

**No More Deaths:  
Direct Aid in the US-Mexico Border Zone**

Sophie Smith, Editor

These essays were written just before the onset of the Trump administration. Since the time of writing, many of the direct aid projects described here have become more imperiled. Over the past several months, for example, the longest standing desert medical clinic run by No More Deaths has come under attack by the US Border Patrol with the cooperation of the US Attorney's offices. Aid workers are also now being denied access to multiple public lands jurisdictions, enduring escalating levels surveillance and intimidation by numerous federal and state agencies. In this context, it is becoming increasingly clear that the powers that be are working to disrupt the provision of basic necessities to those facing state violence and death in the Southwest desert. At the same time, white supremacy is on the rise in the borderlands. Right-wing paramilitary groups conducting armed vigilante patrols are becoming more organized and emboldened. From multiple sides, the humanitarian efforts of nongovernmental organizations are facing new threats. With criminalization and federal prosecutions on the rise, the border struggle is now taking place in a political landscape of heightened tensions.

We thus find ourselves writing in a moment of danger—for those in the border region, as well as for migrant peoples and communities across North America and around the world. For those of us living and working on the border, one thing is clear: the protection of migrants, refugees, families, and community members in the borderlands will not be guaranteed by the politicians and lawmakers. Rather, to disrupt the atrocities on the ground we must continue innovating and defending the work of direct aid.

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Arivaca, Arizona  
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## Introduction: No More Deaths

Podrán cortar todas las flores, pero no podrán detener la primavera.  
They can cut all the flowers, but they can never stop the coming of the spring.  
(My translation.)  
—Pablo Neruda

Over the past twenty years, the wilderness of the southwest United States has been transformed into a deadly arena for those attempting to enter the United States without documentation. The clandestine crossing is now governed by a militarized homeland security establishment and a widening set of exploitation industries that bank on the deepening of human tragedy. In the mix, volunteers with the humanitarian organization No More Deaths have been working to offer a critical measure of care and protection to migrants and refugees who find themselves stranded in the backcountry.<sup>1</sup> Every day in the arid deserts of southern Arizona, border activists and rural residents undertake concrete efforts to provide food, water, and medical care to those caught out in the struggle for survival. While the name “No More Deaths” expresses a political aspiration, aid work in the border region is in truth a highly pragmatic undertaking, as small humanitarian organizations cannot ultimately guarantee the protection of all those who enter the vast geographic expanse of the border territory. Nonetheless, providing on-the-ground assistance has developed into a powerful practice, ethos, and, arguably, a politics in the region—one that prioritizes direct antiracist intervention as a means of contesting the daily harms dealt by the border security regime.

The essays presented in this installment of *Against the Day* are authored by activist-scholars who have substantial experience working with

No More Deaths to provide disaster relief on the ground in the Sonoran Desert of southern Arizona. Amid growing concern over the Trump administration's designs for wall building and deportation, we offer a picture of the deadly play of immigration and enforcement already taking place on the border. Our writing goals are ultimately transformative: to provide a closer view of the contemporary border struggle and to protest the massive loss of life being wrought by US immigration enforcement.

### **Walking in the Wilderness**

The border is a broken strand of barbed wire lying on the dirt floor of a tranquil desert canyon. Gray-green mesquite trees reach up from the baking ground. Hawks, ravens, and vultures glide in a transnational network through the long blue sky. Nearby, a dry riverbed betrays dozens of footprints of those who have recently crossed through. Empty water bottles, tuna fish cans, and plastic granola wrappers left over from a nearby humanitarian aid supply drop toss about in the hot wind. Otherwise, all is quiet.

To the east, twenty-five-foot metallic poles propped in vertical succession slice a hilly city in two. On the north side sits Nogales, Arizona, dotted with fast food restaurants, gas stations, and taxi stands. To the south, the metropolis of Nogales, Sonora, rises. Colorful adobe homes, churches, and apartment buildings range across the sloping landscape. Downtown, near the colossal eggshell awning of the international port of entry, community members gather on both sides of the border wall to hold hands through the steel beams in the location where a sixteen-year-old was killed by a US Border Patrol agent.<sup>2</sup> Graffiti reading *SOMOS UN PUEBLO SIN FRONTERAS* (WE ARE A PEOPLE WITHOUT BORDERS) defiantly adorns its base. In such binational border cities where the wall has been built, it stands as an imposing architectural feat. Outside of urban areas, the construction dwindles into shorter slats, triangular vehicle barriers, and eventually diminishes to thin wire cattle fencing, or nothing at all. Foot traffic flows into the open desert.

At present, the specter of wall building on the Southwest border looms large. The protest anthem “no ban, no wall” rings out across the globe as a challenge to the nationalist rhetoric of the Trump administration. For those of us working on the ground in the US-Mexico borderlands, however, the demand for “no wall” is just as perplexing as it is encouraging: this cry to transnational solidarity seems to deny the existence of more than six hundred fifty miles of reinforced barriers already carving up the Southwest landscape. Moreover, what is missing from the national conversation is how

walls already function as a powerful policing tactic on the southern border—one that is not only offensive and expensive but also, and most critically, deadly.

This history of walling reaches back more than twenty years to the 1990s—a decade that revolutionized US-Mexico border control. The year 1994 is often remembered as a moment of radical economic liberalization on the continent with the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). However, beyond economic expansion, 1994 was also a year of radical transformation for US border-enforcement policy. It was then, in anticipation of a new surge of unauthorized labor-driven migration, that the Border Patrol met with Department of Defense tacticians versed in low-intensity conflict doctrine to discuss militarizing the southern border. At the time, officials asserted that sealing off the entire two thousand miles of binational territory and achieving a 100 percent apprehension rate of unauthorized border crossers would be “an unreasonable goal” (US Border Patrol 1994: 6). Instead, the Border Patrol adopted an enforcement strategy called “prevention through deterrence,” which would regulate undocumented migration by making the crossing increasingly dangerous (6).

The concept was a geographical one: historically, most undocumented border crossings cycled through urban areas where, at the time, it was relatively easy to enter the United States without inspection. In 1994, the Border Patrol decided to shift the flow of unauthorized immigration away from border cities and into remote wilderness areas just inside of the US interior. The agency resolved that it would build walls and concentrate personnel and surveillance technology in and around urban ports of entry as a means of deflecting unauthorized migration out into the open desert. In effect, to enter the United States, people without papers would be “forced over more hostile terrain,” where they would have to endure multiday treks on foot through a treacherous landscape (12). The Border Patrol predicted that many would “find themselves in mortal danger,” being cut off from civilization, resources, and rescue in the backcountry (2). By transforming the migration trail into a potentially deadly ordeal, the agency reasoned that others would be dissuaded from attempting the journey. In sum, the Border Patrol speculated that tactically enhancing the dangers facing border crossers would diminish the overall rate of unauthorized migration into the United States, amounting to a policing program of relative prevention through aggressive deterrence.

Over the last two decades, reinforced walls have gone up in and around border cities, and vehicle barriers have been scattered around the desert to

force migration to flow on foot through the most rugged regions of the southwest borderlands. It is now in isolated deserts, treacherous uplands, and humid subtropical brushland corridors within the US interior that the infraction of unauthorized entry is now subjected to a plurality of on-the-ground punishments through tactical games of risk.

### **Banking on the Border**

The border-policing approach of heightening danger for migrants and refugees has produced sizable profits for a diversity of nonstate actors. A growing set of markets now bank on the perpetuation of human crisis. First, war industry outfits have gained lucrative government contracts to provide the weaponry and manpower to militarize the home front. Outfitting the border with walls, towers, helicopters, drones, scopes, sensors, SUVs, rifles, and more has become a multibillion-dollar global industry, constantly expanding what some now term the “border-security industrial complex” (Miller 2014: 53).<sup>3</sup> In this military approach to border security, the traditionally “repressive” tools of the state are increasingly put to work to open and expand new markets, which has led Peter Andreas (2000: 141) to comment, “a liberalizing state is not necessarily a less interventionist state.”

Second, border security has also meant big business for black-market actors. By routing migration through a vast, rugged, and unfamiliar landscape, it is now next to impossible to cross through the border zone without hiring a guide. Consequently, the contemporary border security approach has birthed a human smuggling industry—one which has quickly become monopolized by Mexican cartel organizations. Regional monopolies have allowed traffickers to charge three to five thousand dollars a head for covert escort through the wilderness. Many migrants pay part or all of this fee in advance; in effect, cartels often make a significant profit whether or not they successfully deliver their human cargo to their desired destination within the United States. Simply walking across the line to be apprehended by Border Patrol agents is now a value-adding enterprise. In this positive feedback loop of mutual enrichment among border defense contractors and organized crime, profits are ensured by the US deportation regime when those expelled from their homes in the US interior inevitably attempt to cross back again. This new peril-based transnational economy amounts to what Scott Warren terms in his contribution to this issue a “coupled smuggling interdiction industry.” The US border security apparatus facilitates a cycle of

violence and exploitation that uses the vulnerabilities of the undocumented as its currency.

The strategic aim of placing those crossing the US-Mexico border in harm's way has amassed untold casualties in the borderlands. Since the 1990s, the remains of more than six thousand people have been recovered from the US Southwest, the majority of whom died from dehydration and exposure. Such environmental afflictions are treatable when they occur within proximity to care, but they become life threatening when access to water, food, and rescue has been tactically severed. Official casualty counts represent only a fraction of those who have perished in the US Southwest.<sup>4</sup> Thousands more are never discovered; their remains are forever lost in the folds of the wilderness to disintegrate under the hot sun. In effect, over the last twenty years of risk-based policing, the borderlands have transformed into a gauntlet of survival and a vast graveyard of the missing.

