

Steel Walls and Picket Fences: Rematerializing the U.S.–Mexican Border in Ambos Nogales

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ABSTRACT For most of the 20th century, the border cities of Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora formed the single transnational community of Ambos Nogales (Both Nogales). Today the people in Ambos Nogales nostalgically remember this border as a picket fence between neighbors. In the mid-1990s, the United States tore down the picket fence and erected a steel wall to enclose the border and prevent undocumented migration and drug smuggling. In 2011, they erected a new and improved steel wall. The rematerialization of the U.S.–Mexican border through Ambos Nogales emerges dialectically from fortification and transgression. The wall is the most visible instrument of the United States’ militarization of the border, but the wall does not secure the border. The United States built the wall to limit the agency of crossers. The wall, however, enables agency that the builders did not imagine or desire, and crossers continually create new ways to transgress the barrier. The material border facilitates and restricts the agency of the people of Ambos Nogales, and they rematerialize the border in ways that contravene the interests of the nation-states. This in turn leads the nation-state to rematerialize the border to counter this transgression. [*contemporary archaeology, borders, U.S.–Mexican border*]

RESUMEN Por el siglo XX, las ciudades fronterizas de Nogales, Arizona y Nogales, Sonora conformaron una sola comunidad transnacional de Ambos, Nogales. Hoy en día la gente de Ambos, Nogales solo recuerda con nostalgia esta frontera como una cerca entre vecinos. A mediados de la década de los 90’s Estados Unidos demolió la cerca y erigió un muro de acero que bloqueó la frontera para prevenir la inmigración de indocumentados y el contrabando de drogas. En 2011 se construyó un nuevo y mejorado muro de acero; fue así como la reconstrucción de la frontera E.U.–México en Ambos, Nogales surgió del dialecto de fortificación y transgresión. Aunque el muro es el más importante instrumento de militarización en la frontera, éste no la asegura. Estados Unidos construyó el muro para limitar a la agencia de quienes cruzan; sin embargo éste le permite aquello que sus constructores no deseaban ni imaginaban y estos cruces crean continuamente nuevas formas de traspasar la barrera. La frontera material facilita y restringe a la agencia de la gente de Ambos, Nogales; no obstante ellos crearon formas de infringir en los intereses de las naciones-estado, a quienes conllevó a reconstruir la frontera para oponerse a esta transgresión.

What the fence, the wall, stops anyway is uncertain. If the parades don’t come through any more, the music still does. The fence doesn’t stop that very well. [Ríos 1999:11]

In 1972, I drove a sputtering Volkswagen bug from Tucson, Arizona, down the newly completed Interstate 19 for my first visit to Sonora, México. As the highway curved

and dropped into downtown Nogales, Arizona, a sweeping vista opened up revealing the brightly painted homes of Nogales, Sonora. Before me lay Ambos Nogales (Both Nogales). Almost immediately, Ambos Nogales felt different to me from the Texas border towns of my adolescence. It seemed cleaner, more prosperous, more relaxed, more

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2
3 bilingual, more multinational, and more of a vibrant com-
4 munity. Waiting in the morning auto line to cross into
5 México, I saw streams of day tourists flowing south to the
6 curio shops and restaurants of Nogales, Sonora, while a tor-
7 rent of Mexican shoppers surged north toward the variety
8 stores and supermarkets of Nogales, Arizona. Crossers go-
9 ing both ways joked and chatted with the U.S. and Mexican
10 customs agents. On my late-afternoon return from México
11 a few days later, the currents had reversed. Tourists return-
12 ing to the United States loaded down with piñatas, Mexican
13 vanilla, pottery, and liquor moved against the flood of Mex-
14 ican shoppers with bags of clothing, shoes, electronics, and
15 groceries. Waiting in the northbound auto line, I looked up
16 the hill at the chain-link border fence and watched children
17 scurrying under it. As the children separated, a boy tossed
18 something through the fence to a girl on the other side.

19 Since that first visit, I have crossed the border at Ambos
20 Nogales hundreds of times. Sometimes I have come as a
21 tourist, more recently I have passed back and forth as a
22 humanitarian aid volunteer, but mostly I have crossed as
23 an archaeologist traveling to and from my research area in
24 northern Sonora. With an archaeologist's eye I began to
25 observe and study the material border. When I first arrived
26 in Ambos Nogales, the border policies of both the United
27 States and México emphasized trade, communication, and
28 internationalism. The chain-link fence that materialized the
29 border reflected, enhanced, and implemented these goals.
30 Since the 1990s, dramatic changes have occurred in national
31 border policies, and both countries have rematerialized the
32 border to execute these programs. In 1996, the United States
33 fortified the border through Nogales with a green steel wall
34 made from surplus landing mats, and in 2011 they replaced
35 this earlier barrier with an improved bollard-style steel wall.
36 This study focuses on the fences and walls that materialize
37 the border because of what they represent to the people of
38 Ambos Nogales and because of what they came to signify to
39 me.

