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▢ Surveilling Surveillance: Counter-mapping Undocumented Migration in the USA-Mexico Borderlands

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Introduction

Since 2001, the bodies of almost 2,500 migrants have been found in the Tucson Sector of the Mexico–USA border (Figure 1), the US federal border patrol zone that covers the majority of the Sonoran Desert in Arizona (Blust 2016). These bodies, the remains of undocumented migrants attempting to cross into the USA, are the direct result of a US Department of Homeland Security border strategy that actively funnels migrants into harsh, dangerous desert areas between Nogales and Sasabe. Though unwalled and ostensibly unguarded, this open desert is by design a key component of the US border security apparatus (Dunn 2009; De León 2015).

The Sonoran Desert is thus central to the US Department of Homeland Security's border policy, often referred to as Prevention Through Deterrence (PTD). By increasing security in and around urban ports-of-entry, migrants are funneled into more remote areas, where environmental conditions act as a natural barrier to movement and provide law
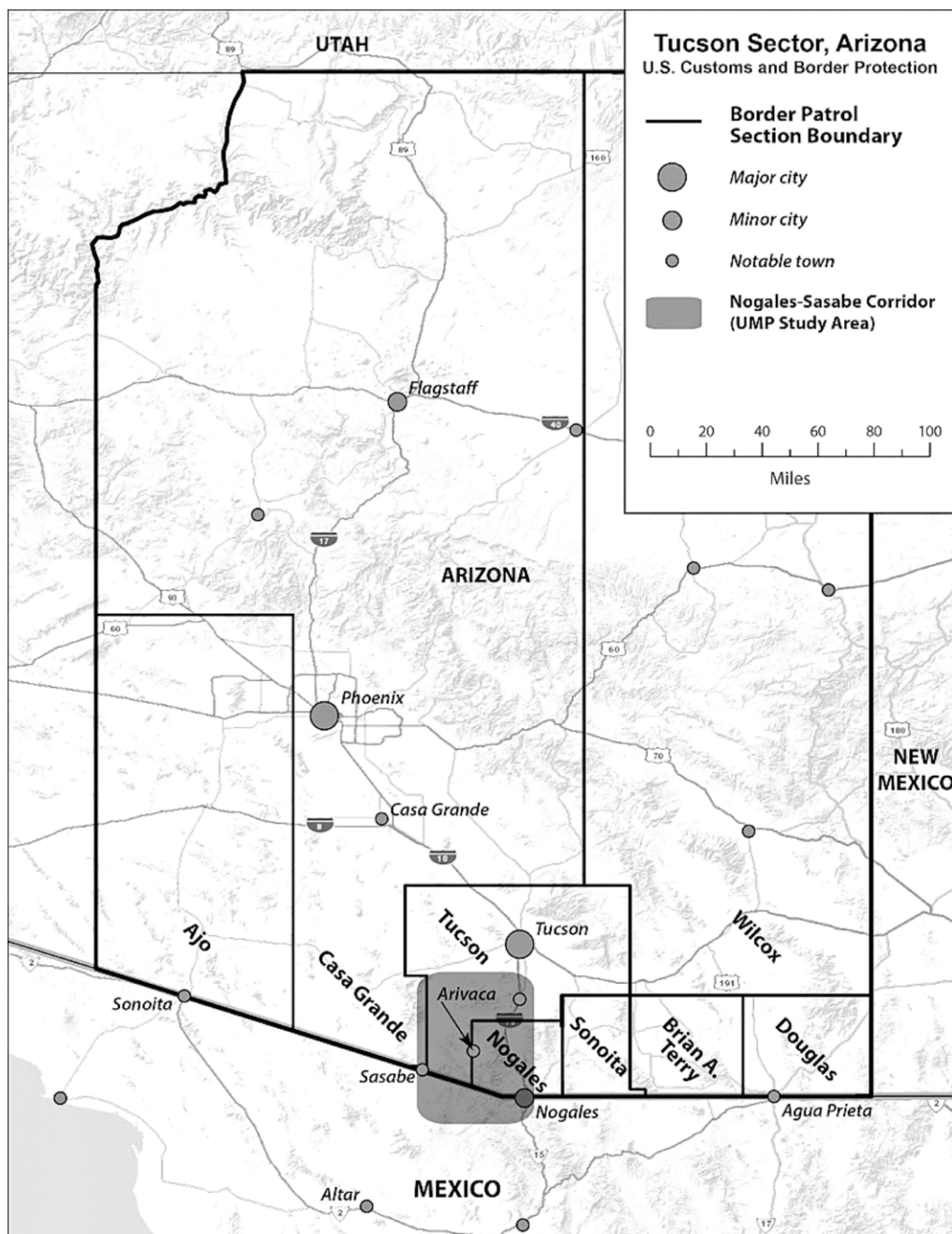
FIGURE 1. The Tucson Sector (US Border Patrol).

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enforcement with a "tactical advantage". This paper both examines the ways in which mapping technology is central to how Border Patrol constructs and operates within this security apparatus and explores how the very same mapping technology can be used in opposition to the border security project by analyzing the spatial patterning of migrant paths and deaths that are causally related to how US Border Patrol surveils the borderlands.

