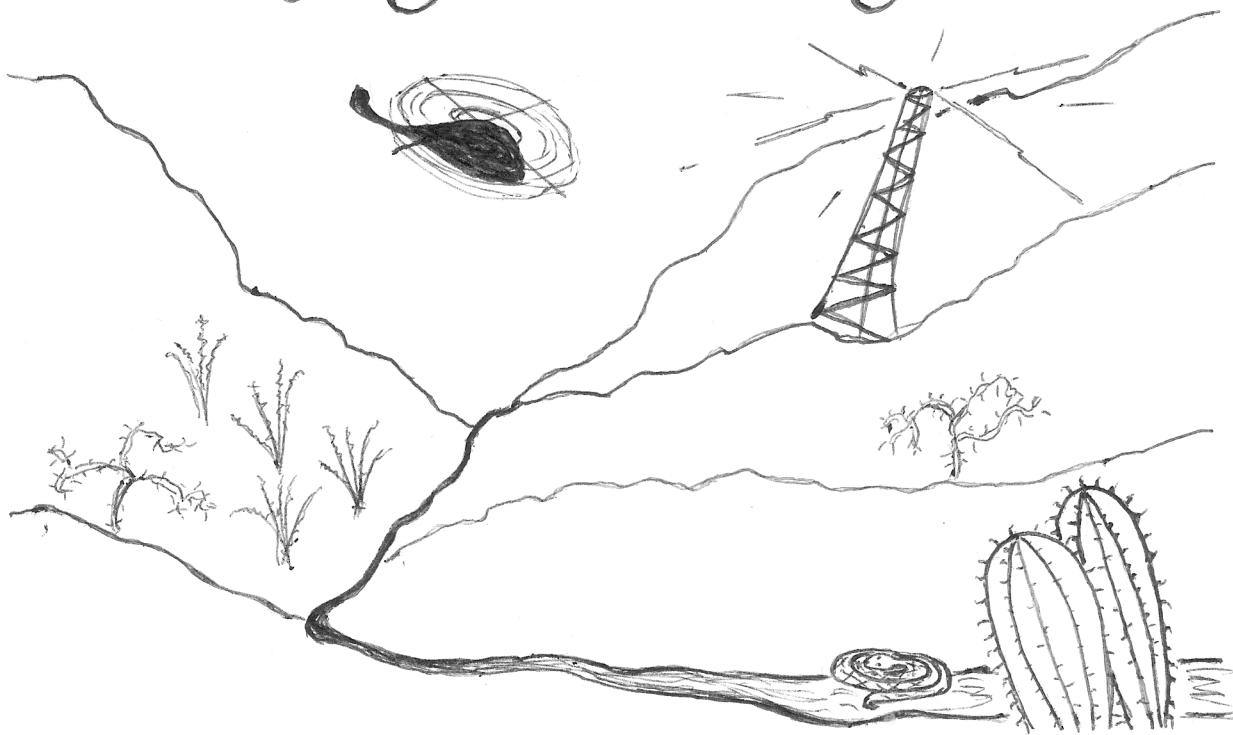


Welcome to the  
**DESERT**  
*...enjoy your stay.*



Racism, Migration & the Border  
in Arizona, U.S.A.

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## Introduction - why write about Arizona?

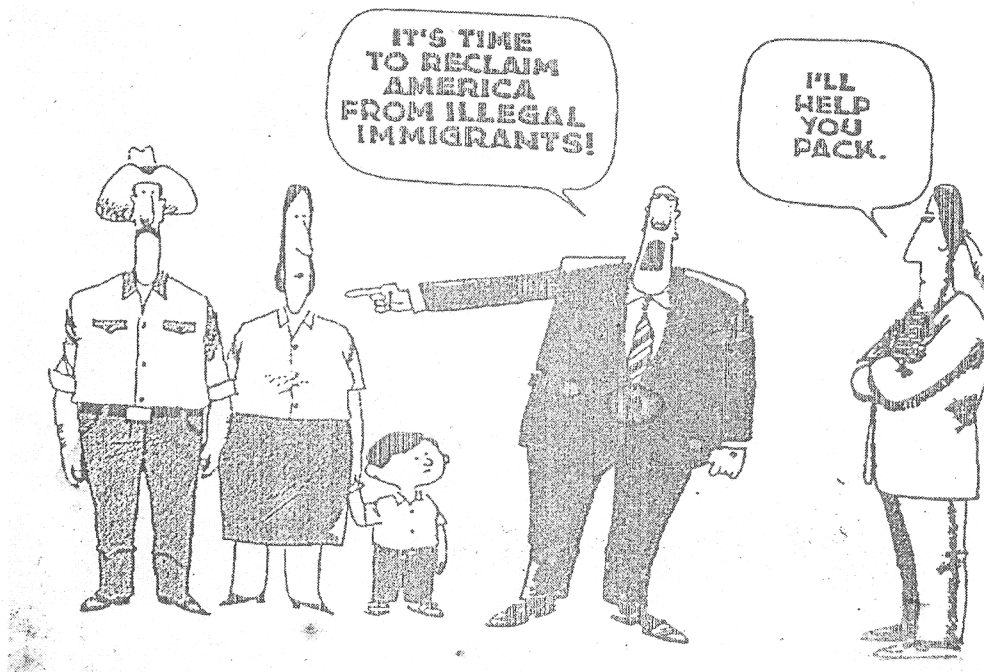
“For centuries, mobility has been a tool, a strategy used by the oppressed to escape conditions of violence and exploitation. To criminalize mobility...is to use violence to enforce that exploitation and dictate its conditions.”

— Geoff Boyce.

Within the United States, the state of Arizona can be viewed as the vanguard of racist and anti-immigrant policies, and whilst this *kind* of racism exists in many places in the US, it is the *degree* to which Arizona goes that makes it different from elsewhere, although other conservative states wait in the wings to see how Arizona's right-wing policies operate, hoping to follow suit. Arizona is itself a migrant state. The population has doubled relentlessly every 20 years since 1910, when there resided only 200,000 inhabitants in Arizona; the state now has a population of 6.6million. Most of those people have migrated from other areas of the United States, but it remains those that come from outside the nation-state of the US that are the recipients of racism and border enforcement policies. It's therefore poignant to talk about migration and racism in this context; the hypocrisy of a migrant state being so full of anti-immigrant sentiment is flagrant, but the right-wingers continue to perpetuate racist policies and make it seem like they have the authority to do so.

I spent the month of July 2010 in Arizona, and although not a long time to spend in a place, I learnt a phenomenal amount about how border enforcement and racism operate in this setting. I found it useful to think about and analyse the issue of migration in a context that is entirely different to the European one. People migrate for very different reasons and in a very different way, with a very different set of problems that they come up against. I felt that people thinking about and working on migration issues in Europe may be interested in how and why things operate as they do in Arizona, and so produced this writing as a resource.

Part 1 and Part 2 of this writing is an analysis of how historical events have produced the situation that now exists in Arizona, and goes on to describe how current circumstances and policies are perpetuating racism and fear of immigration. Part 2 examines some of the ways in which people are affected in their every day lives by the existence and enforcement of the border. It is rather more personalised and makes for lighter reading.



## Part 1: Racist roots – a history of racism, migration and the border in Arizona.

*[When I first got to the United States, I spent 2 months in the state of New Mexico, which neighbours Arizona to the east. During my time there, many people told me that New Mexico was a much less racist place for people to live than Arizona. While the 3 principle communities in New Mexico (Hispanic, Indigenous, and European descendants) did not seem particularly integrated with one another, there also seemed a kind of ease with which they lived alongside each other. New Mexico residents informed me that the colour of a person's skin did not automatically dictate their class position in society. Not so in Arizona, I was told. So this was my starting point for thinking about Arizona. But no matter how liberal a state is in the US, it always holds a legacy of colonialism and racism, making racism endemic to every state. Is Arizona really worse than other places in the US? And if so, what were the historical factors that led this to be the case? And how has that historical legacy created a context for more racist policies to be brought forth?]*

This is a fairly detailed account of how the border in Arizona came to exist as it does today, which looks at the roots of migration and racism and how it has changed over time. Some of this history is particular to Arizona, but of course there are overlaps with the history of the United States as a whole<sup>1</sup>.

### Colonialism and resistance

In the 1580s, Spanish colonisers started to move northwards through Mexico into what is today the south-west of the United States. They had already grown wealthy through conquering the Incas of Peru and the Aztecs of Mexico and subsequently exploiting their natural resources, and they imagined that moving northwards would yield yet more juicy goods to make them even richer. The first place that they landed was in what is now New Mexico, along the fertile plains of the river that flowed through it, now called the Rio Grande, where people had lived since time immemorial. To the dismay of the Spanish invaders, the area didn't have the gold and other riches they so desired. However, they resolved to make it a Spanish colony due to the potential for agriculture, and later, mining. From early colonising in New Mexico, the Spanish colonisers spread outwards, to encompass what are now the states of California, Wyoming, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, and Texas (see map opposite); all of this land became part of northern Mexico.

The colonisers had no real interest in the local population, but they were to spend the next 300 years having a hell of a time trying to keep a foothold on these territories due to the potency of local resistance. The settlers attempted the establishment of missions, ranches, and military garrisons in an attempt to control the locals, but all was to remain precarious due to the fierce resistance of many tribes, such as the Apache, O'odham, Yaki, Wallapi, Kamanchi and Dene, amongst others. In the 17th century the colonisers were booted out of New Mexico twice through popular rebellion. Only along the coast of what is now California did the settlers succeed in domesticating the local population. In the area of Arizona, the resistance was the most consistently fierce.