40 In 2011, while doing humanitarian aid work, I met
41 Carlos (pseudonym)—a middle-aged man, a colleague, and
42 a lifelong resident of Ambos Nogales. In the pauses between
43 our duties, he would reminisce with me about his life. He
44 often spoke bitterly about the new border wall that the
45 United States had just erected through his community:

47 You know, when I was a boy this border wasn't a wall—it was
48 more like a picket fence between neighbors. My family crossed
49 all the time to visit relatives and friends. When I was a *chamaco* [a
50 youngster] we would sneak back and forth to buy Mexican sweets
51 or American candy. Later I had a girlfriend on *el otro lado* [the
52 other side] and I would crawl under the fence to take her to the
53 movies. She is my wife now and we live in Nogales, Arizona but
54 we still have family and friends in Nogales, Sonora. This new wall
55 replaces that old ugly green thing but it is still hideous because it
56 separates us from *nuestros queridos* [our beloved]. [Conversation
57 with author November 17, 2011]

58 Carlos's stories about the Nogales of his childhood res-
onated with my memories and my experiences. Like other

border dwellers around the world (Radu 2010), Carlos
tended to emphasize the border as a fluid space of cross-
ing that transgresses the tidy schemes of nation-states. This
fluidity has continually attracted me to Nogales. My experi-
ences on the border have also always made me skeptical
of politicians who imagine an impermeable barrier and who
charge Americans to “regain control” of our border with
México. I have to wonder, what does chasing this impossible
desire for control mean for those who live along the frontier?

Other residents of Ambos Nogales frequently echoed
Carlos's metaphor of the old material border as a “picket
fence between neighbors.” Many of them nostalgically
hunger for this picket fence, in contrast to the new border
wall that drives a wedge between friends (McCombs 2011b).
In the words of one resident, “Those of us of a certain age
remember the old Nogales. We yearn for those days, the old
Ambos Nogales” (Holm 2012:B5). This metaphor romanti-
cizes the past, but it also alludes to real changes. The image
of the picket fence captures what many residents of Ambos
Nogales want “their” border to be.

The brute materiality of the modern Nogales steel bor-
der wall stands in marked contrast to the metaphorical picket
fence and to the real chain-link fence that once materialized
the border. The wall is the most visible and substantial
instrument of the United States' militarization of the Mex-
ican border, but the wall has failed to secure the border
(Brown 2010). For the people of Ambos Nogales, it phys-
ically shatters interaction and joining. It produces instead
ruptured bodies and lives; nevertheless, many still struggle
to inhabit “their” border. The United States built the wall to
limit the agency of the people who wish to cross. The wall,
however, enables agency that the builders did not imag-
ine or desire, and crossers continually create new ways to
transgress the purpose of the wall. In this ongoing dialectic
of fortification and transgression, both the states (México
and the United States) and the transgressors rematerialize
the border.

CONTEMPORARY ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE BORDER

For 40 years, the material border in Ambos Nogales has
confronted me as an archaeologist and as a border crosser.
As an archaeologist, the materialization and rematerialization
of the border has intrigued me as a material process that
affects the human condition and that has real consequences
for people's lives. As a border crosser, I have had to navigate
the network of fences/walls, gates, checkpoints, and state
agents to pursue my profession and to live my life. Numerous
sojourns in Ambos Nogales have allowed me to participate in
the life of the community and to observe how the community
lives with the materialized border.

My analysis participates in a growing archaeological
commentary on the contemporary world. The archaeol-
ogy of the contemporary was born in the 1980s and has
emerged as a distinct research practice in the 21st century
(Schiffer and Gould 1981; Graves-Brown 2000; Rathje and

Murphy 2001; Berger 2009; Miller 2010; Olsen 2010). The archaeological act of excavation makes the invisible visible. Excavation also trains the archaeologist to be skeptical of the surface appearance of things, to look carefully behind the façade, and to bring a diachronic perspective to contemporary events (Voss 2010). The study of mute, ancient artifacts has forced archaeologists to develop techniques to understand the human condition without discursive evidence (Buchli and Lucas 2001). These techniques, when integrated with history and ethnography, provide a distinctive perspective on the contemporary. An emphasis on the human condition, and a commitment to making the exotic familiar and the familiar exotic, makes my archaeology intensely anthropological, and differentiates it from most histories. Archaeological methods and a focus on diachronic material processes distinguish it from conventional ethnographies.

An archaeology of the contemporary studies the modern landscape as material process. Archaeological techniques give us the ability to find detail in the seeming chaos of the current material world. This detail reveals the complex relationship that the material shares with social relations, meaning, and agency. The lived experience of material process entails a dialectic between the material world and human agency (Miller 2010). Humans create things, but once created, things in turn affect humans, constraining and enabling possible agency. Thus, materiality is both transformed by human agency and transformative of it.

Globally, archaeologists have engaged the contemporary in a multitude of research projects (Harrison and Schofield 2010). Studies of the walls dividing the European cities of Berlin and Belfast provide insights useful to my analysis. Jason De León's (2012) analysis of clandestine border crossing in Arizona gives context to an analysis of the Nogales border wall.

The physicality of the walls in Berlin and Belfast made them highly visible in an urban environment, and they had/have tangible effects on how people could/can physically negotiate their surroundings. In Berlin, archaeologists have analyzed the material processes that made the wall a security system, sculpture, art canvas, and historical monument (Baker 1993; Klausmeier and Schmidt 2004). Baker (1993) described how West German street artists painted the wall in order to overcome it. Laura McAtackney's (2011) analysis of the peace walls of Belfast found that wall faces became canvases to communicate opinions and maintain identity despite prohibiting movement and creating tension.