Drawing on the concept of counter-mapping, we use spatial data collected by the Undocumented Migration Project, a long-term anthropological project aimed at understanding various elements of the violent social process of clandestine migration between Latin America and the United States between 2009 and 2013, and mortality data from Humane Borders, a faith-based humanitarian organization dedicated to providing aid to migrants crossing the Sonoran Desert. Using these data, we critique the spatial ideology of PTD and the technological conditions of its production. In doing so, we also outline the tense contradictions that follow the seemingly paradoxical attempt to use spatial data and spatial analysis to critique and undermine spatial data and spatial analysis.

Denaturalizing the Desert

Prevention Through Deterrence (PTD), the dominant security paradigm that has organized US border security policy on the Mexico–USA border over the past two decades, was first officially developed in 1993 as a response to increasing numbers of people clandestinely crossing the border from the south through urban border towns like El Paso (for further discussion, see Nevins 2002; De León 2015). PTD's solution was a massive build-up of security infrastructure: specifically, military-grade walls and road checkpoints in cities and other easily crossable border zones, while leaving open areas of the border such as the section of desert between the towns of Nogales and Sasabe, where rugged terrain and severe environmental conditions (e.g. heat and venomous snakes) make crossings dangerous and deadly. In addition to funneling migrants through an already dangerous landscape, border security continually alters the desert, transforming it to make crossing more difficult and dangerous for migrants; for example, by dragging tires across large swathes of road and clearing foliage and underbrush, border agents create a landscape in which migrant footprints are easier to track, and migrants are easier to find.

The spatial ideology underpinning PTD naturalizes the border and differentiates human from non-human security. Border Patrol strategy appropriates, uses, and influences the Sonoran Desert as an element of border security, yet designates it as completely separate from explicitly human-built infrastructure. In the Border Patrol pamphlet in Figure 2, the desert is designated as a mortal threat beyond the control of border security. This separation veils the desert as a "natural" space, an area outside the control of human agents, rather than a constructed space actively supporting the intentional security apparatus.

In identifying the desert as a natural barrier, PTD also casts the international border itself as a natural dividing line, as opposed to something created through the security process. As such, the desert appears as a boundary that is simultaneously a form of protection for the nation and something whose "nature" requires defending. In this sense, as "nature", the desert becomes a useful ally to serve as a moral alibi (Doty 2011) for Border Patrol, removing the culpability of their security strategies for violence

FIGURE 2. US Border Patrol-distributed pamphlet warning would-be migrants about the dangers of border crossing (photograph by Mike Wells).

to migrants during desert crossings. At the same time, the desert is an at-risk sector of the border security body, requiring protection against "invading foreigners" and their polluting trash (Sundberg 2008).

GIS, Border Patrol and Counter-mapping

The spatial ideology of PTD, which naturalizes the desert as border and differentiates between human and non-human security infrastructure, is not merely presumed by US Border Patrol; it is actively produced. This ideology is constructed and disseminated through the production of maps for public consumption which portray the USA as a coherent entity with constantly at-risk borders (Figure 3). Other maps distinguish between "controlled" or walled sections, and "monitored" or unwalled sections of the border (Schroeder 2012). The gaps in the border wall are, according to this spatial logic, beyond the control of border security (Sundberg 2008; Andreas 2009). This representation of remote spaces as uncontrollable at once highlights their need for security – the need to be monitored – and reinforces their status as natural, existing outside human security technology.
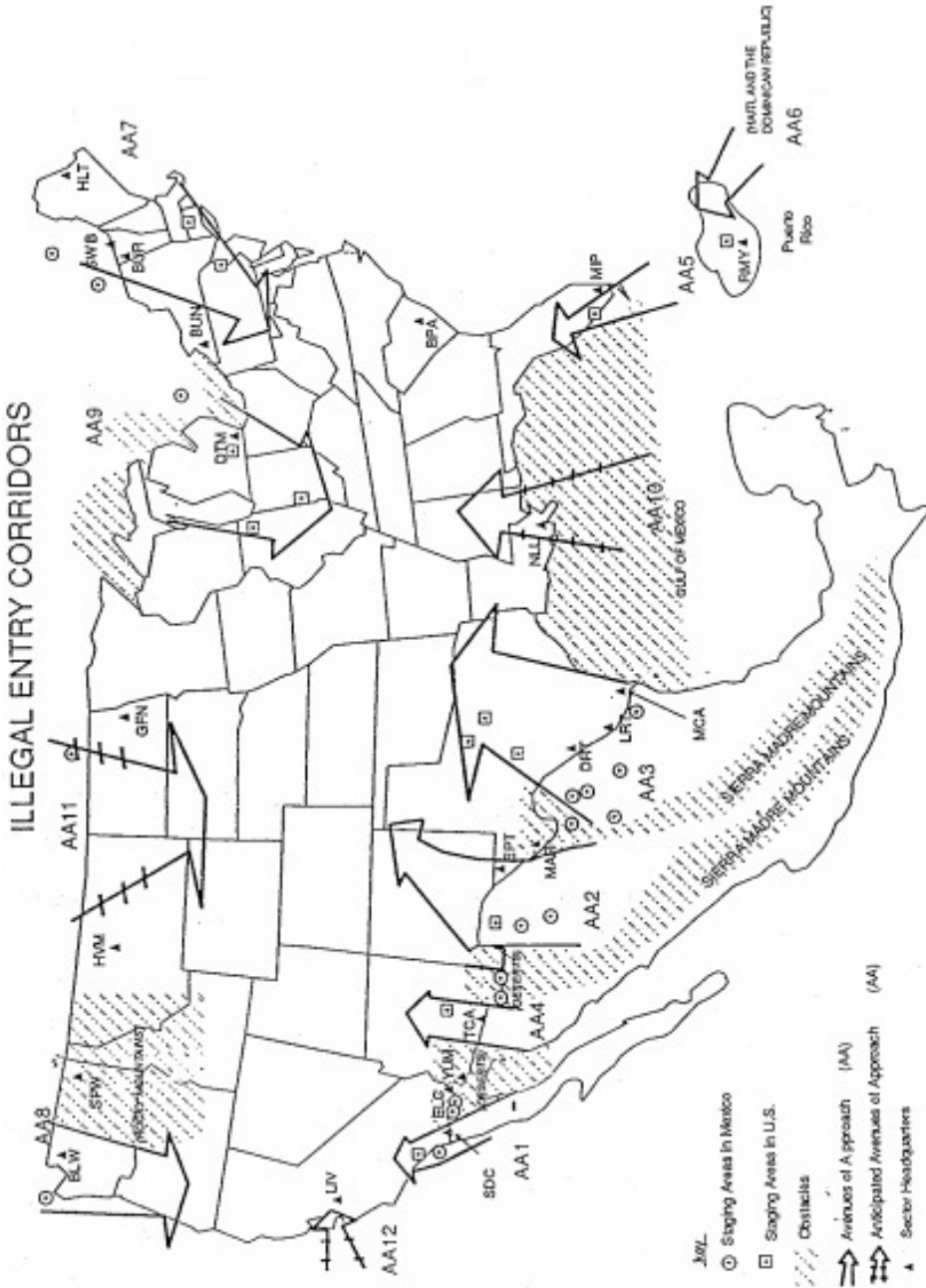
FIGURE 3.   Map showing US borders as at risk of invasion (1994 Border Patrol Report Map, cited in Loyd 2014).

