarments from branches, less than a mile from the family home.

One of the family dogs returns late one morning with a human foot in its mouth.

As she relays these experiences 30 miles north of the border she laughs nervously, I suspect out of an inability to make sense according to comfortable forms and means, but with a quick comment: “We have kids around here!” As the woman explained after recounting the four events so quickly one after the

other that they seemed to spill from her consciousness for lack of anywhere else to go, "You don't know it's there until it bursts through the surface." (Instead, maybe you try to forget, I think to myself.) Or you prepare in uncertain ways for uncertain futures that can be measured in minutes—carry extra water and first-aid supplies, distribute guns throughout your vehicle and home, or make mental notes of the locations of the Border Patrol during a workday, so that they can be summoned when someone suddenly emerges onto a work site and declares themselves done with the exposure and suffering of traveling north.

The rancher's note about the existence of kids in this environment is poignant but indicative of how finding-event normalization processes work through people's bodies under partially understood conditions. Her comment suggests that children should not see such things, and that such events should not be part of their routine lives. While it would probably be inaccurate to claim that she thought it acceptable for adults to see such things, it is important to note that she drew a boundary, based on age and experience, between what was completely unacceptable and what belongs on the other side of the boundary of acceptability, given the physical and social environments in which she now lives. She had adjusted boundaries and adapted to circumstances, but that adjustment was clearly incomplete. It had come with an emotional price that she and I were both unable to reconcile from the middle of things, even as we knew that ranchers and ecologists should not expect to find the things they did, nor have to forge the version of cultural memory under construction through their bodily experiences in ways and means not of their choosing.

Together, my natural resources colleagues and I repeated many of these types of interviews and casual conversations dozens of times and from the places we made our lives—kitchens, the cabs of trucks, bars, roadsides, meetings, diners, and conferences—in addition to the more typical office-based sites of interaction. According to one agency professional, one of her most common and productive means of gathering information about the resource management challenges that ranchers face involves "bouncing around in their truck, having a cup of coffee," because, "relationships are key. There is other data collected too." I would soon learn that shoes, guns, and bodies had already become a larger part of the lived, shared experiment and data set of the contemporary borderlands, whether anyone liked it or not.

INTERSTICE III—WORKING AMONG BODIES
KNOWN AND PARTIALLY KNOWN

A wildlife biologist with whom I worked conducted most of his activities in mountain canyons and often along crests where he could expect to find wildlife. One afternoon while he checked wildlife monitoring devices, he met a group of marijuana haulers and their heavily armed escorts. The biologist nervously launched into an explanation of his wildlife research focus and the fact that he had no desire to have anything to do with the men's efforts in that place. The escorts' reply seemed confident and even professional, from the biologist's account: "We know who you are." The group turned and continued north without further comment or incident, and the biologist continued his work. The event repeats itself in a kind of regularized rhythm—bodies and their activities known to some bodies but not to others, and according to new yet very old logics. As with the war stories often dismissed by the storytellers themselves, my question, "What is it like to go about your workday in the field?" is usually met with a dismissive wave of the hand and claims such as, "Oh, they [smugglers] know who I am," or, "I'm sure they see me all the time." The number of portable radios and water, gun, and food caches found in the higher-elevation areas of intensive smuggling seem to corroborate this. As one environmental activist accustomed to work in remote areas of the borderlands put it, "When I smell cigarette smoke out in the field now, I don't wonder if there is a hunter or rancher around. I leave."