There are two events which are then pertinent to the history of the creation of the border. The first is the independence of Mexico from Spain in 1821, after a war of independence that Mexico won, but which practically bankrupted the new country. The second is the US-Mexico war, fought between 1846 and 1848, which Mexico subsequently lost. The United States precipitated the war by first invading Texas, and then other parts of what was then northern Mexico. The US eventually captured Mexico City, which put Mexico in a position where it was forced to give up all of its northern

<sup>1</sup> Much of the following historical information is a transcript of an interview done with Geoff Boyce, an academic and activist who specialises in border history and geography in Arizona. Thanks to Geoff.





States which were formally a part of Mexico that became territory of the United States after the U.S.-Mexican war, 1846-'48. The area constituted 900,000 square miles.

territories<sup>2</sup> (around 900, 000 square miles, which represented 55% of its overall territory), for a sum of \$15million (\$380million today), in the “Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo”. This part of history is key to understanding who in the modern-day United States gets counted as a “foreigner” and who is seen to “belong”; of who would become displaced and of who would gain advantages in terms of resources, privileges, opportunities, and subsidies. It is from this point onwards that the modern-day border between Mexico and the States starts to become ever more relevant in the control it exerts over people's lives, as before this time there was no real border. However, the newly drawn-up border was to remain nothing more than a line in the sand for some time to come.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo maintained that it would honour all claims to land held by Mexican citizens that were in existence prior to the US-Mexican war, but the reality was often to the contrary. In Arizona for example, after the signing of the Treaty white settlers flooded in to this new part of the United States, seeing the potential for the appropriation of land for ranching and the exploitation of resources, as well as for the future building of a rail-road to transport those resources. From the outset, the settlers were extremely corrupt in their dealings with the land. They would get land deeds from local authorities that were written in Spanish, make highly inaccurate English translations, and lay claim to the land themselves. Land was also bought very cheaply and sold on for much more. This was how Anglos (people of Northern European descent) started to gain a stronghold in Arizona and the existing population became disenfranchised.

In 1853 a further treaty known as the “Gadsden Purchase”<sup>3</sup>, extended the territory of southern Arizona and south-western New Mexico even further. An area of nearly 30,000 square-miles (about the size of Scotland) was bought from Mexico by the United States for \$10million. This was so that the US would have an area of flat land for the new rail-road construction to run through, as it would otherwise need to be built through the mountains. What is often left out of this history is that the Gadsden Purchase forced 5,000 square miles of what had previously been O'odham homeland to become part of the United States, permanently dividing O'odham country between the United States and Mexico. The O'odham were not consulted, nor even mentioned in the terms of the purchase. This marked the third colonisation of O'odham land; from Spanish to Mexican to US-American. Anglo settlers then began the appropriation of their land, both for the rail-road, and for ranching, pushing the O'odham onto much smaller areas of reservation.

During the process of land appropriation, the new settlers in Arizona were to encounter a problem: indigenous resistance, especially from the Apache tribe, was so high, and banditry was so widespread, that it was very difficult to exploit the natural resources of the area to the degree that they wanted to. The level of resistance also made a bad climate for investment from outside the state. It was felt that economic progress could not be made until the “Indian problem” had been dealt with, and to do that the settlers would need greater control of the region. Until this time Arizona was not a state in and of itself; it was pretty much controlled from a city in New Mexico. The settlers maintained that what was needed to overcome the problem was to create a separate state, which would have a more centrally organised administration and military presence, including military garrisons that could operate locally and independently, so that indigenous people might be brought under control. Nonetheless, it took an additional 30 years – until the 1880s – for the settlers to pacify indigenous resistance.

Because of the military success of the indigenous population in Arizona prior to the US-Mexican war, the area was to remain comparatively empty of settlers until Anglo settlement after the war. In New Mexico, however, where resistance was less, over time it was possible for greater Spanish/Mexican settlement to occur. This meant that more of a Mexican stronghold was formed in New Mexico than in Arizona, where a political and economic bourgeoisie became established, and

2 For the history buffs: after the 1936 Texan revolution, Texas claimed its independence from Mexico, which Mexico did not recognise. This work takes the historical perspective of Mexico also having lost the territory of Texas in the US-Mexican war, and takes the figures for how much land was lost to include Texas.

the local population obtained greater rights. Spanish became recognised as an official language in New Mexico, and to this day, it remains one of only two states that recognises a language other than English (in Arizona, Spanish, as well as the indigenous languages of Navajo, Apache and Akimel O'odham are listed as "foreign languages spoken in Arizona"<sup>3</sup>).

Ironically, in the long run, the resistance of native peoples in Arizona meant that eventually it was white settlers who came to the region, and these settlers of course held a certain amount of power to push for their own agendas. Because the prior Spanish/Mexican colonial stronghold was a weaker one, the new Anglo settlers found it easy to steal land rights and disenfranchise the people who were already settled. In this way, it was these early white settlers in Arizona who were to create the underpinnings for the racist policies of migration and border control that we see today. The potential for finding work has meant a massive demographic influx to Arizona. After the initial flood of moneyed white settlers with mining interests came migrant labour in the form of Europeans of all nationalities, Mexicans, and Chinese (who came in to work on the rail-road). The trend continues to this day, and so Arizona's population continues to grow, although it is mainly US citizens who now migrate. But the agenda for who should be able to stay and who should go was originally set by those who came to Arizona to exploit resources and appropriate land, and policies continue to be made in that vein.

So we can see that in the early days of settlement, indigenous resistance shaped the way in which land was appropriated. The next important area of history was in the workers' unions that formed out of the migrant labour that came to Arizona; in fact in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Arizona was to become a hotbed of militant union activity, along with other areas along the border. At this time, union organising transcended the border, involving people living in both Mexico and the US; in fact migrant workers of many different nationalities were involved in the same worker struggle. Union activity was militant in Arizona, and the authorities' response to it was harsh; in 1905 for example, 60 migrant workers were massacred during a strike at a copper mine, which subsequently fed into the beginning of the Mexican Revolution. Political organising was particularly concerned with resisting racial hierarchies; for example in 1917, a huge strike took place at one of the world's biggest copper mines, which was partially an anti-war strike, and partially in support of the fact that Mexican workers were receiving a lesser wage than European workers and were unable to receive any kind of promotion. In southern Texas in 1918 there was an insurgency called "Plan of San Diego," which was aimed at spreading the Mexican Revolution, and was fought for 3 or 4 years. When the First World War ended, US troops were redeployed to southern Texas to put down the insurgency, which led to tens of thousands of refugees fleeing into Mexico.

It should be noted that up until this time the border was still not really a determining factor in how people migrated or how they organised in terms of political resistance. In fact, the first immigration law only emerged in 1882 in the form of the Chinese Exclusion Act<sup>4</sup>. People deemed to be criminals, mentally handicapped, or suffering from seriously contagious diseases such as leprosy, were also excluded from permission to enter. No other immigration restrictions existed, and as yet, no-one was in the least bit concerned about Mexican migrant workers.

In addition, although there was a legal framework for prohibiting certain groups from entry, it wasn't until 1922 that any kind of border agency was formed. What would come to be known as Border Patrol was then set up, specifically to police Chinese migrants, as well as to enforce laws regarding the prohibition of alcohol. Arizona then implemented the first immigration policy detailing who should be allowed to enter. The policy stated that if, for example, 20% of people already living in the area of Arizona were from Germany, then 20% of those given permission to

<sup>3</sup> From the website of the Federation of American Immigration Reform

<sup>4</sup> Chinese people had come primarily to participate in the California Gold Rush, which was well tolerated until the economy nose-dived in the wake of the US Civil War. The "Chinese Exclusion Act" was then enacted as the Chinese came to be seen as a threat. From this time on, the size of the Chinese community in the US became frozen, whereas the European community was allowed to continue to grow.

migrate to Arizona would also be from Germany. This was a way for conservatives to maintain the status quo in terms of ethnic populations, preventing a feared flood of migrants from a different racial background. At the time, the Anglos were still more scared of an Italian, Polish or Greek influx of migrants than of a Mexican one. In fact, during World War 2, what was called the "Brasero Programme" created a policy of bringing in Mexicans to work, primarily in agriculture, without a minimum wage or health and safety regulations. The programme continued until 1965, when a period of border industrialisation began and Mexicans came to work in factories in the area instead. As time went on, factories shifted over the border into Mexico as the labour was so much cheaper. This had the effect of breaking the continuity of union activity. It was also the point in time when it became illegal to be in the US without the relevant papers.

## **Leading up to the present day**

We can see that thus far, direct colonialism and settlement was the primary means by which control was maintained in Arizona and other areas. As time goes on, we come to realise that there has been an ever-increasing shift towards the enforcement of the border. This is the means through which a modern form of colonialism is operated; the border acting as an instrument of displacement for some people, and bestowing advantages in terms of resources, privileges, opportunities and subsidies upon others. As the border has grown more enforced, it has also inhibited any kind of cross-border political organising that was previously potent. However, until the 1970s, Border Patrol remained a very small organisation; even after President Carter expanded the organisation during a period of post-1960s racial anxiety in the South-West, following a series of race riots. Carter attempted to deal with the problem of illegal immigration (which had only become illegal 12 years before) by restricting employment for immigrants. Until this time, migrants had essentially been able to work anywhere, although they didn't receive the full rights of a citizen.

In the 1980's an important movement grew up that should be taking note of known as the Sanctuary Movement, which posed a challenge to immigration policy that excluded Central American refugees from being granted asylum. Between 1980 and 1991, nearly 1million Central Americans crossed the US-Mexican border in order to seek asylum from violence and political repression, particularly from civil wars in Guatemala and El Salvador, but also in the wake of the Nicaraguan revolution. The restrictive policy of Reagan's administration greatly impeded these refugees from gaining asylum status; Central Americans were argued to be "economic migrants" for whom the "well-founded fear of violence" that was needed to claim refugee status was therefore not provable. This was in the context of the Cold War, in which refugees fleeing communist regimes easily obtained asylum, whereas those fleeing right-wing governments receiving economic aid from the US were denied, as a wider policy of denying that those governments were violent and repressive. Numerous Central Americans who had found their way into the States were thus forced into detention centres and then deported. This situation precipitated the birth of the Sanctuary Movement, which began in Arizona and spread elsewhere. It was a religious and political campaign which openly opposed federal immigration policy by aiding Central Americans refugees in crossing the border (sometimes even smuggling them across), as well as creating sanctuaries that provided shelter, legal advice, and for the material needs of the refugees. At its peak, the movement involved 500 different Christian congregations.

