Cactus Carvings and Desert Defecations: Narrating Exclusion through Nature in the United States-Mexico Borderlands
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Introduction

In the late 1980s, the United States border with Mexico was increasingly represented as a “conduit for a variety of defined ‘threats’ to the United States,” including drugs, “illegal” workers, and social instability (Ackleson 2005, page 172; Andreas 2000; Nevins 2002). In reaction to these perceived threats, in 1994, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) initiated the Southwest Border Enforcement Strategy (U.S. INS 1996). The strategy was intended to deter unauthorized entries by shifting border crossers away from busy urban areas like San Diego, California. Outside of urban areas, INS officials calculated, “natural barriers such as rivers, mountains, and the harsh terrain of the desert” would serve as “deterrents to illegal entry” (U.S. GAO 2001: 24; for further analysis of “natural barriers,” see Sundberg 2011).

Although the INS strategy failed to deter unauthorized crossings, it succeeded in shifting this traffic to “more remote” areas that are “difficult to cross” (INS 1996: 3; Cornelius 2001, 2005; Hing 2004; Nevins 2002) (see Figure 1). Undocumented migrants now traverse harsh, uninhabited terrain, as over forty percent of border landscapes are federally designated as national protected areas and managed to promote environmental diversity and protect endangered species (U.S. GAO 2004). The geographical shift in unauthorized border traffic to rural and protected areas impacts the border environment. Thousands of undocumented migrants traverse protected areas while federal border enforcement authorities respond by escalating operations (Cordova and de la Parra 2007; Defenders of Wildlife 2006; GNEB 2007).
While U.S. media and government narratives of the 1980s and early 1990s framed the border as a conduit of threats by drug smugglers and “illegal” workers, popular discourses of geopolitical threat in the late 1990s and 2000s began to position undocumented migrants as an environmental threat (Adamson 2002; Hill 2006; Sundberg and Kaserman 2007; Piekielek 2009; Jaquette Ray 2010). For example, a report to the U.S. Congress on the impacts of “undocumented aliens” in public lands (U.S. DOI 2002, page 2) states, “the extremely valuable, and many times irreplaceable, natural and cultural resources [in Arizona Federal lands] are in jeopardy.” The Arizona Daily Star contends: “Ecologically, the entire border region is getting hammered by wave after wave of illegal border crossers” (Tobin 2002c). Another piece details the threat to nature: “Another problem with the heavy traffic are the large amounts of empty water jugs, old clothes and food scraps left behind by crossers” (Yang 2003). A story in National Parks regarding cross-border traffic in protected areas quotes a National Park Service official as saying: “There is a crisis down here, and it’s going to take future Americans’ heritage away from them” (Vanderpool 2002b).

In text after text, government agencies and media outlets represent nature in border-protected areas as under threat. Discourses of threat are significant, David Campbell argues, for they work to constitute and secure the imagined communities said to be contained within national boundaries (Dalby 2002; Kuus 2002; Paasi 1996, 1999). In “telling us what to fear,” discourses of danger “have been able to fix who ‘we’ are” (Campbell 1992, p. 170). This chapter examines how representations of border-protected areas work to forge notions of “us” and “them,” thereby delimiting “belonging” in the U.S.A. Who is made to embody “Americans”? And, who is said to threaten this imagined community and how?
To address these questions, we examine representations of environmental impacts in border-protected areas found in state and national media, government documents, local newsletters, and internet sites centered on Arizona, the state with the highest increase in undocumented border crossings since 1994 and the largest percentage of federally protected lands along the border. As we illustrate, discourses about border-protected areas cast nature as the embodiment of the “American” nation and its national heritage. The notion of natural/national heritage, we argue, serves to delimit the body politic as Anglo-American\(^1\) and cements this community’s claims to territory. Undocumented migrants are said to threaten “America’s” heritage and, as a consequence, framed as inadmissible to the body politic. The association between migrants and environmental threat has become so hegemonic that it now is transferred onto predominantly white humanitarian groups who leave water bottles on migrant trails in an effort to save migrant lives. We conclude by asking how such associations further delimit national belonging.

**Methodology: Discourse Analysis**

The argument presented here is based on a discourse analysis of hundreds of documents dating from 2001 to the present, from a wide range of sources focusing specifically on border-protected areas.\(^2\) Discourse analysis is concerned with the role of language in constructing and organizing social reality (Tonkiss 2004). Discourses do more than reflect or describe the world: they are productive of and therefore have material

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\(^1\) The term Anglo-American is used commonly in the Southwest to refer to English-speaking, whites of non-Hispanic descent.

