# A Matter of Waste and Bodies: Life, Death, and Materiality in the United States-Mexico Borderlands 1990 to the Present

by

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**A Matter of Waste and Bodies: Life, Death, and Materiality in the United States-Mexico Borderlands 1990 to the Present**

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This dissertation examines contemporary United States border policy, which disregards the lives of border crossers and border dwellers. Since the inception of Prevention through Deterrence and the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, immigration policy has pushed marginalized peoples into increasingly dangerous spaces, including the desert of Southern Arizona and maquiladora-fueled garbage dumps. The rise in new dumps along the border is a direct consequence of economic systems which relies on the disposability of both materials and workers. Waste is used as a justification for heightened border policing as it plays a pivotal role in the economic and environmental rhetoric of the borderlands. This dissertation analyzes the discourses of migrants and border dwellers as waste and wasteful through works of literature, digital art, and digital archives that use discarded and disposed objects to address the humanitarian crisis in the borderlands. Critical to this analysis is the use of new materialism and environmental justice approaches to elucidate the violence of waste visible through dumps along the border like those in Roberto Bolaño's *2666*. Equally important are specific objects exhibited in databases like *Yo Tengo Nombre*, which serves as a catalogue for identifying recovered migrants via their personal affects. In this way, objects become sites of recovery, which make visible the immense loss of life happening in the borderlands. Digital memorials further the importance of making visible the violence of sovereignty as explored in *Fatal Migrations*, *2487*, and *Border Memorial*, all of which utilize digital methods to honor the deaths of thousands as a direct consequence of border policy. Considering the entanglements of objects, environments, and people, this dissertation examines how the border space is a continuation of a settler colonial ethic that effectively diminishes both

the land and the those who have died along the border. Taken together, the pieces analyzed and discussed in this dissertation expose the violence of the borderlands as both historical and contemporary, social and political. This dissertation posits public mourning as a crucial site of resistance to the violence of U.S. border policy, and erasures which have been foundational to immigration enforcement in the borderlands.

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## Preface

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## 1.0 Introduction

Jovita Garcia Ortiz's body was recovered on September 9, 2020. On October 27, 2020 I, along with a group from the Tucson Samaritans, visited the site where she was recovered. Along the edge of a large wash that runs from State Highway 286 to the edge of the Tohono O'odham reservation, we found a backpack with the remnants of her journey. Toilet paper was tangled in the nearby bushes and unopened menstrual pads blew around in the slight breeze. Like so many of the sites where migrant bodies are recovered, the area is remote but still reachable with 4-wheel drive and a GPS unit. The spot where Jovita was recovered was less than a quarter mile from State Highway 286, but forty-five miles from the border crossing in Sasabe, AZ. She was likely making her way to Three Points, a small town in Southern Arizona where 286 meets 86 and runs into Tucson. It's a common pick-up spot for migrants making their way across the border and into the United States. Migrant encounters in the areas around 286 happen frequently and there are hundreds of recorded deaths in the area. Border Patrol race up and down 286 at high speeds; you can often see them unloading ATVs to go patrol the areas on either side of 286. There's a Border Patrol check point about 20 miles South of Three Points; it's hardly ever open. Aside from a few ranches, the area is largely comprised of lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). It is both open and well-traveled. The Coronado National Forest runs alongside 286 from Arivaca down to Sasabe and all the way to Nogales to the East. All that stands between the highway and these spaces are barbed wire fences and gates with signs placed by BLM. There's a failed housing development right outside of Three Points – the roads are still marked on maps, but there are almost no houses out there and the plots of land have been for sale for years. Developers cite migrant movement through the area as the reason for the failed development. The proximity to the

border and the empty landscape provides the ideal conditions for catching a ride and making your way to Tucson, Phoenix, and on to California or out East. The encroachment of housing, the constant presence of Border Patrol, and the remains of migration are all visible along State Highway 286.

After reaching the spot where Jovita was recovered we planted a cross for her. I have been helping artist Alvaro Enciso plant crosses for migrants in the desert of Southern Arizona since September 2020. I, along with a group of other volunteers from the Tucson Samaritans, accompany Alvaro every Tuesday in search of the sites where migrant bodies were recovered. Over the past seven years Alvaro has planted over 1,000 crosses in different parts of the desert, and his work is seemingly never ending. As we stand at the site it's quiet. There are markers on the earth that someone died here, as well as the items. We dig the hole, pour cement, pour water, mix, and pound the earth around the cross. It's bright red and its color contrasts the brown earth and the muted greens of the surrounding bushes. These moments are difficult for everyone as we reconcile with our proximity to help that could have changed the story we're now honoring. We're close to major roads including homes, a general store, and even a Border Patrol checkpoint. But close is relative when you're on foot and especially during the heat of summer. Luckily, we know her name which we all repeat quietly as we search for rocks to help prop up the cross. There are none here, just sand, bushes, and sunlight.

Once the cross is planted and secure everyone begins the short hike back to the cars. I stay behind with another volunteer to record the site. Throughout my time in Southern Arizona I've visited many sites where migrant bodies have been recovered, both with the Samaritans and individually. I set out my 360 camera and hide in the wash – crouching quietly as the camera records. I've done this so many times it starts to feel like a routine until I'm confronted with how

quiet the area is with no people around. Hiding in this way invites a kind of reflection that I don't think would be possible in any other form and allows me to sit with what I do and don't know about the person. Crouching quietly and counting the seconds I'm thankful for the gentle breeze that day – I know the camera will pick up these small movements. After 90 or so seconds I stop the camera, pack up my tripod, and begin heading back to the rest of the group.

I don't know if the cross for Jovita is still there, but it's likely. It's an acknowledgement of the United States' deadly approach to migration and the needless nature of her death. More importantly, the cross is a memorial for Jovita, someone none of us knew, but a person who deserves to be honored and remembered.

**Figure 1: Cross placed for Jovita Garcia Ortiz.**

I began constructing *Vistas de la Frontera* (Views of the Border) in August 2020. *Vistas* is a digital memorial for migrants who have died in Southern Arizona from 2001 to the present. I use 360 technologies to record the sites where migrant bodies have been recovered as a means of memorializing the person and calling attention to the environmental realities facing border crossers. *Vistas de la Frontera* is both the culmination of research for my dissertation, *A Matter of Waste and Bodies: Life, Death, and Materiality in the United States-Mexico Borderlands 1990 to the Present*, and the implementation of that research in the real-world. In *A Matter of Waste and Bodies*, I examine how United States border policy disregards the lives of border crossers and border dwellers. Since the inception of Prevention through Deterrence and the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, immigration policy has pushed marginalized peoples into increasingly dangerous spaces, including the desert of Southern Arizona and maquiladora-fueled garbage dumps. The rise in new dumps along the border is a direct consequence of economic systems which relies on the disposability of both materials and workers. Waste is used as a justification for heightened border policing as it plays a pivotal role in the economic and environmental rhetoric of the borderlands. I analyze the discourses of migrants and border dwellers as waste and wasteful through works of literature, digital art, and digital archives that use discarded and disposed objects to address the humanitarian crisis in the borderlands. I bring fiction and digital art together to consider the importance of objects and the accumulation of waste, as well as the locations where they are discarded or recovered as a link to the exertion of state power over the borderlands. Critical to this analysis is my use of materiality and environmental justice approaches to elucidate the violence of sovereignty made visible through waste, discarded objects, and militarized environments. I turn to the need for mourning through new and different means including digital databases and digital memorials that work to make visible the loss of thousands

of people as a consequence of maintaining the border. These pieces are the foundation for *Vistas de la Frontera* which adds to discourses about the possibilities of digital memorials as pieces of public humanities work and advocacy. Taken together, the pieces discussed and analyzed in my dissertation expose the violence of the borderlands as historical, environmental, and political. I posit public mourning as a crucial site of resistance to the violence and attempted erasure of people under U.S. border policy.

Like the fiction and digital memorials explored in my dissertation, *Vistas* is a call for public mourning that attends to the environmental realities migrants face while crossing the border. I have based *Vistas* in the desert of Southern Arizona for a few specific reasons, the first of which is the amount of accessible information about migrant deaths in this area. The second is that Luis Alberto Urrea's *The Devil's Highway* documents the treacherous conditions in the area, which are also reflected in fictional works like Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive,* Natalia Sylvester's *Everyone Knows You Go Home*, and Ana Castillo's *The Guardians*. Fictional representations of this particular desert are critical to my own understanding of the environment and the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the Sonoran Desert. These books (to name just a few) all address the need for public mourning and awareness within discussions about the violence of the United States-Mexico border. The causes of this violence are the result of 1994 policy Prevention through Deterrence (PTD) (De León, *The Land of Open Graves*). Created as a response to rises in illegal immigration and the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, PTD solidified the border in major metropolitan areas like El Paso/Ciudad Juarez and San Diego/Tijuana (Nevins, De León). By placing hundreds of Border Patrol agents directly along the border, the United States government has forced migrants into hostile landscapes like the Sonoran Desert that is both too big to fully surveil and too treacherous for everyone to survive without assistance. The result is an

unacknowledged and largely unmourned humanitarian crisis created by American immigration policy.

Prevention through Deterrence relies on the borderlands environments of Southern Arizona, Southern California, and the Rio Grande river to not only make the journey difficult, but deadly. As Jason de León writes in his book about PTD and the resulting migrant deaths, *The Land of Open Graves,* "the desert is a tool of boundary enforcement and a strategic layer for border crossers" (67). The weaponization of the borderlands environment is an essential part of contemporary immigration policy as it allows for the redirection of blame "blame, [on to] 'natural' environmental processes that erase evidence of what happens in the most remote parts of southern Arizona" (De León 4). With the rising wall topped with barbed wire and the constant presence of Border Patrol, the borderlands have become a heavily militarized space where citizenship is always in question (Miller, De León). Despite new measures, the environment is still one of the most reliable forms of enforcement. This weaponization of the environment against an entire group of people is "slow violence" in action. As Rob Nixon writes in his book of the same name, slow violence is "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, and attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). The displacement of peoples into dangerous and hostile environments with the aim of not only not seeing their movement but counting on their deaths as a form of deterrence is part of the deliberate violence of sovereignty. Because of this, much of the advocacy surrounding migrant-aid is about visibility.

The problem of migrant deaths is so pervasive in Southern Arizona that the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner documents and makes public all of the migrant deaths they work on. In conjunction with migrant aid group Humane Borders, the Office of the Medical Examiner

has created an interactive map that allows users access to the data about who was recovered and where. The map is an important resource and part of Humane Borders' advocacy, but there are issues with the system itself. Some deaths are placed in illogical or impossible areas – one was charted in the middle of a highway overpass, but the cause of death was hyperthermia. While not impossible, the person was likely taken to the hospital and the site was notated after the fact. Within this data are hundreds of deaths that are listed as "unknown".

Everything that surrounds migrant deaths is already marred by the inability to know the circumstances beyond the data or the science that makes the data visible. But even then, there are hundreds of deaths from the early 2000's that still don't have a name. This anonymity is central to policies like Prevention through Deterrence persistence. With or without names, the majority of these deaths are deemed "ungrievable" or as Judith Butler writes, a life that "cannot be mourned because they are always already lost or, rather, never 'were'" (Butler 33). As migrants fall outside of the purview of sovereignty their deaths challenge what it means to grieve for someone with "no name, no narrative, so that there never was a life, and there never was a death" (Buler 146). The state relies upon the relative anonymity of many migrants, even the named ones, to hide the violence repeatedly being done in the remote landscapes that make up the border. What these deaths do make visible is the lengths the United States has gone through to protect its borders not from other countries, but from "nonstate transnational actors – individuals, groups, movements, organizations" (Brown 21). These deaths, like many deaths that happen in the shadow of the border, happen out of sight – in the desert, on remote ranchlands, and in used-up places. They are also repeatedly positioned as a choice on the behalf of the individual with the perpetrator always evading capture or simply being a "natural" occurrence. People are still choosing to cross the dangerous desert despite the reality of difficult terrain and the possibility of death from the

elements (De León, *The Land of Open Graves*). This shifting of responsibility to the environment and individuals results in a move away from mourning and memorial. By refusing to take responsibility for the conditions that lead to those deaths, the state is deliberately positioning migrant deaths as ungrievable.

Without recognition from the state, mourning these deaths falls to activists, artists, and communities to publicly recognize the loss of life. Of course, families grieve for these individuals, but the difference between personal grief and public mourning illustrates the state's biopolitical control. The state, then, not only dictates who lives and who dies, but whose death is recognized as a death at all. This construction of life under contemporary political structures illuminates the ways in which the state has solidified ideas of migration around legality, personal responsibility, and people living a space of "nonexistence" (Coutin). In turn, how can these people be mourned by the structures of the state, if they were never alive to begin with? In essence, "if someone is lost, and that person is not someone, then what and where is the loss?" (Butler 32). These structures are deliberately reductive and rely on the binary between citizen/undocumented as a means of justifying the legality of someone's right to dying in the United States. Consequently, the refusal to recognize these deaths on a public scale is not only the refusal to take responsibility for them, but a refusal to mourn them. The result is a militarized landscape that is haunted by thousands of unmourned and unacknowledged migrant deaths.

Capturing the environment allows users to see and "interact" with some of the spaces via their computer or cell phone screen. Through interaction each space becomes a site of mourning that users can explore and revisit through a publicly accessible map. Each of the videos is haunted by the absence at its center – the person who is no longer there. The absence of the person who was recovered there haunts each and every site, leading to more questions than answers. Avery

Gordon writes that "haunting" makes visible the ways in which "elusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with" (xvi). Visiting each of these sites brings forth these specters and also suggests how the entire desert is haunted by the forces that have led to their deaths. These deaths are the consequence of deliberate decisions made by people who both did and did not understand the borderlands socially and environmentally. Part of mourning on a large-scale means holding accountable the forces that led to the deaths of so many people. At present there are no physical memorials for the thousands of migrants who have died, at least not large-scale ones. In some ways traditional memorials that are the "material expression of mourning for lost lives" cannot capture the scope or scale of a tragedy that has been slowly unfolding over 26 years (Haskins and DeRose 378). Moreover, how can a physical memorial, like those that attract crowds and are deemed as sites of reverence, account for the material realities that lead to migrant deaths?

The differences in landscapes make the possibility of creating a centralized memorial incredibly difficult. One physical memorial for migrant deaths would in many ways, deem the deaths of migrants "attention worthy" and bring people together to mourn for those who have been lost (Blair 35-6). This, of course, is an important pursuit and one that the Colibrí Center for Human Rights is currently advocating for. However, the construction of a physical monument or memorial will only be able to capture a small part of what is a large and entangled problem of death, environment, and politics. Alvaro's crosses which are placed on each site gestures to the decentralized nature that mourning, and by extension, memorial must take in the Sonoran Desert. Unlike other forms of memorial, placing a cross in the spot itself calls attention to how people are moving through hostile landscapes and the ways in which the desert has been made a part of migration. In this way, the crosses are as much for the living as they are for the dead. They are the

constant reminder that the border is nearby, and that the environment has been weaponized. Very few of these crosses would be considered "memorial sites" and thereby "*destinations*", but their presence throughout nearly the entirety of Southern Arizona points to the scale of death as a persistent and largely invisible problem (Blair 46).

Every cross is a memorial site for the both the person honored there and the other migrants who have never been found or faced a similar death. These spaces are "by their very existence,… *communal spaces*" because they are markers of a loss of life that provide a place for people to come together to mourn (Blair 48). However, there are hundreds of crosses and thousands of sites throughout the desert. Each is worthy of visiting and mourning, and as such shows the possibilities of creating communal mourning in non-physical spaces. More than that, this approach to planting crosses shows how mourning for such a large problem demands decentralized memorials. On February 2, 2020 we visited the site where Josseline, a 14-year old El Salvadorian girl, died. Visiting the sites where young people or children died is always the hardest. Several of these sites have received an abundance of attention from volunteers, reporters, even authors (Regan). About 7 miles north of the border and on some remote ranch lands in the Coronado National Forest, Josseline's body was recovered in the middle of a wash. The story goes that she was traveling with her brother and fell ill, likely from drinking some contaminated water from a nearby cow tank. The children were crossing to reunite with their mother who lived in California (Regan). This story is well-known by Samaritans and one of the sites they show new volunteers to impress the gravity of the situation and the harshness of the desert. There is a shrine at the site where her body was recovered – one that is much larger than the crosses the Alvaro places. Every year there is also a memorial event at the shrine held by the Samaritans that includes other migrant-aid organizations. While the politics of public grief specifically for a young woman give me pause as it can often be

used to value certain lives over others, the practice of communal mourning at Josseline's shrine points to the decentralized nature of memorial in the desert. By this I mean that it is one site where people can meet to mourn, but it does not and cannot stand in for every other site. We know more about Josseline's death than most others, and this is largely because her death is framed as more tragic than others because her age and her sex. However, as many Samaritans point out, it is just a symptom of a larger problem that is pervasive throughout the desert. But Josseline's shrine is not the only shrine in the desert. In fact, many people who have found migrant bodies, regardless of their affiliations with migrant aid organizations, have constructed their own shrines and visit them with some regularity.

What mourning in this form illustrates is that memorials for migrant deaths must be simultaneously rooted in place and dislocated from one specific site. Traditional memorials in the form of monuments or plaques, would fail to account for the scope, scale, and specificity of the situation that led to these deaths and disappearances. Each site is worthy of the same reverence that is afforded to Josseline's shrine, but a decentralized approach can have the consequence of making the problem feel too big and sparse. Crosses throughout the desert serve as a reminder of the lives lost, and on the ground memorial work must attend to this challenge because it is foundational to the deaths in the first place. Of course, not all memorials need to take this form nor should they. But deaths in the desert and their invisibility under contemporary border policy are strongly linked to the environment and place. Consequently, mourning for this kind of tragedy must be simultaneously accessible and hard to reach. These deaths must be visible and grievable in some centralized way while also acknowledging that not all of these deaths occur in the same way and that the specificity of each death should not be erased under a myopic view of migrant death. All of the deaths in the desert are political, and as such public mourning becomes a means

of resistance and acknowledgement for a human life. Just as Butler writes of the obituary, public mourning makes "a life worth noting, a life worth valuing and preserving, a life that qualifies for recognition" (Butler 34). Each life lost in the desert is a life worth acknowledge and preserving. Some of the accessible sites become stand-ins for the larger problem, but as maps, crosses in the desert, and digital memorials all acknowledge: each individual death deserves its own memorial.

Like the deaths themselves, the problem with decentralized memorials is one of visibility. The crosses are part of the visibility, but they require on-the-ground participation that is not always possible or accessible to everyone. Memorial in this form also raises questions about who sees and interacts with the crosses themselves. One Tuesday while planting a cross for a migrant around Arivaca we encountered some hunters who stopped their truck to ask what we were doing. Encounters in the desert like this aren't altogether uncommon, but they don't happen at a high frequency. One of the most troubling aspects of this kind of encounter is the awareness that the areas around Arivaca and along 286 are host to many militias. We often find bottles of water placed by migrant aid organizations vandalized or completely destroyed, including the tanks managed by Humane Borders. Volunteers often talk about the rise in militia activity in the area and their encounters with the leader of one of these groups. All of us were acutely aware of all of these things when the hunters pulled up to ask what we were doing. The interaction wasn't necessarily unfriendly and certainly wasn't as threatening as other encounters, but it was a reminder of just who encounters the crosses. It should come as no surprise that many of Alvaro's crosses go missing, are vandalized, or completely destroyed. There's strange tension between the need for visibility for this person's death and the need to protect the marker of that death. Interestingly, crosses left in populated places are more often left alone, largely because they are regarded as religious symbols and are often in very public spaces. One cross in Nogales, AZ survived the

construction of a shopping center next to it while others in remote parts of Ironwood National Forest are often removed, leaving behind only a pile of rocks.

This is, in part, why I created *Vistas de la Frontera* as a digital memorial. In one sense, digital memorials can reach wider audiences and speak to the needs of advocacy for an invisible population. Pieces like the VR accompaniment to Hostile Terrain 94 use digital methods and storytelling to highlight some of the most insidious aspects of contemporary border policy. The piece is an "interactive" digital exhibit that can be accessed via cell phone technology. It takes users through four different locations and features interviews from scholars, activists, and migrants ("Hostile Terrain 94"). Users can click and drag to experience the interactive environment and choose specific objects in the landscape to learn more. The piece is less of a memorial and more a piece of advocacy that accompanies the Hostile Terrain 94's physical memorial. But its virtual reality (VR) form is an important example of how digital methods have the potential to reach a much wider audience. In this way, both VR and Augmented Reality (AR) are important technologies for making distant environments accessible and making visible the environments people are facing. Both methods allow for the site of mourning to be seen and heard, and also invite user interaction in some way. The VR accompaniment to Hostile Terrain 94, *Vistas de la Frontera*, and other digital pieces about the borderlands show the potential for a "mixture of real and virtual environments" (de Souza e Silva 264). These augmented spaces allow for a more complex view of the crisis unfolding in the borderlands alongside the ability to "move" the space itself.

While augmented reality experiences rely upon locative media in order to work (i.e. running AR through apps depends upon location), the visual representation of an interactive space walks the line of AR and VR. *Vistas de la Frontera* does not rely upon the user moving, but it only

works via interaction with the piece in terms of the Google map where the videos are plotted, the 360 videos which can be controlled via cursor or by phone, and a willingness to sit with the videos. In this way, digital memorials challenge conceptions of space and instead transform it into a "dataspace" wherein an "immaterial layer [is placed] over the real space" (Manovich 227). While Manovich is writing about augmented reality systems via locative technologies, the idea of a dataspace is an important one to both seeing and experiencing spaces of memorial that have been digitized and made accessible. The space is real, and its digital representation is not a live feed, but a video. However, this clashing of augmented space with the reality of what each video represents illustrates how the flexibility of digital methods allows for new and different modes of representation. Each video imbues "space with meaning, thus transforming a space by giving it a sense of place" (Farman 39). It's important to note that *Vistas de la Frontera* comes out of research on other digital memorials in the borderlands, primarily Josh Begley's *Fatal Migrations* and John Craig Freeman's *Border Memorial*. Building on ideas of surveillance from *Fatal Migrations* alongside an on-the-ground approach from *Border Memorial*, I have used new technologies to illustrate the need for new ways of mourning in the borderlands. Augmented spaces allows memorials to move beyond the confines of the physical and instead calls attention to the ways in which "the space of the digital and the space of the material…have constant interplay and permeability between one another" (Farman 36). This mingling of the digital and real allows for more voices and more modes of memorial that challenge the very idea of memorial as communal physical space. Instead, through their circulation digital memorials can speak to larger problems on a systemic level outside of a fixed location. Rather, the location becomes a site of reverence that speaks to larger issues that can be viewed and visited via the screen.

While the videos can reach a wider audience, the crosses and other physical memorials will likely last longer than the platforms that make *Vistas de la Frontera* possible. The shifts in technology occur at such a rate that digital memorials created in 2016, *Yo Tengo Nombre*, and 2012, *Border Memorial*, are no longer accessible. The platform that made *Border Memorial* possible was dismantled in 2014 and the images in *Yo Tengo Nombre* have been migrated to another system. Physical memorials will not have to contend with technological obsolesce, but their material form is subject to the elements as well as human interaction. During a trip to plant crosses in September 2020 we visited the Tumacacori Mountains outside of Arivaca. We had planned to check on three crosses and place another two. After hiking about a mile in the 100+ degree heat we reached one of the first crosses Alvaro had planted. It stood weather-beaten, but still in solid shape. It didn't wiggle when touched nor did the wood crumble. The Tumacacori Mountains are a dizzying mountain range comprised of large rolling hills and oftentimes deep washes. The sun is relentless. The first cross still stood, but the next two were falling apart. One had fallen over with its base jagged from the weight of the cross tipping and breaking apart over time. Termites had eaten through part of the base helping bring it down. Despite using cement and wood, Alvaro always says that his crosses aren't permanent structures in the natural environment and having seen the cross's decay in just 3 years it's clear why.

Decay in the desert is uneven and the environmental factors that occur heavily depend upon the specifics of the spot. We see this reflected in the reports from the Medical Examiner wherein bodies are found rapidly decayed in certain areas in a matter of weeks and others are still intact after months. Under harsh environmental conditions the materiality of all things comes to matter in ways that are often overlooked or merely dismissed elsewhere. By this I mean, that the physical matter of objects and bodies in the desert is more important because they are essential traces of

movement and death. But the harshness of the desert is part of PTD and "with enough time, a person left to rot on the ground can disappear completely" (De León 67). Not only is the desert weaponized against migrants, its ecosystems work quickly to make sure bodies disappear.

Understanding border policing requires looking at the material reality of both bodies and things. Consequently, the attempted erasure of migrant bodies – and by extension their movement – relies upon the desert's harsh conditions and animal interference. These "remote locations where people die, the rapid scavenging of corpses, and the destruction of clothes, personal effects, and bones by various processes mean that the current death tally for the desert undercounts the actual number of people who die there" (De León 83). The matter of the body is rapidly dismantled by natural elements that work to erase the presence of a person at all. The destruction of bodies in this way has led to thousands of missing persons cases with no resolution – if there is no trace of a body to find, then did that death even happen? Because of this, disappearances are impossible to account for in the data that makes creating a memorial. Consequently, all memorials about these deaths will be perpetually incomplete. Groups like the Colibrí Center for Human Rights and Operation ID work to help provide families of the missing with any possible answers. But it's important to note that this work falls to non-profit organizations rather than the federal government. The rapid decay of bodies in the desert is an important part of upholding PTD because it hides the violence of migration. Within this, all that's left, both human and non-human, is often the only materials clues that allow us to know what happens in the desert.

Whenever we visit sites in the desert, basically anywhere in the desert, we search for materials. There are certain things we find over and over again: carpet shoes, backpacks, jackets, etc. Even in tatters we can estimate when people were in the area, or if this is no longer a place to put water. These items often lead us to trails which are key for providing migrant aid, allowing

volunteers to better know where to leave water, blankets, and foods. Conversely, it allows Border Patrol to better track and apprehend migrants in the desert. On December 10, 2020 a fellow Samaritan and I visited Warsaw Canyon, approximately 1 mile from the border with Mexico. During the trip we stopped to find the site where Fernando Diaz Roblero was recovered on August 16, 2020. Around a hill about a quarter of a mile from main canyon road we found the spot right to the side of a new trail. The land was recently walked upon and just out of sight from the main road. It snaked its way along the back side of the hill and further into the canyon toward Mexico. Along the trail and tangled in the bushes along the way were empty bottles of water, Gatorade (and other drinks with electrolytes), food cans, and wrappers. This trail was not on any Samaritan maps, but it was clearly in use. Construction on the wall to the South has pushed migrants into even more dangerous areas like mountain ranges, including Warsaw Canyon where the wall hadn't reached at that point. There are ranches throughout the canyon leased by BLM, so movement through the canyon isn't infrequent in the form of cars and Border Patrol. However, other forms of movement are present in the form of trails just out of sight of the main road and discarded objects in the brush.

**Figure 2: Site where the body of Fernando Roblero was recovered.**

Warsaw Canyon is full of trails like this with objects lining the trodden earth. Taken together, these indications of movement have garnered a lot of attention as proof of migrants' destructive impact. These objects are often labeled as "trash" because they are indication of what I'm calling *objects out place*. Based on Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger*, objects out of place walk the line between discarded and recovered. Many are figured as "trash", but they reveal larger narratives by being in places where they are unexpected or reduced to waste. Importantly, objects out of place help us understand not only the diminishment of things, but of the people associated with them. These objects are all over the desert, and the label of "trash" deliberately undermines the importance what they have to tell us about the routinized suffering migrants experiences as they move across the border (De León, "Undocumented Migration, Use Wear, and the Materiality

of Habitual Suffering in the Sonoran Desert"). These items are indications of life and death that are deliberately pushed out of view under contemporary immigration policy. Finding places with large accumulations of these objects raises questions about the people who were moving through the area as well as those who did not make it. These objects are intentionally pushed out of place by American immigration policy and then further vilified for being "trash". By this I mean that anti-immigration political rhetoric looks at the accumulation of these objects as a means of reducing migrants to "dirty" and "wasteful" (Ray). But what this line of reasoning fails to recognize is the outright violence of maintaining sovereignty by pushing migrants into hostile and inhumane spaces that force them to carry large amounts of items. After seeing these items in different areas and different states of decay, I recognize this matter as "evidence of violence" that is both "undeniable materiality of what happened as well as the lack of resolution" (Soto 471). Contemporary political understandings of the borderlands works because these objects are both necessary for migrants and evidence of their illegal entry.

Objects in the desert reveal the material realities of the borderlands as hostile space, but their political and cultural significance also carries over to tell us more about the people who move through those spaces. Among the many things we encounter in the desert, one that speaks to the particularities of border crossing is the small glass jars. Buried in the sand or discarded in the brush, they are both important for their use -- many migrants store their money in these jars because they are waterproof and small enough to fit into a pocket – and for their place in the environment. The materiality of the jar comes into view because the decay rate of the jar is much lower than other objects and bodies. The jars persist, they continue to exist despite their intended function and their presence in the desert disrupts expectations of a "natural" environment. The jar shows how society is "simultaneously materially real and socially constructed" and that lives are "always

culturally mediate, but they are not only cultural" (Coole and Frost 27). Social and political discourses have a direct bearing on the material reality that led to the placement of the jar in the desert. But more than that, the jar is then imbued with unintended effects that reduce it to trash or "the ruins of a kind of disaster" (Soto 461). Under the political strain of the border, objects become "vibrant," to borrow a term of Jane Bennett. They represent the complex reality faced by border dwellers and border crossers as markers of movement, life, and death. Their materiality makes them persistent, polysemous, and impossible to ignore.

Discarded and recovered migrant objects are "continually moving into and out of archaeological contexts" as the focus of both research and art (Soto 461). A wide array of art projects have showcased migrant objects as a means of speaking to the harshness of American immigration policy. Tom Kiefer's *El Sueno Americano/The American Dream* is one such project that is a mixture of cataloguing and photography. While working as a janitor in a Border Patrol detention center, Keifer collected objects migrants were forced to discard. Arranged carefully on colorful backgrounds, the items Keifer's photographs show a wide array of items migrants carry. Pieces like "Pink Combs and Brushes 2014" is a collection of pink combs and brushes on a pink background. Of course, the people who these items belonged to are anonymous and their stories begin and end for the viewer with the items in the piece. Keifer shows the dehumanization nature of the detention centers through discarded objects including small necessitates and important documents. By contrast, Susan Harbage's *The Anti-Archive* is a collection of photographs of items found in the landscape along the border. Placed on a colored background, the objects are photographed to display the imposition of the natural world on to each item. A comb is covered in dirt and shows environmental wear while suggesting a story that can never be accessed. These are just two of many pieces that acknowledge the crisis in the borderlands and the many shapes it

takes. However, what Keifer and Harbage both show is the significance of objects recovered in the borderlands beyond the borderlands themselves. Displaying these objects illustrates their political force beyond the landscape and provides them with an afterlife that extends beyond the physical bodies that brought them across the border.

In the context of the desert, recovered objects show the direct effects of the environment on the people moving through them. These environments play an essential role in the history and legacy of the borderlands and their protection is entwined with their weaponization. When I began working on *Vistas de la Frontera*, I asked several Samaritans about how to access different spaces. The first thing I had to do was obtain a recreational permit from the Arizona State Land Department. At twenty dollars, the permit allows people legal access to state lands for hunting, hiking, and other recreational pursuits.


ARIZONA
STATE LAND DEPARTMENT

RECREATIONAL PERMIT PARKING PASS

This parking pass must be displayed in clear view while parking on State Trust Land for recreational purposes

Recreational Permit No: 00059498
Expiration Date: 09-03-2021

ARIZONA STATE LAND DEPARTMENT
NATURAL RESOURCES
1915

**Figure 3: Arizona state land recreation permit.**

Several Samaritans mentioned that there are only two people in the entire state who actually check for the permit, but having one is still considered good practice. Regardless of the truth of that statement, it says something important about Arizona's public lands. They are vast, often unmonitored, but still highly regulated via bureaucratic systems that have little influence on the ground. This approach to land management is especially important in Arizona where 95% of the borderlands are public and managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or the National Parks Service (*About*). The designations of public lands is critical to the maintenance of the border for two essential reasons: first, public lands allow for legal designations that help to further criminalize migrants and second, public lands are used by the Border Patrol and Department of Homeland Security. These two aims clearly overlap and show how the environment plays an essential role in creating and maintaining the border.

Central to the implementation of Prevention through Deterrence is a passive form of border enforcement that relies on the environment, as well as the legal designations that are used to maintain it. Protected and designated environments play a critical role along the border as "the environment is invoked to make anti-immigration not just a national security imperative, but an ecological one. That is, immigrants are trespassing protected ecosystems and wildernesses, not just national boundaries" (Ray 140). Designating certain spaces as "natural" along the border further illustrates the damage that migrants do to the United States. This positioning of the border relies upon simultaneously acting as though the border is a closed and impassible space, but also fragile and in perpetual danger (Ahmed 3). Further, these designations are part of a settler colonial history that is critical to the creation and maintenance of the borderlands space. Protected landscapes have a long and storied history in the American Southwest, ranging from the creation of Organ Pipe National Monument in 1937 to the designation of the Ironwood National Forest in 2000 (Piekielek

2). From the very beginning, these parks have played an important role in border enforcement in Southern Arizona. With the help of federal agencies, the southern boundary of Organ Pipe National Monument was one of the first sites of border solidification as "fencing the park boundary was…an important priority to reduce unauthorized uses of the monument" (Piekielek 6). Many of the most "pristine" or secluded areas that make up the Sonoran Desert were and are also directly threatened by the escalation of border policing even before the construction of the wall. The general presence of border patrol both active (in regard to automobiles, the creation of roads, and helicopters) and passive (the construction of security towers) threaten the very idea of a natural landscape. The presence and protection of landscapes in Southern Arizona raises several contradictions in what is considered a natural environment, what protection looks like, and who has "legitimate" access to it. The categorization of spaces as "protected" for the purposes of finding and maintaining nature is complicated by the use of natural spaces to dictate who is or is not part of a larger national whole. In turn, these spaces are essential in making visible who should or should not be moving through them.