What my research participants and I had been grappling with in the region, in the effort to make sense of it and of our lives there, was that the “first times” of entering a new region or seeing something strange were *infinitely recurrent* as first-time events. That is, the events had not become relegated to the category of the everyday or mundane domains of lived experience. Their ubiquity created lived conditions that negated predictability and denied people rest and peace in many cases, including their ability to count on much of anything except the unexpected. Questions arise constantly here about levels of risk, danger, and exactly what has transpired in a given moment, or what might erupt from one day and one place to the next. Specific object-event encounters, particularly those that evidenced deliberation and care, punctuated my daily life and the daily lives of my participants and led me to wonder how objects, finding events, and their effects might be incorporated in a landscape



Figure 9.3 Gallon of water nestled in a tree (photograph by the author).

of uncertainty (Connerton 1989, 2004; Halbwachs (1980 [1950])); Nora 1989). The inability to count on conditions and to control variables, and therefore to guide many kinds of experiments that I noted above, makes experimentation particularly difficult for natural and social scientists. These conditions are particularly vexing for people like cattle ranchers, who already struggle with marginal incomes and unpredictable climatic and range conditions on which their livelihoods and families depend. In just one common incident, a landowner and I approached an ecological monitoring site and came upon three shoeless, beaten-down horses that she had never seen. “I’m just not surprised at anything I see out here anymore,” she said quietly, and we returned to our work.

INTERSTICE IV—A TRAVELER AND A COWBOY IN THE FOUNDRY OF CULTURAL MEMORY

Ecological restoration survey and evaluation work continue on a hot day in a remote area. The focus is on erosion mitigation and soil and moisture retention

so that grass and other native plants may take hold and stabilize the watershed for the benefit of cattle ranching operations and wildlife. Maps and notes contribute to orientation in the dense and confusing assemblage of deep cuts in the earth, large trees, and vast distances. Slow, deliberate walks up and down the arroyos and from side to side are critical to reading this landscape and its needs. At one particularly dense confluence of dry water channels, large, old mesquite trees cluster and suggest that there may be surface water available here occasionally. The area is thick with discarded water bottles, clothing, and empty food cans. Deep footpaths lead in and out of the shade. After a rest and a short walk not far from this site yet another white object appears in the distance. That color does not belong here. Not that bright. Not here. On approach, it takes the shape of a cross, securely planted in the sand. Ecological work is suspended and careful listening ensues, as if there is something to hear. There is not. The object is as mute as the landscape that now holds it. The senses fail to register meaning from among the known quantities that were carried to this place from past experience, and from among the items on that morning's agenda for work. This place is different now, different again.

There is nothing but a cross for an extended moment; other landscape features and objects seem to gather around it and blur at once, while attempts are made to fit this new object into older, more stable patterns. During a grudging and careful approach, the cross bears witness to more than an anonymous dream, more than random discard. It holds a name and a life span in pencil and wood: Lucrecia Domínguez Luna, November 23, 1969–June 21, 2005. Death occurred on the summer solstice—a time of change on the pre-monsoon landscape, and of tremendous heat and little moisture. Notes are taken here in an attempt to record and to comprehend this anomaly, and to align what must have happened here very recently with what is happening in this new moment.

The cross enters conversation with the landowning family soon afterward. A cowboy notes that one day a small group of travelers arrived at the ranch house and asked if they could mark the spot with a cross, for it was their family member who died in that place. The landowning family allowed it. Border Patrol was not called. The travelers moved on. The cowboy tells me that he is tired of finding bodies on the range. He just wants to run cattle. He asks what I have seen. I respond, and his rejoinder is heavy with exhaustion: "If you haven't found one yet, you will." The reference is to human bodies and remains scattered amid other objects, some familiar, some foreign. There seems to be nothing more to say, and silence takes hold. The conversation returns to ecology

and collaborative conservation, perhaps so that temporary respite might be found in forgetting.

Materiality and material culture studies remain a particularly diffuse, wide-ranging, but unsettled field of research that offers a means of making sense of the times and places in which bodies and other things run up against and even incorporate one another in unique ways (Miller 1998, 2010; Tilley 2004). The perspective foregrounds and forces recognition of the difficult-to-map consequences of shifting human interactions with things made, found, and moved around (Olsen 2006; Shelton 2004). This is especially important for research in the border region at this historical moment because, as all my research participants have indicated, life here has changed dramatically over the last 10–15 years.