\(^2\) If we had included texts related to other themes on the border, such as the number of deaths in the borderlands, human rights groups, or environmental damage caused by the U.S. Border Patrol (which has only recently gained attention), our analysis would necessarily address a variety of other factors.
implications in the world (Rose 2001). Political geographers, for instance, argue that discourses play a key role in producing geopolitical imaginaries (Berg and Van Houtum 2003). For Anssi Passi (1999), political boundaries are not simply fixed lines on a map, but are constituted through the discourses of every day life at multiple and intersecting scales, including but not isolated to the state. Joanne Sharp’s work (1996) demonstrates the importance of popular culture and the media as important sites wherein hegemonic conceptions of nation are (re)produced.

Drawing on Judith Butler’s framing of the gendered subject as produced through repetitive performances of regulated norms, Sharp (1996) argues that the repeated (re)citation of similarly structured national identity narratives in the media plays a role in constituting their meanings as commonsensical and thus hegemonic. From this perspective, the production and sedimentation of meaning is an effect of citationality, meaning the continuous repetition and circulation of narratives and images that conform to iterable norms (Braun 2003).

Along these lines, we are continually surprised by the similarities within and between a diverse set of narratives about border-protected areas drawn from academic articles, government documents and websites, testimonies to the U.S. Congress, national media sources, local news outlets and newsletters as well as an extremist web site called Desert Invasion. No matter the source, most of the texts consistently rely upon similar rhetorical strategies – metaphors and word clusters – to represent nature in protected areas, threats to nature, immigration as well as how these relate to the nation. That there are commonalities between mainstream media articles and extremist websites is indicative of the hegemonic meanings they cite and invite. That said, visual and textual representations are always open to multiple interpretations.
Nature & National Heritage

In the United States, nationally designated protected areas have been important sites through which the state narrates the nation, thereby defining an imagined community with a shared history (after Anderson 1991). To build our argument, we briefly highlight three commonly accepted features of this history. First, nature has been woven into national narratives since nineteenth century elite Anglo-Americans gave natural landscapes a significant place in constructions of the expanding nation’s cultural identity (Nash 1967; Runte 1987). Even as Europe had ruins, castles, and other great works of antiquity and achievement, Anglo-Americans such as Albert Richardson of the New York Tribune [1857] pointed to incomparable “earth monuments” (cited in Runte 1987: 21-22). For Richardson, “In grand natural curiosities and wonders, all other countries combined fall far below [the United States]” (cited in Runte 1987: 21-22).

Secondly, the USA distinguished itself by being the first nation-state to set aside natural areas for the enjoyment of “all” its citizens, as opposed to the select few (Runte 1987). In a country where encounters with wilderness on the frontier came to be seen as productive of a distinctive “American” character and set of democratic values, protected areas were meant to provide a site for the development and restoration of morally and physically fit, patriotic citizens (Cronon 1996; Kosek 2004; Runte 1987). Although the creation of federally designated protected areas was and is a contested process, lands designated as national spaces are available to the state to narrate the nation. Indeed, in the early decades of the twentieth century, the preservation movement linked the protection of wilderness areas to the protection
of a “superior” Anglo-American heritage and hegemonic position in the nation (Brechin 1996; DeLuca 1999; Kosek 2004). As such, narratives linking national belonging to nature were inscribed with exclusions.

Third, protected areas have come to be framed as the nation’s heritage, meaning “something transmitted by or acquired from a predecessor” as well as “something possessed as a result of one's natural situation or birth.” For instance, President Richard Nixon's administration expanded the number of protected areas in order to, as his first interior secretary put it in 1969, “fulfill the people's need always to see and understand their heritage of history and the natural world” (cited in Mackintosh 2004).

In addition to playing a key role in producing an imagined community, spaces designated as national work “to mediate people’s experience of the abstract idea of national territory” (Cerwonka 2004, page 29). In other words, such spaces “represent (stand in for) the territoriality of the nation. They invite people to feel an ownership of the land claimed by the nation-state” (Cerwonka 2004, page 29). By invoking the people’s claims over territory, nationally designated natural areas create and naturalize the connection between space and nation, the national body and the individual body.

**Natural/National Heritage in Representations of Border-Protected Areas**

Government and media representations of border-protected areas cite these histories to position nature as the nation’s heritage and protected areas as the embodiment of the nation. The following quote from the Desert Invasion’s home page is one example:

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3 Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary accessed on August 9, 2005.
Our fragile National Monuments, National Wildlife Refuges, National Parks, and National Forests along the U.S. southern border are being annihilated— not by natural forces or by unwitting tourists, but instead by an overwhelming number of illegal aliens... who rampage through and destroy these supposedly protected areas.

Through the repetitive citation of the word national, as in “National” monuments, “National” wildlife refuges, “National” parks, and “National” forests, protected areas are demarcated as national spaces. In this way, damage to border-protected areas is scripted as of national relevance.