Many of the lands along the border are rugged and remote, but Texas and Arizona's vast landscapes comprise the biggest areas of the border. While the majority of Arizona's land along the border is public, the opposite is true of Texas with 90% of land along the border being privately owned (Heinen) These differences illustrate important aspects a settler colonial ethic foundational to the United States. These spaces are an important part of an American legacy of expansion, violence, and land ownership. As Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz notes in An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States, "Everything in US history is about the land – who oversaw and cultivated it, fished its waters, maintained its wildlife; who invaded and stole it; how it became a commodity ("real estate") broken into pieces to be bought and sold on the market" (Dunbar-Ortiz 1). The

construction of national parks and "public" lands often came at the expense of the indigenous peoples who initially called the land home. Land, and its seizure through violent means, provides a guiding philosophy for American expansion that has been solidified through the designation of protected landscapes. The legacy of settler colonialism as "an institution or system, requires violence or threat of violence" to both attain and maintain its goals (Dunbar-Ortiz 5). As such, the reliance on natural landscapes to not only justify the use of violence, but enact violence is central to contemporary borderlands policy. Relying on open spaces is part of Prevention through Deterrence's "success" and longevity as the practice of pushing people into the landscape ensures the invisibility of migration with the added consequence of people disappearing in space that are far too large and difficult to traverse.

The designations of spaces as "natural" relies upon a view of the natural world as a separate space that is distant from the rest of the country, but still part of it. The use of the natural environment within border policy specifically relies heavily on the Sonoran and Chihuahua Deserts that comprise much of the border space in Arizona and Texas. In areas, this boundary is based on the Rio Grande River that runs from Southern Colorado and into the Gulf of Mexico. By using naturally occurring features as both boundary and boundary enforcement the United States is able to displace responsibility for the deaths of migrants who choose to place themselves in harm's way by crossing the border. By using the environment in this way, the United States refuses to accept responsibility as these natural barriers are known to be dangerous. In William Cronon's article, "The Trouble with Wilderness", he writes about the divide between environmental spaces and human spaces. This divide relies upon the wilderness standing as the "last remaining place where civilization…has not fully infected the earth" (Cronon 7). The view of environmental spaces as somehow more pure or untouched by humanity leads to the alienation of the human from nature,

and more importantly, for the designation of certain spaces as pristine wilderness. This view of separation and designation is rooted in ideas of land ownership as a result of a settler colonial ethic. In essence, if the natural world is separate from the human it can be conquered, owned, and exploited.

Creating landscapes as "untrammeled" and "pristine" perpetuates an American myth about conquest and preservation that relies upon continuously forgetting much longer histories. The seizure of lands by "European nations [who] acquired titles to the lands they 'discovered' and Indigenous inhabitants lost their natural right to the land after Europeans arrived and claimed it" (Dunbar-Ortiz 2). This paradigm of discovery led to the subsequent violent removal of indigenous peoples through measures like land titles and land grants. Removing indigenous peoples allowed for the "myth of the vanishing frontier" or the idea that "wild land had been so crucial in the making of the nation, then surely one must save its last remnants as monuments to the American past – and as an insurance policy to protect its future" (Cronon 13). In this way, National Parks, National Forests, Wildlife Refuges, and Wilderness areas are as much about a white-American legacy as they are about conservation. Agencies like Department of the Interior (which manages the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) were created to designate, manage, and protect America's natural spaces. But these designations, and the subsequent bureaucracy created to maintain them, position these natural spaces as public lands. In essence, public lands were taken from indigenous communities, but are "for everyone". These lands are maintained with the idea that the American public should have access to the natural world via designated and maintained landscapes.

America's public lands are meant to protect the country's natural resources, but many of the designations used to protect them ultimately leave them vulnerable to other kinds of

development. While the rhetoric and discourse about the destruction of natural parks for the enjoyment of the American consumer is worth mentioning, the idealization of natural landscapes as spaces of recreation actually encourages its seizure, separation, and preservation through legal means. Once lands are designated as public spaces, they are maintained and run by the federal government. Ideas of environmental preservation are rooted in a settler colonial ethic which is central to upholding the violence of white sovereignty. Preservation is an exercise in state power to dictated who has access to certain lands, and by extension, the country as a whole. The state utilizes natural spaces as a continuation of a white American legacy and a resource for monitoring who is moving into the country. The most recent and egregious example is the Trump administration's ability to waive 41 environmental laws and regulations in order to build the border wall ("Laws Waived for Border Wall Construction"). It's important to note that many of those waived regulations directly affected indigenous lands in Southern Arizona. Quitoboquito Springs in Organ Pipe National Monument is a sacred site for the Hia Ced O'odham peoples of Southern Arizona. The springs were already seized by the National Park Service with the removal of the last ranching families from the park in 1955 and wall construction directly interferes with the springs natural path (Piekielek 12). What Quitoboquito shows is not only the impulse to assert control over the land in the name of American conservation, but also how quickly those same regulations are waived in the name of national security.

In ways large and small, the environment plays a pivotal role in policing the border. This emphasis on the environment creates an important, albeit false, dichotomy surrounding the kinds of movement that are allowed and those that are not only illegal, but dangerous. Lining Organ Pipe National Monument's southern border is now not only the wall, but a road frequently traveled by Border Patrol and light poles every hundred feet. Maintained for its natural beauty, Organ Pipe

is site where border policing is regularly visible and highly destructive. The light poles are necessary not only for the Border Patrol to use the road, but for the wall to be constructed through a landscape that is remote while still being publicly accessible. These light poles not only disrupt the natural landscape that Border Patrol is claiming to protect, but they produce light pollution and disrupt wildlife. Further, maintaining the road is necessary for maintaining the wall. The constant movement in the area undercuts the initial creation of Organ Pipe as a landscape worthy of protection. Put plainly, the environmental cost of border policing does not account for the human behaviors of the Border Patrol or the Department of Homeland Security. When policing is the primary objective the environment becomes the backdrop that must be navigated with all-terrain vehicles, larger scale projects like surveillance towers, and helicopters. Not only do the activities of border patrol illustrate the hypocrisy at the heart of environmental protection as a form of border security, but it is a continuation of an American conquest over the natural world.

While the construction of the border wall in Southern Arizona is a clear and visible mismanagement of public lands in the name of national security, it's equally essential to recognize that smaller acts have lasting effects. Gradual escalations – even putting Border Patrol in remote areas – have radically shifted all of the landscapes that comprise the borderlands. The false narrative of preservation in remote spaces is used to justify patrolling public lands and vilifying the movement of certain peoples while seeking to protect that of others. These environments are not merely backdrops, but part of larger legacies of displacement and violence that are often overlooked or undermined in the name of national security. These landscapes are lively biospheres that play an essential role within a global ecosystem. As such, advocacy for their import evokes an important "sense of place" for many border residents, but the necessity of the flora and fauna of the Sonoran and Chihuahua deserts require a more expansive view of their global effects

(Heise). Disruptions to the borderlands environment affect animal migration patterns, have resulted in the destruction of indigenous flora, and are changing the interconnected nature of ecological systems. The results of vehicular movement and inorganic structures are part of the slow violence unfolding along the borderlands, with the long-term environmental effects remaining unclear. The amnesia that surrounds environmental changes or distressed will continue because these changes are "imperceptible" and the "violence is decoupled from its original causes by the workings of time" (Nixon 11). In turn, the American public sees the presence of policing as part of the border landscape rather than the result of settler colonial violence and political divides with the effects of a continuous destructive presence only beginning to appear ("The Environmental Consequences Of A Wall On The U.S.-Mexico Border" and "Study: Trump's Border Wall Threatens 93 Endangered Species Jaguars, Wolves, Owls Among Those in Harm's Way").

In November of 2019 I dragged my father on a trip to some of the protected landscapes that line Texas' border with Mexico. Beginning in Laredo and ending in with a visit to see my grandmother in Brownsville, Texas we stopped at several wildlife refuges and sanctuaries on the way. In one day, we hiked through three including: Falcon State Park, Bentson-Rio Grande Valley State Park, and the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. At the entrance of each we saw Border Patrol vehicles and often saw signs warning visitors about the risk of encountering an "illegal immigrant" within the park. We ended our trip two days later with a visit to The Sabal Palms Sanctuary right outside of Brownsville. Despite growing up in the area, my father had never visited the sanctuary even though everyone else seemed to know about it. Located on the banks of the Rio Grande, Sabal Palms is a bird sanctuary located on the site of the former Rabb Plantation. Leased by the Gorgas Science Foundation, the sanctuary is one of the last places where sabal palms are

still present and is home to many indigenous birds (Sabal Palms Sanctuary). The intersection of exploitative labor practices, racist history, and the contemporary realities of the border all collide in a natural space that is behind a literal wall. The entrance to the sanctuary is the site of some of the first stretches of border wall erected in 2007 under President George W Bush (Sweany). To reach the sanctuary visitors have to drive through a gap in the wall that runs along a levee which was constructed to keep the wall from interfering with the flood plains. Like many of the natural spaces in Texas, a Border Patrol agent sits at the break in the wall outside of the sanctuary all day. Border Patrol roads run all around and through the sanctuary. Sabal Palms is the embodiment of any environmental concern about protecting and policing border spaces – it is a protected environment in spite of the rising wall, and its colonialist legacy is visible at the white plantation style home at the sanctuary's center. The boundaries of the sanctuary are fortified against "illegal" trespassers with both constant surveillance and a wall, but the space is allocated for the enjoyment of the public for a small fee. The wildlife within the sanctuary's bounds is seemingly protected from human interaction despite the raised walkways that run through the wetlands and the constant presence of border patrol along the park's boundaries. Across the nearly 2,000 miles that comprise the borderlands the approach to environmental preservation and border security are the same. The animals and environment within have luckily been "saved" from the destructive realities and dangers of political borders that have continuously worked to destroy them from all sides. Within this these preserved spaces point to the violence of sovereignty as it weaponizes stolen lands in the name of national security.

My ability to create *Vistas de la Frontera* has depended upon my ability to access protected spaces, but more importantly an awareness of how sovereignty is deeply entangled in the construction and maintence of environments. While the videos in *Vistas* currently only show

spaces in Arizona, it's important to note that what is visible in each is collision of the political, the material, and the environmental, which are all part of the contemporary structures of a heavily policed space. Through *Vistas* I attempt to capture these overlapping realities and to make them accessible to a larger public. But it must be said that the militarization and solidification of the border has harsh and long-lasting effects on the Mexican side of the border too. From the feminicides that are still happening throughout Mexico to the dangerous conditions people from Central America face while migrating, the effects of border policy have created lasting and wide-spread violence. Much of this violence is enacted on marginalized populations and, as such, is not understood as violence at all.

The road that runs along the border wall is open and accessible to the public. With extremely dramatic hills, the road is dangerous because the Border Patrol drives along the road at high speeds. Going over the crest of a hill can lead to a head-on collision with a white and green BP truck racing to go sit at a different point along the wall. In October 2020 a fellow Samaritan and I followed the wall East of Nogales to see just how far construction had gone. Approximately 15 miles East the wall ended abruptly with "normandy" style barriers marking the end before the unmarked border continued into a large mountain range. There were no signs of further construction to the east, just mountains that could only be passed by car a few miles to the north.

**Figure 4: The border wall East of Nogales, Az in October 2020.**

When I returned in January 2021 construction had not only reached the East end of the wall but expanded miles into the mountains. Now there is a road a quarter of a mile wide for construction trucks and materials. The mountains have been blasted to make way for the wall that will run through them despite the fact that because of the terrain, this is not a site through which migrants typically cross. Of course, the wall is a symbol of hate and American imperialism, but all of the noise around it has drowned out the more insidious policies that are both effective and hide American responsibility. Construction on the wall has stopped in most areas, but Prevention through Deterrence isn't going anywhere. The United States' approach to border politics does not

need to rely on a wall to place migrants and border dwellers in danger. Instead, the violence of sovereignty will remain like the road blasted through the mountains – a persistent and unhealing scar.

## 1.1 Methodology

*Vistas de la Frontera* is the culmination of the research that has made this dissertation possible. As a piece of border studies scholarship, the methods explored in this dissertation walk the line between academic discourse and art. Beginning with Gloria Anzaldúa, the field of border studies begins with the lived experiences of the border and experimental modes that blend art and scholarship. Artistic representations are never divorced from the political realities of the border. Rather, this blending of genres is part of the border reality that includes truth, fiction, myth, and lived-experience. In *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaladú uses the blurring of genres to give voice to the blending of experiences that happens along the border. She writes, "Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war" (Anzaldua 100). The work of border studies must account for the clashing of cultures that produces a "third country – a border culture" wherein the material reality of the borderlands is directly impacted by the politics of sovereignty (25). Because of the blending of cultures and the clashing of countries, borders studies cannot and should not be one thing. The history of the region has material effects on the politics of maintaining the border via land dispossession, environmental justice, and the deaths of thousands of migrants. Luis Alberto Urrea's influential *The Devil's Highway* performs a similar kind of mixing of history, anthropology, and journalism to tell how this violence takes many

different shapes. This dissertation, and *Vistas*, demands an interdisciplinary approach in order to account for the overlapping structures that continuously affect life in the borderlands.

The pieces discussed in this dissertation provide various essential perspectives on the United States-Mexico borderlands. I chose works of fiction about different forms of violence, both active and passive, as manifestations of the escalation of economic and immigration policy alongside the militarization of the borderlands. The fictional works explored in this dissertation make visible larger systemic issues that are deeply entrenched in every aspect of our contemporary understandings of the borderlands. Similarly, the digital pieces provide new methods for representing and challenging the violence of contemporary border policy as well as the silence that surrounds the loss of life in the region. Taken together all of the pieces in this dissertation show the continued legacy of violence in the borderlands through contemporary bordering policies and practices. I read these pieces through and alongside works from cultural geography and anthropology, forensic anthropology, history, and sociology. Further, I have used extensive data from both local and international sources to capture the scope of violence in the entire region. Data should not be overlooked for fictional representations nor vice versa; together they allow for a more complex and nuanced recognition of life, death, and materiality in the borderlands.

Fiction plays an essential role in this dissertation by providing a lens through which to understand the entanglements of culture, politics, the environment, and people. These narratives give us access to the trauma and pain of the borderlands without the direct exploitation of individuals' stories. More than that, fiction points to the gaps in personal narratives that cannot or should not be shared. Many of the narratives that circulate about the borderlands are often based on a need to document the violence that is unfolding in those spaces as urgent and legible. Border fiction participates in this tradition while providing a more nuanced approach that encourages

readers to grapple with the larger political realities' individuals face without the expectation that every single fact is correct and verifiable. Border fiction and literature depict the unfolding realities and contemporary violence of the state in ways that vulnerable populations cannot. Novels like the ones explored in this dissertation, *2666, Into the Beautiful North*, and *Signs Preceding the End of the World* are all demonstrations of this approach, which is part of a larger literary tradition in the borderlands. For example, Ana Castillo's *So Far From God* blends the real with the unreal as her characters deal with the material realities of life along the border, and moves (sometimes more than once) between life and death. The novel plays with the idea of real life and its difficulties alongside seemingly impossible events that bring forth ghosts and resurrection. This kind of fiction "slide[s] between the material and the metaphoric and between the spatial and temporal, revealing a complexity and range that both unpack the structure of the border and show how violence [and] conflict coalesce to mask that structure" (Brady 173). Importantly, in the novel no event is more "real" than any of the others. Rather, this fluidity is part of the perceived reality of a border culture wherein the legacies of loss and the violence of the border take a material form that cannot be dismissed. This slippage between material and metaphorical, real and fictional, is an essential part of border narratives that make visible the histories and legacies of violence.

### 1.2 Chapter Summaries

My first chapter, "The Part about the Dumps: The Accumulation of Bodies and Waste in the Borderlands" considers the persistent violence of waste as a byproduct of bordering. Using the dumps in Roberto Bolaño's *2666* and Luis Alberto Urrea's *Into the Beautiful North* I examine how the rise of waste is inextricably linked to the expansion of global capitalism. Both novels present

the dumps as sites of violence which manifest in different forces and result in the reduction of bodies (both living and dead) to capitalistic waste. Consequently, violence and the bodies it acts upon are the byproducts of bordering. Bolaño's fictionalized representation of the feminicides in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico in the mid-90's shows how the escalation of industry led to the murders of hundreds of women. Often placed in continuously sprawling dumps, these women are silenced under economic and cultural constrains. Conversely, Urrea presents the persistence of life within the dump in *Into the Beautiful North.* Within direct view of the United States, the dump is home to a community that exists and persists at the margins of society. The dump is a site of resistance that continues despite the realities of global capitalism. My readings of the dumps in both novels resist the reduction of bodies to waste by asserting the importance of matter. I explore the political force of waste as a means of resistance and persistence for the people who live off of, move through, and are left alongside waste. By beginning on the Mexican side of the border, I interrogate how economic policy created dangerous conditions for vulnerable populations. Looking at waste informs the next two chapters through a consideration of how global systems work to exploit the people and land along the border. Considering the dump highlights what is hidden under structures of power that are used to maintain the border and also how those disposed in the dumps are often silenced, unacknowledged, and unmourned.

The work of mourning comes into clearer focus in my second chapter, "Objects Out of Place: Land, Loss, and the Cracks in Sovereignty." Using the digital database *Yo Tengo Nombre/I Have a Name* alongside Yuri Herrera's novel *Signs Preceding the End of the World* I consider the importance of land, recovered/found objects, and the interstitial spaces of migration. I examine the movement of objects across the border as a way of complicating the binary between citizen/undocumented. Instead, objects are essential in understanding the liminal, or interstitial

spaces, where migrants move, live, and die. The items on display in *Yo Tengo Nombre* are part of a searchable database that is no longer accessible, but was created to help family members identify their loved ones. Each image is linked to a case, but identifying information is missing without proper context. As such, the items become an extension of the person who is not pictured, and in many cases never identified. The database presents an inventory of objects that makes visible the political reality of the border. Similarly, *Signs Preceding the End of the World* highlights the journey of how the items came to be catalogued in the first place through a fictional narrative of border crossing. Written as a mythical quest, the novel curtails the real trauma of border crossing in favor of demonstrating larger truths about the ways people move across the border. As the protagonist moves through a variety of landscapes, she makes visible the necessary cracks in sovereignty. Taken together the two pieces account for the interstitial spaces that make sovereignty possible while illustrating the continued political, material, and environmental violence that is used to maintain the border.

In my third chapter, "Mourning in the Archive: Digital Art and Tools as Sites of Memorial", I consider who is memorialized in the borderlands. I look at three digital art pieces, *Fatal Migrations, 2487*, and *Border Memorial*, to examine how the attempted erasure of border crossers has led to different means of mourning. Under Prevention through Deterrence, many migrant deaths are never publicly addressed or acknowledged. Each piece takes a different approach--from satellite images of the desert, to repeating the names, and finally augmented reality--to call attention to the continued violence in the borderlands. Each of my readings highlights how the pieces both utilize and complicate conventional approaches to archives in order to focus on loss and recentering the human. All three of the pieces work to break the silences that surround migrant deaths through public mourning and collective grief. Digital memorials

complicate spaces of mourning through their accessibility and materiality – or how they represent and act upon bodies. Mourning for the dead in the borderlands, regardless of identifying information or lack thereof, becomes a site of resistance under state-sanctioned violence. Not only do all three pieces call attention to how the humanitarian crisis in the borderlands has long been unacknowledged, but together they highlight the continuous need for mourning and memorialization.

## 2.0 The Part About the Dumps: The Accumulation of Bodies and Waste in the Borderlands

This chapter will examine the economic, political, and cultural implications of dumps along the United States-Mexico borderlands. In particular, I interrogate the materiality of the dump as an essential part of understanding the contemporary and enduring violence in the borderlands. Materiality, or the very matter of all things (humans, non-humans, objects, the environment, etc), shows the effects of cultural, social, and political actions along the border that have both allowed for and benefited from the creation of dumps on the Mexican side of the border. Using dumps from *2666* and *Into the Beautiful North*, I look at how these fictional narratives about the accumulation of waste reveal the connected web of politics, racism, and environmental destruction. Dumps in literature blur the line between the real and the fictional to account for the human, non-human, and structural violence that allowed for the creation and continuation of dumps. These violences are repeatedly enacted upon bodies and fueled by the refusal to recognize them as violence at all. Discounting the dump perpetuates violence in the borderlands through the refusal to recognize the lives, livelihoods, and deaths of those who move through it. The dump is more than a site of unwanted or dead waste. Through these texts, I read dumps as ecosystems with political force that act on and interact with the borderlands.

The accumulation of waste and dumps appears in various literary representations of the borderlands, including Ana Castillo's *The Guardians* (2008), Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood* (2005), and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991). The two novels I focus on here, Roberto Bolaño's *2666* (2004) and Luis Alberto Urrea's *Into the Beautiful North* (2009), grapple with the history of violence and destruction of the US border within a 21st century perspective that considers climate change. Throughout *2666*, Bolaño is both theorist and author,

crafting a narrative that is explains and condemns the shifting reality of life along the border under the pressures of global capitalism. The novel's fourth section centers on the murders of hundreds of women in the fictional Santa Teresa, Mexico, many of whom end up in or alongside waste. The central dump in the section, El Chile, grows and sprawls throughout the entirety of the section gaining increasing force as more bodies accumulate. Positioned directly in sight of the maquiladoras (or subassembly plants), the dumps are the direct consequence of industry that produces both products to be shipped across the border and immense amounts of waste to be left on the Mexico side. As industry rises, hundreds of women are murdered seemingly without a murderer, instead illustrating the ways a capitalist system moves beyond the human to devalue the lives of workers and community members. Bolaño's discussions of the murders are often clinical and removed (reminiscent of police reports), but through them he weaves a narrative that directly implicates the rise of the maquiladora system with the abjection of bodies along the border. Bolaño uses the dump as a site of *multidirectional memory* or memory that is "subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing" to grieve the violence in his home of Chile, a life in exile, and the continuous need to mourn for murdered women (Rothberg 3). The dump, then, becomes multi-faceted, a lively site of matter, a mode of resistance and demand for acknowledgment, and the material consequence of violence under a global capitalism.

In Urrea's *Into the Beautiful North*, the dump is not a condemned space, but a lively one. There is an entire community of people who live, work, and die within the dump, which exists seemingly outside of normative society but is still an essential part of it. Urrea's approach to the dump offers another view of people that are expelled to the margins of global capitalism – one that does not result in death, but rather a peripheral way of life. The dump dwellers exist on the fringes, but their ability to rework, repurpose, and reuse the waste that surrounds them is a means of living

that is not always visible or recognizable. Within this narrative Urrea offers the possibility of life after expulsion and a way of repositioning the political force of matter itself. Urrea's positionality as a border author allows for this more nuanced and ultimately positive reading of the dump, one which is often overlooked in favor of very real violence. Urrea's approach to violence is mediated through the possibility of life in spite of continuous and inhumane anti-immigration policies, and the exploitation of land, people, and resources.

These novels offer differing and, in some ways, contrary views of dumps along the border. But taken together they highlight the importance of matter, especially in spaces that are ignored, abject, and peripheral. Using waste categories from Kate O'Neil's book *Waste,* I explore how waste is positioned differently in the two books. For Bolaño waste is external, a natural byproduct of industry along the border and something to ignore. For Urrea, waste is part of the work of life outside of normative society; dump dwellers reuse, repurpose, and reimagine the possibilities of waste. Together the two approaches shed light on the overlapping systems of neoliberalism, global capitalism, and the resulting multi-faceted violence. I look to the "theory of the flesh" from Gloria Anzladúa and Cherríe Moraga to explore how the body is central to understanding the political and social manifestations of violence – both literal and symbolic. In *2666* the women's bodies are "trans-corporeal", toxic, abject, and reduced to waste under the overlapping political, cultural, and environmental systems that make the dump a site of violence and resistance. While the violence in the novel overwhelms everything, Bolaño's approach is vital in demanding recognition and memorial for seemingly "dead" matter. Conversely, Urrea's approach to the dump highlights the possibilities of seeing the dump as lively. I look at the dump as a site of possibility after "expulsion" or a rejected space on the margins of society placed there by the forces of global capitalism. This labor relies upon the dump to reuse and repurpose some of the matter within. The

objects are repurposed in various ways that show their persistence beyond mechanization. The dump then is an alternative space that rises out of the brutality of economic expulsion wherein the matter of the dump is lively for good or ill. Both books consider the importance of the dump as a lively space worthy of serious consideration. The disavowal of dumps by political and cultural forces works to diminish the real violence continuously happening within the bounds of the dump. Both authors utilize fiction as a means of telling these stories to hold up the real violence there as worthy of attention without having to worry about the burden of "truth" behind every aspect they present. As such both authors work from real circumstances, but fiction provides a productive distance to implicate larger systemic issues in a very direct manner. Through this, this chapter seeks to reposition dump narratives as sites of connection between the human and nonhuman worlds in order to understand the creation of the dump through economic, environmental, political, and social realities.

## 2.1 "The inertia of the festering place itself": Dumping the Dead

> The girl's body turned up in a vacant lot in Colonia Las Flores. She was dressed in a white long-sleeved T-shirt and yellow knee-length skirt, a size too big. Some children playing in the lot found her and told their parents. One of the mothers called the police, who showed up half an hour later. The lot was bordered by Calle Peláez and Celle Hermanos Chacón and it ended in a ditch (Bolaño 353).

The girl, later identified as Esperanza Gómez Saldaña, is the first victim in the years of violence that unfold in Roberto Bolaño's *2666*. After Esperanza Gómez Saldaña, "the killings of women began to be counted" (Bolaño 353). There were certainly murders before Esperanza Gómez Saldaña, but her death signifies a seemingly arbitrary rupture in the spree of deaths that

follows. In comparison to what unfolds, Esperanza Gómez Saldaña's death is unremarkable, unfortunately similar, but ultimately indicating no overarching pattern. The fourth section of Roberto Bolaño's *2666*, "The Part about the Crimes", documents the murders of hundreds of women and girls in the fictional border town of Santa Teresa, Mexico. Esperanza Gómez Saldaña's death begins the counting, but many women are never recovered, never reported, and "buried in unmarked graves in the desert" or their "ashes were scattered in the middle of the night, when not even the person scattering them knew where he was" (Bolaño 354). The violence against women in Santa Teresa is so ubiquitous that no one bothered to notice their disappearances or count the victims. Throughout the four years covered in the section more cases are closed unsolved than not. Despite growing protest from the community, little is done to actually stop the killings beyond victim blaming and public politicking. Consequently, the killings and the bodies that pile up take on a force of their own, spreading to overtake the entire city seemingly outside of human agency.

Written in five parts that span four continents, *2666* is a novel drawn together by the murders of hundreds of women in Santa Teresa, Mexico. The first section, "The Part about the Critics", follows the lives of four academics who, in their search for a famous and reclusive author, find themselves in Santa Teresa. They hear rumblings in the streets about the murders, but ultimately nothing more. The second section, "The Part about Amalfitano", brings the threat the murders pose closer as Amalfitano, a wash-up professor at the university in Santa Teresa, becomes entranced with a book that has appeared seemingly out of nowhere. Amalfitano worries about the murders as his daughter goes out in the evenings. The murders come close in section three, "The Part about Fate", which focuses on a young journalist sent to Santa Teresa to cover a boxing match. Soon he is drawn into the underworld of Santa Teresa and becomes determined to cover the murders despite warning from his editors to the contrary. The final section of the novel, "The Part

about Archimboldi", brings the novel back to the beginning as Bolaño chronicles the life of the reclusive author the critics from section one were attempting to find. The novel's cyclical nature makes clear the gravity of Santa Teresa as a site of violence that continues to draw in people through different means. As such, fourth section, "The Part about the Crimes" is the most explicit about the danger the town presents, particularly for the women who live there. Beginning in 1993 and concluding in 1997, Bolaño's approach to the murders mimics the real-life discourse that surrounded the femincides in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico during the same time. The constant avoidance and lack of urgency afforded to the murders amounts to an unacknowledged crisis, one that continues through Mexico more broadly. While it is a cohesive section, it reads as a series of interconnected vignettes that tell the story of continued violence from the authorities, corporations, politicians, and the community. Bolaño's approach to the section, which is arguably the culmination of the book, adheres to a theoretical understanding of the violence perpetuated by global capitalism, specifically through the continuous presence of the maquiladoras. As such, Bolaño focuses on the material manifestations of border politics which are made increasingly visible through the loss of lives in the border region and the unwillingness to acknowledge the scope and scale of mass death.

Born in Santiago, Chile, Roberto Bolaño spent his youth in Mexico City and returned to Chile to fight against the right-wing government of Augusto Pinochet. Arrested and briefly detained under suspicions of terrorism in 1973, Bolaño left Chile never to return. As an exiled author, Bolaño was particularly concerned with the role of the "writer and the totalitarian state" (Valdes, "Alone Among the Ghosts"). Bolaño survived his experience with totalitarianism and saw the effects it had on his friends but demanded more from the literary community. His novels are full of writers who consider the importance of their work as cultural and political, but often fail in

the face of political violence. As such, Bolaño's approach to the violence in Ciudad Juarez is part theorist, author, and detective. Written in Spain at the end of his life, Bolaño brings together the trauma of his experiences of fighting an oppressive regime and the murders of hundreds of women in Ciudad Juarez. Bolaño's approach to the murders in Ciudad Juarez creates "a path to bring the reader to an uncomfortable place where civilization and barbarism becomes indistinguishable and where the border between violence and art…are blurred" (López-Vicuña 156). *2666* does not shy away from the violence placed upon the women of Juarez; rather, the novel brings their deaths into sharper focus throughout the course of the first four parts, moving them from off-handed mentions to omnipresent and relentless. The result is overwhelming. "The Part about the Crimes" is punctuated by unsolved deaths and ceaseless violence. But this approach is not voyeuristic or exploitative, instead Bolaño's ambitions of *2666* were to "write a postmortem for the dead of the past, the present, and the future" (Valdes "Alone Among the Ghosts"). In this way, *2666* is laden with grief and the consequences of not mourning the dead. *2666* is a graveyard, but not one that is solely encompassing the women of Juarez. Bolaño was not in Juarez while writing the novel, and he creates "Santa Teresa, a fictional town in Sonora," which allowed Bolaño "to blur the lines between what he knew and what he imagined" (Valdes "Alone Among the Ghosts").

The effect is one of multidirectional mourning, or the experience of grief for the past, present, and future – a mourning that is not rooted in location, but rather in the need to develop different forms of memorial, grief, and recognition for overlapping traumas and violences. Building on Michael Rothberg's idea of *multidirection memor*y, multidirectional mourning accounts for the layered nature of grief that is continuously negotiated within personal, collective, and cultural traumas. In grieving the dead, Bolaño layers the trauma of his imprisonment, the responsibility of the author, and the hundreds of murders into the fictional Santa Teresa. This

approach combines his lived experiences with the need to mourn for the deaths of others. Santa Teresa becomes layered under memory that is "highly mediated" with "individuals and groups [playing] an active role in rearticulating memory" (Rothberg 16). Bolaño uses all of his characters to grapple with the sheer scope of the violence as something beyond understanding while also demanding the need for memorial. The use of memory in the novel does not stop at remembrance, but rather continues through layers of grief that are both real and fictional. Santa Teresa and *2666* are sites of continuous mourning for the women of Ciudad Juarez, emphasizing the importance of reimagining and retelling stories of violence, loss and grief.

Mourning is multifaceted in *2666* because it not restricted to the visibility of bodies, but instead addresses the accumulation of waste as a signifier of violence. Throughout "The Part about the Crimes" illegal dumps appear and spread while more bodies are found alongside trash, in back alleys by garbagemen, and in clear view of maquiladoras. The majority of bodies recovered in the section are dumped (or discarded) in various sites throughout the city and its surrounding *colonias*, often directly alongside waste itself. "The Part about the Crimes" not only focuses on the murders of hundreds of women and girls, but on the accumulation of waste on the Mexican side of the border as a byproduct of the maquiladora system. This waste is external, the "unwanted but unavoidable byproducts or consumption that must be collected and discarded" (O'Neill 24). Waste is an inevitable consequence of a capitalist system, but its placement on the Mexican side of the border and away from the American public is the literal manifestation of "not in my backyard" environmentalism[1]. Zygmunt Bauman articulates the danger of this approach to waste in *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*: the "production of 'human waste', or more correctly wasted

[1] See Buell, Lawrence. "Toxic Discourse." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 3, Apr. 1998, pp. 639–65.

humans….is an inevitable outcome of modernization, and an inseparable accompaniment of modernity" (Bauman 5). Modernization – specifically understood through the rise in capital from industry – is a deeply uneven process that moves waste to places with less power, privilege, and money. In essence, waste is a sign of modernization elsewhere.