Maps produced and disseminated by US Border Patrol are a small subset of a much larger phenomenon that employs mapping and spatial analyses as core technologies of border security surveillance. In 2001, ESRI – the producer and vendor of ArcGIS, the industry-standard commercial Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software – published a news article highlighting the usefulness of their products to "maximize" Mexico–USA border security enforcement (Sweeney 2001). They detailed how spatial analyses were the most vital tool for Border Patrol's ability to "patrol and protect" the border. According to William Veal, then Sector Chief in San Diego, GIS provides the ultimate technical backdrop to all levels of border policing activity (Veal 2003, 41). Used in conjunction with the vast network of remote sensors, lookout towers, and agent-carried GPS units, GIS provides a streamlined database of spatial information that can be marshalled to provide immediate real-time information of suspected migrant activity. Specifically, Veal argues that GIS facilitates surveillance of migrant activity "in remote border areas" (Veal 2003, 41). GIS thus provides the underpinning framework to the surveillance of those areas, such as the Sonoran Desert, that have been left open according to the precepts of PTD. It is GIS that facilitates the interconnection of these open, "natural" areas with those areas of explicit security infrastructure. At the same time, GIS – by not constructing clearly visible infrastructure such as walls and checkpoints – allows these areas to retain their "natural" appearance external to the border security apparatus.

This symbiosis between ESRI and Border Patrol is hardly surprising: following long-standing critiques of mapmaking as technology of power, GIS has been accused of being particularly suited to surveillance and control, and fetishizing a positivist and objectivist framework that cleanses the map of its own situatedness and conditions of possibility (Bondi and Domosh 1992; Smith 1992; Goss 1995; Kwan 2002; Elwood 2006). However, although GIS can serve as a tool of violence and control, it can also be used analytically to foreground spatial relationships that challenge and subvert structures of authority.

Since the mid-1990s, geographers have been exploring approaches to mapmaking, such as counter-mapping, that undermine dominant power structures enforced by institutional maps (e.g. Peluso 1995; Harris and Hazen 2006) by levying alternative forms of mapping (Wood 2010, 2015). Counter-mapping generally occurs where a disenfranchised group actively rejects imposed geographies and uses the authoritative voice of maps to stake claims on land rights, resource access, and historical narratives. Counter-mapping not only critiques how mapping technologies bolster imperial and state-level authority; it often actively combines mapping techniques with local knowledge to foster alternative forms of understanding, visualizing, and producing space.

Counter-mapping projects routinely resist the aesthetics and informatics of traditional mapping convention (Wood 2010; Kent 2012), using new ways of visualizing space and place to reterritorialize contested areas. More importantly for the topic of undocumented migration to the USA, counter-mapping reflexively engages with the politics of making the invisible visible, and attempts to map violence and marginalization without undercutting strategies of resistance (Tazzioli 2015). As Tazzioli writes, the "notion of 'counter' in counter-mapping has ultimately two meanings" (Tazzioli 2015, 4). First, it refers to making visible the effects of authority; in the case of migrants, these are the effects of immigration

policy, borders, and border security. Second, it "challenges the very possibility of mapping" these effects (Tazzioli 2015, 4).