While the threat of becoming lost to the desert haunts the migrant trail, in this deadly arena, nothing is certain. The program of state violence on the border largely takes the erratic and indirect form of possible abandonment to the elements. While many have lost their lives in the backcountry, people without papers also make it into the United States every day. By 2006, at least six million people were estimated to have successfully crossed into the United States between ports of entry (Pew Research Center 2006). At present, the undocumented population within the United States has ballooned to nearly thirteen million people (Passel 2016).<sup>5</sup> In the end, the military approach on the border and its opulent walling projects have not closed the border but only succeeded in contorting the experience in the backcountry into ever more risky permutations. In this perilous political theater, the pursuit of safety and stability among the undocumented does not find quick signature in the momentary act of border crossing. Rather, the protracted process of survival in the remote wilderness now sets the scene of social struggle, and the land itself offers up the main tactics.

### **Water Is Life**

For more than twenty years, the movement of people without papers has embossed the Sonoran Desert with thousands of foot trails. In southern Arizona, paths follow vast canyons, dipping in and out of the soft surfaces of dry river beds, climbing up through rugged mountain passes around craggy peaks in measured switchbacks, opening into the rare shaded rest area,

crawling along hillsides, through cactus forests, and perpetually splintering into new ways and other corridors. Migration traffic batters some paths with such frequency that trails widen to the size of small roads. Other ways are only barely perceivable, gently denting the brush. The busiest human highways of last summer might be largely silent places today, playing host only to deteriorating water bottles and abandoned clothing. Routes are in constant and increasing flux. Busy stretches are quickly identifiable for their footprints and freshly discarded items with food bits lingering in opened cans waiting to be scavenged by animals in the night. As masses travel the arid geography of the Southwest desert, humanitarian aid groups supply hundreds of footpaths with water, food, socks, and blankets. Migration trails provide a quiet point of access for this work, where gallons of water can be left at the confluence of several paths to be tapped by travelers on their own terms in the coming hours, days, or weeks. As border enforcement policy aims to increase the risk of harm and loss of life, aid workers labor deep in the backcountry to enhance the odds of survival.

Volunteers explore and map the complex web of migration trails moving through the Sonoran Desert to design effective supply drops. Aid workers walk the far reaches of the desert with water, food, and medical provisions in tow, providing emergency care to the sick and injured who are encountered in the remote wilderness. As part of the daily labor of resupplying water and hiking trails, volunteers develop a keen knowledge of the vast and tangled backcountry terrain. In partnership with other migrant justice groups, No More Deaths coordinates community search and rescue efforts, sending teams out on foot to scour the desert when someone without citizenship status is reported missing or left behind.<sup>6</sup> The organization maintains mobile and fixed desert aid stations where volunteers camp out and the sick and injured receive care. All told, the provision of direct aid represents a small yet consequential resource-based approach to mitigating human suffering on the border. Volunteers aim to strengthen the capacity for survival in the deadly games of risk and chance that now govern the clandestine crossing into the US interior.

### The Humanitarian

In the postwar period, human rights discourse and the cause of humanitarianism have offered a means by which outsiders may intervene in campaigns of state violence. Large relief organizations like *Médicins sans Frontières*

(MSF; Doctors without Borders), Oxfam, the International Committee of the Red Cross, among others, largely based in Western liberal democracies, have worked to provide basic resources and services in global conflict zones. International aid efforts generally descend from the outside and vacate when the job is done or if the context on the ground becomes too perilous.<sup>7</sup> Through the emphasis on simply preserving human life, international humanitarian relief is now recognized as a legitimate form of intervention against atrocity when political processes fail. To this end, Didier Fassin (2007: 149) observes that, since the 1980s, “humanitarian workers have become legitimate actors on the world stage.”

The convention of such global humanitarian efforts is to remain politically neutral so that they are able to gain access to target populations in times of war. In the words of former MSF president Rony Brauman (Brauman, Feher, and Mangeot 2007: 132) global humanitarian groups generally pursue political neutrality as a means of “establish[ing] a purely pragmatic relationship with warring parties on the ground.” Many have observed how the aspiration for such neutrality often amounts to a mere rhetorical pose, as more than once, aid workers have found themselves the unwilling pawns of oppressive regimes.<sup>8</sup> Within humanitarian groups, the attempt to depoliticize these direct modes of intervention is a matter of contention; accusations of unexamined, sanitized, and otherwise naive saviorism are routinely directed at nongovernmental aid operations around the world.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, most global aid organizations uphold at least the rhetorical separation of the humanitarian from the political.

The grassroots mobilization to provide life-preserving aid in the US-Mexico borderlands has taken up the mantle of “humanitarian.” In truth, the work of disaster relief in the desert both strategically upholds and, at times, definitively departs from the new humanitarian tradition. Relative to most global nongovernmental organizations, the humanitarian groups working in the wilderness of the Southwest are tiny; they are entirely volunteer-run efforts that operate on shoestring budgets. The humanitarian mission has been an important means of leveraging legal protection for aid workers in the border zone. Promoting moral action in the face of political persecution, direct aid efforts in the desert bring together people from diverse backgrounds who share a conviction that no one should be punished with death for crossing the national boundary. In principle, border relief efforts are above ground, transparent, and insistent on the slogan, “Humanitarian aid is NEVER a crime.” The principle of transparency to the power structure manifests concretely in the establishment of known desert aid stations in the backcountry that are



clearly marked with large red crosses and by the practice of group members attending meetings to dialogue with US Border Patrol officials.

Yet aid workers on the border are often in a substantially altered relation to many of the conventions that govern international humanitarian relief. As mostly US residents working in US territory and bearing the legal privileges and the civil protections ostensibly afforded therein, aid workers on the US-Mexico border appear to have a greater measure of protection when it comes to intervening in the march of human tragedy. In particular, humanitarian groups do not generally face the same level of threat of being punitively removed from the zone of conflict when government entities disapprove of their beliefs or activities. This is not to say that humanitarians have not faced political stigma or legal challenge by the US Border Patrol and its collaborating agencies.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the rise of the Trump administration has brought unprecedented levels of surveillance, harassment, and intimidation to border relief efforts. No More Deaths' medical aid station in Arivaca was recently raided, and aid workers have faced threats of lethal violence by Border Patrol agents and newly empowered right-wing paramilitary militia organizations operating in the region.<sup>11</sup> Historically, such disturbances, though troubling, have not threatened to end the existence of humanitarian work, full stop. At the present moment, however, the endurance of humanitarianism on the border is being tested anew.

Unlike many global efforts, humanitarian assistance on the border is not only the province of outside specialists. During the course of border militarization, the cultures of direct aid, care, and hospitality have become increasingly entrenched among rural border residents. As migratory traffic first began to flow through remote terrain, small border communities quickly became natural sources of assistance for those in distress. Long before official humanitarian groups entered the scene, rural border residents had been doing what they could to offer care and hospitality to those they encountered. In border towns like Arivaca, Ajo, and Douglas, Arizona, community-based humanitarian efforts are in force and locals host trainings to support one another in an effort to prevent death and suffering in the community.<sup>12</sup> While living under a veritable Border Patrol occupation replete with checkpoints, drone surveillance, and thousands of agents armed for war, rural US border residents routinely station gallons of water at their gates for those crossing. Importantly, such community-based efforts challenge the conception of the humanitarian as a necessarily transient outsider.

Whereas the vocabulary of humanitarianism conjures visions of conflict zones in impoverished countries on the other side of the world, No More

Deaths is conducting humanitarian operations on US soil. By way of mounting humanitarian response in the desert, No More Deaths contends that the global exporter of militarized liberal democracy cannot ensure the well-being of the stateless and persecuted within its own borders. To assert the necessity of nongovernmental relief inside the United States to protect human rights thus amounts to an incisive political claim. It follows that, as No More Deaths publicly asserts that its work is, by definition, a humanitarian presence in the backcountry, the organization does not shy away from identifying the culprit of mass death and disappearance in the border territory. Most recently, such indictments have been delivered in Part One of the *Disappeared* report series authored by the No More Deaths Abuse Documentation Team, which proclaims, “the known disappearance of thousands of people in the remote wilderness of the US-Mexico border zone marks one of the great historical crimes of our day” (La Coalición de Derechos Humanos and No More Deaths 2016: 23). At this historical moment, aid groups, border residents, and migrant justice organizations are together laboring to expose the US border security regime as the architect of human tragedy in the Southwest.

Against this fraught political reality, many of us living and working on the ground in the border zone carry on the daily attempt to restore a measure of freedom and safety to those in distress in what China Medel (this issue) considers “the abolitionist gesture of direct action.” The following essays share some of the on-the-ground lessons learned from participating in this new history of border struggle.

### Notes

- 1 In addition to No More Deaths, there are many direct humanitarian aid organizations working in the US-Mexico borderlands, including *Aguilas del Desierto*, Humane Borders, the Samaritans, South Texas Human Rights Center, and People Helping People in the Border Zone.
- 2 In October 2012, on-duty Border Patrol agent Lonnie Swartz aimed his sidearm south through the border wall to shoot sixteen-year-old Jose Antonio Elena Rodriguez ten times in the back. Jose Antonio is one of more than forty people who have been killed by Border Patrol gunfire over the last decade (Ortega and O’Dell 2013). Swartz faces second-degree murder charges and is slated to stand trial this year.
- 3 Boeing, Elbit Systems, General Atomics, and G4S are among the profiteers, along with mass incarceration giants GeoGroup and the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), who run private detention centers that now house tens of thousands of immigration detainees and refugees awaiting asylum hearings.
- 4 Advocacy groups contend that the true number of border deaths is three to ten times the number of recovered human remains, raising the total estimation to between twenty thousand and sixty-five thousand migrant deaths in the US Southwest.