The problem of waste is heightened along the United States-Mexico border as the rise of industry from 1994 onward ushered in an increasing amount of maquiladoras or subassembly plants. Through NAFTA (and now USMCA) large corporations take advantage of low wages, disposable workers, and quick turnaround times all while leaving behind immense amounts of waste for the Mexican government to manage. Under the pressures of the maquiladora system, border citizens are discarded among the waste, rendering the literal violence that accompanies economic globalization to a small and insignificant consequence. The murders are so persistent that "the death of the maquiladora women…derives its political effect from its unremarkable, and therefore consequential regularity" (Farred 693). Industry reigns over Santa Teresa exacerbating the link between women's bodies (both living and dead) and the waste that accumulates round them. Bolaño uses the murders to shed light on the consequences of the maquiladora system, the externality of waste, and the political and social force of all matter.

Within *2666* waste resists containment and removal, instead reaching beyond the reductive nature of waste as inert or useless matter. Sites of waste are not used-up or dead, but rather the manifestation of overlapping systems of exploitation and historical violence. Looking to the dump highlights the political, social, and cultural importance of matter expressed through the dump's continuous sprawl and demands for recognition. More specifically, for Bolaño the dump is a site of continuous mourning and an expression of grief for and by the women who are murdered and dumped there. The dumps sprawl, propelled by the same systems that led to the murders, and grow

as a problem for authorities and the city. The dumps garner more attention from authorities than the murders and foreign owned corporations are never held accountable. The dumps in *2666* are the material manifestation of violence under global capitalism and a site of endless haunting.

Bolaño writes about Santa Teresa by exploring the overlapping violences that continuously impact the city; the maquiladoras introduced changing economic practices that manifest in social, political, and cultural shifts throughout the entire city. Grant Farred writes about this shift as the "time of the maquilas", or a time dominated by the effects of the maquiladora system on every aspect of life along the border. In his article, "The Impossible Closing: Death, Neoliberalism, and the Postcolonial in Bolaño's *2666,*" Farred explores the diminishment of death under the maquila system, writing that "Death can never be intelligible under the aegis of neoliberalism" (Farred 701). Farred's assertions are especially true in *2666*, when the accumulation of deaths in Santa Teresa are written to mimic the real deaths of hundreds of women in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Melding the two places together, Bolaño articulates how the murders of hundreds of women persists beyond the bounds of the real, walking the line of fiction in their scope and brutality. Both "Ciudad Juarez and the murdered women are part of *2666*, but we are constantly in relation of deferral to them, that is, we never reach them as such, but we can only be haunted by the spectral traces claiming for justices. These killed women are a real trauma" (Peláez 32). To suggest that the murders in *2666* are solely fictionalized representations elides the voices that simultaneously haunt the text and the borderlands. Bolaño's approach to Ciudad Juarez and the violence that occurred there intentionally blurs the line between fiction and reality, allowing the voices in "The Part about the Crimes" to persist throughout the entire novel. The details of each crime are presented as a means of documenting the murder while suggesting the reality of each death within the section. In this way, Bolaño complicates the expectations what Sol Peláez calls "counting

violence" or how Bolaño's approach uses "numbers and words – that is, visibility" but does not "always entail the affective intensity of the work of mourning" (Peláez 39). The text is haunted by the murders, creating a clear divide between the work of mourning and that of documentation. Many of the women in *2666* are buried without a funeral, never named, and not properly grieved on the page. The lack of mourning from the Santa Teresa community within the novel that surrounds the deaths works in a multidirection way for Bolaño. In essence, Bolaño makes the lack of grief for the real events central to the novel, allowing the reader and Bolaño to mourn for those who were never mourned. This grief encompasses the loss of home for Bolaño, most notably through the naming of the dump El Chile. *2666* makes room for all manner of grieving by never locating mourning in one place, but rather placing personal and large-scale tragedy side by side. Within this the women of Ciudad Juarez and Santa Teresa haunt the entire novel, complicating the distinction between real murders and their fictionalized representations. The spectral presence of the murdered women is present throughout the entirety of *2666*, drawing in characters from around the world in other sections, and persisting beyond the pages of the book.

Under the strain of neoliberalism, death (particularly of those in a vulnerable population) is an unremarkable and unstoppable reality faced by the women of Santa Teresa. The time of the maquilas is marked by the violence the system perpetuates and haunted by the victims who were never publicly acknowledged. Consequently, death is reduced to nothing more than "the cost of doing business, [and] is rendered at once evocative and meaningless" (Farred 699). The ubiquity of death under the contemporary neoliberal system is reduced to an unremarkable part of life which Bolaño documents monthly. Many of the sections in "The Part about the Crimes" start with each month and a recounting of the bodies recovered during that particular period of time. Not only does this provide the section with a linear structure, it emphasizes how bodies and waste are

accumulating over the course of section. The scale slowly becomes increasingly difficult to grasp as each month presents more deaths in an unremarkable and seemingly clinical tone. The months without deaths then become the exception, standing in stark contrast both in the linear structure of the section and on the page. Offset from other sections, these months are curtly documented with short descriptions: "There were not deaths in July. None in August either" (Bolaño 375). Given the gradual accumulation of bodies throughout the section it's clear that these abrupt interruptions are not to suggest that the violence has stopped, but rather that the violence is not explicitly visible. The murdered women are only recognized and recognizable through the recovery of their bodies, meaning the months without bodies is compounding their invisibility within the structural violence of Santa Teresa.

In this way the dead haunt the novel, as the female maquiladora worker "does not return from her death through a voicing of her story, her perspective, her telling of her suffering. She who has lived the experience of death cannot tell about it, we are left only with marks on her body to read" (Peláez 41). The dead women never speak out about the violence enacted upon their bodies. They are continuously recovered and reduced to unnamed victims quietly buried by the state. Treated as commonplace, the murders garner little meaningful attention by the government and the characters in the section. Bureaucracy stands in the way of solving the murders and hundreds of cases are closed without resolution: suspects skip town, victims are not identified, other more pressing matters arise, or there no possible leads. The reliance on systems of law to address the crimes quickly points to the influence of industry on the government as a means of continuously silencing how the maquilas have fundamentally altered Santa Teresa. The failure of government to implicate the corporations is all part of the "success of the market as a pacifying vessel in a world where ideologies seemed to have lost their political weight" (Peláez 32). Solving the

murders or even the belief in a governmental system that protects its citizens falls away in the name of capital. The persistence of the economy outweighs any ethical or ideological misgivings any of the characters might express in implicating the maquiladora system. Neoliberalism not only assures the silences that surround the deaths of women, but of everyone involved.

The silence that surrounds the feminicides is reinforced by the importance of capital above people and the gradual accumulation of waste. Throughout "The Part about the Crimes" waste is increasingly visible as the bodies of women and girls are discarded alongside it. The first body documented in the section is found in a lot that was "bordered by the Calle Pelàez and Calle Hermanos Chacón and it ended in a ditch behind which rose the walls of an abandoned dairy in ruins" (Bolaño 353). Discarded like trash in a vacant lot, Esperanza Gómez Saldaña is the first body recovered in 1993, but the third brings waste closer. She is found by "some garbagemen" in "an alley in the center of the city" and is never identified (Bolaño 355). Waste encroaches slowly at first then becomes all-encompassing throughout the section; as the bodies become more frequent and the waste that surrounds them grows. A woman is found "in a dump between Colonia Las Flores and General Sepúlveda industrial park", in a colonia that pushes against the industrial park (Bolaño 358). In the dump the trash of the "slum dwellers piled up along with the waste of the maquiladoras", and more women are found there throughout the section (Bolaño 358). The close proximity of the neighborhood to the plants is a part of the intermingling between industry and the poverty it perpetuates. Discarded between the neighborhood and factories, the woman is left to decay among the materials produced by a system that reduced her to her labor or nothing at all. She is never named and "it was assumed she was a migrant from some central or southern state", but this assumption is based solely the inability to identify her (Bolaño 359). Her namelessness

reinforces her abstraction and disposability. Further, her body is what is extruded by the system, waste that is a byproduct and uncontainable. She is just one of hundreds found among the waste.

Many of the dumps, both legal and illegal, rise out of liminal spaces – vacant lots, sides of highways, adjacent to the maquilas, and in between neighborhoods – and remain largely untouched by official government channels. Left alone and without any consequence more women's bodies appear in the dumps that continue to grow. The most notable and forceful dump in the section is one that "didn't have a formal name, because it wasn't supposed to be there, but it had an informal name: it was called El Chile" (Bolaño 372). Naming the dump El Chile is a direct reference to the political disappearances and murders under the Pinochet regime in Chile. Bolaño makes the bodies visible drawing parallels between political violence and industrial waste. Bodies are continuously found in El Chile as it grows beyond the control of the authorities. In June of 1993, the body of Emilia Mena Mena was discovered in the "illegal dump near Calle Yucatecos, on the way to the Hermanos Corinto brick factory" (Bolaño 372). Emilia Mena Mena is the first woman found in the illegal dump. The waste, illegally placed, is yet another space to discard women's bodies. Importantly, the waste is illegally placed, not Emilia Mena Mena's body. Her body is found "stabbed and burned," though it's hard to tell when the burns were inflicted because the dump is constantly ablaze: "Fires were constantly being reported in the dump where she was found, most of them set on purpose, others flaring up by chance," importantly little is ever done about the fires (Bolaño 372). From its introduction, Bolaño gives El Chile a lively quality; it is a site where fires burn without an arsonist, the waste appears without any apparent source, everything in the dump pulses with life, but not necessarily with human force. Created by the influence of the maquiladoras, El Chile is a site of seeming chaos that exists outside of the structures that created

it. It is a dump that continuously burns and spreads, swallowing the surrounding fields and neighborhoods.

Emilia Mena Mena's body is recovered still clothed despite the injuries she sustained, not only complicating the nature the crime, but ensuring a kind of humanity through clothing itself. Clothing makes her body recognizable as a body because "To strip the clothes from a body was to skin it" (Bolaño 373). Emilia Mena Mena is not a bare body among the waste, but a human one recognizable through the dignity of clothing. She is distinguishable and identifiable, unlike many of the other women. And yet, she is still found among the waste left by the maquiladora system. As the narrative continues more and more bodies are found without clothing, or with the clothing dumped alongside them. The violence escalates, diminishing the recognizable markers of the human through its continuous force. This reduction is already at play with all bodies in El Chile, both living and dead, which are positioned as part of the waste – both hiding within the used-up space and falling victim to it. The dump continuously claims victims, displacing human agency to control it, and instead becoming an extension of the maquiladoras that produced the waste. Importantly, the women placed in the dump are killed by people, but the agency of the murderers is displaced by the force of the dump itself. Global capitalism moves through what's left, emphasizing the disposability of people alongside things. In clear view of the border, El Chile sprawls seemingly forever as more and more bodies lay among the waste.

The waste is lively as it moves and aggregates both objects and people – demanding the city reckon with its force. Bodies are found among materials stripped of their mechanization, emphasizing our understanding of objects based on "the use that *we* get out of it and ignore its life before we buy it and after we throw it away" (O'Neill 31). Waste accumulates because it is divorced from its expectations, used-up, or broken. The waste in El Chile, and later in the new city

dump, is largely the unspecified and unwanted remains of industry and the surrounding communities. When specific items are identified alongside the bodies they show the persistence of matter, particularly through materials that are slow to decay. Marisa Hernández Silva is found "sprawled between two big gray plastic bags full of scraps of synthetic fiber" (Bolaño 464). The bags and scraps of fiber are likely the remains from a maquila, but it's unclear if they were dumped with Marisa Hernández Silva's body or if they were already there. Regardless, the fibers are a man-made material, created without expectations or consideration of its afterlife. Considered as external, the waste inside the dump is undifferentiated matter out of control; waste that is devoid of purpose and becomes a threatening mass created and propelled by the maquilas.

Measures to control El Chile quickly fail after more women are recovered within the boundaries of the dump. The mayor "ordered that the dump be closed, although he later changed the order (informed by his secretary of the legal impossibility of closing something that, for all intents and purposes, had never been open) to decree the dismantling, removal, and destruction of that pestilential no-man's land" (Bolaño 464). El Chile, despite continuing to not exist, is to be removed because it is a dirty and sprawling space, not because it is a dumping ground for women's bodies. It's clear that many bodies are never recovered among the waste of El Chile, but the measures to move the dump are entirely bureaucratic with no regard for what comprises the waste itself. Instead, measures to remove the dump fail, when the city "faced with the magnitude of the job and their own lack of manpower…soon gave up" (Bolaño 464). The attempt to move the waste is careless and feeble, one that is more concerned with optics of the waste than its environmental or social impacts. The effort to close the dump is just the beginning of a losing battle for the city of Santa Teresa against the rise of waste.

The thwarted attempt to remove El Chile reinforces the damage of moving industry across borders and into poorer communities. The relocation of waste pushes the byproducts of labor out of sight, but moving industry itself hides all that accompanies the means of production. However, El Chile is not the only dump to rise throughout the section, instead other sites of waste accumulation are marked legitimate and created by the city. In October 1994, a body "was found at the new city dump, a festering heap a mile and a half long and a half a mile wide….where a fleet of more than one hundred trucks came each day to drop their loads. Despite its size, the dump would soon be too small" (Bolaño 423). The new city dump quickly outgrows its bounds as more and more waste (and bodies) is left there by seemingly legitimate streams. Even legitimate spaces for waste quickly resist containment and move toward continuous sprawl. The materiality of waste becomes visible through its outward reach; it is simultaneously the manifestation of slow violence, external to the maquiladora system, expected and even upheld by systems of capital, and toxic. Both forms of waste, legal and illegal, come from the same origins and work to change the borderlands environment as "waste from…park[s] ended up in Colonia Las Rositas, where it formed a lake of mud that bleached white in the sun" (Bolaño375). The toxicity of waste is not restricted to its origins, as all manner of waste effects the environment. It damages the water, the air, and the earth as unused and unwanted matter aggregates under the same neoliberal capitalistic thinking. Ultimately, all forms of waste in Santa Teresa originate under the time of the maquilas that allows for the continuous disposal of things and people. Waste shifts the environment, and consequently, the bodies that move through and within it.

The inability to control legal and illegal accumulations of waste becomes part of the refusal to acknowledge the violence of the maquila system. Importantly, in *2666*, the waste is out of control, not the subsequent violence it obfuscates. Placed among rising amounts of waste, the

women of Santa Teresa may not have a voice, but they are not silent or absent from the narrative. Rather, Bolaño's attention to the body is part of his examination of the material effects of the maquiladora system especially in regard to women in Santa Teresa. The dumps grow as more bodies appear within their bounds. The female maquiladora worker is only rendered visible and useful through her work and toxic when she is recovered in the dump. As Melissa Wright examines in her book, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*, the female maquiladora worker resides in a "living state of worthlessness" in the eyes of maquiladora management (2). She is at once essential as a "dexterous, patient, and attentive" worker, but easily dismissed for pregnancy, the need for childcare, or even menstruation (2). Women are clearly marked within the maquiladora system as their bodies of are seen as standing in the way of production and are easily replaced because many more women are seeking work that provides them with a paycheck, and some independence (Wright 5). The strain of neoliberal capitalism upon the borderlands thrives not only on the disposability of the female maquiladora worker, but a lack of acknowledgment about her exit from the system. In this way, the disposability of women in Santa Teresa is entangled with the spread of waste: capital dominates every aspect of their lives. Bolaño makes this connection overt by continually placing women's bodies in dumps, which shows that bodies, both living and dead, are "not inert; they function interactively and productively. They act and react. They generate what is new, surprising, and unpredictable" (Grosz xi). Unlike other matter, the human body is continuously positioned outside of or in opposition to the non-human world. However, the matter of the body, particularly the flesh, is essential in understanding the social and political structures through which bodies move, live, and die. As Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldùa assert in *This Bridge Called my Back*, the flesh is critical to understanding the lived realities of women, particularly women of color. They write about the "theory in the flesh"

meaning "one where the physical realities of our lives – skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (Moraga 23). The flesh is the way in which the world is felt, experienced, and integrated into the body itself. It is pivotal in the female experience of the borderlands as Gloria Anzaldúa writes in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the body is the site violence, change, and new consciousness. The body internalizes layers of language, colonization, oppression, and is the material reality through which the continued violence of the border is felt (Anzaldúa 102). Materiality has long focused on objects within patriarchal structures that have failed to account for the difference in women's movement through the world. Theory in the flesh accounts for the importance of the external non-human world on the human body and accounts for the lived-realities of movement in a marked and sexed body. Bolaño demonstrates how the murder of women are intertwined with systems of capital by focusing on disposal of female body.

Flesh is at the center of the murders. "The Part about the Crimes" and the real murders in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico are acts of gendered violence aimed specifically at the vulnerability of women and women identifying peoples. The vulnerability of gender manifests in the material reality that surrounds women as they move through maquiladoras, colonías, and their homes. Their bodies make them visible and the direct targets of violence, both by the maquiladoras and men. Many bodies are found mutilated throughout the section with bodies found with their "breasts…almost completely severed and the other was missing the nipple, which had been bitten off" (Bolaño 464). This kind of violence, which is repeated throughout the section, works to gender the body as a female. It is the performance of gender being placed upon the material body through the act of destroying the signifiers of difference. Judith Butler writes about the materiality of sex in *Bodies that Matter*, suggesting that "'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized

through time" (Butler 1). For Butler, the performance of sex is solidified through material of the body and continually performed and performed upon by the surrounding world. In this way, the breast and other identifiers of femininity are repeatedly targeted and destroyed in the feminicides. For the women of Santa Teresa, their bodies are the site of continuous violence literally enacted on them and made possible by social, cultural, and economic structures. Each body must "be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, and constitution. The body is not opposed to culture…it is itself a culture, *the* cultural, product" (Grosz 23). The act of killing the body by targeting the signifiers of gender is part of the cultural product of the female body in the borderlands. Death is the ultimate instantiation of the body as a cultural product for the women of Santa Teresa: they are subjected to the violences of global capitalism that ultimately reduce them to their labor and disposability. Their bodies are a reflection of the externality of waste as an inevitable byproduct and positioned as separate from a privileged (and often Western) version of the human. The violence of the maquiladoras manifest on all bodies that move and work within them, but is particularly violent toward women. Not only are women blamed for their own deaths (i.e. diminishment of women to sex workers, knowing better than walking alone at night), they are increasingly undervalued within the maquiladora structure. They are seen as easily replaceable, docile, and not fit for management work (Wright, "Dialects of Still Life", 455). This disposability is most visible when women are left among the waste of a system that expected to dispel them anyway. Waste makes material the violence enacted upon the borderlands through the maquila system as it accumulates more matter – toxic, object, and human.

The impulse to position waste, and by extension all matter, outside of the body reinforces the divide between the human and the surrounding world. But like the body, waste is a cultural product that influences and is influenced by the surrounding world. The undifferentiated matter in

the dumps is the "vast stuff of the world"; matter that is conceived of in opposition to humans as "fleshed beings with their own needs, claims, and actions" (Alaimo 1, 2). The body acts and interacts, but so too does matter. Viewing the more-than-human worlds as separate or distinct from the human stresses not only superiority, but the ability to push aside responsibility for the material conditions that affect others. This is not to suggest a flat ontology in which matter has the same agency as bodies, but rather that matter has real and continuous effects on humans and their bodies. Like Moraga and Anzladúa's theory of the flesh, Stacy Alaimo's approach stresses that "the human is always the very stuff of the messy, contingent, emergent mix of the material world" (Alaimo 11). In *Bodily Natures*, Alaimo emphasizes the connection between all things, particularly the porous nature of the human as a material subject. The material world is not and never has been separate from the human: humans are matter comprised and influenced by outside systems that are inflected backward on to the world itself[2]. Alaimo's focus is a continuation of Anzaldúa and Moraga's the theory of the flesh that emphasizes that the flesh is not merely the site where the body meets the outside world, but where the body internalizes it. She furthers this by looking at the pores, suggesting that the flesh makes humans "trans-corporeal" or in Alaimo's assertion, directly part of the external world. The flesh connects the human to the outside world while the pores let in everything – the boundary between the outside world and the realm of the human is

[2] Also see Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist Perfromativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Material Feminisms*, edited by Alaimo, Stacy and Hekman, Susan, 1st ed., Indiana University Press, 2008, pp. 120–57. And Frost, Samantha. *Biocultural Creatures: Toward a New Theory of the Human*. Duke University Press Books, 2016.

not much of a boundary at all. The flesh is not only the way in which the outside world is felt, but the material connection to it. As such, what the flesh comes in contact with is predicated on social, cultural, and political factors that continuously dictate where the body can and cannot go, and where the body is placed in environmental, social, and political danger. Bodies in the dump exploit the connection between the externality of waste (both from the human and from systems) to the toxicity explicitly imposed on to the material of certain bodies. The dump dwellers in El Chile embody the toxicity of the dump as their "life expectancy was short. They died after seven months, at most, of picking their way through the dump….All without exception, were sick" (Bolaño 372-3). Alaimo's approach to trans-corporeality allows for a more positive understanding of the connection between the human and external world, but it can also illustrate the damage certain environments have on the bodies that move through them. The residents of El Chile are continuously exposed to the dump, reducing their movements to the seemingly inhumane sprawl of the dump itself. But toxicity does not adhere to the bounds of the dump, or even borders. Santa Teresa and the colonías nearest the dumps and maquilas take the brunt of environmental degradation, but its presence fundamentally changes the surrounding world – including bodies across borders. Despite the spread of waste, toxicity is placed on the bodies in the borderlands, especially those dumped there.

In Santa Teresa, there is an uneven exposure to toxcitity that often allows for the dismissal of those bodies that are close to it. However, El Chile exerts a force that defies human expectation and as it spreads, so too does the toxicity associated with it. El Chile, like the other dumps, is the material manifestation of maquila violence, both comprised of industrial waste and the bodies of murdered women. In life and death, the women are treated as waste, and the dump becomes an extension of discourse that assures the dismissal of their bodies and their deaths. The sprawl of

waste shows the ability of matter to resist containment, demand recognition, and assert the persistence of systemic problems. Because of this, El Chile is not only a used-up site, but a means of resistance for the murdered women. It becomes a demand to look at what happened to them and to hold accountable the systems that placed them there in the first place. El Chile's persistence through the section grows and after the first attempt to contain the dump all efforts are halted. A reporter, covering the "relocation or demolition of the dump said he'd never seen so much chaos in his life. Asked whether the chaos was caused by the city workers involved in the futile effort, he answered that it wasn't, it came from the inertia of the festering place itself" (Bolaño 473). The dump is both man-made and outside of human control; a site of agency beyond recognizable measures. The dump embodies the violence of the maquiladora system, and for the western world it is the "temporal as well as spatial denial through a literal concretizing of out of sight out of mind" (Nixon 20). The consequences of industry can damage and overwhelm systems as long as it's elsewhere. The damage that the dump perpetuates is the "exploitation of wastes [that] can leave behind a literal wasteland, damaged human health and damaged environments. That business of waste disposal and reprocessing is often relocated to poorer parts of the world magnifies these impacts" (O'Neill 35). The damage the dump embodies is propelled by the need for industry at all costs, particularly humans in poorer parts of the world. The demand for recognition moves through the dump itself as it moves ever outward and more bodies appear within its bound. Recognition and remembrance facilitate the work of multidirectional mourning as they make visible the connections between modes of grief. In other words, Bolaño's acknowledgement of the unmourned is only possible through a demand for recognition that is ignored on a public scale. Folding the demand for recognition into multidirectional mourning allows for Bolaño to acknowledge the different layers of grief made visible through the dumps. In this way, the dump

becomes a site of recognition expressed by the women who are dumped there; Bolaño uses the figure of the dump as a lively and uncontrollable site as a form of resistance for those who are otherwise silent. In doing so the dump becomes a cyclical interconnection between things, bodies, systems, and matter all propelled by the violence of capitalism along the border. Bolaño illustrates the perpetuation of systemic violence through waste that grows because the killings of women are unaddressed and unacknowledged. El Chile only grows because it is propelled by unchecked violence, which is ultimately perpetuated by the dump itself. Caught in a cycle where everything influences everything else, El Chile is the manifestation of ideologies, systems, and a global economy that externalizes both waste and bodies.

Bolaño ends "The Part about the Crimes" with a seemingly feeble attempt to acknowledge and investigate the crimes. Former American FBI agent and consultant, Albert Kessler is brought to Santa Teresa to investigate the murders under the guise of a "fifteen hour professional training and that Santa Teresa had been picked as the site for this course" (Bolaño 575). Despite any explanation to the contrary, it's clear from the start that Kessler's visit to Santa Teresa is meant to encourage an external investigation to help assuage the city's growing unrest. Throughout his time in Santa Teresa, Kessler visits many of the sites of the murders, particularly requesting to see El Chile, "the biggest illegal dump in Santa Teresa, bigger than the city dump, where waste was disposed not only by the maquiladora trucks but also by garbage trucks contracted by the city and some private garbage trucks" (Bolaño 602). By now El Chile is recognized as an unstoppable force that the city refuses to handle. Like the murders themselves, the dump is spreading without recourse. Kessler visits the dump to understand its role as a dumping ground and the potential site of many murders. As they approach the dump his driver advises Kessler to not open the window "Why not? [Kessler asks] The smell, it smells like death. It stinks" (Bolaño 603). The stench of

El Chile permeates the area, making the reality of death unavoidable and impossible to ignore. It seeps into the bodies of everyone in Santa Teresa, not merely those directly in contact with the dump. Despite its continuous presence, its liveliness, its sprawl outward and into every part of the Santa Teresa, it's not enough. Kessler stands in the dump and it "made less of an impression on Kessler than the neighborhoods he drove through" (Bolaño 605). El Chile connects everything in Santa Teresa: the colonias, the maquiladoras, the systemic privileging of profits over people, the violence and displacement of waste, and the city's citizens. Waste perpetuated by capitalism becomes both external and the direct connection to everything else. The undifferentiated matter of the dump moves through economic and cultural systems, and into the environment. It courses through every aspect of life in Santa Teresa Kessler's inability to understand the impact of El Chile highlights the continuous dismissal of waste as a byproduct, but not necessarily the direct threat facing Santa Teresa. He, like other officials, fails to reconcile the dump's force with the inability to solve the crimes or the lack of attention given to the victims. As the dead women haunt the entirety of the novel, they exert themselves through the sprawling matter of the dump. Failing to recognize the dump as anything more than waste allows for it to accumulate and excuses the persistent impact of industry on Santa Teresa, Ciudad Juarez, and the entire region. Kessler is an outsider, an American who fails to fully see Santa Teresa in its entirety (both out of protection and secrecy), and he fails to recognize the scope of the murders on the population. Instead, his conclusions suggest cultural strain, but ultimately nothing more.

In Santa Teresa, the dump is polysemous, amounting to a figure whose creation undermines its destruction and whose force is the amalgamation of violence itself. The violence inherent in life under the maquilas is multifaceted, but the impulse to reject waste and bodies overlooks its material effects. More importantly, the refusal to recognize the materiality of waste as more than a

byproduct reduces the bodies left within its bounds to toxicity not worthy of consideration. Refusing to look at the materiality of waste undermines the lives, deaths, and persistence of the women murdered in Santa Teresa and Ciudad Juarez. "The Part about the Crimes" ends without resolution to the murders, and *2666* ends with even less of a conclusion, pushing the narrative back to the beginning in a cyclical loop where every single character moves to and from Santa Teresa, Mexico, endlessly. Like the violence itself, the narrative is never resolved. No conclusions are offered by any character or even Bolaño who died before the book was finished. The unresolved form of *2666* mirrors the unending reality of violence in the borderlands, the dominance of global capitalism, and the endless accumulation of waste.

### 2.2 "From up there…You can see America": Burying the Dead

Standing on the outskirts of the dump, the characters in Luis Alberto Urrea's 2009 novel, *Into the Beautiful North*, are greeted by the harsh reality of life along the border. Their grand ideas of crossing into the U.S. in search of men to save their town from "banditos" slowly deflate as the mountain of trash in front of them comes into sharper focus. The border looks nothing like their expectations – it is no longer the Wild West they saw in the movies, but a modern gauntlet complete with near assaults, no shelter, and no contact from the other side. Following a kindly couple back to their home from the city center, the characters realize their hosts' home is within a closed city dump. It is a community in its own right complete with houses, gardens, and graves. In direct view of the border, this is the closest the characters have ever been to the United States. Their guide and host, Don Porfirio, points to the crest of a waste mountain, saying "From up there…you can see America" (Urrea 113).

*Into the Beautiful North* follows four friends, Nayeli (the book's main protagonist), Yolo, Vampi, and Tacho, as they make their way to the United States from a small village in the Southern part of Mexico. Motivated by impending violence and Nayeli's Tía Irma, the four characters head north looking to recruit men who had previously left Mexico in search of better economic opportunities. The book brings together tropes from westerns and places them along the border, complicating the trials and tribulations that face the group. Considered as a border author, Urrea's works largely focus on the movement of people, ideas, and things across the United States-Mexico border. Born in Tijuana and raised in San Diego, CA, Urrea depicts the lived-reality of the borderlands as messy, harsh, and simultaneously full of life. For Urrea, life on the border is heavily politicized, but those realities are navigated through the daily lives of border dwellers. In other words, the politics of the border manifest in a wide variety of ways but are rarely named as such by characters. Urrea depicts the border as a lively space in *Into the Beautiful North* one that is experienced on a personal level despite the escalation of border policing and anti-immigration rhetoric. The characters at the heart of the novel are naïve and hopeful on a mission that does not account for nuances of policy, instead focusing on what moving through the space looks and feels like. The rhetoric of border politics falls into the background, privileging the characters' stories and quest as a means of emphasizing the persistence of border dwellers and border crossers. Urrea stresses that stating what happens in political and economic terms fails to capture the lives and experiences of those along the border, which is far more complex than the division of the border itself. The hope at the center of *Into the Beautiful North* pushes against more pessimistic views of the borderlands, while still emphasizing the perpetuation of violence in anti-immigration rhetoric and policy. However, by focusing on the border as a lived space, Urrea depicts it as lively and complex despite expulsion and environmental degradation.

Urrea's vision of the borderlands is in direct contrast of that of Bolaño's in *2666.* Throughout *2666,* the dump is a site of death at the expense of a neoliberal capitalist system whose force is felt in every aspect of life in Santa Teresa. The people who move through the dump are hardly visible and exist in such a way that they are deemed dangerous. As more bodies appear in the dump, more waste accumulates around them and the dump grows. While this approach to the dump is important for understanding the violence that is unfolding as a direct consequence of global capitalism, Urrea' *Into the Beautiful North* presents a very different view of the dump. Instead, the dump is an expelled place, where people who have been pushed to the margins of society live and work, but it is much more than that. What the characters find in the dump is a place of life, with a whole community that lives there including a graveyard where they bury their loved ones, and livelihood, as recycling materials in the dump provides many with some form of income. There are homes, yards, and a manner of life that is dependent upon the waste itself. In this way, the novels present differing representations of the dump, but come to the similar conclusions about the violence the dump both perpetuates and represents. The dumps in *2666* are considered "externalized" waste in that they are the direct consequence of industry, but the dumps in *Into the Beautiful North* are the project of "waste imperialism" or the movement of waste from richer countries to poorer ones (DeLonghrey 8). The two types obviously and deliberately overlap, but for Urrea the source of the waste is not industry, it is the legacy of the border itself. Thus, the dump dwellers in the novel are positioned as waste workers who live by repurposing the materials they recover in the dump and so create a life on the fringes of a capitalist system. Unlike Bolaño, the agency of the dump comes from the people inside it and work to reuse the matter available to them. In this way, the dump is a lively, and in some ways, vibrant space that helps Urrea assert the possibilities of life at the border under global capitalism.

As the characters approach the dump in *Into the Beautiful North*, the "smell [of] smoke, and a tart, ugly stink" greets them before they see the mountain of waste (Urrea 112). The smell is a shift in the landscape and the characters' understanding of themselves as noble travelers. The smells moves through the characters' bodies working on them physically and affectively. The materials left in dumps (not just this one) along the border are often reduced to used-up matter left under the conditions of global capitalism. While very true, what is left in the dump in *Into the Beautiful North*, is not directly linked to the maquiladora industry. It is, however, the literal waste from the United States. This particular dump is comprised of waste trucked across the border and left out of sight of the American public. The dump in *Into the Beautiful North* is a continuation of settler colonialism and a reinforcement of, to use Immanuel Wallerstein's terms, the divide between "core" and "periphery" (Wallerstein 230). While the dump makes this divide visible, it is, in Urrea's depiction, a place where a community of people who have been excluded by normative society continue to live, work, and die. Within this they make visible waste work – or the work of moving, maintaining, and picking waste. Kate O'Neil explores the importance of waste work as the "front line of immediate and long-term risks posed by wastes and waste disposal methods" (47). Examining the importance of waste work raises a tension between what kind of work is visible, and what is deemed dirty. The contrast between labor and waste differs from that of *2666* as forces of capitalism are so harsh they effectively erase the workers. In comparison, Urrea brings the need for labor, particularly waste work, into focus in the dump to show the persistence of life which continues to rely upon work even when it is pushed to the margins. Both novels are exploring the relationship of labor to waste, but Urrea's exploration elevates the continuation of labor outside of the dominant systems of capital. While those in *2666* are reduced to waste, their deaths are a byproduct of a capitalist system they can no longer contribute to. In

*Into the Beautiful North*, the persistence of capitalism is such that even those who are expelled from it are still reliant upon it. Urrea's depiction of the dump asks, what does it means for workers who continue to participate in a global economy after being expelled from it? In other words, how does waste work make visible the political and social realities of the border? Finally, waste work allows for the repositioning of disposability and brings forth the myriad ways that things are repurposed. Throughout the dump scene in *Into the Beautiful North*, Urrea examines how objects are reclaimed, reused, and reimagined by dump dwellers. Not only does this make visible the work that waste can do, but the importance of making visible the materiality of the dump. Importantly, the materiality of the dump is both good and bad. It is lively and presents people with possibility, but also works on the bodies of people who live there and spreads constantly as a consequence of the border. Looking at materiality lays bare the lived reality of the borderlands and highlights the interconnectivity of bodies, matter, and politics.