Since 2009, the Undocumented Migrant Project (De León 2012) has conducted an archaeological and ethnographic study of clandestine border crossing in southern Arizona. This research reveals a well-established social process in which migrants have adapted dark clothes and water bottles as tools for subterfuge. Archaeological data collected along the migrant trails demonstrate the routinized techniques and tools associated with the violent process of border crossing, and the dialectical and often oppressive relationship that exists between migrants and objects. More recent

work has focused on how migrants die in the desert and the taphonomy of the bodies. De León et al. (2012) conclude that the killing desert allows the U.S. government to carry out multiple forms of state-crafted violence against migrants while the environment simultaneously obscures culpability and erases material traces of brutality. De León's work highlights the violence and death that haunts any study of the U.S.–Mexican border.

I analyze the material border dividing Ambos Nogales as a surface assemblage of things (Harrison 2011). An archaeological assemblage is a material grouping that occurs in a particular place and time and that both reflects and affects agency, meanings, and social relations. Assemblages entail both functional relations and dynamic contradictions because they are the results of historical processes that become jumbled up in the present. As such, their effects on human agency vary, depending upon the relationship of individuals and groups to the historical, social and material processes that they entail. Analyzing contemporary assemblages reveals emergent material processes that exist in a dynamic present ripe with the potentiality to be something else.

I start with a complex description of the assemblage (buildings, fences, walls, gates, etc.) that materializes the border in Ambos Nogales. This description considers the physical characteristics of that assemblage but moves quickly to the human experience. How does the material border affect human senses? What behaviors does it restrict or enable? What social, economic, and political needs does the assemblage serve? What were the interests and intentions of the builders, and how do they conflict with the intentions and interests of others who experience the border? The material border has a life history (Schiffer 2011). It decays and the people who build it and experience it rematerialize it so that the materiality of the border is constantly emerging. The United States and México try to simplify relations along the border and to materialize the border as a hard line that defines homogeneous national spaces. Whereas this physicality checks the ability of the people to move freely, it also provokes willful responses that generate agency just as the material border constrains it. Transgressors, crossers, and even state agents rematerialize the border in ways that the state never anticipated.

STEEL WALLS IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

The U.S.–Mexican frontier has always been a contested space where some people benefit and others suffer (Alvarez 1995; Vélez-Ibáñez 1996; Gutiérrez and Young 2010). Both the benefits and the suffering spring from contradictions in the social, cultural, political, economic, and material life of the frontier. The United States militarized the border to secure and protect the country from undocumented migrants and drugs. Even as the United States fortified the border, neoliberal policies such as NAFTA have increased the cross-border flow of goods, capital, culture, ideas, and people to unprecedented levels. Currently, the

U.S.–Mexican border is one of the most commercially active and most crossed borders in the world (Maril 2011). This creates a contested space where nations charge their agencies with conflicting goals and responsibilities, often putting these agencies at odds with themselves. This contradiction also means that border policy remains contested both within and between social groups. Most importantly to this analysis, this contradiction expresses itself strongly in the materialized border. How do you construct a material border that encloses the nation and protects it from harm but at the same time facilitates increasing commerce and the legal movement of people?

The experience of Ambos Nogales is not unique. Across the globe, similar contradictions are transforming borders (Follis 2012). Traditionally, the state exerts its sovereignty by controlling the movement of people, goods, wealth, and information across borders (Donnan and Wilson 1999). In a globalized capitalist economy, the growing power of international corporations and the increasing flexibility of capital flows stimulate the transnational movement of ideas, objects, wealth, and people. Post-9/11, insecurities and fears of terrorism and violence have led nation-states to assert their sovereignty by increasing security along their frontiers and by restricting the movement of “undesirable peoples” (DeGenova and Peutz 2010). This “governmentality of unease” (Bigo 2002:63) and the current global recession have also swelled preexisting nationalistic/chauvinistic dread of excessive immigration. The contradiction between a global capitalism and nationalist fortresses has fundamentally changed borders in the modern world by reinventing them as loci of movement and enclosure (Heyman and Cunningham 2004).

The fortification of the U.S.–Mexican border is also not a unique material process. Across the globe, democratic nation-states have fortified their boundaries to keep out undesirable people and contraband even as globalization has increased legal transnational flows (Brown 2010). For example, the Israeli government uses walls, highways, and other structures to inscribe its sovereignty on the land and to expand its territory (Weizman 2010). Globally, border walls target nonstate, transnational actors rather than international enemies in a world where nation-states no longer exclusively define global political relations. Wendy Brown (2010) contends that they erode national dominion despite their explicit purpose of maintaining sovereignty. They do this by intensifying the very phenomena that governments created them to control, especially violence and lawlessness (see also Maril 2011). She also argues that they largely fail to control illegal flows of people and goods and serve primarily as theatrical devices to assert fading national sovereignty. Brown (2010) invites scholars to study the context of walls and how they operate from the perspective of subjects.

As Weizman (2010) points out for the Palestinians, even though it may appear that only the state has agency in the materialization of borders, those people being excluded also

have agency. In Ambos Nogales, archaeology provides a way to study the context of walls and to reveal nonstate agency with steel walls both in terms of crossing and theatrics. It also exposes how steel walls in one community intensify the lawlessness and violence they are supposed to suppress.

THE U.S.–MEXICAN BORDER IN AMBOS NOGALES

The U.S. and Mexican officials who created the border through Ambos Nogales in 1855 imagined that they could easily separate sovereign space, but the reality of the borderlands defies such partitioning (St. John 2011). In Ambos Nogales, structures of identity and power, as well as “discrete” practices that existed separately, fused to generate new structures, subjectivities, objects, and practices. Crossing this border, U.S. and Mexican cultures have been reconstituted in transnational cultural interactions. Josiah Heyman (1994) stresses the importance of studying the border not only in terms of this transnational interculturality but also in terms of the massive state apparatuses of the frontier. These apparatuses include the material border. This assemblage makes interculturality manifest because people must cross or transgress this material border to make and remake transnational culture.