An investigation into the Movement, which used paid informants to infiltrate Sanctuary communities, led to what are known as the Sanctuary Trials. In 1986, in the principle trial, sixteen US and Mexican Sanctuary members were charged on 71 counts of conspiracy and encouraging and aiding "illegal aliens to enter the United States by shielding, harbouring and transporting them." The court found movement members guilty on alien smuggling charges, but most received suspended sentences or underwent short house arrests. This lenient sentencing was related to widespread public outcry, and the government eventually granted asylum status to many of the refugees

that were involved in the trial. As a result of Sanctuary campaigning, the cause was also taken up by Democrats in government, and a bill was eventually approved in which Central Americans would receive at least temporary residence.

In 1986, around the same time as the Sanctuary Trials, President Reagan had an amnesty for all immigrants without papers who were present in the United States prior to that date, after which immigration law was made much more punitive for newcomers entering the US. This trend continued into the Presidency of both Bush and then Clinton. In fact, it was Clinton in the 1990's who was to instigate the toughest and most extreme national immigration policy of any US president to date, primarily out of fear of Republican backlash against Democrats not doing enough to tackle the problem of immigration. It was also in the wake of NAFTA, (the North American Free Trade Agreement, made in 1994) in which economic liberalisation forced large numbers of workers in Mexico to migrate so that they might find employment, that these policies emerged.

Video footage made by white supremacists in California was to cause hysteria regarding the migrant worker issue, after hundreds of people were filmed coming across the border from Mexico each day. What the footage did not show was that at the end of the day all of these people went home again, as they were simply crossing the border every morning to get to work. In response to the footage, Clinton launched a programme which sought to close off the border in the cities through which it ran. Sheet-metal walls were erected in the border cities (which had previously been chain-link fence), and Border Patrol agents were stationed in lines across entire cities. Unauthorised border crossing was found to drop 90% within a week. However, it was then realised that people merely walked around the city and continued to cross the border, but from more obscure locations. From this, a strategy of deterrence was created, in which border controls were made ever more impenetrable in all the places that were previously easy to cross, and where it was therefore easy to erect border fences, channelling people into more difficult and dangerous terrain, in the hope that people would be put off. Today, the desert leading into Arizona is the busiest corridor of migration along the entire US-Mexico border because this mountainous desert zone makes it so difficult to cross, and it is towards this area to which migrants are being squeezed.

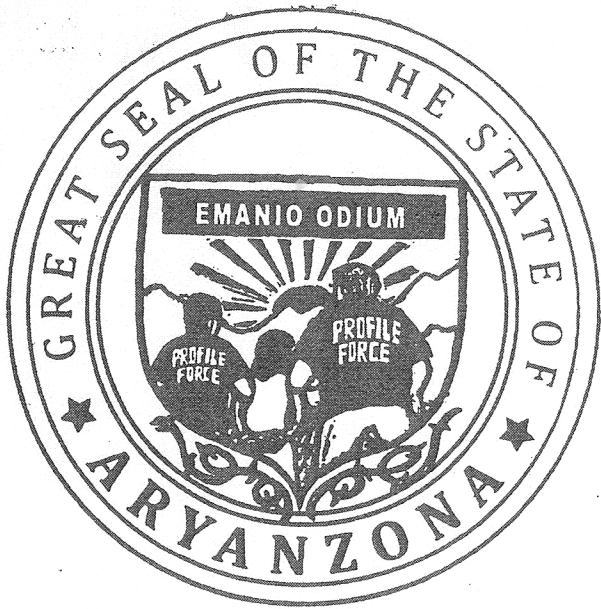
However, deterrence has never been an effective strategy; although crossing the desert can be highly dangerous and many die trying to do so, this policy has not brought about any real decline in immigration. In fact, economic migration only rises or drops in relation to what the economy is doing. It should also be noted that migrants from outside the United States have made up the same proportion of the overall population in Arizona for the past 80 years (around 12%). Nonetheless, in the States as a whole, funding for immigration control has more than tripled since 1999, as right-wing politicians and vigilante groups continue to whip up anti-immigration sentiment. Post-9/11 United States immigration policy came in the form of a severe tightening of border security, as anti-terrorist rhetoric and anti-immigrant sentiment became conflated, providing an extra pretext for the creation of border security. An article in Time magazine (20/10/2004) encapsulates this sentiment well in saying, "Law-enforcement authorities believe the mass movement of illegals, wherever they are from, offers the perfect cover for terrorists seeking to enter the U.S." So from this time, terrorists have come to be seen as being migrants, meaning that people have come to believe that it is people from outside who pose a threat, and the border must therefore be enforced to keep a terrorist threat at bay. At the same time, migrants as a group have become seen as terrorists who threaten the American way of life.

Note should also be made of two other fairly recent laws that have attempted to perpetuate racism and anti-immigration sentiment. From 2004, Arizona has implemented a law to kick immigrants off any kind of welfare programme (unemployment benefits, social programmes like prenatal classes, public health programmes, food stamps<sup>5</sup>, and more). In 2009, this law was reinforced as state employees became legally obliged to check the immigration status of anyone who came into their

<sup>5</sup> Food stamps are vouchers for food that people on low incomes receive in the US.

office, which affected families where, for example, the children had been born in the US and therefore had legal status, whereas the parents were migrants and so did not, meaning that the entire family would be excluded from the programme.

## Part 2: What's happening right now...(2010)



What has been described so far is the back-drop to the racism that exists in Arizona today and the context from which yet more racism emerges. Before going on to look at what's happening in today's Arizona in terms of racist and anti-immigrant policy, some further analysis of the current demographics of Arizona lends to a deeper understanding of why things are as they are. As stated elsewhere, Arizona is a migrant state in which the population has ballooned over the course of the last century, principally due to the interests of an elite in the land and resources of the area, and the employment opportunities which then opened up due to mining and ranching. The number of migrants in Arizona lies at 64.2% of the total population. 51.4% of the population are migrants that have come from elsewhere in the United States. 12.8% are migrants who have come from another nation

state. One theory, which has not been researched, but may come close to the truth, is that most of the really extreme intolerance originates from people who come from outside of Arizona. People who grow up here tend to recognise the multi-cultural dimensions of the state. This includes ranchers, who are usually cited as making the most complaints against migrants for messing up their land or bringing drugs across it; however ranchers who have grown up in Arizona are usually not hostile to migrants. Many ranchers are from out of state, and are much more aggressive. It is also significant that Arizona is full of retirement communities; rich white right-wingers who come to Arizona for a nice, comfortable, manicured life-style in the sunshine (known as "Snow birds" as they migrate back to where they came from during the summer, when the heat gets too bothersome), having tried to escape from inner city black people, only to find there are such irksome things as minorities and poverty in Arizona.

Then there are other extremists, such as a vigilante group known as the "Minute Men"<sup>6</sup>, who came from California, were involved there in pushing for various racist immigration policies which ultimately failed, and so have come to Arizona with the goal of making a stronghold for their ideology through stirring up racism in an area where people may be more sympathetic to their cause. Essentially, these kinds of dynamics, which originated in other parts of the US, have ended up concentrated in Arizona. It should be noted that because migrants have been channelled by Border Patrol away from being able to cross the border anywhere along the entire east-to-west stretch of land, to being left with one concentrated area in Arizona where they can find their way across, migration has been made far more visible to people. This in turn lends credit to the right-wing ideologues' claims that Mexican migrants are taking over the world. In addition, Arizona has always drawn great business interests, and migration is now an industry in and of itself. In fact, many of the lobbyists who have been pushing for the bill SB1070 to be made law (see below) have their fingers in the prison industry pie. With increasing ties between immigration and incarceration,

6 The Minute Men are a kind of civilian border patrol, who consider border policy to not be stringent enough and the border to be insecure. They thus take it upon themselves to "protect" US citizens by policing the border and hassling migrants and O'odham alike.



stirring up anti-immigration sentiment becomes a nice money earner. And keeping many migrant workers without rights means that there is more potential for low-wage, health-and-safety devoid labour. Of course, while migrants are hounded for being without papers, there are no repercussions for employers who take advantage by not granting employment rights.

What follows is not a exhaustive account of the racist policies and personalities that currently exist in Arizona, but describes some of the most prominent issues currently affecting Arizona, and takes a look at resistance to those issues.

## The "Kangaroo court" of Operation Streamline

*[The term "Kangaroo Court" is used in the United States to refer to sham legal or court proceedings that deny due process and rights to the defendant(s). "The outcome of such proceedings is essentially determined in advance, usually for the purpose of providing a conviction, either by going through the motions of a manipulated procedure or by allowing no defence at all" (definition from wikipedia).]*

If ever a Kangaroo Court existed, it goes into process every day of the working week in both Texas and Arizona in what is called "Operation Streamline". During the court hearing, groups of 70 migrants who have been picked up by Border Patrol have judgement passed on them simultaneously by the court.

Whilst in Arizona, I attended one of the daily court hearings. Although I felt pretty voyeuristic in my presence there, it was for me a powerful illustration of the foul and racist nature of immigration control, and I remain gob-smacked in the flagrancy with which legal rights are denied to those who cross the border to find work.