After meeting Don Porfirio and Doña Araceli in downtown Tijuana, the four characters accept their offer of a warm meal and a place to stay. The six of them board a bus that takes them away from the middle of the city and to a closed dump on the outskirts of town. The dump is closed in the sense that the official channels of waste into the dump are no longer functional, making it a site of illegal dumping that continues. Upon leaving the bus and walking toward their host's home, they are greeted with the smell and the "soil turned gray, then black" (Urrea 112). The dump comes into view gradually as they "hopped down on a slope of tan soil pocked with bits of glass and can lids. Five dogs danced and gamboled around them. Tatter paper kites rattled in the phone lines. Down the slope, car tires, car wrecks, and shacks crowded the arroyo" (Urrea 112). Their movement is marked by the downward descent into a space that is already removed from the city center and the rest of the Tijuana society. The car tires and car wrecks already position the space

as a site where the unused and unusable are left. The waste in *Into the Beautiful North* is a byproduct of capitalist system, but less associated with capitalist production as was the case in *2666*. Instead, what is left in *Into the Beautiful North* is more associated with waste as a consequence of the border and the refusal of the United States to attend to their own waste. However, both places are sites of expulsion, or as Saskia Sassen defines in her book, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy,* they are spaces where the brutal exploitation of both land and people at the hands of human decision and the operations of power are visible (Sassen 3). Expulsions, on both the individual and systemic level, show the brutality and violence of economic systems that demand the participation and dismissal of both land and people. For Sassen, the growth in inequality across countries shows the true consequence of the global economy as it continuously pushes out people in the name of progress. She writes that "expulsions can coexist with economic growth as counted by standard measures" (Sassen 2). As such, the logic of expulsions depends on the disposability of people – leading to millions of people who are moved to the margins. This marginalization, for Sasssen, is part of the global economy itself – it is not arbitrary, but an economic choice made by industry. Within this, the global economy creates expelled places, sites purchased by corporations from poorer countries and used until they are no longer profitable. These places are inaccessible and unusable.

The idea of expulsion places intent behind the consequences of marginalization in the name of a global economic system. Global corporations that move to exploit land and people are directly responsible for the conditions that actively discount and dehumanize people. There are "countless displaced people warehoused in formal and informal refugee camps, the minoritized groups in rich countries who are warehoused in prisons, and the able-bodied unemployed men and women warehoused in ghettos and slums" (Sassen 3). Like the border itself, expulsion mediates whose

work is legitimate and legible in a global economy – moving people away from the center and toward places where they are increasingly invisible. In other words, global capitalism thrives on borders that allow for the free flow of money, goods, and waste, while simultaneously impeding the movement of certain peoples. The dump is a manifestation of this inequality, both in the harm it does to the land and the creation of the community within its bounds. The people and objects in the dump are expelled from a global economic system that continuously creates waste – both bodies and objects (Thill 8). The dump is not a space devoid of economic value, but its participation in capitalist systems is cursory and remains largely invisible to normative society.

Often, the value of the dump is attached to the devaluation of the land and the nearby community – these spaces are designated as sites that can be destroyed as a repository for that which is unwanted. This move is part of an "era of disposability…[that] has created an epidemic in worldwide waste and waste imperialism" (DeLonghrey 28). What the dump spaces show is the entanglement of communities, destroyed environment, and the trash dumped there as a consequence of "waste imperialism" which is particularly salient given the proximity of the United States. In *Into the Beautiful North* the waste is mixed with the land, literally integrating it into the space itself. The reduction of the environment where the dump is placed to a land fill becomes part of the justification for waste imperialism wherein waste is moved across the border. Staring at the dump the four characters in *Into the Beautiful North* see a "malodorous volcano of garbage [that] rose two hundred feet or more. It was dark gray, ashen, black, and it was covered in flecks of white paper as if small snowdrifts were on its slopes. Gulls swirled and shrieked, and packs of feral dogs trotted downslope. The black mountain was stark" (Urrea 113). The mountain of trash both covers and is covered by earth itself. The practice of covering the trash makes literal foreign intervention that destroys the land and the people who live there from below. As a site of expulsion, there is

little concern about the intermingling of waste and land, but it is a marker of the United States' dismissal of spaces across the border. The work that the dismissed waste does on the land is both literal and symbolic – in one sense, it poses a threat to the environment through slow decay rates and increasing amounts of materials. Symbolically, the earth is turned black, seemingly unsuitable for life that was once there. However, as the gulls, dogs, and the bodies that move through the space show there is a promise of life and livelihood despite the blackened earth. In this way, the dump is neither good nor bad, but both simultaneously. It is an expelled space that provides people with economic participation and a place to live despite being a marker of American imperialism. The earth is damaged, but life within still persists showing the entanglements of disposed materials as a consequence of the global economy and sites of possibility.

Ruled by packs of dogs and waste pickers, the livelihood of dump dwellers is built on the possibility of repurposing, reusing, and restoring waste. The movement of waste across borders and around the world takes an extraordinary amount of essential labor that largely goes unseen or unacknowledged. Much of the economy that surrounds the movement of waste is based on upholding certain standards of cleanliness. But the reality is that waste is an important part of the global economy, one which provides "livelihoods for millions around the world, from subsistence workers….slums and peri-urban areas, right up to the corporate boardrooms of waste management, recycling, and mining companies" (O'Neill 23). The distinction between the different types of waste work show levels of economic expulsion and increasing brutality associated with waste itself. These levels reflect the movement of waste across global economies as the displacement of waste from western countries to elsewhere is an extension of slow violence at the site of expulsion. In other words, the displacement of waste from one part of the world on to another is a violence that is demanded and upheld by a global economic system. There is little regulation to contain or

control the movement of waste across borders, particularly in terms of where it accumulates and how it is disposed (James "This Mexican City was Transformed by Factories"). In large cities the effects of waste on a region lead to dumps like the one in *Into the Beautiful North* that is both a community and a site of work. Labor within the dump is both legal in the form of moving, burying, and burning trash and illegal in the form of waste pickers and criminal elements. Considering the dump as an external space of expulsion allows for overlapping systems to all thrive, often at the expense of marginalized communities.

Walking through the dump, the characters in *Into the Beautiful North* are confronted with the multiplicity of waste as a set of reusable resources. The smells of the place overwhelm them as they recognize an "acrid chemical stink of… smoke [that] wafted across the friends. The men melted the plastic sheaths off the wires and sold the copper strands to the recyclers" (Urrea 114). Collecting wire for recycling is a mode of income for waste pickers who not only discern what is capable of being salvaged and how to best repurpose it. They are burning the plastic sheaths off to reach the wire that is sold elsewhere, exposing themselves to the chemical fumes that are likely toxic. These waste pickers are an essential part of the waste economy as they reclaim, repurpose, and reintroduce discarded materials. The characters view the waste pickers as "hunched cavemen in a wasteland", further positioning their work outside the normative streams of waste labor and emphasizing its proximity the waste itself (Urrea 114). The work of waste picking is dangerous and dirty, and "waste pickers collect, sort, recycle, repurpose, and sell materials thrown away by others, extracting value from them" (O'Neill 52). The wires are not useless, but their value is only possible if they are recovered and repurposed. The work of repurposing falls to those who are expelled from a global capitalist system but continue to add to it as a means of survival. Further, the exposure of the wires releases dangerous fumes that work on the bodies of the laborers. The

intersection of human labor and the ability of materials to act upon the people using them comes to the forefront in the dumps. The toxicity of objects is exposed via the labor itself, as such human agency plays a central role in the ways which certain materials are repurposed. Communities, land, and people are expelled, making their contributions to a global economy less visible, less desirable, and less recognizable within economic flows.

Despite the dismissal of waste pickers as an illegitimate form of work or way of living, the dump also makes visible the necessary forms of legitimate waste labor. At the bottom of the mountain of trash is a "road [that] cut across its face, and far above, they could see and hear tractors moving soil over trash" (Urrea 113). The dump, which is technically closed, is still a site of physical labor to mediate the spread of waste and to fit more within its bounds. The tractors continue to move trash, consolidating it and making it more manageable, but they do not necessarily take on the work of sorting, let alone repurposing it. The tractors highlight the different kinds of work that happen within the bounds of the dump itself – the work is still considered dirty, but necessary in order to maintain appearances. Many places "make every effort to appear sparkling clean for foreign audiences…[trash is a] visible symbol of poverty or potentially unruly" (O'Neill 54). The waste within the dump is taken from elsewhere and left within the bounds of the dump, but even within that space it is kept orderly. Importantly, the waste work within the dump is not for the benefit of the people living within its bounds, rather it is in spite of those who live there. Waste pickers and dwellers work with the waste itself, repurposing and reconsidering its use, while waste workers reinforce the uselessness of objects by burying and pushing them aside. All are contributing to the economic flows of waste, but the tractors continuously move the trash as a legitimate manner of waste management always making room for more.

Throughout the entirety of the dump section of *Into the Beautiful North*, the characters are aware of how the objects that surround them are no longer taking familiar forms. As they are ushered inside Don Porfirio and Doña Araceli's house, they see a stove or "really the shell of a stove…Fire came out of the burner holes on top. [Doña Araceli] fed twigs in, then a few chunks of two-by-four, and slammed the over door closed" (Urrea 116). The stove is both familiar in its purpose and shape, but it also does not fit the expectations of a stove. The shell of the stove makes visible the stove's "objectness" and illustrates how it is used and functions despite its intended mechanization. Throughout her book *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett writes about the importance of breaking down the binaries between "dull matter (it, things)" and "vibrant life (us, being)" (Bennett vii). Repositioning matter against this binary allows for a reexamination of the capacity of things to act or "make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events" (Bennett viii). Matter has force that continuously acts on the human, it has a "vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans" that is not necessarily given its political due (Bennett viii). The shell of the stove calls forth this vibrancy by inviting the characters to reconsider the structure of the stove as an object. The stove is still a stove, but it betrays its mechanization by no longer working as expected. Rather, the character's interaction with the stove, as both an object that is out of place and one that still functions, shows its material force. Thus, the stove is repurposed via human labor which allows the stove to have political and affective force beyond its initial creation. While the stove shows the interaction of repurposed objects mediated by human labor, its place highlights a more positive understanding of how the dump is a vibrant space. The dump exerts a liveliness that allows the dump dwellers to utilize the discarded items in ways that challenge the objects initial mechanization. Labor and human interaction mediate the vibrancy of the matter in the dump that persists regardless of that interaction. By this I mean, the objects in the dump are part of the

possibility and resilience that is made visible via waste work in the novel. The matter of the dump sprawls and is part of a way of life for some and as such the emphasis on re-envisioning what objects can do make visible the overlapping political, social, and environmental conditions that have made the dump a site of persistence.

The entire community in the dump is constructed through the repurposing and reuse of waste. There are flowers outside the house with a "fence…apparently made out of bedsprings, tied together" a garbage picker's staff made of "bamboo…covered tubes of epoxy glue…the knob from a broken-off Hurst power shifter….marbles and ball bearings…[and] copper wires" (Urrea 118, 122). The shift in objects from their original purpose to something that serves the people within the dump shows the far reach of waste work as waste dwellers extract new and different value from discarded objects. The transformation of objects is an essential part of the streams of waste that continues to re-imagine waste as a "global resource, not as a local problem" (O'Neill 19). The people in the dump created a community around continuously extracting value from waste in ways that push against each object's mechanization and intended purpose. While this approach to objects arises largely out of necessity, it illustrates the possibilities of matter as it is becoming "absolv[ed]…from its long history of attachment to automatism or mechanism" (Bennett 3). This is not to say that the objects are not serving an explicit purpose within the homes and lives of the people in the dump, but rather that these purposes are different from those initially intended for the objects. Or, like the stove and the fence, they make visible both the old and new form intended for the object. As such, each object has the possibility of becoming something new by pushing against its intended use and playing an important role in the persistence of life outside of normative structures. Each object is lively matter that both feeds into a capitalist system, directly or indirectly, even after they have been discarded. As the dump dwellers reshape, repurpose, and reuse the matter

they find in the dump, they are able to survive despite being expelled from a larger system. For Urrea in these moments, waste is part of this system that allows people to have access to livelihood and a community in the shadow of the border itself. In some ways this positive view of the dump is a reclamation for the lives of people who move there, but it is still a place the character's desperately want to flee.

The United States' decision to place waste and its effects outside of the view allows it to avoid responsibility for the labor that occurs there. In fact, pushed to the fringes of the system, no one is held responsible for the waste work that the dump dwellers undertake. For example, the dangers of burning wires to expose the copper is positioned as a personal decision and no entity is responsible for the health of those individuals afterward. The ability to salvage and repurpose items only happens in dismissed spaces like the dump, positioning matter as useful and functional beyond its mechanization. However, one of the main ways that matter is vibrant is through the impulse to relocate and hide items that are no longer useable or necessary. The amount of labor, both legal and illegal, that goes into managing waste is part of its vibrancy – even devoid of explicit use the matter in the dumps has continuous and unruly political force. While this is a departure of the positive view of vibrant matter, it speaks to the persistence of things and the exploitation of the border space. Importantly, the dump's vibrancy changes with and in spite of human interaction – the objects are dumped, but they are not dead or without effect. In terms of waste, a culture of disposing of waste away from public view creates a perception that unused and unwanted objects are dirty. As such, dump dwellers and waste pickers are connected to "dirty places…with people who, therefore, are unhygienic, immoral, and possibly rebellious. They symbolize disorder" (O'Neill 53-4). The dump and its dwellers are continuously dismissed, both economically and culturally, but its vibrancy and effects demand continuous work and attention.

On the border, and right next to the ocean, the dump in Tijuana brings together the human consequences of waste movement and labor on the environment. Throughout the characters' time in the dump they are confronted with the reality of where waste goes and what it means to live within it. Several times they see, "a crude cemetery….[and] a squat crematorium [that] waited in a fence enclosure" (Urrea 115). The dump itself is full of graves, ones that are noted with "cement slabs. Some were bare mounds of trash and pebbles…many handmade crosses – blue wood, red and white wood" (Urrea 115). Like the border, death looms over the dump. While the dump offers a place for expelled peoples, it also poses an immense risk to human and environmental health. One study found that "waste pickers in Mexico have a life expectancy of 39, compared with 67 for the general population" (Dauvergne and LeBaron 418). Expelled sites like the dump make access to resources difficult and consistently endanger the health and wellbeing of people who are already positioned on the margins. The cemetery within the dump highlights the entanglement of bodies alongside the waste itself. As Nayeli, moves through the graves the next morning she notices, "The crosses and painted furniture were stark in the morning light. Etched like charcoal drawings" (Urrea 118). Her response to the graves and the dump are the same, "It was awful. Tragic. Yet…yet it moved her. The sorrow she felt was profound…She was so disturbed that it gave her the strangest comfort, as though something she had suspected about life all along was being confirmed" (Urrea 119). Nayeli's response is one of sadness and comfort, a realization that all bodies ultimately meet the same end – just that the place often looks different. The graves are created from waste and dirt; a new place for people to rest after death, but not necessarily one that is an alternative. Like the dump in *2666,* this moment is one of multidirection mourning wherein the layers of loss are built into the sadness of the dump and the grief of death. The objects that comprise the waste then become part of this mourning as the bodies are buried in the remnants of global capitalism. But

the graves are not a damning alternative to normative perceptions; they are merely the reality facing the dump community.

What remains in the dump is the importance of mourning and the insistence on liveliness through everything. Empty graves are created until they're needed and waste is part of the burial, from what surrounds the bodies to reused items for crosses and slabs. The dead are continuously honored within the dump, so much so that they haunt the space as specters of the expelled. Reminders of the dead persist through their memorials and their decay alongside the disposed of materials in the dump. The graves in the dump are part of the systemic expulsion of whole populations to the margins, but Urrea's positioning of the graves in a cemetery is more deliberate than the reduction of bodies to objects. Rather, the dump is an environment all its own, one that encompasses and supports a community based around the importance of reusing and repurposing what is available. The bodies are not dumped but placed in graves within their community. The graves are maintained, still visible and important to both visitors and residents alike. The bodies buried within the dump elevate the vibrancy that surrounds them through the demand to see the possibilities in the waste itself. Urrea's approach to the dump brings forth the possibilities of waste and an approach to community that exists despite expulsion and the systemic effects of border policy. The characters in *Into the Beautiful North* are headed across the border, which looms over everything in the dump – their journey waiting for them. Standing on the edge of the dump, directly in sight of the border, Nayeli sees the liveliness of the dump as a means of confronting the reality of life along the border. She "looked back at the huts and shacks of the village. She squinted, it almost seemed rustic – a sweet little town painted in all of the Mexican primary colors" (Urrea 119). The graves, the waste, and the community itself all point to the persistence of life along the border that is often overlooked or hidden under the immigration policies. Instead, what the dump

shows in *Into the Beautiful North* is the importance of seeing not only the accumulation of waste, but all that moves through it. As is true in *2666*, dismissing the importance of the dump in *Into the Beautiful North* overlooks the violence of the border. But more importantly for Urrea, not accounting for the dump diminished the life that exists there and realities many people face once after they are expelled from normative systems. The dump is a multilayered site that makes visible the effects of global capitalism, border politics, and the need for mourning all through the accumulation of waste.

## 2.3 Conclusion

In a May 2020 article entitled, “AMLO and the Femicides”, writer Lorena Rios Trevino outlines the continued failings of the Mexican government to stop or even curb violence against women. In the year 2018, “10 women were murdered every day in Mexico”, hundreds of women die every year in Mexico due to domestic and drug related violence (Rios Trevino). Despite promises from the country’s president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), to “democratize Mexico” by fighting corruption and inequality, more women are dying every day. Ultimately, progressive politics continually fail to even publicly acknowledge that the violence against women is a problem at all.

Similarly, the rise of waste along the border is relentless. A 2018 exposé from *Desert Sun*, highlights increased pollution in the border town of Mexicali. The rise of industry, both in waste management and otherwise, in the area has made the air unsafe to breathe, leaking toxins into the river and the land, and contributed to the spread of slag heaps (James "This Mexican City was Transformed by Factories"). Hundreds of people die of respiratory diseases in the area every year,

but little is done to hold companies accountable. Border citizens are continuously negotiating the realities of watching the environment around them become deadly and the desire to keep their homes.

The violence examined in this chapter persists. It is not a thing of the past, but rather the new form through which border violence occurs alongside ever heightening security measures. The deaths of women and the accumulation of waste are intertwined with the material reality of the borderlands, allowing both to continue under the pressures of global capitalism. Despite governmental promises (at the federal level on the Mexican side and from the EPA on the American side), the violence of exploitation along the borderlands is deeply embedded within political understandings of the space. As such, violence is the necessary consequence of industry along the border, one that is abject and disavowed.

While *2666* and *Into the Beautiful North* take different approaches to the accumulation of waste along the border, both books bring it to the forefront of conversations about social, cultural, political, and environmental violence. As both narratives show, the consequences of the border are multifaceted, manifesting in the rise of waste and bodies. Further still, the impulse to look away from the waste erases the stories of hundreds of people who live, work, and die within the confines of dumps. Re-examining the matter in the dumps opens the possibilities for pushing against increasingly inhumane border policies and environmental consequences of dumping. Dumps are polysemous as sites of work and life, while also being undefined matter and the amalgamation of violence via waste imperialism. The rise of waste is a very human problem, both in terms of environmental effects and the expelled people who live and work there. Looking at waste does not reduce the bodies that exist within the space to waste itself; instead, it forces humans to reckon with the political force of objects illuminating our interconnection with matter and the

environment. In *2666* Bolaño uses the waste to highlight this connection and condemn the source of waste while showing the dump as a site of resistance. So too does Urrea, who uses the dump in *Into the Beautiful North* to contemplate the overlapping structures that have expelled bodies (both alive and dead) and the site itself.

Reconsidering the dump as a site of life and livelihood begins by examining the systems that condemned matter in the first place. The dichotomy between cleanliness and order, dirt and chaos, dominates the abjection placed upon sites like the dump. As Mary Douglas writes in *Purity and Danger*, "Reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death" (Douglas 5). To reclaim the dump, particularly to account for the humans that live there, means challenging the association of uncleanliness with morally dubious behavior. In other words, associations of certain bodies with waste have led to their continuous exclusion from society (including resources), and consequently narratives about life along the borderlands. Looking to waste, and sites of expulsion like the dump, pushes against dominant narratives while asserting the importance of matter as essential to understanding human life. This is not to say that dumps are not toxic or dangerous, but rather that including them in understandings of the borderlands (and the global south more broadly), helps us reconsider the multifaceted violence of borders and global capitalism. Waste creates sites of violence, ones that work against people and the environment, and ones that are allowed to accumulate in less privileged places. But understanding it only as a site of uncleanliness erases its dynamic force, particularly for the humans that use it as a site of life, work, and resistance to the dominate systems that created it.

Bolaño and Urrea both use the dump to explore the violence of expulsion and the accumulation of waste that persist beyond the pages of their novels. By looking at the waste that

surrounds people in the borderlands, both authors are exploring the force of matter and demanding recognition for different understandings of life. Within this, dumps are spaces that take on a multitude of meanings; they are sites of life, the manifestation of violence, and places of mourning. Both authors challenge the dismissal of the dump and demand consideration for those who live, work, and die there. Considering matter allows us to highlight these intentions, not by flattening the human to the state of objects, but by repositioning the force of matter. *2666* and *Into the Beautiful North* offer differing perspectives on the border, but ultimately advocate for the same understanding of looking at waste to see the very human element – both in terms of life and death. The novels broaden our understandings of what it means to see within the waste itself and why looking at the dump is necessary. Further, the novels introduce the dumps as sites of mourning, ones that often fall outside the purview of normative structures of grief. In this way, *2666* and *Into the Beautiful North* place strain on who is visible in the borderlands and how we account for deaths that are never truly mourned.

## 3.0 Objects out of Place: Land, Loss, and the Cracks in Sovereignty

"Various Pens" by Tom Keifer. One is for "Skin Deep Tattoo" in Priceville, Alabama. It's black with white lettering and a finger grip around the middle. Sitting on a salmon background, the black and white of the pen contrasts the light color and the white framing. In the next frame is a pen from Wilmington, North Carolina for a property management company; it's white with blue accents and lettering on a royal blue background. Another is from Boise, Idaho and the last is from Holcomb, Kansas. Placed together as a set of four, the photographs of the pens from all over the United States seem out of place in Tom Kiefer's *El Sueño Americano/The American Dream*. The majority of the photographs in the collection are elegantly arranged piles of objects – from combs and brushes, to dozens and dozens of cans of tuna. The sheer number of items in many of the photos is startling, but their placement in the photographs continuously suggest the unseen people associated with the items. *El Sueño Americano* is a collection of photographs of some of the items taken from apprehended migrants and discarded by the United States Border Patrol. Ranging from hygienic necessities to personal affects, all of the items in Kiefer's photographs were rescued from the garbage cans in Border Patrol detention centers.

Unlike other objects in Kiefer's collection, the pens are not necessarily important for their function. Rather, the photographs of the pens actually show a departure of the mechanized nature of items and highlight the circulation of items across borders. The pens are not important because of their use as a writing utensil, but their ability to travel across borders and serve as an easily accessible printed guide to a specific place. The pens show how people travel, move, and live crossing the border. The addresses on the pens are reminders of where family might be located, where work can be found, or simply the print form of asking for directions. All objects discarded

or recovered in the desert are indications of the cracks in sovereignty through which migrants move, but the pens highlight how objects serve multiple functions. Objects are guides, they keep people alive, and they show how the movement of migrants is necessary for the function of sovereignty broadly speaking. Their placement in Keifer's work stresses their "objectness" or the fact that their very function is called into question both in regard to what a pen does and why a pen from North Carolina was in the trash in Arizona.

The objects in *El Sueño Americano* are a demonstration of state power at work. Not only do the pens show the enforcement of sovereignty along the border, but the cracks that facilitate the movement across the border. The pens are part of the fluidity of information, people, and objects that moves through the border itself. By making visible the Border Patrol's use of force through the disposal of personal items, Keifer highlights the multifaceted ways that sovereignty is exerted to treat migrants as less than human. Disposing of personal belongings is an attempt to undermine the lives of those crossing the border by positioning them as "non-citizens" and illegal actors who have broken the law. Importantly, as Keifer points out, even those who have broken the law and are incarcerated receive their personal belongings upon release. By disposing of the items, which sometimes include personal documentation, the state is imposing its power to assert that non-citizen actors are less worthy of the materials that belong to them. To be a non-citizen in the borderlands is to contend with the binary created and maintained by the border that works to identify those who are outside of the systems of personhood recognized by the state. Without citizenship, rights do not apply to many peoples and the reaction from the authorities is to treat people as outside of the purview of the state. However, the items in the trash in the Border Patrol detention center show that even the expulsion of peoples is a mode of participation within sovereignty. In essence, the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border is justified by the continuous

imposition of illegal immigration. Protecting our borders in this way is a means of protecting the very idea of sovereignty that is thrown into question along our borders. The items recovered from the trash by Keifer are an indication of the interconnection of objects, state power, and the spaces that both make migration possible and extremely dangerous.

In this chapter I consider the interstitial spaces, or the literal and metaphorical cracks in sovereignty, that have pushed migration into being a dangerous and deadly pursuit, especially once reaching the other side of the border. I look at how the collection and inventory of recovered objects, alongside border fiction, makes visible the reach of sovereignty and its continued violence. These examples not only account for the enforcement of sovereignty, but the weaponization of the environment as a means of border policing. Sovereignty, in this manner, is the construction and maintenance of political life through the participation of citizens and the exclusion of others, or *bare life* (Agamben 7). Similarly, theorizations of sovereignty are based around the exertion of state power to dictate "the right to *take* life or *let* live" (Foucault 136). Thus, the state is created and maintained through biopolitical control which is exerted through who is included/excluded and who lives or dies (Agamben, Foucault). Both pieces, *Yo Tengo Nombre/I Have a Name* and *Signs Preceding the End of the World* draw attention to this construction of sovereignty through land use, land ownership, and the environment as boundary enforcement. The environment and its use in immigration policies is essential in policing borderlands spaces that rely on the binaries of legality (legal/illegal, citizen/noncitizen, private/public, etc) as a means of monitoring the movement of individuals. Importantly, moving through certain landscapes, particularly protected spaces along the border, is possible for citizens as a form of recreation. Conversely, noncitizens are forced into these same landscapes in dangerous ways that require them to remain invisible and without access to important resources. In turn, this movement is deemed doubly illegal as migrant

movement threatens vulnerable landscapes as well as the legality of citizenship. Consequently, the environment "along the US-Mexico border must be preserved as both a safety valve for the nation and a playground for its able-bodied elite [which] informs immigration policy there, so much so that the price of access to the United States is risk of death or disablement" (Ray 140). Sarah Jaquette Ray writes about the policing of the borderlands environment as motivated by affects of disgust that reduce migrant movement to the objects they leave behind along the trail (Ray 140). Environments along the border are deliberately weaponized against migrants and the association of migrant movement with discarded objects furthers their positioning as non-citizens.

Utilizing ideas of a "pristine" environment for boundary security means that its use for clandestine activity is highly visible in the form of discarded objects and migrant trails. Both serve as markers of undocumented movement and raise concerns about not only the cleanliness of migrants, but the damage migrants do to the environment, and by extension, the nation. These objects make visible the ways in which undocumented persons challenge the solidification of sovereignty. Like the objects in Kiefer's work, objects show the realities of the border where national security is visible and enacted. Objects are essential in acknowledging that the border space is less about ideas of the nation-state and more about the impositions of state power upon individuals. In 2016 The Texas Observer, in conjunction with Operation Identification out of Texas State University, launched *Yo Tengo Nombre*, a collection of photographs of recovered objects from migrant graves in South Texas. Operation Identification, in conjunction with the South Texas Human Rights Center, has exhumed these graves and made strides toward identifying the people left there. *Yo Tengo Nombre* was an inventory of objects that walked the line of art, database, and memorial that allowed users to search through the items recovered with unidentified bodies as a means of identification. The piece was comprised of nearly 80 cases of unidentified peoples and

the items that they carried as they moved across the border. Many of the objects in the piece challenge the expectation of migration by seeming out of place. By this I mean, these objects do not have easily assigned use in regard to the difficulties of the journey, and instead they make visible the unknown individual who carried it across the border. By highlighting these unexpected objects, *Yo Tengo Nombre* shows how the powers of the state are exerted upon real people. Further, the complications of deaths that are considered outside of the purview of sovereignty despite happening on American soil raises questions about the ways in which the deaths of migrants are part of the protection of borders. This, ultimately, creates a space that is used by migrants to move into the country, but places their deaths as unacknowledged and often unrecognized by the state. Considering some of the objects in *Yo Tengo Nombre,* as well as the structure of the piece, makes visible the false binary of the border, particularly in regard to the use of environments as modes of entry and militarized landscapes.

Examining these spaces as modes of entry brings forth the complex circumstances migrants face as they move across the border. Fictional and non-fictional narratives about the border highlight these harsh landscapes as part of the overwhelming difficulty of crossing into the United States. Yuri Herrera's 2015 novel *Signs Preceding the End of the World* positions border crossing as a mythical quest that is both dangerous and mundane. The routinized manner of border crossing makes the main character, Makina's, stay on the other side of the border an inevitability that she must face regardless of her assertions to the contrary. Land is a central aspect of the novel as ideas of land ownership and histories of dispossession put the main protagonist in motion across rivers, through mountains, and toward an eventual descent into the underworld of life as an undocumented person. The entire narrative focuses on what can and cannot move across borders – peoples, messages, and objects – and how ideas of legality are often circumvented in favor of the lived

experiences people are facing. I consider the importance of these cracks in sovereignty as a means of challenging the borderlands as a "state of exception" or a "*zone between life and death, inside and outside*" (Lee 58). As Charles Lee and other migration scholars have illustrated, the reality is that their participation is far more complicated and cannot be reduced to the binary of inside/outside (Lee 58). Instead, I use the novel to explore the visible slippages in the border binary, which extends to the use of the landscape as zones of movement and the participation of undocumented peoples in the maintence of sovereignty. This interstitial participation, or as Charles Lee defines it, "alternative conception…of citizenship not only as juridical institutions or political acts, but as a hegemonic cultural script that sustains liberal governance in reproducing a 'normal' and 'proper' mode of social life that interpolates how subjects should behave as citizens" (59). Paths to citizenship, or even participation in sovereignty, do not all look the same nor does the binary of bare life/citizen account for all of the ways that people move through and around the legal systems that uphold sovereignty. Looking at the interstitial spaces and modes of participation allows for a more complex understanding how people move into and through the "underworld" of undocumented life. Moreover, it accounts for how undocumented life is a form of participation in and of itself.

Using a kind of mythical form that focuses on the journey itself, Herrera makes visible the liminal spaces where people live and participate in sovereignty despite not having legal documentation. Herrera's fictionalized border crossing compounds the realities facing migrants with an imaged border space that encompasses the biodiversity of the borderlands. These spaces are navigated in such a way that they are lively, persistent, and illuminate the very fragile nature of the border itself. Herrera's protagonist, Makina, her brother, and all of the "homegrown" individuals she meets along the way shows how many people exist within the cracks of sovereignty

and how the dichotomy of inside/outside fails to account for the diverse and complex realities many migrants face after arriving in the United States. These liminal spaces not only allow for participation but take advantage of it in the form of an undocumented labor force. Work is a cultural and economic practice that is readily legible as participation, but the undocumented laborer occupies a precarious position wherein their status makes them easy to exploit and dispensable. Importantly, as Makina's journey shows, not all participation is dependent on economic involvement, instead the cracks in sovereignty rely upon people existing both outside and inside the system.

By bringing these conversations together I not only demonstrate the continuation of the border as a site of historic violence, but how that extends to the legal practices that have worked to solidify ideas of belonging and exclusion. This binary of inside/outside, inclusion/exclusion, is particularly pronounced in the borderlands and relies upon protection of environmental spaces. Exploring the entanglements of environments, objects, and people allows us to think critically about the ways in which sovereignty is deployed along borders around the world. The environment also allows us to consider how people both participate within and circumvent the legal structures used to solidify sovereignty. Moreover, it illustrates how many of the deaths that happen in the borderlands are not grieved, and instead buried with little acknowledgement or effort put toward identifying the person. The use of the environment, particularly protected spaces, and the reliance on legal languages to solidify the divide continuously fails to acknowledge how people live, work, and die in the cracks created by sovereignty.

### 3.1 Exhuming the Border's Lost and Found in *Yo Tengo Nombre/I Have a Name*

The white of the baseball's leather contrasts the black background. It seems to float right in the middle of the frame: a MacGregor 92722 official league ball with red stitching, only a little dirty. Alongside the inhalers, the rosaries, and the items of clothing the baseball seems out of place. Many of the items photographed have a clear function – even the toys seem to have the more legible purpose of calming or distracting a child during the long journey across the border. But the baseball, in its relatively clean condition, doesn't feel like a toy in the same way – it seems like a memento, an indication of a lost memory or even the promise of new memories.