A line on a map cannot effectively create sovereign space until states materialize that line on the ground. From 1855 to the Mexican Revolution, the materialized U.S.–Mexican border consisted of scattered rock cairns and metal obelisks (St. John 2011). In 1855, only a small pile of stones called Boundary Monument 26 marked the border in Nogales Pass. In 1880, the United States and México built customs houses in the pass. When the railroad crossed the pass in 1884, the platting and construction of Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora materialized the 1855 line. By 1898, a line of telephone poles, Boundary Marker 122 (a metal obelisk), and kiosk-type guard buildings at the two crossing gates materialized the border through Ambos Nogales. One gate sat where U.S. Morley Avenue meets Mexican Calle Elías, and the main gate (now known as the DeConcini Port of Entry) sits a few blocks to the west where Grand Avenue ends (Arreola and Curtis 1993) (Figure 1). In response to the Mexican Revolution (1910–1918), the United States put up a single-strand barbwire fence. A new six foot–high chain-link fence went up in 1929, with electric lights, and stone pillars at the two gates on the border and new U.S. and Mexican gatehouses (Arreola 2004). A chain-link fence would materialize the border through Nogales for the following 65 years. This fence was the material border that the modern residents of Ambos Nogales wistfully remember as a “picket fence between neighbors.”

The post–World War II era is the nostalgic golden age of the picket fence border. People have romanticized the memory of this age, but the border did differ greatly from the modern militarized frontier. For nearly 50 years, both the United States and México avidly sought to increase economic flows between the two nations. The two states materialized the border to facilitate and promote these efforts.

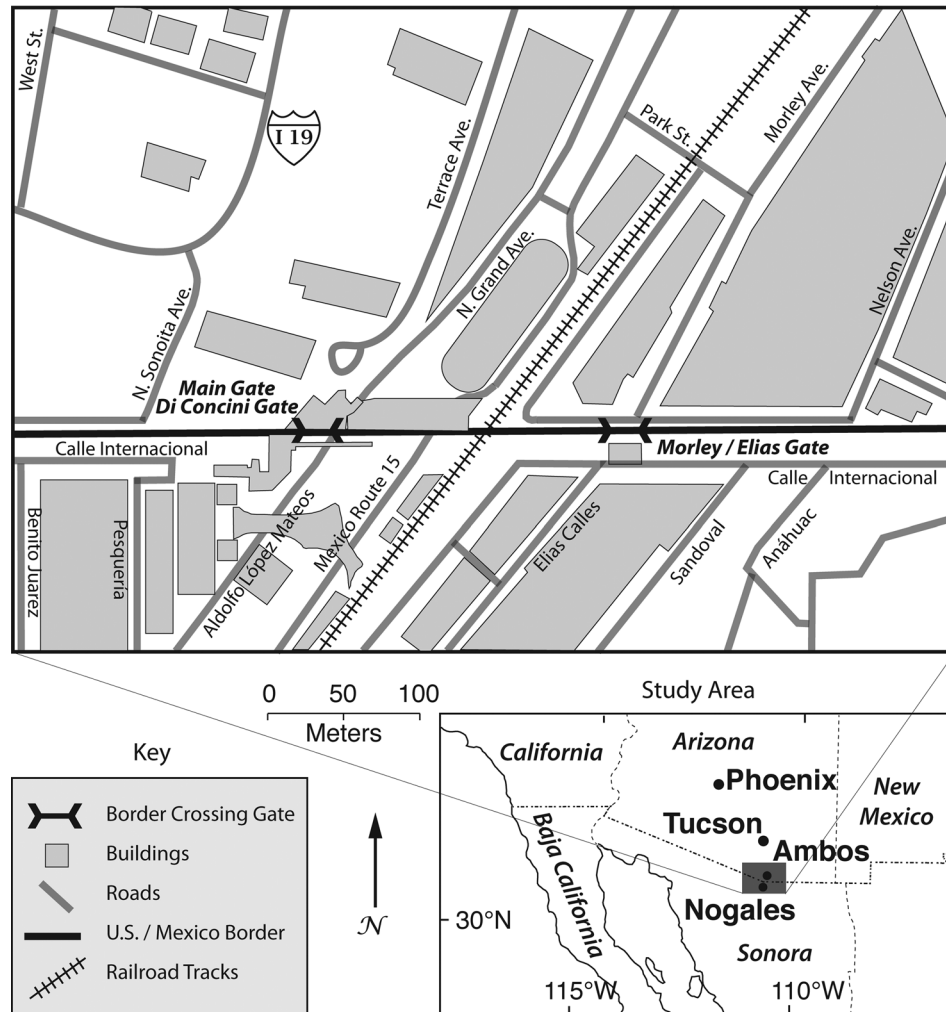


FIGURE 1. Map of downtown Ambos Nogales.

