

A photograph of a border fence made of vertical metal slats. In the foreground, a black tire is suspended by a yellow rope, acting as a swing. The ground is dry and dusty. The sky is clear and blue.

# To the Border and Back:

## **Visualizing and Narrating Migration**

Essays and Photographs by student  
participants in the Spring 2017  
Migrations and Borderlands 360°  
Course Cluster at Bryn Mawr College

Canaday Library  
Coombe Suite, 2nd floor  
April 24 – June 15, 2017



360° class trip to Tijuana, March 9, 2017



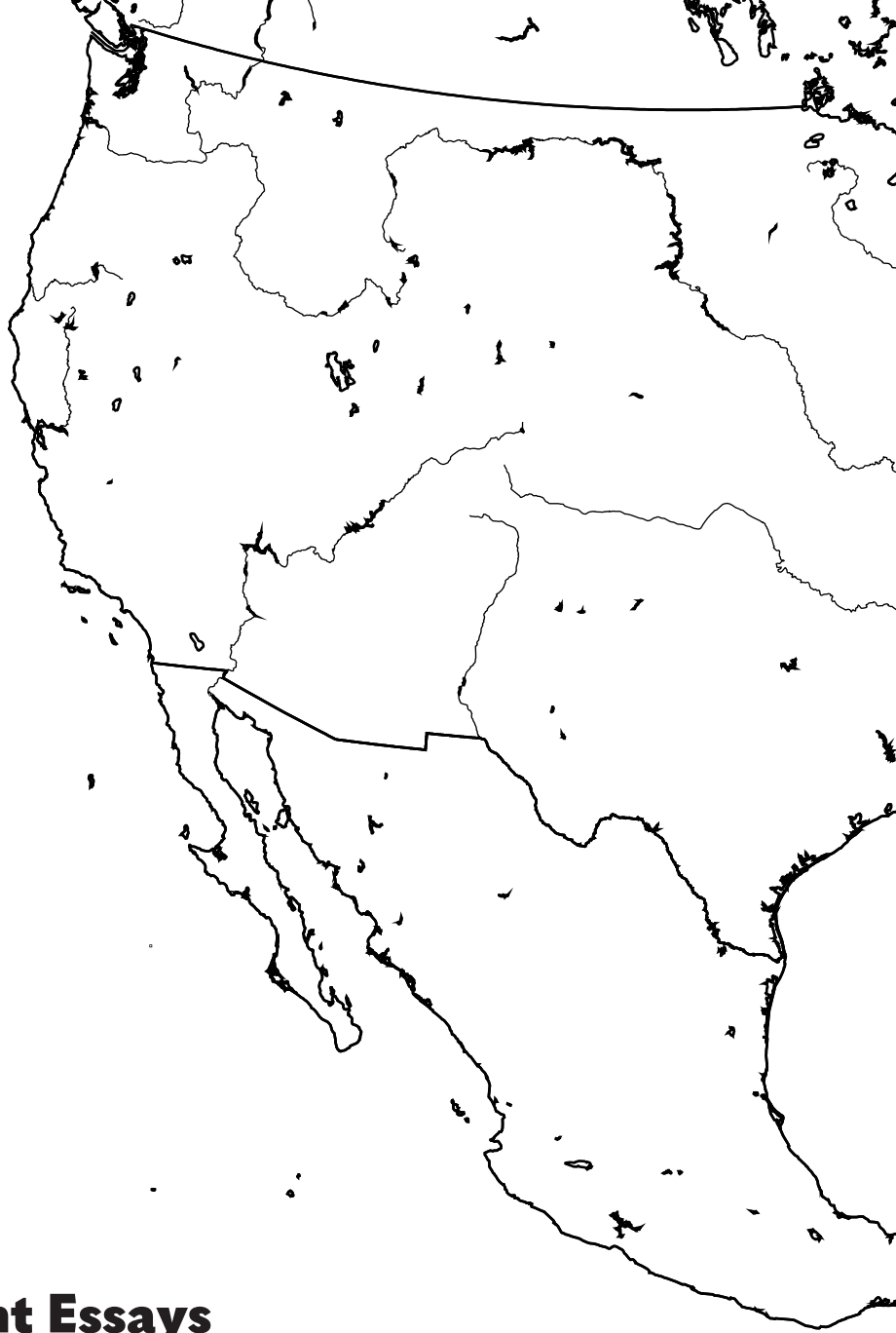
360° is an interdisciplinary experience that creates an opportunity to participate in a cluster of multiple courses connecting students and faculty in a single semester (or in some cases across contiguous semesters) to focus on common problems, themes, and experiences for the purposes of research and scholarship.

# To the Border and Back: **Visualizing and Narrating Migration**

Jennifer Harford Vargas, Verónica Montes, H. Rosi Song

As part of our Migrations and Borderlands 360° course cluster, we brought the travelling photography exhibition *Del Golfo al Pacífico*, which chronicles the evolution of the U.S.-Mexico border over the last three decades, to Bryn Mawr College. This exhibition was curated by El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF), a research institute in Tijuana, México dedicated to studying the phenomenon of migration between Mexico and the United States. Our students used this exhibition as an analytical and artistic tool to prepare for our class trip to Tucson and Sonora, Arizona and Tijuana, México. While in Tijuana, we had the opportunity to do a photography workshop with Alfonso Caraveo Castro, a photographer at COLEF and one of the curators of its travelling exhibition. We asked students to select one of the photographs they took during our trip to the border and put it in dialogue with one of the COLEF photographs, narrating what they learned about migration from this experience. Collected herein are our students' images, analyses, and meditations on the U.S.-Mexico border.





# **Student Essays and Photographs**

## Border Homes at the Wall, Nogales, Arizona, U.S.A.

after Gloria Anzaldúa, *Cherríe Moraga, 21st Birthday*, Virginia Grise,  
José Antonio Elena Rodríguez, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*,  
45th President

Sofía Juliana Chávez Crixell

I'm riding along in a hot van, my neck bent at 45-degrees and smooshed against the glass window. I'm taking a nap—the kind you don't see coming, the kind that pours cement in your limbs and leaves you heavy. The van rolls on gravel. The sun says "Wake up." I blink my eyes open and the world comes into focus: 30-foot tall steel bars reach to the sky. Clay red bars like jail. Wide enough for a hand but too small for a dog.

Nogales, Arizona.

I had never seen the wall in person. I had only seen pictures—graffiti on the U.S.-Mexico wall on Twitter, a mural on the U.S.-Mexico wall in the *Huffington Post*, images from the COLEF exhibit. Some images stay with you because they make you see the wall in a new and different way. For me, one of these is *Los Car Poolers* by Alejandro Cartagena. These are men we see every day, but Cartagena invites us into an intimate moment we might not otherwise see. We normally do not think about the in-between. The car ride to work. The car ride home. We do not think about the way the wall seeps into the space between every breath.

I'm still hungry for the words to describe the day the wall staked my soul firmly in two worlds. Like sweet saltwater taffy, Sonora grabbed me. Arizona grabbed me. The steel bars grabbed me and pulled me in all directions. *The Casitas* is four photos of the homes directly on the U.S.-Mexico border that bear witness to the wall. They stood across the street from it, the wall jutting out of the earth where their neighbors should have been, and I stood in the middle. A chihuahua in Arizona barked. Teenagers in Sonora walked by. A car in Arizona kicked up dust. A family in Sonora laughed.

Nogales, Sonora.

My family is from Albuquerque, New Mexico and Brownsville, Texas. This was my borderland. I knew cacti and palm trees and Whataburger on Sundays after mass. I knew empty parks and grass that cuts your bare feet and okra fields and adobe houses. This was the border. You lived here. I did not think about how it feels to live on steel. I did not know how to walk your dog on knives. How do you wake up on a steel pillow, or brush your teeth and look outside to see that steel is the neighbor eating your pie?

*Los Car Poolers*  
ALEJANDRO CARTAGENA  
Monterrey, México, 2011-2012



I did not know walls meant so much to me.

I live with ghosts. Some call them poems. They filter into my mind and talk to me. "Sofi," they say, "play with me." They dance away. Ghosts were visited on me that day. The day I drank the wall and turned green. The day I sang the wall and went mute.

I sit before the walls and I ask them, What have you seen?

There are men who ride in trucks. Could be the trucks tucked in the driveways in the pictures I took. They live somewhere. Maybe in the blue house, or the one with the porch, or maybe 2,000 miles away. Maybe they live alone, or nowhere at all. Wherever they are, it's steel. It's border. It's cactus. It's dust. Mornings they wake up, early. Maybe they eat breakfast. Maybe they feed their dogs. Always they ride in trucks.