This discursive move is pervasive in other textual and visual representations of border-protected areas as well. Through the repeated use of prefixes like “public,” “national,” or “American,” nature in border-protected areas is cast as belonging to the nation and all who are considered to be part of that “American public.” In an article in National Parks Magazine, for instance, nature on the Arizona-Mexico border is referred to as “America’s most beautiful desert treasures” (Vanderpool 2002b). Journalist Mitch Tobin of the Arizona Daily Star makes frequent use of this discursive move, mentioning “America’s natural jewels” (2002c) in one piece and “America’s natural gems” (2002a) in another. The repetitive use of possessive prefixes effectively establishes natural places as national spaces. And nature is naturalized as a component of America’s heritage. The Sonora Desert may span the political boundaries between the US and Mexico, but visual and textual representations of border-protected areas contain desert lands within the territorial boundaries of the nation. Such statements not only invite a connection between territory and the nation, they also literally bring the nation into being.

References to America conjure up a larger community to whom these natural places belong, and this belonging is referenced through possessives such as ‘ours’ and ‘yours.’ In
naming these national spaces as “ours,” the above quote from the *Desert Invasion* web site invites the reader to position him or herself within this community. Another example invoking belonging comes from an article entitled, “Perilous parks: Danger funnels northward.” The accompanying photograph shows a muscular, Anglo-American U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service law enforcement officer holding a semiautomatic rifle; the heading states: “Stand by your lands” (Tobin 2002a). The message explicitly expressed here is that public officials are engaged in protecting nature/nation from danger moving northward through protected areas. The use of the word “your” to preface “lands” invites individual readers to identify with this hyper-masculine white male figure and his militarized strategy for defending their nation’s natural spaces.

In addition, representations of border-protected areas (re)cite nature’s place in the nation’s history. The article cited above quotes a National Park Service official as saying: “There is a crisis down here, and it’s going to take future Americans’ heritage away from them” (Vanderpool 2002b). Here, the notion of natural heritage works to conjure an imagined community comprised of past generations of Americans who have protected nature for present and future generations. The *Desert Invasion* web site also invokes this trans-generational community by pointing out that border-protected areas have been “set aside by Congress to preserve for future generations.” The notion of heritage appears repeatedly. For instance, the *National Geographic News* equates environmental degradation in border-protected areas with the destruction of “America’s natural heritage” (Clynes 2003). An article in the *Wall Street Journal* about threats to the “natural treasures” in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument quotes a staff biologist as saying “We’re losing our legacy here” (Fialka 2003).
**Nature’s delimitations**

In sum, government, media, and popular narratives about border-protected areas weave nature into productions of the nation-as-imagined-community. And yet, notions of natural history and heritage are not neutral; rather they articulate certain trajectories, while ignoring others (Cerwonka 2004). If nationally designated protected areas are meant to celebrate the heritage of Americans, thereby contributing to the production of an American nation, whose vision of national heritage do these discourses privilege? And, how do discourses about border-protected areas delimit belonging in the nation?

Asking these questions is crucial, for national parks across the nation – most famously Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Glacier – were established upon territory inhabited and claimed by native peoples (Spence 1999). From the mid-nineteenth century on, Native Americans were forcibly removed from these places on the grounds that they did not know how to appreciate wilderness (Olwig 2002, page 201). Dispossessed of their lands, rights to livelihood, and sovereignty, Native Americans were forcibly included within the territorial boundaries of the United States, but excluded from the body politic. In specific reference to protected areas in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, it is critical to recall that the entire southwest region was acquired from Mexico through imperial aggression in the mid-nineteenth century. Although Mexican citizens (a category that included Christianized native peoples) were promised citizenship as inhabitants of the U.S. under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), the rights of all but those deemed to be white were denied (Mechaca 2001). The majority of Mexican- and Native-Americans subsequently suffered loss of property as well as political, social, and economic marginalization (Mechaca 2001; Kosek 2006). Native Americans were
further dispossessed by the creation of Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in Arizona as well as other protected areas in the southwest in the early twentieth century (Piekielek 2009). Seen through this lens, protected areas celebrate nature and national identity by erasing the (continuing) violence originating in acts of imperial dispossession and exclusion. In this way, they symbolize and reproduce Anglo-American cultural hegemony in the telling of the nation’s history. By embodying the nation through nature and repeatedly rationalizing the need to protect nature on the border in terms of saving the nation’s natural heritage, contemporary visual and textual representations continue to naturalize an exclusionary vision of the nation and its heritage as white.

The Nature of Threat in Border-Protected Areas

As noted in the chapter’s introduction, the Southwest Border Enforcement Strategy has resulted in environmental impacts to border-protected areas (Cordova and de la Parra 2007; Defenders of Wildlife 2006; GNEB 2007). Since the early to mid 2000s, some federal land managers on the border have documented a range of impacts they attribute to unauthorized crossers, including the creation of unauthorized tails and roads, trash, fire scars, and disturbances to vegetative and animal species (US GAO 2010). Land managers at Arizona’s Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge suggest an estimated 1300 miles of “illegal” trails have been created (US F&WS 2007; see also McIntyre and Weeks 2002). The Border Agency Fire Council (2005) attributes the start of several wildfires to unauthorized migrants’ campfires. And, the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality cites an estimated 2000 tons of discarded materials left annually by migrants crossing Arizona’s 370-mile border with Mexico (Arizona Border Trash 2011; see also DOI 2002 and Madsen 2007).
Although less studied, Border Patrol operations in border-protected areas also have long-term environmental implications. This is especially the case since 2006, when the Department of Homeland Security began building over 700 miles of border fencing, which has closed public land in border protected areas, fragmented ecological communities and blocked wildlife migration, disrupted the flow of watersheds, and in some locations, severely altered biophysical formations like mountains and wetlands (Cordova and de la Parra 2007; U.S. NPS 2008; Flesch et al. 2010).