The economies of both cities depended upon the border. In the 1950s, Nogales became the foremost port of entry for fruit and vegetables from México (Heyman 2004). The produce business was family based and Latino, usually with relatives on both sides of the “picket fence.” These civic leaders had profound binational and bicultural knowledge, orientations, and social networks (Arreola and Curtis 1993). Other civic leaders included the U.S. merchants who owned the downtown Nogales, Arizona stores (Eppinga 2002). They attracted Mexican shoppers with American goods of better quality and lower price. The 1950s also saw the expansion of day-trip tourism to Nogales, Sonora. Tourists would park in Nogales, Arizona and walk across the line to Sonora. In 1997, over 700 thousand tourists visited Nogales, Sonora—almost 2 thousand a day (Arreola 2004). The population of Nogales, Sonora soared from 14,000 in 1940 to 38,000 in 1960, while the population of Nogales, Arizona grew from 5,100 in 1940 to 7,300 in 1960. Nogales developed a reputation in the United States as being the border town most connected to México (Heyman 2004).

In the *Saturday Evening Post*, Neil Clark (1952:26) described Ambos Nogales as a bilingual community where

“Anglos and Latins mix like peaches and cream.” He praised Nogales, Sonora as bustling, colorful, and friendly. He noted that city officials in both communities often acted as though it were one city because they shared services such as a sewage treatment plant in Arizona and their police and firefighters cooperated closely. Celebrations transcended the border, with bands and parade floats passing through the main gate and the cities removing sections of the border fence for reviewing platforms (Ríos 1999).

In 1963, the United States and México rematerialized the border to accommodate and increase interaction, trade, and traffic across the line. Both countries embraced the aesthetic of modernism in the international effort to remake the main gate. The United States took a utilitarian approach to the rebuilding. México, in contrast, sought to make their port of entry a show window on their country (Cadava 2011). Leading Latin American architect Mario Pani designed the gateway as two massive, white, concrete arches resembling the wings of a bird flying north. In 1974, México and the United States opened a third port of entry for commercial and auto traffic at Mariposa, on the western edge of Ambos Nogales.

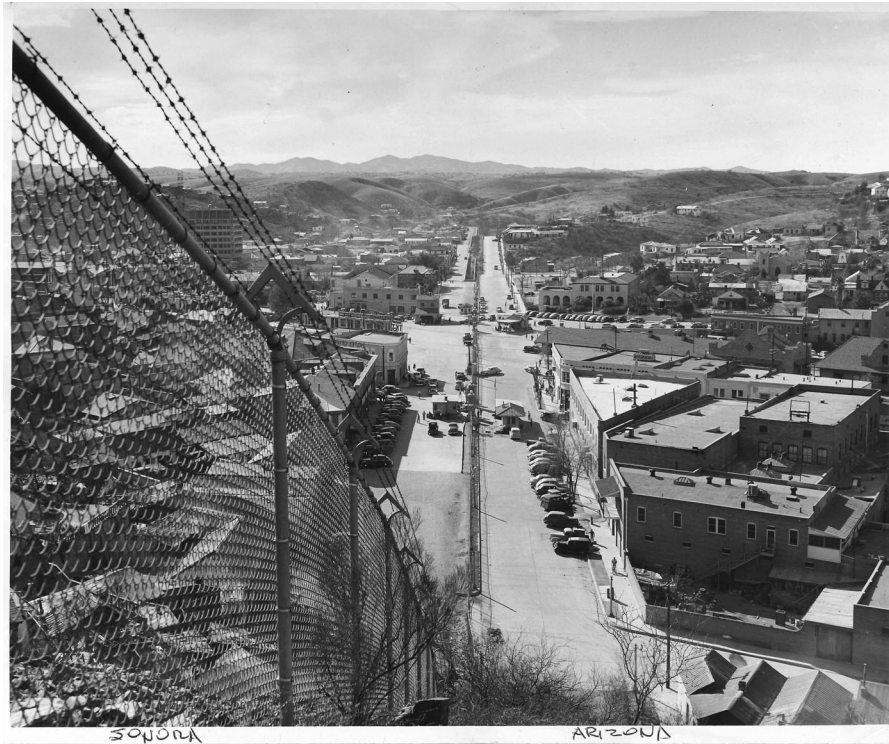


FIGURE 2. *International Border Fence in Nogales ca. 1950. (Photograph by Charles Herbert, Arizona Historical Society, Charles and Lucile Herbert Western Ways Features Manuscript and Photographic Collections)*

Clark (1952) described the material border as a 12 foot-high chain-link fence topped with barbed wire, and this fence still stood 20 years later when I first drove into town (Figure 2). The contrast between the neat streets and buildings of Nogales, Arizona and the brightly colored jumble of Nogales, Sonora captured my gaze. It was only with closer inspection that I noticed the fine line of the fence on the landscape. Sounds and smells wafted through the chain link, and the residents of Ambos Nogales could easily see activities on the other side.

The fence impeded movement and directed foot traffic through the two gates, but it did not impede concerted efforts at transgression. Before 1994, U.S. policy was to intercept undocumented migrants within the United States, not at the border. In the 1980s, I frequently observed Border Patrol agents at a McDonalds overlooking the border watching the line with binoculars. They would radio patrol officers to intercept suspicious characters, but to let the kids and housewives pass. It was possible to climb the fence, but there were easier ways to pass through. Illicit crossers could simply crawl under it, like the children I observed. The zinc-coated wire resisted rust in the dry desert climate, but transgressors easily severed it with bolt cutters. Sometimes fence cutters would charge a small toll for crossers to use the passage that they created (Sahagun 1994). I observed holes in the fence closed by wire ties, or patched with new chain-link fabric, or still open. Some sections, between the two downtown gates, lacked both the barbed wire and a tubular top rail so that they could be easily taken down to allow the

passage of fire trucks, parade floats, and temporary water lines. In 1994, newspaper reporter Louis Sahagun described the fence as droopy, tattered, and riddled with holes.