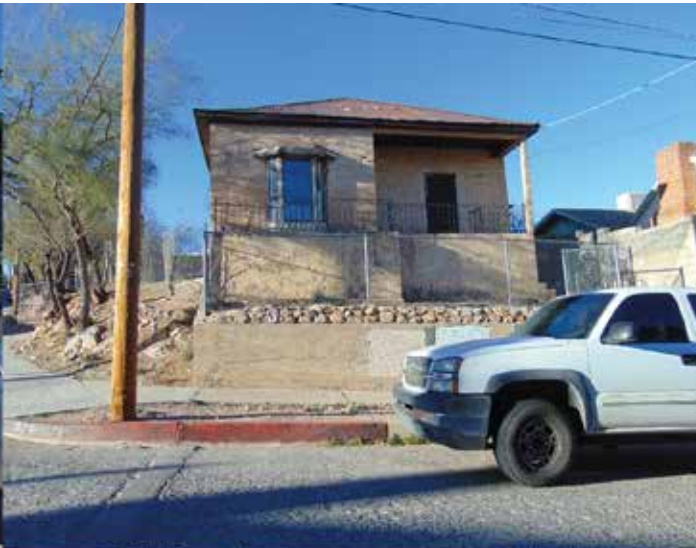
I hold my heart, my heart in my hands.

People think houses are forever. I've moved ten times. Every time I go with my parents to look in a realtor's car. Sometimes his name is Chad, or Ben. Sometimes I don't remember. At open houses there are sometimes cookies. Sometimes it smells like cinnamon but it's a Glade Plug-In room freshener. I used to think if you were a kid and your mom marked your height on a wall in her closet that meant you got to keep the house forever. But apartments in San Francisco, ranch-style homes in Austin, white-people neighborhoods in Dallas don't hold your body in their belly for long.

People think walls are 30-feet tall and 1-foot across. People think Sonora sits still and Arizona walks beside her. People think Arizona can't pull her pigtails. They think pulling pigtails is flirting. People think men in trucks don't dream when they sleep. They think it's not possible to fall asleep in Nogales, Arizona and wake up in Nogales, Sonora, but I've done it. I've been there with my heart and poems.

I am there now.

And will be again.



*The Casitas*  
SOFÍA JULIANA CHÁVEZ CRIXELL (Class of 2017)  
2017



## Looking Back

Lilian Hawley Domenick

Every Sunday at 12pm, families gather on both sides of the wall that divides Tijuana, Mexico from San Ysidro, California for a shared mass. Our group had the privilege of witnessing this moment of prayer and reunion on our final day in Mexico.

As we arrive, I notice the murals that stretch the height of the wall. I notice the way the barnacles have begun to eat away at the metal bars. I notice the faces pressed against the wire mesh, whispering to loved ones on the other side of the fence. I also notice the cameras.

Five different camera lenses hone in on a family clustered near the center of the fence. Most of these cameras belong to our group. We snap pictures of the pregnant woman leaning her back against the fence, a man and an older woman crouching nearby, and we follow the small boy as he shoves bits of french fry through the wire mesh. Someone kneels down and zooms the camera lens on the boy's curls, and a documentary camera hovers in the periphery, creeping closer to the family's whispered conversation. I feel a sense of guilt and shame for observing this moment, as well as disgust for the way we jump so quickly to document this cross-border reunion. The Border Patrol guards on the U.S. side only permit families to approach this section of the fence for two hours every Sunday. Some families travel to the border each week to speak with loved ones on the other side; others peer through the grid in search of family they have not seen in twenty years. The wall makes these meetings necessarily public, exposed to our camera lenses. I wonder, why do we feel we have permission to document this moment of pain and joy, which we observe but do not experience?

Later, I play with one of the children who has been the subject of our photographs. His mother calls him Brian. We sift gravel through our fingers and chase the donkeys that saunter past. In a moment of carelessness, my camera slips from my pocket and Brian crouches to pick it up. He presses the screen to his eyes and points the lens at my own face. I am now the subject of Brian's gaze. I want to preserve this moment when Brian snatched up the dropped camera, turning the lens back on his observer.

This photograph of Brian observing me through the lens of my own camera reminds me of a photograph by Alfonso Caraveo Castor, *Familia repatriada con menor lesionado*. The photo captures the boy amidst the confusion and pain of deportation, which is mirrored in the physical scars sketched across the child's nose and cheek. I wonder again, do we have the right to capture and gaze at his pain?



*Familia repatriada con menor lesionado*  
ALFONSO CARAVEO CASTRO  
Tijuana, México, 2005

Yet, like Brian, this child is not a passive subject. The child's gaze is present, peering out at the viewer. This act of "looking back" or reversing the gaze gives a certain power to the subject of the photo; it creates a dynamic where viewer and subject occupy both positions. We look at this child, but he also stares back at us.

I recall the words of one of the migrants I spoke with at Casa del Migrante, a shelter that feeds and houses men who have recently been deported from the United States to Tijuana, Mexico: "It's strange, for you to come here and study us," one man says to me. I nod and search my mind for the words, any words, to say back. He continues, "But I'm studying you too. And I'm observing lots of things." The man reminds me that we are not alone in our observation. While we have come to the borderlands to study and observe, we are also the subjects of others' observations.

Considering this exchange, I wonder about the source of my original discomfort with watching and documenting the migrants we observed at the border wall. I felt a sense of guilt for being an observer invading a moment of privacy. But perhaps this guilt was also rooted in an assumption that there is a level of inequality between me and the people I saw at the border. I came to the border expecting to see fracture and suffering, which I have not experienced. I told myself that I didn't belong in this space, that I had no right to come here and observe others' pain. It's true that the dynamic of power exists; we are outside tourists with cameras and passports that allow us to cross the border with ease. But, by focusing on this difference of power and by fixating on my role as an observer, I created a barrier. I projected a narrative of pain onto the people I observed and did not leave room for a two-way conversation that could allow for a more complex understanding of their story.

I imagine that the presence of these stories is why I am so struck by Brian when he looks back or by the migrant at the shelter when he tells me he is observing too. Our brief encounters lead to a sharing of gazes and stories that start a conversation. I tell Brian my name, and he tells me he likes honey-roasted peanuts. The man at Casa del Migrante watches as I tell him about my mother's blue eyes, how my own hazel eyes blend her blue with my father's brown. Then I watch as he tells me about his three daughters and the way he dreams of traveling to Playas de Tijuana to see the waves. Here, in this space of sharing and mutual exchange, we grow beyond the narratives we construct about one another. They are not just subjects or victims but human beings *de hueso y carne* with stories that exist beyond of the pain I had imagined for them.



*The Photographer*  
LILIAN HAWLEY DOMENICK (Class of 2019)  
2017

## Movement and Absence: Migration is Everywhere

Melanie Giselle Esquilín Rodríguez

While taking photographs during our 360° field study trip, I was drawn to areas that were fully occupied or where there was evidence of abundant life. I admired the beauty of market places and the beach in Tijuana where lives continue amidst the heavy impact of migration in these areas. I took the photo *Los vendedores* in a small Mexican marketplace that flaunted its irresistible colors. The shops, filled with traditional Mexican dresses and ceramic art decorated in the country's colors, appeared intriguing and inviting. However, as I looked more closely at my photo after returning from our trip, I realized the image did not align with my memories of this busy site of life. There are no vendors in the picture. In fact, there are no visible customers or wanderers, only the figures of a few people walking with their backs towards me, which suggests that they are leaving. So why did I remember this photograph capturing a vibrant moment in a lively market place?

To continue this pattern of thinking and questioning, I decided to compare my photo with the attention-grabbing photo, *Los Car Poolers*, taken by Alejandro Cartagena. Similar to the symmetry of the two market walls captured in *Los vendedores*, the seemingly mirrored images of the four cars in each corner of *Los Car Poolers* provides immediate visual pleasure. Taking a closer look, we see the somewhat comical positions of the riders and the wide range of their facial expressions. Some men are lounging with their legs and arms crossed, appearing stoic, unmoved, and uncomfortable. Others are curled up, as the space allows, sleeping with their faces shielded from the sun. One panel in particular shows a man fully stretched out on his back, as if exhaustion has taken over his body. The tools and wheelbarrows that accompany these riders give us enough context to answer questions such as: *Where are they going? What kind of work are they doing?* But we are still left with some uncertainty in terms of these car poolers' feelings about their work and whether they are actually sleeping or perhaps hiding from the border patrol. We learn from the caption that the photo was taken in Monterrey, México; it is more probable, therefore, that these men are workers hired to do physical labor in the area, but we cannot help but remain unsure, especially due to Cartagena's title, *Los Car Poolers*. His title calls attention to the debatable and unbound status of these men—what they may or may not be doing, where they may or may not be going—and links the photo to the processes of migration and the labeling of migrants.

