

Introduction to “Gatekeeper’s State: Immigration and Boundary Policing in an Era of Globalization”

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The U.S.-Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.

— Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

Once the inner connection is grasped, all theoretical belief in the permanent necessity of existing conditions breaks down before their collapse in practice.

— Karl Marx to Dr. Kugelmann, 1868

WHEN JULIAN AMBROSE MALAGA LEFT HIS SMALL VILLAGE IN CHAMIZAL, Veracruz, Mexico, he had hopes of reaching North Carolina to find work. Having recently married at 24 years of age, Julian was soon expecting to be a father. Julian and 13 other Mexican migrants perished while crossing the U.S.-Mexico border near the Yuma, Arizona, desert. Searchers found their rapidly decomposing bodies on May 23, 2001. Another 13 severely dehydrated immigrants survived the ordeal. The migrants who survived the 114-degree temperature had been lost in the desert for over a week. The coroners said the dehydration was so severe that the victims appeared to be mummified.

The unrelenting dry heat of the Sonora desert contrasts sharply with the beautiful state of Veracruz, home to the migrants who attempted to cross this desolate stretch of border. Rich in resources, the state of Veracruz produces coffee, tobacco, sugar, and oil and its coastal fisherman harvest an abundance of seafood. However, declining coffee prices and a struggling oil industry forced many to

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leave their homes and travel north in search of work. “I cried when he told me he was leaving,” José Hernandez, Julian’s 18-year-old cousin told the *New York Times* (Thompson, 2001: A3). “But he said he was going to be the first one to start making life better for all of us. After a while, we started to believe him.” Julian told his dad that, as soon as he found work, he would send the family money. Julian’s dad said the following about his son: “He promised me that he would always behave with respect, and that he would make me proud” (*Ibid.*).

According to immigration authorities, responsibility for the suffering and tortuous deaths of these migrants lay with the *coyotes*, or people smugglers. In the aftermath of the desert fatalities, Johnny Williams, the Western regional director for the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), promised that he would do “everything humanly possible to bring those responsible for [the Arizona] tragedy to justice” (Ellingwood, 2001: A10). Although some smugglers have taken migrants into dangerous areas, as in the Arizona case, we must ask, who really killed Julian Ambrose Malaga? Why has there been a progressive and almost systemic increase in fatalities among migrants along the U.S.-Mexico border? How has public policy created conditions that have forced so many migrants to risk their lives by crossing into the U.S. through treacherous and remote areas? Almost seven years earlier, in the isolated Arizona border area where Julian Malaga and 13 other migrants perished, the Border Patrol launched Operation Safeguard. According to one INS report, the operation was designed to “redirect illegal crossings away from urban areas near the Nogales port of entry to open areas that the Border Patrol can easily control” (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997: 6). Conspicuously absent from the INS rationale was the role this policy would play in framing the treacherous conditions and risks of border crossing. As Peter Andreas (2001: 117) has noted, “U.S. officials have gone to great lengths to portray migrants as the victims of smugglers, and they use this both to deflect criticism and to provide a further rationale to crack down on smuggling.”

Contributors to this special issue of *Social Justice* on U.S.-Mexico border policing point out that in late 1993, the Clinton administration embarked on a “national strategy”¹ to reduce unauthorized crossings. The administration launched a series of coordinated operations that channeled unauthorized crossings away from urbanized areas, where it had been easier to cross, to remote and forbidden mountain and desert areas. The objective of the U.S. Border Patrol (1994) “prevention through deterrence” policy is to prevent unauthorized crossings by deploying more agents to the border, building more fences, and using military technologies to thwart migrants before they enter the U.S. Concomitantly, the Border Patrol plans to increase the number of border patrol agents to 10,000 in 2001. The INS budget grew from \$1.5 billion in 1993 to \$4.2 billion in 1999 to support the increasing militarization of the border.

The INS also receives large-scale support from the U.S. military to construct and maintain border fences. The military operates and loans military technologies

such as infrared telescopes, heat and ground sensors, surveillance cameras, and helicopters to the Border Patrol (see Dunn, Falcón, Huspek, and Brownell in this issue). To increase military collaboration with the Border Patrol, the Clinton administration announced in early 1996 that it was ordering up to 350 Marine Corps, Army, and National Guard soldiers to conduct aerial and ground surveillance along the U.S.-Mexico border, especially in the California and Arizona regions (McDonnell and Rotella, 1996; Pear, 1996).

In the San Diego-Tijuana border region, the INS launched Operation Gatekeeper in 1994 to reduce unauthorized entries in what had been the busiest point of entry. According to the INS (1995: 7), launching Operation Gatekeeper would make crossings into Imperial Beach — an urbanized border area that was easier for migrants to successfully cross — “so difficult that aliens would be forced to areas east of the city, in more remote, mountainous terrain where it is harder to cross and where the Border Patrol has the tactical advantage....” In a 1996 letter to the San Diego Border Patrol Sector, President Bill Clinton celebrated the recent border enforcement initiative in San Diego. “As a result of Operation Gatekeeper,” President Clinton noted, “the San Diego border is now harder to cross illegally than at any time in history” (U.S. Department of Justice, 1996: 13). Early reports of the Border Patrol/INS national strategy help us contextualize efforts by U.S. government officials to blame the escalating deaths along the U.S.-Mexico border on people smugglers (see Dunn in this issue). Due to the public outcry over the deaths of migrants attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border,² the INS and government officials launched a public relations campaign to transform the discourse on the causes and consequences of migrant deaths along the border.³

Issue Overview

Contributors to this issue examine the complexity of U.S.-Mexico border policing in terms of the effects of U.S. immigration and border policy on unauthorized migrants and on the well-being of all U.S. citizens. Timothy Dunn’s article notes that the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border has human rights implications beyond immigration and border issues. He focuses on the tragic killing of Esequiel Hernandez, Jr., a young Mexican-American in Redford, Texas. Dunn argues that the Southwest border is the key locus of militarized enforcement in the U.S., as well as the site of the longest-running (over decade-long) manifestation of such efforts, with the deepest institutional ties between the military and police bodies.