In 1987, Brent Ashabranner described Ambos Nogales as one city separated by a fence. He wrote that economic expansion, cultural mixing, and migration would soon erase the border. He did not foresee the developments of the 1990s.

BUILDING WALLS OF STEEL

The contradiction between the border at Ambos Nogales as a node of global capitalism and as a nationalist fortress arose during the 1990s. The development of *maquiladora* factories, NAFTA, and the expansion of the produce trade stimulated the transnational movement of ideas, commodities, objects, wealth, and people through Ambos Nogales. In 2009, over 270 thousand semitrucks passed through Nogales going to the United States. The population of Nogales, Sonora soared to an estimated 300 thousand people in 2010, while the Nogales, Arizona population peaked at 21 thousand. The nation-states, however, did not welcome all people and commodities in this new transnational world. The United States rematerialized the border with steel walls.

Tearing Down the Picket Fence

At the end of the 20th century, the United States abandoned the midcentury rhetoric of economic linkages and friendship between nations for a policy of safe and secure borders (Cadava 2011). Fear of undocumented migration and of the

drug trade drove a massive militarization of the border. This militarization transformed border policing into a form of low-intensity warfare that has resulted in the deaths of thousands of people (Dunn 1996, 2009; Alonso 2008).

The number of undocumented people crossing the border from México into the United States grew exponentially at the dawn of the 21st century (Hernández 2010; Henderson 2011). Customs and Border Protection (CBP) apprehensions of undocumented migrants soared from 32,519 in 1964 to over a million by the mid-1980s and a peak of 1,171,396 in 2006 (Border Patrol 2011). In 2006, Mexican officials reported to me that they counted 3,000 people a day making their way across the border west of Ambos Nogales. The 2008 economic recession brought a decline in undocumented immigration, with CBP apprehensions dropping to 327,577 in 2011.

U.S. policies have stoked the drug wars in México. U.S. fortification of border corridors has led cartels to attack rivals controlling easier passages (Haddal 2010). The Sinaloa Cartel had ruled the Nogales corridor for decades until 2007, when the Beltrán-Leyva Cartel launched an attack on them (Steller 2012). The violence in Nogales spiked to 196 drug-related killings in 2010. The word on the street is that the Sinaloans have won the battle, and in 2011 only 47 people died in drug-related violence.

The United States has increased the number of CBP and Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents. In the Tucson sector, which includes Nogales, the number of CBP officers went from 287 in 1993 to 4,239 in 2011. Heavily armed agents stop, interrogate, and inspect Chicano citizens in and around Nogales with little provocation (Amnesty International 2012). In a 2007 survey, 66 percent of Nogales, Sonora residents believed that the CBP stopped people simply for having brown skin (Immigration Task Force 2008).

In 1994, U.S. immigration authorities instituted a new policy of “prevention through deterrence,” and they fortified urban borders with walls to prevent migrants from entering the United States (Henderson 2011; Maril 2011). The policy sought to force migrants out into “hostile terrain” where they would be at “mortal danger” in the desert and easier to capture than in crowded cities. Before prevention through deterrence, 90 percent of Border Patrol annual apprehensions of undocumented migrants occurred in Texas and California. Since 2000, however, roughly half of yearly apprehensions have occurred in Arizona (Haddal 2010).

9/11 brought a widespread fear of foreign terrorism and an obsessive focus on the border (Henderson 2011). Congress called for “safe and secure borders” and greatly increased the requirements for inspection and documentation at the border. The new procedures noticeably slowed legal border crossings in Nogales. The CBP fortified the two downtown gates with steel doors, tire shredders, and bars, making entry into the United States feel like entering a prison. Border policing increasingly entails military knowledge, tactics, and weaponry, with deadly consequences.

Over five thousand people have died on the militarized border since 1998 (Amnesty International 2012). The vast majority of these people were undocumented migrants who died slow, painful deaths in the desert (De León et al. 2012). Their decomposing bodies and bones tragically materialize the contradiction between the commerce in their labor and the enclosure to keep them out. In Ambos Nogales, death comes from gunfire at the border wall and the bodies are quickly removed. Blood-stained sidewalks, impromptu memorials, and pockmarked buildings materialize the deaths and protest the silence and impunity of the CBP in the killings (Green 2008).

“That Old Ugly Green Thing”

Prevention through deterrence rematerialized the Nogales border. In 1996, builders placed eight foot-high steel posts in the ground and connected them with metal rails. They then welded military surplus landing mats together and hung them on this framework, creating a wall 10–12 feet high. On most of the wall, an anticlimb guard made of steel mesh angled toward México, but just west of the main gate the mesh vertically extended the top of the wall several feet higher. On the U.S. side, steel pillars set at a 45° angle buttressed the wall. The wall had a jagged, junkyard look to it. The corrugated landing mats had been painted olive drab. They rusted and weathered into a mix of purple, gray, and green, the color of a bad bruise (Regan 2004). The wall blocked lines of sight between the communities and dominated the visual landscape. It disrupted the sense of community along the border far more seriously than the chain-link fence.

Many in Nogales complained that the wall was ugly and that it prevented people from seeing from one city to the other. The Nogales, Arizona mayor, José Canchola, publicly opposed construction of the barrier (Meyer 1994). As life-long Nogales, Arizona resident Edward Holler commented, “I couldn’t see México any more. I couldn’t see the parades. That’s what I miss” (Turner 2011). The fortified gates and tall steel walls could not be taken down to accommodate viewing platforms for parades. Fire trucks, bands, and floats no longer passed through the main gate.