Given this, I named my work *Los vendedores* to emphasize my questions and to connect them with the larger issue of migration. *Where are the vendedores? Why does the market appear to be open? Why does it appear to be waiting?* As I



*Los Car Poolers*  
ALEJANDRO CARTAGENA  
Monterrey, México, 2011-2012

mentioned, there are essentially no people in my photo. Nevertheless, I chose this title precisely because it prompts viewers to think more deeply about the issue of absence and how, in a broader sense, absence relates to the effects of migration. Without people, the market appears to be frozen in time, waiting for its customers to come back and bring life back to the space. The customers represent the migrants who have left to find better opportunities or refuge, but they have taken with them the hope of their families. Those left behind, *los vendedores*, depend on the hope that their separated family members will return. In the meantime, they continue life without them, but the reality is that it is too difficult to maintain the lifestyles they had prior to separation. Like the market in the photo, the families of migrants prepare and wait for the homecoming of their loved ones. Yet, by being constantly preoccupied with the prolonged distance between them, these families are emotionally withdrawn from their everyday lives; thus, they too become absent.

By dwelling on *Los Car Poolers* and moving past its aesthetically moving imagery, I was able to unpack my own image and give it meaning in the context of migration. I found that a strong and purposeful title for my photo highlights the impact of migration on a host country's communities, and it offers a small hope that *los vendedores* are just waiting for their customers to come back. Until then, they will leave everything just as prepared and beautiful as the day the migrants left.



Los vendedores  
MELANIE GISELLE ESQUILÍN RODRÍGUEZ (Class of 2019)  
2017

## The Borderlands as Canvas

Delia Rose Landers

The borderlands are important spaces to examine in the larger conversation about migration. Borders are purely arbitrary inventions created and perpetuated by people. They not only confine physical spaces but also people, limiting their movements and creating perceived differences between the two sides. In the spaces closest to the physical borders, people combat the presence of border walls by using art to reclaim the humanity that borders take away. The border thereby becomes a canvas on which people speak with art. The messages that are conveyed through these spaces claim ownership and fight against or transform the border.

Throughout the borderlands people are using art to speak. The photograph entitled *Fila peatonal de cruce fronterizo en la Garita de San Ysidro* by Alex García documents the intersection between art and real life at the border. A line of people waiting to walk across the border is directly under a mural that depicts a similar line of unidentifiable persons at an unidentified time. The photo shows and affirms the constant presence of migrants within these spaces and the world. The mural reclaims the space because it transforms the line, which is a constructed aspect of the border process, into a community of migrants. To explore these transformations through art further, I decided to place four photographs of different works of art, which I took while visiting the borderlands of Arizona and Tijuana, in conversation with one another. The purpose that each work of art attempts to actualize is directly related to the way that it exists in the space.

In my first photograph I peer through the border fence at a piece of graffiti in Nogales, Mexico that reads “¡Justicia! ¡No Fronteras!” This piece of art is working to fight against the space on the Mexican side of the border, but it is also clearly visible for the U.S. side. This piece is directly opposing the border in numerous ways. Physically, the words are placed against the border and can be seen through the fence. By being a piece of graffiti, an art form that has a rich history of resistance of its own, the artwork holds another level of opposition to the space.

Another informal piece of art I chose to display is a mural that I saw along the boardwalk in Tijuana. It shows a child surrounded by paper cranes putting a boat into the water. This boardwalk in the borderlands contains a gallery of murals, and every piece of art automatically becomes incorporated into the greater narrative of resistance. My photograph highlights this. The youthful age of the child and the paper cranes both convey messages of hope. Since the border is such a pervasive space of resistance, this also includes claiming and transforming the space, making



*Fila peatonal de cruce fronterizo  
en la Garita de San Ysidro*  
ALEX GARCÍA  
Tijuana, México, 2012

the border a space of hope and connection instead of the narrative of hate that border walls convey.

My photograph of the mural of the butterfly in Tijuana shows another piece that works to reclaim the space on which it appears. The butterfly is such a common yet powerful representation of migration. This mural is not just claiming that the borderlands are beautiful, and thereby transforming the space into a beautiful site, it is also showing the beauty in migration itself.

The final image I choose is a photo I took at the beach in Tijuana that contains Ana Teresa Fernández's piece of border art entitled *Borrando la frontera*. The photograph shows her piece from a distance and so the viewer may initially believe that there is a section of the wall missing. Fernández's artwork is a perfect example of art transforming the border in an act of resistance. She physically alters the fence itself to imagine a world without borders by painting an entire section to blend into the sea and sky. In this way, the border becomes something that Fernández herself controls. She claims the border space and radically transforms it in a pure act of resistance.

My photographs all work in conversation with each other to show the many ways that art and people interact at the border. Together they give a small glimpse into the borderland being used as a canvas. The border is a space where art is able to say things that people aren't always able to voice. This border art collectively generates a narrative of resistance by claiming the space of oppression as a place of belonging.





*The Border as Canvas*  
DELIA ROSE LANDERS (Class of 2019)  
2017

## Quinceañeras and Transnational Dreams

Leslie Patricia Luqueño

When I first saw Alfonso Lorenzana Navarro's photograph, *Quinceañera*, I automatically felt a connection. Navarro's picture depicts a *quinceañera* in San Diego, California. Navarro is a photographer from Tijuana who was asked to come up to San Diego because the family believed that only a Mexican photographer could do this important event justice. Looking at this photograph, I remember how integral *quinceañeras* are to my life and to the lives of many Mexican people, whether they are in Mexico or in the United States. *Quinceañeras* in the U.S. are symbols of transnationalism and of mixed identities, as well as symbols of resistance.

When I was younger, my mom always imagined my 15th birthday being celebrated with a huge party, envisioning me wearing a pink ball gown to celebrate my coming of age. I rejected this idea as a young girl because I was conscious of our socioeconomic status. I grew up under the poverty line so it seemed ridiculous for my family to spend our few savings on just one night. In contrast, my Mexican immigrant parents saw my *quinceañera* as proof of the American Dream and evidence that their migration was successful. My parents saved money for years, in hopes that I would come around and want to feel like a princess on my 15th birthday. I never really did, so when I turned 14 and my parents asked me for the last time if I wanted this party, I answered no.

To this day, my parents see my rejection of the *quinceañera* as a failure on their part. On the one hand, they recognize that the cost of having such a huge party was not within our reach and that they would have had to go into debt to pay for my 15th birthday. But, on the other hand, they feel they failed to raise their Mexican American daughter with Mexican values. My rejection of this coming of age party made my parents believe that I was ashamed of my *mexicanidad* since the *quinceañera* is such an important event in Mexican culture. I now regret breaking that dream for my parents since I did not realize how important it was for them to see me in a beautiful ball gown dancing the night away when I turned 15. Until recently, I did not realize that *quinceañeras* in the U.S. are considered the achievement of a transnational dream, in particular the dream that the children of migrants will have a better future than their migrant parents.

I decided to take a picture in response to the photo taken by Alfonso Lorenzana Navarro. I photographed the U.S.-Mexico border fence on Tijuana's side. When I saw this particular piece of art, which has the U.S. and Mexican flags, I instantly felt it



*Quinceañera*  
ALFONSO LORENZANA NAVARRO  
San Diego, Estados Unidos, 2010

connected with my identity as a young Mexican American woman. Many second-generation migrants feel conflicted about their identity since they never really belong in the country of their birth (the U.S.) or in the country of their blood (Mexico). For me, being Chicana has led to me question who I am because I am too American for the Mexicans and too Mexican for the Americans. This ongoing feud is often framed through the sharp divide between nationality and ethnicity. As seen in the mural I photographed, there is a sharp line between the U.S. and the Mexican flags. Yet, *quinceañeras* in the U.S. prove that this divide is not as sharp as it is usually presented; rather, both identities can blend together and blur the divide.

Both Navarro's photo and my photo portray transnational identities in different ways; nonetheless, both photos reveal how closing the border does not prevent identities from permeating the cracks in the border wall. Our food, our music, our traditions, and our culture resist the assimilation that the U.S. tries to impose on us. Ultimately, while *quinceañeras* are a symbol of transnational identity, they are not the only signifier that one is proud of her culture. I have come to terms with the fact that not having a *quinceañera* does not define how I value my Chicana identity. I know that I am proud of my Mexican descent, and I do not need to wear a ball gown and heels to prove that I am brown and proud. Both *la bandera tricolor* and the star spangled banner make up who I am. I may feel conflict between both of my identities from time to time, but for the most part, I am glad that I was brought up with Mexican values on American soil. I am the fusion of both flags. There is no divide between the two; there is simply a mixture of both.