- 5 Heightening the dangers of crossing has resulted in more permanent undocumented settlement within the United States by Mexican laborers who previously crossed temporarily for seasonal work and then returned home; they can no longer risk multiple crossings and have, instead, elected to relocate their entire families to the United States (CrimethInc. 2011).
- 6 Coalición de Derechos Humanos in Tucson, Arizona, has been key in these efforts. Derechos Humanos volunteers who staff the Missing Migrant hotline have documented dozens of cases in which law enforcement agencies refuse to mount searches for the undocumented in the desert. A joint report on these discriminatory practices around emergency response is forthcoming from the No More Deaths Abuse Documentation Team.
- 7 In October of 2015, US war planes bombed an MSF hospital in Afghanistan, killing nineteen relief workers (Rubin 2015: 1).
- 8 The most notorious of which is perhaps the case of MSF during the famine in Ethiopia in 1985, when international relief stations were allowed to establish themselves because they were then used by the government to entrap and deport fleeing refugees. Another potent example can be found in the instance of the Congo war in 1996, when liaison officers accompanying humanitarians on the ground searching for refugees in distress would alert death squads as to their whereabouts. The killing squads would then execute anyone who had been found (Brauman, Feher, and Mangeot 2007: 139).
- 9 French groups in particular point to the lessons of the Red Cross sending food parcels to concentration camp prisoners just before being led into the gas chamber. Such histories haunt the limited focus of humanitarian assistance within politically driven landscapes of state violence and genocide.
- 10 Aid workers have faced pushback from public lands management agencies, who have ticketed volunteers with littering citations for leaving out water on known migration trails. Humanitarian groups have fought and won most of these cases access to numerous public lands for the purpose of providing life-saving resources (Cooper: 1). No More Deaths volunteers are currently fighting for access to a number of land jurisdictions in the western deserts of Arizona, such as in the Growler Valley on the Cabeza Prieta Wilderness Refuge, where aid workers have recovered dozens of human remains in the past six months alone. And, perhaps more seriously, two No More Deaths volunteers were brought up on felony smuggling and conspiracy charges in 2009 when they were stopped by Border Patrol agents while attempting to evacuate critically injured and ill migrants to emergency medical care. At the time, the No More Deaths legal team asserted that delivering someone to the hospital does not constitute criminal activity. The case was eventually thrown out in court.
- 11 For a detailed account of the recent raids on the No More Deaths aid station, see Boodman 2017.
- 12 And proprietors in places like Brooks County, Texas, many of them politically conservative, have also worked to establish water stations on their ranches in a moral effort to stop the plague of death on their lands (del Bosque, and the Guardian Interactive Team 2014: 1). In southern Arizona, rural communities in the militarized border zone have formed political coalitions to call for the demilitarization of the region and the immediate removal of Border Patrol agents and infrastructure from the land (Duara 2015: 1).

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**Sophie Smith**

Crisis Time, Constant Border:  
On Direct Aid and the Tactics of the Temporary

The world outside the walls  
has had its turbulent say  
and history like a long  
snake has crawled on its way  
and is crawling onward still.  
—Adrienne Rich

Everything is temporary.  
—Adi Ophir

**T**he makeshift desert clinic wears out on repeat. Under the constant sun, the tent's heavy-duty vinyl turns to fragile crepe paper. Whipping winds pull at the seams, tearing a wide gap along the shelter's base. During the summer monsoons, water floods in. The provisional floor, made of pallets and plywood, turns to rot. The PVC skeleton that holds the large structure aloft begins to strain and warp: bolts pop out, linkages detach, and all, slowly and steadily, falls down. The metal cafeteria cabinets that have been repurposed to store medical supplies are quickly shuffled to another temporary location. Aid workers plan a workday to rebuild the failing structure. In the meantime, someone donates another massive backcountry-ready shelter—this time a geodesic dome—and the medical cabinets are moved again. The makeshift clinic quickly settles into this next provisional iteration. Patients seeking respite from the treachery of the migrant trail immediately fill its keep.

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The medical tent is not the only structure in the constant flux of ruin and repair at No More Deaths humanitarian aid stations in the Arizona desert. Sleeping trailers are in perpetual deterioration—their windows pop out, insulation crumbles, roofs leak, and they collapse into heaps on the ground, overtaken by rats' nests, left in place to live on as the installation art of border disaster relief. But, as so many things fall apart at the desert refuge, new infrastructure constantly digs in. Replacement campers are dragged onto the property and nestle into the burgeoning settlement. A solar panel trailer arrives, bringing lights and refrigeration: new luxuries. A phone line awakens. Antennae go up. A well is installed. A faucet. A shower. A garden. The daily labor of placing water on migrant trails is now joined by the ritual work of rebuilding aging infrastructure. Over time, the provisional camp mutates into an indefinite shelter; the border crisis perpetually births the tactics of the temporary.

The transformation of the US Southwest into an arena of death and survival seems to have occurred in a flash. The quick buildup of walls, agents, and infrastructure in border cities have pushed migrants and refugees out into the open desert. In effect, the transnational crossing now takes shape as a life-threatening ordeal. Myriad possible dangers threaten the survival of those traveling for days on foot through the remote wilderness. After being chased by the Border Patrol or falling behind their group due to injury, many find themselves stranded without access to water, food, or rescue. An empty water bottle, a wrong turn, a twisted ankle, a dead cell phone battery, the loss of life-preserving medication, among other contingencies, form the variable forces of human destruction. For nearly two decades now, thousands of migrants and refugees have lost their lives in the borderlands due to dehydration, exposure, and other preventable maladies. Untold numbers have simply vanished, their remains swiftly disappeared by the quick heat, winds, and wildlife of the Sonoran Desert.

As the new age of border security began to sow death across the land, the rapid onset of mortal punishments on the border was taken by many to constitute a temporary state of affairs. The conversion of the desert into a vast graveyard of the undocumented appeared so egregious in its harms that border activists presumed this governing error would soon be corrected once the tragedy had been made public. In what was expected to be an interim period between public outcry and policy change, rural border residents and outside humanitarians began delivering emergency relief to the many migrants newly wandering the far reaches of the desert. The disaster in the borderlands has multiplied in scale and duration over the years. With it, offi-

cial efforts to provide water, food, medical care, and shelter began to take clearer shape, all the while delivered in the ephemerae of pop-up tents, mobile trailers, and a constantly rotating cast of volunteers.

In the desert of the Southwest, we are confronted with a political scenario that is routinely deemed a crisis both by the powers that be and those providing disaster relief on the ground. This essay interrogates how these temporal terms shape the tactics and strategies afoot in the border struggle, exploring what a sense of urgency empowers and what political approaches the declaration of crisis might elide or disavow.

### **Crisis Time**

An aura of crisis has come to cloak the border environment. Taken all at once, the production of mass death and disappearance wrought by the contemporary border-security strategy constitutes a staggering and ongoing catastrophe. At ground level in the US-Mexico border zone, crisis manifests in the infinity of daily harms in an always volatile survival scenario. For those attempting the perilous journey into the US interior, the erratic play of risk, luck, and contingency in the deadly game of crossing makes for perplexing gambles over timing: Is it best to wait for the cold of winter—for the light of the full moon? Is it best to go before the heat kicks up, before the vote is cast, before the mafia returns to the door? When could conditions let up? When will they have become too dire to wait any longer? So many temporal contingencies make the calculations around personal safety unruly. In the Southwest border zone, the thin line between life and death is so often a temporal one: a quickly closing window of intervention in which help may come to a sick or injured person stranded in the backcountry in the nick of time. In other cases, the time of action stalls out; human remains wait in the desert for months or years, turning skeletal and disintegrating before anyone happens upon them.

The desert buzzes with a nagging sense of urgency, tragedy, and possibility around which all actors are all challenged to orient themselves. Decisions over which road to drive, which trail to walk, when to do a trash run, and when to leave on patrol are forever terrorized by so many microcrises ruled by the ambivalent serendipity of timing. The effect of humanitarian aid efforts is thus both painfully partial and seriously consequential. By circulating daily in the terrain of struggle, those on the ground in the border zone at times respond to unexpected encounters with migrants in severe distress by providing resources, care, and often a critical measure of protection.

Yet the temporal mechanism of this potent mode of direct life-preserving intervention is based largely in the unforeseeable play of coincidence—a material truth that belies the powerful force of contingency to shape the course of events on the ground.

If crisis constitutes time on the border, then with it has come dynamic and creative modes of direct life-preserving action. A declaration of crisis generally invites immediate intervention, authorizing improvisatory modes of action that may elide preestablished norms, models, protocols, and institutions. When it comes to political struggle, the timeframe of crisis propels its activity with great speed: representing the border as a humanitarian crisis, for instance, has been an effective means of fostering public challenge to the brutal practices of the security regime. It has been a hook for new volunteers to join the relief effort. In the contemporary movement, urgency, event, and singularity have distinct political traction. Crisis responses are quick and on the ground. They are employed in scenarios wherein the urgency of mitigating immediate suffering cannot adhere to the slowed tempo of the official political process and all its bureaucracy, particularly when there is no promise of official redress to be found therein. Yet, despite the best relief efforts, most of the lost, sick, injured, and ill go undiscovered, perishing in the remote wilderness. The erratic, indirect, and geographically expansive design of border violence ensures that the tragedy will never find full resolution in direct aid. Such is the logic and ethos of direct aid in the US-Mexico border zone—its limited action lies in the time of the present.