In the context of the Mexico–USA borderlands, the above tenets underpin our counter-mapping project. This paper employs counter-mapping as a method of mapping the effects of the border security project, and of challenging the spatial ideology upon which border security is premised. This counter-mapping draws upon six years of field research in the Sonoran Desert mapping security infrastructure and migrant trails. By exploring how migrants are either forced or choose to move through surveilled landscapes and the resultant dangers they face, we aim to use counter-mapping both to surveil surveillance (i.e. reappropriate mapping authority to hold border policy accountable) and, in the process, reveal the mechanisms of silencing that such surveillance methods engender.

Unlike other counter-mapping projects (Hermann 2010; Wood 2010), we use conventional forms of data collection and visualization, while at the same time acknowledging that our maps are themselves artefacts of situated, incomplete, and politically motivated techniques of production. In our project, the priority is to make visible border security processes of erasure and not merely to unveil, but to unveil in a manner that is easy to understand and disseminate. However, our primary concern is that in using traditional modes of mapping, our data could be used to abet border security. Accordingly, we have waited over two years for publication and present our survey-based analyses in tabular format rather than as conventional maps.

Selective Surveillance: Risk, Death, and Invisibility

Our data is derived from surveying the desert between Nogales and Altar, from the border in the south to Three Points in the north, mapping 341 locations with concentrations of border-crossing material culture culture (Figure 4). These sites were typologized based on size, artefact concentration, and activity (humanitarian, migrant, or Border Patrol, smuggler, etc.). Sites were dated roughly with expiry dates on food packages, the presence of artefact types, and the state of object decay, which allowed a basic understanding of site chronologies. Furthermore, complete inventories of all objects found were performed for 80 of the largest sites.

Analysing objects left in the desert became an entry point to better understand what border security is and does. Material traces track how people move through space over time, index the costs of existing in the landscape, and provide an optic onto how the desert has been constructed to control movement and enact violence on migrants over the past 15 years. Combining material and spatial data with ethnographic interviews of migrants who had recently crossed the border, we examined how the combination with desert and security defined migrant mobility. Using objects we had found in the desert as interview prompts, these ethnographic interviews outlined not only migrant strategies of preparation and movement, but experiences of the desert landscape itself.

Movement

Our initial mapping project, never published, examined the landscape position of different migrant site types to determine migrant movement strategy in relation to security
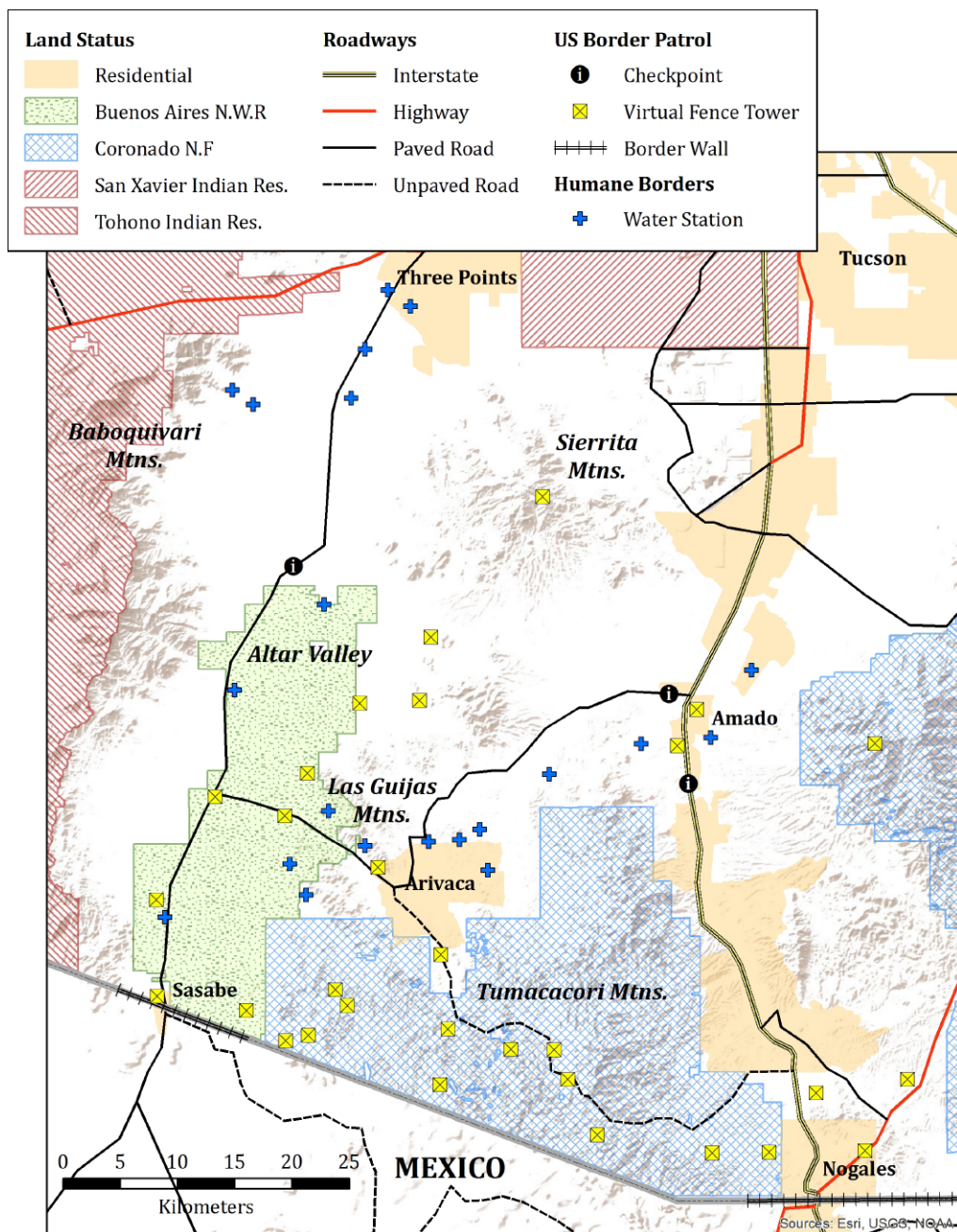
FIGURE 4.   The Nogales–Sasabe corridor.

