

FROM THREAT TO PROMISE : MAPPING DISAPPEARANCE AND THE PRODUCTION OF DETERRENCE IN THE SONORA- ARIZONA BORDERLANDS

Tara Plath

This article investigates how the concept of deterrence is maintained in the United States border enforcement policy of "Prevention Through Deterrence," by interrogating how death and its representations are produced by local NGOs in Arizona. It proposes that mass death and disappearance in Arizona's deserts are not the consequences of poor policy, but rather its driving force.

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Keywords: Prevention through Deterrence, Necropolitics, Mortality Mapping



The horizon of the Sonoran Desert in southern Arizona, taken on the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. July 2019.

I. Representations of death always falter

1 Visualizations of absence, markers of finitude, mourning and memorial must always supplant what is not there with the tangible; what cannot be known with the sensible. Globally, untold thousands have disappeared in migrations across seas, mountains, and deserts, whose journeys resist sovereign cartographies in life as well as death.

Untold thousands have disappeared in migrations across seas, mountains, and deserts.

Just as geographies so often dictate sovereign borders, the defense of territory, and forms of circulation between states, they facilitate

2 A poster on a shelter wall in Mexico, just south of the US-Mexico Border reads :

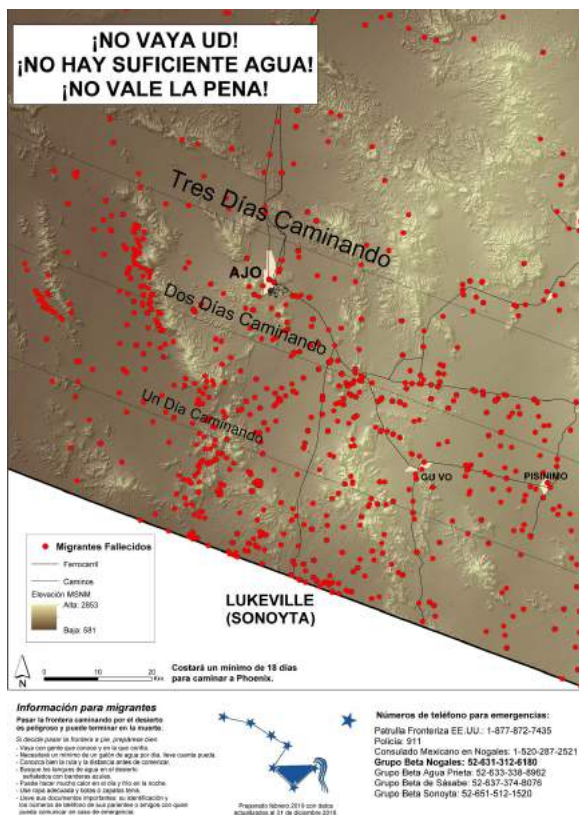
*¡No Vaya Ud!
¡No Hay Suficiente Agua!
¡No Vale La Pena!*

Hundreds of small red circles, each representative of the location where a set of human remains have been recovered.

Over a monochromatic terrain map are hundreds of small red circles, each representative of the location where a set of human remains have been recovered and subsequently attributed to an undocumented migrant. The poster is produced by Tucson, Arizona-based NGO Humane Borders, Inc. who circulates flyers along the

disappearance in ways that are inseparable to the character of their terrain and environment. The work of disappearing those who resist the effort of various government agencies to contain and control within geographic boundaries, within lines on a map, has very much to do with the qualities of border zones that stretch across these strategic lines. This form of disappearance is not bound to a corporeal absence, but expands to social death, to epistemological failings, to the "discursive limits of legibility," as Yves Winter describes it, that has allowed such treacherous border zones to be constituted as such¹.

border with the intention of deterring another attempt to cross, of preventing any more deaths. Like all maps, aggregated and stylized, this map reveals as much as it obscures. The flattening of sovereign power, ideology, and disappearance into an image of points and lines with a set of imperatives deserves to be interpreted not just as a representation of crisis, but as a mechanism in the thickly layered apparatus of what William Walters calls the humanitarian border². This assemblage of state and nonstate actors towards humanitarian ends is readily apparent in the poster's map, which is the result of a partnership between Humane Borders and the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner (PCOME): the Arizona OpenGIS Initiative for Deceased Migrants³.



Right and below : a poster warns of the dangers of crossing the U.S.-Mexico border through Arizona’s west desert. The posters are produced and distributed in shelters along the border by the nongovernmental organisation Humane Borders, Inc.

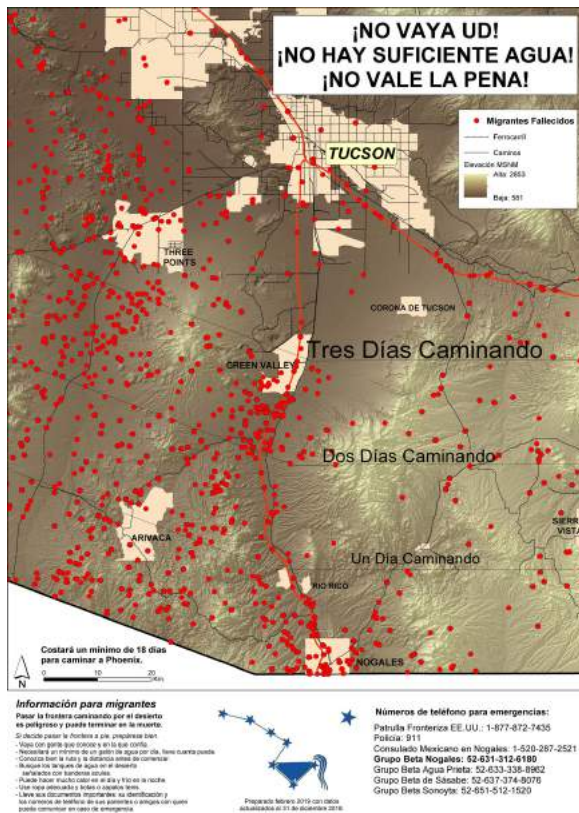
3 According to a query of the Initiative’s database, as of September 2019, 3.130 sets of migrants’ remains have been recovered from the mountainous desert regions of southern Arizona, whose entire southern boundary constitutes 373 of the 1.933 miles international border between Mexico and the United States⁴. This number is widely understood to be a significant undercount of the total number of deaths, as it does not account for those whose remains have not yet been or may never be recovered, nor the thousands of open missing person reports recorded by local NGOs, national and international databases.

The leading factor for these deaths, when can be determined, is dehydration or exposure to

the desert’s extreme conditions⁵.

3.130 sets of migrants’ remains have been recovered from the mountainous desert regions of southern Arizona.

Arguably less visible but no less direct is the fact that each fatality in this record is the consequence of shifts in United States’ border enforcement policies and specifically the strategy coined Prevention Through Deterrence (PTD), which was established in the mid-90s and continues today.



4 The widely-accepted discourse around Prevention Through Deterrence places emphasis on the intention of the strategy at the time it was implemented, and interprets migrant fatalities as tragic but “unintended” consequences of a strategic turn in 1994⁶. But excessive focus on the intentions and miscalculations of Border Patrol fails to address how deterrence continues to operate in Arizona’s west desert, and is thusly unable to account for why there has been a lack of comprehensive policy change or adequate governmental response to the thousands of death on U.S. soil. By redirecting attention towards the ways in which Prevention Through Deterrence operates through the lens of the mortality map depicted on Humane Borders’ flyers, I would like to put forward a renewed understanding of how migrant fatalities are not a corollary effect but are in fact the very fuel of deterrence as a functioning strategy. This process is what I call the *deterrent imperative*.

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The regional mortality data, which is publicly available from Arizona’s Pima County Office of

the Medical Examiner, and its corresponding representation in the form of an open access GIS map do not represent a clear and straightforward picture of the dangers of border-crossing, as they first appear to, but rather gesture toward a complex and layered apparatus of securitization and disappearance. The accumulation of migrant fatalities over the past two decades and the illustration of those deaths constitute a territorial boundary both visually, materially, and in the cultural imagination, rendering a wall or fence unnecessary. The map acts not as a secondary representation of previously established fact, but as an active and ever-evolving producer of sovereign territory within the Border Patrol’s strategic framework of “deterrence.” Through an analysis of the open access GIS map of migrant fatalities, and the modes through which this map circulates, I aim to demonstrate how Border Patrol’s Prevention Through Deterrence strategy sustains itself in relation to the ecological and spatio-temporal conditions specific to Sonora-Arizona borderlands; according to the deterrent imperative, the space of deterrence must produce death in order to legitimize the incitement of the fear of death as a functioning strategy in establishing and maintaining the border.