While there is no doubt that U.S. border policies have had tremendous environmental implications, the following section examines how such impacts are represented in media, government, and popular narratives. As we illustrate, undocumented migrants are represented as the cause of environmental damage in border-protected areas in two primary ways: as injuring nature and contaminating nature (see also Piekielek 2009; Jaquette Ray 2010). How do these representations script belonging in popular discourses?

Injuring nature

One way in which the environmental consequences of unauthorized border-crossings are narrated is through metaphors for the human body. A quote from the Arizona Daily Star illustrates this trend: “They’ll [abandoned vehicles] probably have to be removed by helicopter to minimize further damage to the cryptobiotic soil that serves as the living ‘skin’ of the desert” (Tobin 2002b). Here, the desert’s soil becomes its skin, a word that evokes associations with the human body and allows for the message to be tangibly apprehended by the senses. The following example also invites association with the body’s skin: “Smugglers
have left Organ Pipe – 95 percent of which is designated wilderness – blemished with tons of garbage and dozens of junked vehicles” (Barcott 2003).

The body is invoked in numerous instances wherein nature is said to be subject to scarring from border-crossers. In one case, drug traffickers are said to have “scarred a unique volcanic desert” (Watson 2002a); in other cases, this evocative word is used to characterize the impacts of unauthorized trails: “Foot trails and car tracks scar the delicate sandy ground in all directions” (Dellios 2003). In addition, the murder of park ranger Kris Eggle in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument is framed as the “latest wound for a fragile piece of Sonoran Desert” (Tobin 2002c). Through the productive power of association, nature is transfigured; it becomes a body that is vulnerable to blemishes, scars, and wounds.

The utilization of the body as a metaphor for nature invites questions about whose body is made vulnerable to threat in these instances. The Report to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations on Impacts Caused by Undocumented Aliens Crossing Federal Lands in Southeast Arizona (U.S. DOI 2002: 2) provides a hint, in that the document frames federal lands in Southeast Arizona as “major arteries for smuggling humans and controlled substances into the United States.” Here, a corporeal metaphor is drawn upon to embody both nature and nation, and border-protected areas are cast as one of the national body’s most important parts: the arteries that move blood to and from the heart. The corporeal metaphor allows for threats to nature in border-protected areas to be understood as threats to the national body.

Drawing from this realm of corporeal associations, Tobin (2002a) suggests that public lands on the border have become “casualties in the cat-and-mouse game between law enforcement and illegal entrants.” Here, protected areas are cast as bodies fallen in the
struggle between the nation and undocumented entrants. In another article, a law enforcement officer from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is quoted as asking: “Is this [a national wildlife refuge in Arizona] just going to become a sacrifice area?” (Tobin 2002b). The image of protected areas as bodies sacrificed in the name of the nation reappears in another piece: “Manager of the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge 50 miles South of Tucson, says it will sacrifice some of its pristine property for homeland defense” (Foster 2003). The Desert Invasion website also makes use of this trope: “These beautiful and pristine areas, set aside by Congress to preserve for future generations, are quickly being turned into National Sacrifice Areas.” In using the term sacrifice, which is most often associated with the soldier’s willingness to offer him or herself to defend the nation (Paasi 1999, page 79), nature in protected areas is cast as a body sacrificed and fallen in the name of the nation, framed as under assault by “illegal immigration.” This is also to say that discourses about threats to nature’s integrity also bring the nation into being as a body vulnerable to damage, assault, or attack.

Contaminating nature

In addition to causing injury to the national body, undocumented migrants are framed as threatening border-protected areas with contamination. Indeed, virtually all media and government representations of border-protected areas make consistent and explicit associations between undocumented migrants and contamination in the form of defiled nature, trash, and human waste. The Arizona Daily Star summarizes a survey of environmental contamination at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in these terms: “if a visitor were to pick a point at random in the wilderness, then walk three miles in any direction, he would likely see four vehicle tracks, seven pieces of trash, nine water bottles and four incidents of
‘major damage,’ such as saguaros carved with names or rocks stained with graffiti” (Tobin 2002b). Damage to the saguaros in particular is detailed in another piece: “Towering saguaro cacti, hundreds of years old, have been carved by migrants with the names of Mexican villages” (Watson 2002b). An image of a tree carving is featured on the cover of the report to the U.S. Congress (U.S. DOI 2002).