The claim to crisis has political utility both among those working to topple its reign and those working to undo its grip. On the side of government, the declaration of crisis on the border slackens the regulatory hold of law and eases the troubles of measure and accountability. Emergency border enforcement tactics have been delivered in the ephemera of pop-up checkpoints, hiring surges, and mobile surveillance units. In effect, the political freedoms unleashed by the time of crisis have also come to work on behalf of the powers that be. The claim to crisis is a means of quickly authorizing violence and militarism: the innovation of the new border security strategy was originally posed as a reactive measure in a historic moment of temporarily increased migration caused by the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Its later enhancement with checkpoints, sensors, and thousands of agents on the ground was posed as a stop-gap security response to the sudden events of September 11, 2001. And now the power of crisis is being played again in the Trump administration's orders for the quick hiring



of at least five thousand new Border Patrol agents and the reconstruction of the border wall. In effect, the implementation of militarized border operations proceeds by way of the discursive elision of permanence. The temporary border security approach evinces a temporal formation of political power that functions by denying its own perpetuity. This declaration of emergency is an amnesiac political force. Its fever pitch tempo relentlessly dissolves the recent history of militarized border policing of death and disappearance, sowing political disorientation. The provisional and erratic organization of aggressive “security measures” perpetually displaces programmatic government and its proceduralist violence.

### **Constant Border?**

If crisis time emits the tactics of the temporary, then this temporariness is based on the implication of a coming end of catastrophe, which holds the eternal possibility of sudden reversal or radical transformation in view. The proclamation of emergency entails the hope of relief: a phoenix rising from the ashes. As it happens on the border, however, this potent yet always latent “we’ll see” in the present leans into oblivion. As the years pass, new questions draw near: If the lethal policing of the border is indeed a political crisis, then what is its duration? A week? A month? A year? A decade? A generation? What happens when a crisis does not end? When does the event of crisis turn into a historical process? When does rupture become structure?

While the effects the Border Patrol’s strategy of prevention through deterrence ignited in a sudden surge, the march of militarization and mass death has now stretched across two decades. Time drags on the border scene. Looking around at the weathered work of a dozen years of ad hoc direct aid on the desert floor, the speculative end to the disaster appears to be increasingly remote at present. The political vernacular of temporariness has pitched time on the border toward the endless, the siege state, and the stalemate. For those of us on the ground, the new calls for emergency wall-building signal not an entirely new crisis but the extension and intensification of an all too familiar social terror. We now find ourselves mired in what Adi Ophir (2004: 48) calls “the squall of the temporary.” It appears that the endurance of the border crisis over historical time has shifted the interventionist life of the temporary into the comatose politics of the indefinite.

To be sure, some elements have changed in the design of enforcement across the decades of militarized border control. In Arizona, unauthorized migration is now moving west into the most remote regions of the desert. South Texas rises as a second principal theater of immigration policing.

Brand new eighty-foot surveillance towers leer over the Sonoran Desert. The Border Patrol has more than quintupled in size and, we are told, will soon balloon further.<sup>4</sup> And humanitarian aid work is being subjected to new legal pressures under the Trump administration. In May 2017, the Border Patrol obtained its first federal search warrant to raid and arrest migrants receiving care at one of the No More Deaths aid stations. All told, these recent shifts are certainly consequential on the ground. However, in the general strategy of using the threat of death in the desert to police migration, the border security game continues to curve about its original plan. Far from approaching a point of reversal, the struggle in the backcountry, in the detention centers, on the trains, and in the shelters seems to be only deepening. New populations are being brought into the dangerous migration system designed for others a generation ago. Refugees from cartel violence in El Salvador now join deported Mexican nationals who, a decade past, crossed the same desert in search of work and now attempt the trek again in search of family unification. Displaced Haitians fleeing the disastrous impacts of climate change wait en masse at the Nogales, Sonora/Arizona, port of entry seeking asylum. Deported DREAMers who cannot remember their early childhood crossings now walk out into the wilderness once more. In the border zone, crisis no longer forms a cut between before and after but seems to only move in a circle.

Those of us living and working in the rural Southwest now gaze at the same ocean of tragedy we first confronted years ago and begin the work of telling its history—not from an external future place looking back on the rubble of the past, but from within its indefinite arena. With time and witness, the border struggle has emerged not as a singular event but as an ongoing social process: “history like a long snake has crawled on its way, and is crawling onward still” (Rich 1993). Through the vector of protracted time, what once seemed to be a *de facto* production of human crisis on the border can now only be taken for *de jure* policy.

Looking closer, one cannot help but begin to notice the quiet signs of permanency that were somehow there all along: the gargantuan feat of erecting eighty-foot Border Patrol surveillance towers in the Southwest desert is not a provisional undertaking. The walls in border cities, which have been built, remade, layered, and fortified, are not architecturally temporary. The second freezer installed at the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner to house the unidentified remains recovered from the far reaches of the border zone looks to be a permanent infrastructural investment. The myriad Border Patrol substations and opulent headquarters scattered across the Southwest are not designed as makeshift compounds. A strong set of industries now bank on the indefinite stability of the forces producing human

destruction in the region. On the side of enforcement, the rhetoric of temporariness gives way to practical, if not planned, permanence.

If the policing approach on the Southwest border is not an exceptional or momentary state of affairs but a vested political reality, then can its violence be called a crisis any longer? If we face a lasting border struggle, then have we been left with the tactics of the temporary in a playing field of the permanent? What is to be gained by retaining the concept of crisis over the indictment of the terminal? How do crisis and permanency inflect our sense of what can be altered and what will remain? These are some of the questions of time that now face all those circulating in the border arena.

As participants, one thing is certain: we may no longer operate under the assumption that the end of suffering and disappearance in the Southwest borderlands draws near. And this apparent longevity of the deadly border security regime offers a moment to take pause. For at least several years to come, the border crisis promises to stay. And perhaps it was intended to make dominion of the Southwest desert from the outset, as the border massacre has always been a bipartisan invention.<sup>2</sup> If time is a rubber band, then it seems that crisis is a temporal force that not only contracts but also expands: “the state of emergency is not limited in time and space . . . it, too, enters onto an indefinite future” (Butler 2004: 64).

On the side of strategy, perhaps this long view offers a period of planning—an occasion to pitch the tempo and planning of crisis intervention forward much farther into the future than it has ever been allowed to travel. As relief workers, we begin to catalogue the ambivalent promises of permanency on the ground: the growing imposition of institutional structures on grassroots, shoestring, volunteer-run, donations-driven, ad hoc, and direct action modes of political intervention. The possible mutation of disaster relief into social service, of stopgap actions into institutions, of DIY into NGO. After more than ten years of organized aid work, these transformations are perhaps already creeping in, bringing with them the dream of permanent infrastructure and long-term paid staff, among other institutional stabilities.

Yet, even if our tactics dig in for the long haul, it is clear that we cannot fully turn away from the special powers of crisis as a political vernacular: the claim to crisis continues to communicate the need for immediate action. While political authorities wield the power of crisis discourse to cause sudden hiring surges and construction projects, among aid workers, the same discourse is a matter of political savvy that acts as an effective means of galvanizing direct on-the-ground responses. And beyond the matter of rhetoric, the struggle over survival in the US Southwest continues to issue new daily

disasters at a frenetic pace—an on the ground formation of social terror which seems to resist all powers of normalization.

But the commitment to ad hoc tactics may be haunted by a deeper political hesitation: Would forgoing the proclaimed temporariness of the border crisis for the declaration of policing conditions on the ground as a functionally “permanent” system amount to an admission that the violent program of Southwest border control is so thoroughly entrenched that it has become unchangeable? If those opposed to the border disaster admit that the conditions sustaining its growth are ubiquitous and thoroughly entrenched, would this mean that no power can be exercised to alter the political world in which we find ourselves? A loss of agency, a loss of scale, and a loss of historical time all seem to flow rapidly from this suggestion.

Yet the answer is clearly no: the border crisis will indeed end one day, as all things change, transform, shift, and move into other patterns, alignments, styles, and forms, growing up and dying off. We may never see the end of tension between the ruled and the rulers or the end of hardship and the human systems that make and mediate our world, as long as we are here. But just as we have seen the end of other formations of political rule, other horrific scenes of state-sponsored violence, so will we see the passing of the rigged game of risk and abandonment catching the lives of so many in the net of border terror. The vision of the coming end of the catastrophe, even if it is cast generations in the future, begs the question of remembrance: How will others look back on the events at the border? Will the system of family detention centers be recounted as the internment camps of our day? Will the borderlands themselves be mourned as former killing fields? Will the hospitality, safe haven, and means of survival provided by those on the ground be celebrated as the Underground Railroad of our time? “Whatever we do, we are in the posture/ of one who is about to depart/ Like a person pausing and lingering/ for a moment on the last hill” (Rilke 1992).

Be it a year from now or three hundred, the forces acting to give the crossing its catastrophic shape will move along. The tents can be packed up, the trailers dragged away, the towers dismantled, the sensors unearthed, the drones grounded, the agents laid off, and the walls torn down, for “every epoch bears its own ending within itself” (Forché 1994). There is no guarantee that the end of the border struggle will be catalyzed by the forces of resistance already in motion any more than they will be catalyzed by the forces of domination, the force of nature, or the game of chance, with great speed or at a terrible crawl. The political embrace of the present crisis as no longer a momentary event but as an ongoing social process that we call border security, therefore, requires no implicit surrender of the historicity of

the situation—no loss of the possibility of transformation endemic to the march of time. For, whereas the temporary is never without the indefinite following close behind, the permanent is forever terrorized by the powerful force of the conditional.

### Notes

- 1 In 1992, there were approximately four thousand Border Patrol agents. Today, there are more than twenty-one thousand. The Trump administration plans to hire five to ten thousand more.
- 2 Prevention through deterrence was adopted in 1994 under the Clinton administration. The system of death and disappearance on the border was enhanced with the passage of the 2006 Secure Fence Act under President George W. Bush. The Border Patrol expanded further under the Obama administration, which became known for its “deportation regime,” removing a record 2.7 million people without papers from the US interior and vastly expanding the private immigration detention system.