II. The Space of Deterrence as Border Enforcement

5 The 1990s saw an unprecedented bolstering of U.S. border enforcement, driven by bipartisan support in the face of public outcry over a “border out of control”, with a focus on unauthorized entries in cities along the border⁷. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service expanded its border enforcement budget in the southwest from \$400 million USD in 1993 to \$800 million in 1997, in tandem with a significant increase of agents in specific southwest sectors⁸. A series of dramatic injections of budget, personnel, and infrastructure to urban enforcement came in the form of Operation Blockade (later renamed Hold-the-Line) in El Paso, Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego, and Operation Safeguard in Arizona, all implemented between 1993 and 1995. These operations were built around the strategy of “prevention through

deterrence”, as outlined in the document *Border Patrol Strategy 1994 and Beyond*, with the pretext that the intensification of border enforcement in traditional corridors of entries, increased apprehensions, and inflated smuggling costs would drastically reduce the number of unauthorized entries, resulting with only “the most desperate of those aliens seeking entry” attempting to do so illegally⁹. It was anticipated that those who did still attempt to cross outside of state-sanctioned channels would be forced to do so over “more hostile terrain, less suited for crossing and more suited for enforcement¹⁰”. Thus, a single line describing the policy followed by a meagre framework of tactics resulted in untold deaths in the desert.



On a trip to Altar, Sonora, Mexico, Rev. Robin Hoover refers to a map marking the deaths of border crossers in the Arizona, USA. Norma Jean Gargas / Alamy Stock Photo, 2011.

6 In the same year, North American Free Trade Agreement was put into effect, validating Mexico as an established trading partner with the United States and Canada. Designed primarily with the interests of bankers and corporations at heart, the architects of NAFTA resolutely placed the free movement of goods and capital as its priority while refusing to account for the movement of people. Labour-related movement between Mexico and the U.S., however, has been a perennial phenomenon since the advent of immigration laws in the 1880s¹¹. This reality was only exacerbated by NAFTA’s decimation of Mexico’s agricultural subsidies and the privatisation of collective farms in Mexico, as heavily-subsidized U.S. corn flooded the market and forced indebted farmers to sell their land¹². Between 1991 and 2007, over 4.9 million, or 58% of agricultural jobs were lost in the family farm sector¹³. The impacts of these

events on migration exceeded the agreement’s prediction of job creation in Mexico’s manufacturing sector, thwarting any anticipated reduction of migration from south to north¹⁴.

The connections between territory, deterrence, and death must be activated by a body deemed disposable.

While historically, Mexico has understood migration as an economic phenomenon, the United States recognizes labour-related movement as strictly criminal activity warranting a judicial and increasingly militarized response¹⁵. Similar to the tens of thousands of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean Sea at the edges of the European Union, migrant deaths in Arizona’s desert are

recognized as accidental and the exclusive consequences of individual acts of criminal transgression¹⁶. These factors – the United States' wilful negligence of the historical given of migration in the negotiation of NAFTA and how migration trends would be impacted by dramatic changes to the agricultural sector on both sides of the border; the ongoing and increasing criminalization of migrants from Mexico, and now asylum-seekers from other Central American countries; and the rampant militarization of the southwest border over the past three decades, has resulted in a missing persons crisis that depends on an

7 Unlike the image of a smooth sandy space that the word desert evokes, the Sonoran Desert that spans the U.S.-Mexico border is a rugged, mountainous area with rich biodiversity and temperatures exceeding 48°C in the summer months. While all border regions have particular environments deserving of study, the Sonoran Desert is perhaps eminent in the way it has been strategically implemented within border policy. As Juanita Sundberg has described, "the southwest strategy treats rivers, mountains, and deserts as objects of geopolitical calculation and instruments of enforcement¹⁹". PTD relies on the desert's characteristics to in two ways: the first – the illusion that a fear of the conditions of the desert itself would stop migrants from attempting their journey across the border ; and second – the belief that the area would be better suited for apprehending those who had crossed the border : "The prediction is that with traditional entry and smuggling routes disrupted, illegal traffic will be deterred, or forced over more hostile terrain, less suited for crossing and more suited for enforcement". (US Border Patrol, 1994)

The southwest strategy treats rivers, mountains, and deserts as

8 In Arizona's west desert, the journey from the border to any main road or populous center can exceed forty miles across remote and rugged terrain, and often takes days and sometimes weeks for people who have often already suffered a long and laborious journey²¹. As most of this land is federally managed, Border Patrol and cooperating federal agencies have broad authority to dictate what behavior is authorized and assess which bodies are criminal before apprehension. The fallout from both assumptions has worked in tandem to produce the ongoing missing persons crisis, creating a space of disappearance that neither deters those who would attempt to cross it nor is easy to patrol, and therefore apprehend, rescue, or discover both the living and those who perish along the way.

9 It is helpful here to turn to Achille Mbembe's description of colonial occupation to understand the relationship between sovereign power and land in this scenario. The Sonoran-Arizona borderlands are a spatial expression of Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, with an

attitude of misplaced culpability and the presumed negligibility of the life of a person crossing the border. It is integral to acknowledge how the state practices that have produced this crisis, as described above, rely on a conception of certain lives as disappearable, or worthy of desertion¹⁷. The connections between territory, deterrence, and death must be activated by a body deemed disposable¹⁸.

objects of geopolitical calculation and instruments of enforcement.

This latter hypothesis of increasing apprehension rates was based on the challenges at the time of detecting unauthorized border crossers in urban environments, which Operation Hold the Line, Operation Gatekeeper, and Operation Safeguard sought to mitigate. Once the border was crossed in cities such as El Paso and San Diego, an individual could immediately blend into the fabric of the city north of the border, making apprehension a challenge without violating constitutional rights :²⁰

When urban areas are uncontrolled, they provide illegal entrants an opportunity to assimilate with the population, making it difficult for the Border Patrol to quickly identify and arrest individual illegal entrants. When the Border Patrol controls the urban areas, the illegal traffic is forced to use the rural roads which offer less anonymity and accessibility to public transportation. (US Border Patrol, 1994).

The environmental and topographic conditions of this space of deterrence produce what Roxanne Lynne Doty calls a moral alibi.

The environmental and topographic conditions of this space of deterrence produce what Roxanne Lynne Doty calls a moral alibi, noting "the significance of geographic space/landscape in the process of obscuring official state responsibility for the moral consequences of the bare life that is made possible by the creation of spaces of exception²²".

invisible hand of the state that deftly merges its territorial claim with a promise of death delivered by the particular characteristics of that territory itself.

"Colonial occupation itself was a matter of

11 Launched in 2013, Arizona OpenGIS Initiative's interactive online map was designed to respond to two distinct needs of both Humane Borders and the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner (PCOME) : since 2000 Humane Borders has managed a network of water stations along known migrant routes and was interested in a spatial analysis that would allow them to better identify the best locations ; meanwhile, the forensic anthropologists at PCOME were at this time beginning to receive fragments of bodies found in the desert - a single bone or partial skeleton - and were interested in knowing where the rest of a body might be found for the purposes of identification²⁸.

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The data set that populates the map has been meticulously "scrubbed," reviewed for accuracy and detail, and is now updated monthly by a volunteer with Humane Borders who receives the mortality data directly from PCOME²⁹.

A form can be queried by decedent name, gender, year of death, cause of death, county of discovery, land management, and land corridor which results in the populating of the adjacent embedded Google map with small red circles for each corresponding case. The symbols can be individually selected to reveal case number, identity (e.g. Unidentified, male), reporting date, location, cause of death, OME determined COD (cause of death), and county. The corresponding data can also be downloaded either as spreadsheets or geographic data³⁰. While these categories appear at first to be straightforward, if administrative, a closer inspection of both individual cases and patterns amongst them reveals the complicated and entangled nature of disappearance in the borderlands.