### The beginnings of Operation Streamline

In 2005, Border Patrol in Texas put into action a "zero tolerance" approach to migration, in which anyone arrested in the border zone was to be arrested. A corresponding court procedure was set up to fast-track migrants out of the country. Migrants who were arrested were to be charged, processed in terms of their legal claim, sent to court, and deported, all within a few days. Until this time, crossing the border without papers was seen as a "civil offence", meaning that migrants who were caught were finger-printed and returned over the border without charge. From 2005 onwards, illegal entry became a criminal offence to be treated in a federal (national) court of law. In 2008, implementation of Operation Streamline began in the state of Arizona.

In actuality, there are not the resources and infrastructure to prosecute every migrant picked up on the border, and so there exists a quota system of 70 people per day chosen at random to be prosecuted for illegal entry. As there are not enough public defenders in the law enforcement system to work on the claims of everyone passing through Operation Streamline, attorneys who actually work for Border Patrol are employed, adding to the farce of the possibility of any kind of fair hearing. Each migrant receives 15-30 minutes with an attorney, in which the attorney is supposed to have the time assess their entire case.

One of the most astonishing things about the court procedure is witnessing each and every one of the defendants plead guilty to the charge against them. This happens due to the existence of a "plea bargain", which means that if a defendant pleads guilty, the severity of the sentence passed will be lessened drastically. Those who have been caught entering the country for the first time are charged

with illegal entry, which is classified as a “misdemeanour” under US law<sup>7</sup>. Those who have been caught crossing the border more than once are charged with illegal re-entry, which is a “felony” offence<sup>8</sup>. Anyone who speaks an indigenous language rather than English or Spanish is dismissed without charge, as there are no lawyers who speak indigenous languages to work on these cases.

Those who have been charged with a misdemeanour will receive a maximum of 30 days in prison if they plead guilty. Those charged with a felony offence will have their “crime” reclassified as a misdemeanour if they plead guilty and their sentencing will drop from a maximum of 2 years to a maximum of 6 months.

Security at the court building is already high, but nevertheless, every defendant is shackled; they are handcuffed, and their handcuffs are attached to shackles around their waist. They also have shackles around their feet. This is a stark illustration of how migrants are being treated as criminals.

The judge calls up groups of individuals who are facing the same charge. They stand before him and answer “yes” or “no” in unison as he asks them if they are citizens of Mexico, if they were found in one of the places he lists, if they have a right to be in the United States, if they understand the explanation of the court as to their rights, and other closed questions. The only answer that each person is required to give individually is whether or not they are guilty, to which they all state their guilt. The attorneys state that they have had sufficient time to meet with all the defendants and that all of them wish to plead guilty.

The vast majority of what the judge says comes from a script, reeled off so fast as to be barely understood. Whenever the judge varied from the script, it was to say something utterly condescending to the defendants, such as “There is no problem with entering the United States, but you must have legal authorisation from the the government of the United States to enter” - as if it simply hadn't occurred to people that there must exist a fair legal channel which they could go through to obtain papers and instead they were silly enough to attempt the life-threatening journey across the desert.

### The economics of Operation Streamline

Operation Streamline was set up to show that illegal immigration is being dealt with quickly and efficiently, as well as seeking to provide a deterrent to migrants so that they may not attempt to cross the border more than once, as well as relaying information to their communities that crossing the border was not possible. Streamlining obviously doesn't do what it intends to, as many of those who end up back in court are re-offenders who have tried twice or more to enter. However, the court proceedings are highly lucrative to all those involved; the attorneys alone earn \$700-\$800 a day working on Operation Streamline (many of whom actually work for Border Patrol), and the contracting of prisons to private companies is a fast-growing industry, for which funding is received every time a migrant is sent to jail. Operation Streamline costs the state \$4million per year, all of which goes into the pockets of those working to maintain it.

### **SB 1070 - the racial profiling law.**

In April 2010, State Governor for Arizona, Jan Brewer (see below), signed into Arizona law a bill entitled Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhood Act (SB1070), which has been enacted since July 29<sup>th</sup> 2010. The law was to make it “a state crime for illegal immigrants to not

<sup>7</sup> In US law, a “misdemeanour” is a lesser criminal offence punishable by up to a maximum of one year of incarceration. Petty theft, vandalism, and drug possession are all examples of misdemeanours.

<sup>8</sup> A “felony” is a greater offence in US law, constituting a serious crime. Classifying illegal entry as a felony puts it into the same category as aggravated assault, arson, drug dealing, grand theft, murder, and rape.



have an alien registration document”, making it a crime to be in Arizona without permission from the US government (Operation Streamline is distinct because it views the crime to be in crossing the border). SB1070 obliges Arizona police to question people about their immigration status if there is reasonable cause to suspect a person is in the country illegally. The check can be made only during the course of a lawful police action, such as a traffic stop, a detention or arrest, or the investigation of a crime. It also makes it illegal for people to hire illegal immigrants for day labour or to knowingly transport them. The law has made provisions for citizens of Arizona to be able to file lawsuits against government agencies – such as police departments – that are seen to be hindering the enforcement of immigration laws. Those in support of the law claimed that it would act as a second line of defence due to the government's ineptitude for securing the border. They also argued the law would help combat the problems brought by illegal immigrants such as having to support them through the education system, health care, and the jail system, as well as keeping jobs for US citizens. Of course, this does not take into account that many migrants without papers pay taxes through the work they do (a legal provision exists for people to pay taxes even without having legal documentation).

## TAKEOURJOBS.ORG

There are two issues facing our nation--high unemployment and undocumented people in the workforce--that many Americans believe are related.

Missing from the debate on both issues is an honest recognition that the food we all eat - at home, in restaurants and workplace cafeterias (including those in the Capitol) - comes to us from the labour of undocumented farm workers.

Agriculture in the United States is dependent on an immigrant workforce. Three-quarters of all crop workers working in American agriculture were born outside the United States. According to government statistics, since the late 1990s, at least 50% of the crop workers have not been authorized to work legally in the United States.

We are a nation in denial about our food supply. As a result the Union of Farm Workers has initiated the "Take Our Jobs" campaign.

Farm workers are ready to welcome citizens and legal residents who wish to replace them in the field. We will use our knowledge and staff to help connect the unemployed with farm employers. Just fill out the form below and continue on to the request for job application.

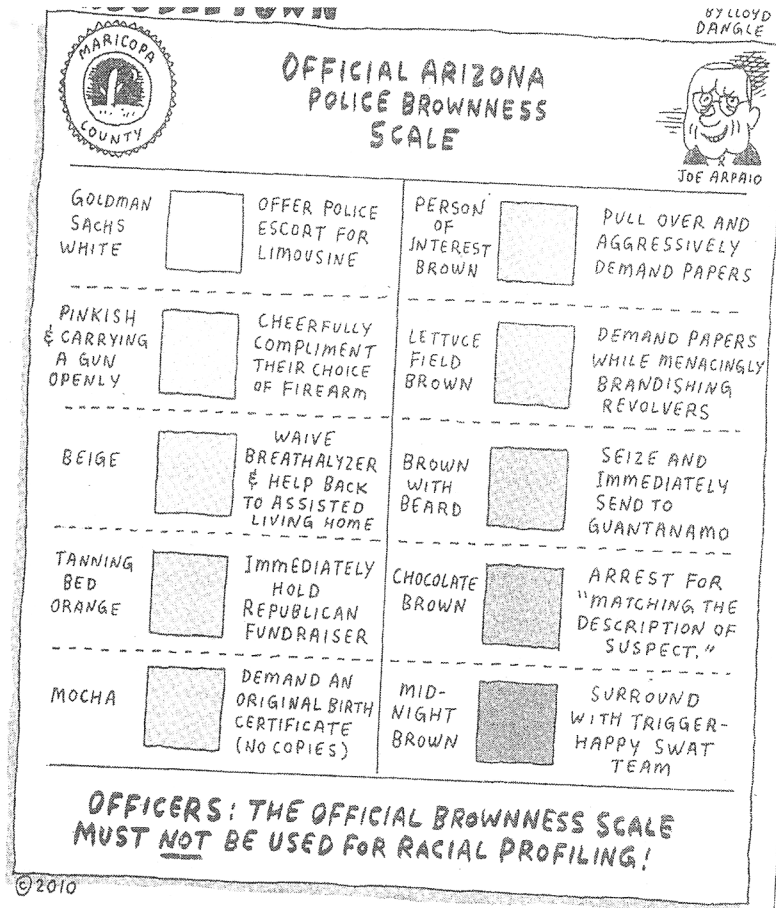
I want to be a farm worker:

First name:	Last name:
E-mail:	Zip code:

\*\* Job may include using hand tools such as knives, hoes, shovels, etc. Duties may include tilling the soil, transplanting, weeding, thinning, picking, cutting, sorting & packing of harvested produce. May set up & operate irrigation equip. Work is performed outside in all weather conditions (Summertime 90+ degree weather) & is physically demanding requiring workers to bend, stoop, lift & carry up to 50 lbs on a regular basis. Sign me up to get breaking news on farm worker issues and immigration reform!

A protest movement against SB1070 emerged across the United States, in reaction to the racism inherent in the law, the potential for racial profiling of US citizens and other abuses of the law by police officers, and the possibility created for separation of families and the terrorizing of communities. Seven lawsuits were filed against SB1070 by the Obama administration<sup>9</sup>, the Justice Department, several civil rights groups, two Arizona police officers, a Latino clergy group, and a researcher from Washington to prevent the law from being enacted. An eleventh-hour decision was made by a federal judge that there should be an injunction on the most controversial parts of the law, meaning that police officers will no longer be obliged to check up on a person's immigration status while enforcing other laws, and migrants will no longer need to carry their papers at all times.

In spite of the partial injunction, on July 29<sup>th</sup> protests and direct actions took place throughout Arizona, as well as around the US and Mexico. This was because the overall law was still to take effect, and the ruling is such that controversial sections of the law should only be put on hold until the court resolves the issues, rather than a permanent injunction on the entire law.