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## China Medel

### Abolitionist Care in the Militarized Borderlands

Since adopting the 1994 Border Patrol Strategic Plan, a strategy called “Prevention through Deterrence” (PTD) has governed the enforcement of the US-Mexico border. Relying on heavy physical enforcement like walls, surveillance, and concentrating personnel in urban crossing zones, Border Patrol has funneled migration into rural and remote crossing zones characterized by dangerous terrain and climate in which migrants face “mortal danger” (De Leon 2013: 32). This approach purported to use the desert as its own kind of enforcement tactic; the extreme heat, scarcity of water, rugged and uninhabited terrain, and inhospitable plant and wildlife would discourage unauthorized migration. After the walls began going up in border cities, migrant bodies began piling up in the Pima County coroner’s office. Death by exposure, hyperthermia, dehydration, and related complications increased, and the mortality rate at the border more than doubled between 1995 and 2005 (US Government Accountability Office 2006). This new border policing approach has not prevented migration but has turned the desert into what Joseph Nevins (2010: 174) has called “a landscape of death.” As Jason De Leon (2013: 35) concisely puts it, “rather than shooting people as they jumped the fence,” PTD “set the stage for the desert to become the new ‘victimizer’ of border transgressors.” The Border Patrol factored in the loss of life at the border, banked on the bodies piling up in the coroner’s office, and rationally calculated the death and suffering in the Arizona borderlands as an essential ingredient in their enforcement strategy.

And so people mobilized.

In this section I focus on the organization with whom I seasonally volunteer, No More Deaths, based out of Tucson, Arizona.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, I

situate the practices of care entailed in No More Deaths' work within the intellectual tradition and activist praxis of abolition that thinkers from the prison abolition collective Critical Resistance define as three converging aspects: dismantle, change, and build. That is, the effort to abolish the prison industrial complex and other systems of racialized violence like it must not only dismantle the institution of the prison but also build new social formations in its wake. In our practices of care, No More Deaths actively works against the neoliberal process of strategic abandonment, in which governing bodies carefully eschew responsibility for a minoritized social group deemed valueless by a logic of racialized criminalization. Sequestered in the Sonoran Desert, the camp wakes up each day committed to practices of taking care, not only of migrants in distress, but also of one another. In the practice of care, desert aid workers prefiguratively build a world in which hierarchies of human value are abolished, where migration is an expression of life making, and where food, shelter, medical, and emotional care are available to all, regardless of notions of deservedness. This care work becomes an abolitionist gesture of direct action that builds alternative forms of recognition and inclusion against the logic of criminalization and the production of valueless life functioning to "protect" the United States.

### **Practices and Ethics of Care in Direct Action**

No More Deaths emerges from an ongoing tradition of migration justice, mutual aid, and direct action in Tucson. The organization grew out of the work by participants in the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s. That work was founded by Quaker minister Jim Corbett's concept of civil initiative, which proposes that people have the capacity and the obligation to respond in situations where governing bodies cause or choose not to respond to situations of harm (No More Deaths 2017). One of the central facets of civil initiative that distinguishes it from other forms of nonviolent direct action is that it forgoes symbolic and expressive actions as its means of intervention and, instead, focuses on "action that is germane to [victims'] needs for protection" (No More Deaths 2017). The direct aid action of protection emphasizes providing water, sustenance, medicine, shelter, and support against a desert that state security forces count on to kill them; protecting migrants became about providing care. Care is a radical departure from state-sponsored modes of intervention, which entail capture by Border Patrol and subsequent imprisonment and punishment, causing yet more harm.

Humanitarian efforts provide relatively simple but crucial first aid to those moving through what activist Carlos García (2015) calls the "death

trap” of the US-Mexico border. It primarily takes the shape of what we call “desert aid,” in which volunteers hike migrant trails where the highest concentration of bodies is found, leaving caches of water, food, socks, and blankets. Volunteers hike with medical kits in order to assist migrants upon encounter; they bandage blistered and injured feet, provide treatment for dehydration and stomach infections due to drinking bad water, and attend to other medical issues. Like other direct-action practitioners, volunteers hiking the trails become an insurgent and mobile presence within the site of dispossession and social violence.

In addition to the water drops and desert aid patrols, the organization established its first desert aid camp near the town of Arivaca, approximately eleven miles from the border. Occupied by volunteers nearly three hundred sixty-five days of the year, the camp has become a beacon of aid for migrants in distress; it is a place to find water, food, shade, rest, and medical attention. The encampment has become the hub of the direct action of care that No More Deaths calls “hospitality,” a practice and philosophy of revaluing and respecting migrant life through a gesture of sanctuary and free access to care and respite.

Caring amounts to much more than merely fostering survival. Caring entails a relational ethic of interdependency. At the camp, volunteers practice multiple modes of care that fulfill three primary actions laid out by sociologist Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2000: 86–87): (1) ethics of care, or to care about, is expounded by the use of care as a larger response to the devaluation of migrant lives; (2) the activity of care, or caring for, is articulated by hospitality and civil initiative; (3) the physical and emotional activities of care are lived out in the practices of care in the camp and on the trails. These practices and what I would like to call “positionalities” of care take place between not only migrants and volunteers but also short- and long-term volunteers in the camp. This latter dynamic generates another, excess layer of the action of care by No More Deaths’ volunteers. In the overlap between these two dimensions of care, for migrants and among aid workers, the camp becomes a living space of an ongoing abolitionist gesture, one in which people innovate and practice ways of protecting disavowed life in the shadow of a state that has strategically abandoned them to die in the desert.

### **The Necessity of Abolitionist Care in the Borderlands**

PTD is an apt tool and by-product of neoliberalism in the Americas, becoming an enforcement strategy that allows US authorities to kill by way of abandoning bodies to die in the desert in the name of border security while also



absolving itself of responsibility through a rhetoric of personal choice and responsibility. Neoliberalism, as Grace Kyungwon Hong (2015: 27) theorizes, is structured as an epistemological project of disavowal, one in which it works to “erase its racial and colonial brutalities and thus legitimate its self-definition as defenders of freedom and protectors of life.” Contemporary border enforcement aims to “protect” the United States by criminalizing migrants, abandoning them to the dangers of the desert, and disavowing their deaths. Of course, the US-Mexico border brokers what is ultimately a racialized distinction between a white United States and a brown global South. The production of disavowable death at the border takes place through a racialized logic of value, to borrow Lisa Marie Cacho’s (2012) framework, in which some bodies, especially those determined criminal through racialization, are deemed to matter less than others. The border performs a critical task in this racialized economy of disavowable death: unauthorized border crossers, as many have pointed out, are always already deemed criminal by the very act of their presence in the United States (Escobar 2016; Inda 2006; Nevins 2010; Ngai 2014; Cacho 2012). Rendered criminals, unauthorized migrants are vulnerable to punishment and abandonment by the state because they have not lived up to the rights and responsibilities of neoliberal citizenship that positions citizens as entrepreneurial subjects constantly working to become better, more effective citizens deserving of protection (Inda 2006; Escobar 2016). Labeling and punishing unauthorized migrants as criminals allows US authorities to disavow responsibility for the death and torture of those crossing the border.

Stranded as valueless life in the desert, migrants become the targets of what I call “strategic abandonment,” building on Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s (2007: 41–52) concept of abandonments, the turn in statecraft away from social welfare.<sup>2</sup> Strategic abandonment is the rational calculus by which governing bodies decide they have no responsibility for the health, well-being, safety, or sheer existence of a minoritized body of people due to its criminalized racialization and subsequent valuelessness. PTD becomes the tactic by which strategic abandonment is carried out in the borderlands, literally aiming to police the border by abandoning irresponsible subjects and valueless life to perish in the desert. But strategic abandonment is not a passive activity, as analyses of border security or other anti-immigrant legislation make clear (De Leon 2013). Legislation from the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1994, which barred immigrants from welfare and social services and increased deportable offenses, to the Trump administration’s recent executive orders to expand the scope of deportable

offenses, increase policing, and criminalize giving aid to migrants function to exclude migrants from social welfare and strategically abandon them in the name of protecting the United States. Strategic abandonment functions as a neoliberal strategy of social reproduction and control in racialized communities, a strategy whereby the means of social reproduction are withheld, social needs are ignored, bodies are essentially left to fend for themselves, and migrant life, as a legislative supporter of Arizona's notorious bill SB1070 put it, becomes "untenable" (McDowell and Fernández 2012).

Within the market logics and paradigms of neoliberalism, care is itself a commodity accessible only to those rendered valuable by fulfilling the demands of entrepreneurial citizenship. Care has long been a pivot point on which struggles for self-determination and decolonization have organized precisely because it counters a key strategy of abandonment by the state, one that is drawn along racialized lines of value. For example, inspired by the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, a militant Puerto Rican self-determination and decolonial organization active in the 1960s and 1970s, operated an ambulance service and health clinic as part of their struggle against domestic warfare. The Young Lords succinctly named the racism fueling strategic abandonment in their newspaper: ". . . preventative medicine is not done on Puerto Ricans and Blacks because this capitalist system wants to make the rulers live longer and let the spics and niggers die off as quickly and quietly as possible" (Enck-Wanzer 2010: 192). Anticipating the logics of Border Patrol's policing strategy of strategic abandonment, the Young Lords name the racialized lines along which notions of human value are drawn and organized to provide for their own care through practices of mutual aid and community self-determination. Through their practices, they articulated alternative worlds in which the health and safety of their people was built from within, by and for the people, within and against logics of market or state assigned value.