A circle of stones marks the place where a set of human remains were found on the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge by the Armadillos, a volunteer search-and-rescue group based in southern California. July 2019.

12 The very principals of mortality data - identification of a body along with the temporal and spatial elements related to that person's death, or the *who*, the *where*, and the *when* - is disrupted by PTD's functions. Not only does a close reading reveal the layered bureaucratic conditions of the border zone, but also the ways in which ecological conditions of the desert distort the data's

resolution. What is revealed, to varying degrees, are the inconsistencies in reporting protocols, jurisdictional lapses, authorized behavior and access, and the material conditions of disappearance, which in this case is the biological impact of the Sonoran Desert ecology on a body after death.

The migrant mortality data interacts with these territorial distinctions in ways that are dynamic and in constant flux. It is truly a living data set, as it relies more on the actions and activities of the living – both human and non-human – in relation to the land than it does on those who have died and are accounted for in the data itself. From a surface read, each mark on the OGIS map corresponds to a coordinate that is understood as the place where an individual perished. But this is a faulty assumption; a closer analysis of the data reveals that each mark actually represents where a death was encountered and recorded. While it might appear a minor distinction, it is integral to understanding how the space of deterrence functions. The former interpretation suggests a full image of the crisis, offering a definitive number of those who have perished and an inherent relationship between the locations of their deaths, changes to migratory routes over time, and its relationship to the terrain. In the latter, an expanded reading of the map reveals patterns of deaths to be more closely linked to the spatial and ecological conditions of the desert as well as corresponding patterns of authorized activity by those who are not migrants, rather than the clandestine activities of migrants themselves. This can be identified in a series of specific examples, as well as in the patterns of the Post Mortem Intervals attributed to discovered remains by the PCOME.

The inextricable relationship between authorized uses of

federally managed lands and the limitations of the migrant mortality data.

The Barry M. Goldwater Air Force Range, comprising BMGR-East and BMGR-West, flanks the Cabeza Prieta to the west and north, with the majority of its three million acres residing in Yuma County but a portion also in Pima County. Much of it is active bombing range littered with unexploded ordnances and lined with signage that warns of the dangers of entering the area unauthorized. To date, sixty-one sets of remains have been recovered in areas accessible to the public with a permit, while only four sets of remains have been discovered in areas with limited or no public access³¹. I would argue that this vast disparity is not due to established patterns of migrant routes, but of the limitations of access and detectability across this vast bombing range. This hypothesis is further substantiated by a recent account of the volunteer search-and-rescue group Aguilas del Desierto, who in summer of 2018 was given access to search for a missing migrant in a small portion of the range over the course of two weekends, and in the process of their search discovered thirteen sets of remains³². That such a high number of remains could be discovered by a small group of volunteers searching on foot over the course of four days is indicative of the inextricable relationship between authorized uses of federally managed lands and the limitations of the migrant mortality data.



Volunteers with humanitarian organisations No More Deaths and the Armadillos record the coordinates of a set of human remains discovered during a search-and-rescue on the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge in Arizona. July 2019.

14 On the OGIS map, marked deaths are thickly populated in the east, and thin out as they move westward into the Cabeza Prieta and farther away from populated areas. Patterns

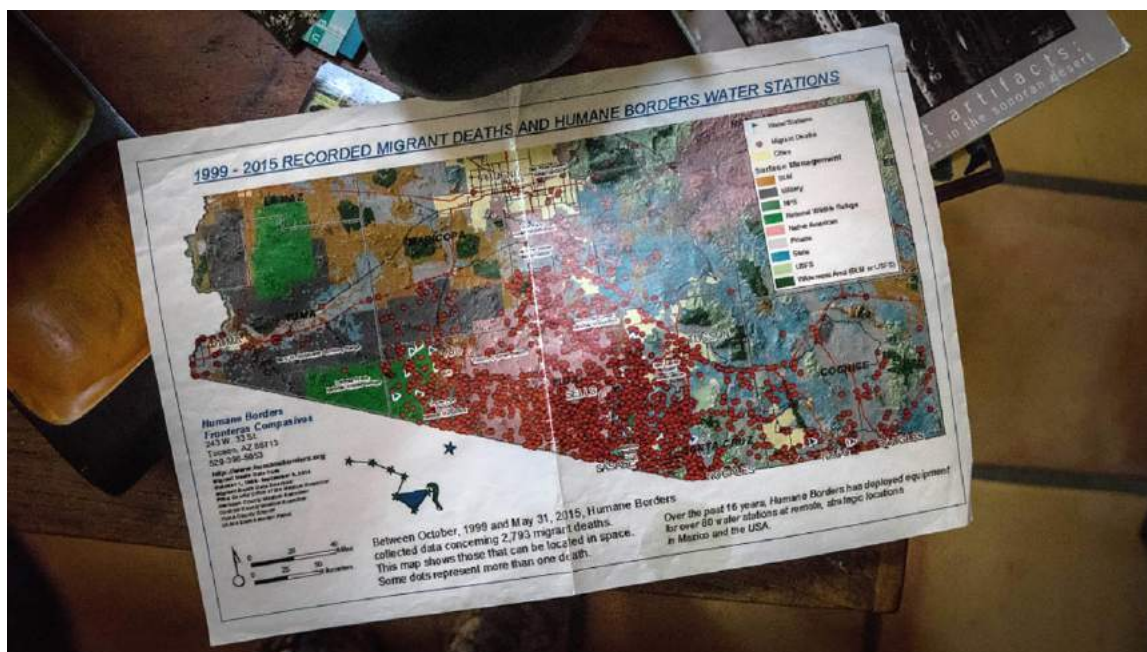
can be observed in the distribution of marks on the map, for instance in the Growler Valley west of the small incorporated community of Ajo. A cumulative view of recorded mortality

from 1998 to 2019 shows a dense cluster of discovered remains that follow the valley's eastern edge, along the base of Growler Mountains that stretch south to north. From 1998-2014, there are only a handful of deaths recorded in the Valley in total. In 2015 and 2016, the number of remains being discovered increases to nearly a dozen instances annually, and in 2017 this annual rate more than doubles to 29 sets of discovered remains. This uptick can be directly correlated to activity of the humanitarian organisation No More Deaths, who in 2014 began to expand their activities, which includes leaving water along known migrant routes, providing medical care to migrants in need, and search and rescue operations. The vast majority of those remains that were discovered in 2017 were found in the first six months of the year, over which time tensions between No More Deaths and officials from the Fish and Wildlife Service, who manage the Cabeza Prieta began to increase³³.

The conflict between the humanitarian organisation and the

federal agency, resulting in policy changes that restricted the group's activities, increased monitoring of volunteers, and a Border Patrol raid of their medical camp.

The conflict between the humanitarian organisation and the federal agency culminated in June of that year, resulting in policy changes that restricted the group's activities, increased monitoring of volunteers, and a Border Patrol raid of their medical camp outside of the community of Arivaca³⁴. It is evident that the fluctuation of the rates of discovering remains have a direct correlation to the level of activity, and in this case the level of given authorization for certain types of activity, in a geographic corridor of federally managed land that had previously not been identified as a common migration route.

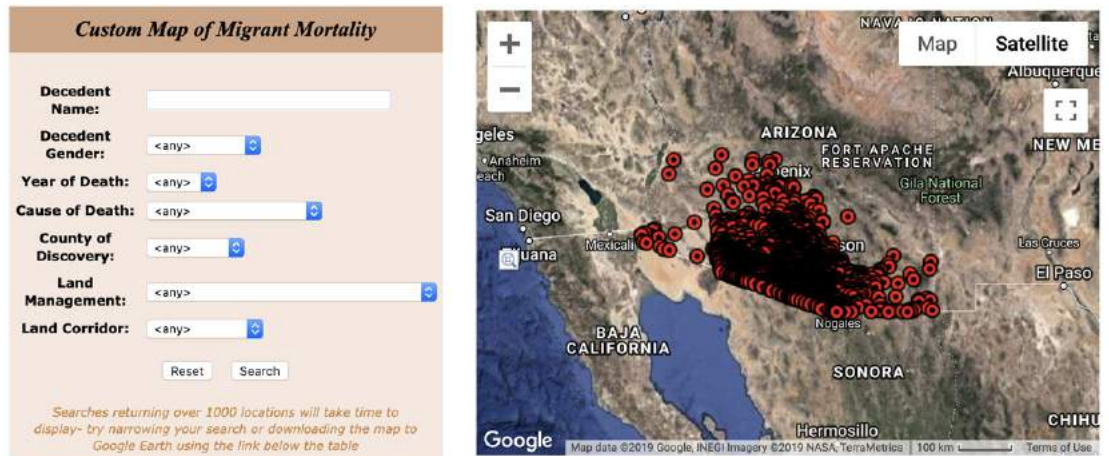


The number of people who died on both sides of the US-Mexico border increased from 398 in 2016 to 412 in 2017, according to UN data. Image © Patrick Strickland/Al Jazeera.