What had been a loosely organized system of exchange and reciprocity among residents and travelers from the south—who would predictably arrive for seasonal ranch work, do it well, and move on—has given way to mistrust and a fear of unknowns. Major trade agreements have effectively forced people to move into more dangerous territory, but increased drug cartel organization paired with heightened security and militarization from the north have changed more than just the physical landscape, and irrevocably. Today it is impossible for researchers to avoid the disturbing possibilities of what connections might be in place among governing agencies and groups on both sides of the border, now an active assemblage through which violent eruptions occur with a disturbing regularity among confusing combinations of official and criminal elements on both sides of the line (Bowden 1998, 2010; Hernández 2013 [2010]).

For many whose work centers on the borderlands, the region represents “a space that seems chronically unmade,” where control over land and life was, and in many ways still is, “tenuous, uneven, and incomplete” (Truett 2004a:309, 337). Such conclusions could understandably lead researchers to feel that contemporary conditions represent a failure to resolve centuries of frontier interactions among indigenous peoples, Spanish explorers, and contemporary citizens of México, the United States, and many other countries now, some of whom naturally have been and still are complicit in regionally pervasive violence and drug activity (DeLay 2008; Sheridan 2012; Truett 2004b; White 1991).

In just one example, over the course of centuries in the Southwest the effects of Apache control over vast geographies could be measured in

decades and generations, ebbing and returning in several episodic pulses across the landscapes, one of which included my fieldwork site and home in Arivaca. These are some of the most salient historical analogues to what continues to unfold in the region today. Although there are many obvious differences between Apache history and practices and those of modern drug cartels, perhaps their similarities will someday provide a rich if disturbing research platform that can help define why and how such groups emerged onto the southwestern landscape, and how and why they occupied and continue to occupy it so effectively, in spite of the massive surveillance and enforcement inputs that continue to flow to the region today. In a coincident irony that I discovered only recently, the shocking event related in the following interstice occurred in Arivaca several feet from the remains of a crumbling adobe structure, itself an artifact of multiple Anglo attempts to inhabit the region in the face of native inhabitants’ attempts to hold their ground in the late nineteenth century. When yet another artifact of the contemporary border conflict burst through the door of the room where I sat quietly that night, another chapter was not being written but extended into emergent and ancient territories at once.

INTERSTICE V—A SUDDEN AND UNWELCOME VISITOR IS JUST AS SUDDENLY WELCOMED

In the least inhabited borderlands communities, individuals and small groups spend the majority of their time in mundane pursuits—watching traffic on the road from outside a market, conversing with a friend while the friend works, or drinking among the quiet voices of a few friends in a cantina. Sometimes these proceedings are interrupted. On a late summer night a man drinks with a bartender while the television flits in silence behind him. It is dark and still. This seems to be a good place to allow one’s senses to rest for a time, perhaps to reflect on some things and to forget others. Suddenly, a side door that normally goes unused explodes open. A dark-clothed figure stumbles in, hits the ground hard, and exhales with a moan.

*The female entrant has grass in her hair, a great deal it appears. It is likely the ubiquitously invasive non-native Lehmann’s lovegrass (*Eragrostis lehmanniana*), or so one of the men thinks. In hindsight this identification seems offensively absurd; although ecological restoration has been his primary focus*

for work in this place, other things and ideas intrude and demand reckoning. He and others rush to her assistance, and through broken Spanish determine that she has been raped. It is difficult to know where or when, but this matters little right now, when sudden emergence demands bodily attention. Two women appear on the scene out of nowhere it seems, as if conjured for this purpose. They carefully guide the visitor away. She is welcome now and will receive care. The others do not see her again, or hear of her fate. More drinks are ordered and glances are exchanged, but not words. Forgetting might bring solace for those who met on this night under such conditions, but it is unlikely that there will be forgetting.