### **Abolishing Value: The Direct Action of Care**

As Corbett notes of humanitarian aid on the US-Mexico border, civil initiative is distinct from typical deployments of symbolic and expressive direct actions. Unlike other encampments, such as Occupy Wall Street or the annual teacher's encampment in Oaxaca, Mexico, the No More Deaths encampment does not aim to disrupt or impede the flow of traffic, capital, or business-as-usual in order to discursively interrupt the violence and injustice of the status quo. On the surface, direct aid is not so much theater as

service. Yet, to do away with its relationship to traditions and motives of direct action would miss the imaginative dimensions of this work. In the nexus of No More Deaths' care work that is "germane" to the needs of those affected by strategic abandonment is a form of direct action that functions prefiguratively—performing service *that opens onto* alternatives to the world in which they work.

The Blackout Collective, direct action trainers and organizers working for Black liberation based in the Bay Area, refer to this form of direct intervention as "abolitionist actions."<sup>3</sup> Abolitionist actions are conceived of as *longue durée* actions that take place at a site of social violence or dispossession and work to imagine new forms of social and political life.<sup>4</sup> The practitioners call these actions abolitionist, situating their particular form of intervention within the tradition of abolition that thinkers such as Angela Davis, Joy James, and Dylan Rodríguez have taken up and extended from the work of W. E. B. DuBois, who insisted that abolition's project must include not only the dismantling of slavery but also the invention of "new democratic institutions" (Davis 2005: 75). As thinkers from the Critical Resistance Collective note, abolition is defined as three converging actions: to dismantle, change, and build. Abolitionist actions, by asserting and building alternative worlds at the site of social dispossession and violence, interrupt and negate the violence of the status quo. But most importantly, they engage in the abolitionist project that Rodríguez (2015) defines as the "production of freedom and liberation practices from within collective rebellion, insurgency, and community."

The abolitionist dimensions of direct-action humanitarian aid on the border is most vivid when we specifically consider the practices of care that No More Deaths performs at its encampment. Between care for both migrants and one another, we can see micropractices that evoke abolitionist projects to dismantle the notions of racialized value on which the border and its enforcement are built. In these micropractices, volunteers dismantle, change, and build the world they want to see within a site of state disavowal, dispossession, and violence.

Care work for migrants largely revolves around practical medical and health care: bandaging blisters, administering electrolytes for dehydration, and treating stomach infections resulting from drinking contaminated water. Usually, these interactions support migrants in becoming well enough or equipping them with supplies so that they can, of their own volition, finish their journey. However, if a person is in acute distress, such that volunteers, who are often Wilderness First Responders, EMTs, paramedics, and, at times, nurses and doctors, cannot sufficiently aid them and they need

to be hospitalized, volunteers will call 911, only with the patient's consent. Any emergency call also summons Border Patrol and facilitates their detention, criminal trial, deportation, and likely repeat attempt at crossing. No More Deaths also performs search and rescue operations and will search out a missing companion or someone their group left behind because they were sick or injured. Witnessing the indomitability of the human will to migrate in the face of such relentless violence, suffering, and death demands a form of recognition that acknowledges another's agency and tendency toward survival and life making, rather than the specter of abject, valueless life that criminalization attempts to produce. In these interactions, volunteers attend not only to physical care but also to the ethical stance in which caring about means respecting the agency and desire to cross borders. In caring for and caring *about*, as Nakano Glenn (2000: 86–87) puts it, volunteers both dismantle a spectrum of valuable life and change orientations toward migration and migrant desire and will.

Yet, a bandaged blister and other forms of practical care is not where the work ends. In addition to providing medical aid, volunteers often provide some forms of emotional and spiritual support to the patients in camp or on the trail. Especially at the camp, the politic of hospitality takes the shape of a kind of emotional labor. Offering rest and respite, cooking, listening to people's stories, witnessing the aftermath of sexual violence as you perform their intake, providing support and reassurance, interfacing with requests to make phone calls to family members, all make up hospitality.<sup>5</sup> In these interactions, it is common to hear people's stories and reasons for migrating, to get glimpses of both the dangerous journey itself and the roots of and reasons for that journey. These interactions ask us to reckon not only with PTSD or Border Patrol but also with the systemic and racially distributed effects of neoliberal policy in the Americas that work to value and devalue different kinds of life. Providing care that transverses physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions dismantles and changes the logics of value that render migrants disavowable targets of strategic abandonment. In its place, care builds moments of community and connection where enforcement demands disavowal. Rather than hierarchies of valuation, the abolitionist actions of care in No More Deaths' work builds alternative forms of recognition and inclusion that center migratory movement as a human energy, will, and life force rather than as a right extended only to those rendered valuable through their purchase on whiteness.<sup>6</sup> While many desert aid volunteers enjoy the privilege of whiteness that allows them to access the time and resources to perform this care work, their work ultimately becomes about dismantling

access to the freedom of movement. This is not to say that volunteers' whiteness disappears in the act of care; rather, care work allows them to become not merely allies but also accomplices—those engaged in a mutual and collaborative struggle against the violence and disposessions enacted through white supremacy (Indigenous Action Media 2015).

Yet, care work exists beyond the patient-caregiver relationship. Contributing to care work's abolitionist politics are the excess practices of care that emerge between aid workers and the camp itself, creating the resilience necessary for the *longue durée* temporality of the action and the practices of community that structure it, daily rhythms at camp during the volunteer program season, which sees a constant turnover of volunteers. While in residence at the desert aid camp, all volunteers participate in the general maintenance of the camp: cooking, cleaning, maintaining the latrine, managing the solar panels, organizing supplies, and checking the vehicles. Every day as a volunteer, I have witnessed and performed idiosyncratic practices of care that include sharing sunscreen and tips for staying cool, reminding one another to stay hydrated, sharing cigarettes on top of the trailers, lending generous ears, taking refuge in perfect sunsets, and helping each other see the beauty of the land even as we confront the violence it is used to perpetrate. Together, volunteers process the things they have witnessed and experienced during patrols at the structured nightly debriefing. During these debriefings, volunteers engage in a kind of democratically distributed talk therapy, or a collective and mutual holding of the troubling, traumatic, and infuriating dimensions of Border Patrol's strategy of abandonment. While in residence at the desert aid camp, volunteers are not passive consumers of a service experience, not merely guests on the land, but also active interdependents engaged in the care, maintenance, and protection of the patients, of one another, and of the camp. Community interdependency and mutual aid become excess forms of sociality created in the process of doing desert aid. The practices of care that structure life in the camp open onto a kind of politics of friendship that, as Michel Foucault (1998: 137) wrote, "introduce[s] love where there was supposed to be only law, rule, or habit." Moving from this practice of friendship that centers the collective coproduction of care and dislodges the rules and laws of value and markets, the camp produces an abolitionist action that dismantles and changes hierarchies of value and builds alternative modes of recognition and inclusion through moments of community.

As stated in its mission statement, No More Deaths (2017) works fundamentally to end the loss of life and suffering on the US-Mexico border. Seeking an end to the suffering and death on the border is an abolitionist

project, but one that I claim opens onto a larger and more visionary project of abolishing the racialized hierarchies of human value and regimes of criminalization enforced by the border by transforming perceptions of migration and migrant agency. Performing actions of care is not something that can be done simply by treating wounds or offering water; it requires that volunteers see and acknowledge the full humanity of their patient, inclusive of their will, desire, and investments in facing their journey. As Nakano Glenn (2000: 86–87) contends, care includes both practical activities of care and an ethical orientation. The ethical orientation in the borderlands refuses the hierarchies of valuable life and the logics of disavowal cultivated by neoliberal border enforcement strategies.

Direct-action humanitarian aid enacts abolition's three converging actions—dismantle, change, and build—in the micropractices of care that structure the work of aid givers. Centering these actions specifically on the ways in which border enforcement generates schemas of human value, care by humanitarian aid workers dismantles logics of criminality that otherwise bar some from inclusion and recognition. Direct aid work alters approaches to care, making it about providing both physical and emotional care. Moreover, in these micropractices of emotional care and the act of “caring about,” *No More Deaths* changes the ways in which migration and migrants are recognized, seeing them not as abject criminals but as fighters, people striving and moving toward their lives. Finally, they build, in the practices of hospitality and care extended to migrants as well as each other, alternative instances and models of community, inclusion, and recognition. Through these direct actions of aid, *No More Deaths* generates positionalities of care, dismantling logics of value by making medical attention, hospitality, respite, and sanctuary available to all, regardless of citizenship status, criminal record, gender, sexuality, or race. In hiking these trails and establishing an encampment that takes up space in terrains of state violence and disavowal in the name of saying “no” to that violence, *No More Deaths*' practices of care for migrants connects points of intervention that insurgently erupts into the disavowing silence on migrant death and disposability. In the daily rhythms of hospitality and resilience, the collectivizing of aid, of spiritual and emotional sustenance, we can practice new modes of human value and community predicated on care.

## Notes

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No More Deaths in a different light. This paper could not have been written without the help of Meghan McDowell. Thank you for the conversation, books, and persistent orientation toward an abolitionist imaginary.

- 1 No More Deaths, along with other organizations like Aguilas del Desierto (Eagles of the Desert), The Samaritans, and Border Angels, have performed over ten years of direct-action humanitarian aid at the border, recruiting volunteers to provide water, food, medical aid, and other lifesaving resources to migrants crossing through the deserts.
- 2 For a further analysis of the concept of abandonment, see Povinelli 2011.
- 3 The Blackout Collective has not published these frameworks. I use this concept in my writing after having participated in a training led by them and the Indigenous People's Project from the Ruckus Society.
- 4 The Blackout Collective draws upon the histories of maroon communities and the *kilombos* of Brazil to historicize abolitionist actions as sites where communities came together in rejection of an existing racist power structure, building up infrastructures of resistance and alternative social forms that provided for their own need.
- 5 In response to patients in the aid camp hoping to phone home and let their families know that they have not disappeared in the desert, No More Deaths has partnered with the International Committee of the Red Cross to offer a free family reunification phone service that allows migrants to contact their loved ones.
- 6 For a discussion of freedom of movement as a definition of human freedom, see de Genova 2010.