15 Finally, a characteristic of the data set perhaps most revealing of the map's distorted representation of the data is **the classification of each case with a Post Mortem Interval code, or PMI.** The PMI classification reveals at once the environmental and spatio-

temporal conditions of the Sonoran Desert, exposing how this space of deterrence is materialized through its unique ecological qualities, federal jurisdictions, and layered apparatus of border enforcement.

Arizona OpenGIS Initiative for Deceased Migrants



Screengrab of the Arizona OpenGIS Initiative for Deceased Migrants.

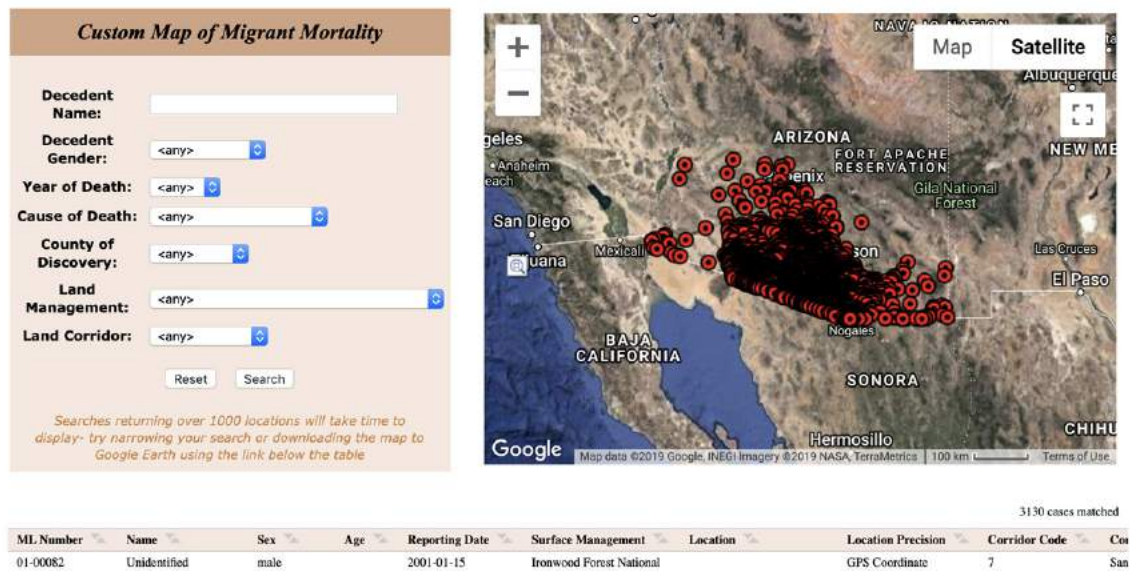
16 The PCOME has completed PMI assessments, or an estimated time of death, on an individual case by case basis for decades³⁵.

In 2013, in response to the dramatic increase of bodies being found in the desert, the medical examiners developed a 1-8 body condition scale in order to more objectively classify the sets of remains.

In 2013, in response to the dramatic increase of bodies being found in the desert, the medical examiners developed a 1-8 body condition scale in order to more objectively classify the sets of remains and their various levels of decomposition (PCOME, 2017). This scale attributes an estimated window for the time of death to the physical condition of the

remains, and ranges from less than one day since death (fully fleshed, PMI 1) to a minimum of six months and possibly years (skeletal remains, PMI 7). It must be noted, that according to Chief Medical Examiner Bruce Anderson, the estimated PMI is not a precise science³⁶. The fallibility of this attempt at an objective system is due to the nature of the Sonoran Desert's climate, topography, and ecology, and there are a variety of factors that can obscure the time of death. Knowing the amount of moisture and the level of direct exposure to sunlight are key elements in identifying the time of death, however many people search for shade in their final moments which makes this assessment less reliable post mortem. Bodies are often scavenged by animals such as vultures very quickly, who might spread the remains across large swaths of area. Ultimately, the designation of a PMI depends more on an examiner's experience and subjective interpretation than hard science.

Arizona OpenGIS Initiative for Deceased Migrants



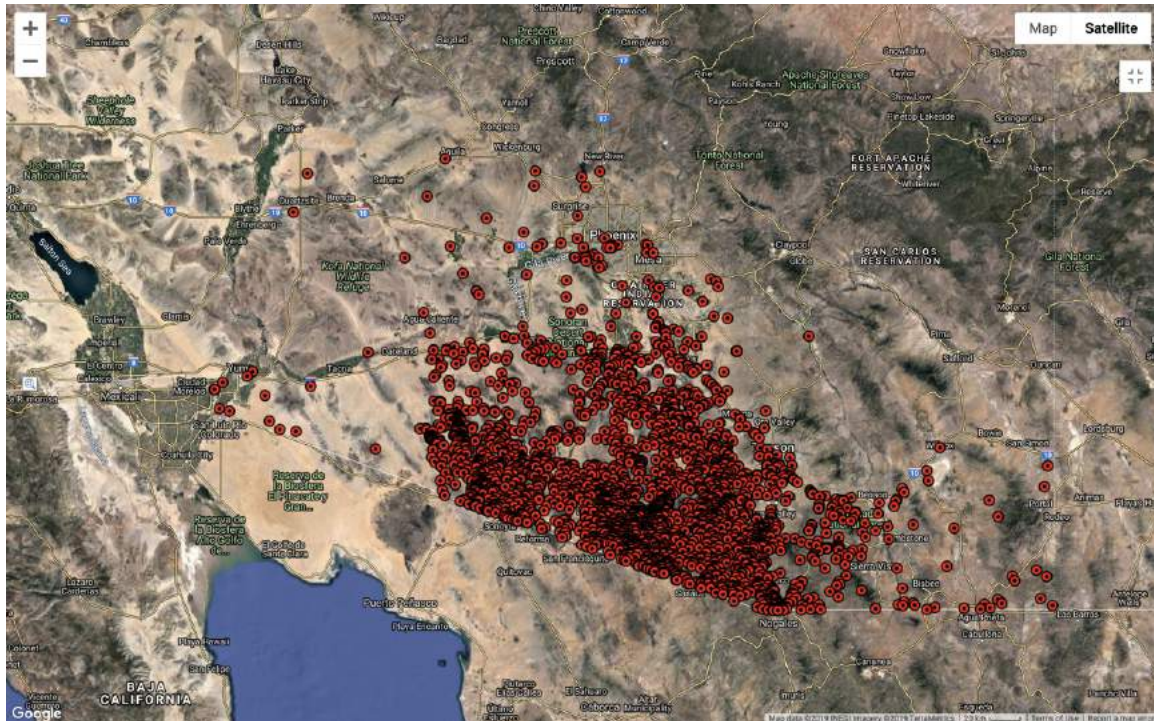
Screengrab of the Arizona OpenGIS Initiative for Deceased Migrants.

17 However, even with these inconsistencies, the PMI does reveal patterns of behavior and perception.

The discovery of remains occurring months, if not years, after the time of death is becoming increasingly common.