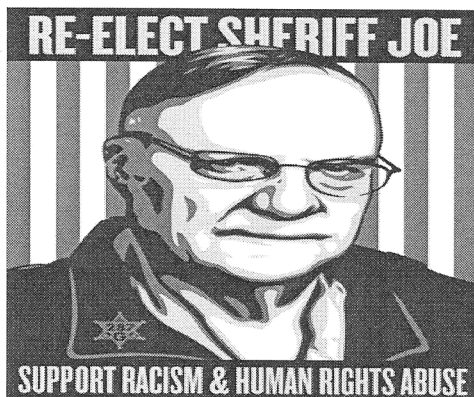
The partial injunction was also not to prevent the reactionary Sheriff Arpaio (see below) from attempting to carry out a series of raids on July 29<sup>th</sup>, saying that he had been waiting weeks to execute the crime-sweep, and that he had been doing this kind of sweep for years to check people's criminal history. In the past, some of Arpaio's deputies would conduct roadside immigration screenings, but the federal office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement stripped deputies of that authority last year, forcing deputies to wait until they bring suspects to jail to determine immigration status. Advocates Arpaio's sweeps say their value is largely in discouraging illegal immigrants from remaining in the community. However, critics suggest they simply

scare legal and illegal immigrants alike and drive a wedge between law enforcement agencies and the general population.

9 However, just because Obama challenged this law (which in any case is flagrantly anti-constitutional), it does not mean that he can be viewed as an ally to the migrant cause. Obama's administration has deported more migrants than any other administration apart from Eisenhower's. Obama has infused an extra \$500million in funds to Border Patrol, and his recent address on immigration reform (July 2010) pushed without question the need for further border security. Obama stated that he supported the approach that illegal immigrants who wish to remain in the country should be required to admit they broke the law, pay fines, pay taxes on earnings not previously paid for, and pass background checks and prove that they can speak English before going to the back of the line of those seeking permanent legal residency. He also advocates the provision biometric social security cards for temporary workers to ensure that illegal workers can't get jobs.

## Jan Brewer

Currently the State Governor for Arizona, Jan Brewer has consistently upheld the most reactionary of policies since her time in office. She has slackened gun law restrictions, making it legal to possess guns that would only usually be used in warfare, and eliminated parts of the children's health insurance programme for Arizona, leaving many children without healthcare insurance. In terms of immigration and border security, Brewer believes that there should be absolutely no amnesty for immigrants without papers. She has also prohibited migrants from receiving any kind of public benefits, and made it a misdemeanour (lesser crime in the US) for a state or local government official to fail to report immigration law violations discovered while administering a public benefit or service. She is quoted as saying, "law enforcement agencies have found bodies in the desert either buried or just lying out there that have been beheaded", after which Fox News investigated her claim and found absolutely no evidence to support it, even after asking 6 medical examiners from different locations. Upon being verbally attacked as being a Nazi by various opponents after the signing of SB1070, Brewer stated, "Knowing that my father died fighting the Nazi regime in Germany, that I lost him when I was 11 because of that . . . and then to have them call me Hitler's daughter. It hurts. It's ugliness beyond anything I've ever experienced." It has since been found that Brewer's father died in 1955 of lung cancer, never served in the military, and was not overseas during the Second World War.



## Sheriff Arpaio

*[In the United States, each county within a state votes for its sheriff to head the police force. This is done along political lines; you can have a republican or a democrat sheriff.]*

Joe Arpaio is the republican sheriff of Maricopa County, Arizona. His policies are so extremely reactionary that it would be hard to make them up. In Maricopa County lies the 4th largest jail system in the world. Concerned about the early release of inmates due to overcrowding, Arpaio ordered the construction of "Tent City", using inmate labour to establish it, in which prisoners were to be re-accommodated in military tents. 2,400 inmates now live in these tents, in an area which regularly reaches 110°F/42°C (Arpaio stated that if this was good enough for servicemen and women in Desert Storm in Iraq, it was good enough for prisoners, especially as the military in Iraq "hadn't even committed any crime"). Arpaio also re-instigated the "chain gang", in which inmates are shackled to one another and labour "voluntarily". He has been found to falsely accuse his opponents in cases of abuse in order to tar their reputation. He has also been sued under allegations of racial profiling by the American Civil Liberties Union. Arpaio has carried out raids on places of employment from the day that SB1070 was enacted (July 29th 2010).

The raids were partially prevented through acts of civil disobedience, in which several hundred protesters blocked an entrance to one of the county jails, meaning that numerous officers who would otherwise have been deployed in the raids were sent to deal with the protest. However, later in the day, Arpaio's officers carried out a traffic sweep in which, like raids conducted previously, employed “zero tolerance” approach to traffic offences. Upon stopping a vehicle, the officer would then check up on any other offences the driver may have committed. One woman reported that she was stopped by police for having “windows that were too dark”, but soon realised that the real reason was because she was not white. Other Latino drivers have been pulled over for reasons such as not turning on their indicators quickly enough. This type of raid was performed not only on July 29<sup>th</sup>, but has been carrying on since that time to demand proof immigration status; in fact there have been many reports made of people being asked for immigration documents and of Border Patrol being contacted by law enforcement officers.

## **Withdrawal of Ethnic Studies from education**

HB2281 is a law that goes into effect in Arizona from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2011. It allows the state to make judgement on what should be included or excluded in the curriculum of high-school education with regards to studies on ethnicity and culture. It contains an “inquisitorial mechanism,” which means that it will be decided as to which books and curricula are deemed by the state to be suitable for study, essentially meaning that many components of Ethnic Studies will be branded as “un-American”. Books such as “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” by Paulo Freire have already been singled out as being un-American, as they are deemed to be preaching the violent overthrow of the U.S. Government. The law seeks to change the emphasis that Ethnic Studies has on philosophical principles based on indigenous concepts to principles based on Greco-Roman culture. Additionally, the law seeks to ensure that schools will no longer be permitted to have English teachers who have “heavy accents”, which can only be construed as a racist and classist way of excluding teachers from backgrounds that are not white and middle-class.

In its very design, Ethnic Studies is intended to reach students that were unfamiliar with indigenous concepts, including de-indigenized Mexicans, Chicanos, Central Americans, and other people from the Americas. Its aim has been to imbue a sense of identity, and give the feeling that the culture from which people come has continued on from the past; theirs is not a culture which died, but a culture from which they have become disconnected. The effort to understand indigenous concepts, and to embrace and live by them, can be seen as a method of decolonization and a way in which people can find a way back to their roots. This is in keeping with what indigenous elders have been imploring people to do for the past generation.

The following is an extract from an article by Roberto Rodriguez<sup>10</sup> to explain these founding principles:

In general, the philosophical foundation for Ethnic Studies are several Indigenous concepts, including: “In Lak Ech”, “Panche Be”, and “Hunab Ku”. Over the past generation, the first two concepts have become fairly well known in the Mexican/Chicana/Chicano communities of the United States, In Lak Ech meaning, ‘You are my other self’ and Panche Be meaning, ‘To seek the root of the truth’ or ‘To find the truth in the roots’. The third concept, Hunab Ku, is relatively less well known, though it actually forms the foundation for In Lak Ech and Panche Be... Hunab Ku is the name the Maya gave in their language to the equivalence of the Supreme Being or the Grand Architect of the Universe. Such a concept is an understanding of how the universe functions.

Ethnic Studies is something that until now young people, especially those of Chicano/a origin have found profoundly empowering, and it has acted as a radicalising force and a basis for community

<sup>10</sup> “What state officials don't want Arizona school children to know.” July 26<sup>th</sup> 2010.  
<http://www.commondreams.org/view/2010/07/26-4>

organising, and example being a series of walk-outs orchestrated by both high-school and middle-school students, in protest of various immigration laws. This is a radicalism which the state in Arizona is said to have found strongly unsettling. HB2281 is seen as a means by which the state will be able to break this radicalism and return disadvantaged groups to their status of that of a silenced foreign and minority culture.

## The potential for a cross-border wall

The final thing to mention with regards to immigration policy is that right-wing proponents of border security are advocating the building of a border wall that would stretch almost two-thousand miles from east to west, in the belief that this will bring full national security from terrorists and immigrants. Whilst the wall is most probably impracticable due to the extreme expense of construction in the times of a failing economy, as well as the impossibility of monitoring the entire wall at all times, this is what right-wingers are pushing for, not realising that a wall doesn't just have the potential to keep people *out* but also to keep them *in*.

## Part 3: The desert

*[When thinking about how political forces operate, it becomes easy to de-personalise the issues and difficult to remember that these forces affect real people and their choices about how they live their lives. It's also hard to remember or believe that people are not just caught up in a system in which they have absolutely no control, and that they (we) constantly maintain agency over the set of choices which are left, be those choices wide-ranging or narrow.*

*I turn now to the most prominent aspect of the migration issue in Arizona: the crossing of the US-Mexican border through the Sonoran desert. Of course, the issues surrounding migration are experienced by people in many different contexts, not just at the border, and there are many different projects of resistance, but migrating across the border was the one that I became most familiar with, as I spent time in the desert volunteering for the organisation "No More Deaths". I am therefore better able to relay some of the details of what it may mean on a personal level for people to cross, even if it is something that I will never need to do].*

## A deserted desert?

Words like "deserted" and "desolate" might be what spring to mind when we think of the desert. I certainly had *no idea* of the incredible level of biodiversity in the Sonoran desert; a landscape teeming with life, in spite of the brutal heat, as well as the lack of rain, which comes in great torrents only in the twice-yearly monsoon months. So, from my idea of the desert as a flat, sand-filled, empty expanse, I found that the desert in Sonora is actually very mountainous, and full of...