*Yo Tengo Nombre/I Have a Name* was a collection of searchable photographs of some of the items recovered with migrant bodies in the borderlands of South Texas. The items pictured for the piece are mostly photographed individually and placed on a black background, making them stand out in their singular positioning. Created by the Texas Observer in conjunction with Operation Identification based at Texas State University, *Yo Tengo Nombre* was an inventory of objects recovered with migrants' bodies aimed at reuniting families with their lost loved ones. Using images of items found alongside bodies that were either exhumed for identification, the piece highlighted the dangerous realities of border crossing by calling attention to the amount of unacknowledged death continuing to happen as a consequence of the border in Texas. What the items in *Yo Tengo Nombre* revealed were objects out of place, or items that present as discarded matter but are important clues to understanding the violence of sovereignty. *Yo Tengo Nombre* focused specifically on the items that are seemingly unexpected. Things like the baseball that gesture to the complexity of the people moving and the harshness of their deaths under contemporary border policy. However, like other pieces about the death of border crossers, *Yo Tengo Nombre* is no longer available in its original form. *Yo Tengo Nombre* was never meant to

be a permanent site as editor Forrest Wilder noted when announcing the site, the "web app was built so that it's easily scalable (adding more cases) and transferrable to another entity, such as a nonprofit, university or government agency" (Wilder). The photos in *Yo Tengo Nombre* have been moved to the NamUS system which is provides "technology, forensic services, and investigative support to resolve missing persons cases" ("The National Missing and Unidentified Persons System") Run by the University of North Texas Health Science Center and the National Institute for Justice, NamUS is a nation-wide service for missing persons cases. While the NamUS service is an important tool for families searching for their loved ones, the loss of *Yo Tengo Nombre* into a larger system ultimately flattens the complex reality facing migrants across the border which was visible through the photographed items. What is lost with the migration of *Yo Tengo Nombre* is not merely its functionality or its importance as memorial, but a larger acknowledgement about the specific conditions border crossers face in Texas.

Place plays a critical role in the formulation and enforcement of regulations regarding how the border is policed. Within this, the work of identifying migrants takes different forms in different areas. In Arizona the Colibrí Center for Human Rights works with the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner to not only catalogue migrant remains, but to reach families across country lines. Similarly, Dr. Kate Spradely of Operation Identification based at Texas State University uses forensic methods to identify the hundreds of migrant remains that have been buried in Jim Hogg and Brooks Counties. In a January 2020 interview with Texas Monthly, Dr. Spradley spoke about her work and the importance of identifying remains. Created in 2013, Operation Identification works to exhume, document, and identify unidentified migrants who have been buried in South Texas. While not adjacent to the border, Brooks county is home to the Falfurrias Border Patrol checkpoint, "one of the busiest in the U.S." (Heinen). Smugglers typically drop off

migrants before the checkpoint with the intention of people making their way through the dry, flat, and disorienting ranchlands that make up the county (Heinen). Consequently, many migrants get lost and die from dehydration or from drinking contaminated water from cattle tanks (Heinen). These two counties in Texas are some of the deadliest terrain in the borderlands and with little funding or regulations, many migrant bodies are buried without identification in unmarked graves throughout the region. Authorities in Brook's County estimate that since 2009 "more than 3,500 migrants are presumed to have died" in the county (Heinen). Dr. Spradley's team not only works to exhume these bodies, but to bring dignity to the deaths of migrants who have, sometimes, been buried in large unmarked graves. The work of Operation Identification addresses the distinct lack of attention and awareness given to migrant deaths in South Texas. The implementation of Prevention through Deterrence has uneven effects, not only in regard to the environments weaponized as a consequence of the policy, but how those environments are managed and designated. Working with South Texas Human Rights Center and the Brooks County Sheriff's office, Operation Identification utilizes forensic methods, GIS data, and DNA sampling to help family members identify their loved ones. Together all of the information is accessible through the NamUS platform which allows families to submit a DNA sample for comparison with the findings from Operation Identification.

Prior to NamUS, *Yo Tengo Nombre* made the efforts of Operation Identification visible and accessible through its focus on the personal affects. Photographed by Texas Observer Editor Jen Reel, the photos in *Yo Tengo Nombre* provide a more artistic representation of the crisis unfolding in Jim Hogg and Brooks county. While family reunification was part of the initial mission of the piece, the photos capture the solemnity of individual items and the missing stories that surround each object. *Yo Tengo Nombre* helped raise the profile of Operation Identification

and the very real violence faced by many migrants crossing the border in South Texas. In this way, *Yo Tengo Nombre* is specific to the geography of Texas that is not only mirrored in the wear on the items, but in their very presence in the piece. Making the piece specific to the region brings the border closer for many Texans who do not have to engage with the daily realities of migration. More importantly, the piece works to honor those who have died and remain nameless under contemporary border policy that not only forces them into dangerous terrain, but allows them to remain nameless. As Dr. Spradley states so clearly, "If you're going to have a policy that leads to deaths, you should at least try to identify the dead, and give the counties the resources they need to process them" (Heinen). Without programs like Operation Identification, many of the deaths happening in Texas would never even be catalogued as an unnamed person, let alone exhumed in order to be identified.

Unlike Arizona, the migrant crisis in Texas is unfolding a very different manner because of the terrain and the privatization of land. The land along Arizona's border with Mexico is 90% public, meaning that it is accessible to people in the state and protected by laws that allow it to stay untouched by development (*About*). As explored previously, public lands introduce a host of problems including extensive hypocrisy about who has access to the land and how it is used. Conversely, 95% of Texas' lands along the border is privately owned meaning that attempts to build the wall along the border have been stalled by lawsuits from many private landowners. The consequence is that because land is private, Texas' response to the recovery, documentation, and burial of migrant bodies often falls to landowners who do not know or can ignore the state's regulations (Heinen). Privatization leads to a distinct lack of clarity about what to do when someone encounters a body. Arizona's public lands allows for the facilitation of recovering human remains including the creation of databases like the one run by Humane Borders in conjunction

with the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner ("Migrant Death Mapping"). The difference in response to migrant deaths is essential in understanding how dangerous immigration policies have facilitated not only the deaths of thousands of people, but the attempted erasure of those deaths altogether. Land, once again, plays an instrumental part in who is recognized by the state and whose death falls between the very cracks that make migration possible.

One of the ways that recovered and found objects show the violence of the border is through their interactions with the natural world. All of the items in *Yo Tengo Nombre* show some form of decay as the journey across the border and their subsequent burying has worn away many of the fabrics or the plastics. For example, a luchador mask found near a body recovered in 2009 shows visible dirt stains and sun damage. The fabric looks worn thin, not from wear, but from its very presence in a hot and hostile environment. Listed with the person's effects are, "toothbrush…button…plastic bag – 'Farmacia Guadalaraja" with white letters…[and] Lion Stuffed animal" ("The National Missing and Unidentified Persons System" Case UP13475). The images capture these small markers of environmental wear which ultimately suggests the conditions of the crossing as much as the effects of burial. It's impossible to pinpoint at which point the decay occurred, but this shows the diminishment of that person under contemporary border politics. The mask is dirty and the lion stuffed animal is in fair condition, but its little strands of hair in its mane are unkempt. Seeing these items raises questions about the person who left them behind. These out of place items are a reflection of the answer we will never get and that migrants narratives are not easily shared nor can they be reduced to one set of circumstances. Within the piece the objects betray how out of place they are via the remainders of the environmental decay that they show. As is true for all forms of movement, the rationale behind why people migrate are often complex, but the objects show the difficulty of that movement and ideas of a life beyond it.

What these objects, particularly those that read as more personal, show is the absence of people. Each object is attached to a case that featured other photos and information about when and where each person was recovered. However, all of the cases in the piece are for unidentified peoples, showing how many people die without recognition or public acknowledgement. The lack of clarity or even identifying information at the center of the piece haunts every image and every case. What the images show is akin to the idea of haunting and ghosts that Avery Gordon writes of in *Ghost Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*: "In haunting, organized forces and systemic structures that appear removed from us make their impact felt in everyday life in a way that confounds our analytic separation and confound the social separations themselves" (Gordon 19). The objects make readily visible the impact of border politics on real people who are not and cannot be present. Their omission is the force of sovereignty exerting itself, but their absence looms over every image and the very need for the piece at all.

The persistent lack or silence at the center of the piece shows how the need to acknowledge, mourn, and identify people is a human rights issue. One that has long been ignored not only in favor of secure borders and private lands, but out of a lack of funding for the necessary work of cataloguing and documenting peoples. The cracks in sovereignty widen through the misunderstanding that putting funding toward the fortification of the border in the form of militarization will actually stop migration. Instead, heightened security only leads to increasingly dangerous conditions as people, particularly as coyotes and smugglers find new ways across. Within this structure, the need for identification is not just the idea of putting a name to a person, but the very act of identifying death in the borderlands as a problem at all.

The images of objects make visible the very real losses of people under contemporary border policy and demonstrate the inherent lack of knowledge and of recognition that must happen

to catalogue the images in the first place. Using objects, *Yo Tengo Nombre* shows the difficulties of representing a humanitarian crisis that is deliberately hidden under policy. The work of *Yo Tengo Nombre* is based around ideas of public advocacy because the piece is public facing. The act of collecting and cataloguing these items to create an inventory, both of objects and photographs of those objects, which shows the need to preserve these items lest they decay completely and disappear. The inventory of objects is an act of preservation, one that brings forth the haunting within each picture and demands that what happens to migrants not be forgotten. While NamUS now holds many of the images its database function effectively reduced the emotional side of the images. In essence, it refuses to make room for the ghosts that haunted *Yo Tengo Nombre* and instead opts for a more clinical approach to all disappearances. The persistence of absence is lost in such a database as its purpose is to function as a tool, but that is not to say that databases cannot facilitate the complex absences that make their work essential. Rather, as *Yo Tengo Nombre* shows the database must take a much simpler form to make those absences continuously present.

The database used for *Yo Tengo Nombre* was built around its photo and object focus allowing users to pull up specific cases and search for certain items. For instance, searching for the word "shoe" brought up all of the images of shoes or references to shoes in the database. When searched the image was brought forth in relation to the case it is part of and alongside other items in the same category. This kind of structure allowed the images in *Yo Tengo Nombre* to function as the center of the piece. Users could search for specific objects rather than case numbers, linking each item to an unseen and unnamed person. The databases search function allowed the piece to not only store relevant information about each case, but to make the losses at its center searchable and identifiable. The result is a database that is haunted by what cannot be catalogued, searched,

or accessed. While the narrative that was used to create *Yo Tengo Nombre* was not on the same page as the database, it primed users to interact with what they can and cannot see or search. The inability to search for a person, but instead the items they carried reminded users about what is not and can never be within the piece.

The absence of people and their narratives is most apparent through the photographs of items that challenge a seemingly routinized approach to migration. Emphasizing small mundane objects like toothbrushes or water bottles is incredibly important to recognizing the humanity of people whose movements and deaths deliberately do not attract attention. So, their placement in *Yo Tengo Nombre* attends to a somehow expected understanding of the narrative of migration. However, the objects that stood out the most are the ones that challenge the viewer's expectations of migration. These objects are out of place because they reflect the inability to know what happens along the migrant trial and highlight the failed expectations of life in the United States. Objects make visible the circumstances migrants face and often emphasize the life that is hidden under overarching and overwhelming narratives about migrations. Given the reality that some 3,500 migrants have disappeared or died crossing the border in Texas, the numbers can obscure the fact that each migrant was an individual with a story and a family (Heinen). Objects that are seemingly out of place further illustrate the tragedy of loss continuously unfolding along the Texas border. Objects like the baseball, a toy, a bottle of cologne, etc. keep the expectation of the migrant journey from becoming a fixed narrative about who crosses the border and how they do it. Rather, by prioritizing the objects that challenge these expectations, *Yo Tengo Nombre* focuses on the how the loss of individual migrants is hidden under the numbers or just not publicly acknowledged. The choice to do so through photographs of objects is one that illuminates not only how migrants are moving, but how the losses at the center of American immigration policy cannot and should

not merely be understood through statistics or numbers. These things not only gesture to an unknown and unknowable story, but are essential understanding how migrants navigate the liminal and interstitial spaces that make migration possible.

By circumventing the legal means of entry, many migrant deaths remain in the interstitial spaces of sovereignty and are thus, illegal to a larger public. Efforts to not only reclaim these deaths then fall to services like NamUS which not only documents migrant deaths but offers robust search functions. Users have the ability to search by case number, demographic, physical description, images and more. All of this information is publicly available in an effort to help law enforcement, as well as families, identify missing persons and find closure. Unlike *Yo Tengo Nombre* NamUS includes extensive reports on the circumstances under which a person's body was recovered or exhumed. These details are important to understanding how and where people migrate, but they also articulate the material reality of death in the borderlands. The ability to navigate the database is important for grieving families as it may work to reduce the trauma of scrolling through thousands of cases in hopes of finding some identifying information. It is also likely to have the opposite effect as families must search for specific criteria. Regardless, many of these measures do help protect families and identifies of those lost as many of the cases are removed from the database once they are identified. However, what is lost in the NamUS system is the need for public mourning which is hidden by the databases' filters. The result is a tension between the need for privacy and a desire for public awareness and advocacy.

What the filters in the NamUS database still facilitate is the frequency at which migrants remain nameless. The impulse to identify each person is one that works to legitimize the grief and mourning elicited by the cases within the piece. But the danger of identification is complex and can be traumatic for the families or loved ones involved. The anonymity of each item allows for

the grief they illicit to feel both specific and universal – mourning the death of someone who carried a specific object speaks to the larger social and political situation that led to the death in the first place. The emphasis on specificity in *Yo Tengo Nombre* provides a much more solemn look at how individuals are forced into dangerous situations and then fall outside the purview of sovereignty. Thus, objects illuminate what is hidden under the reach of border and national security. Objects reveal the promises of a life imagined and the tragedy of an unacknowledged and prematurely buried death. The result is a ghostly piece that points to the need for continuous advocacy that is specific to the place itself. The methods of advocacy in Southern Arizona via extensive water drops and migrant aid camps are not possible in South Texas. Private lands prohibit many of these activities which means that advocacy must take a different shape, primarily in the form of visibility and education. This is not to say that migrant aid groups aren't present in South Texas, the South Texas Center for Human Rights is located in Falfurrias, TX and maintains water stations throughout the region (*About STHRC*). But the reality is that the struggles of the two areas are different even if the result is ultimately the same. The heat between the two regions is also different, as are the topographies which provide different kinds of challenges for migrants. Ultimately, the decision to weaponize the environment takes different forms, but has consistently produced the same result.

The anonymity that haunted *Yo Tengo Nombre* protected many of the people whose items were within the piece. The choice to show items rather than feature stories that might replay or even sensationalize the trauma that many migrants face, allows for the piece to center on the people lost without ever showing them. The need for recognition and identification was a dominant force in *Yo Tengo Nombre* and its loss speaks to problems of obsolescence. The movement of the images in *Yo Tengo Nombre* to another system is part of the need for collective action to not only

acknowledge and identify those who have died, but to hold systems of power accountable for the loss of thousands of people in the borderlands. *Yo Tengo Nombre* illustrates how the act of mourning is an important starting place for what is a contemporary and continuous crisis. Operation Identification shows the need to work with organizations on the ground in order to address the effects of a national policy that is created with little awareness of the resulting violence. Projects like *Yo Tengo Nombre* and the work of Operation Identification make visible the liminal spaces in which migrants are forced and ultimately die. As such, many go unidentified, are buried quickly, and reside outside of the structures of sovereignty despite dying in the country itself. Recovering these bodies and the items found with them is part of the tension that many migrants face living and dying both inside and outside the structures of the state. The lack of context or specificity about the person and their journey does not undermine the difficulties faced by migrants. Instead, it highlights the realities that people are continuing to overcome or succumb to as they move across the border. Without *Yo Tengo Nombre* and projects like it, many of these deaths would fall through the cracks in sovereignty and never be openly acknowledged.

### 3.2 Interstitial Environments: Moving through the Cracks in Sovereignty

> Rucksacks. What do people whose life stops here take with them? Makina could see their rucksacks crammed with time. Amulets, letters, sometimes a *huapango* violin, sometimes a *jaranera* harp. Jackets. People who left took jackets because they'd been told that of there was one thing they could be sure of over there, it was the freezing cold, even if it was desert all the way. They hid what little money they had in their underwear and stuck a knife in their back pocket. Photos, photos, photos. They carried photos like promised but by the time they came back they were in tatters. (51)

Left behind during the journey, the items are the remnants of a life shed out of necessity. These items are "seemingly mundane things left behind in the desert", but they are important keys to "understanding the routinized and widespread forms of suffering that many border crossers experience, but often downplay" (De León 326). The items are objects of necessity, rucksacks and jackets that will make the journey possible. They are also mundane things that illustrate the harshness of the journey itself and their fictionalize representation is part of the disruptive nature of migration. Each item makes visible how people survive not only the cracks that make migration possible, but the realities of navigating the interstitial spaces in sovereignty. Questions of survival cannot be reduced to things like food, but must include items like photos that are held, carried, and lost in the desert. Symbolically the photos are a loss of self and a life left behind, literally they are part of survival reminding people of home, family, friends, and loved ones. Stripped of their associations, their placement in the desert on the migrant trail means they are markers of illegitimate movement and out of place in the order of sovereignty. The image on the photographs are no longer significant – rather the physical matter of the photo is what remains. The photos show the violence of the border as it applies to objects and people – under environmental strain and the reach of sovereignty the photos, the people, and the promise are all left in tatters.

Similarly, the object's in Makina's bag show the intersections of the personal and the practical. She carries: "a small blue metal flashlight, for the darkness she might encounter, one white blouse and one with colorful embroidery, in case she came across any parties, three pairs of panties…a bar of .. soap, a lipstick that was more long-lasting than it was dark…She was coming right back, that's why that was all she took" (Herrera 52). Like the objects Makina finds, not all of them are mundane – in fact, many are specific to who Makina is. Her choice to bring an embroidered shirt for social occasions mirrors this through the suggestion of certain expectations

of life on the American side of the border. She carries a nice shirt for social events, but also soap and underwear. While some of things Makina finds and the ones she carries are largely mundane and necessary objects, the personal ones are more about the possibilities of life – both the one left behind and the one expected. The division between what Makina finds and what she carries shows the liveliness of objects as they move from belongings to discarded matter. She attached ideas of use to many of the objects she carries and memories or hearsay to those she finds.

Published in Spanish in 2009 and translated into English in 2015, *Signs Preceding the End of the World* is a novel about thresholds, political borders, and migratory spaces. Written as a quest narrative, Yuri Herrea and translator Lisa Dillman, position the journey across the border a mythical one in the name of land and family. Tasked with finding her brother who crossed in search of some "promised" land, Makina makes her way to the other side of the border through hostile human and environmental landscapes. Leaving behind her familial obligations, her mother and young sister, and her work as the town telephone operator, Makina is confronted with the consequences of historical and contemporary land dispossession. As she moves toward and across the border she must overcome nine different levels, or obstacles, in the form of men, natural landscapes, dizzying cityscapes, and state violence. Her quest takes her through spaces that challenge the very structure of sovereignty and the binary of the border internal/external which is not only complicated by her movement, but her brother's new life and her own ability to stay. Objects make visible the landscapes Makina moves through and are important in illustrating the link between land and bodies. The novel's conclusion makes literal the underworld of undocumented life as Makina confronts the many losses she has experienced when she decides to stay on the other side of the border.

The objects Makina finds and those she carries are part of the violence of sovereignty which pushes people into liminal and dangerous spaces where survival is difficult. This moment reflects the work that the items in *Yo Tengo Nombre* do for highlighting the loss of life happening in the borderlands. Like the objects in *Yo Tengo Nombre*, the ones Makina finds are markers of how people move across the border and the multiple losses people experience along the way. Further, the silences and absences at the center of *Yo Tengo Nombre* speak to Herrera's positioning of the novel as mythical. This approach to storytelling resists a kind of "truth" that would make visible the trauma of migration. Instead, Herrera crafts a narrative that resists the assumed realities of migration in order to highlight larger systemic challenges facing people as they move. As Elizabeth Rodriguez-Fielder writes, this approach communicates "what is not written by stowing away truths within the text, even sometimes refusing to reveal them at all" (6). These missing truths loom over the items in *Yo Tengo Nombre* and provide another view of the migrant narrative that shows the effects of moving through the cracks in sovereignty and the subsequent exclusion of many deaths. The lack of names or contextual information in the form of the circumstances that led to the persons crossing or their death, is instrumental in upholding the silences that surround the objects. Herrera reflects the reality of these silences by making the spaces Makina moves through fictional analogues of real place – they are both real and indistinct. Like the items in *Yo Tengo Nombre*, the precise details of Makina's migration are not what matters – the effects of sovereignty on entire populations is what is central to both pieces. These omissions, or the lack of certainty over both pieces, is essential and tells us more about the complex landscapes and political situations that continue to make migration deadly.

*Signs Preceding the End of the World* is a narrative that reflects the realities of migration through a filter that is both mundane and mythical. Migration is routinized and unremarkable, but

the trials Makina faces are unreal, effectively hiding the real violence migrants often face. By refusing to reveal all of the realities of migration, Herrera's narrative show how "ancient stories of the underworld reveal a truth about the border that we cannot know from the official record dominated by surveillance" (Rodriguez-Fielder 10). This approach, which Rodriguez-Fielder calls "the stowaway" challenges "the binary of documented/undocumented, gesturing to secret worlds outside and stories outside of or beyond the linear path to citizenship"(Rodriguez-Fielder 5). Herrera's mythical approach to storytelling makes visible the liminal spaces that surround ideas of citizenship and instead shows how circumventing the surveillance of the state is not only possible, but necessary for the maintence of sovereignty. The very threat of illegal immigration is a rationale for the escalation of border security and the expanding reach of sovereignty.

Throughout *Signs Preceding the End of the World*, Herrera uses the environment to show the entanglements of sovereignty, migration, and the legacy of settler colonialism. After a sinkhole begins to swallow up The Little Town, Makina notes that the place "was riddled with bullet holes and tunnels bored by five centuries of various silver lust, and from time to time some poor soul accidentally discovered just what a half-assed job they'd done covering them over" (Herrera 11-12). The unstable earth reaches out for Makina, making her descent into the underworld of undocumented migration inevitable. It's instability also makes visible the lasting effects of Spanish colonization and environmental abuse. The sinkhole is a fast consequence of slow violence and an indication that the "colonial past does not haunt the present as a spectral lingering; rather, it directly affects – and endangers – daily life in materials ways" (Rodriguez-Fielder 11). The earth is used up and the place was built on top of the legacies and histories of colonization which left the earth unstable. The histories and violence of land dispossession are still present in the foundation of the

town and not a thing of the past. Instead, what the sinkhole scene makes clear is that those often-disavowed legacies and histories are unevenly experienced and felt.

While Herrera does not provide much information about the town itself, two things are clear: the town is out of touch with the outside world and many people have left in pursuit of a life on the other side of the border. Makina's role as the town telephone operator positions her as the connection between those who have left and the crumbling town that remains. She not only hears, but mediates the conversations coming through her switchboard. She views her role as essential to the community and prides herself on knowing the many languages she must speak across. She works the switchboard which was "the only phone for miles and miles around" and she "answered them in native tongue or latin tongue. Sometimes, more and more these days, they called from the North; these were the ones who'd often already forgotten the local lingo, so she responded to them in their new tongue" (Herrera 19). Makina's ability to speak and communicate across borders, linguistic boundaries, and through the very thresholds of meaning is an important aspect of viewing herself as a messenger. But what the sinkhole makes clear is that staying in the little town is doomed, it is literally falling away. It is a "bashed' place whose land is "rendered…not of presence but of absence" (Glotfelty 236).

From the crumbling earth as a consequence of industry to the absence of her brother, The Little Town is marked by the legacy of colonization and the uneven development that followed. Makina's mother tasks her with going to find her brother and to deliver a message hopefully prompting his return. Not only is Makina the town telephone operator, but a messenger who runs around the town informing people that their loved ones called and even participating in the politics of the place. Because of her work Makina sees herself as "the door, not the one who walks through it" as messages were "her way of having a hand in the world" (Herrera 18-20). In this way, Makina

is preparing for a journey with a fixed end – her return to the town, her mother, and her roles as messenger and switchboard operator. By seeing herself as a messenger rather than a migrant, Makina is primed to circumvent the structures of sovereignty (both those deployed in the environment and their political counterparts). She sees herself moving across the border in both ways. Importantly, she does not intend to stay as she reminds herself multiple times throughout the novel, "she was coming right back" (Herrera 52). This understanding of herself as a messenger is one of the ways she is able to move through the world without detection, and how she moves fluidly across the border itself. As a messenger Makina is hoping to move seamlessly across the border as a means of doing her familial duty. What her expectations of going and coming back show is the political construct of the border as an inside/outside binary upholds the fiction of the border. In other words, the fluidity of people going and coming across the border is part of many migrant's lives and concretization of who does or does not belong ultimately fails to account for movement. The in-between space that Makina occupies as a traveler not only allows her to move past and through, but it also encourages her to see beyond the dichotomy established along the political divide. The construct of the border binary and the false narrative it creates comes into sharper relief as Makina moves across rivers, though mountains, and over the "bleak tundras" that comprise the city on the other side of the border.

Not only do the borderlands environment play an essential role in the novel, so too does the legacies and ideas of land ownership. After being tasked with finding her brother, Makina recalls how he left after one of the town's bosses, Mr. Aitch, told Makina that "they owned a little piece of land, over on the other side of the river, that a gentleman had left it to them" (Herrera 29). Unphased and fairly certain of the lie, Makina ignores the encounter, but Mr. Aitch's men convince Makina's brother of his claim to the land. After his time with Mr. Aitch's men he stands before

Makina and tells her “I’m off to claim what’s ours” and as he leaves he insists “Someone’s got to fight for what’s ours and I got the balls if you don’t” (Herrera 29). Land ownership is a driving force for Makina’s brother as it not only holds the promise of prosperity in the form of ownership, but it is an interstitial space that would allow for more legitimate forms of participation. By having land, Makina’s brother would literally own a piece of the country, making the idea of land ownership an attractive promise for a new life away from a seemingly doomed and dying town. Like many of the others who have left, Makina’s brother is enticed to cross the border with the promise of something better and, likely, while carrying something for Mr. Aitch. Put into motion by external forces, Makina’s brother crosses the river in pursuit of literal promised land.

Tempting Makina’s brother across the border with the promise of land is telling, particularly when considering the role of land within the construction of the border itself. Ideas of land ownership were and are essential to the creation and maintence of the border. The largest disputes that put the Mexican-American war in motion and which allowed for the creation of the border itself were disputes over land between Mexican farmers and American settlers. As Peter Guardino writes in *Dead March: A History of the Mexican-American War*, “The war was more than anything a direct consequence of American expansionism, driven not only by the rapid economic growth of the United States but also by central aspects of America’s political culture and changing social identity” (18). America’s westward expansion became a defining feature in the 19$^{th}$ century with the Mexican-American war resulting in Mexico losing its claim to the land that is not Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming (1). The war solidified the United States claim on the region which resulted in the forced removal of some Mexican citizens, and also a rise in racist violence that forced many Mexican and Mexican-American land owners to give up their claims to the land they once owned (Guardino

25). While this history is important to the establishment and seeming concretization of the political divide, it often overlooks the overwhelming violence Mexican nationals perpetuated against indigenous peoples in the region (Guidotti-Hernández). Land dispossession is an important part of the American Southwest – one that makes visible the continuous layers of violence that are still unfolding under the contemporary American political situation. Makina's brother leaves to "claim what's [theirs]" gesturing to the longstanding tradition of land ownership which is part of the history of the region and the solidification of the border. He seeks a literal promised land that can and never will be his because of the longstanding and often disavowed violence that comprises the region itself. Makina's brother is not seeking the American dream (to put it tritely), but rather a mode of participation that is a reclamation of the spaces that have been stripped from Mexican and indigenous people as a consequence of American conquest. Within this, Makina and her family have the possibility of interstitial participation wherein they would literally own part of the country despite being outside of sovereignty. The land is viewed as a way in to sovereignty and a mode of participation that links the environment to ideas of the nation and citizenship.

Makina leaves The Little Town for The Big Chilango where she will meet her guide and begin crossing the border. Along the river she locates her guide, Chucho, who moves swiftly across the river to help her cross. The river is a natural boundary made political by the force of sovereignty and the legacies of violence. As they paddle "an icy current began to push their feet away like a living thing, relentless" (Herrera 39). Submerged, Makina finds herself fighting for air as she is pulled downward by "invisible water monsters" that make it harder for her to fight her way up (Herrera 39). She sinks and her panic gives way to a clarity that, "it made no difference which way she headed or how fast she went, that in the end she'd wind up where she needed to be. She smiled. She felt herself smile" (Herrera 39). Makina's dunk in the river washes away her old life and

assures her that she will find what she is looking for on the other side of the border. The risk of drowning is part of her revelation linking it to the precarity of her movement across the border and highlighting the danger that surrounds her every move. Despite the comfort of knowing she will end up where she needs to be, she has little control over the forces that are pulling her downward. Further, falling into the river makes her descent into the border divide literal. Used as the border itself in some areas, Makina falls into the liminal space between the two countries and the ideas of sovereignty cannot reach her just as the flows of the river keep it from being a fixed space. The constant movement of water creates a space that is never in one place, but rather always in flux.

The river's flow is part of the natural world's intersection with the political divide between the two countries. It is both an obstacle that migrants must cross and an alluring part of the landscape that has been politicized. In this way, the river shows both the futility of placing a political divide along a natural landscape and the allure of using a dangerous landscape as a means of border policing. But containing the river, or even trying to control its flows, shows the difficulty of relying on a natural landscape as a border. The Rio Grande River that runs from the Colorado and along the border for much of Texas has shifted over 1 square mile over time ("50 Years Ago, A Fluid Border Made The U.S. 1 Square Mile Smaller"). While the Rio Grande is dammed at several places, its flows are part of the natural landscape of the Southern United States and Northern Mexico. The attempt to control environmental spaces like the river highlights how the legacies of colonization have moved to exploit naturally occurring landscapes as a means of border policing. While Makina does not exit these spaces fully unharmed, she moves through them with relative ease and each one speaks to her in a way that makes visible the performance of the border in a natural space. As Makina moves away from the human constructed landscapes she confronts the damage that the creation and maintence of political border perpetuates. These spaces allow for

the possibility of migration and assist in her downward descent into both inside/outside the structures of sovereignty. When she comes out on the other side of the river, she finds the sky "different, more distant or less blue" (Herrera 40).

The river's consistent flow undermines the border as a fixed space; conversely, the mountains are monolithic with their only movement occurring beyond human perception. As Makina and Chucho move away from the river she sees, "Nothing but a frayed strip of cement over the white earth. Then she made out two mountains colliding in the back of beyond: like they'd come from who knows where and were headed to anyone's guess" (Herrera 43). The mountains in the background "insisted on crashing noisily against each other; though the oblivious might think they simply stood there in silence" (Herrera 43). The cement disrupts the white earth, but quickly leads to the mountains that are easily dismissed as background noise to those who do not fully see their importance. The mountains stand both noisily and noiselessly in the background as they are, for Makina, another part of her journey. Having collided long ago, the mountains are a naturally occurring landscape that has been weaponized. With increasing surveillance and border patrol presence, the mountain pass provides cover for migrants to move into the United States. It is an interstitial space that allows for passage. Importantly, this space is left open for practical reasons and deliberately exploited as a security measure. The false narrative that upholds the use of environmental barriers relies upon the disappearance of death of migrants through dangerous landscapes serving as a warning for others. The mountains then are far more than mountains, which is why some can hear them crashing loudly while others assume they are silent. The noise the mountains make, like the politics of the border, is audible to those who know it's there and are forced to listen. In other words, many people do not have to attend to or even know about the realities facing border crossers. Rather, those who have to make the journey the very loud noise

made by two mountains and two countries continuously clashing. Makina moves closer to the sound the mountains make and even moves through them as a form of passage.

Like the river, the clashing mountains are a point of clarity for Makina who moves further into the border divide. After having falling into the water and hearing the noise of the mountains, she begins to engage with the construct of the border through the natural world. Walking toward the mountains she and Chucho come across "a tree and beneath the tree a pregnant woman. She saw her belly before her legs or her face or her hair and saw she was resting there in the side" (Herrera 43). Makina sees this as a good omen, she was entering "a country where a woman with child walking through the desert just lies right down to let her baby grow" (Herrera 43). The image of a pregnant woman resting under a tree is one that positions women in harmony with the natural world. The tree provides shade to someone who is growing another form of life; for Makina it is a hopeful sight that represents the promise of a new life and shelter on the other side of the border. However, as Makina approaches she realizes the body is "no woman, nor was that belly full with child; it was some poor wretch swollen with putrefaction, his eyes and tongue pecked out by buzzards" (Herrera 44). The body moves from a site of hope to one of horror as the realities of the journey Makina is undertaking come crashing down on her. Seeing the body is a moment of realization that many people do not survive the crossing and if they do, they leave behind a life that is no longer accessible or possible. The switch from a pregnant woman to that of a bloated man demonstrates the false promises migrants face when crossing the border. The hope for a better life, particularly one that involves prosperity for children left behind and those anticipated in the future, is a complex fiction that is often undone by the challenges of crossing and life on the other side of the border. The scene suggests there is no peace or rest for those who make the journey

across the border, instead there is only the material remains that are continuously subjected to the elements.