As of April 2019, 21% of all discovered remains were categorised as PMI 7, or were discovered a minimum of six months after death if not years later. It is significant to note that since 2015, remains coded at PMI 7 exceed any other code, revealing that the discovery

of remains occurring months, if not years, after the time of death is becoming increasingly common - not the result of search and rescue operations in response to reported missing person, but rather of a chance encounter during an unrelated activity or the concerted effort of volunteer organisations. A body found in this state evades identification - as a set of skeletal remains at this stage of decomposition does not offer fingerprints, personal affects, or clothing to aid in recognition, and any potential DNA that might be found must be matched within a domestic police database which relies on the individual having been arrested on U.S. soil previously³⁷.



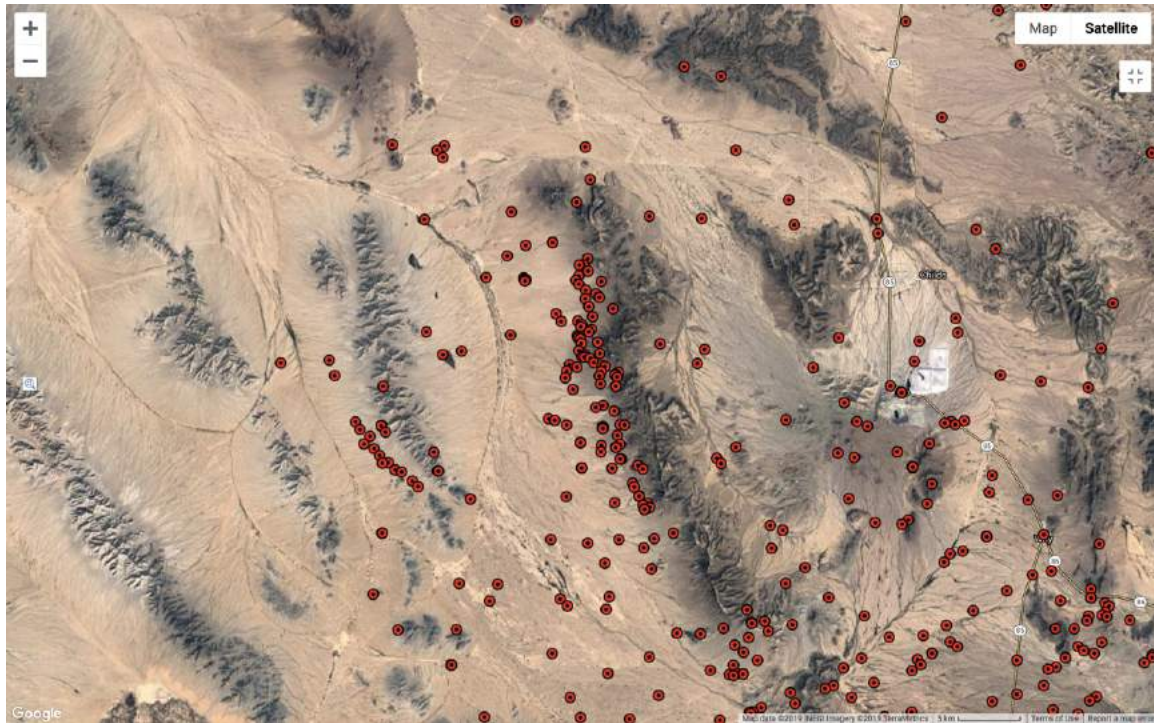
Screengrab of the Arizona OpenGIS Initiative for Deceased Migrants.

18 The rising annual rates of remains coded at PMI 7 is also indicative of the challenges of estimating the totality of those who have died in this region. The correlation of authorized behaviour and observed deaths that I have detailed in these examples, and the indeterminant amount of time that individual has been deceased, suggests that the true number of fatalities lies far outside the window of observation available to those who might seek to know it³⁸.

The true number of fatalities lies far outside the window of observation available to those who might seek to know it.

Remains are discovered by Border Patrol agents, hikers, local residents, and humanitarian volunteers (PCOME, 2019). The state's relationship to these deaths as an unfortunate byproduct or unavoidable

consequence is nowhere more apparent than in their own record-keeping protocols. There is a growing disparity between the number of deaths recorded along the border by Border Patrol and those counted by the PCOME, according to PCOME's Chief Forensic Anthropologist Bruce Anderson. A 2018 CNN exposé, however, cites Border Patrol agents who maintain that the annual numbers of border deaths published by their agency have always reflected only those discovered remains that have been encountered by the agency's own personnel³⁹. This is an illustration of the relationship between perception and accountability, or the obfuscation of state responsibility in accounting for lives lost in the desert. Those deaths that have not been directly observed by Border Patrol agents fall outside of the purview of the state's responsibility even as a statistic, and those deaths which are encountered, are understood as evidence of criminal behavior⁴⁰.



Left: screengrab of the Arizona OpenGIS Initiative for Deceased Migrants.

19 The interpretation of these deaths as consequences or byproducts of border enforcement misinterpret death as final. I do not seek to diminish the culmination of a life in tragedy here, but to recognize that lives lived extend beyond the moment of death, in spaces of mourning, grief, and remembrance. The state of limbo and the long life of death that comes from this particular form of disappearance persists on varying scales - from the months or years that family members await news from a missing relative, to the more than a thousand unidentified bodies that remain in PCOME's storage indefinitely, to the families who refuse to accept the news of the death of a loved one identified by the medical examiner, thereby also refusing the

repatriation of that body for a home burial and the legal impossibility of issuing a death certificate⁴¹.

Lives lived extend beyond the moment of death, in spaces of mourning, grief, and remembrance.

In this way, the border is materialised by this elongated space-time of Arizona's west desert, with a form of violence that is often recognized as passive and adjacent - the collateral consequence of migrants' criminal behavior.

seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area – of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations. The writing of new spatial relations (territorialisation) was, ultimately, tantamount to the production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves ; the subversion of existing property arrangements ; the classification of people according to different categories ; resource extraction ; and, finally, the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries... space was therefore the raw material of sovereignty and the violence carried with it²³."

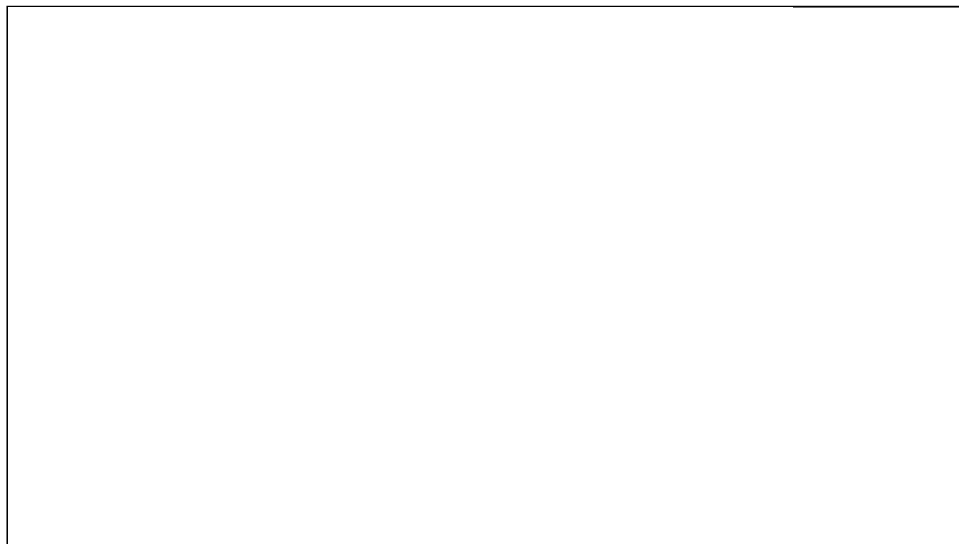
Comparing the U.S. federal management of land in Arizona to the colonial occupation Mbembe describes here is not unfounded; the specific jurisdictions of land in question are the ancestral homelands of the Tohono O'odham nation, whose territory has been drastically reduced and divided by the international border, and is now surveilled and subject to Border Patrol inspection at checkpoints at every road into the territory. Meanwhile, the various jurisdictions managed by the U.S. Department of the Interior have been demarcated as wildlife refuge and national parks, with a new set of spatial relations imposed upon them under the rubric of conservation and the preservation of nature²⁴. By necessitating that visitors purchase permits to enter, those who are on the land are efficiently classified as authorized,

unauthorized, or illegal. And finally, rather than return to the oft-cited idea of the "weaponization" of the desert, **the ways in which the space of deterrence operates as a border should be considered as a macabre form of resource extraction** that relies on extreme temperatures and rugged terrain to do the work of the border by slowing or fatally halting migrant entry into the U.S.²⁵.