...mesquite (a tree in the pea family that's prickly and grows everywhere); acacia (similar to mesquite; also in the pea family); saguaro cactus (pronounced su-wa-ro, these are the giant cactuses that can live for hundreds of years, which the O'odham native people see as human. They produce a candy-like fruit that, before the monsoon season begins, the O'odham make into alcohol and drink until vomiting point, in a ritual to bring forth the rains); various species of rattlesnake (petrifying! And they pop up surprisingly often. There is an urban myth that the people most prone to rattlesnake bites are men with tattoos – and the last thing they say is, "hold my beer and look at this..."); gopher snakes (they eat rattlesnakes); king snakes (also eat rattlers); bunnies; jack rabbits (these are the American version of hares, but they are more bandy-legged and look a bit like old men); ocatillo (a plant that looks like a whole load of big spiky sticks); cholla (a very spiky cactus that grows everywhere and who's spikes you just can't avoid. You can use a piece of the root in your drinking water and it will help keep you hydrated);

buzzards (these live all over the country. The Lakota native people in the north of the US call them “grandmother” birds, because they clean up everyone’s mess); vermillion fly catchers (these are little birds that are a dazzling colour of pinky-red); crows; creosote bush (a potent herbal medicine with 50 different uses in traditional Mexican medicine, such as to cure infertility, arthritis, diabetes, gallbladder and kidney stones, pain and inflammation. When the rains come, the smell of creosote hangs strongly in the air); different kinds of prickly pear (you can eat the fruits of these. But don’t touch until you’ve shaken the spines out in a container! Don’t say I didn’t warn you!); vultures; cicadas (a kind of insect that makes a very intense noise just like an electricity pylon. Ahh, the peace of nature); milkweed (another herbal medicine); butterflies; flies; bees; black widow spiders (very poisonous! I once slept with one right next to my bed! Eek!); coyotes; road runners (beep-beep!); giant centipedes (which have a nasty bite); manzanita (a bush that doesn’t burn); palo verde (which means “green stick” in Spanish, and grows in the lowlands of the desert, which are the hottest parts, so it has very tiny leaves, as they would otherwise shrivel up, and a bright green trunk that can photosynthesise); barrel cactus (a chunky cactus that usually grows pointing towards South); shin-daggers (a kind of plant. You can imagine how it got its name. It’s one spiky thing too many in the desert); scorpions; lizards that run along with their tails in the air so that they can pretend that actually they are really scary scorpions; jabolina (when Spanish colonisers arrived, these creatures reminded them of the wild boar - “jaboli” in Spanish - from back home, but they are actually a kind of large and very snuffly rodent); tarantulas; lamb’s quarter (a kind of wild spinach with a whole lot of nutrients. Very useful when you are out in the desert); cows (put there by ranchers, and completely screwing up the desert’s ecology); big ants, medium ants, tiny ants, red ants, black ants, fire ants (the ants will probably take over the whole desert. They have whole ant empires, and have such well-travelled ground that they have created ant highways – strips of bare earth that run through the scrub that hundreds of ants career up and down at the same time, without any kind of traffic regulations about keeping to the left or right); frogs; toads; praying mantis (we adopted one as the camp pet which we called Pat, and fed it flies till it was fit to burst)...

...and so much more that I didn’t even get to learn about. All these beings that are doing their thing all of the time provide the backdrop to the torment being inflicted upon those trying to cross the desert by Border Patrol and to the people who make decisions in air-conditioned offices hundreds of miles away...

## **How do people cross the desert?**

In most situations, people cross the desert in groups of twenty or more. They are led by guides, known as “Coyotes” (which are essentially people traffickers) that they pay to take them across. This is very expensive for people, but if they come from an area where there is no work, it is common for people to spend the last of their money (gathered together from family or even from loans) in trying to get to the United States. This is seen as an investment that will produce more money when work is eventually found that can then be sent back to the community from which they came.

Coyotes may be fairly ordinary people, but many of them are not to be trusted, and it is not possible to tell who is who. Invariably, Coyotes are linked to the drugs cartels that exist in Mexico, and there have been incidences of rape wreaked by Coyotes upon women they are trafficking. One theory suggests that in times gone by, a town would have its Coyote that was known to everyone, and who knew a particular route through the desert, so that when people needed to cross, the Coyote would take them. If the Coyote did something wrong, this would come to be known by the whole community, and there would be repercussions for what he did. As control of the border has become increasingly enforced, it has become ever more difficult to take tried-and-tested routes through the



desert that run from particular locations. This is because Border Patrol moves around and security measures are implemented in new places all the time, which has led to a kind of specialisation in the work of the Coyotes, who must be able to travel around and to find different routes to take. The result is that Coyotes are no longer tied to one community and so there are no longer repercussions for what they do – which gives an extra level of danger to ordinary migrants who are making their journey across.

In the past it was mostly men that crossed the desert, but the proportion of women, as well as children who may be coming to join family members, has started to grow. Problems for people usually occur when they are unable to keep up with the rest of the group, and the group will then leave them to fend for themselves. The main problems that prevent people from keeping apace are dehydration, heat stroke, (the heat in the summer months is brutal, and water is sparse), exhaustion, or due to injuries sustained in the rough and uneven terrain of the desert mountains. People may suffer from terrible foot blisters, and falling over is a severe hazard, as a sprain can leave people stranded and risking the possibility of death. Hundreds of people have died crossing the desert; in fact since 2001, there have been more deaths of migrants along the border than of US soldiers who have died in Iraq and Afghanistan combined<sup>11</sup>.

### Check points

As border enforcement increases, it becomes ever more problematic to cross over the border. At one point it was possible for a migrant to pay someone to give them a lift from the border into the city of Tucson, which is about 60 miles or so to the north. There are now two check-points along the highway into Tucson, at which Border Patrol agents are stationed. This means that migrants need to find their way north of the check-points before they can get picked up by someone who will drive them the rest of the way into the city. There is no check-point closer to Tucson because of a place called “Green Valley” - a white, middle class town, where there is too much risk of people kicking up a big stink about the border issue being played out in their nice neighbourhoods in the form of hoards of Border Patrol agents essentially occupying the whole area and hassling migrants. This means that the check-points lie further south, which is of benefit to migrants as it means less walking time in the desert, although doubtless concern for migrant welfare was not what the Green Valley folks had in mind. It also means that Border Patrol is a heavy presence in the poorer town of Arivaca, where people are pretty sick of the whole thing. This is primarily because Border Patrol has been given a mandate by Congress to be able to override local, state, and tribal law in the execution of its work within the border zone, which extends a number of miles north of the border. As such, the organisation can essentially do whatever it wants, making living conditions difficult for local people.

### Border Patrol

The starting wage for a Border Patrol agent is \$43,000 (around £28,000), so there is a high incentive for people to seek employment with the organization. Funding for Border Patrol is ever-increasing, and is used for, amongst other things, high-tech devices such as surveillance towers with sensors that pick up on movement, and helicopters to survey the land when a sensor gets triggered (apparently more often than not the sensor is triggered by cows and other animals. But Border Patrol don't seem to mind spending thousands on regularly sending a helicopter up to survey the area). Actually, when I went to volunteer in the desert, I was surprised at how empty of Border Patrol agents the desert was. There were numerous Border Patrol vehicles on the roads, and the check-points were heavily staffed but I never caught sight of an agent on the trails. In fact, it is reckoned that the agents actually know very little about the desert, as they sometimes ask for directions to prominent desert landmarks. Instead, the agents tend to sit at check-points or drive

11 Figure produced by No More Deaths.

around the roads, waiting for migrants to appear. So it seems that Border Patrol agents are not particularly good at their jobs, which is also to the benefit of the organisation itself, as requests for more funding can then be made so that they might improve the work that they do.

## **No More Deaths (No Más Muertes)**

No More Deaths was set up in 2004, in essence a Christian organisation of the Presbyterian denomination, but drawing together an alliance of a wide range of individuals and organisations, both faith-based and social-action based, to work for the alleviation of suffering in the desert. Many of the participants come from the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s (see section on “Leading up to the present day”). It is run almost solely by volunteers, and a few organisers who receive a stipend.

### **No More Deaths Mission Statement:**

“No More Deaths is an organization whose mission is to end death and suffering on the U.S./Mexico border through civil initiative<sup>12</sup>: the conviction that people of conscience must work openly and in community to uphold fundamental human rights. Our work...focuses on the following themes: direct aid that extends the right to provide humanitarian assistance; witnessing and responding; consciousness raising; global movement building; encouraging humane immigration policy.

No More Deaths primarily provides humanitarian aid to those crossing the desert, but also monitors the behaviour of Border Patrol, has an in-town outreach programme, and a help-centre in a city just over the border in Mexico for migrants who have been deported by Border Patrol. The organisation has a permanent camp in the desert, located in the heart of the area where more people die than across the rest of the border combined. The camp lies on the private land of a local resident, which makes it an ultimately more sustainable space to maintain. Patrols from the camp are carried out on a daily basis year round, distributing gallon bottles of water and tins of food along the trails that people use as they are crossing the desert. The patrols also hike along the trails, carrying food, water and medical aid in case they should meet migrants who are in need of help. They look for signs of recent activity, such as footprints or recently dropped rubbish, so that an idea can be created of whether or not the trails are in regular use. People who are experienced No More Deaths workers have a profound knowledge of the geography of the desert, such that they are able to help people navigate their way through the difficult terrain, or track for miles the footprints of someone who is lost until they are able to find the person. If a person is found to be in ill health, they may come to the camp to rest.

No More Deaths works within the confines of the law but pushes legal structures to their limits. If the organisation did not work within legal structures, it would quickly be stopped from operating. Legally, it is possible to provide humanitarian aid to those crossing the desert, but there are certain aspects of the work where care must be taken in order to prevent serious legal problems from occurring. For example, a volunteer is not able to accompany a migrant in the direction of the border, because this would constitute trafficking if found by Border Patrol. Volunteers are, however, able to follow on after a migrant to check that they have been able to continue. A legal case has been mounted against two volunteers who were transporting a migrant to hospital for trafficking. Migrants are also not able to stay at camp unless sick, as this could legally constitute the harbouring of a migrant.