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**Scott Warren**

In Defense of Wilderness:  
Policing Public Borderlands

**T**he town in which I live, Ajo, is located about forty miles north of the Arizona-Mexico border. Another twenty miles north of Ajo, on the only paved highway heading in that direction, there is a Border Patrol drug and immigration checkpoint. This checkpoint, along with the dozen or so others like it in southern Arizona, creates a secondary border some distance inland from the international boundary with Mexico. This particular checkpoint, however, is so far inland that it creates a long enforcement cordon stretching some seventy miles north as the crow flies. The land within this so-called Ajo corridor is rugged, dry, and sparsely populated, making it one of the longest and most arduous crossings for undocumented migrants anywhere on the US-Mexico border. Because so many migrants die from exposure while making this crossing, groups like No More Deaths regularly go out on patrol in the Ajo corridor to provide humanitarian relief. I volunteer with No More Deaths and spend many weekends out on patrol, working to distribute water, food, and first aid to migrants who find themselves in distress.

With the exception of a few settlements and a few private parcels, the land within the Ajo corridor is managed entirely by federal agencies, including the National Park Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the United States Air Force, and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). On the one hand, this mosaic of federal lands reflects the aridity, remoteness, and dryness of the larger region. These were the lands that defaulted into federal control because they could not be practicably farmed, ranched, or settled. As a result, their highest and best use was determined to be for wildlife habitats, conservation, recreation, and military training.

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On the other hand, this mosaic reflects what historian Patricia Limerick (1987) has called the “legacy of conquest.” Most obviously, this refers to US settler colonialism in the nineteenth century, in which control of this land was wrested from Mexico and independent indigenous nations. Yet, various forms of colonial dispossession continued through the twentieth century as well. As the mosaic of federal lands took shape, the new rules and regulations that governed Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument (Organ Pipe), Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge (Cabeza Prieta), and the Barry M. Goldwater military training range (BMGR) restricted the long-standing local uses of ranchers, prospectors, and woodcutters. These rules and regulations affected the indigenous O’odham the most, perhaps, as their traditional settlements were circumscribed within conservation and wilderness boundaries, and their uses of the land and its resources restricted by new management plans implemented by federal agencies. At best, this twentieth-century dispossession reflected the shortsightedness of otherwise well-meaning land managers who were guided by a wilderness ethic in which all contemporary human imprints on the land were deemed unnatural. At worst, it reflected a pervasive paternalism in which federal agencies not only denied local access to these lands but worked to erase the recent histories of indigenous people and Mexican citizens from the landscape all together.

Nevertheless, by the latter part of the twentieth century, the Ajo corridor had taken on the mantle of undeveloped and unbroken conservation space. Edward Abbey wrote romantically about it, a greater area was proposed for a national park, and even the BMGR was reimagined as relatively undisturbed habitat for wildlife. In the 1990s, for example, the botanist Richard Felger (1997: 403) described a remote arroyo in Cabeza Prieta as “a treasure house of information and experiences” because there were virtually no human impacts to the land in that area.

By the early 2000s, however, a new use for the land emerged. Planners from the US Border Patrol (1994: 6) and the former Immigration and Naturalization Service debuted a strategy called “prevention through deterrence,” in which lands such as those in the Ajo corridor were imagined to be unpopulated and therefore better suited to carrying out enforcement activities than the cities and urban areas of the Border Patrol. As double-layer walls went up in places like San Diego and El Paso, the Ajo corridor increasingly felt the impacts of undocumented migration, smuggling, and an ever greater Border Patrol footprint entering public lands. For example, in 1996, there were twenty-seven hundred apprehensions of undocumented border crossers in the Ajo corridor, and in 1999 there were twenty-one thousand (OPCNM

2000). From the late 1980s to the early 2010s, the contingent of Border Patrol agents at the Ajo station grew from ten to five hundred. And whereas Cabeza Prieta had been imagined as free from human impact in the mid-1990s, Naturalist Bill Broyles (Broyles and Berman 2006: 197) chafed at the damage being wrought by smuggling and undocumented migration in the mid-2000s: “plants are trampled, cactus smashed, bird nests robbed, waterholes drained and fouled, [and] the biological soil crust churned into moon dust.”

Many metaphors are used to understand the border, with perhaps the border-as-war-zone being the most common. But the best metaphor to use in understanding the transformation of the Ajo corridor at the turn of the twenty-first century is that of the border as the setting for a coupled smuggling-interdiction industry. The expansion of this industry is reflected in the physical infrastructure of roads, walls, forward operating bases, surveillance towers, and checkpoints, as well as an equal magnitude of expansion in the tools, techniques, and resources used by smuggling organizations to evade this detection infrastructure. Both sides of the industry have become interdependent, and as the size and scope of interdiction efforts has increased, so too has the size and scope of human- and drug-smuggling efforts. And while locales on both sides of the border may have experienced an economic boom as a result of this expanding economy, these same locales bear the overwhelming burden of militarization, violence, fear, and environmental damage. The smuggling-interdiction industry has further proven to be extractive in nature, as the profits of smuggling and the federal expenditures for interdiction are now enjoyed by people and corporations largely outside of the border region.

The environmental footprint of this extractive industry on border public lands is big, and land managers have expressed frustration with its expansion. Organ Pipe officials, for instance, have publicly recognized that migrants were being funneled into the desert by border enforcement policies, and because of this, on one high-profile occasion even denied the Border Patrol's request for increased access to wilderness areas (GAO 2010: 30). A certain amount of distrust, therefore, exists between federal agencies such as the US Border Patrol and the National Park Service, particularly as the goals of conservation and border policing continue to come into conflict.

Officially, however, all federal agencies—Border Patrol, Park Service, Fish and Wildlife—work together to achieve shared goals. Each of these public lands management agencies, after all, has a law enforcement arm with a mission to police not only the particular regulations of their land unit but also the laws of the United States in general. Seen through this lens, the Park

Service helps the Border Patrol with its goals of immigration control and drug interdiction, while the Border Patrol helps the Park Service with its goals related to conservation and recreation. Various department-level memoranda-of-understanding guide the two agencies in matters related to border policing and conservation, such that the Border Patrol can describe the Park Service as a willing partner in its drug interdiction and immigration control efforts, and the Park Service can describe the Border Patrol as an ally in conservation.<sup>1</sup>

The enduring legacies of conquest, however, become quite apparent when public land managers team up with the Border Patrol and even adopt the agency's paramilitary tactics in their own efforts to police undocumented border crossers.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps most troubling in all of this, however, is the ambivalence of the environmental community. Part of this is no doubt due to the lack of legal recourse available, as many environmental and cultural protection laws have been waived by Congress or circumscribed by the government to allow Border Patrol unfettered access to conservation lands (Ring 2014). However, this ambivalence might reflect deeper tensions within the environmental community regarding the intersection of social justice and environmentalism. Abbey, for instance, was a formidable defender of Organ Pipe and Cabeza Prieta against extractive industries such as mining. Yet, when it came to immigration he was an unabashed advocate of border enforcement:

Most of the border runs through flat, wide open, sparsely vegetated desert country. Except for the far-scattered towns and cities, most of the border could be easily patrolled and easily "sealed;" a force of twenty thousand . . . properly armed and equipped, would have no difficulty . . . in keeping out unwelcome intruders. In and near the few towns and cities a physical barrier is obviously needed. . . . People do not cut holes through fences when the fences are watched and guarded. (Abbey 2006)

Fearing unchecked population growth and, ironically, increasing pressures on wilderness, Abbey proposed the above plan to curtail undocumented immigration in the 1980s. It has eerily come to resemble the Border Patrol's prevention-through-deterrence strategy implemented in the 1990s.

### **No More Deaths and Public Lands**

In the course of our work, humanitarian aid volunteers with No More Deaths frequently interface with land managers and law enforcement agencies. Adding to the handful of federal land managers are law enforcement agen-

cies such as the US Border Patrol and sheriff's deputies, which, together, make for at least eight different law enforcement entities with which humanitarian aid volunteers in the Ajo corridor regularly interact. Some of these encounters between volunteers and law enforcement take place in formal meetings, but most occur informally in the desert while servicing water and food drops in remote areas.

Informal interactions with law enforcement representatives in the field are unpredictable, but they offer critical insight into the complexity, diversity, and conflicting interpretations of the border and the nature of the crisis on public lands. Contrast, for instance, the Border Patrol agent that I encountered while providing aid who admonished me for "helping the illegals" on the BMGR with the law enforcement ranger who once thanked me for being on patrol in Organ Pipe. And lest the reader think that this simply reflects different agency cultures, contrast, for example, the words of another Border Patrol agent who approved of the efforts of aid workers to give water to migrants because, "they sure do need it," with the words of a park ranger who disapproved of our efforts to give water to migrants because, "we don't want to make it too easy for them."

There are as many different individual dispositions as there are individual rangers, agents, deputies, officers, and guards. It is perhaps no surprise, therefore, that law enforcement personnel would have different interpretations of the work that No More Deaths volunteers do. Still, I have heard law enforcement personnel repeat narratives that appear designed to delegitimize humanitarian aid on public lands. For instance, Organ Pipe park rangers have described the water and food drops of No More Deaths as ineffective, with one park ranger telling me they are akin to "driving around the desert and throwing cans of beans out the window." Cabeza Prieta officers have described the volunteer humanitarian response to me as not only ineffective but also redundant, citing Border Patrol beacons—tall towers equipped with lights and an emergency button that summons law enforcement—as the more effective solution to preventing deaths in the desert. Organ Pipe rangers and BMGR security guards have even suggested to me that water and food drops cause more harm than good. Migrants, they say, will develop a false sense of security knowing there is water in the desert and may even get lulled farther into the wilderness where there is little chance of rescue.