A late-night knock on the door at a cabin outside Arivaca opens new and uncertain fields of possibilities. Will the sound attach to an injured traveler, prospective thief, or lost Border Patrol agent? Will our interaction result in an enrichment of my borderlands experiment in the opportunity to assist a fellow human being, in an angry insistence on a ride to Cleveland, or in a testy interaction with a sheriff who attempts to enter my house because he is certain that I operate a safe house for illegal activity? In this emergent moment I have no clear plan or reason for why I stand on my threshold, hold space with my body, then step in front of the sheriff as he tries to enter. And yet my response has everything to do with the bloodied traveler sitting in my front yard, a young man who needs medical attention. I tell the sheriff I know the law even if I don't, and say that his business is with the traveler and not with me. He becomes aggressive and I respond in kind, surprised at my response even as it emerges from my mouth. I tell him again that he cannot enter my house, in spite of my innocence. He eventually accepts my stance, in body and in theory and along with whatever it is that I decided to hold in place at that time, when a sworn protector seemed like an enemy and an anonymous traveler seemed like a friend.

Theoretical studies in phenomenology provide some guidance. They suggest not only how human bodies and other objects become entangled in unique ways during emergent events in extremely dynamic shared landscapes, but how those entanglements might be represented both accurately and without resolution at once. In one sense, it is a matter of telling the truth without providing an answer but through a research framework that incorporates the somatic and emotional effects of lived conditions in and through place (Casey 1996; de Certeau 1984; Tilley

1994); and it centers on the concept that “the body is our general medium for having a world” at all (Merleau-Ponty 1962:146).

INTERSTICE VI—BEING AND EMBODIMENT,
AT THE TABLE . . .

“Sometimes you get sort of teary,” she says, about finding things and people on her land. “In the abstract you get upset, but when you meet them . . .,” and her words trail off, leaving me to wonder about how to manage or relay a possible shift in perspective. Maybe when we tell, and when we listen, we bear witness to newly emergent conditions of life, as fraught as they ever were, just different now. In the abstract, discarded items are ubiquitous throughout much of the borderlands landscape, a fact that becomes readily apparent when one spends only a few days far from here. But “when you meet them,” our collective orientation to conditions changes dramatically. We know what we mean, and we all have our particular points of resonance. In this example, the finder was quick to couple the statement to an object that she references regularly in our conversations, perhaps in an attempt to humanize for herself a landscape and a set of political conditions that always challenge attempts at making sense. In nearly every conversation, she insists on telling me repeatedly of the many times she has found items related to small children, in particular children’s shoes. She is a mother, we sit in her kitchen, and this seems to matter. That child’s shoe matters.

As she tells yet another story of such a finding while we comfortably drink coffee at her kitchen table, she slowly holds her hand up, measuring a gap of about four inches between thumb and index finger. In creating this metaphoric but somehow physical bridge, the now-absent shoe erupts right into the kitchen where we speak. She effectively closes the gap between those who caused that shoe to erupt into her life—politicians, voters, drug users, migrants, many others—those who left it more immediately in her path, and herself. For her, the world has changed; she seems to welcome it, but remains unsure of exactly how to orient herself to it effectively, how to make sense. At the same time, she has in fact created a space for the leavers of the object to inhabit her own place both in and out of the house, and in an unusual way. Neither is a place that either participant can inhabit easily, or otherwise. What they, and we, can do, through attention to objects, memories, gestures, and stories, is create and hold a space to “meet,” and to continue meeting as new social and physical territories emerge around and through us.