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infrastructure. The results, while interesting, were also deeply troubling and problematic, as they only made sense within border security enforcement strategy. Our data mimicked, rather than critiqued, surveillance data. Furthermore, this analysis maintained the naturalized fetish of the border as the organizing point of analysis. We redirected our analyses to focus less on migrants as a stable category with a single strategy, and more on the changing effects of the border security apparatus on migrant mobility over time.

The spatial patterning of migrant sites was combined with each site's Earliest Date (ED), the earliest identifiable date at the site. Instead of relating sites to distance from the border, each site was defined according to remoteness (distance from major roads). Three major trends of movement change are identifiable over the past 15 years. First, a decrease in trails in the flat areas of Altar and Green Valley (Figure 4), and increasing activity through the Tumacocori Mountains; and second, an increasing number of campsites closer to the border. Campsites, defined by high numbers of cans and packaging from protein-rich foods (e.g. tuna, sardines, beans), are frequently connected to either *ad hoc* built shelters, or sheltered, hidden areas within the landscape, and represent areas where migrants spend significant amounts of time resting or hiding (Gokee and De León 2014). Our survey indicates that in 2010–2013, campsites were situated on average over 3 km further south than was the case in 2000–2005. A southern shift in campsites suggests that crossing had slowed and was less direct.

The reduced speed of desert crossing is corroborated by a trend in site locations in increasingly remote areas, away from established trails and roads (Figure 5). In early sites (with an ED of 2005 or earlier) over half of the sites were located on major desert trails. Between 2010 and 2013, only a quarter of the sites were directly on trails

FIGURE 5.　Photograph of two migrants in rugged terrain (photograph by "Memo" – see De León 2015 for detailed discussion of migrant photos shot *en route*).

(Table 1). Together, these patterns suggest that migrants have been moving away from established trails, taking more time to move through the desert, and moving through increasingly difficult areas to traverse as a means of avoiding detection. This at once increases the resource demand of the crossing (more food and water necessary) and the risk of injury or death.

TABLE 1. Site locations

Non-isolate Migrant Sites	2000–2005	2006–2009	2010–2013
On trail (n-count)	26	20	14
Off trail (n-count)	18	33	40
Total sites	44	53	54
Percentage of sites on trail	59%	38%	26%

Complementary to our survey, mortality data from Humane Borders shows increasingly frequent migrant deaths in remote sectors of the desert. Migrant deaths in 2001–2004 were clearly grouped around the three arterial roads (Figure 6), with three-quarters of migrant bodies found in Altar and Green Valley. In 2005–2008 the total number of bodies found between Sasabe and Nogales had tripled, with half of the deaths occurring in the rougher terrain of the Tumacocori Mountains (Figure 7). In 2009–2013, nearly two thirds of all bodies were found in the mountains between Altar and Green Valley (Figure 8), and the latest statistics from Humane Borders show this trend continuing (Humane Borders 2016). Notably, one third of all bodies found during the same period were concentrated in the southwestern-most section of the Tumacocori Mountains, a much more rugged landscape closer to the border and where only 5% of bodies were found in 2000–2004.

The patterns of slower, off-path movement and higher occurrences of death in rugged and remote locations are direct results of migrants trying to avoid detection in the wake of PTD. However, a central paradox within Humane Borders's data, as well as the material culture data collected by the UMP, is that the general trends they identify suggest their own incompleteness. As migrants are forced into more remote areas where bodies are more difficult to find, the statistics and maps will account for fewer of the actual numbers of migrant deaths (see also Beck *et al.* 2014 for more on the effects of desert scavengers on corpse visibility). Therefore, the blank spaces in our maps may well indicate – by their inaccessibility – regions of higher potential for migrant deaths and extreme crossing conditions. In other words, not only does the security apparatus direct migrants to move through areas with a higher risk of death, it also forces them into areas where, if they do die, their bodies are unlikely to be found.