The following quote follows a pattern of making long lists detailing how nature is defiled (Turf 2003):

Discarded pants and plastic bags are caught in a sotol plant. Hundreds of discarded water jugs are only the beginning of the problem. Jumex drink cans, tuna tins, Coca-Cola containers, pants, shoes, women's underwear and discarded feminine hygiene products, chips and bread bags, emptied canned fruit containers, hats and a tequila bottle blanket the landscape.

Another piece states: “discarded water bottles, backpacks, hot sauce containers, and Spanish language comic books littered the ground around a sprawling Ironwood tree, estimated to be 1,000 years old” (Watson 2002a). An article from the Tucson Weekly states, “garbage is strewn everywhere” (Vanderpool 2002a). The article quotes a border-protected area employee as saying: “The amount of trash that we have to pick up annually is incredible” (Vanderpool 2002a). After listing types of trash, a local news outlet concludes: “Some border areas look like city dumps” (Yang 2003).

With few exceptions, border-crossers are framed as the cause of wounding and contaminating nature. One mechanism for isolating undocumented migrants as the cause of damage is to simply name them as such. The following quote is a good example of this discursive strategy: “The flow of these illegal ‘invaders’ will continue, and the trash will never cease” (Dare 2003). The association between environmental damage and border-crossers is naturalized through repeated citations linking them together. After a list of the
kinds of items left behind, a resident of southern Arizona is quoted as saying: "We're used to the trash along the road and all of that... But having it this extensive, it was just as if they brought all of Mexico here. ... I didn't know how people could have that much trash" (Turf 2003). In this headline, the meaning is clear: “Dumping, illegal immigrants go hand-in-hand” (Rothstein 2004). Some texts go so far as to characterize border-crossers as ecologically reckless, as in this quote from the Tucson Citizen: “More trash sites are likely until illegal immigrants stop coming over the border or start cleaning up after themselves” (Turf 2003).

Very few texts provide background information or balance lines explaining the wider political and policy contexts in which geographical shifts in border traffic have occurred. Even fewer make the connection between crossings in protected areas and Border Patrol enforcement measures or the Patrol’s own impact on the environment. Rather, the corporeal presence of undocumented migrants in border-protected areas is repeatedly associated with defiling and contaminating nature.

Quotes about saguaros carved with the names of Mexican towns and ancient Ironwood trees littered with Spanish language trash give the contamination of nature a national significance. Here, “1,000 years old” ironwood trees and “hundreds of years old” saguaros are recast as “earth monuments,” which, as noted above, have been foundational to American nationhood since the 19th century. If, as suggested in the previous section, nature in protected areas is territorialized and claimed by the nation, then contaminating nature and turning it into a city dump represents a threat to the nation. Former CNN host Lou Dobbs suggests as much when he interprets such developments at Organ Pipe Cactus as injurious to the body politic: “American citizens are losing privileges within one of the most beautiful national parks” (Lou Dobbs Tonight 2003).
Migrant Bodies and the Logics of Contamination

Protected areas throughout the U.S. experience problems similar to those in protected areas bordering Mexico; however, they are interpreted in very different ways. Popular places like Yellowstone National Park, for instance, are experiencing serious and long-term forms of contamination such as over-crowding and air pollution (Gourley 1997; Nolte 2004; Sanchez 2004). And yet, a management assistant at Yellowstone frames environmental damage caused by park visitors in the following terms: “This park is just being loved to death” (as cited in Bohrer 2002). Here, the environmental impacts of legitimate park visitors are framed in terms of love. Linking acts of environmental destruction with love of parks, which stand in for the nation, is to position legitimate park users as belonging to the nation.

In contrast, representations of border-protected areas draw direct links between undocumented migrants and the injuring and contamination of nature. Indeed, contamination seems to emanate from their bodies (see also Hill 2006). This is made particularly evident by the frequent references to human waste deposits attributed to border-crossers in media articles and government documents, including reports to the federal government and the legislative record. “Tons of trash and high concentrations of human waste are left behind by undocumented aliens” reads the House report on the impacts of border-crossers in southeast Arizona (U.S. DOI 2002, page 3). This report bemoans the degrading impacts on the scenic value ascribed to protected areas and alludes to potential health hazards as waste enters the water supply. In his statement to Congress, Congressperson Tancredo, who led the Caucus on

4 For example, Slivka’s (2003) article entitled “‘It’s the Wild West every night’ along the border” states that “North Cascades National Park in Washington has more serious crimes per visitor than any park in the country.”
Immigration Reform, said: “They [immigrants] stream across the border everyday day and every night. They dump tons of trash and human feces in places that are set aside for their scenic beauty” (Congressional Record 2003, page H2918).