. . . AND FROM ANOTHER TRUCK
ON ANOTHER DIRT ROAD

An elderly man whose politics do not seem to align closely with providing aid to migrants, or to opening the border, stops during a workday on his ranch and casually exits his truck. In front of us in the grass is a heavy blanket, another object usually defined as trash in this environment. But when he picks up this newfound object, and carefully folds and hangs it on a branch beside a trail, something else happens. Something has changed on the landscape, and perhaps in him. Perhaps that ethnography is for another day, or even better, for a future historian to wonder about because those days will have passed for the region and its inhabitants. But not yet. As he reenters the vehicle on this cold winter day, he quietly informs the rest of us, "Someone's gonna need that tonight." Those who witness this act of grace silently from inside the truck, including a young woman who faced three desperate travelers in her own harrowing first-time encounter during her natural resources fieldwork, know why he does this. But it would be somehow improper to say so. Not here, not now. These witnesses too have inhabited the region for a time, have moved their own bodies



Figure 9.4 Shrine in the desert (photograph by the author).

through it in concert with others, some unseen and unmet, and so developed a local, practical sophistication around its varied and shifting topographies. They know what it means to live within and to participate in the construction of this place at the same time, and they have nothing to add to the man's gesture and comment; he has already said and done all that is necessary, and possible, in a brief moment of finding, folding, and re-placement.

ADJACENT POSSIBLES AND UNCONCLUSIONS

The object-event intersections described here can be usefully considered as metaphors, not strictly as figures of speech, but as figures of practice that forge bonds between residents and travelers who may never enjoy physical proximity, and between people and places that are changing quite literally beneath their feet. As ethnographer Stephania Pandolfo describes them, "Metaphors express in other words and other images something that does not yet have a language of its own" (1997:281–282). The term indexes and works within the space between the objects' material presence and the psychological and physical effects they have on the finders of objects. As we have witnessed, these include the unusual ways that bodies and other objects align, realign, or do not, and thereby contribute to a contemporary borderlands assemblage of interests, values, and bodily practices. They evidence impromptu practices of care and in-corporation that are both intra- and interpersonal, practices that had never been part of the plan of inhabitation for most residents.

These are tensions that remain unresolved, but can be managed and negotiated in the practices of inhabiting place, which in many instances become practices of care for one's own body and for those of others in tandem. Thinking through metaphor and borderlands object-events accomplishes much more than enabling a mental passage from one concept to another. Instead, the approach suggested here, like the woman's hand and the not-so-empty space between her index finger and thumb, between her body and the bodies of others inhabiting and creating the border region in new and creative ways, produces a set of adjacent possibilities through which we can create, hold, and inhabit a new middle ground that did not exist prior to the interaction. Considered in these ways, there are countless opportunities to think and rethink the limits of experience even as those limits emerge and shift around and through the

bodies of residents, travelers, and others. Here things run into, but also *through*, one another—babies' shoes, firearms, mesquite trees carefully hung with blankets and jackets, empty water bottles, full water bottles, discarded backpacks, bones, and crosses without end—and encourage residents and researchers first to ponder them, but then to act on them and head off in both new and very old directions of travel.

The effects can be simple and profound at once. Those resonant white shoes and similar objects and events had always deserved further attention, including from more people than I could have imagined at the time. Remarkably but perhaps not surprisingly anymore, my 12-year-old nephew unwittingly responded with his own version of a “practice of care” from hundreds of miles away, on hearing his mother relate the story of the white shoes. Later that day and without prompting, he spontaneously drew a picture of the shoes and a road, again without a known person associated with them, but with an expanse of quiet and empty space surrounding them on the page.

If we allow them to, such objects, events, and the stories we tell of their leavings and findings can expose and coordinate in new ways the lived effects of a particular geopolitical assemblage that continuously erupt into and through the bodies of border region inhabitants of all kinds. Just north of the border, these practices extend backward in time and southward across space to points of origin and reasons for travel that researchers and activists today struggle to interpret and relate to the public. Crucial to bridging in accurate ways lived experiences under duress and uncertainty is that we create and maintain conceptual spaces that allow such things as a baby's shoe, or a desperate desert moment—removing shoes, arranging them, and then moving away from a means of self-protection—to be recognized for what they truly represent. In this way what had been, at first, little more than an amalgamation of rubber and white cloth now stands at, and defends, a new threshold of comprehension and possibly compassion, by marking what was likely one person's too short, too common, and now too acceptable life lived briefly in the U.S.-México borderlands.

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