Although humanitarian aid has been the primary undertaking of No More Deaths, the organisation is expanding its work to encompass doing outreach aimed at local residents and businesses about

<sup>12</sup> “Civil initiative” is based on the idea that, in contravening human rights standards, it is the state which breaks the law, and it is the duty of citizens to uphold the law by providing aid to those who need it. This differs from the idea of “Civil disobedience”, in which individuals or groups break the law in order to fight for justice.



issues such as SB1070 (see work previous), and awareness-raising on other migration issues. This is in the recognition that although humanitarian aid is essential, it also does not address the root of the problem, and that a widespread shift in thinking and action need occur in the general population at large with regards to issues of race and migration.

For interest, organisations affiliated with No More Deaths are: Border Action Network, Campañeros en Mision, BorderLinks, Frontera de Cristo/Healing Our Borders, The Samaritans, Casa San Juan (Diocesan Migrant Service Center).

## Stories of the desert

I did not spend the numerous months in the desert that other volunteers have done, but I was still struck by meetings I had with people and how they maintained their sense of agency, making decisions from a very narrow range of possibilities, and by the anecdotes of those who have spent much time working on getting to know the desert and the trails that people take to cross it. So here are a few stories which come from a sea of stories that people have, to keep us connected with the realities of people living in this context and prevent us from losing ourselves in a world of theory.

Laura

Like the majority of those crossing the desert, Laura had been with a group of migrants that were being led by Coyotes. She had become exhausted and was left behind by the rest of the group. Some friends of a No More Deaths volunteer had come across her whilst hiking and the volunteer went to find her and bring her back to camp. It was strange that Laura had been left behind because she was incredibly tough. She had been hiking across the desert in shorts, a tank-top, and trainers; in fact she had the appearance of someone who had just come from the gym. However, she needed rest, as the rough terrain of the desert had obviously taken its toll, and she was very tired and bruised.

Although she was alone, Laura was utterly determined to continue, and wanted to rest for no more than a day at camp, even with the pain and stiffness she was encountering. She was particularly determined because she had previously spent time in the United States without ever being picked up by immigration control, and wanted to go on because she thought that her chances would be good if she continued alone.

Volunteers from No More Deaths went to check out possible routes that she could take so that she might be able to make it across. The next day she went on. I worried about her the whole of the next week...how could she possibly make it on her own? Wouldn't she become stranded and find herself without food and water? Maybe, in some twisted way, it would be better if she got picked up by Border Patrol if that was to give her a greater chance of survival? But she did make it...she walked that rough terrain and managed to get picked up by her lift north of the final checkpoint going into Tucson. I was so happy for her, and at the same time astounded at the strength she'd had to carry on.

## Guatemalan migration

One day Darby and a friend of his, both volunteers for No More Deaths, were carrying out a usual daily patrol. They were making their usual cry of, "HOLA, SOMOS VOLUNTARIOS DE LA IGLESIA! ESTAMOS AQUI PARA SERVIRLES! TRAEMOS AGUA, COMIDA, Y AYUDA MEDICA! SI NOS PUEDEN OIR, GRITENOS POR FAVOUR!!" Which means: "Hello! We are church volunteers! (to make it clear that the volunteers are not from Border Patrol, even if they are not themselves Christians; also because many people crossing are Catholic). We are here to be of assistance! We bring water, food, and medical aid! If you can hear us, shout out to us please!" They turned a corner as they were shouting, and walked straight into a group of around 40 people of

different ages, all packed neatly together, all wearing colours that gave them camouflage in the desert.

*"We can hear you!"* they whispered.

*"DO YOU NEED ANYTHING?"* the volunteers continued to boom.

*"Shhh!! We need you to be quiet!!"* they said, still whispering.

The entire group had travelled all the way from Guatemala, and seemed to be doing very well on their way. The volunteers attended to their needs, and as they were about to leave the group, much to their surprise, someone turned to them and handed them, of all things, a big bag of money. It transpired that they had collected coins from the many shrines that have been made by migrants along the trails, where, amongst candles and other things, people often leave coins. In their eyes, all these coins being left around was a bit of a waste, and so the group picked them up as they went along, until they had so many that it became rather impractical to carry on with such a heavy bag. They instructed the volunteers to give the money to a Catholic church that works to help migrants.

When the volunteers told the story to the No More Deaths co-ordinator, he said, "Are you *sure* they didn't say a *Presbyterian* church that helps migrants?" But they had said Catholic, and so that was where the money went.

#### Josseline's shrine



Josseline was a girl of around 15 years of age from El Salvador who died whilst attempting to cross the desert. She had been walking with her younger brother as part of a larger group. The two of them were trying to reach their family, who were living and working in Los Angeles. For some reason Josseline couldn't continue; she was sick or too tired, and she insisted that her brother go on without her. She was later reported as missing to a human rights organisation, who asked No More Deaths to carry out searches for her. She wasn't found for at least another couple of weeks, but eventually a No More Deaths volunteer found her body in a wash (the dry bed of a stream that flows

intermittently). The autopsy of her body found that between the time when she was reported missing and found dead, she had been alive for up to two weeks, surviving on her own in the desert, there in the middle of January, when the desert gets cold. A funeral was held for Josseline in the wash where she was found, and family members, both those living in the United States, and those who managed to obtain visas from El Salvador, came there to attend. There is a shrine to her memory at the place where she was found.

#### And finally...The O'odham indigenous struggle for autonomy

*[This work has been compiled by somebody white and middle-class who has passed through Arizona, which means that the emphasis on what people are doing to survive, resist and do solidarity work would, in all likelihood, be entirely different if written by someone of a different ethnicity and class background, or someone who is actually from Arizona.]*

*I say this because, in writing from the experiences that I have had, I am aware that my class and ethnic background means that there are many experiences that I have not had, which in turn means*

*that there are many things that I will have sidelined in this work. What springs to mind for me is that I have focused on the work of No More Deaths, which was started up by white middle-class people, and not on the work of the O'odham native people and what they have done in the struggle for their autonomy. So for reasons of my background, this may come written at the end, but is an attempt to give credit to the Tohono O'odham's (desert people's) struggle, especially as the impact that border militarization has on indigenous people is often left out of the overall picture of immigration struggle].*

## **We Didn't Cross the Border, The Border Crossed Us.**

Those who are pushing for the securing of the US border do not acknowledge that a secure border would mean the forced removal and relocations of all indigenous tribes that live in the border region, revealing the colonial attitudes and privileges invoked when constructing border policies. There are a number of indigenous groups – O'odham, Yaki, Lipan Apache, Mohawk, and more – who live in the border zone and are therefore affected by border militarization. However, the O'odham struggle is less well-known, than, for example, the Apache one, even in Arizona. It also seems that the O'odham are now the most affected by border militarization, as their homeland lies in the Sonoran desert in Arizona and Mexico, and it is this area to which migrants have been channelled since the instigation of Clinton-era policies in the 1990's (see section on “Leading up to the present day). And as we shall see, the border has a profound impact on the way in which Tohono O'odham are treated, giving the potential to pit O'odham and migrants against one another.

According to Western historians, the O'odham have lived in the Sonoran desert for between two and three thousand years. According to O'odham history, however, the O'odham have been in the Sonoran desert since the world began. “O'odham” means people, and within that people there exist different tribes, such as the Akimel O'odham – the river people, and Tohono O'odham – the desert people. It is the desert people who are now most affected by border enforcement. The land on which the O'odham live is sacred to them, holding many designated areas of importance, such as places for birthing and death ceremonies, for special rites of passage for medicine people, or separate places for men and women. There are songs associated with these places and special herbs for medicine grown there. Food is gathered from the desert, for which special songs are sung and ceremonies held to acknowledge their “Him'dag”, meaning “way of life”, which is the balance of the lands. The O'odham have, since time immemorial, used natural farming techniques in which they manage to raise crops using only rainwater (as opposed to groundwater irrigation) that comes but twice a year in the monsoon season.

In the process of Spanish colonisation, followed by Mexican and Anglo-American settlement, and later the enforcement of the US-Mexican Border, the O'odham have had their land appropriated for ranching and resources, their community divided by a border fence, and what little they have left ravaged by Border Patrol vehicles and infrastructure such as a detention centre for migrants. On the Mexican side, the Tohono O'odham face the threat of the construction of a toxic chemicals dump on ceremonial land. Poverty is rife in O'odham lands, and unemployment runs at 97%<sup>13</sup>, and as a consequence many O'odham have left to find economic opportunities in urban environments, or to work in modern agriculture. Of those left, the struggle continues for autonomy.

<sup>13</sup> However, many people who are not from the O'odham are employed to manage the O'odham cultural affairs office, do legal work, and manage the reservation's casino.

Historically, the O'odham have faced the same degree of racism and injustice as other indigenous people, such as loss of land (in the case of the O'odham, often to Anglo-American settlers in Arizona), persecution of traditional religion, their children being sent off to boarding schools far away, assimilation policies, imposed tribal governments, and more. However, in terms of the creation of the border, the O'odham way of life remained relatively unaffected for a long time to come after the US-Mexican war, as there was little to mark the existence of the border, and border enforcement was minimal. The O'odham also remained unaware for a long time of the decisions made in the Gadsden purchase (see "Colonialism and resistance") that would lead to the appropriation of their land. They continued to move freely back and forth across the border to make religious pilgrimages, visit family, buy goods, or practise traditional ceremonies. Even after 1924, when Border Patrol started to operate, the O'odham were not really affected by the existence of the border.