The federal government responded to this criticism in 1997, by replacing the short section of wall between the two downtown gates with a pinkish “decorative wall” (Lopez 1997). Washed-cement columns hold up this 15 foot-high barrier, connected by two rows of windows. The windows in the upper row are barred with steel mesh, and the windows in the lower row are Plexiglas. An angle-iron, steel-mesh, anticlimb barrier tops the barricade.

CBP’s three-layered security at Nogales begins with line watching at the wall. Agents patrol a dirt road along the north side of the wall. Helicopters routinely buzz the wall and the countryside north of the wall. A few yards from the road stands a series of remote video-surveillance system towers with cameras and motion sensors. Between these towers, the CBP has installed floodlights and mobile

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3 observation towers. At dusk the floodlights come on, illuminating the wall and agents scurrying into position. CBP officers swarm the first 25 miles north of the border and establish tactical checkpoints on the roads. Remote video-surveillance system towers pepper this 25 mile swath. Finally, a permanent vehicle checkpoint sits 25 miles north of town astride Interstate 19.

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10 Many people of Ambos Nogales resisted this division of
11 their community and rematerialized the wall to cross. At one
12 spot, people pushed a panel hard enough for it to fall into the
13 United States and to bridge a small canal (Ríos 1999). Smug-
14 glers, migrants, and residents quickly learned to cut through
15 the landing-mat wall with welding torches or electric saws.
16 As of old, cutters charged people to use the new passages.
17 The patches that the CBP welded over these doors pock-
18 marked sections of the wall. At dusk, during a spring day
19 in 1997, as I sat in Nogales, Sonora waiting at the Mariposa
20 gate, I saw a pickup truck ram the wall. Dozens of migrants
21 dashed through the hole pursued by CBP officers on foot and
22 in ATVs. Numerous dented and welded sections along the
23 wall indicated that this was not a unique incident. People
24 in Nogales, Sonora also pelted U.S. agents with rocks and
25 the CBP began covering the windows of their Nogales SUVs
26 with steel grates to protect them from stones.

27 The young and the fit climbed over the fortification,
28 sometimes with tragic results. Occasionally, I would see a
29 scrap of cloth clinging to the wall snagged from the cloth-
30 ing of a climber. In 1994, the Nogales, Arizona hospital
31 reported a steady stream of undocumented crossers with
32 lacerations, fractures, and dislocations from falling off the
33 wall. An emergency room nurse commented that if they
34 made the wall higher “we’ll have to pick these people up
35 with pancake flippers” (Sahagun 1994:A9). In January 2011,
36 a CBP officer shot 17-year-old Ramses Barron Torres as he
37 scaled the border wall returning to México (Nogales Interna-
38 tional 2011). Barron died in a Sonoran hospital. The agents
39 claimed that the teen had been throwing rocks at them. His
40 family said that he was returning from visiting his girlfriend
41 in Nogales, Arizona.

42 Just as in Berlin (Baker 1993), some sought to over-
43 come the wall by painting its face. Writers rematerialized
44 the landing-mat wall as a blackboard for graffiti to protest
45 its existence (Figure 3). Graffiti tended to be transitory
46 where CBP agents could paint over it, but it permanently
47 decorated the Mexican side of the wall. Many of the mes-
48 sages used the U.S. wall to express anti-U.S. sentiments.
49 One writer spray painted “asesinos” (murderers) in red,
50 white, and blue letters, and the most repeated message
51 was “deporten la migra” (deport the Border Patrol). Per-
52 Q2 haps the bluntest declaration said “fuck you USA.” Other
53 writers protested the wall itself with slogans such as “ter-
54 rorismo visual” (visual terrorism) and “no mural” (no wall).
55 Additional messages challenged the legitimacy of borders
56 and expressed a desire for the connections that the wall
57 had ruptured. These sentiments included “*fronteras: cicatri-
58 ces en la tierra*” (borders: scars on the earth) and “*las paredes*



FIGURE 3. Southern face of decorative wall and landing-mat wall with graffiti, October 2006. *La frontera es grande porque estamos de rodillas* (The border is great because we are on our knees).

vueltas de lado son puentes” (walls turned on their sides are bridges).

Artists rematerialized the Mexican side of the wall as a canvas for political art to overcome the wall. They placed most of this art just west of the main gate, adjacent to the municipal bus depot for Nogales, Sonora, creating an outdoor gallery of protest. Humanitarian groups hung hundreds of white crosses on the wall, each with the name of a migrant who had died in the desert. People painted folk images and murals on the landing mats. These included a set of paintings in the style of *lotería* cards (a traditional Mexican card game) representing, among other images, the Virgin of Guadalupe blessing migrants, a caricature of U.S. Minutemen vigilantes, and a floating eye pyramid. A crude image showed a CBP officer holding a gun to the head of a kneeling migrant. A concrete slab directly south of the wall bears an elaborate image of the Santa Muerte (Holy Death). Drug traffickers, smugglers, and a growing popular cult among the poor embrace this folk saint as their patron. In 2005, Sonoran artists Guadalupe Serrano and Alberto Morackis with binational volunteers painted a 60 foot–long mural entitled “*Vida y Sueños de la Cañada Perla*” (Life and dreams of the Perla Ravine) (Clark 2011). It replicates a 1998 painting done by Tzeltal Indians in the then-Zapatista municipality of Taniperla, Chiapas.