Conclusions

This mapping project intends to do two things. First, we aim to give presence to migrant traces and bear witness to those aspects of migration being erased jointly by the desert and the security apparatus. In pushing migrants into remote areas, border security intentionally directs migrants into the desert and outsources the resultant violence against migrants to landscapes concealed from public view. As migrants die in
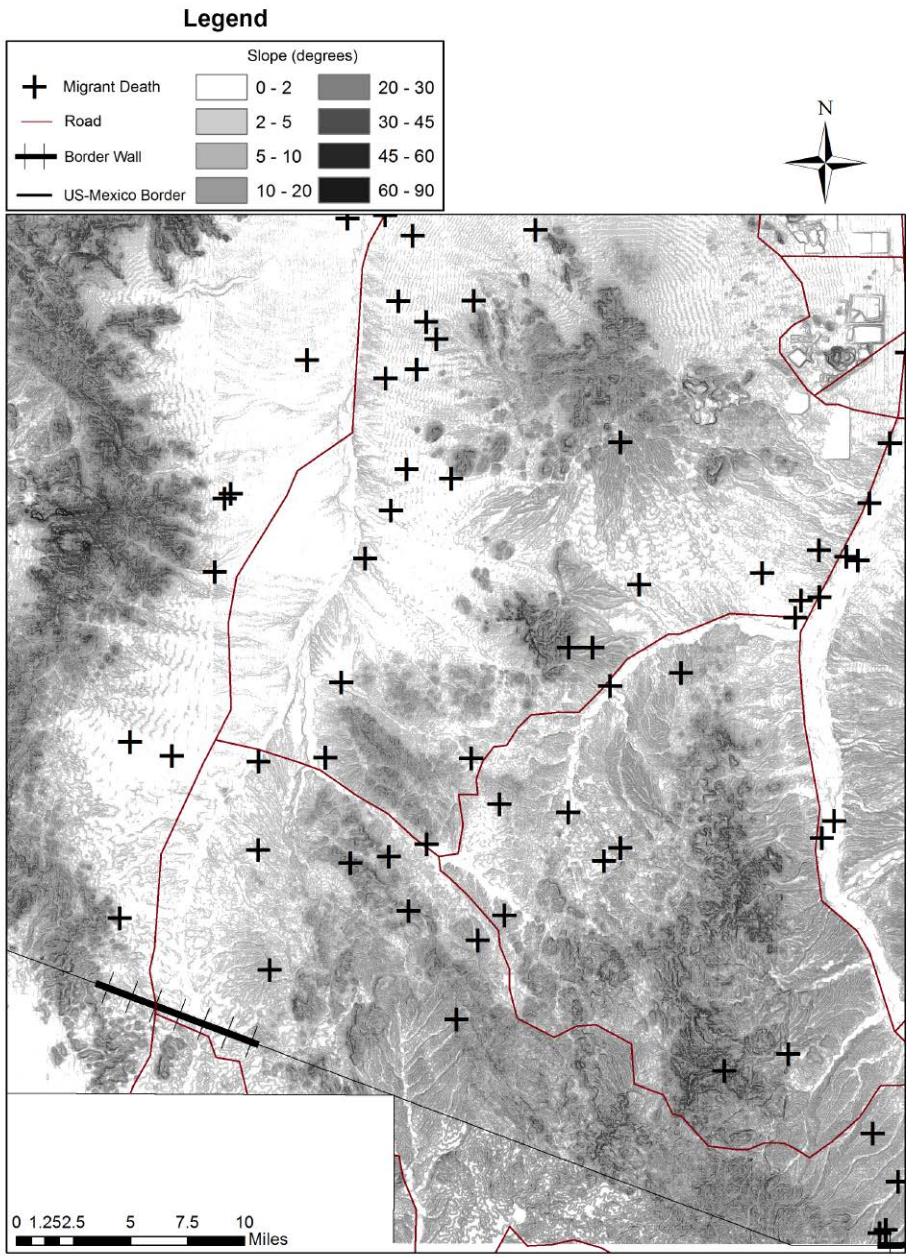