*Transnational Identities*

LESLIE PATRICIA LUQUEÑO (Class of 2020)

2017

## Two Images of the Border Wall

Jessica M. Nguyen

Covering almost 2,000 miles, the border between the United States and Mexico separates the Global South from the Global North. The border consists of the Rio Grande river, the Sonoran deserts, and various miles of fences and barriers. Although the wall is expansive in length, it is not hard to find art graffiti made with paint or from carving words into the wall.

Jill M. Holslin's *Rastros: Fotografías del muro fronterizo (Traces: Border Wall Photographs)* really spoke to me because it captures a personal depiction of migrants' stories, even though there are no bodies present in the photo. It is also powerful to see a border wall, which belongs to the government, filled with graffiti. As people enter and exit the border space, they also leave their traces. Holslin's up-close shot at the border wall in Tijuana, Mexico shows words, numbers, and names carved into the wall. In a way, these *rastros* are messages to the world acknowledging migrants' existence and taking a stand against the immigration system that renders their stories invisible. Holslin's photo tells a part of the narrative of people crossing through the borderlands. As the wall corrodes, the inscriptions remain intact. They are permanent; even if the wall were covered in a layer of paint, the carved out messages would still be visible. As long as the wall exists, the memory created on it cannot be erased.

During our field study, we spent some time at the border fence that separates Tijuana, Mexico from San Diego, United States, and that extends into the Pacific Ocean. With Holslin's photo in mind, I searched for places where people left their marks on the border wall. In my photograph, taken in Tijuana, Mexico, the names of deported U.S. military veterans, their ranks, and their sectors of the military service are painted along the border fence. The fence is structured in a way that, from one angle, you see the names oriented bottom to top along each of the 21 columns. From another angle, you see an upside-down flag, the stars replaced with upside down crosses. Some names are marked with R.I.P. Similar to Holslin's photo, the names of the deported veterans take up space, expansively and unavoidably, on the 12 foot tall steel wall.

What do these border walls represent? They are intended to keep a certain population out, while protecting another. Painting and inscribing names on the border is a way to challenge the meaning of the wall. As intimidating as it is, the border wall is not untouchable. Moreover, the border wall is not physically impenetrable, as evidenced by the rust in both photos.



*Rastros: Fotografías del muro  
fronterizo*

JILL M. HOLSLIN

Tijuana, México, 1999-2013

I chose to place these images beside each other because, not only does the art on border walls create space for stories of migration, it also claims space on those very walls that are meant to divide and trigger fear. The public representation of art on the border indicates resistance against the acceptance of the wall. The footprints left behind serve as a reminder to those who visit and also cross the border afterwards that these lives are invisible to the majority of Americans. Because these images only contain the names of migrants who have entered and left the border space, we cannot know the entire story of their migration, even for the ones marked with R.I.P. However, the painted names are little acts of resistance that make space for part of the migrants' stories to be shared and their voices to be heard. Amidst the rusting border bars, the veterans' names are clearly visible and present in my photo *Names on the Wall Memorial*.

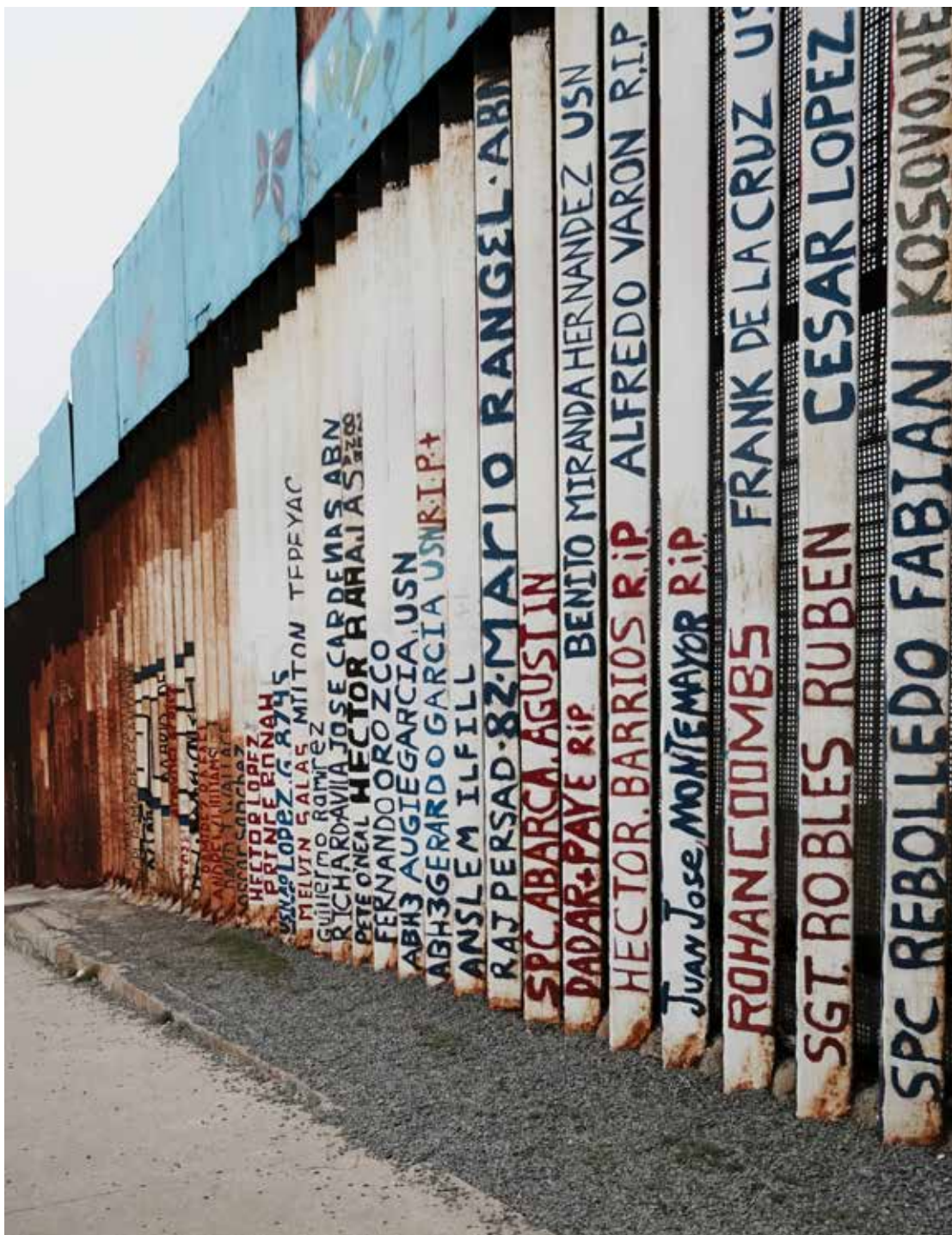
Memorials are structures established to remind us of a person or event. In the case of this deported veterans wall memorial, we must think about whose narrative of migration is told, and whose is not. Standing at the bottom of the border wall, I came face to face with the story of those who chose to fight for the United States but afterward were forcefully removed from the county. These names not only remind us of the people who served but, most especially, of the people who have been oppressed by a harsh immigration system.

(opposite)

*Names on the Memorial Wall*

JESSICA M. NGUYEN (Class of 2017)

2017



OSCAR SANCHEZ  
HECTOR LOPEZ  
PRINCE ENNAH  
USMC Lopez G 8745  
MELVIN GALAS MITTON TREFYAC  
GUILLERMO RAMIREZ  
RICHARD AVILA JOSE CARDENAS ABN  
PETER NEAL HECTOR RAHAJIAS  
FERNANDO OROZCO  
ABH3 AUGIE GARCIA USN  
ABH3 GERARDO GARCIA USN R.I.P.  
ANSLEM ILFILL  
RAJ PERSAD 82 MACIO RANGEL ABN  
SPC ABARCA AGUSTIN  
DADAR+PAYE R.I.P BENITO MIRANDA HERNANDEZ USN  
HECTOR BARRIOS R.I.P ALFREDO VARON R.I.P.  
Juan Jose MONTEMAYOR R.I.P  
ROHANC DOOMBS FRANK DE LA CRUZ US  
SGT. ROBLES RUBEN CESAR LOPEZ  
SPC REBOLLEDO FABIAN KOSOVO VE

## **Continúa...**

Tania Isabel Ortega Castillo

The border wall separates. It is a dividing force between families and between people. The border wall is also something that is erected in response to a nation's waning sovereignty. When this occurs, the border becomes a symbol that reinforces the power of a nation. In its many different forms, the border has consistently represented for me a boundary and a barrier in the lives of many people.