In its application here, the term "deterrence" is not benign; its common usage as "the inhibition of criminal behavior by fear especially of punishment" is recast as a tool of sovereign hegemony by its appropriation into Cold War vernacular, as "the maintenance of military power for the purpose of discouraging attack²⁶". But a closer look reveals that the term likely shares its Latin root, *terrere*, "to frighten, flee" with *territory*²⁷. Deterrence, when considered in this light, becomes not just a term to describe a military tactic or government policy, but the method through which the territory is produced. The term is uprooted from its original application in PTD as a reference to the fear of death by way of the desert and is re-contextualized through the realization and visual representation of that death. In this way, a threat becomes promise as year after year more deaths accumulate in support of the logics of deterrence.

10 Below: *Environment*, video by David Soto, July 2019. Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge is over 860,000 square miles of remote and mountainous terrain along the U.S-Mexico border in Arizona's west desert. In recent years, an area known as the Growler Valley has been the site of increased

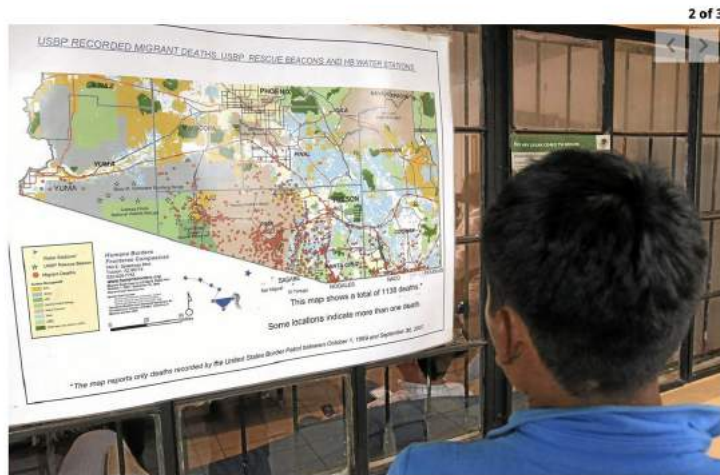
humanitarian efforts following the discoveries of dozens of sets of human remains attributed to undocumented migrants. U.S. Border Patrol actively patrols the area, and has charged nine No More Deaths volunteers with various misdemeanours related to their activities on the refuge.



III. Reading the Data/Reading the Desert

At Arizona's border morgue, bodies keep coming

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press Mar 7, 2013 Comments



In this Aug. 9, 2012 photo, a Mexican national, who is staying at a well-known immigrant shelter in Mexico, looks at an older map showing the illegal immigrant deaths in the Arizona desert, prior to him attempting to cross over into Arizona in the heat of the summer, in Nogales, Mexico. The death of migrants crossing the Southwest border has long been a tragic consequence of illegal immigration and, many say, the massive increase in U.S. border enforcement. For some, the tragedies are a powerful motivator in pushing Congress to act this year on a larger immigration reform package. (AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin)

Screengrab of a U.S. news site using the Humane Borders poster and onlooking migrant to illustrate a story about border-crossing deaths in Arizona's desert.

IV. The Border in Circulation

20 Humane Borders' Spanish-language warning posters are distributed to shelters south of the border, in areas known to be common departure points. The map of accumulated fatalities is cropped and enlarged to represent a specific corridor, with each death prominently marked and a key that describes the time it takes to walk incremental distances across the desert. It is Humane Borders' mission "to save desperate people from a horrible death by dehydration and exposure and to create a just and humane environment in the borderlands⁴²". The posters are meant to function in this vein, as a tool to convince those considering crossing the

border to find another way or not go at all, as the dangers of the desert (primarily the lack of available water and extreme temperatures) cannot be fully comprehended without a visualization of the deaths caused by those dangers.

The warning posters are the visualization of deterrence, and play an active role in the deterrent imperative.



The horizon of the Sonoran Desert in southern Arizona, taken on the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. July 2019.

21 Brian Massumi offers a useful interpretation of deterrence as a military strategy. There are fundamental differences in Massumi's analysis of deterrence as a war-time strategy post 9-11 and the way it function in PTD. As a Cold War strategy, deterrence depends on mutuality and equilibrium between two powers, in the way that one must acquire the same means to threaten (in this case, obtaining nuclear weapons capable of equal destruction) in order to neutralize the original threat.

In PTD, a sovereign power projects an assumed relationship between man and nature or man and death, in order to alter migrants' perceptions of what they are capable of.

In PTD, a sovereign power projects an assumed relationship between man and nature or man and death, in order to alter migrants' perceptions of what they are capable of, i.e. of the possibility that they might successfully cross the desert in spite of its vastness, rugged terrain, extreme temperatures, and insufficient water. With these differences in mind, Massumi still offers a framework through which to understand Border Patrol's application of deterrence as a tool of prevention in the borderlands, and the ways in which the deaths represented in Humane Border's map, and the map itself, functions an active producer of territory⁴³.

PTD inverts the temporal logics of both

prevention and deterrence. Prevention, as a tactic, "assumes an ability to assess threats empirically and identify their causes⁴⁴". PTD responded to a known but unrealized threat when it accurately projected that common routes of unauthorized entry would be diverted into rural and remote areas following operations in San Diego and El Paso. But it misidentified the cause of border crossing, placing it at the end of a migrant's journey rather than prior to the phenomenon of migration itself.

To mobilize deterrence as a tool of prevention assumes that migrants cross the border because it is easy to do so, neglecting the root economic and social causes that prompt someone to leave their home to begin with.

To mobilize deterrence as a tool of prevention assumes that migrants cross the border because it is easy to do so, neglecting the root economic and social causes that prompt someone to leave their home to begin with. Deterrence, meanwhile, is mobilized "when the means of prevention have failed". In this case, the means of prevention had not yet failed when deterrence as a strategy was mobilized, but it was and still is understood and widely accepted by the U.S. Border Patrol that a 100% rate of successful apprehension of unauthorized border crossers is an impossible goal⁴⁵. It was known that regardless of border enforcement measures, infrastructural or otherwise, migrants would attempt to cross the border. In this way, deterrence in PTD becomes

not a final measure fixed in time but is perpetually "maintained by continuing to produce the conditions that bring the cause so vividly into the present" – the condition of dying in the desert. The medium of deterrence is not heat or rugged terrain, it is death, and it is necessary that death occurs in order to perpetually strengthen the very threat of death as an operative strategy :

The only way to have the kind of epistemological immediacy necessary for deterrence is for its process to have its own cause and to hold it fast within itself. The quickest and most direct way for a process to acquire its own cause is for it to produce one. The easiest way to do this is to take the imminence of the very threat prevention has failed to neutralize and make it the foundation of a new process. In other words, the process must take the effect it seeks to avoid (nuclear annihilation) and organize itself around it, as the cause of its very own dynamic (deterrence)⁴⁶.

The deaths, as recorded on the OGIS death map, demarcate the sovereign territory of the United States, so that no line on the map or wall across the desert is necessary.