These arguments—that humanitarian aid is ineffective, redundant, and harmful—seek not only to delegitimize volunteer groups such as No More Deaths but also to legitimize the role of law enforcement agencies and

lay claim to the rhetorical high ground of humanitarianism. The Ajo corridor, after all, is a rugged desert where migrants are forced to travel on foot for many days. Detentions of migrants by Border Patrol agents are therefore often cast as rescues, not arrests. Unwitting migrants, the argument goes, are victimized by smugglers who lie, cheat, steal, rape, abuse, and leave their clients for dead in the desert. This role of rescuer and protector even extends to the land itself. These same smugglers trash environmentally sensitive conservation lands, the logic continues, so agencies such as the Border Patrol and the Park Service work toward shared conservation goals in their efforts to combat drug smuggling and illegal immigration. This paternalistic attitude toward migrants is dutifully maintained even despite the many migrants who describe “rescues” in which they are chased, scattered, injured, and abused (see *La Coalición de Derechos Humanos* and *No More Deaths* 2016). And the role of protector of the land is even maintained despite the thousands of miles of vehicle tracks laid down by Border Patrol agents driving in conservation and wilderness areas (Abhat 2011).

At other times, however, law enforcement officers are quick to shift the focus away from their roles as rescuers and protectors and put the focus on the people who, apparently, are not deserving of humanitarian aid. It is not uncommon, for instance, for law enforcement representatives to say that “95 percent” of the people crossing the border in the Ajo corridor are drug smugglers. One ranger even described the majority of border crossers to me as being people who “are not coming here looking for work.” In one instance, I encountered a group of individuals who were already in Border Patrol detention in the backcountry of Organ Pipe. When I asked whether the group needed water, I was assured by the Border Patrol agent on the scene that these were “bad guys” and “not the kind of people you are trying to help.” After assuring the agent that humanitarian aid is nondiscriminatory and given solely on the basis of need, he relented and ultimately allowed our volunteers to give water, food, socks, and first aid to the group.

Further underscoring the ambivalence inherent in these various narratives are the direct actions of law enforcement personnel in response to humanitarian aid. Border Patrol agents have been documented destroying humanitarian aid supplies, and it is not uncommon for volunteers to find water bottles that have been slashed and otherwise vandalized in the Ajo corridor (see Epstein 2012). On the other hand, law enforcement officially approves of efforts by other humanitarian aid groups to site large stationary water barrels on public lands. Additionally, one Organ Pipe law enforcement ranger even shared with me and other aid workers how, when they

arrest migrants in the summer, they leave water behind at the site in case other members of the group in hiding return to the area.

Law enforcement personnel seemingly struggle to define “good” water or legitimate humanitarian aid on the one hand, and “bad” water or illegitimate humanitarian aid on the other. One officer described himself to me as a supporter of “true humanitarian aid,” but he nevertheless protested the food and water “dumps” of No More Deaths and other groups. One Border Patrol agent described his personal evolution on the matter, admitting to me as having slashed water jugs in the past, but assuring me that though he continues to destroy supplies left for drug smugglers he no longer destroys humanitarian aid left for migrants.

Perhaps no other issue, however, has proved as complicated and vexing as the issue of litter. Land management agencies have largely staked their claim on the problem of litter in the context of their relationship with humanitarian aid groups like No More Deaths. What No More Deaths volunteers consider to be the provision of life-saving humanitarian aid—putting out water, food, socks, and blankets—federal land managers argue constitutes an act of littering. The issue has been litigated in court with a judicial decision that avoided making a crystal clear distinction between humanitarian aid and litter, but it nevertheless marked a victory for No More Deaths’ ongoing “humanitarian aid is never a crime” campaign (see Lacey 2010). Since this decision, only a handful of additional littering citations have been written by law enforcement officials against No More Deaths volunteers, and none of these have reached a trial.

The focus on litter may be due to the fact that the biggest challenge facing public lands along the border, the expansion of the coupled smuggling-interdiction industry, results from issues that are essentially beyond the control of local managers. The Park Service, Fish and Wildlife, and other agencies, therefore, work to manage what they can, which is often limited to restoring the environmental impacts—such as trails, camps, and trash—left by undocumented migrants and circumscribing the efforts of local volunteers to provide humanitarian aid.

Perhaps a less obvious effect of these efforts to clean up “trash” however, is the continuation of a long legacy of dispossession and erasure of those deemed to be illegitimate “users” of public lands along the border. This dispossession is not unlike the dispossession of indigenous people and Mexican citizens in the nineteenth century, and this erasure is not unlike the erasure of the traces of human use and habitation in the twentieth century. Not only are the migrants who cross the vast distances of the Ajo corridor

subjected to arrest and deportation, but even the signs of their presence are being removed from the landscape.

In working to reduce the death and suffering of migrants along the border, No More Deaths volunteers and other humanitarian aid organizations also inherently work to counter this dispossession and erasure. Importantly, this is not to say that humanitarian aid legitimizes the physical presence of smuggling organizations on public lands along the border. Rather, humanitarian aid drops of water, food, socks, and blankets serve to acknowledge the struggle of migrants and force land managers and the public to recognize the ongoing humanitarian crisis. Simply put, the very presence of humanitarian aid forces land managers to publicly acknowledge a problem that they may wish to push into the remotest and least touristed areas of the desert, keeping it invisible to everyone but law enforcement personnel.

Rather than simply being an issue about the ecological consequences of trash versus the humanitarian value of water drops, therefore, the rhetorical effort to cast humanitarian aid as litter also underscores an attempt by land managers to control, or perhaps even silence, narratives about what is happening on public lands along the border. Organ Pipe officials, for instance, have repeatedly expressed frustration to me and other volunteers that visiting tourists “don’t know what to make” of water and food drops, and that tourists have recently “begun asking questions” about the significance of No More Deaths’ supplies left for migrants in areas of the park also frequented by hikers and campers. Interestingly, Organ Pipe offers very little public interpretation about the humanitarian crisis or the history of the border. Instead, the focus of public interpretation in the park is almost entirely focused on ecological issues, ancient Native American history, and early twentieth-century histories of ranching and prospecting.

And yet, the struggles of undocumented migrants in crossing the desert, and the subsequent humanitarian crisis, may prove to be the most significant story playing out on public lands in the Ajo corridor and elsewhere along the border. In 2003, for instance, the superintendent of Organ Pipe estimated that the number of tourists that entered the park that year, about two hundred forty thousand, was likely the same as the number of undocumented border crossers that entered the park that year (Eckert 2004). Some Organ Pipe employees have even speculated that someday in the distant future, the park may become more of a historic monument, in recognition of the mass movement of people coming across the border in recent decades (Piekielek 2009).



Until then, the dual efforts of No More Deaths and other groups in responding to the humanitarian crisis and resisting the erasure of migrant presence on public lands will continue. These dual efforts by no means contradict conservation and environmental protection. Rather, they are commensurate to a better ethic of treating both land and life with respect in the border region. Abbey (1977: 223) once famously said that “The idea of wilderness needs no defense. It only needs more defenders.” And yet, he inadvertently advocated for a more militarized border that, when it came into being in the 1990s, ironically besieged wilderness and introduced a new kind of extractive industry on public lands. This new industry has been most violent to the migrants forced into it and most destructive to the land on which it works. Perhaps Abbey’s sentiment would be made more holistic and appropriate if it were expanded to include the ideas of humanitarianism and human rights as well.

## Notes

- 1 This interagency cooperation is a highlight of public relations campaigns. Beginning in 2013, for example, the Ajo Border Patrol station began offering a six-week “Border Patrol Citizen’s Academy” that taught local residents about the agency and its mission. In 2016 this Border Patrol Citizens Academy was recast as the “Multi Agency Citizen’s Academy,” with representation from the Park Service, Fish and Wildlife, tribal police, the county sheriff, the Arizona Fish and Game Department, and others. This rebranding of the Citizen’s Academy, however, belies the power imbalance reflected in the size of agency budgets and personnel. Organ Pipe’s contingent of law enforcement rangers, for instance, numbers about twenty-five, Pima County’s force of deputies in Ajo is about the same, and Cabeza Prieta has only a handful of law enforcement officers. Meanwhile, the five hundred agents of the Ajo Border Patrol occupy a new twenty-five million dollar station that was built to eventually accommodate up to nine hundred agents.
- 2 Take, for instance, the BLM’s operation Regain Our Arizona Monuments (ROAM). Operation ROAM combines drug interdiction, immigration control, and conservation. The hallmark of operation ROAM is a two-week “surge,” where law enforcement rangers—along with allied deputies, officers, and agents—deploy in force to particular areas affected by smuggling and undocumented immigration. During one surge in November 2011, for instance, BLM law enforcement rangers swept into the Sawtooth and Silver Bell mountains. With support from Border Patrol, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigators, and sheriff’s deputies, a total of two hundred ten undocumented migrants were arrested and about six thousand pounds of marijuana were seized (USCBP 2011). Teams of civilian volunteers are deployed following surges such as these to pick up trash, rehabilitate illegal roads, and map sites and trails used by undocumented migrants. As part of the “Take Back Antelope Peak Project,” for instance, volunteers and law enforcement rangers worked together to “take back, hold, and maintain” a wilderness area that had been impacted by smuggling activities (BLM 2012: 3).

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