Standing in the presence of the border, I felt small. Learning about the conditions behind the creation and existence of this border, I felt even smaller. The beginning of our learning experience was difficult for me because I could not imagine how contemporary anti-immigrant, racist, and xenophobic discourses and policies can ever be changed. Facing the towering border reminded me of this.

Though I was once again in the presence of the border wall at Playas de Tijuana, this time I experienced and witnessed the space in a way that contradicted my previous expectations. I learned that while life is impacted or divided by the border, it is not defined by the border. For, life continues. *La vida continúa.*

*Continúa...* was taken at the border in Playas de Tijuana during the weekly binational mass. Every Sunday, people on both the Tijuana and San Diego side come together across the border from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Mass is held for approximately one hour; it is conducted in both Spanish and English with the priest on the Tijuana side speaking first, followed by the priest on the San Diego side offering his translation. While mass is taking place, families divided by the border wall use this slot of time to spend together. For people in the United States, this four-hour slot every Sunday is the only time they are allowed to approach the border fence. In *Continúa...*, for example, this four-hour slot is the only time the woman in red and her daughter can come into close contact with their family on the other side. One way they show intimacy is by extending their pinkies through the small gaps in the fence to touch each other. My photograph captures the mass, a street vendor, a family talking across the border, and one of the many organizations providing different resources to the community. All of these reflect typical Sunday occurrences. The space in which these encounters take place, however, complicates the situation.

In Angélica Escoto's photograph *Diario desierto de mar y juegos*, the border stands as a backdrop to the group of children playing together. The border and the conditions surrounding the existence of the border fence do not cripple life in Mexico.





*Diario desierto de mar y juegos*  
ANGÉLICA ESCOTO  
Tijuana, México, 2008

Life is made more difficult, but people do not lose hope or determination. We traditionally only see resistance in large acts of protest—in loud, public demonstrations. Yet, these photographs depict forms of protest that are just as great. To continue with daily life and participate in normal day-to-day activities is an act of resistance. The rhetoric, sentiment, and beliefs that have created the border fence constantly work against people and families who are separated by the border, so to be in this space where people participate in activities that could occur anywhere, is very powerful. Seeing a photograph of a group of children playing jump rope along the shores of the beach and near the border wall is inspiring.

The variety of quotidian interactions occurring in the border zone stands in stark contradiction to the physical nature of the border. Mass continues, family ties are kept, daily interactions never stop occurring, and children keep playing, all in spite of the border. Life continues.

My photograph captures the immensity of the border wall, which takes up a large portion of the image and seems unending. The size and overbearing nature of the fence is further magnified by the size of the people standing directly in front of it. But the focus of my photograph is not on the border; instead, it is on the individuals interacting with each other across the fence. The focus is on how they continue to live their lives in spite of the border that is directly in front of them and between them.

*La vida continúa. La resistencia continúa. La esperanza continúa.* Life continues. Resistance continues. Hope continues.



*Continúa...*  
TANIA ISABEL ORTEGA CASTILLO (Class of 2019)  
2017

## **Divided: The U.S.-Mexico Border Wall in Pictures**

Kayla Patton

During our trip to the U.S.-Mexico border, I took so many photos of so many different aspects of our experience that I found it difficult to choose just one photo to discuss in relation to the COLEF photo series. After much deliberation, I chose this photo I took of Tania Ortega, a member of our Migrations and Borderlands 360° and a student at Haverford College. This photo of Tania was taken at the wall in Nogales Arizona. When looking through my photos, I immediately felt a strong connection between this image and the 2008 image (*Sin Título*) taken by David Maung in Tijuana, Mexico. Although these two images were taken at two different places along the U.S.-Mexico border, they are connected and represent the border wall as a space of emotion, individual reflection, and experience.

My image captures one of the important experiences we had during the trip. While much of our time was spent meeting with different organizations and activists, we also spent a significant amount of time visiting different parts of the border wall and reflecting in its presence. During these visits, we each spent time taking in the border and engaging with this border spectacle in our own way. I believe we each gained a unique emotional understanding of the border from having the opportunity to reflect individually in the presence of the physical divide. My photograph of Tania and Maung's photograph together capture the varying experiences different people have at the border. Our visit to the U.S.-Mexico border was a time for us to learn more about how this divide strongly affects migrant communities. For others, such as the subjects in Maung's work, the U.S.-Mexico border is simultaneously a space of reconnection and separation.

In both photos, the steel bars that make up the border wall create an interesting emotional and physical landscape. The wall was constructed with solid steel beams so there are small spaces between each beam. These spaces allow certain things to pass through while restricting the passage of others. Whole bodies are barred from moving through the bars, but arms may reach through the gaps and across the two countries. Individuals' gazes are allowed to pass through the border wall, but their views of the opposite side are also always partially obstructed by the steel pillars. The view of the other side can also be limited by Border Patrol agents in the United States. When we were visiting the wall in Nogales, Arizona, for example, we were harassed by a border patrol officer in his vehicle who tried to deter us from visiting the wall by constantly driving past our group and making excessive noise. In both of these photographs, little to nothing can be seen through the bars, which captures



*(Sin título)*  
DAVID MAUNG  
Tijuana, México, 2008

how, from some angles, the wall appears to be a solid piece of steel that completely impedes visibility of the other side.

Both images also communicate with one another through their similar composition. Both photos have a simple singular off-center focus without secondary or tertiary focus points. In both these photos, the wall serves as the backdrop and the subject matter, giving it a unique relationship with the subjects. Both Tania and the female subject in Muang's photo are wearing clothing or accessories that provide a pop of color against the uniform darkness of the wall. This color difference immediately draws the focus of the viewer to the subjects and allows the viewer to take in the presence of the wall in the context of these subjects. The simple, singular focus of these photos allows for intense emotions to be conveyed even for viewers who may only have a few seconds to look at each photograph.



*Divided*  
KAYLA PATTON (Class of 2018)  
2017

## ***Nunca me lo imaginé***

Vanessa Quiroz Morales

There are certain things in my life that I can do freely without facing any obstacles, such as brush my teeth, go to the bathroom, shower, get myself food, hug my friends and parents, or even do my laundry. As a college student, I have twice had the privilege of studying migration and borders. The first experience happened earlier this year in Mexico City. It was here that I realized the powerful impact of the border beyond its physical location. While in Mexico City, I wasn't supposed to flush toilet paper down the toilet, or spend more than ten minutes in the shower, or even drink the water (according to the Haverford Health Center). These are things I have never had to worry about on the other side of the border in the United States of America. I can flush toilet paper down any toilet, spend more than twenty minutes in the shower if I want to, and drink water from most fountains or sinks without a second thought because I live on this side of the border. Life is "easier" in the U.S. because I have been socialized in a way that makes quotidian actions in Mexico feel significantly different and strange. Traveling back to Mexico for the second time with our 360° Migrations and Borderlands cluster gave me a new perspective on the different quotidian experiences and lifestyles than what I had previously witnessed in the U.S. and Mexico.

In Playas de Tijuana, my heart broke when I saw the reality for those who live in this border city. I never expected to see a baby stroller alongside the border wall or to see the family with the baby stroller sharing a meal of french fries with their loved ones through the small squares in the border fence. The nagging feeling inside of me at seeing this baby stroller alongside the wall challenged the assumptions I had about the border. I had assumed that the border is a place of death and that the border wall is a structure of hate that divides people. I had also assumed that life cannot be fully lived or experienced at the border. These were assumptions I had made as a U.S. citizen who has lived all of her life outside the hundred-mile border zone. Yet, even though a border wall separates this family, there is life at the border. Families come to the wall to see their loved ones, talk with their loved ones, laugh with their loved ones, pray with their loved ones. Their existence constitutes resistance in the border zone.

The family's *convivencia* with the border is complicated because it also signifies how the border wall can be normalized. I never expected to see the two children playing in the rocks and the sand alongside such a dividing monstrosity. The border wall is part of the landscape of their youth. The reality for those who live in Tijuana and



*Tendedero*  
ROBERTO CÓRDOVA-LEYVA  
Tijuana, México, 2012

other border cities is stark because, even though this is surely not the first baby stroller brought to the border wall, one baby stroller is one baby stroller too many. While my experience in Playas de Tijuana challenged my presuppositions and expanding my understanding of life on the border, it is still incredibly frustrating to see the racialized, militarized surveillance institution of the border wall.