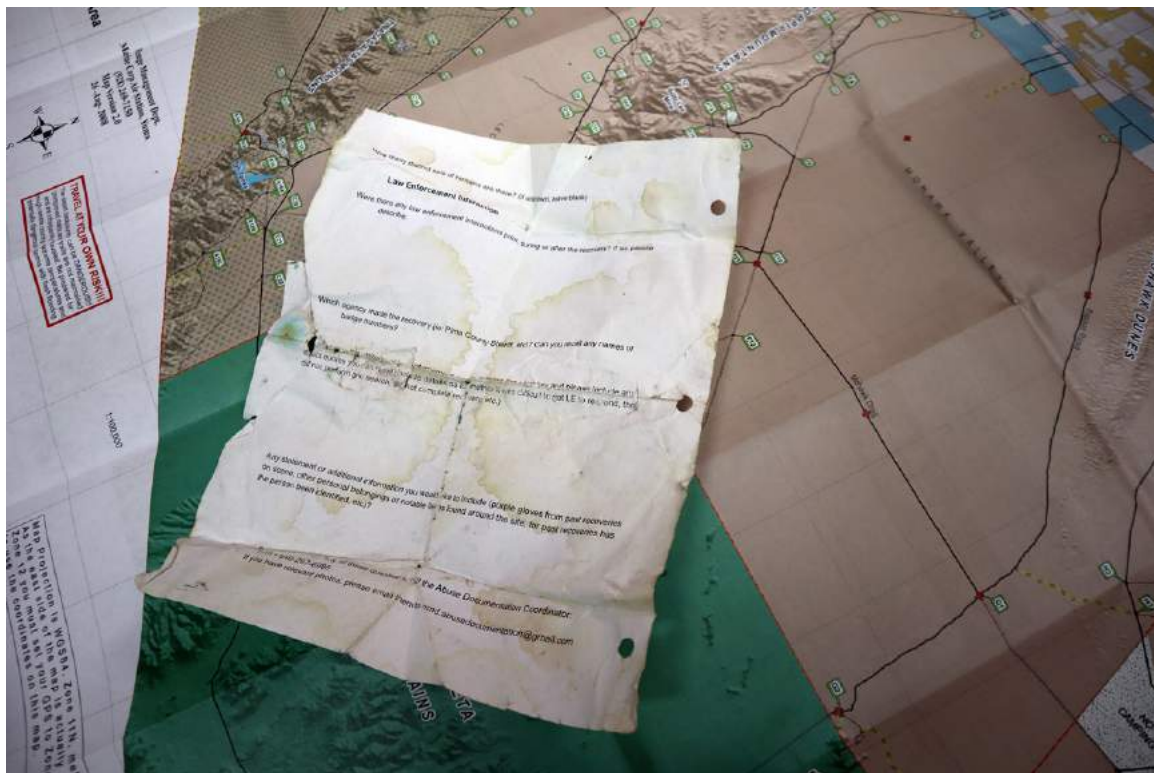
By replacing "nuclear annihilation" here with "death in the desert," it becomes apparent that the alarming number of fatalities in the west desert of Arizona should not be understood as a mere byproduct of policy and border enforcement, but as the necessary conditions of border production. The deaths, as recorded on the OGIS death map, demarcate the sovereign territory of the United States, so that no line on the map or wall across the desert is necessary. PTD must facilitate the production of those very deaths it purports to avoid in order for deterrence to qualify as a tool of prevention.



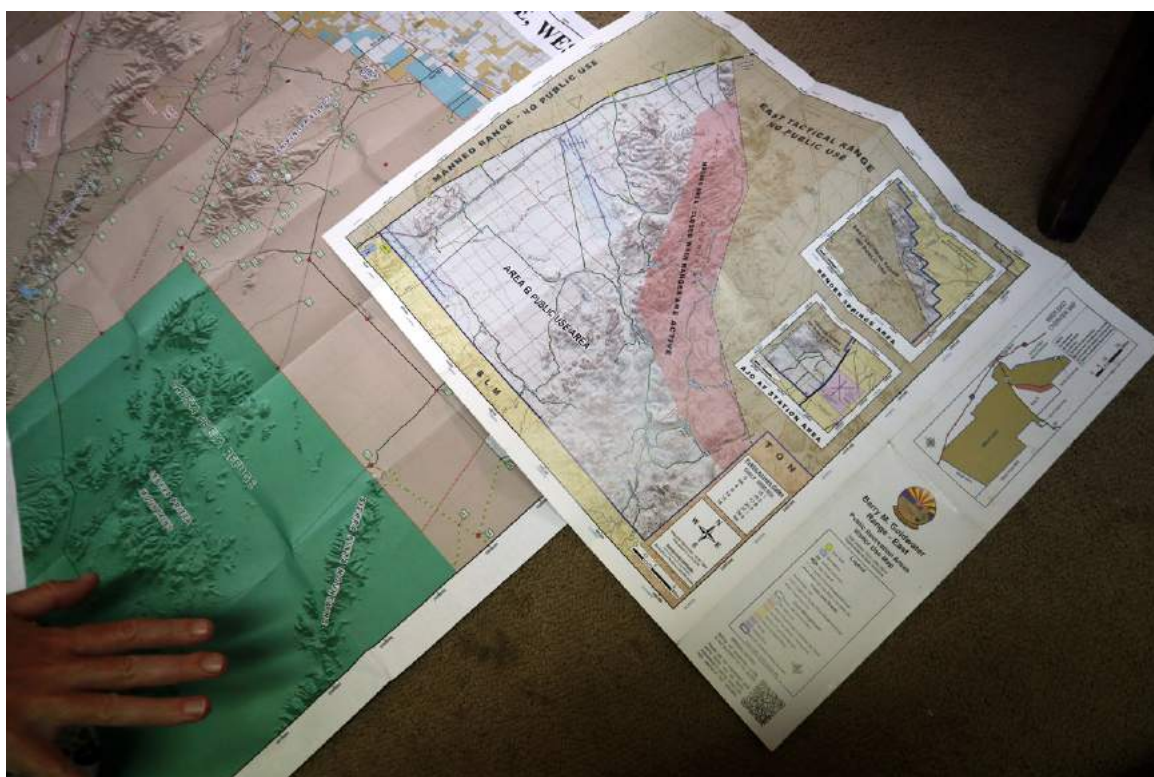
A portion of the wall along the U.S.-Mexico border in Arizona crests a hill in the distance. July 2019.

22 By producing warning posters depicting migrant fatalities, **Humane Borders seeks to prevent the suffering** of those who intend to cross Arizona's west desert. **Yet, in their mission, the organization echoes the same sentiment and strategy as U.S. Border Patrol** by responding to border-crossing deaths by deterring migrants from border-crossing attempts, thereby doing the work of securitisation and border enforcement. The visual representation of deaths across the border asserts U.S. sovereign territory,

clearly demarcating the threat of death in an attempt to enter the country unauthorized. Heat, lack of water, and distance are not the elements that function to deter potential border-crossers, nor are they qualities that can be concretely communicated prior to an attempt. The threat of death, which becomes promise with every discovered set of remains, must be communicated, as they are in the warning posters, for "deterrence" to function as a strategy.



A form carried by volunteers with the humanitarian organisation No More Deaths, in the scenario that they encounter a set of human remains in Arizona's desert. July 2019.



A volunteer with the humanitarian organisation No More Deaths shares her collection of the federally-managed lands in Arizona's west desert. July 2019.

23 The deaths of thousands of migrants attempting to cross Arizona's west desert should not be understood as collateral damage or the unfortunate consequence of U.S. Border Patrol's Prevention Through Deterrence strategy. Rather, they should be interpreted as an operative condition of "deterrence," and the very material of the maintenance of sovereign territory. The results of this

strategy are subsequently communicated through various media as threats and warnings to deter those who may follow. By interrogating deterrence through the lens of the imperative, the strategy's contradictions appear. The imperative here, as a mode of communication, simultaneously endeavors to command the end of a behavior - crossing the border outside of state-sanctioned channels - while depending

09:11

Dr. Caitlin Vogelsberg and Dr. Jennifer Vollner, of the Pima County Medical Examiners Office, discuss the challenges of identifying recovered human remains attributed to undocumented migrants in Arizona. Video by David Soto. July 2019.



Members of the Armadillos, a volunteer group based in southern California, cover a human bone found during a search-and-rescue mission on the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge in Arizona. The cloth is intended to protect the remains and be easily identified by the county sheriff when they return to recover them. July 2019.

13 What makes the area particular when compared to other southwest borderlands is that this region of western Arizona is primarily composed of federal land managed by various agencies within the United States Department of the Interior. The areas accounted for in the OGIS map include, from east to west : the sovereign territory of the Tohono O'odham Nation, whose lands extend south into Mexico, bifurcated by the national border ; the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, managed by the National Park Service ; Cabeza Prieta, a wildlife refuge managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service ; and

the Barry M. Goldwater Air Force Range (East and West), an active Air Force base and bombing range managed by the Bureau of Land Management and Department of Defense. These various demarcations of land and their corresponding management agencies point to a complex web of federal authority, jurisdiction, access, and history.