FIGURE 6.   Migrant death locations in the Nogales–Sasabe corridor 2001–2004 (data from Humane Borders).
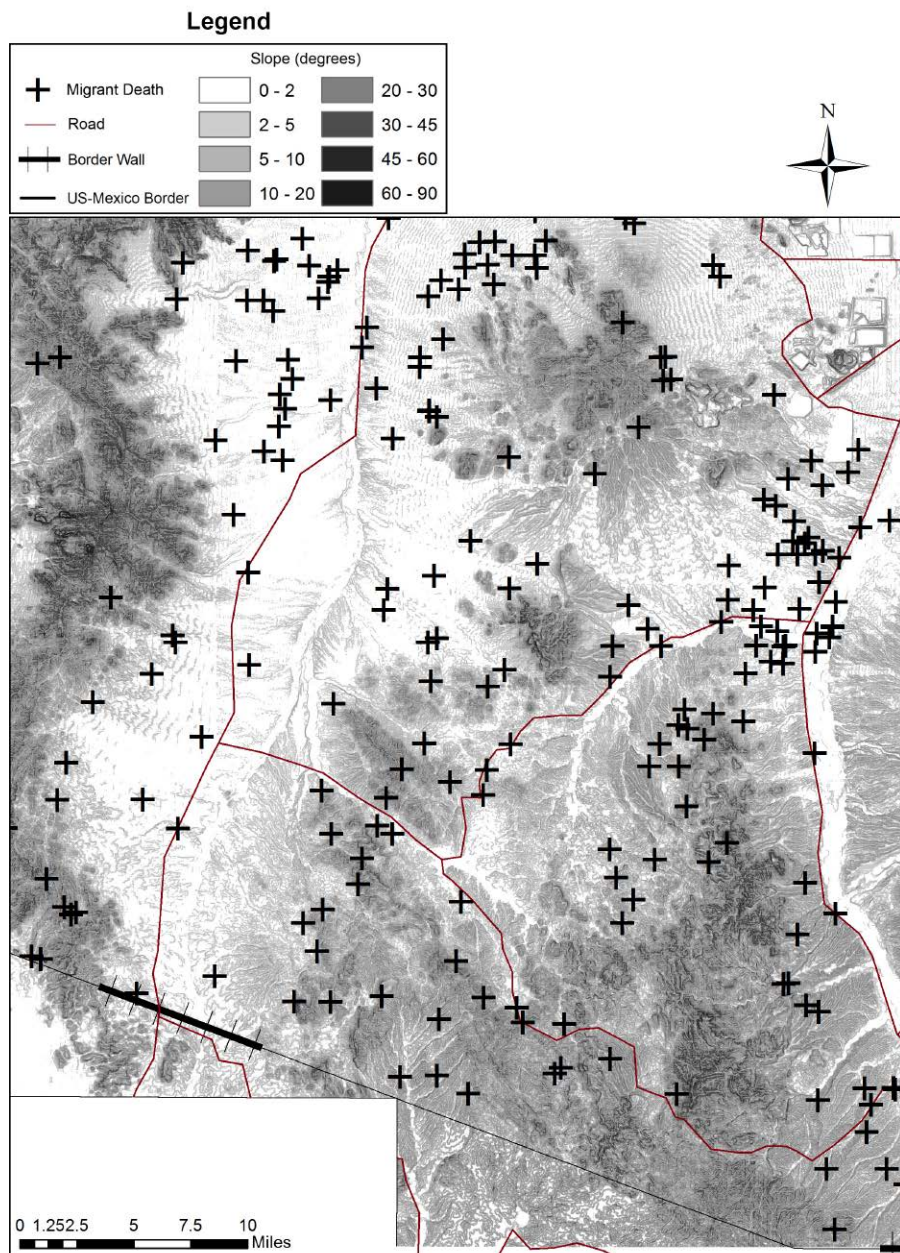
FIGURE 7. Migrant death locations in the Nogales–Sasabe corridor 2005–2008 (data from Humane Borders).
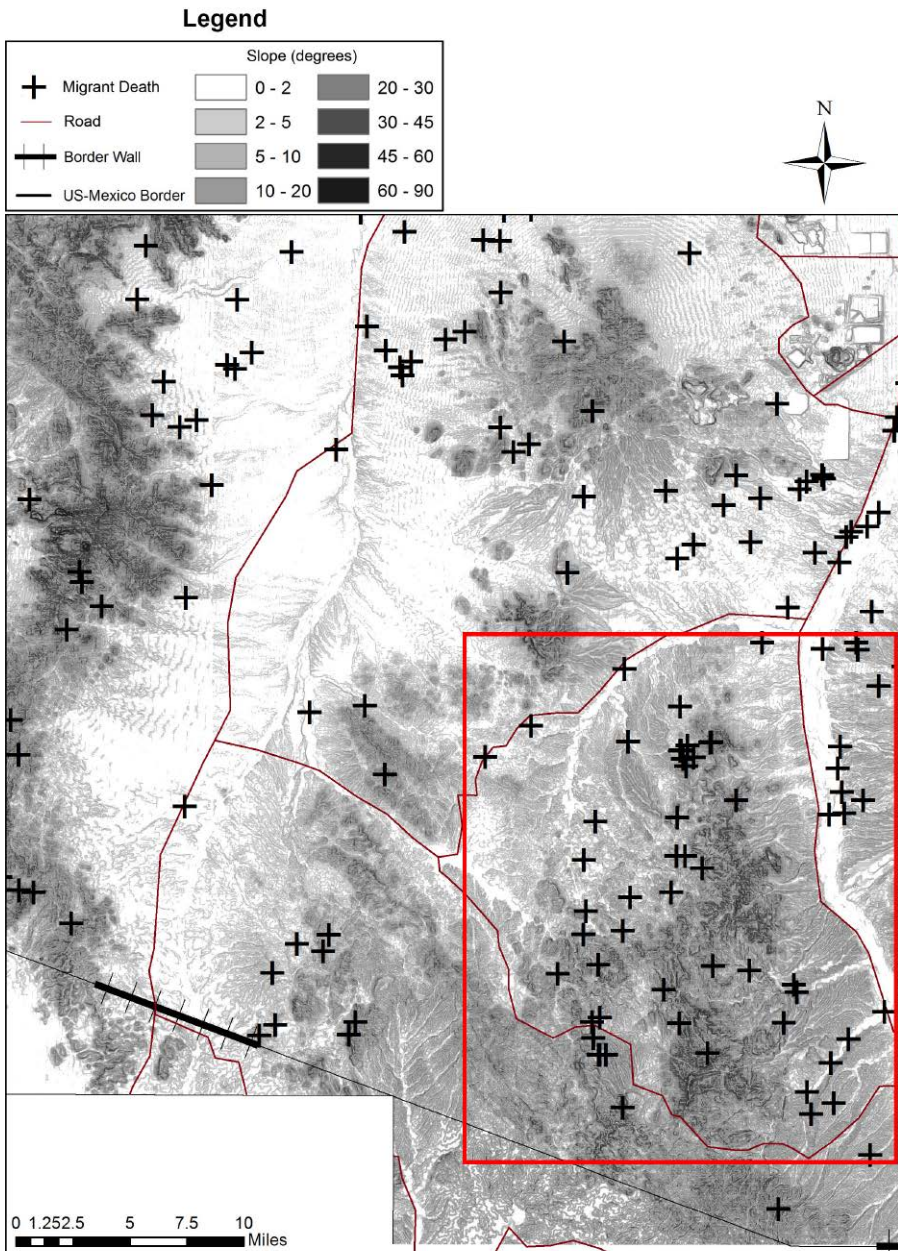
FIGURE 8.   Migrant death locations in the Nogales–Sasabe corridor 2009–2013. Red box indicates southwestern portion of the Tumacocori Mountains (data from Humane Borders).