Encountering the body on the way to the mountains is just one of the interstitial spaces where migrants die without recognition or mourning. Living undocumented in the United States in a space of "nonexistence" places thousands of people in harms way as it "excludes people, limits, rights, restricts services, and erases personhood. The space of nonexistence is largely a space of subjugation" (Coutin 172). Seeing the body of the dead man in sight of the mountains is a reminder of the precarious movement of undocumented peoples that does not end once they have crossed through the mountains. Being forced to the margins or "underground" results in restricted movement, life, and in many ways, death. Encountering someone's remains during migration serves as a warning about the ability to survive in interstitial spaces and how that existence is deliberately made precarious, dangerous, and deadly.

Without "legitimate" access to resources or help, people die inside a system that will not recognize their deaths. The most obvious example of this is thousands of migrants dying on American soil without recognition from the state. The work of sovereignty actually depends upon the exclusion of some peoples, and the perpetuation of an "interstitial zone in maintaining the normalcy of the body politic" (Lee 60). These zones are sites of subjugation as they are "necessary in defining that which is illegal simultaneously indicating that which is legal, determining who is to be excluded also reveals the criterial for inclusion" (Coutin 173). Makina's approach to the body makes her aware of the reach of sovereignty as a violent force along the border. She sees that the justification of certain deaths is part of protecting the rights and legal access of others. Located in full view of the clashing mountains, the body is neither inside nor outside of the country. The body is literally inside the country, but will never have access to simple, very humane, rights that would

legitimize the death of a person. More importantly for border enforcement, it will remain out of view of the American public and is reduced to another cautionary migrant narrative.

The solidification of the border relies on making border crossers' movement and their bodies invisible. Makina's encounter with the body illustrates this liminality which is only made more urgent when she enters a mountain pass that many other migrants use as a way into the country. People's use of the mountain pass as a mode of entry breeches the inside/outside dichotomy even before they can begin to participate (legally or illegally) in the systems that uphold sovereignty. For Makina, the objects are a precursor to her revelation about the seeming permanence of social and political structures that fix people in place. It starts to snow as she moves through the mountains and a snowflake "came to perch on her eyelashes; it looked like a stack of crosses or the map of a palace" (Herrera 55). The snowflake dissolves and "she wondered how it was that some things in the world – some countries, some people – could seem enteral when everything was actually like that miniature ice palace: one-of-a-kind, precious, fragile" (Herrera 55). Like the river, the mountain pass provides another moment of clarity for Makina as she confronts the very impermanence of all human structures. Many ideas, things, and structures are positioned as permanent because they have a direct impact on the material reality of many people. But as the snowflake assures Makina, they all fade with time. What is permanent is the mountain pass that Makina is moving through – the environmental world is more than a backdrop and it continues to stand the test of time. The mountains, both in their continuous clashing, and the pass they provide are examples of the difficulty of perceiving environmental time beyond human constructs. The border binary completely collapses for Makina in this moment as she is both inside/outside while moving through the mountain pass. But beyond her own positions she sees

how the imposition of policy on the natural world will fall away in an environment that will be there long after the border.

The mountain pass is one of many liminal spaces where the interstitial nature of undocumented movement and migration is not only possible, but visible. Using environmental spaces as a barrier for migration means that they are both the least and most visible access points for people to move through. Environments show human movement if the environment is protected and "untrammeled", but they also conceal people just by their very size and scope. While the entanglement of the human and nonhuman worlds is visible via the weaponization of the borderlands, Makina's awareness of these structures are a reminder of where she is heading and how precarious her migration actually is. After making her way out of the mountains she sees people at work maintaining the city. She recognizes the smells of the city and realizes that those at work were "her homegrown, armed with work: builders, florists, loaders, drivers; playing it sly so as not to let on to any shared objective…just, just, just: just there to take orders" (Herrera 57). "Homegrown" labor is the lifeblood of the city, but it can never be openly acknowledged. The economic participation of undocumented workers is essential but never fully acknowledged, because acknowledging the labor of undocumented individuals would mean acknowledging the structures of sovereignty have failed (Coutin 176). Migrant workers are "not simply excluded: they are deliberately brought in, sought after, and tolerated by the capitalist regime to play a critical part as the disposable and complaint labor of the state operation (thus *inside*), while their membership is deliberately left suspended as "undocumented" individuals…have no official resort to participate politically…(thus *outside*)" (Lee 62). While it is never explicitly stated, Makina's use of "homegrown" gestures to the people who are living on the fringes and are participating in the state without legal access. "Homegrown" still applies to people who have lost their language

and can no longer speak across the border and it's a comforting designation for Makina. The labor that makes the city possible is hidden away from the legal structures of the state and shows interstitial participation of many undocumented peoples (Lee, Coutin, Salter). Their labor is necessary, it's vibrant, and it's hidden underground.

Once in the city Makina's journey becomes more focused on the need to find her brother in such a big and foreboding place. Having reached the place she needs to be, or so she thinks, she must confront the cityscape and the people who live there. After giving over Mr. Aitches' package in the middle of a baseball stadium (Herrera uses a baseball metaphor to articulate the United States' military expansion), she sets out to find the land her family had apparently been promised. After crossing many cold and bleak "tundras" Makina comes across the machines at work. They were the "first thing she noticed when they pointed the place out to her: excavators obstinately scratching the soil as if they needed urgently to empty the earth…Whatever once was there had been pulled out by the roots, expelled from this world; it no longer existed" (Herrera 70). While it was clear from the beginning that the land used to lure Makina's brother across the border was never theirs, its use as an oil field diminishes any possibility of a claim to the land. Standing there watching the machines work, Makina is told "I don't know what you think you lost but you ain't going to find it here, there was nothing here to begin with" (Herrera 70). What is lost as a result of settler colonialism is not merely that the land was never hers, but very idea of the land as something that would have existed before its use for oil is out of the question. The idea that there "was nothing here to begin with" furthers the understanding that land only exists as a backdrop unless it is being used for something. This echoes the positioning of the natural spaces Makina crosses as somehow inside and outside of the border structure – they are increasingly liminal and only come into focus when they are used by undocumented migrants. As such, the oil field is a space used up by

capitalist forces that push Makina and her brother's claim to any life on the other side of the border as even more unreasonable. Without the land they have no means of legitimate participation in a system that is constructed and maintained to not allow them access. Further, the very idea that the land is important for anything other than profit is pulled up by its roots. The history of dispossession from indigenous peoples and Mexicans is ripped up from the earth itself and reduced to profits.

The reduction of land to a site for profit and its eventual dismissal as a used-up space is compounded under Makina's desperation to find her brother. Her pursuit is fruitless and what was promised is turning out to be nothing at all. Her journey becomes repetitive and dizzying as she moves through the "bleak tundras" that comprise the cityscape. Landmarks move from environmental ones to street names and statues as she wanders through different neighborhoods with no luck. After a detour to house she finds herself on a military base asking for a young man who is said to have lived where her brother was last seen. Her brother finally appears under a different name and in a military uniform. He explains that he was paid to take the identity of a white teenager whose family did not want him to serve in the military. Makina's brother has taken the new identity, fought in the war, and returned to continue living under his new identity while the white family leaves the country. When Makina asks him what he will do and if he will leave he says, "Not now. Too late. I already fought for these people. There must be something they fight so hard for" (Herrera 93). Makina's brother participated directly in the violence of sovereignty, both as a victim and as a participant. His military service positions him as a direct beneficiary of the very form of sovereignty used to justify his exclusion as an undocumented person. Like the spaces and situations Makina moves through, her brother's participation in the military is an interstitial space that allows him to be both inside/outside of the system simultaneously. Makina's

brother is participating in a script of citizenship that is dictated by "lived practices by the abject that are neither transparently democratic nor directly counterhegemonic, and yet they interrupt the stagnant liberal way of life and reinscribe the cultural script of citizenship itself" (Lee 59). These practices uphold a way of life that is not fully accessible to those who do not have citizenship, but as Makina's brother's military service shows, is important to a contemporary system of governance. Having fought for a country that is not his, but is now his home, her brother chooses to stay and to figure out a life on that side of the border. The idea that there is something worth fighting for after "there wasn't any land to claim", illustrates the multidirectional ways that people participate and exist both inside and outside of sovereignty (Herrera 93). While the land would have given him legitimate access to the country, so too does military service even if he is not who he says he is. This kind of interstitial space is small, but as is made clear by the others on the base, it's one that is exploited by many people living as undocumented. Her brother is performing a duty that is only available to those who have "legitimate" access to the state and participating in a system that is used to justify his exclusion.

Makina's brother occupies a precarious position despite his military service. Moreover, his experience illustrates the ways in which people participate in sovereignty often without recognition. The many pathways through which people find themselves living, working, and participating at the fringes or in the interstitial spaces of sovereignty are often hidden under narratives of migrant success or failure. Instead, what Herrera shows is the possibilities and difficulties of precarious life as an undocumented person. Her brother's journey through the environmental interstitial spaces and into a life that is both directly participatory and, on the margins, shows how the flimsy nature of sovereignty allows for many different kinds of participation. His decision to stay is not merely that he hasn't been caught, but that he now has a

claim to the country in a way that was not possible by claiming land. The land has become a stand in for what has been lost historically and that service, even when it goes unrecognized, is now the available path into the country.

Like her brother, Makina is faced with the choice of staying or returning to her home and responsibilities. Having fulfilled her quest and after finding out that her brother is staying, she wanders away from the military base. After a brief encounter with a racist police officer Makina realizes she is being hailed by Chucho who sits on a park bench and tells her he's seen her whole journey. Distraught about the outcome of her quest Makina expresses her confusion about the United States, to which Chucho responds, "they don't understand it either…They need us. They want to live forever but still can't see that for that to work they need to change color and number. But that's already happening" (Herrera 104). Chucho comments on the interstitial spaces where undocumented peoples reside and how their participation, economic or not, is an essential part of the shifting reality in the United States. To deny the reality of shifting demographics and the importance of undocumented peoples is to fail to see who really runs the country. His comments account for the fluidity of the border he repeatedly crosses and his recognition that the dynamics of a country are more complex than what can be seen on the surface. As her guide, Chucho is helping Makina make sense of her experience while also preparing her for the life she will be confronted with should she choose to stay on the other side of the border. The kinds of participation that make the country run are not limited to economic, though as Herrera has repeatedly shown throughout the novel, this kind of participation is an absolute necessity to the continuation of the United States.

Chucho leads Makina to "a low, narrow door behind which nothing could be seen" (Herrera 105). As he tells her to go in, he assures her that this is where "they'll give you a hand" (Herrera

105). What Makina finds as she descends is a "place…like a sleepwalker's bedroom: specific yet inexact, somehow unreal and yet vivid; there were lots of people, very calm, all smoking, and though she saw no ventilation shafts nor felt any currents the air didn't smell" (Herrera 105). The only sound is "running water" and the space is like a dream – nothing in it seems certain, and the dreamlike quality that surrounds Makina lures her into a kind of calm that she cannot trust (Herrera 106). The space is seemingly outside of the reality Makina was moving through during the rest of the narrative. It is what Susan Bibler Coutin calls, "the space of nonexistence" or a spatialization of legality that dictates "who does not exist legally" and are therefore "'outside' in an 'underground,' or 'not there'" (Coutin 172). Herrera makes the "underworld" of undocumented living quite literal as Makina's descent is complete and she finds herself existing outside and under the rule of law. This space of nonexistence is real as "in that the practices that make people not exist have material effects" forcing people to live "underground" and on the margins (Coutin 173). The entire novel is one of descent and a mythical imagining of undocumented migration as a journey through the nine layers of the underworld. By making this outside space into a literal room Herrera is concretizing the realities many migrants faced when they decide to live undocumented. What seemed unreal through Makina's journey is exacerbated by her surroundings in the room which is oddly quiet. The tension finally breaks when Makina is handed a file where she sees herself "with another name, another birthplace. Her photo, new numbers, new trade, new home. I've been skinned, she whispered" (Herrera 106). In that moment Makina realizes just how much she has lost throughout her journey across the border and the cost of actually staying. Her stay must start in the space of "nonexistence", because she will remain an interstitial space if she is to live on the other side of the border. The world of undocumented life is one that requires the dark

room and uncertainty, because while the ground under her feet was unstable in the village she has now descended into the sinkhole.

As the river knew all too well, Makina has finally found where she is supposed to be, even if her descent was gradual and required her own agency. The loss of self that Makina feels is made literal when she is handed a new life without the responsibilities of her former one. She has moved from the door, to the one who walked through it despite her resistance to staying. She continues to hear the flows of water in the underground place, a symbol to the fluidity of peoples through national boundaries and the realities of living as part of the underworld. Part of the book's mythology is the importance of the underworld – which is made more pressing by the amount of people that participate in the country despite remaining unseen and unaccounted for. The entire room is that which sovereignty refuses to account for, but is essential to policing what is legal and therefore legible by the state. Without documents and positioned as traveler, Makina moved through the interstitial spaces that allowed her to navigate the borderlands (these are both environmental and manmade). Conversely, when she receives the documents she becomes part of those interstitial spaces that are necessary to the construction, maintence, and continuation of a settler colonial legacy. Makina does not have to face this reality, nor the consequences of her movement or what living undocumented really means until this moment. She has seen what her "homegrown" peers have experienced on both sides of the border, and many have stayed too long only to return different (Herrera 20). When she is confronted with new documents she not only loses herself, but she is fixed in place and part of the system. Even outside of the system, Makina is part of the system itself as "Legal nonexistence is defined in relation to the nation-state as the arbiter of citizenship" (Coutin 193-4). By moving through and living in the interstitial spaces, Makina's movement shows how the imposition of sovereignty as included/excluded,

citizen/undocumented binary overlooks the lived practices of thousands of people. And while Makina can, of course, return to the other side of the border, she is altered by this experience. She has lost herself in her quest and instead finds herself part of the underworld.

What becomes clear through *Signs Preceding the End of the World* is the ability of people to move, live, and participate through the interstitial spaces that exist in systems of sovereignty. While Herrera's approach makes the journey mythical, it still tells us important truths about migratory practices and how people are forced into a life in the "underworld" or undocumented living. This approach allows Herrera to capture a large-scale understanding of life and death that happens through the cracks in the system. Exploited environments along the border make this movement possible and necessary as the United States relies heavily on undocumented labor. Rather than emphasizing the traumatic experiences that many migrants face, Herrera focuses on the persistence of life and that migrant journeys are part of the natural course of nation-building. Herrera's depiction of the life as an undocumented person is one that mirrors the language many migrant scholars use to explain how people simultaneous exist and do not exist within a nation (Coutin, Salter, Lee). In actuality, all of the language used to capture how people move through and exist inside and outside, fails to fully articulate the complex spaces people occupy as undocumented workers or migrants. The inability to represent the many different types of migrant stories that are continuously unfolding in the borderlands is critical to Herrera's mythical approach. Instead, what Herrera makes visible is the cracks in sovereignty and the interstitial spaces that make people's movement possible and lead to the escalation of border policing. The false binary established by the border is a continuation of a settler colonialist ethic that depends upon violence and the dispossession of lands.

The novel ends with Makina seeing what is happening as "not a cataclysm" and reaching a moment of understanding where she is ready to partake in the path now in front of her (107). While returning to the Little Town is no longer the end of her journey, Makina must reckon with her many losses as her decision to stay makes her return harder, if not impossible. As Makina moved downward she moved further away from her home and her familial obligations. In this new place she has the opportunity to stay hidden, but the ground beneath her feet is solid at the bottom. *Signs Preceding the End of the World* shows what is gained by interstitial participation, but more importantly the novel illustrates the many layered losses that must occur along the way.

## 3.3 Conclusion

Immigration reform was one of the top items for President Joe Biden in his first 100 days in office. This included a temporary halt on border wall construction as well as a path to citizenship for nearly 11 million people (Shear). While ambitious, these plans continue to draw attention away from the larger need for immigration reform or the United States' continued reliance on undocumented labor. A path to citizenship will certainly help many undocumented laborers, but without larger reforms more people will enter into the same system. The reality is, and will likely remain, that border policy and policing is increasingly geared against individuals who are entering the country to participate in the liminal and underground spaces that are necessary for the country. In light of these continuing realities, works like *Yo Tengo Nombre* and *Signs Preceding the End of the World* will remain important for making visible the losses that are necessary to maintaining and solidifying the United States-Mexico border.

The objects in *Yo Tengo Nombre* highlight the increasing attention of border militarization against individual migrants rather than other nations. These objects make visible how land ownership is critical to the movement of migrants and, consequently, the visibility of their deaths. The reality of death under the border conditions in Texas are different from those in other parts of the borderlands which presents differing dynamics to the inside/outside binary created by the border. However, the reality of death for many migrants is the same across the entirety of the borderlands as many migrant remain unidentified and consequently unmourned. The politics of the border are visible through objects in *Yo Tengo Nombre* alongside the need for mourning, particularly for largely invisible and unnamed populations.

Similarly, Makina's movement in *Signs Preceding the End of the World* shows how the objects came to be on display as the narrative traces the importance of liminal spaces and the ability to live and move therein. The novel emphasizes the difficulties of migration, but also how systems of sovereignty come to rely on illicit movement and economic participation. What Makina loses in the novel is more than just her brother, but her understanding of herself and a life with direct and legible participation. Mediated by environmental spaces, Makina's movement across the border shows the violence of weaponizing spaces that exist and persist beyond the construct of a political border. As such, the novel shows the layered nature of loss that happens when crossing the border – land, self, and citizenship.

Take together the two pieces complicate the idea of a border as a fixed binary and instead illuminate the complexity of movement, participation, and death. Considering these liminal spaces is essential to recovering those lost as a consequence of contemporary border policy and understanding how the legacies of settler colonialism have continuous effects. Both *Yo Tengo Nombre* and *Signs Preceding the End of the World* point to the inability to fully know or understand

the realities of migration, instead they illustrate the effects of sovereignty on vulnerable peoples. These pieces challenge the silences that surround migration and provide new ways of understanding how people live and die in the borderlands. Within this literature and digital art speak to the complex political and environmental realities that comprise the borderlands while simultaneously asserting the importance of the stories we cannot know.

## 4.0 Mourning in the Archive: Digital Art as Sites of Memorial

On November 1, 2019 the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) constructed a Día de los Muertos ofrenda (or altar) outside of their offices in Capitol Hill (Byrnes). Displayed on bright serapes, the ofrenda is a traditional celebration of the lives of family and loved ones. Through the display of pictures and small reminiscent items, the ofrenda allows the living to both grieve and celebrate the lives of the dead. The altar outside of the CHC included fourteen framed pictures of people who were apprehended while attempting to enter the United States and died in either ICE or border patrol custody. Surrounded by vibrant flowers and candles, each picture makes visible the migrants who died at the hands of American border policy. The solemnity of the ofrenda clashes with the political surrounding of Capitol Hill; it is a memorial that is steeped in Mexican and Latin American traditions that are often deeply personal. Displaced from its traditional cultural surroundings (i.e. homes or communities), the ofrenda in Capitol Hill resists the political silences that surround migrant deaths and gestures to the much larger problems of inhumane immigration policy and border policing. Fourteen deaths are visible on the altar, but thousands more haunt the border.

The CHC's ofrenda is a material manifestation of loss and public display of grief that demands attention. Anchored in the physical world, the ofrenda is a memorial deemed worthy of attention even if only temporarily (Blair 35-6). While not as permanent as a plaque or a monument, the ofrenda does rely on its physicality as a means of mourning and public memorial. The image of the altar can, and does, circulate online, but it is then limited by the computer or phone screen. Photographs of the ofrenda "two-dimensionaliz[e] and freeze an experience of three dimensions and movement, accommodating a kind of sharing of

experience, but only a limited kind" (Blair 38). Pictures allow for articles and discussion about the ofrenda's importance, both on Capitol Hill and more broadly. The ofrenda offers a way in to mourning for the borderlands by providing a physical stand-in for the realities facing migrants along the United States' Southern border. More importantly, it is an immediate response to the Trump administration's increasingly inhumane border policies and the rise of anti-immigration sentiment throughout the country. It is a political message about the human cost of bordering. But the Capitol Hill ofrenda is just one, impermanent, memorial for an increasing number of migrant deaths. Beginning in the mid-1990s border crosser deaths rose from single digits to hundreds every year[1]. The increase in deaths is the direct consequence of heightened border security and the use of the environment as an essential part of boundary enforcement[2]. As such, migrant deaths, particularly in the desert, largely go unnoticed, unmourned, and forgotten. These deaths have been honored by individualized memorials in the forms of crosses or small candle-light vigils in communities directly affected by the deaths[3]. And while crosses in the desert are an important part of grief, they are not nearly as legible or public as monuments, plaques, or other state sanctioned memorials.

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[1] It's important to note that there are limited records about the amount of deaths that happened in the late 1990s and early 2000s. See Humane Borders "Migrant Death Mapping".

[2] The natural harshness of the environment along the border is used not only to prevent people from coming, but to erase their bodies after they die. The desert in Arizona in particular is a site where people died often die from exposure only to have their bodies decompose rapidly. See De León, Jason. The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail. University of California Press, 2015.

[3] Columbian artist Alvaro Enciso's *donde mueren los suneos* is a collection of crosses placed throughout the desert of Southern Arizona in remembrance of border crossers who have died. Volunteer organizations (No More Deaths, Humane Borders, etc) in the region hold candlelight vigils and invite the community to mourn collectively.

What the ofrenda in Capitol Hill omits is the scale of death that happens every year along the United States-Mexico border. 497 deaths were reported in 2019 alone, and this does not account for the hundreds of migrants who remain missing (*Missing Migrants Project*). The ofrenda memorializes fourteen highly visible deaths because of the direct involvement of border enforcement agencies. This is not to say that the ofrenda's omissions are intentional, misleading, or malicious, but it does show the continued invisibility of migrant deaths and the complications of scale over time. In other words, the difficulty of memorializing migrant deaths is at once their invisibility, the amount of deaths, and the rate of deaths over a long period of time. The crisis in the borderlands is a continuous tragedy, but its longevity resists typical understandings of violence. As Rob Nixon writes in his book *Slow Violence*, "Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility" (Nixon 2). While Nixon is largely concerned with the effects of environmental degradation and climate change as a means of violence against impoverished and marginalized communities, his theorization of slow violence is apt to the crisis in the borderlands. Slow violence is "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, and attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2). The slow violence of the borderlands is the deployment of the harsh desert environment against migrants as a means of border policing, assuring the invisibility of their deaths and displacing the responsibility of American immigration policy. The slow trickle of deaths challenges more visible and legible tragedies like 9/11 or mass shootings

that are memorialized with monuments, days of remembrance, and demands for change[4]. It's important to acknowledge that events like 9/11 or Pearl Harbor show how national mourning can turn into rallying cry for violence and war. Large scale events like these register as acts of war that are solidified through national mourning as a rationale for defense. Further, national disasters like hurricanes and earthquakes become moments of solidarity through the layers of loss that work to bind the nation. However, a crisis that was created to deliberately resist visibility and that has unfolded over 26 years is not afforded the same kind of mourning. Collectively mourning for migrants lost in the act of border crossing resists classification and acknowledgement. The slow violence of borderlands allows for deaths to remain hidden and pushes them toward archives instead of memorials.

Projects like *The Missing Migrant Project* run by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) work to collect the data of migrant deaths, but not necessarily to grieve those lost. NGOs like The IOM, United Nation's Refugee Agency, Humane Borders, and others work to collect data on migrant deaths. These organizations offer maps, graphs, and other visualizations to display global movement and the dangers facing migrants. Similarly, the border patrol keeps yearly numbers of migrant deaths for the different sectors along the border. All of these organizations record, report, and archive these deaths for policing purposes, policy enforcement, and understanding the movement of peoples more broadly. Nowhere within these systems (even the ones sympathetic to the difficulties facing migrants) is there room for grief, mourning, or

[4] In many instances large scale events often lead to the creation of memorial sites that are destinations in and of themselves. See Blair, Carole. "Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric's Materiality." Rhetorical Bodies, edited by Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999.

memorial. Migrants' humanity is abstracted and displaced when their lives and journeys are reduced to numbers in an archive – their deaths are positioned as unknown and ungrievable. The omission of grief is a consequence of the inability to fully know the realities facing migrants. More specifically to the U.S. borderlands, the numbers are incomplete – riddled with inconsistencies across agencies and discrepancies as to which migrants count where. These absences perpetuate the political and cultural silences that surround migrant deaths. They suggest the vastness of slow violence in the borderlands and seeming impossibility of truly understanding the realities facing migrants. Knowing that there are always absences, silences, and erasure draws attention to how archival systems are essential, but insufficient for mourning the deaths of border crossers. The creation of public memorial pieces draws attention to the impossibility of knowing how to fill them. The data is never complete and in turn, public memorialization for border crossers is always incomplete. The question then becomes: how do we mourn an incomplete archive?

Unlike the numbers, statistics, graphs, and maps that document the movement and deaths of migrants across the border, digital art provides a public memorial for migrant deaths. Josh Begley's 2016 piece, *Fatal Migrations: Some of the Places Where People Died While Trying to Cross the Border*, is a collection of digital images from the border. Each image, taken from Google Maps, shows the spot where someone's body was recovered. The deaths in the piece are accessed digitally, and while the piece is not searchable, the user is able to view them in a way that demands interaction. The piece is riddled with absences which are made visible through black pictures with the word "unknown" typed in white on top. These serve as placeholders for migrant deaths that are accounted for, but there is no location associated with the recovered person. *Fatal Migrations* does not resist these absences but flags them as part of its purpose and approach to mourning. Similarly, the digital sound piece *2487* acknowledges the persistence of absence through silence.

*2487* makes literal the silences in *Fatal Migrations:* each silence is not an omission, but a deliberate recognition of the absence. *2487* uses traditional archival systems to catalogue and collect the information about border crossers and gives voice to their names. The piece's approach to archiving and the digital database that makes it run embraces the incomplete nature of the data. Silence dominates the piece, but is repeatedly broken by the need to hear, to audibly mourn, to acknowledge not only what is lost, but who. In contrast, *The Border Memorial*, an augmented reality piece, refuses the need for names as a means of mourning. The piece moves users close to the reality of migrant death by demanding their interaction with the desert environment. As such, the piece does not rely on names, but on the digital image of a calaca (or skeleton) as the stand-in for the border crosser recovered there. *The Border Memorial*'s approach to the archive is to make it move. The database at the center of *The Border Memorial* is not of names, but locations. Importantly, *The Border Memorial* is an example of technological obsolescence as the application used to create the piece is no longer accessible and all access to it is now only possible via the creators website. Still, what matters in *The Border Memorial* is how the desert is a site of systemic violence haunted by the loss of thousands of people.

Taken together all three pieces show the insufficiencies of the archive alone as a means of memorial. I begin with the archive because the structure is such that it is often created with the intent of preservation and reliant upon ideas of interaction for a larger narrative to take shape (Steedman, Cvetkovich, Derrida, Taylor). This formulation of the archive is important to making sense of the messy data that is collected and catalogued about migrant deaths. In this way, the archive is just the beginning for mourning as the impulse to preserve the information about the individuals who have died in the desert is essential for the pieces discussed in this chapter. Each of the pieces adds new layers, new ways of seeing, and new modes of interaction to give context,

life, and meaning to the archives at their center. Saved digitally, each of the pieces are created through databases, but those aspects are either are not accessible to the users or not searchable. In this way, the pieces discussed here are closer to archives by virtue of placing the responsibility of discovery and recovery on the users. The ability to move between database and archive is important to each of the pieces within and makes visible how "the successful archive enables the work of mourning" (Cvetkovich 271). But archiving and cataloguing deaths is not the same as recognizing the humanity attached to each one. Instead, all three pieces demand the user not only acknowledge the deaths, but see, hear, and interact with them.

Interactivity and user involvement allow the pieces discussed here to be more than archives and digital art; they are resistance to silences that dominate contemporary discourses about the deaths of border crossers. *Fatal Migrations* invites users to see the reality of the desert environment, while *The Border Memorial* demands interaction with it. The deaths memorialized in each are a reclamation of incomplete archives that have been reduced to data. Each is a site of public mourning that moves through digital spaces and reaches broader audiences. These pieces all mobilize data that has been collected and catalogued in ways that resist the reduction of deaths to just numbers. Instead, the artists use digital methods to show the human crisis unfolding at the center of the data collection itself. This approach allows for a shift in in perspectives about what it means to grieve, particularly in very public ways on a larger scale, by demanding the user see and interact with the realities facing border crossers. *The Border Memorial* is the most explicit in this regard through the use GPS which collapses the distances through mobile technologies. Death is often represented through stagnant memorials – monuments and plaques – but by demanding interaction the user is now part of the conversation, invited to grieve openly even for those who are labeled as "unknown". These projects are political; they refuse the dehumanization of borders,

but more importantly they challenge the ways in which mourning is displaced in physical objects that refuse expansion or mobility. Digital archives are essential to the project of mourning in the borderlands, particularly when they are divorced from institutions that uphold exclusionary practices. *Fatal Migrations, 2487,* and *The Border Memorial* are lively pieces as they make mourning felt beyond the place itself and continuously keep the names of the dead from being reduced to data.

In this chapter, I examine the ecosystem of disposability in the borderlands that is created and sustained by immigration policy and border policing. I argue for the importance of new and diverse methods of mourning, grief, and archiving as both modes of political resistance and memorial. The digital pieces discussed in this chapter assert the need for grief and mourning, especially for all the unknowns that surround the deaths of border crossers. I begin by complicating the work that archives do through analyzing the inconsistencies in border patrol numbers and turn to the ways in which disavowal has long haunted the borderlands. Using Grace Kyungwon Hong's theorization of disavowal, I explore how deaths in the borderlands are continuously silenced, abstracted, and reduced to a thing of the past. This framework helps me to reassert the importance of mourning as both a political and human act. I end by looking at the experience of place in the borderlands as essential to mourning itself. All of these pieces address different aspects of memorial, but feed into one another as they move to acknowledge the silences, gaps, and absences that surround death in the borderlands and their representation (or omission) in archives. *Fatal Migrations* uses the landscape as its point of focus, while *2487* displaces it in exchange for the soundscape. *The Border Memorial* brings the two together by inviting the user to move through both and experience the realities of the space as haunted. Consequently, all three pieces show how all memorials in the borderlands will remain incomplete and thus, the constant need for them.

Considered together all reposition the possibilities of the archive and the work that data can do in regard to mourning and memorial. Most importantly, the pieces make visible the violence of the borderlands and invite users to mourn for those who have died.

## 4.1 *Fatal Migrations* and the Archive

The images of brown earth blur together. Each circle opens to a bigger picture, more in focus, another name, a date, a place that looks like the one next to it, but maybe this one has a road. Or the edge of a town with some cars. Or more likely, underbrush. More underbrush. The circles create a landscape interrupted by black "unknowns" that pull the user out and away – reminding them about the impossibility of knowing the heat, the dirt, the ridges of the mountains. The circles go on for what seems like forever; there are so many, they overwhelm the screen. There's a crossroads, a highway, a riverbed, and so much sand. The images never get any closer, they never create a map, their distance keeps the user scrolling, searching, but never fully revealing what's missing.

Josh Begley's digital art piece, *Fatal Migrations: Some of the Places Where People Have Died While Trying to Cross the Border,* highlights the views of the desert that make up the border. The piece, comprised of 2,600 circles, is the "interactive visualization…[of] the known location of someone's death" (Alarcón and Begley). The piece focuses on the land between the U.S. (specifically Southern Arizona) and Mexico to illustrate the desert's role in policing the border. Each circle contains the image of where a body was recovered; it also contains a name (if available) and date (if available). Clicking on the images pulls up a different place, though the desert quickly blurs together as the user scrolls over the circles. There is no additional text explaining the

importance of the work or even the specifics of the display. The user is invited to click on each individual circle or merely scroll through them. By privileging the land Begley leaves out the actual bodies of border crossers, stressing the erasure of their experiences alongside their material bodies. By giving each migrant a bubble, *Fatal Migrations* recognizes the death of each person. Begley foregrounds the space as part of an individual experience instead of relying on maps. Pulled from Google Maps, the images recognize a place where someone has died, illustrating the overwhelming and desolate landscape migrants cross.

Josh Begley is a New York based digital artist whose work has largely focused on tracking, reporting, and visualizing injustices. Many of his pieces offer new modes of seeing large amounts of data and range from issues of police brutality through an app that tells users each time someone is killed by police to short films that stitch together geographic areas. Begley's work brings the need for social justice to big data, often raising questions of how surveillance is used and what it means to use the same means as resistance. As a white American based in New York, Begley's concerns about the U.S.-Mexico borderlands are social and political. In the accompaniment piece to "Best of Luck with the Wall" a short digital film that traces the 1,954 miles of the border through images collected from Google Maps, Begley writes that "Borders begin as fictions. They are performed. They are lines drawn in the sand, spaces that bend and break and make exceptions for certain kinds of bodies." (Begley and P.m). Both pieces, "Best of Luck with the Wall" and *Fatal Migrations*, focus on the landscape to unravel the fiction of the border and show the harsh realities of the space itself. Begley's approach to the desert and border is a distant one that is mediated through maps, data, and surveillance technologies. This approach brings the border into focus for many people who have no prior knowledge of what it looks like. He writes that part of seeing the

border is to invite viewers to "gain a sense of the enormity of it all, and perhaps imagine what it would mean to be a political subject of that terrain" (Begley and P.m).