Roberto Córdova-Leyva's photograph *Tendedero* captures the juxtaposition I have been describing. The photo depicts a woman hanging her clothes along the border fence, using the fence as a *tendedero*, or clothesline, to dry her laundry. This use of the border ironically illustrates the reality of daily life. Previously, I never would have imagined seeing such a quotidian use of the border. The border wall has created a border culture that is cultivated by those who live near it. It is undeniably a part of their lives; you cannot ignore such an eyesore. However, you can choose how you interact with the border wall. For, the border is much more than rods of steel and sheets of metal. At the very least, you can turn it into a clothesline or into a structure to lean your baby stroller against. In all its nuanced complexity, the border is a living space where quotidian experiences of sharing a meal through a fence and drying your clothes along the wall are normal actions. Despite its cruel design, the border wall is space that is imbued with daily life, exceeding my wildest imaginations.



*Nunca me lo imaginé*  
VANESSA QUIROZ MORALES (Class of 2019)  
2017



## **Domingos en familia**

Leticia Abigail Robledo Trejo

Before embarking on our week-long journey to Tucson and Tijuana, I was impacted by a photograph taken by Alfonso Caraveo Castro. Entitled *Migrantes, deportados y heridos*, the photo depicts the hands of wounded migrants and deportees. At first glance, the colors and the hands at the center of the image provide a visually striking representation of migration. Beyond this visual impact, the photo also captures the complexity of migrants' stories. The colored clothing and packed suitcases in the photograph contradict the false narrative of migrant homogeneity so often displayed in the media, conveying much more emotion than what is immediately visible in the photo. While taking photographs, I felt a sense of wonder knowing that we were surrounded by many stories we would never hear. With the photographs I took, I tried to provide this same sense of wonder that drew me to choosing *Migrantes, deportados y heridos* as my central image. I too wanted to find ways to portray emotion without it being immediately recognizable through the lens of the camera.

Our trip consisted of documenting what we saw through photography, but I felt conflicted trying to take a good quality image in a land that has experienced so much pain. During the first half of our trip, I was stunned and a bit disgusted with myself at how easy it was to become a tourist in the borderlands. At times, I found myself getting too attached to the camera and not fully observing the events unfolding in front of me. Most of us were taking pictures as U.S. citizens, and all of us had the freedom of movement. I felt torn about how to capture what I wanted to capture without being insensitive to the stories and difficulties migrants face.

Once I was able to talk with people along the border and listen to their stories, it became much easier to photograph the stories in front of me. Many of the images I took are of children and families attempting to converse with their relatives on the other side of the wall in the United States. Being in Tijuana made me think of the ambiguity of *Migrantes, deportados y heridos* and the feeling of uncertainty created by only showing the migrants' hands, as well as the questions the photo provokes about the lives of the migrants whose hands are depicted in the photo. Seeing families try to talk to each other through metal bars also made me wonder what their future holds. *How long have these families been separated? Will they ever be able to return?*

*Migrantes, deportados y heridos* does not depict facial expressions but one imagines them, evoking strong feelings. In the image, what you first notice are the injured hands of two migrants, followed by the color of their clothing. Perhaps a person's



*Migrantes, deportados y heridos*  
ALFONSO CARAVEO CASTRO  
Piedras Negras, México, 2001

personality cannot be predicted based on clothing alone, especially given the situations migrants face while crossing the border and being deported. But something different stands out about each migrant in the image. What they are carrying, their wounds, the placement of their hands, and their body posture all say so much, while also saying so little.

With the image I took at the border, I want to demonstrate the humanity of the people directly affected by the border, and I want to highlight how children are among those affected as well. Images like this one serve to combat the stereotype that migrants are all criminals and are mainly men. Not only does the image show the normal, everyday lives of these children, it also demonstrates a common theme in stories of migration: strength. Although, the uncertainty of not knowing when they will be together with their relatives on the other side is heartbreaking, it is powerful to see that the physical wall does not separate them emotionally.

Much of the power in the two images I have discussed comes from the different stories of migration that they capture. They tell stories of joy, of uncertainty, and of normalcy. The overall sentiment in both images is not expressed by the angle in which the camera was placed or by the individual elements that stand out. What most draws our attention is the human resilience that we perceive in these two images and the truth that there are no modern day walls or modern day chains that can contain this resilience.



*Domingo sin familia*  
LETICIA ABIGAIL ROBLEDO TREJO (Class of 2020)  
2017

## Death This Way in Tijuana, México

Rebeca Salas Miranda

Being the daughter of Mexican migrants, I have known about migration since as long as I can remember. However, it was not until I got to college that I learned about how the United States is responsible for so much mass immigration and various forms of displacement. Throughout my time at Bryn Mawr, I have also expanded my knowledge about how the U.S. has intentionally increased the dangers and obstacles posed to those trying to enter the country, for example, by constructing border walls and fences in populated areas that push migrants to risk their lives in merciless deserts.

Through Operation Streamline in Tucson, Arizona, migrant detainees are forced to claim culpability. In a large courtroom overseen by one judge, fifty to sixty migrants sit, their hands and feet shackled, waiting to be tried for “illegal re-entry” into the United States. In sets of seven, they walk up to the front silently, most of them wearing earpieces that translate the judge’s English into Spanish. The sounds of their footsteps are interrupted by the clangs, clanks, clinks, and clunks of the shackles. Once standing before the judge, in less than a minute, each migrant is asked by the judge if he or she is guilty of crossing the border. The mandated answer is not “yes” or “no” or “culpable,” which is Spanish for “guilty.” Instead, the migrants are taught to respond with the word “guilty.” But they are *not* guilty. The United States is the one guilty of creating the conditions that make living in their countries of origin unaffordable, dangerous, or too difficult to survive. The United States is also guilty of taking the lives of thousands of migrants who die attempting to cross through the desert.

I chose Alfonso Caraveo Castro’s *Gilberto, menor migrante no acompañado* to highlight the reality that death is, unfortunately, part of thousands of migrants’ stories. Caraveo Castro’s photograph of Gilberto, an unaccompanied minor, alive in front of this mural calls attention to the prevalence of death in the migration process. Gilberto’s singularity as a living, moving person in front of a mural populated by a collection of skulls and corpses highlights the dangerous reality that he faces, for a significant number of unaccompanied minors die or are gravely injured while migrating. The long snake that lies treacherously in the foreground of the mural and behind Gilberto represents the life-threatening violence that prevents many migrants from reaching their destination.

I took the photo *Death This Way* with the intention of expanding on Caraveo Castro’s image. While his image illustrates death during migration, mine captures the idea of death specifically when crossing the U.S.-México border on foot. I came across this street sign in Tijuana, Baja California, México. We were walking along a



*Gilberto, menor migrante no acompañado*  
ALFONSO CARAVEO CASTRO  
Altar, Sonora, México, 2007

bridge above and perpendicular to the dozens of lines of cars waiting to cross into the United States. This sign attracted my attention because of the sticker in which the person's face seems to be melting or dripping away, revealing his skull. I am intrigued by the decision someone made to place this sticker on the sign, and I interpret that act as a continuation of Caraveo Castro's work.

I chose to title my photograph *Death This Way* because I read the sticker as a call to recognize the death involved in crossing the U.S.-México border on foot. Consider the skull sticker's impeccable state. Someone clearly attempted to remove two stickers placed higher-up below the "U" in "USA." It appears that the skull sticker was recently placed on the sign, likely because the artist felt an urgent need for those passing by to learn about the deaths at the border. Another reason I entitled my photograph *Death This Way* is because the head of the large human stick figure below the word "USA" is concealed by a mysterious sticker but a large arrow points at this stick figure. For me, this parallels how the United States erases migrants' humanity when it refuses to recognize migrants' rights, both to not migrate and to be treated as equal if they do migrate. I included the human stick figure, the arrow, and the skull sticker in my photo to depict their combination as a warning sign of "death right ahead."

The angle from which I captured the sign, looking up to the object from a lower level, would normally be used to give an admiring, awestruck power to the photographed object. However, I strategically used this angle to generate irony. It questions why "America" is viewed as "great" by people in the United States, by people outside of it, and by people migrating to it. The United States of America is not great, and will never be, as long as it hides its responsibility in displacing and forcing thousands of people migrate and in dehumanizing them by reducing them to "illegal criminals."

