



Borders & Bodies

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Somewhere outside of the old mining town of Ruby—nothing more than a ghost town—and not too far from the Arizona/Mexico border, we run across a group of migrants. They are moving fast through a canyon cutting the San Luis and Atascosa Mountains. They are young, mostly women, and nervous. I offer water, food, and directions in Spanish, and the *guia* offers me water and food in English. He's unsure of my intentions. I explain that we had seen *la migra* along Ruby road and we part ways—good luck, *buena suerte*. Back up the wash I find that the group had stopped to pick up clean socks we'd left in a bucket. A pair of old bloody socks hang from a manzanita tree.

A week before, a good friend was a part of a humanitarian team that found the body of a young woman who had died, just hours before, in the open desert a couple miles from Ruby. The best guess as to the cause is that her group was scattered by Border Patrol, by a helicopter or drone or men on horseback, and that she lost her way in the panic, wandered this section of the Coronado National Forest and died of thirst. Having found an emergency contact, my friend learned that the woman was trying to reach her husband and children in Texas. Her husband cried on the phone at the news.

Just a bit north of here, around Arivaca, is one of hundreds of border check points scattered throughout

Southern Arizona. "US Citizens?" asks a guard. There's no question about whether or not we are drug runners, just whether or not our human bodies are legally sanctioned. Though he probably knows the car and suspects we've been providing aid to undocumented migrants, the officer doesn't ask if we've found any injured or dead people. There is no care for the refugee blood that spills in the desert, dries up, and cakes into the hard caliche soil.

The check point is one small impersonal component of the border control system, a part of state control over human migration, labor, and solidarity against Empire. The surveillance apparatus staring us down from the side of the road, a giant rod packed with dozens of cameras, sways in the wind, mocking the ocatillo cacti around it. I ask the guard if he knows that the Coronado National Forest is named after a conquistador who, after brutally capturing large portions of Northwest Mexico, crossed through the area that is now the border, seeking gold and conquest. I ask if he knows that Coronado's path laid the ground work for the theft of the land Border Patrol is now guarding. He says he's not heard this before—his intonation says he's bored with the history—and he waves us through.

Its no matter that this National Forest, just another compartmentalized wilderness area, honors the passage of a murderer, a tyrant, and, at the same time, is patrolled by police, the national guard, and right-wing militias, to stop the trek of the poor. Its no matter that

imperialist policy has pulled them away from the land of their families.

Today nearly 700 miles of wall stretch across a nearly 2,000 mile border between the US and Mexico. Other infrastructure—surveillance equipment, giant towers with cameras and sensors and thousands of miles of road for patrols—disrupts a borderland of rich biological diversity and sensitivity. The intolerant, homogenous, and hyper-security needs of the North openly supports racism and ecocide at the border. As state surveillance zooms from all angles, seeing all, thousands of humans and thousands of non-humans die, cut off from ancient and necessary migration paths.

In 2009 the last jaguar in all of North America was euthanized by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. But the border had long cut off its natural path to and from Northern Mexico. Its unfettered self was already murdered. Likewise, ocelots, bighorn sheep, and pronghorns,—all endangered—have been deprived of their migration paths. In order to expedite the closing of the border, and to demonstrate the priorities of the government to contain the movement of people from an economy under attack by US interests, Congress waived all environmental laws that interfere with construction. Homeland Security director Michael Chertoff waived the Coastal Zone Management Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act in the name of national security.

In order to expedite the closing of peoples minds, the state of Arizona, through HB2281 has outlawed ethnic studies programs in all grade schools. The law also prohibits courses “that promote the overthrow of the US Government.” The connection between fear, racism, homogeneity, environmental destruction and state security needs becomes obvious.

Natural borders are fluid, changing—negotiated at every step. Autonomy and collectivity intercourse and blend. Bodies, human or otherwise, are beautiful borders. Fingers, lips, eyes, tails, tentacles, and whiskers all negotiate space, touch, freedom, relationships, food, love, knowledge and movement. They are fragile and, in return for any boundaries or restraints laid, offer longing, organic reciprocity and the rhythms of heart and hunger. They follow the rules of the sky and the terrain, rain and physical need. They follow the rules of relationship and reproduction. Political borders are rigid, controlling, autocratic, murderous. They impede without giving back, without emotion. They offer the rhythms of abstraction and control: national anthems, speeches on nationhood, sirens, police banter across radio waves. They follow the laws of abstractions: property, profit, and techno-progress.

Back at home in Florida, I realize one never leaves the border. We are constantly in its presence in the US. Many of my neighbors made the trek here



through Arizona, and a certain restraint—as well as power—in their eyes, in the movement of their bodies, reflects that journey. ICE raids happen often in my town, pulling communities apart, ensuring the dominance of xenophobia and alienation through intimidation. I've watched from my roof the bodies of ICE agents, SWAT, and the Sheriffs raiding a neighbor. They are tormented and ugly and unyieldingly cold bodies, armored with kevlar, ammunition, helmets, goggles, plated gloves and rifles. They are almost not bodies at all. They are more like border walls. As long as these kinds of borders exist, the kind that stunt the movement of bodies and the exchange of life, that sever neighbors and watersheds and minds, wilderness and our place in it will remain a compartment of the state.

After the helicopters and police cars leave, friends and allies of the victims of the raid slowly stroll by the house to see if anyone remains, if they can help comfort, rebuild, and support. Some help clean up the mess left by the police intrusion, the twisted gate, the flung chairs and the broken door. After the helicopters leave I notice the return of a small flock of juvenile ibis to a nearby yard and the return of a Cooper's hawk to its perch in a mango tree. After they leave, the community begins to rebuild. The same will be true when the border wall is expelled from the sacred land it currently torments.

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