*Fatal Migrations* takes its data from the Humane Borders' Migrant Death map which was created and maintained in conjunction with the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner ("Migrant Death Mapping"). The Migrant Death map uses red dots to plot where migrant bodies were recovered and has lists of exportable data about each of the people recovered including names, recovery dates, cause of death, and GPS data. *Fatal Migrations* uses this concept of the death map to actually show what the environment looks like in locations on the map. Viewers are encouraged to click on each circle which lists the name of the person at the bottom. Interactivity is an important part of the piece as it implicates the user in the politics of sovereignty along the border through distant viewing. The piece presents removed spaces where meaning is generated through the context and the names. The display emphasizes the vastness of the desert and the very real danger it presents for those who might get lost or merely do not have sufficient supplies to cross. *Fatal Migrations* points the dehumanizing effects of maintaining the border through a hostile environment. Death in the desert would not be as likely or as much of a threat without measures like Prevention through Deterrence [5].Within this *Fatal Migrations* is a visual archive of migrants' deaths in the desert and acknowledgement of border surveillance. Border policing relies on surveillance, not only in the form of knowledge about how border crossers are moving, but by

[5] As discussed in previous chapters, Prevention through Deterrence is the 1994 policy that fortified the border in major metropolitan areas and weaponized the environment as a means of hiding migrant movement. The result is thousands of migrant deaths and disappearances in the desert of Southern Arizona, Southern California, and Texas. See Jason de León's *The Land of Open Graves* and Joseph Nevins *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the "Illegal Alien" and Making the U.S.-Mexico Boundary.*

continuously letting border crossers know that they are visible. Maps from Humane Borders line the border in Southern Arizona, showing spots where border crossers' bodies have been recovered – there are hundreds. While the map serves as a warning about the harsh conditions facing border crossers, it doubles as border policing. The visual representation reinforces the likelihood of death, not by the border patrol, but by the environment. The posters emphasize the danger of moving into the desert as a means of entry into the U.S.; making border crossers aware of the loss of life in the borderlands places the responsibility for their deaths in their own hands. This is only made worse through the inconsistencies in the number of bodies recovered. The Colibrí Center for Human Rights reports that "7,216 remains have been recovered along the entire border between 1998 and 2017. This number is considered by many experts to be a low estimate of the actual number of deaths that have occurred along the border" (*Colibri Center for Human Rights*). The Border Patrol reported 283 deaths along the United States Southern border in 2018, while the International Organization of Migration reports 442 in the same year (*Missing Migrants Project*). This discrepancy is just one of many that shows which border crossers' deaths are recognized and how many remain invisible.

Given the Trump administration's continuous demand for a wall, border surveillance is a growing area of concern for the American right. The rise of detentions and camps along the border stresses how the border is surveilled and policed through force. By using distant photography, *Fatal Migrations* illustrates the difficulty and omnipresence of surveillance in the borderlands. The Border Patrol is present throughout the region in a variety of ways: on the ground in SUVs, at checkpoints ranging at least 100 miles into the US, and via mobile technologies such as radar and thermal imaging devices ("Immigration Enforcement"). While Border Patrol creates archives of those apprehended and reduces deaths down to numbers, *Fatal Migrations* uses similar systems of

surveillance to push against the reduction of border crossers to nothing more than bodies. Created through distant images from Google Maps, *Fatal Migrations* both participates in ideas of surveillance and subverts them. Using distant images from Google Maps, *Fatal Migrations* is also a critique on the omnipresence of certain technologies as a means of surveillance not just in the borderlands, but everywhere. These images are publicly accessible and when placed on display they can be coopted for artistic means. Begley shifts the ideas of surveillance from a state tool to one of visibility for a population whose deaths largely go unnoticed and unacknowledged. The user is implicated within public surveillance of the borderlands which helps to emphasize the impossibility of understanding the reality facing migrants. Using satellite images, *Fatal Migrations* makes the borderlands visible to outsiders by highlighting the importance of each migrant death in an overwhelming landscape. Through this technique, Begley turns the construct of surveillance to make migrants seen and their deaths felt to a larger public. By creating an archive of migrant deaths along the border, Begley is complicating the images themselves and showing why their inclusion in essential. However, the slippage in the official numbers published by the border patrol and those reported by human rights organizations is never directly addressed in *Fatal Migrations*. Instead, the piece acknowledges the unknowability of many migrant deaths through the inclusion of black circles stating "unknown" and implying the difficulty of recovering bodies in the desert. Looking to archives and databases shows the possibilities of coopting surveillance as a means of challenging the "official" and very incomplete numbers reported by the border patrol.

Archive and databases used to catalogue and collect migrant deaths are never fully accurate or comprehensive. Considering the size of the desert and its harshness, the overwhelming reality is that the true scope of migrant deaths is unknowable. The border patrol benefits from reporting numbers that are lower than the reality, and while human rights organizations that work to report

these numbers try to be comprehensive, they are often dependent upon limited resources. By creating a piece that blurs the line between art, archive, and database, *Fatal Migrations* challenges the work that traditional archives and databases can do when representation the tragedy of death. As Begley shows, collections of data are not sufficient for addressing a humanitarian crisis and the loss of life on a mass scale. Through this, the piece was created as a call for mourning. At the center of *Fatal Migration* is a catalogue of names from Humane Borders that is updated regularly with more information and newly recovered remains. Begley has taken this information and presented it in a way that positions it as a repository of images that resists both archive and database. In creating a piece that represents the vastness of death and the vastness of the desert, *Fatal Migrations* is not made to be searched. Like an archive, it is constructed through the collection of names and locations that rely upon the user's discovery of them. Indeed, *Fatal Migrations* plays with the construct of archives as sites that rely upon the intake of "stuff, heterogeneous, undifferentiated stuff.…This stuff, reordered, remade, then emerges – some would say like memory – when someone needs to find it, or just simply needs it, for new and current purposes" (Steedman 68). However, the "stuff" that constitutes the archive at the center of *Fatal Migrations* is the ultimately an absence.

In creating a piece around the lack of bodies, acknowledgment, and mourning, *Fatal Migrations* raises larger questions about the work of archives. Collective memory and the importance of remembrance is often understood through the archive as "certain archival records get used to tell stories about the past" (Caswell 11). Throughout *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida grapples with the structures of the archive as not a mode of remembrance, but a manner of future preservation. He writes that the move toward conservation is "the violence of the archive itself as archive, as archival violence" (Derrida 7). For Derrida, archival violence is the aggregation of

memory that replicates structures of power when it is externalized and public. The official numbers or archive of deaths held by the Border Patrol and other governmental agencies are often used to create a narrative about border crossers that uphold structures of power. In other words, the data about migrant deaths should not be held exclusively by those in power. Instead, as *Fatal Migrations* shows, it should be part of the public discourses about border policy. However, *Fatal Migrations* and works like it suggest the complications of these archives and catalogues. Rather than reducing migrants to reportable numbers, *Fatal Migrations* works to create another mode of preservation which is aimed at ideas of memorial. The pieces layers ideas of surveillance with the practices of collecting and cataloguing to highlight the dangers of the border space. By adding layers to the work that archives can do, *Fatal Migrations* is a collection with the intent of making visible what is often reduced to data. Using images from Google Maps, Begley is able to construct an art piece that focuses on the U.S.'s most "vulnerable" area in order to show the reality of who is actually in danger. Further, by emphasizing the importance of archives, particularly where the form pushes against the database, illustrates how archives "produce more archive" only to "open out to the future" (Steedman 68). Archives are built to create and preserve a certain past for a particular future.

Unlike traditional archives, like those held by institutions, *Fatal Migrations* is not built for the future. The piece holds the possibility to persist beyond the contemporary moment but is largely dependent upon the maintence of its digital platform. As of the construction of this chapter, *Fatal Migrations* is five years old, its database is missing hundreds of deaths that have occurred since its creation. It is a fixed project that continues to use images from Google Maps that are fixed in time. The images do not change even if the area they represent does. Despite its fixed nature, the piece's digital platform moves it toward obsolescence. The images are only accessible, viewable, and

interactive so long as the platform itself is maintained. *Fatal Migrations* digital form complicates its interaction with and use of the traditional archive. The piece is not about "collecting traces of the past, and for the forgetting of them", but the resistance to inevitable forgetting (Steedman 4-5). The inconsistencies in the numbers and in the piece suggest that the archive at its center is never complete. But *Fatal Migrations* is not about the discovery or recovery of the lives at the center of its archive. The piece works toward mourning and giving voice to a dismissed population. In this sense the piece complicates its digital form, as well. In some ways *Fatal Migrations* is closer to a database in that it is "computerized collection" that is dependent upon its form for presentation (Manovich 241). However, the piece does not allow "one to quickly access, sort, and reorganize millions of records" (Manovich 214). Regardless, searching through the piece misses the point. Attempting to use any search function when scrolling renders no results, instead pushing the viewer to engage in order to encounter any information. There is not really anything to search for, but an overwhelming sense of loss that permeates the piece's entirety. The vastness of loss is mirrored through the piece's scope. Relying on the pictures of the land itself further emphasizes the overwhelming nature of the crisis at hand, because the places where bodies have been recovered simultaneously blur together and demand differentiation. Searching implies there is some clear meaning or an object to find at the center, but *Fatal Migrations* asserts that what is missing is more pressing.

Each bubble in *Fatal Migrations* opens up to a square which gives a closer view of the land and lists the name of the deceased at the bottom. The piece itself does not rely on hyperlinks or further explanation of the person being memorialized. Like the database itself, *Fatal Migrations* resists narrative as a means of privileging loss. As Lev Manovich writes of the database in *The Language of New Media*, "Many new media objects do not tell stories; they do not have a

beginning or end; in fact, they do not have any development, thematically, formally, or otherwise that would organize their elements into a sequence. Instead, they are collections of individual items, with every item possessing the same significance as any other" (218). *Fatal Migrations* utilizes the database's inherent resistance to narrative in order to encourage the user to start anywhere. The first bubble in the piece does not change whenever it is loaded, but the user's interaction with the piece dictates their path through it. Even our understanding of the pictures as representations of deaths (or lives) comes from the desire to read a narrative on to the piece. While the introductory piece to *Fatal Migrations* explains what is within the piece itself, it merely provides context for the images within. Without providing the user with a clear path through the images, *Fatal Migrations* resists a direct narrative through the database form. Further, narratives "creat[e] a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events)" but the rationale behind the crisis in the borderlands is off-screen (Manovich 225). The links created between the why of the border crisis and the mass amounts of death represented are positioned as an external narrative; one that isn't immediately necessary to understand *Fatal Migrations*. By complicating or refusing an easily recognizable narrative, *Fatal Migrations* is a piece that questions how the structures of power are deployed against marginal communities (both physically and archivally).

*Fatal Migrations'* resistance to narrative addresses the limitations of the archive and database's use for nation-building. The construct of the border is largely dependent upon ideas of the nation as sovereign and worthy of protection (even going to the extent to build a large wall). However, as *Fatal Migrations* shows, the bounds of the nation are porous and used against individuals crossing into the United States. Representing the deaths that happen in the desert illustrates how the narrative of migration isn't necessary to mourn the loss of life. In other words, relying on humanizing each individual person through stories is not the only reason to mourn. As

Jessica Auchter writes in her piece about memorials in the borderlands, "mourning for mourning's sake, mourning at its most basic level, of human for human, grief without regard for classifying a life a grievable life, grief simply because it is life" (Auchter). Aucher emphasizes the complex place of the border memorials as a means of understanding and resisting statecraft, particularly in a seemingly vulnerable area. Statecraft relies on the invisibility of certain deaths because "they cannot be situated within the (b)ordering mechanisms of the state" (Auchter 291). Memorials in the borderlands space challenge the very idea of the border as a fortified national boundary. Each memorial for a border crosser's death, named or unnamed, is part of the very human act of mourning another human loss. This need for mourning is even more pressing in the absences throughout *Fatal Migrations.* The display of bubbles is disrupted by black ones that simply state "unknown" or the missing names at the bottom of many of the pictures. The gaps and silences that persist even in a memorial about those lost in the desert further assert the importance of mourning and grief. Importantly, this understanding of missing mourning functions on a collective and national level – this is not say that families do not mourn or grieve their loved ones. The United States' and Mexican governments' refusal to openly recognize and mourn those lost in crossing the desert speaks to the criminalization of migrants. *Fatal Migrations* disrupts these silences as means of recognizing the deaths of migrants as worthy of grief. Migrants are continuously perceived as a threat to U.S. sovereignty and in doing so are reduced to abject or bare life. The move from human to threat positions migrant deaths outside of legibility, erasing their struggles.

No narrative can fully capture what it means to die in the desert. The piece does not seek to fill those silences, but calls attention to their persistence. In focusing on the land itself, *Fatal Migrations* shows the longer lineage of death in the borderlands as the political policies. Privileging a distant view of the environment shows the escalation of border policing from "just

desert, brush, and land" to the importance of "citizens, ownership, geography, territory, governance, and enforcement" (Auchter 295). The land is not passive and neither are the fringes of populated areas visible throughout. However, focusing on the land shows what is worthy of defending and the seeming slipperiness of sovereignty at the border. The demand for ownership of land further silences the loss of migrants who die in the desert and positions them as environmentally dangerous. The images from Google Maps highlight how these constructs of the border are crafted around a national narrative of protection against an invading other. *Fatal Migrations* does not directly undo those narratives but uses the images to emphasize the loneliness and desolation of the desert. Like the structures of power that move migrants to the margins, the desert is both literal and metaphoric in dehumanizing border crossers. Images of the desert compound these challenges and present them as essential to a continually silenced migrant narrative.

The individual pictures in *Fatal Migrations* capture different aspects of the environment, but the presence of the human world looms just out of the frame. Roads run across many of the pictures, the edges of towns are present, even a solar farm. The photos are reminders that while migrants are faced with dangerous conditions, their journeys are part of the American landscape. In one sense the pictures are representations of the desert. However, this notion is disrupted by fringes of the human both in the pictures and through the mediation of technology. The most striking thing in the *Fatal Migrations* archive is the proximity of migrant death to places and people that can prevent the death from happening at all. The desert dominates the screen, but it's not the only site where migrants die. The closeness of the desert to roads that lead north raises questions about why these deaths are not mourned and what it means to represent them. The deaths are scattered across landscapes that are not distant, but essential to the makeup of the borderlands (both

Mexican and American). While *Fatal Migrations* represents just the American side of the border, the United States' unwillingness to acknowledge the proximity of migrant death shows the importance of the piece. Further, Begley's layering of what archives and databases can do upends the notion of merely cataloguing these deaths and points to all the absences therein. Just as the deaths of migrants are frequently on the fringes of town and inhabited spaces, so too is mourning. The presence of loss is continuously felt, but frequently silenced.

### 4.2 *2487*: Silence, Sound, and Haunting

Augustin Maldonado Casades is the first name this time. It's Eduardo Diaz Estrada the next. Each time the page is reloaded a new name starts *2487*, or it's a prolonged silence. Or it's a cluster of names; four or five all read simultaneously, overlapping each other. Máximo Reséndiz García, Joel Esteban Martínez, Estela Tenorio. The names are never in the same order, nor are they all audible. They come at random intervals, sometimes creating long periods of silence where it's unclear if the computer is muted or glitching. Other times they overwhelm the listener; names are recited on top of other names for several seconds at a time. Each name disrupts the black screen with a thin white bubble that ripples outward and across the darkness. Sometimes the ripples linger, other times they appear quickly in succession like rain falling on a still pond. No matter what, the screen always returns to black.

*2487* is a digital sound piece by artist Luz María Sanchez. The piece "speaks the names of two thousand four hundred eighty-seven persons who were found dead throughout the border region of Mexico and United States" since 1993 (Sánchez, *2487*). Names are read at seemingly random intervals disrupting the silence and stillness of the piece. The unknowns move from seen

to felt through the act of listening. Sanchez uses sound to create an "audible terrain" that depicts the difficulty of movement, migration, and loss (Sánchez, *2487*). Coupled with the simplicity of a black screen that is repeatedly interrupted by thin white ripples, the piece emphasizes the disruption of death. The use of sound, particularly through the human voices, breaks and creates literal and symbolic silence as a means of grief and memorial. *2487* makes literal the silences that surround the absences in *Fatal Migrations*. Between the two pieces, the absences move from visual to audible. By collecting, displaying, and repeatedly stating the names of those who have died *2487* pushes against politics of "ungrievability" and more precisely, what Grace Kyungwon Hong understands as "disavowal". In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler writes that "ungrievability" is attached to those deaths that do not "certain forms of grief [which become] nationally recognized and amplified" (Butler xiv). Under neoliberal systems of power an attention to grief pushes against the erasure of peoples, especially within marginalized communities – or more specifically for persons who fall outside the purview of the state. *2487* calls attention to the failure to publicly mourn 2,487 deaths as part of the politics that led to those deaths in the first place.

Luz María Sanchez is a Mexican-based transdisciplinary sound artist and professor. Her work, like *2487*, deals with "violence in the Americas" and the "failure of the Nation-state" (Sánchez, "Biography"). Each sound piece offers asynchronous sound that challenges users to "grasp, embrace, touch, listen or activate" (Sánchez, "Statement"). Her use of sound is a means of reaching listeners, disrupting injustice, and a site of empowerment against the continuous violence of the state. The voice is an essential tool for breaking the forced silences placed upon marginalized and disenfranchised peoples. For Sanchez, the voice, in all its forms, demands attentive listening – refusing comfort or passivity to listeners. Like Begley, Sanchez uses large data sets as the basis of her art but makes them accessible and interactive. She gives literal voice to these sets of data

creating soundscapes that are material and continuous. As a Mexican resident Sanchez focuses largely on consequences of continued corruption in Mexico, both along the border and throughout the country. Her pieces utilize digital sound as a means of reaching a broader audience and speaking against injustice ("Statement", Sánchez).

Like *Fatal Migrations*, *2487* utilizes a database to collect and present the names of border crossers. Both pieces refuse to show the bodies of border crossers, instead emphasizing different aspects of border policing. *Fatal Migrations* focuses largely on the desert environment as a tool of border enforcement, while *2487* is more concerned with the political and cultural silences that lead to mass amounts of death. These pieces speak to each other by centering on the border as a deadly space created and maintained through the settler-colonial state. They shed light on the different facets of border policing as actualizations of American political rhetoric and historical violences. In essence, the rise in concern about the United States' Southern border have amounted to real and deadly consequences over time. The choice to memorialize and mourn border crossers brings "into question not simply the fixity of the border, but the founding myth of the state which relies upon the differentiation between the self and the other" (Auchter 299). Within this myth, life is reduced to ungrievable, silenced, and without memorial (Auchter 299). Both pieces are invested in mourning as sites of resistance to the cultural and political silences that maintain the border. More importantly, they show the human cost of American national security.

At the center of *2487* is the silence of the dead. The performance of the piece occurs on the black screen, but links to an Intro, the Database, the Score, and Information all present at the bottom of the screen. *2487* was originally created as a sound-exhibit for the San Antonio Artspace and transformed into an online piece that displays extra information about the work itself (Casillas). Each link reveals different layers of the pieces, highlighting not only its accessibility,

but its creation as something more than art. The database, as it's called on the site, is the collection of names with more information. Sanchez includes the following: given name, family name, origin, year, report date, reason of death, and place. Some lines are completely filled out while most have a few to many gaps. Like the silences in the piece itself, the absences overwhelm the database. The blank spaces are the visual representation of the silence that surrounds the lives and deaths of migrants. Importantly, the location is not restricted to one specific area along the border, but encompasses the entire thing (from California to Texas). The "reason of death" category reflects the difference in border geography while still illustrating the hostile terrain that makes up the entirety of the nearly 2,000 miles. Deaths range from environmental in the form of drowning with migrant trying to cross the Rio Grande river in South Texas, to heat exposure and dehydration in Arizona. There is also a clear acknowledgment of human violence in form of gunshots and multiple blunt force injuries, which are often linked to the border patrol or smugglers. The database displays the many dangers that threaten migrants as they cross into the United States. The violence is explicitly stated within the database, but absent from all other places in the work.

The database that *2487* uses is seemingly fixed – it does not open outward to further links or more information. Like *Fatal Migrations, 2487* provides context for the information presented, but it does not provide a narrative as the users' interaction with the piece can take many forms. Also like *Fatal Migrations, 2487* is also presented as simultaneously always incomplete, but final. Manovich writes that the "interface simply provides access to the underlying database" as most websites open to other links and eventually show the data that makes them work (226). *2487* both shows this underlying data but makes it inert to the user. The user cannot click on any name but can merely scroll through the database itself. Sometimes it's slow to load, stalling for seconds at a time before more names come up; reaching the end proves to be a bit of a challenge. Nothing opens

to new links, and instead the database is only there as a visualization and display of the names that make it possible with some extra contextualizing data. The absences, omissions, and silences in the database are repeated and recreated throughout the piece itself. The database is full of blank spaces which are the replicated through the use of audible silence in the piece. Silence makes audible the gaps in data and the is a representation of the larger cultural and political silences that surround migrant deaths.

Despite the label of "database," the fixed nature of the collected names is arguably more reminiscent of an ongoing archive. Some of the spaces are marked as "pending investigation" suggesting the possibility of updates and futures for those catalogued. But unlike the archive, the database at the center of *2487* is changing and changeable behind the readily visible interface. Regardless, the piece's focus on names brings "to life those who do not for the main part exist, not even between the lines of state papers and legal documents, who are not really present" (Steedman 70). Just as *Fatal Migrations* added layers to the possibilities of data collection, so too does *2487* by utilizing names as reminders of those who formerly existed in physical form. The bodies of every person named are brought forth through the process of naming itself. Each name asserts the humanity abstracted by the structures of sovereignty along the border, and the work of archives as both productive and damaging. Saydia Hartman's piece, "Venus in Two Acts", directly addresses the conflict of archiving names as both a means of remembrance and a selfish act of reconstruction for the living. The impossibility of knowing the stories of the dead, particularly those who died violent deaths at the hands of colonial and racial violence, allows modern researchers, archivists, and scholars to reclaim stories. However, these stories are not our own. They are full of blanks and absences that we desire to fill because the act of reclamation and documentation is intended to undo the violence of erasure. But this too is violence. The reconstruction of stories, the recitation

of names, is ultimately "a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property…an asterisk in the grand narrative of history" (Hartman 2). Recovered names are sentenced to death, displayed as a means of reclamation, made knowable despite a lack of contextual or clarifying information. The absences permeate *2487* through silence and highlight the "the impossibility that conditions our knowledge of the past and animates our desire for a liberated future" (Hartman 13). *2487* embraces the impossibilities of knowing through silence, but still makes visible the deaths of border crossers (for good or ill). Speaking each name mourns for the violent past and demands a more from our collective future. The tomb at the center of *2487* is not merely dead, but lively and full of possibility.

*2487* complicates how the bodies at the center of its archive are displayed, accessed, and materialized. The database is only one aspect of making the deaths of border crossers knowable and grievable. The unwillingness to acknowledge the deaths of border crossers is not merely a lack of awareness, but a willful refusal of humanity on the part of the United States' government. Under the structures of the United States governance, some names are worthy of repeating and memorializing, while others are deemed "ungrievable". Butler writes of this ungrievability, these deaths are not just "poorly marked, but that it is unmarkable" (35). Unmarked deaths are example of the state at work – dictating who counts and who is ungrievable. However, deaths along the border are also part of the maintenance of the state, even though their attempted erasure pushes grief for them to the margins. Butler uses the example of the obituary to show the importance of grief within structures of state power and sovereignty. The obituary is "a means by which a life becomes, or fails to become, a publicly grievable life, and icon of national self-recognition…consider the obituary as an act of nation-building" (Butler 34). Obituaries, funerals, and public expressions of grief are essential parts of national participation and nation-building.

Claiming a citizen through mourning illustrates who is part of a collective whole and who is deliberately (and necessarily) excluded. While many non-profits and human rights organizations work to honor border crossers' deaths, there is still not a national recognition that legitimizes their deaths in the eyes of the state. This is largely true on the Mexican side of the border as methods to prevent border crossing are perceived as more essential than mourning. This is not to say that these deaths are not mourned by family, friends, and communities. Ungrievability functions on a mass scale, assuring the silences that surround thousands of deaths and allow them to continue. Like the ofrenda in Capitol Hill, *2487* is pushes against the politics of ungrievability and preserves the names of border crossers. The people within the piece have not been grieved or publicly recognized within the United States and attention to their deaths highlights their deliberate exclusion.

In constructing ideas of ungrievability, Butler grapples with the aftermath of 9/11 and the centrality of public mourning within the U.S. Grief for those who died at the hands of terrorist attacks are clearly legible deaths that elicit continued memorialization both inside and outside museum spaces. The collection and cataloguing of 9/11 associated memorials shows the lengths to which the United States goes in recognizing and grieving citizens (Haskins and DeRose 381). However, unlike 9/11, the deaths in the borderlands are the result of slow violence and thus span a longer period of time and a marginalized position. Large scale events like 9/11 generate a lot of immediate attention because they happen quickly and are examples of rapid tragedies. The digital creation of *2487* reaches beyond the boundaries of the museum and toward a continuous process of grief that is not dependent upon a specific temporal moment. Further, the United States uses events like 9/11 to solidify who is part of the population (grievable) and who falls outside of its bound (ungrievable). This binary is exacerbated along the border where the difference between citizens and noncitizens is more visible and projected on to different bodies. Using an online

platform, *2487* is able to speak to the limitations of ungrievability and point to the larger systemic issues that rely on the silence that surrounds border crossers deaths.

For Grace Kyungwon Hong, deaths on the margins are not merely ungrievable, they are disavowed. She writes that under neoliberalism disavowal is the "means of claiming that racial and gendered violences are a thing of the past" (7). The deaths along the border are disavowed in order to refuse the historical lineages of violence leading to more violence. In other words, neoliberalism assures us that violence is a thing of the past, which is the continuation of violence in and of itself. This is particularly troubling along the border as the historical dispossession of land, the rise in border crosser deaths, and the consequences of maquiladoras are necessarily forgotten under anti-immigration policy. Disavowal, coupled with ungrievability, assures that border crossers' deaths are not publicly mourned. These deaths, as Hong writes are, "the basis of a politics in the contemporary moment, impossibly alongside the antagonistic pursuit of a politics based on the preservation of life" (Hong 8). Anti-immigration rhetoric depends on preserving and fighting for life as a means of increasing border security. For example, assertions about migrants stealing American jobs threaten an American way of life beyond the just the economy. Despite the clear falsehoods within these claims, they are still based on the right of certain populations to life and livelihood. Hong points to the importance of neoliberalism as something that positions the life of individual as more important than the death of an externalized "other". Neoliberalism demands that these "deaths are necessary but forgotten, so that others may live" (Hong 15). Disavowal depends upon the continued abjection of others coupled with a political and cultural amnesia that assures the individual that violence is a thing of the past. This return to silence allows the specter of violence to remain and, ultimately, continue.

*2487* is constructed through repeated silences that linger only to shatter when the voice speaks a name. Silence is essential to *2487* as a digital sound piece. The silences replicated in the piece are simultaneously literal, political, and cultural as they are continuously broken by hearing "some names…in isolation while others sound like links in a chain, and many overlap" (Sánchez, *2487*). The creation of silence elicits uncertainty that mirrors the realities faced by border crossers and the threat of continuous disavowal. Within *2487* silence is constructed as an essential part of the piece that calls forth the silence of death and the refusal to grieve. The cultural turn away from deaths at the border is politically constructed, allowing both the United States and Mexico to refuse responsibility. The United States relies upon the environment as an extension of border policing that is largely out of human control, while the Mexican government's reach is limited by the border itself. Political silences resist responsibility and the hide the problem from a broader public. In turn, silences are built into the discourses about the border reducing migrants into symbols of criminality by virtue of illegally crossing the border and thus are not afforded the grief and memorial of citizens.

Silence permeates the borderlands. The refusal to acknowledge migrants, their lives, and their deaths is built into the very fabric of the border. *2487* depends on these silences to disrupt ideas of disavowal and ungrievability in the borderlands. The silences in *2487* stand in contrast to wails as grief and the voice "never quivers, trembles, or abandons its strength" (Casillas). Each name disrupts the silence to demand recognition, but more importantly, upend expectations of grief and memorial. The voice that makes *2487* possible is slightly mechanical, but easily recognizable as a human voice mediated and digitized. In essence, the piece is the voice's continual disruption of political, cultural, and historical violence in the borderlands. The voice speaks to each death as the names have been "audibly re-recorded and re-filed by the artists as individual sound files to

play randomly, initiating organic patterns like migrations patterns themselves" (Sánchez, *2487*). Like the lines in the database, each name is spoken individually. Only when the piece is played do the names overlap – mimicking the chaos and isolation of border crossing and death. The voice speaks to and shows the intertwined nature of life, death, and silence.

Whenever the piece is loaded and reloaded it literally speaks against disavowal and demands mourning for all of the names in its archive. More than that, the use of a voice adds to the materiality of the piece in ways that other digital memorials do not. Created through the act of speaking, the voice is grief itself, the grain of which "cannot be defined…[it is] something else, which something is the particular language (and nowise the message)" (Barthes 185). In Roland Barthes' essay "The Grain of the Voice" he writes about the ways in which voice moves beyond the bounds of language and toward something deeper. While he specifically looks at the singing voice, his focus on the human voice speaks to its power beyond language and toward materiality of sound itself. Each name read calls forth "something which is directly the cantor's body, brought to your ears in one and the same movement from deep down in the cavities…as though a single skin lined the inner flesh of the performer and the music he sings" (Barthes 181-2). The connection between performer and what is performed is materially mediated through the body. However, what is performed in *2487* is the recitation of names – a memorial that is mediated through the bodies of the performer and listener, conjuring the bodies of the dead themselves. The materiality of the voice powerfully connects the listener to those lost, actively refusing the silences of death and disavowal.

In calling forth the materiality of the body, *2487* highlights the very materiality of listening. Sound is not immaterial; it moves through and works on the body. Hearing "involves physical contact with the outside world…[it] places us inside an event…[and] tends toward

subjectivity…[it] brings us into the living world" (Sterne 15). Hearing "immerses us in the world" and through online platforms, brings other worlds to listeners (Sterne 15). *2487* links the materiality of the listener to the names within the piece itself through the human voice. Rather than merely collecting names, *2487* creates a sound archive that makes material the loss of each person in the piece. There is no body to see in *2487,* but a person to hear. In other words, loss is literally felt through sound. Mourning becomes lively through *2487* as the names are felt and the shifting form of the piece is an illustration the possibilities of the archive when put into motion via digital means. Within this *2487* highlights important ways of reconsidering how mourning in the archive must be a more expansive and inclusive. Sound furthers this need by making material each loss regardless of contextualizing information, and instead allowing mourning to be at the center of the piece.

As *2487* shows, memorials transcend archives and catalogues while moving toward haunting, or reconciling with the persistence of absence, that is not limited by the computer screen. Instead, *2487* collapses the dehumanization of border policy by naming, making visible the intertwined nature history, policy, and the resulting violence. The historical violences that make the piece possible are not foregrounded but represented in the names and black screen itself. The interaction between past and present haunts by showing both are "repressed and disavowed, but never entirely or successfully" (Hong 29). Each name repeatedly acknowledges the larger legacies and structures that reduced each person to a name. The violence of the past is not forgotten but carried into new and more legitimized structures used against marginalized peoples. In breaking the silence *2487* calls attention to the "ungrievable" lives of border crossers and haunts through the material body of the listener. *2487* demands that the listener acknowledge the ghosts that haunt our borders, both in terms of those lost and the legacies of dispossession. The digital platform of

*2487* is continuously accessible, repeatable, and disruptive. Digital sound, specifically, breaks structures of mourning as something that is seemingly finite. Grief is present through *2487* as long as the site is online. *2487* ability to haunt beyond the physical world is predicated on the site's accessibility. While it's unclear if Sanchez is updating *2487*, the platform that runs the piece will eventually fall silent. Sanchez's voice is no longer coming through the computer, and the names of border crossers will fade into the silence that surrounds them. Despite this, the sound at the center of *2487* moves mourning away from grief to material haunting.

Sound haunts the border through its silences and disruptions. The use of a voice in *2487* assures us that some silences are never fully broken.

### 4.3 *Border Memorial*: The Place of Mourning

Standing in the middle of the Southern Arizona desert a cell phone pings. A calaca appears on the screen, floating above the ground directly in front of the cell phone; it looks like a found object in a video game – an item to collect and inventory. Lifting the phone toward the sky the calaca follows, floating ever upward like a beacon. There's no sound, just the quiet of the desert. Or maybe there's highway nearby. The calaca floats on the screen from all angles. Its seemingly 3D body shows the thickness of its bones. When the phone is gone, the calaca is gone, but the surrounding space is different. The calaca was never really there, and yet it remains.

*Border Memorial,* created in 2012-2013 by digital artist John Craig Freeman, is an augmented reality piece (AR) created through the now defunct Layar app, *Border Memorial* charts the places where migrant bodies were recovered. Using Augmented reality (or AR), *Border Memorial* utilized "geolocation software to superimpose individual augments at the precise GPS

coordinates of each recorded death, enabling the public to see the objects integrated into the physical locations as if they existed in the real world" (Freeman). The real world is still visible and accessible through the use of cameras, but the image is ultimately altered for the user. As such, *Border Memorial* identifies each site with a calaca (or a skeletal figure used to memorialize loved ones during Día de los Muertos). The calacas are both markers and representations of the person whose body was recovered at that particular site. Each calaca hovers above the ground mediated by a cell phone. When a calaca is discovered the skeleton appears in the space directly in front of the user; allowing the figure to appear in real-time. Based on the user's mobility, a calaca might appear seemingly out of nowhere as the phone moves. The calacas are small, fitting on a cell phone screen, but they loom large through the technology depending on the user's distance. The calaca can appear as large as a human body, or just a blip in the distance. They are both real and unreal, collapsing the expectations of space, memorial, and technology.