Another example from an Internet article, which is cited in the Congressional Record, states: “In places, the land is littered a foot deep with bottles, cans, soiled disposable diapers, sanitary napkins, panties, clothes, backpacks, human feces, used toilet paper, pharmacy bottles and syringes” (Walley 2001). An article by Martha Dare (2003) from the SierraTimes.com also emphasizes bodily fluids:

The continuous glut of migrants unabashedly defecating on the desert floor as they try to evade the law has created a toxic dump site that is ever-increasing buildup of human waste, tossed feminine hygiene products, and soiled underwear.

Dare’s is certainly one of the more inflammatory statements made regarding human excrement in the border’s desert ecosystem. And yet, the article and the images of feminine hygiene products and soiled toilet paper that accompany it are consistent with a dominant trend, wherein undocumented migrants are depicted solely in terms of bodily leakages (excrement, blood) rather than as embodied individuals.

**Tracing the Logic of Leakages**

One might argue that the attention given to human waste simply relates to the strict regulations regarding its disposal in protected areas. For example, according to the U.S. National Parks Service (2005b), individuals camping and hiking must either use sewage facilities or, in the case of backcountry hiking, human waste must be buried, specifically using “a ‘cat hole’, a six-inch deep hole, covered after use.” In both of these waste disposal scenarios, human excrement is managed to minimize the destruction of the scenic and
ecological/natural value of protected areas. It is also physically separated from the body and made to be out-of-sight.

We argue that legal regulation certainly comes into play, but for different reasons. We suggest that the obsessive interest in bodily leakages derives from their role in Western conceptualizations of subject formation: controlling and bounding bodily flows have been a requirement of civility, rationality, and therefore inclusion in the body politic (Pateman 1989). As Geraldine Pratt (2004, page 98) notes, “historically, physical closure has been a defining characteristic of ‘civilised’ individuals and a source of their entitlement to individual rights; black bodies and women’s bodies often have been read as lacking this characteristic of physical closure and consequently undeserving of individual rights.” The notion of bodily leakages, then, is constitutive of a racialized binary between civilized versus primitive bodies (Passavant 2000). Given that all individuals do leak, as Robyn Longhurst (2001) points out, the civilized, rights-claiming body is produced through the disciplined management of leakages. Constituted as lacking such discipline, the primitive body is framed as unprepared for inclusion.

This history is especially relevant in the case of excrement and the odors it produces. In the History of Shit, Dominique Laporte (1993: viii) links “the concept of the individual to the fate of human waste.” Connecting the institutional disciplining of excrement to the emergence of the individual as a bourgeois social formation, Laporte argues that injunctions privatizing the management of excrement made it the responsibility of the individual. In this way, “the politics of waste branded the subject to his [sic] body, and prefigured, not so insignificantly perhaps, the Cartesian ideology of the I” (Laporte 1993, page 31). For his part, Alain Corbin (1986) illustrates how the bourgeoisie used its management of excrement and
separation from odors to constitute themselves as social and political subjects distinct from the impoverished masses and racialized others. Thus, in the mid-to late-nineteenth century, those groups associated with undisciplined defecation and excremental odors were seen to require social control and geographic segregation.

In representations of border-protected areas, undocumented migrants are said to “unabashedly defecate” while running from the law and their leakages are manifest in inappropriately discarded items such as toilet paper, syringes, sanitary napkins, and diapers. In the narratives addressed here, border-crossers threaten border-protected areas with contamination but also fail to contain their leakages. If narratives about leakages are discursive mechanisms by which subjects excluded from embodying the category of rights-claiming individual are produced and naturalized, what are the effects of such representations? In our estimation, these discourses narrate how undocumented migrants relate to the nation. Representations of border-crossers as leaky bodies serve to weaken their claims to being a civilized, rights-claiming individual.

Embodying representations of undocumented migrants

In the U.S., immigrants have long been linked to dangerous contaminants (germs, genes) and filth. As Alan Kraut (1994, page 2) documents, notions of health and disease are one vehicle through which nativism – “prejudices and policies that express opposition to the foreign born” – is manifest in the U.S. context. Narratives labeling immigrants as a health menace have been used to draw boundaries around who belongs in the nation and justify the exclusion and social policing of entire groups of people. As such, discursive associations between immigrant bodies and contamination have material implications.
To comprehend the specific socio-political implications of the narratives under consideration here, it is necessary to embody the bodies referenced in representations of border-protected areas. Although the nationality of undocumented migrants tends to be unstated, media and government texts deploy official terminology to distinguish between Mexicans and Other Than Mexicans or OTMs. Given that most narratives use the term OTM when referring to specific nationalities, we argue that the majority of undocumented migrants are taken to be Mexican.