increasingly remote locations the rapid decomposition of their bodies by the elements makes it less likely that their remains will be recovered (Beck *et al.* 2014). Accordingly, the number of migrant deaths will rise while the number of recorded deaths may stay the same or even decline.

Second, this project attempts to critique and undercut the naturalized violence and erasure that constitutes the border security apparatus. We argue that the desert, despite being touted as "nature", is not distinct from walls and checkpoints, and is utilized by security because it appears separate and outside of human control. This critique, rooted in the very same technologies of spatial analysis used by security forces, reveals border security's reliance on a geographically based foundation of deniability and erasure. The purpose of counter-mapping the borderlands is not only to draw links between the violence of the security apparatus and the landscape, but to deconstruct the central conceptual pillars of the apparatus itself: i.e., that the border is a natural line, and that the desert is harsh and brutal but unconnected to human activities.

However, our mapping project – including the various maps both seen and unseen, published and those unpublishable – is not an objective representation of borderland interactions; they are products of specific conditions of possibility mediated by both border security and the desert. This project is itself situated, congealing the traces of our mapping process, identifying places we went and those we could not go due to the limits of our own bodies and methods. Despite years of surveying this area, attempts to map and identify migrant sites were constantly constrained by the landscape itself. Large numbers of our sites were encountered at the very edge of our field of vision, at the edge of our own physical, financial, and personal limits of survey. Migrant sites are increasingly remote, hidden, and therefore beyond our limits as surveyors.

This is where the two points converge; our data represent the manners in which a changing border security apparatus remakes and remaps the desert as a violent tool for silencing and hiding the traumas of migration, and is itself an example of this silencing process. Both the content and gaps in our data point toward this erasure. At the same time, the ability of our maps and analyses to represent anything speaks to the unique discriminatory practices that the border security apparatus upholds, as our research was only possible due to our own positions within the regimes of citizenship, race, and class that border security recognizes. In other words, the data we collected indexed the ability of us, the researchers, to move through a contested landscape, unhindered and relatively unmolested, and juxtaposed our privileged position with those of the migrants. Despite walking the same desert paths, our outings were leisurely hikes dedicated to research, while those of the migrants were struggles for survival.

With clandestine migration occurring throughout the world, and public attention within Western nations flitting between sensationalized tragedies of Mediterranean crossings, bodycounts in the Sonora Desert, and the increasingly shrill rhetoric concerning the "threat" of immigrants to "civilization", the importance of politically engaged research on undocumented migration is incredibly high. To maintain its critical commitment to shedding light on the endemic violences of immigration policing and to doing no harm against the victims of this policing, this research on clandestine immigration can neither reject out of hand the use of rigorous data collection and dissemination techniques used

by governing authorities, nor can it naively presume that these methods can be easily repurposed to speak truth to power. Counter-mapping, as we imagine it in this project, seeks to thread this needle through continual reflexivity over its methodology and constant concern over the potential value or harm of its data. Rather than attempting to reject spatial analysis as a technique *in toto*, or lionize it as the single tool to counter oppression, counter-mapping's approach to spatial analysis is much more modest. Relying on spatial analysis as a core part of long-term archaeological survey, counter-mapping provides a critical perspective on how a landscape has been designed and built. The survey is itself situated and historical, a fact which does not diminish the veracity of its data but helps to flesh out the contours of the landscape and the manner in which it has been produced. As a mode of critique which is reflexive, political, and committed to rigorous data collecting fieldwork, counter-mapping provides an ethical and politically salient methodology for the archaeological study of clandestine migration.

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☐ Place making in Non-places: Migrant Graffiti in Rural Highway Box Culverts

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Rural Roads and Undocumented Migration In Southern Arizona: An Overview

This paper describes a particular material phenomenon resulting from the mass movement of undocumented migrants across the border from Mexico into Arizona in the USA. Focusing on the rural highways that weave through the borderlands, I examine how sites of sanctioned interstate and international traffic overlap with irregular or undocumented migration. Alongside and underneath these roadways, one finds traces of the clandestine foot traffic of undocumented people. I argue that through these traces one can track the recent history of migration in the region. Specifically, though one can currently (2016) find evidence of undocumented migrants walking alongside the border region's remote highways, the dates and context of this evidence points to a decrease in these sites'