John Craig Freeman is a public artist and professor based in Boston, MA. His works use "emergent technologies to produce large-scale public work at sites where the forces of globalization are impacting the lives of individuals in local communities" ("About John Craig Freeman"). This approach to public viewing of global issues is present in many of his works that bring the realities of seemingly distant crises to white Americans. Freeman staged an interactive viewing of *Border Memorial* at the MOMA in New York that replicated the Sonoran Desert via the Layar app. The interactive exhibit was short-lived but used technology to make the desert more visible to a seemingly removed public. In his accompanying statement of the piece Freeman asserts the importance of memorial and awareness of migrant death: "this project is designed for the citizens of the United States and intended to impact the formation of national identity" by reminding people of the lives of border crossers sacrificed in the name of national security

(Freeman, "Border Memorial"). Like the piece itself, Freeman is demanding the attention of a predominately white American public to recognize their participation in migrant death. Many of Freeman's other pieces demand the attention of the American public through new technologies like AR and VR as means of broadening the public's understandings and view of the world around them.

As an augmented reality piece, *Border Memorial* raises tensions between space and place, illuminating an invisible landscape in Southern Arizona. By presenting the calacas through technology, *Border Memorial* both reveals and conceals the legacies of violence, bordering, and more pointedly death. Inviting the user to explore the space of the Southern Arizona desert the piece draws attention to the importance of physical location within the archive and more pressingly, mourning. The bodies in the piece are both digitized and real – death is both present and abstracted in favor of a symbol. The piece "marks the landscape as haunted" and allows users to recognize and interact with "what surrounds them just beyond the edges of the visual" (Murphy 44). The migrant is materially summoned and symbolically abstracted through the unnamed calacas. Instead of focusing on distant views or audio, *Border Memorial* invites users to move through the physical space. The piece makes mourning more personal, allowing grief to be more active and dependent upon the users' movements through the haunted space itself. It brings together visuality of *Fatal Migrations* and the auditory importance of *2487*, by encouraging the user to engage with the physical space itself. In doing so, it presents a distinct mode of memorial that challenges the way in which the absences that surround border crossers' deaths are catalogued, archived, and represented. Unlike the other two pieces in this chapter, *Border Memorial* withholds any identifying information for all of the calcacs. The lack of names and reliance upon location alone illustrates the possibilities of digital archives to move beyond fixed and institutional spaces.

Using location as the primary method of visualization complicates traditional approaches to cataloguing, remembrance, and interaction as *Border Memorial* only works in Southern Arizona. The piece brings together the environment, technology, and materiality all as a means of remembrance. In shifting the user's experience of the space itself, the piece highlights understandings of place at the intersections of memorial.

Anchored in Southern Arizona, *Border Memorial* brings together the realities of the death in the borderlands with the invisibility of migration. The blending of technology with the real works to complicate the landscape and memorialize each person, but only if the location where they are represented is accessed and accessible. In other words, *Border Memorial* is not visible, nor does it work anywhere other than Southern Arizona. Videos of *Border Memorial* show how the phone pings when the user comes across a site where a body was recovered – the phone mediates the landscape and makes the unseen seen. On Freeman's blog about the experience of creating the piece there is also an interactive google map that plots each calaca. Mapped on to the physical landscape, *Border Memorial* reveals what lies just outside of sight, an "invisible landscape" that is only accessible through knowledge of the app, the place, and awareness of the border. While the limitations of the piece are clear, the use of AR highlights what it means to disavow border deaths and how they are continuously forgotten under new waves of border security. The continuous refusal to acknowledge the human consequences of the problem allows for growing border security, and most recently, the construction of a camps and a physical wall. This violence often remains invisible and is positioned as thing of the past, only accessible to those already concerned and aware. However, seeing each calaca breaks the silences that surround it and changes the landscape itself. The interaction between the real and the digital, the immaterial and the material, emphasizes the power of the unseen.

On Freeman's website he documented the process of creating *Border Memorial* and shows a map where the calacas overwhelm the desert like an army of the dead. Using a calaca filter over each of the places where migrants were recovered, very similar to that of the Humane Border Migrant Death Map, the map shows what is hidden in the desert of Southern Arizona. However, *Border Memorial* relies on individual experiences with the calacas, not seeing them en masse. The landscape shifts when each calaca appears on the phone screen showing "an unseen layer of usage, memory, and significance – an invisible landscape, if you will, of imaginative landmarks – superimposed upon the geographical surface and the two-dimensional map" (Ryden 40). While *Border Memorial* makes visible the violence of the borderlands placing it directly on the spots where the person was recovered shows the importance of place itself. The calacas are not visible on maps or even in the space itself without the use of the app. The space is lively with memory, bringing the user into interaction with the invisible landscape itself – making the user privy to the complexity of the space. Through the piece the user is invited into interact not only with the migrants in the memorial, but material intra-actions that encompass place, environment, policy, and memory. *Border Memorial* uses technology to create a "web of relations" that encompasses "other humans and the more-than-human world, including the natural and built environments through which we move and to which we develop attachments" (Holmes 10). Each calaca draws the user further into this web of relations, revealing the outward effects of the invisible landscape as both physical and immaterial.

Geolocation software mediates the distance between the user and those catalogued, preserved, and represented in the piece. In one sense the literal distance is collapsed as the user must go to a place to interact with what is represented, but that is only possible through the phone itself. In revealing each death, *Border Memorial* not only makes it visible, but interactive and

experiential. The landscape is lively with calacas, showing the user the materiality of the calacas, but also the human consequences of the border as systemic and widespread. The piece relies on the user's interaction with the physical environment and technology to move each site from space to place. The creation of place "becomes vividly real through dramatization" or interaction and experience (Tuan 178). This idea is taken further via locative technologies as Jason Farman writes in *Mobile Interface Theory: Embodied Space and Locative Media*. AR applications do the work of imbuing a "space with meaning, thus transforming a space by giving it a sense of place" (39). This sense of place is dramatized through the use of the calaca which is a stand in for both a migrant and death. In this way, *Border Memorial* disrupts the seemingly "abstracted, geometrical, [and] undifferentiated" space of the borderlands to expose the realities of violence (Ryden 37). The desert with its emptiness and seemingly desolate landscape lends to space as a "blank surface on which areal relations, physical landforms, and social patterns are dispassionately outline" (Ryden 37). Certain aspects of the space are easily recognizable, and the border itself makes it noteworthy in some regards, but *Border Memorial* undoes the presuppositions about the desert as a site of nothingness. Customs and Border Patrol benefit from the environmental space of the borderlands as blank and devoid of association as a mode of border policing. They often disguise "the impact of its current enforcement policy by mobilizing a combination of sterilized discourse, redirected blame, and 'natural' environmental processes that erase evidence of what happens in the most remote parts of southern Arizona" (De León 4). The emptiness and lack of "place" allows for the deaths of border crossers to remain largely invisible within social, cultural, and political structures. However, *Border Memorial*'s emphasis on place through AR invites users to experience each site as both real and deadly. No longer just part of a large and abstracted space, the piece mourns each

individual place as worthy of mourning. The spot is no longer blank, but part of the larger narrative of the borderlands.

*Border Memorial* mourns by changing blank spaces to concrete places. Users are invited to physically move through the space of the borderlands, making each site where they stop to see, experience, and grieve noteworthy. Each user is not only seeing the calaca but experiencing the conditions of the real world in real time. By placing an invisible layer on the landscape, the piece is "fus[ing] history to location and [giving] that location significance" (Ryden 39). Of course, the border already has significance, but the piece suggests that the state should not be the only one crafting that narrative. *Border Memorial* is not merely about seeing the calacas, but the experience of standing in the same spot where a body was recovered – where someone died. Freeman himself recalls plotting the places as both "sobering" and part of "read[ing] the landscape", creating a piece that is as much about the possibilities of AR and awareness (Liao and Humphreys 1428).

Each death is entwined in the borderlands environment, policy, and histories. These histories do not belong to the users but are unearthed as part of an essential understanding of the piece and contemporary border polices. The piece itself does not necessarily create a "sense of place" that is based upon sustained interactions with each location but emphasizes the importance of place as a mode of memorial. By including and emphasizing space the piece calls attention to what it means to stand where someone died. Asking the user to consider the place through sight, sound, and touch. The interactions between the user and calaca might be fleeting or sustained (depending on who the user is), regardless, each interaction creates a place with significance. Through movement, the use of technology, and the physical world the user becomes part of a larger web of relations about the border. *Border Memorial's* use of place-based mourning invites users to move through the desert spaces a means of mourning. By this, I mean that the effort to seek out

spaces where the calacas are present is part of the act of memorial. Users have to actively find each calaca and seeing them is an act of memorial for the person found that specific location. It also raises questions about what cannot be seen and what remains hidden in the desert landscape. The calacas remain coded in that particular location after the user puts down their phone or leaves the location. The place is marked, changed by mourning – visible or not.

*Border Memorial* localizes grief with the site of each death. Not only does the user have to be in Southern Arizona in order for the AR to work, but the piece allows the user mediate contact with the person being grieved. This contact calls forth the digitized body of the calaca and is literally felt as the user holds the phone. The calaca both betrays the technological limitations of the piece and is the point itself. Floating above the ground the calaca is a digitally rendered object whose outline points to its imposition upon the landscape. It is both there and never there. Held within the phone, the calaca is anchored to the location, and only made visible through the technology that produces it. The user's physical interaction with the phone is the link to making the calaca visible. Its materiality, is "ontologically inseparab[le from] agentially intra-acting 'components'" (Barad 133). The ontology of each calaca within *Border Memorial* is contingent upon its intra-action with everything that surrounds it. The calacas are "real" because "reality is not composed of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena, but of 'things'-in-phenomena" (Barad 135). The piece has real effects not because it continuously interacts with itself, but because of its intra-action with the world outside the code. Put another way, as the user stands in the desert they are interacting with the calaca who is interacting with everything around it. The calaca changes the landscape from a very human perspective, but the environment is haunted by legacies of loss. While the calacas are overlaid on to their surroundings, the user's interaction with the environment, the cell phone, and the calaca itself make it have real and material

effects. The cascading effect of making the calaca appear shows not only intra-action of all things, but how its effects are felt through larger web of relations. Simply put, each calaca is relational in terms of geolocation software, the user, and the phone.

Each user's interaction with a calaca leads to the digital exposure of a material body, and consequently death. In this way, *Border Memorial* introduces the effects of overlapping systems of statecraft that have led to placing the calaca there at all. The violence of the border is central to the creation of *Border Memorial* in the first place. While the joyous approach to mourning through the calacas is important, the calacas are ultimately skeletons. The calacas are not people, but a symbolic representation of the human form in its most basic physical parts. Not only is the skeleton both the beginning and end point of the physical human body, but largely reminiscent of different figures of death. Within *Border Memorial* the calacas are symbolic, but also suggest a kind of voyeuristic representation of decay. To see each calaca is to see far more than memorial and creates the association between the bodies recovered in each spot and realities of death. Moreover, the calcacas are not accurate skeletons, but skeletal figures with sharp edges, brown-white color shading, and an outline that approaches the edge of uncanniness. The calaca's materiality is felt through its visibility and notable through its intra-action that unifies the world around it. It is not flat, but a 3-D object with contours and dimensions that add to its digitally rendered bones. The calacas are both real and unreal in exposing the human body and hiding the realities of death. They are seemingly physical, both in their representation and the ways in which they change and shift other bodies. Yet, they are ephemeral, disappearing when the screen is gone and only reappearing when mediated by technology. The calacas clash with the real physical world on the screen behind them, drawing attention to the interplay between the real and the digital.

Every time the phone pings a new calaca is discoverable (the user can choose not to look or interact with the new calaca) – placing a digital figure into a real world and environment. But all of the calacas are the same – the program loads the exact same figure each time a calaca is encountered. *Border Memorial* is about ideas of mourning as they apply to figures and concepts of death instead of specifics. In crafting a memorial that honors the deaths of border crossers, Freeman mapped the locations where bodies were recovered but deliberately omitted names. The lack of names is a striking contrast to other memorials as identity is often anchored in the name itself – it is often used to rehumanize those stripped of their identity.

However, *Border Memorial* challenges conceptions of grief and mourning by asserting that names are not the only structure through which to mourn. A central aspect of the piece is not the names of border crossers, but the silence that surrounds their material bodies. The continued focus on grieving names, dates, or any other identifying information reduces border crossers to those identifiers, effectively obscuring the physical realities facing migrants. As stated previously, it is tomb unto itself. In her analysis of *Border Memorial*, Jessica Auchter considers the importance of the unnamed calacas as essential to questioning statecraft and making visible the consequences of bordering. She experiences *Border Memorial* as way of thinking of the "impossible place of the migrant body in our own national imaginaries" the piece "memorializes this impossibility by drawing attention not to the individual life lost, by naming it, as in traditional memorialization, but rather to the very impossibility of place itself" (Auchter, Hyperhiz). The calaca is not about the name attached to it, but the ability and invisibility of death in the borderlands as essential to American sovereignty. This awareness haunts beyond the limitations of the name itself by demanding interaction between the user and the calaca. This is not to say that naming isn't

incredibly important in memorialization, but the piece sheds light on modes of memorial that bring complications of place into clearer view.

*Border Memorial* is about place, the experience of place as the foundation of memorial, and the dangers of space against certain bodies. The piece complicates the intersections of mourning by focusing on place instead of names. In doing so, *Border Memorial* upends the expectations of the memorial's relationship to the archive. Videos of the piece at work created by Freeman show digital skeletons floating over the Arizona desert. The video zooms in to move through the sea of skeletons, framing each digital body above the digitized earth. Each death is not a name, but coordinates, a plot point within the digital map. What the map presents is not merely a representation of the desert, but a distant view of migration as overwhelming and deadly. While *Border Memorial* is not invested in sharing the names of border crossers, the piece still works from an aggregated list of coordinates. Freeman does not say which organization he worked with to get the coordinates, but almost all organizations that keep these records list them alongside names (if available). The piece is like the archive itself; it is a collection that depends upon interaction and continuous discovery and rediscovery. What is found at the center of *Border Memorial* is entirely dependent upon the user's experience of the piece, their interaction with each calaca, and the creation of place. The piece layers ideas of the archive as a site of discovery and recovery and makes it mobile and interactive.

*Border Memorial* is only possible through collected and preserved information about border crossers – their deaths and locations of their bodies. Considering that the piece is based upon experience, it resists searchability, though it is somewhat possible through the computer-based versions of the piece. Searching is location dependent and can take the form of scrolling across a digitized version of the borderlands to find different calacas. When clicked upon each

calaca is marked by a question mark with its latitude and longitude listed below. Consequently, searching for one calaca will bring up every calaca in the piece – gesturing to the importance of collective mourning. The database or archive that Freeman relied upon to create the piece is never fully visible though his process makes apparent that he is working from a specific collection of information. In not exposing its archive or database *Border Memorial* highlights the work that collecting, cataloguing, and preserving does for mourning. In other words, saving the data – in whatever form – allows for the possibility of mourning despite any identifying information. This framework suggests that mourning need not be highly individualized, but rather is necessary for the larger circumstances that have led to mass amounts of death. We can mourn for those in the database even if we don't know their names. We can access the spot where they died on foot or through our computers, but the archives that make access possible are stored within the piece itself. The archive in *Border Memorial* may contain all of the identifying information about each person, but its purpose is not to name, it is to move. Displaying the calacas without names complicates traditional expectations for how we understand mourning in the archive while showing the possibilities of large-scale mourning in an interactive and personal way.

In enabling the work of mourning, *Border Memorial* captures the complexity of how information is accessed, represented, and retrievable through different apps and technology. By relying on and creating one-on-one experiences, the piece captures the borderlands through the experience of place. Considering the place-based nature of AR, *Border Memorial* invites users to utilize the possibilities of the screen to see the realities facing migrants. A 2015 article published in New Media & Society speaks to the promise of AR as a way for users to question "who has authority over space and to reconstruct political and historical meaning in place" (Liao and Humphreys 1420). In blurring the lines between the real and technologically mediated, AR has the

potential to change human interaction with the physical world. AR has the potential to allow users to complicate and add to the spaces that surround them in ways that are political, social, cultural, and historical. The article looks specifically at Layar an app that "displays points of interests (POI), user-created annotations, graphics based on the Global Positioning System (GPS)" (Liao and Humphreys 1419). Launched in 2009, Layar was one of the first AR apps that allow users to create their own augmented realities pieces (supported by both Android and Apple). However, by the construction of this chapter, Layar is no longer accessible or supported by contemporary mobile phones. In fact, Layar was purchased by Blippar in 2014, a large tech corporation, and moved away from AR via phone technology to more commercialized software (augmented marketing materials, etc). The Layar website now has a statement requesting that users "not sign up [or] make further payments for Layar services" (Layar). In the span of five years, Layar went from a promising technology for creators and artists, to one that is no longer accessible regardless of location. There are, of course, many other apps that allow users to create AR pieces or experiences, but our exposure to AR and the loss of Layar points to the struggle of technological obsolescence.

The end of Layar means the end of *Border Memorial* in its fullest and intended form. The piece both is and is not about the technology through which it was available: AR makes the experience of place possible, allowing for intimate interactions and complex materialities, but the piece is really about the deaths it represents. Like other mobile technologies, it "offer[ed] users new ways of visualizing information" (Farman 39). Importantly, AR is not a dead or dying media, but one that is taking different and more commercialized forms (i.e. Pokemon Go! and military use). It still stands at the edge of possibility but has largely been overtaken by Virtual Reality (VR) which is more immersive and does not always interact with the physical world. VR is about creating another reality, not necessarily complicating our current one. *Border Memorial* stands at

odds with VR as it relies upon the physical world to not only make each calaca seen but felt. Understandings of the work *Border Memorial* does shifts away from its practiced reality and toward a distant view created through videos and maps. The larger question remains, what happens to the deaths archived and represented within the piece itself? The piece's obsolescence points to the need for continuous memorial in a variety of forms. While *Border Memorial* may no longer be accessible, its importance as a memorial still remains. The borderlands is still haunted by the calacas that are no longer visible – bodies are continuously recovered in those areas until the lives of border crossers are valued and protected. More specifically, *Border Memorial* created places in the desert borderlands emphasizing the importance of location as a means of mourning. While the technology is no longer accessible, the region remains haunted. Like the demonstrations of the piece being used, the place is forever changed by the knowledge of the invisible landscape. The legacies of violence in the border region are not always tangible, but as the piece reminds us, even in its obsolescence, we can see their effects if we look a little harder.

## 4.4 Conclusion

Together the pieces in this chapter mourn some 6,000 people who have died crossing the United States-Mexico border[6]. With *Fatal Migrations*' release in 2016 there are upwards of 1,300 migrants who have died since then (*Missing Migrants Project*). There are, of course, on-the-ground efforts to mourn for all of migrants who have died with different groups placing crosses in the

[6] There is, obviously, overlap within the pieces themselves. However, given the limited search functions of each piece, finding and locating the overlap would be time-consuming and at odds with the pieces themselves.

desert and annual candlelight vigils. While *Fatal Migrations*, *2487*, and *Border Memorial* all reflect the possibilities for more encompassing mourning, they also betray their own limitations by not reflecting new data. The importance of mourning in the borderlands is continuous and something that does not get nearly enough attention even when people recognize the scope. Because the majority of these deaths happen in isolated or seemingly distant places, they resist legibility and urgency. Migrant aid groups in Southern Arizona keep calling attention to the crisis, but the structures of the state benefit from the silence that surrounds migrant death.

Despite these structural silences and erasures, the pieces in this chapter show how grief and mourning are modes of political resistance. *Fatal Migrations* illustrates how the borderlands environment is used against migrants through surveillance technology. While the piece complicates the user's position, it allows the user to recognize the vastness of loss itself. *2487* works similarly by using sound to move bodies to grief, emphasizing the importance of each and every name. The materiality of sound makes each body felt beyond the need to just see the desert. Finally, *Border Memorial* invites the user to experience place as a mode of remembrance and recognizing that someone died in that space. The materiality of digital objects changes the user and the space itself. Just by drawing attention to the deaths of border crossers each piece is pushing against the silence and invisibility ascribed to migrants. All three have to work from database and catalogues in order to present different aspects of migrant death, however the choice of how that information is presented also resists expectations. The inclusion of each migrant within an archive or database shows how those structures are often built with the intent of upholding certain legacies. In this sense, it's not enough to just include the names. As all three pieces show, the archives that hold the names of border crossers are accessible but should not be searchable. Further, the archives at the center of each makes their pieces possible – it makes mourning possible.

One of the most important aspects of each of these pieces is their ability raise awareness about the realities facing migrants. Even considering technological limitations, all of these pieces circulated via online spaces. Each uses different digital aspects to convey overlapping concerns about the United States-Mexico borderlands. The use of the digital methods both expands and limits the reach of these particular pieces – they are all dependent upon platforms outside of the creator's control but can reach new audiences. The risks and rewards of creating digital memorials raises questions about who actually sees these pieces and the work they do beyond the borderlands. Begley (*Fatal Migrations*) and Freeman (*Border Memorial*) are explicit in saying that their works are meant to be seen by those who have a very limited understanding of the border. However, circulation of digital art is something that is very hard to track and quantify. This is particularly important for *Border Memorial,* which is no longer available in its intended form. While the reach is hard to pin down, the effects of digital art remain: it has the potential to disrupt discourses, reach its intended audience, and change minds. *Fatal Migrations* and *2487* are accessible and legible to a broader public; because they rely on relatively passive engagement (scrolling, clicking, listening, and viewing) they are easily shareable, interactive, and legible as political art. This is not say that all digital art must adhere to these standards, but the pieces all aim to mourn widely and explain the detrimental effects of border policing.

But reducing the pieces in this chapter to their political resistance undermines the names given in this chapter, in the pieces themselves, and even those unnamed calacas still haunting the desert. The reason we mourn is not merely a political action, it is a human one. All of these pieces ask the users to mourn for the sake of mourning, grieve for every person represented because they are human. Mourning is not merely the acknowledgement of death, but the feeling of loss that does not have to be located in the specifics of who someone was. We mourn for others because we are

humans who have lost another human. Even if the lives go unrecognized or ungrieved, there must be grief simply because there was life. Considering the contemporary conditions of the borderlands as the of the construction of this chapter (Winter 2020), the need for mourning will only rise. There are so many people who we have yet to grieve. There are so many places we have yet to see and experience. There are so many names we haven't heard. There is still so much to mourn.

## 5.0 Coda: Fortifying for the Future/Borders and the Climate Crisis

On January 19th, 2021 about 10 miles East of Nogales, Arizona, I found myself on a tour of a border wall construction site. A public relations representative from the construction company intercepted our vehicle as we approached the site, offering a tour as a safe way to see the wall. We followed his truck on to the new road built to bring in new materials and equipment for the wall. When I had previously visited the area, the wall had ended in "normandy" style cattle barriers, but now there was a massive road that extended into the pervious impassable mountains.

The amount of dust blowing in the air made it hard to breath and the new roads ripped through the land like a fresh wound. Small barriers used to line the border in this area as the mountains were a sufficient indication of the border itself. It was too hard for most to cross on foot and driving through the area was impossible. Now, with the mountains flattened to make way for the road and the wall, it was easily accessible. The irony of actually making the area easier to cross was lost on no one. The very next day, Joe Biden was inaugurated as the 46th president of the United States. By January 21st, 2021 construction on the wall was (temporarily) halted.

**Figure 5: Progress on the border wall East of Nogales, AZ in January 2021. Photo coursey of David Whitmer.**

This project has been bookended by the presidency of Donald Trump, the construction of the border wall, and constant political rhetoric about the border in "crisis". At present whenever "border studies" is mentioned, the immediate response is to bring up Trump and the wall. Many academic discourses have also shifted to analyze Trump's stance on the border and to account for how conservatives have changed our conversations about migration. While all of this is true, I'm reminded that Trump and contemporary conservative responses to migration are just a symptom of much larger problems. These shifts toward our current moment as the problem often overlook the history of the borderlands and fail to acknowledge that portions of the wall were being built as early as the 1990s under President Bill Clinton. Construction in the 90's doesn't include the

barriers that went up far earlier placed by ranchers, the National Parks Service, and others. But more than that, physical barriers are just one small part of the immense damage that the United States has done to the borderlands environment and people through policy. Prevention through Deterrence is arguably one of the steadiest border policies the United States has. However, policies like Operation Streamline, Remain in Mexico, and most recently Title 42 all point to the borderlands a fraught problem of policy rather than one of human rights.[1] Often migrants and asylum seekers are faced with labyrinthian bureaucratic systems and insufficient support even when the United States isn't led by a party that is deliberately trying to keep them out. As the current border "crisis" unfolds in the Spring of 2021, the question of why measures haven't been taken to make immigration systems more robust or humane is put simply by a Customs and Border Patrol agent, "such a project could send a message that would encourage even more people to migrate to the United States" (Dickerson). The American unwillingness to create systems that support noncitizens leads more people into the desert, the mountains, or across the river every year. Border policies are created to fix the "problem" of immigration in ways that are deliberately insufficient with the hopes that people will just stop coming. Despite that not being the case under

[1] Implemented in 2005, Operation Streamline is a "zero-tolerance policy" wherein "unauthorized migrants face criminal prosecution and potential prison sentences in addition to formal deportation and removal from the United States" (No More Deaths). Remain in Mexico came into effect after Donald Trump took office and was used to keep all migrants, including asylum seekers, from entering the country even as they waited for their asylum cases to be heard ("The Out Crowd"). Remain in Mexico is a very large departure from previous approaches to asylum which allowed people to reconnect with their family members in the states as they waited for hearings. Title 42 is a public health policy that was used to close the border as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic ("Nationwide Enforcement Encounters").

any of the contemporary policies, hiding the ills of the American immigration system seems to be the path of least resistance.

Issues with immigration policy are a reflection of a global effort to fortify borders. Around the world countries are working to heighten border security showing, as Todd Miller writes in *Empire of Borders: The Expansion of the US Border Around the World*, "a type of enforcement that is less about 'protecting' national sovereignties and much more about policing the global fault lines, the jagged borders between the 'north' and the 'south'" (4). Solidifying the borders between "north" and "south" explains why the United States is not only investing so much money in its Southern border with Mexico, but borders around the world. Programa Frontera Sur is Mexico's U.S. backed response to migration that relies heavily on detention and deportation, much like Operation Streamline (*Programa Frontera Sur*). With help from the U.S., Mexico is meant to stop migrants from central and south America from ever reaching the U.S. In essence, expanding the U.S.-Mexico border through force around the world is a globalizing move that connects countries through military spending at the expense of ordinary people, or even refugees, on the move (Miller 33). The solidification of borders globally will always come at the expense of vulnerable populations moving because of poverty, political turmoil, and outright violence. The performance of bordering is a global project that has and will continue to suspend millions of people without juridical rights seemingly without end.

Even with construction on the wall halted, new technologies are being implemented to help spot, stop, and apprehend border crossers. Surveillance towers throughout Southern Arizona are used to monitor large areas of land, including places where Border Patrol agents cannot easily reach. Towers dot the Southern Arizona desert and despite the environmental damage the construction of these towers may have done, these towers are a much quieter solution than the

wall. Meaning, that even if efforts were made to remove the wall, the towers have garnered less attention and are more likely to stay. The use of surveillance in this way, along with drones and helicopters, helps expand the border into the country. The borderlands are expanding with continued pressures to root out those who are seen to not a have a right to be in the country despite economic or social participation. At present Border Patrol policy is such that the "border" includes 100 miles into the United States. This allows for the Border Patrol to have checkpoints and a policing presence in areas that are geographically and culturally distant from the border itself. In essence, expanding the border in to the country provides the state with legitimate grounds to find and remove non-citizens. For many, their legal status is constantly in question and under investigation as border policing moves into every part of the country. This expansion of the border both around the world and into the country points to a rise in nationalist sentiments and a response to globalization. However, what is missing from this conversation is the reality that many more people will be on the move in the coming decades. The solidification of borders globally are signals that certain peoples can move while others cannot and that certain countries will need much stronger borders in the future.

When I arrived in Tucson in August 2020, every day was around 110 degrees Fahrenheit. Having grown up in El Paso, Texas a little over 300 miles away I knew the heat was going to be extreme, but this was far worse than I remembered. It's very likely not having lived in the desert for around ten years had something to do with it, but after a while everyone was commenting on the lack of monsoons as the reason for the extreme heat. I remember the monsoons from growing up. These devastating desert storms sometimes went on for days with water flooding houses because the desert ground cannot accommodate a large volume of water quickly enough. In the fall of 2008, a storm hit El Paso so hard that whole streets were washed away and the foundation

under the city's last remaining Blockbuster crumbled. The monsoons cool off the desert in important and necessary ways. June is typically the hottest month in Tucson because the monsoons don't start until July and August. They provide much needed rain in the desert and tend to keep the evenings cooler (relative to the heat, of course). While they can quickly turn to extreme weather, the monsoons are the one time a year when the desert gets the water it needs to sustain the extreme heat and blistering sun. But the monsoons never arrived in 2020. The 100-degree heat lasted into mid-November with everyone commenting on how unusual the long-lasting heat is for the region. Many of the Samaritans I've met have commented on the rising in heat in Tucson, saying that the area was nowhere near as hot even ten years ago. A quick look at data shows this to be true, the weather in Arizona has always faced extreme temperatures but the reality is that those temperatures are lasting longer and longer with less rainfall every year (Livingston). With population booms in both major cities in the state (Phoneix and Tucson), there is increasing demand for power in the summer and infrastructure that makes these places even hotter.

To say that Arizona is hot is both an understatement and misses the larger point. The truth of the matter is that climate change is here. With the record heat and the escalation of the wall, 2020 was one of the deadliest years for migrants with 227 reported deaths ("Migrant Death Mapping"). The acceleration of global climate change not only means disaster for migrants crossing through the United States-Mexico border, but the reality that more and more people will be moving through the border at all. As more countries around the world face rising sea levels, drier seasons, and floods people will be forced to find better futures for their families. Climate disasters are anticipated to be the biggest force of displacement with some studies estimating that more than 700 million climate refugees on the move by the year 2050 (Kimmelman). The numbers are bleak and without clear designations of what constitutes a "climate refugee" even within a

country's borders, millions are people will be displaced with little aid along the way. Of course, who will be moving falls along economic lines and will exacerbate massive global inequalities that widen the gap between "those who are environmentally secure and those who are not" (Miller, *Storming the Wall* 23). Like all systemic problems, climate change is layered, but the hardest hit will be those in poorer nations. As people move from coastal areas to more cities, the pressure for resources will place further strain on already overwhelmed systems. In Southern Mexico, Central and South America people will move North in hopes of environmental security which will be met with increasingly large and violent border zones.

The escalation and expansion of border zones is part of the unfolding climate crisis and as countries around the world move toward militarized borders the number of displaced peoples globally will only grow. Considering the United States' contemporary means of border fortification, it's unsurprising to never hear Prevention through Deterrence mentioned on the national stage. It's a policy that has been so effective at doing its job, many people outside of the borderlands have no idea migrants die crossing the desert constantly. While the wall and the new technology outwardly militarizes the border and expands it inward, the horrible reality is that as the temperatures in rise in Southern Arizona every year, more people will die. This will undoubtably be positioned as a choice made by individual migrants, one that will lead to their deaths. But as the temperatures soar to new highs throughout the year even those new technologies won't be necessary, the desert will quickly erase all of the evidence of people moving through the area. The outward move toward militarization assures many displace peoples that our "rapidly warming world will be addressed with walls, bullets, drones, cops, and cages" (Miller, *Storming the Wall* 32). As more people arrive and less is done to solve immigration reform, more people will find themselves looking to the desert as a means of entry into the country. Insufficient attention

to immigration reform mirrors the idea that climate change is too large of a problem to solve, instead fortifying the border is more urgent.

Guarding the United States from the effects of migration, particularly in preparation for the climate crisis, we've spent billions of dollars destroying our own environment and immigration system with insufficient policies and unfinished walls. Securing the United States' Southern border with Mexico is a costly endeavor, some 5 billion dollars have been spent on 200 miles of wall in 2020 alone (*FY 2020*). Millions more goes to paying for new technologies, border patrol agents, and vehicles (*FY 2020*). On the ground in Southern Arizona, you don't have to look far to see that money at work. Border patrol checkpoints are often closed, and BP agents leave empty cars in populated areas giving the impression of policing the region. A lot of patrolling the desert is far more passive than public perception might anticipate, but billions of dollars are poured into the region to give the effect that everyone is being watched all the time. I will say that it does work, there are areas where it is plainly obvious that the Border Patrol is watching. But other areas, sometimes places where there are many migrant deaths, there's no one around for miles. This performance of border fortification is most apparent when it comes to the wall – the most public, albeit passive, border strategy currently being implemented. In November 2020 I visited the San Pedro River with a fellow Samaritan to see what stage wall construction had reached in the area. Hidden beyond waist-high grasses and fairly difficult terrain, the riverbed was dry and beautiful. The trees overhead created a canopy that provided much needed shade with their changing leaves. The San Pedro River flows North, beginning in Sonora, Mexico and without the monsoons it was completely dry. We walked South in the riverbed itself until we reached wall construction which tore across the entirety of the riverbed. There was a new road that ran along the wall above the riverbed itself. Like many other parts of the wall there were flood doors created with the intent of

being opened when the monsoon rains bring water to river. But the gaps along the doors are large enough for a person to walk through with ease. Peeking through to the other side is uninterrupted wilderness. There's just the riverbed, the trees, the grasses. There's no sign of construction, no roads, and no border patrol.

**Figure 6: The border wall at the San Pedro River in Arizona.**

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