Such assumptions have serious implications for how undocumented migrants from Mexico are regarded in the U.S., for anti-Mexican discourses and practices have a long history (Bender 2003; Menchaca 2001; Weber 2003). In the nineteenth century, when the U.S. Congress was considering seizing a large portion of northern Mexico, debates centered on the undesirability and/or difficulty of incorporating Mexicans into the national body due to their perceived racial inferiority (Schoultz 1998; Weber 2003). In the U.S. Southwest, Anglo-Americans produced a discourse associating Mexicans and incorporated Mexican-Americans with racial contamination and filth (De León 1983; Menchaca 2001). Indeed, the one seemed to lead to the other, for Anglo-Americans viewed mestizaje [racial mixing] as a process by which Spaniards had allowed their blood to be contaminated by that of inferior peoples (Stepan 1991). Ideas about racial hygiene were woven into assumptions about bodily hygiene to brand Mexicans and Mexican-Americans as dirty (De León 1983; Stern 2005).

Although such explicit forms of racial discrimination have been outlawed since the Civil Rights era, the cultural logics justifying race-based exclusions are embedded in the foundational texts of liberalism (Passavant 2000). The body and norms of bodily comportment remain a “part of the story of citizenship and its limits” (Stepan 1998, page 30).
Without explicitly saying as much, narratives linking undocumented migrants – the majority of whom are assumed to be Mexican – to bodily leakages, and excrement in particular, draw from this realm of association to suggest that they are not deserving of inclusion in the nation: they do not belong.

Discourses representing undocumented migrants as threats to border-protected areas call upon the law to sustain such exclusionary discourses (Pulido 2004): border-crossers are said to evade the law by crossing the border without the proper documentation, but also to violate environmental regulations by contaminating nature with deposits of human waste and other bodily leakages. We suggest that such legal discourses are underwritten by a racial logic, which excludes leaky bodies from embodying the category of rights-claiming individuals. Accordingly, representations of border-protected areas work to naturalize the exclusion of Mexican migrants – as bodies that contaminate and leak – from the national body and the body politic without ever referring to their racial identity.

In the narratives gathered here, representations and interpretations of threats to nature in border-protected areas enroll nature in the production of an imagined community defined by its Anglo-American heritage. Through repeated citations of their damage to and contamination of a nature scripted as embodying the nation and its natural heritage, undocumented migrants are excluded from this community. The nation is further delimited through representations explicitly depicting undocumented migrants in terms of the traces they leave behind, thereby conjuring images of undisciplined and uncivilized bodies. As we demonstrate in the next section, such narratives have become so hegemonic they are transferred onto the bodies of predominantly white volunteers who offer life-saving water and medical aid to undocumented migrants.
The Politics of “Littering”

In February 2008, law enforcement officers with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (F&WS) ticketed Dan Millis with “littering” on the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge (BANWR) in Arizona. Millis is a volunteer with No More Deaths, an organization whose mission is to provide direct assistance to unauthorized migrants in southern Arizona in an effort to prevent deaths in the most dangerous of migrant-crossing corridors. When he was ticketed for littering, Millis was depositing gallon jugs of water on heavily traveled migrant trails in the Arizona Sonora Desert.

In an official statement, F&WS (n.d.) explained the reasoning behind their actions: “The citation was issued for purposefully leaving plastic jugs filled with water on the Refuge.” The statement went on to say, “Unfortunately, depositing plastic jugs contributes to the overwhelming amount of trash already being left on the Refuge.” As in the narratives analyzed above, undocumented migrants are cited as the source of “trash” (F&WS n.d.): “This increase in immigrant traffic has resulted in the creation of illegal trails and significant soil erosion. Tons of trash and abandoned vehicles now litter parts of the refuge.” According to refuge staff, the bottles are dangerous to animals that may try to eat them (U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona 2009).

Just two days before being ticketed, Millis led a group into a remote canyon to leave food and water. On the trail, they found the body of Josseline Hernández, a fourteen-year old girl from El Salvador who was en route to join her mother in California (Regan 2010). Josseline is one of over 5,000 undocumented migrants who have perished while attempting to enter the U.S. since the initiation of the Southwest Border Enforcement Strategy in 1994. Between 2004-2006, the bodies of eighteen undocumented migrants were recovered from the BANWR, “most
succumbing to dehydration and exposure” according to a former manager (Ellis 2006). When Millis was ticketed 2008, at least two more bodies had been found on the refuge.

Despite the high number of deaths on the 117,000-acre refuge, the F&WS officers seized twenty sealed gallon jugs of water left on a migrant trail along with eight additional jugs in the No More Deaths vehicle. Although the volunteers had filled their vehicle with empty water bottles as well as additional objects gathered from desert trails during the group’s hike, this fact did not deter officials from ticketing Millis. In July 2008, Millis was convicted of littering, though the court imposed a suspended sentence. Millis contested the littering charge: "We have heard many stories from migrants who found our water just in the nick of time. These people haven't had a clean drink of water in days. If they find drinking water, it's a godsend, not trash" (NMDs 2009).