Sylvanna Falcón examines the gendered effects of militarization on women at the U.S.-Mexico border, particularly in the form of “militarized border rape” and sexual assault. For Falcón, militarization ideology is embedded with issues of hyper-masculinity, patriarchy, and threats to national security. She maintains that violence against women has escalated to the serial, multiple, and mass murders of Mexican women (e.g., in the border city of Ciudad Juárez).⁴ In a piece on the

dynamics of El Paso, Ciudad Juárez' border sister, Victor Ortiz examines the contextual dimensions that foster and sustain border rights violations. He provides ethnographic research and probes the work of U.S.-Mexico border scholars.⁵

Michael Huspek investigates the increased reliance of the INS and state and local police agencies on military terminology, with an emphasis on the impact this has had on unauthorized migrants and state practices. How was Operation Gatekeeper "operationalized"? How have unauthorized practices been affected? Huspek explores the relationship between the state and the citizenry, as well as that between the state and capital. Though different in focus, Peter Brownell's article complements Huspek's by revealing how border enforcement *structures* unauthorized migration, which benefits U.S. capital interests in ways authorized migration does not. Sasha Khokha's article departs from the issue's general focus on "border region enforcement" by relating the "interior enforcement strategy" of the INS to human rights violations of migrants within the U.S. proper. Khokha's evidence and analysis support the position that current border enforcement policy and practice benefit U.S. employers and further the divide between undocumented workers and U.S.-born workers. Moreover, the de facto stratified work force negatively affects the position of all workers.

Joe Nevins provides an overview and critique of the various interpretations of U.S.-Mexico border policing beginning in the early 1990s. By situating the topic globally, Nevins demonstrates that despite current notions of the demise of nation-states and the emergence of "borderless economies," the forces of globalization have served to strengthen territorial boundaries. Also in this issue, the "Dialogue Between NGOs" from the U.S. and Mexico posits a bilateral symbiosis of the causes and consequences of militarization. The report confirms disturbing trends: increased social polarization in both countries, the view of civilians as potential enemies, and the idea that in a militarized social conflict, it is appropriate to destroy the enemy (i.e., civilian populations). Tragically, the study found that militarization in Mexico has profoundly increased. The issue concludes with Jose Palafox' review of *Border Games*, with a response by the book's author, Peter Andreas.

NOTES

1. It should be noted that this "national strategy" was developed by "planning experts from the Department of Defense Center for Low Intensity Conflict (CLIC) and Chief Patrol Agents from all regions and selected Headquarters staff" (U.S. Border Patrol, 1994: 1, *fn.* 1). Other military think tanks and research institutions have drafted border enforcement policies and practices for the INS. In 1993, the INS commissioned the Sandia National Laboratories (1993) to develop a three-volume study, which recommended the construction of a triple fence in the San Diego-Tijuana border area (as of 2001, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has not completed the fence). Finally, the Border Research and Technology Center in San Diego develops and refines new technologies and techniques for border enforcement measures, which, according to a former INS official, "came out of the CIA and the Department of Defense" (Dibble, 1995: B1).

2. See, for example, the front-page coverage in the *New York Times* (Verhovek, 1997) and *Los Angeles Times* (O’Connor, 1997) of a University of Houston study on border migrant mortality that disclosed the death of nearly 1,200 migrants from 1993 to 1996, a period of intensified border policing.

3. Between October 1994 and February 2001, this author noticed a shift in discourse based on interviews and “ride-alongs” with Public Information Officers in the San Diego Border Patrol Sector and on media analysis of five daily newspapers. See also the contrast in the two INS videos, “Challenge at the Border” (1996a), where the INS does not hide its role in forcing migrants into more remote and harsher border crossing areas. The “Stay Out, Stay Alive” (n.d.) video warns migrants not to cross the border without inspection, because it puts their lives at risk. A recent study by Leo Chavez (2001) examines media images and how they shape our understanding of documented and undocumented immigration to the U.S. Clearly, how the INS seeks to influence public discourse on border fatalities is an important research area.

4. According to a statement by a women’s group in the border city of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, between 230 and 408 young women have been murdered or disappeared from 1993 through 2001. On March 8, 2001, the group released the following statement: “We appeal to the international community, such as that which has been present in our country in such difficult situations as the conflict in Chiapas, asking that it focus its attention on this war against women, and that it know that our country is outstanding not only for its disdain for our ethnic minorities, but also for its disregard for us women. In this war, the 230 women who have been victims of sexual violence and assassination far outnumber those who have died in the conflict in Chiapas” (*Against the Current*, 2001: 22).

5. For a review of some of this literature, see Palafox (2000).

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