As immigration hysteria set in during the 1990's, the O'odham started to become adversely affected on several different levels. This trend has only escalated with post-9/11 terrorism hysteria, as from this time on, harassment of indigenous people has been in the guise of borderland defence. Because migrants now cross the border primarily through the Sonoran desert in Arizona (see section on "Leading up to the present day"), many of them enter a stretch of 75 miles of O'odham land where 25,000 Tohono O'odham live. As well as migrants crossing O'odham reservation land, human and drug smuggling rings began to use the area to cross the border. Border Patrol then became an ever-increasing presence in the region, along with the presence of agencies such as the FBI, special drug agencies, US customs, special rescue forces and others. Harassment of Tohono O'odham by Border Patrol agents started to occur, especially as the agents were not trained and educated with regards to O'odham culture and way of life. This has led to many incidents of racial profiling, home invasions, holding people at gunpoint, violation of traditional items in search/seize procedures, demeaning treatment, deportations, imprisonment without trial, and human rights violations resulting in deaths. These have occurred both when the O'odham have been engaged in their business on the reservation and when crossing the border as they have always done to visit family and participate in traditional gatherings. Because Congress has stipulated neither US nor tribal law need operate within the border zone, the Tohono O'odham are left without rights. Much of the abuse that occurs goes undocumented, as O'odham that have made statements about violations have been penalised by being denied access to social services, or suffered harassment from federal agents and local tribal police.

The Tohono O'odham's case has been further complicated after their agreement to co-operate with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), due to the fear and insecurity caused by the increasing presence of people- and drug- smugglers on reservation land. This co-operation allowed for the establishment on the reservation of vehicle barriers (which violated 37 US laws and dug up O'odham elders in their construction), permanent check-points, and surveillance technology such as an integrated camera-radar system and radio towers. This has resulted in an escalation in Border Patrol surveillance and harassment of Tohono O'odham. Essentially the Tohono O'odham now live in what can be described as a complete militarized zone. The construction of an actual border wall, justified by the fear of terrorist invasion, remains a plan in the foreseeable future, which would further disrupt traditional O'odham practices.

One of the aspects of harassment by Border Patrol has been in pressuring Tohono O'odham to prove their identity as US citizens. Many members of the Tohono O'odham were not born in hospitals and so do not have valid birth certificates, rendering them unable to prove their status. The Tohono O'odham Nation then issued tribal ID cards, which was to act as a kind of passport. This worked for some time, but eventually the DHS declared the ID cards unable to prove US citizenship, and therefore not valid for return to the US. In 2008, a law was passed to mean that anyone who entered the US would need a valid passport (until this time, US citizens could enter without a passport).

Many O'odham do not possess the papers needed to obtain a passport, thus sealing off the border and excluding them from being able to continue aspects of their traditional way of life that lie in Mexico. The Tohono O'odham Nation has been in negotiation with the DHS about this to find a solution.

It is said by O'odham activist Ofelia Rivas that many O'odham now live in a state of apathy as they do not see any hope of the situation changing. The Tohono O'odham tribal government also supports Border Patrol and the DHS in what it is doing, continuing to accept federal assistance and refusing to uphold O'odham complaints. However, action is taken by the O'odham Solidarity Across Borders Collective who are fighting against...

“the ongoing colonization of our traditional lands (i.e. U.S./Mexico Border policies), environmental racism from transnational corporations and the state, and all colonial polices aimed at destroying our O'odham Him'dag (Traditional Way of Life). We fight for self-determination, and true sovereignty of our lands. We advocate for the traditional elders in Mexico and the United States. We provide an autonomous space for O'odham to educate themselves on the issues that affect our land and people (our future). We encourage and support all O'odham, especially the youth, in carrying on our traditional practices, just as our ancestors did before us. Our projects of solidarity are our politics.”

Five O'odham are still awaiting trial, after they were targeted at a demonstration consisting of thousands of protesters against Sheriff Arpaio's racist policies. The five O'odham were arrested, brutalized, and handed charges which would give maximum sentences of ten years imprisonment. Their cases continue, and can be followed at [www.arpaiofive.blogspot.com](http://www.arpaiofive.blogspot.com).

### **A drop in the bucket? - An attempt at conclusions...**

One day I was on patrol with a group of people on a trail in the middle of nowhere, and it seems that we tripped a sensor, because a helicopter flew up and began circling around us. There we were, late in the afternoon, a glorious shade of light, billowing fluffy pink clouds due to the arrival of the monsoon season, surrounded by the most stunning scenery of mountains and creeks, of the most beautiful desert plants, with this great shiny black bug of technology whirring perniciously around us. The paradox hit me then of how we could be doing this work in such a beautiful place, a place that we would never find ourselves in if it wasn't for the terrorism of the bug in the sky that I wanted to swat and feed to the No More Deaths camp's pet praying mantis.

It must be a cliché by now to say that in engaging with migration issues, there are always more questions formed than answers found. I certainly don't have an answer as to what we can do to become more than a drop in the bucket in fighting the giant of the racist immigration system. Maybe this work isn't even a drop in the bucket yet, maybe just a drop in the ocean...or maybe the work is a thorn in the side of all those who are attempting to perpetuate a racist, colonialist system – it depends on the day as to which metaphors we consider using. In the case of working in the desert, and so many other projects that work to pose a challenge to the system, those drops can't change the whole system (yet), but are changing the lives of many individuals - to the point of stopping people from dying unnecessarily.

From meeting some brave and incredible people, in Arizona and elsewhere, who are caught up in the whirlwind of migration, I came to realise that when people have few or no options, there is no such thing as deterrence. The state can do what it wants in trying to put people off moving from one place to another, but people will always find a way – walking across deserts, jumping onto trains, cramming into lorries, swimming out to ferries. This isn't to romanticise the terrible and tough journeys that people take to find ways of surviving or to say that border controls don't have brutal

consequences for the people who run into it, but to state categorically that anyone who thinks that deterrence is a good or effective thing is way off-track. People move because of necessity and State control can never really prevent that; it can just mess profoundly with people's lives.

Sometimes I forget why people could possibly be engaged in something as silly and nonsensical as dividing the world up into boxes and trying to control who goes in and out of them – or why people would think this is a good idea. Then I remember that some people have figured out how to make lots and lots of money out of controlling other people's freedom of movement, and suddenly it seems that all of the crazy talk of immigrants invading and taking over our way of life or taking our jobs or there not being enough to go round in the wealthy countries that built their wealth from the countries from which people are trying to migrate – all of this is just noisy rhetoric to justify why people's freedom of movement should be controlled, giving some false morality to the whole thing, because it's sure as hell that nobody is going to admit that migration control exists because it's so lucrative.

I believe that there are a whole lot of people in power who actually *want* people to migrate, – just as long as they can maintain control over people's movement so that they can make money out of it. Because there are just so many ways to make money from migration. Either you can pick people up without papers and put them in detention, which means that immigration officials and private companies involved in the transportation of migrants or detention centres all make money. And you can contract out the building of high-tech surveillance towers in the desert; that's another way for companies to make money. Or you let people get in somehow, by hook or by crook, and then they work for low pay and without employment rights to produce things that can be sold for a greater profit. Or you give a few people papers who you land with the enormous task of struggling to prop up ailing public services because private companies have taken them over and are siphoning money off from the taxes people pay. The possibilities for making cash are so numerous... and the key is to not pick up everybody at the border, which is a whole aspect of what makes the money go round. Small wonder that the racist reactionaries are up in arms about how immigration control isn't effective enough; but keeping *everyone* out just wouldn't be lucrative enough...which in turn means that border control agencies can keep getting more money from the state so that they can become more effective. Erm, why do we pay our taxes again?

So what do you think? Papers for all? No papers at all? Freedom of movement, or border control to stop the drug dealers, traffickers (why is it that trafficking exists? Why would I pay a trafficker if I could just walk over the border?) and any other undesirables (like people with brown skin and beards?) from coming in? Or maybe we should stop trying to find neat answers...maybe we need to go out and work on the things that are affecting people every day, because until we do, how can our perspectives mean anything?

Being in Arizona and witnessing the strength and bravery employed by people to get across the desert and living out the craziness of being “illegal”, and the diligence and dedication of those working in solidarity with them, has blown my mind. So to everyone crossing, and to everyone supporting, I wish you love and strength.



## Bibliography

There is no conventional bibliography for “Welcome to the desert...enjoy your stay”. Most of the information in this writing comes from interviews, lectures, and talking to people about the work they do. This writing draws upon the work of the following:

- An interview with Geoff Boyce, history and geography academic.
- A talk on migration by Maria Aparico, historian.
- No More Deaths training talks, especially a talk by Jean Lefay.
- The knowledge and experience of activists who oppose the border in various different capacities, including No More Deaths volunteers.
- An info-sheet by Ofelia Rivas, an O'odham activist.
- “The desert smells like rain: a Naturalist in O'odham country” by Gary Paul Nabhan, 2002, University of Arizona Press.
- An interview with an immigration lawyer about Operation Streamline

The following websites were also used:

- Arizona indymedia <http://arizona.indymedia.org/>
- O'odham Solidarity Across Borders Collective <http://oodhamsolidarity.blogspot.com/>
- Article by Roberto Rodriguez; “What state officials don't want Arizona school children to know.” July 26<sup>th</sup> 2010. <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2010/07/26-4>
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**\*\* Big thank-yous to Topi and Jonathan for help and advice in producing this writing. \*\***

Welcome to Arizona, the Grand Canyon State, full of sunshine and the beauty of the desert. A perfect place to retire should the cold be getting to those old bones of yours...but no need to worry, you won't have to experience the discomfort of the desert...there's climate-destroying air-conditioning everywhere to prevent that, and although no grass naturally grows here, of course you can continue your absolute right to play golf – as the local authorities are dedicated to draining the scant water supply for you to do so. And just in case you were concerned about those brown-skinned folk affecting your God-given right to be here, don't worry, there are lots and lots of policies to deal with them!!

# We Reject Racism



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[www.nomoredeaths.org/werejectracism](http://www.nomoredeaths.org/werejectracism)



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