Then, in December 2008, a Border Patrol agent contacted a F&WS officer to let him know No More Deaths volunteers were leaving water jugs on the BANWR; an Air Interdiction Border Patrol Agent guided the F&WS officer to the volunteers by helicopter (Burridge 2009). Walt Staton was ticketed for littering. As had Millis, Staton went to court to contest the charges. In a sentencing memorandum, the prosecutors accused Staton of “environmentally unsound practices” and not caring “about the environmental impact of his actions” (U.S. v Staton: 4). Defending the actions of his agency, the refuge manager at the time stated, "Just leaving the jugs there is like leaving trash, it is like a McDonald's happy meal in front of your yard, it is trash" (cited in Fernández 2009). In August 2009, Staton was convicted of “knowingly littering” and ironically, forced to do community service involving picking up trash on public lands.

The littering cases provide additional support for our argument about the ways in which narratives about the state of nature along the border work to delimit belonging in the U.S.A. The
convictions criminalize humanitarian aid and turn humanitarian volunteers into criminals. As such, their actions are cast outside the bounds of what may be considered appropriate for a well-behaved citizen. The frame of acceptable citizenship was further delimited by allegations linking leaving water with aiding undocumented immigrants. In the sentencing memorandum, the U.S. prosecutors stated: “The defendant left full, plastic jugs on the Refuge with the intent to aid illegal immigrant traffic” (U.S. v Staton: 4).

Of Staton’s actions, federal prosecutors stated (U.S. v Staton: 6):

One need only to look at what is written on the plastic water jugs themselves to determine the true motive in leaving them. On many they state 'Buena suerte,' which means 'Good luck' in Spanish. The obvious conclusion is that the defendant and No More Deaths wish to aid illegal aliens in their entry attempt.

Claims such as this are equivalent to accusations of siding with and aiding an enemy, who threatens and, therefore, does not belong in national territory. Ultimately, the convictions script white, middle class humanitarian volunteers as threats to the nation for contaminating nature and aiding “illegal aliens”.

In a surprising move, however, a federal appeals court overturned Millis’ conviction in September 2010 (U.S. v. Millis; NMDs 2010; Williams 2010). Citing dictionary definitions, the court pointed to the ambiguity of common definitions for garbage and debated “whether purified water in a sealed bottle intended for human consumption meets the definition of “garbage” (U.S. v. Millis). The majority opinion concluded that bottles containing water did not meet the definition of garbage and reversed the prior conviction. The dissenting judge disagreed: “leaving plastic bottles in a wildlife refuge is littering under any ordinary, common meaning of the word” (U.S. v. Millis).

Despite this legal decision, the F&WS has made it much more difficult for No More Deaths to continue its work. In a recently released Final Compatibility Determination (U.S.
F&WS 2010), the F&WS judged the placing of one-gallon jugs of water on BANWR as incompatible with its mission and instead stipulates the permitting of 55-gallon tanks at specific sites if and when their placement is deemed compliant with the National Environmental Protection Act.

While the government spends thousands to prosecute humanitarian volunteers for offering life-saving water on migrant trails, Fiscal Year 2010 is on the way to being the worst year for migrant deaths in Arizona. By July 2010, the Arizona Pima County Medical Examiner's Office handled the bodies of 153 undocumented migrants, a few bodies short of the 159 examined through the same date in 2007, which was a record-breaking year (McCombs 2010). A recent study of all migrant bodies examined by the Medical Examiner’s Office in Pima County from 1990-2005 concludes the increase in deaths in Arizona is the “inevitable result of the ‘funnel effect’ created by the U.S. government’s ‘prevention through deterrence’ immigration control policies” implemented since 1994 (Rubio-Goldsmith et al. 2006). As noted, Southwest Border Enforcement Strategy was intended to push unauthorized border traffic into remote federal lands that are dangerous to cross (U.S. INS 1996; Nevins 2008). The strategy knowingly placed the bodies of undocumented immigrants in grave danger.

Despite the threat of environmental exposure to undocumented migrants, the narratives analyzed here frame undocumented migrants as threats to border-protected areas. When placed alongside a large number of texts related to the border and undocumented immigration, we suggest that the discourse of environmental threat in border-protected areas plays a significant role in naturalizing and even justifying the violent measures taken to prevent undocumented migrants from entering the nation by grounding them in nature.
This conclusion only highlights the importance of studying the ways in which nature and nature protection are enlisted to mobilize an array of other social and geopolitical projects. In the case of protected areas on the U.S.-Mexico border, protecting nature is equated with protecting the national body from social contamination. As such, conservation becomes a vehicle for the elaboration and sedimentation of boundaries between social and geopolitical groups (Kosek 2004; Fall 2005; Ramutsindela 2004). Untangling the ways in which nature protection is articulated with exclusionary projects is one critical step to contesting the naturalization of violence in U.S. border enforcement policies.
Figure One: Map showing the geographical dynamics of the Southwest Border Enforcement Strategy. Cartography Eric Leinberger.
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