*Estados Unidos, tú eres culpable.*



*Death This Way*  
REBECA SALAS MIRANDA (Class of 2019)  
2017

## Serving You: Hierarchies of Power on the Border

Jason Sanchez Espinoza

The borderlands are a paradox. Across the vast, rugged desert runs an unforgiving 580 miles of metal bars that are heavily militarized but porous enough to let some people through. The spectacle of the border invokes a sense of awe and stirs a mix of emotions for so many people on both sides. The border is a space of incredible beauty that shines through its breathtaking landscapes and the warmth of its people, both colored with the same shade of rusty brown. It is a space where two worlds come together to create a new culture, a new race strengthened by elements from each world. Among the bountiful *mercados*, where pesos and dollars are exchanged seamlessly, and the luxurious gated communities, which contain signs such as “PRIVATE BEACH,” the mixture of American and Mexican cultures appears to be a harmonious and smooth process. Despite the cultural mixture that occurs, the borderlands are also a space of danger and social death, especially for those who are most marginalized in our race and class obsessed societies.

While Tijuana is no longer as dangerous as it was back in 2009, when violent drug cartels ruthlessly controlled the flow of undocumented migrants northward, tensions still run high as families struggle to survive with limited job opportunities on the Mexican side of the border. In Tijuana, the American citizen is considered more valuable, more worthy of being protected than the Mexican citizen, who is constantly constructed as dangerous and de-humanized in the process. This unequal system of valorization is rooted in the high value placed on white, wealthy bodies and the criminalization of poor, brown bodies. These racial, economic, and national tensions tend to be best highlighted in interactions with law enforcement; for, it is through this established institution that the State decides who is worthy of protection and who is disposable.

I took the photograph *Here to Serve You* on Avenida Revolución, a large street that runs under the Tijuana Arch in the heart of the city’s tourist district. Unlike other places we visited in Tijuana, there were many white, American tourists who were eagerly taking pictures and entering the souvenir shops that lined the busy street. Given this context, I could not help but take a picture of this sign, since it begs us to question who the “you” is referring to.

Even though this police station is in Mexico, the only Spanish word on the sign is “POLICÍA” written in big, bold black letters. The rest of the sign contains smaller blue letters in English that read “Working to Serve You Better!.” By having this sign in two different languages, the State sends different messages to different groups.



*La redada*  
ROBERTO CÓRDOVA-LEYVA  
Tijuana, México, 1987

*"Policía"* serves to remind the brown, Spanish speaking citizens of the city that they are being watched by law enforcement. It is also reasonable to assume that most English speakers would understand the word *"policía,"* which means police. However, the rest of the sign, which is supposed to reassure people that the police are working to protect them, is written in English. Through this linguistic difference, the English-speaking tourists are prioritized over the Spanish-speaking citizens as the sign reassures the English-speaking tourists that the Mexican state is laboring to protect and serve them. The sign thus reveals how the State cares more about the well being of white bodies than brown bodies.

This hierarchy of power is even more dramatic in the photograph *La redada* by Roberto Córdova-Leyva. The U.S. border patrol agents, while brown skinned, assume a dominant role as they overlook the mass of migrants, who run for the U.S. side of the border when confronted by the agents in this non-walled section of the desert. The power that these agents wield over the migrants is represented by the larger border patrol agents in the foreground of the image who tower over the smaller migrants in the distance. The weapon held by one of the agents also suggests that violence is needed to subdue this group of migrants who are seen as a dangerous swarm. The scene in this photo is also reminiscent of how cowboys hurdle cattle, a metaphor that captures the way the State, both the United States and Mexico, dehumanizes migrants into large masses, making it easier for the State to exploit their labor and violate their rights.

Together, *Here to Serve You* and *La redada* highlight the hierarchical racial, economic, and national systems at play in the borderlands. While *La redada* depicts the more stereotypical image of the border spectacle that gets perpetuated by mass media, *Here to Serve You* shows how these hierarchies of power subtly and disturbingly extend into the daily, everyday spaces people occupy. These two works show how the wall extends beyond the physical space that it divides and how this further divides people within both countries.





*Here to Serve You*  
JASON SANCHEZ ESPINOSA (Class of 2018)  
2017

## **Sueños suspendidos**

Azalia Sprecher Hidalgo

In this photo taken in the town of Nogales, Arizona, U.S.A., a tire swing hangs in the front yard of a quiet neighborhood, facing the beast of a wall with the twin city of Nogales, Sonora, México on the other side. When thinking about a swing, it's easy to imagine the laughter of a child, the sound of little feet scattering on the gravel road, the occasional thump of a body falling from the swing. As I, a 21-year-old Chicana and daughter of immigrants, swung on this very tire, I remembered playing on swings as a child and wishing that I could let go of the swing and, instead of hitting the ground, fly like a bird over the trees and clouds and eventually into the sun. After a day of waking along migrant trails and experiencing a small fraction of the emotional and physical exhaustion that migrants endure, I gripped the metal chains of the tire swing and was faced with a metal monster. Just a few feet from the border, I felt a knot form in my throat. I immediately felt lost. The metal bars of the border wall, built during the Bush administration out of metal returned from the Iraq War, unnaturally cuts through the Sonoran Desert. The wall represents the separation of my family and countless other families, the death of thousands of migrants, and suspension of migrants' dreams.

Yet, when I saw the solitary swing, innocent and untouched, I imagined its existence in this desolate landscape is a form of resistance. Life, happiness, laughter, and love exist at the border, helping migrant communities and separated families to survive despite the pain of loss and despite those metal bars. The dreams of migrants are suspended, sometimes on faith, sometimes in the hands of coyotes, and sometimes in the shadows of uncertainty. Perhaps the child who owns this tire swing also has suspended dreams. I like to think that she dreams of propelling herself over that wall to hug her *abuelita* and eat some warm *tortillas*.

While I sat on swings and dreamed as a child, my mother's hands were busy at work. Her hands never stopped. Like little soldiers, her fingers kept marching, following the residual bit of hope that her suspended dreams had left her, dreams that had been suspended by domestic abuse, by familial separation, and by the lack of documents. Her isolation drowned her, but she figured that if she never stopped washing dishes, cooking, or changing diapers, the painful cracks in her hands, which were reddened by Clorox and blood from her raw wounds, would numb her longing for home. In the photograph *Fábrica de guantes de latex* (Alfonso Caraveo Castro, Tijuana, México, 1999), we see multiple representations of working hands and the value given to them. Like many other women living on the Mexican side of the border, the woman in this



*Fábrica de guantes de látex*  
ALFONSO CARAVEO CASTRO  
Tijuana, México, 1999

picture is a worker in a *maquiladora*. Focused on the task at hand, she works ten-hour shifts daily, possibly leaving her children at home alone. These mothers dream for their children but know that their hands can also never stop working. My mother bought a pair of yellow gloves in our local Walmart in Houston, Texas for the low price of 99 cents, but she never wore them. She said they interrupted her ability to clean the dishes well. I imagine that the woman in the photograph is thinking the same thing, choosing to make gloves without the protection of her own pair.

*Maquiladoras* are weeds that sprouted from the bad seeds the United States threw across the border. Migrants' hands are not valued. No one cared enough to tell this maquiladora worker to protect her hands, which are the source of her survival; instead, she is told she must meet her daily quota. Migrants' hands work and bleed. Their hands service the United States and support the very systems that oppress them. Their hands produce the gloves that Americans use to keep their own hands clean of the unjust exploitation of the migrant community, the militarization of the border, the death of migrants in the desert, the criminalization of undocumented people, and the discrimination of migrants.

A little imagination, a big dream, and working hands can take us far, but sometimes these are not enough. No matter how hard migrants work, they are exploited, they are denied personhood, and they are not protected. Their hard work won't save them from displacement, loss, familial separation, or suspended dreams.



*Sueños suspendidos*  
AZALIA SPRECHER HIDALGO (Class of 2018)  
2017

## **¿Dónde está Cinthia?**

Sandra Torres Galicia

At the border, everyone has a unique story to tell. There is no way to compare or measure the magnitude of how hard immigrants and their families are affected by migration, for every case is different. Even though the border wall may stand as a firm and concrete structure to mark the divide between two countries, it fails to stop stories. The border is a place where many stories originate. The border's purpose is to separate, but this gives rise to the recollections every affected individual has to tell. If you've ever had the opportunity to hear these stories yourself, it is very important to remember that they are just the tip of the iceberg.

A picture is worth a thousand words, but being present in the moment is worth an infinite amount. This idea was extremely evident during our trip to the U.S.-Mexico border while we investigated the lives and injustice that reside on both sides of the border. Our comprehension was truly put to the test when we interacted with the people themselves and their narratives.