The migrant mortality data interacts with these territorial distinctions in ways that are dynamic and in constant flux.

upon the continuation of that behavior in order to maintain rhetorical and political force. The deterrent imperative does not simply enunciate threats or punitive measures,

it actively produces the consequences of that threat.



A volunteer with the humanitarian organisation No More Deaths shares her collection of the federally-managed lands in Arizona's west desert. July 2019.

26 Cartographies of death are not without purpose. The Arizona OpenGIS Initiative for Deceased Migrants does the important work of maintaining a public record of deaths that the U.S. government would rather keep hidden, and consistently work to obscure. But the practice of mapping deaths, when mobilized outside of concrete actions and into spheres of communication and representation, can have unintended consequences ; the flattening of individual deaths into an image of calamity can easily gloss over, or worse, conceal the material conditions of disappearance.

Behind each point and line on the Initiative's map are layers of securitization, ideologies, legal and social constructions, and ecological factors that in tandem comprise the space of disappearance in Arizona's west desert.



A Border Patrol rescue beacon intended to be activated by migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, on the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. July 2019.

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Notes

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3 Tim Murphy, "Want to Track Deaths Along the Border? There's an App for That," *Mother Jones*, 9 May 2013. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/05/pima-county-arizona-tracking-migrant-deaths/>.

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5 Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner *Annual Report 2017*, June 2017, https://webcms.pima.gov/government/medical_examiner/; The Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner (PCOME) estimates their data accounts for 98% of all migrant mortality data accounted for on the OGIS map, as they also manage medical examinations for nearby Santa Cruz County and Cochise County. Unless otherwise noted, all references to qualitative or descriptive information from the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner are from an interview conducted by the author with PCOME anthropologists Dr. Bruce Anderson, Dr. Caitlin Vogelsberg, and Dr. Jennifer Vollner, on 4 April, 2019.

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14 Border Patrol restates this anticipated decrease of migration in its own strategy outlines from the time, stating "The passage of The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) should reduce illegal immigration as the Mexican economy improves," *Border Patrol Strategic Plan*, 3.

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- 16 Maurizio Albahari, "Death and the Modern State: Making Borders and Sovereignty at the Southern Edges of Europe," Working Paper 137, (The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, UC San Diego, May 2006).
- 17 Vicki Squire, "Acts of Desertion: Abandonment and Renouncement at the Sonoran Borderzone," *Antipode* 47, No. 2, 2015.
- 18 Mbembé writes, in the context of colonial occupation, "sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not," "Necropolitics," 27.
- 19 Juanita Sundberg, "Diabolic Caminos in the Desert and Cat Fights on the Río: A Posthumanist Political Ecology of Boundary Enforcement in the United States-Mexico Borderlands," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, No. 2 (March 2011), 323.
- 20 This obstacle would be eliminated in 2010 when then-governor Jan Brewer signed SB 1070, or the "show your papers law," which, until it was overturned in 2016, gave "police broad power to detain anyone suspected of being in the country illegally," Randal C. Archibold, "Arizona Enacts Stringent Law on Immigration," *The New York Times*, 23 April 2010.
- 21 Author's own measurements, based on Euclidian distance calculated in Google Earth Pro ; Boyce et al., 2019, offer a series of alternative variables to Euclidian distance, such as slope, vegetation, "jaggedness," and ground temperature as a way of "measuring and conceptualizing borderlands space". While this might seem like a methodological preference in measuring migrants' journeys, the calculations offered in their work provide a way of better understanding the ecological and topographical challenges of traversing the Sonoran Desert on foot.
- 22 Roxanne Lynn Doty, "Bare life: border-crossing deaths and spaces of moral alibi," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29 (2011), 600.
- 23 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 25-26.
- 24 For a concise history and analysis of the relationship between the designation of the Cabeza Prieta as a wildlife refuge and the militarization of the border, see Lisa Meierotto, "A Disciplined Space: The Co-evolution of Conservation and Militarization on the US-Mexico Border," *Anthropological Quarterly* 87, No. 3 (Summer 2014), 637-664 ; a very recent example of the ways in which the imposition of colonial spatial relations in the Cabeza Prieta intersect with the rubric of conservation can be found in the court decision issued by U.S. District Court Judge Bernardo Velasco who wrote "The Defendants did not get an access permit, they did not remain on designate roads, and they left water, food, and crates in the Refuge. All of this, in addition to violating the law, erodes the national decision to maintain the Refuge in its pristine nature" in his verdict against humanitarian volunteers charged with various federal misdemeanors in August 2017, Paul Ingram, "No More Deaths volunteers found guilty for water drops in protected wilderness," *Tucson Sentinel*, January 18, 2019.
- 25 See Geoffrey Alan Boyce, Samuel N. Chambers, Sarah Launius, "Bodily Inertia and the Weaponization of the Sonoran Desert in the US boundary Enforcement : A GIS Modeling of Migration Routes through Arizona's Altar Valley", *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, (4 March 2019), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2331502419825610> ; Rory Carroll, "US Border Patrol uses desert as 'weapon' to kill thousands of migrants, report says", *The Guardian*, 7 December 2016.
- 26 "Deterrence", Merriam-Webster.com, 2019. <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (29 April 2019).
- 27 Stuart Elden, "Land, Terrain, Territory," *Progress in Human Geography* 34, No. 6, (December 2010): 806-807, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132510362603>. Elden writes, "The Latin *terrere* is to frighten, deriving from the Greek *trein* meaning to flee from fear, to be afraid, and the Sanskrit, *trasati*, meaning he trembles, is afraid. This means that the term territory has an association with fear and violence, an association that is more compelling in history than etymology".
- 28 Anderson, in conversation with the author, 2019.
- 29 Mike Kreyche, Humane Borders volunteer, in conversation with the author, 1 April 2019.
- 30 The forms that the data can be downloaded as, .csv and .kml files, are indicative of the platforms' practical applications for researchers and academics interested in statistics and spatial analyses of migrant mortality in Arizona.
- 31 Author's assessment, using the Arizona OpenGIS Initiative for Deceased Migrants map.

32 Amy Goodman, "Military Cover-Up? 100s of Migrants Feared Dead in Mass Grave at AZ's Barry Goldwater Bombing Range," *Democracy Now!*, 15 August 15 2018.

33 Ryan Devereaux, "Justice Department Attempts to Suppress Evidence That the Border Patrol Targeted Humanitarian Volunteers," *The Intercept*, 16 September 2018.

34 Devereaux, "New Documents Bolster Case That Border Patrol Retaliated Against Humanitarian Group" *The Intercept*, 18 October 2018 ; Devereaux, "Arizona Aid Group Questions Border Patrol Surveillance Following A Raid On Its Camp," *The Intercept*, 17 June 2017.

35 Anderson, in conversation with the author, 2019.

36 Anderson, in conversation with the author, 2019.

37 Anderson, in conversation with the author, 2019.

38 This study of the missing data in the Arizona desert does not seek to establish some semblance of truth in numbers, or a search for a complete picture of tragedy. The numbers of those who have perished thus far has failed to effectively mobilize significant public or political action outside of the grass-roots efforts of those who live in and are directly impacted by federal policies in the borderlands. My emphasis on the missing data is focused specifically on the methodological and material conditions of visibility, access, jurisdiction, and authority when accounting for the dead in the space of deterrence.

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<https://www.cnn.com/2018/05/14/us/border-patrol-migrant-death-count-invs/index.html>.

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41 De León, *The Land of Open Graves*, 71 ; anecdote of families refusing to acknowledge the death of a relative from Anderson, in conversation with the author, 2019.

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43 Brian Massumi, "Potential Politics and the Primacy of Preemption", *Theory & Event* 10, No. 2, (2007).

44 Massumi, "Potential Politics and the Primacy of Preemption".

45 Border Patrol states : "Although a 100 percent apprehension rate is an unrealistic goal, we believe we can achieve a rate of apprehensions sufficiently high to raise the risk of apprehension to the point that many will consider it futile to continue to attempt illegal entry", *BP Strategy 1994 and Beyond*, 6.

46 Massumi, "Potential Politics and the Primacy of Preemption".