While trying to take our surroundings into account as we stood in front of the border wall that runs along the beach in Tijuana, a woman by the name of Luz Beatriz Robles hovered around the boundary, looking but seemingly never finding. She seemed ghostlike, the way she remained rooted to one area while people came and went. She reminded me of the Mexican legend of *La Llorona* about a woman who drowned her kids in a river and was doomed to weep for them there for all eternity. Finally, the woman approached me and a classmate, asking us if we could deliver a message to someone on the other side for her. We couldn't refuse such a request, so we asked her to provide us with the contact information of the person she was trying to reach. She responded immediately that she had no information whatsoever because she last saw her daughter Cinthia twenty-six years ago on the day of she was deported and separated from her daughter, who remained in the United States. I was speechless. How could this woman have lasted for so long not knowing where her daughter was without falling apart? She proceeded to tell us the rest of her story, speaking as fast as she could and occasionally having to remind herself to breathe. I didn't know what to say, so I said as little as possible while she repeated herself over and over. She seemed to speak as if it were the first and last opportunity she would ever have. In the end, I kept asking myself, "What can I possibly do to help her? Am I even able to help her?" But the question that most burned in my mind was, "What should I do?"



*Momentos difíciles*  
MARÍA TERESA FERNÁNDEZ  
Imperial Beach, CA, Estados Unidos, Septiembre, 2007

To this day, her story has resonated with me. The way she searched for someone before she came to talk to us made me think about how much she needed to share her experience. It must be torture to be denied help over and over again when you so desperately want to connect with your loved one.

Stories flood the border, coming in and out of the firm and porous iron bars like the water does at a high tide in Playas de Tijuana. These gaps in the border fence should allow countless voices to pour through. Instead, thousands of stories are often trapped between the bars at the border. When we refuse to see or listen to those who stand alone, we prolong their silence and force them to stay in the shadows.

Storytelling is part of the healing process; it helps people *desahogarse*, removing a heavy burden from their shoulders after they have kept their feelings bottled up for so long. These restless ghosts depend on willing ears in order to be put at ease. One woman in particular fought back and told me her story, which gave me an awareness that I hope to pass onto you.

If someone came up to you and confessed their story, *¿Qué harías tú?*

(opposite)  
*¿Dónde está Cinthia?*  
SANDRA TORRES GALICIA (Class of 2019)  
2017



## **Binational Mass**

Can (May) Zhu

I took this photograph in Playas de Tijuana, where I attended my first mass. Seeing how the physical wall split Tijuana from San Diego, and how unnatural its presence is, stirred up a lot of emotions in me. Among them were feelings associated with separation. The wall marks not only the physical demarcation between the U.S. and Mexico but also the separation of transnational families. We had the privilege of traveling between the two countries on our trip, but in Playas de Tijuana, the presence of the steel bars thwarted people's ability to move between each side and to embrace their loved ones. The closest any of us could get to the people on the U.S. side was to greet them with our index fingers through the wall.

When I first saw the 2008 photograph (*Sin título*) taken by David Maung at the border wall in Tijuana, it provoked similar sentiments in me. In the photo, a man and a woman embrace through the black steel bars. They are leaning together, their foreheads touching and their eyes closed. Only the arm of the man on the U.S. side is showing. They seem as if they are enjoying their temporary reunion, but their body language and facial expression tell another story. They are also suffering from the pain of not being able to fully embrace each other. The black steel bars take up almost the entire photo. It is impossible to tell where the border wall starts or ends. The pain associated with separation is re-inforced by the fact that the couple appears to be so small and powerless in comparison to the gigantic, looming border wall. Looking at the photograph, I became curious about the encounters that take place at the border, thinking many people would have similar physical interactions to the one captured in Maung's photo.

I was very shocked when we arrived at the border wall in Tijuana, because, unlike what I had expected, people's interactions with each other are minimal because of a wire mesh installed on the U.S. side of the fence. I was frustrated at this division, and at the fact that the space between the steel bars is now even narrower. Yet, as we approached the steel bars and greeted the people on the U.S. side with our index fingers, another emotion emerged inside me. From this connection and communication, I realized that support can extend transnationally. Through my photograph, I want to express the message that even though border walls exist and affect our lives, our love and solidarity *no tienen fronteras*.

Like the photo taken by Maung, my photo documents the inhumane effect of border walls, which turn transnational families into fractured families. In Maung's photo, the exact relationship between the man and the women is not revealed, but it is clear





(Sin título)  
DAVID MAUNG  
Tijuana, México, 2008

that their relationship is impacted by the border. Only the man's head and hand are showing. His lack of physical presence on the Mexican side of the border suggests his absence from his life and family in Mexico. In my photo, the outlines of different people, whose faces and physical presence are blocked by the border wall, capture the absence that results from the forced separation that borders create. Many transnational families have to endure the absence of family members when they cross to *el otro lado*. Thousands of families are separated, and their access to this border wall is strictly monitored. Without legal documentation such as passports and IDs, people on the U.S. side cannot get to the border wall, whereas on the Mexican side people can walk up to the border wall unrestricted. Yet, even the minimal physical contact allowed in this space tortures these families.

My photo simultaneously documents one way that transnational communication takes place at the border: through a binational mass. As the woman holding the service on the Mexican side presses the microphone at the border wall, the priest on the other side shares his thoughts. Even though the faces of the people standing on the U.S. side cannot be clearly seen through the border wall, their voices are not silenced. The communities on each side of the border are united by this binational mass. My photo captures their resilience and faith.

The 2,000-mile border between the U.S. and Mexico separates families, creates distance, and inflicts pain, but the solidarity and faith people show on both sides give me hope. Border policies should be challenged and changed because human beings should have the right to embrace the people they love. The steel bars and mesh wire convey a sense of incarceration, but who are the criminals in this case? The thousands of fractured families? What makes them culpable? In the end, our collective effort can and will change these inhumane border policies and the existence of the border fence.



*Binational Mass*  
CAN (MAY) ZHU (Class of 2020)  
2017



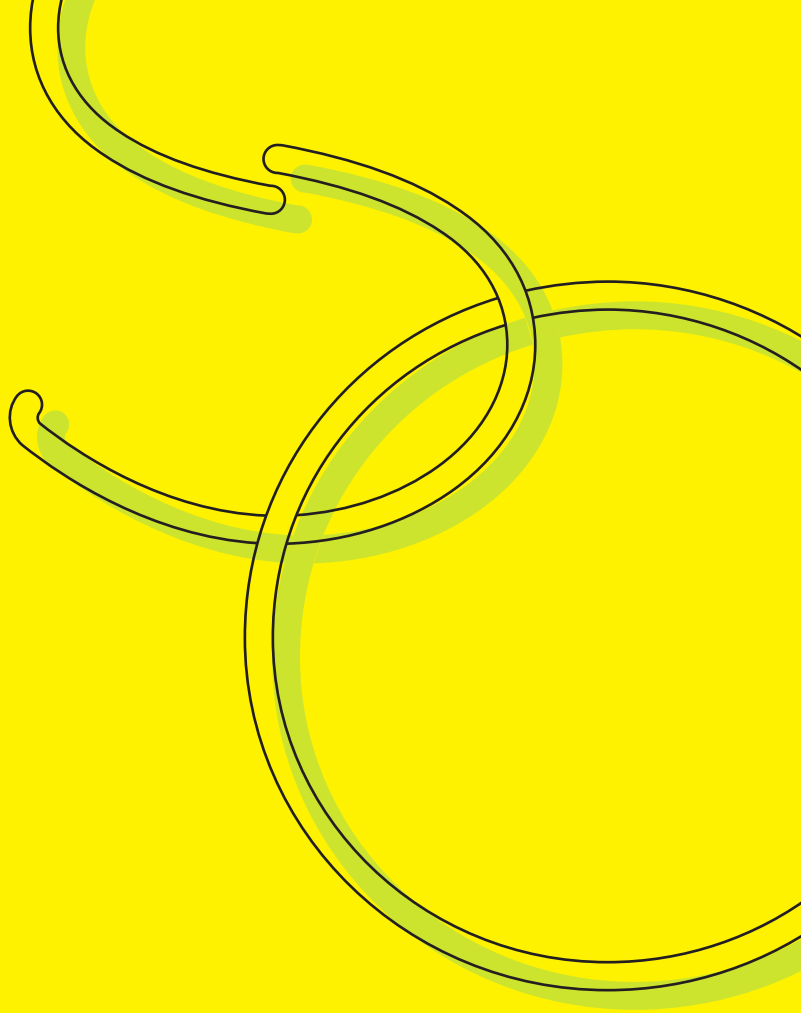
360° class trip to Playas de Tijuana, March 12, 2017

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