Serrano and Morackis had previously created two temporary professional art installations near the bus depot (Regan 2004). Their 2002 commission, “Border Dynamics,” consisted of four large human figures pushing or holding up the border wall. The artists planned to install the work with two figures on either side of the wall pushing against each other. Border Patrol officials, however, prohibited installation on the U.S. side, so the artists placed all four on the Mexican side. For a year, the figures had their feet planted in México pushing against the Mexican face of the wall, which stands in the United States. In 2004, Serrano, Morackis,



FIGURE 4. Mural *Paseo de la Humanidad*, September 2009. (Photograph by Jonathan McIntosh)

and University of Arizona art professor Alfred Quiróz installed “*Paseo de Humanidad*” (Parade of humanity) (Figure 4). This painted metal mural was made of flat, cut-out, brightly colored figures mounted on an aluminum frame. The figures featured 19 caricatures of migrants and CBP agents in the Arizona desert, offering warnings to would-be border transgressors of the dangers ahead. Quiróz contributed 16 giant, polished aluminum *milagros* (medallions pinned to saints’ images in hopes of blessings). The Arizona Commission of the Arts gave \$5,000 for *Paseo de Humanidad*, but again the CBP barred the work from the U.S. side of the wall (Regan 2004). The artists hung the work on the southern side of the wall, where people made it a folk shrine. They lit candles and placed small offerings below it for their kin on the migrant trails. *Paseo de Humanidad* now hangs above the entrance to the Museum of Art at the University of Arizona.

Serrano and Morackis later collaborated with Diego Taddei to mount a massive Mexican government-funded photography project, the “Migration Mosaic.” In 2009, they printed a huge photo montage on plastic cloth and hung it on the Mexican side of the landing-mat wall. It incorporated the faces of hundreds of people, including residents of Ambos Nogales and migrants, to create the image of four feet walking through the desert. The artists took down the Migration Mosaic in 2011, before construction started on the new wall.

The steel landing-mat wall compromised the grand messages of cooperation, learning, and internationalism that México’s modernist monuments of the 1960s sought to proclaim. U.S. fortification of their side of the main gate and the landing-mat wall obscured the great, white, north-flying bird that remains at the Mexican main gate. Crossers from the United States pass through doors, bars, and turnstiles, and at no point can they see Pani’s grand vision of interna-

tionalism. From the south, the hardened U.S. gate building and wall visually overwhelm the white concrete wings of Pani’s creation.

The New Border Wall

The Nogales landing-mat wall and other urban walls failed to stop or even significantly slow the flow of migrants and drugs across the border (Maril 2011). Work on a new barrier through Ambos Nogales began in early 2011. The construction transgressed the border as wall elements moved between sovereign spaces. Some of the steel components were clearly marked “Made in Mexico.” As workers pulled down the landing mats, they stacked them on the Mexican side of the line. Here scavengers retrieved them away to sell in Sonoran scrap yards or to use as building material. The scrap yards sold the panels to make more Mexican steel.

The art on the Mexican side came down. The graffiti, *lotería* cards, and other folk art on the mats went to the scrap heaps. A last-minute effort by Serrano and allies from the art community of southern Arizona moved all but two panels of *Vida y Sueños de la Cañada Perla* to storage in Nogales, Sonora (Clark 2011). The *Santa Muerte* painting stands untouched several feet inside México. The CBP will not allow anything to be hung or painted on either side of the new wall. Because the agents can reach between the bars they may be able to enforce this policy, and to prevent a rebirth of the bus depot art gallery.

Homeland Security completed the new \$11.6 million, 2.8 mile-long, bollard-style, steel wall in the summer of 2011 (Figure 5). It ranges from 23 to 30 feet in height, and a 5 foot-high, south-facing metal sheet tops it to discourage climbers. It is made of six inch-square steel tubes filled with concrete and a steel rebar running down the middle to prevent cutting. The tubes are four inches apart so that



FIGURE 5. New bollard-style wall looking south at the Nogales, Sonora municipal bus station, December 2011.

agents in the United States can see through the fence into México. It sits on a six to ten foot–deep concrete foundation to discourage tunneling under it.

U.S. officials like the new wall. CBP spokesperson Eric Cantu said “the other fence was easier to compromise. You could get under it, over it and through it” (González 2011:A2). Agents prefer the new barred barrier because they can see individuals on the Mexican side preparing to cross and intercept them before they get over the wall. Between October of 2010 and May of 2011, CBP reported 188 rocking attacks on agents. Now officers can observe stone throwers on the Mexican side and better avoid any projectiles. The new wall also requires less maintenance than the old landing-mat wall; transgressors have yet to figure out how they can cut through it. Finally, the CBP finds the new wall aesthetically more pleasing than the eyesore of landing mats.

The new wall is taller, more imposing, and crueler than the old landing-mat fence. It visually dominates the border landscape even more than the old wall did. Now the fretful migrant finds his or her path more effectively blocked, but the vista through the bars entices them to cross. The people of Ambos Nogales can observe the other side, but now the view is barred like a prison cell.

The wall disrupts lives and breaks bodies (Miller 2011a). People commonly fall while attempting to climb it and a plunge inevitably results in injuries such as compound fractures, open wounds, amputated fingers, and blown knees. The Mexican government has posted signs with an image of a person falling off the wall and warning “*NO TE ARRIESGUES DETENTE: Saltar el muro puede causarte heridas y/o fracturas graves. No pongas tu vida en peligro*” (DO NOT RISK—STOP: Jumping the wall can cause you severe wounds and/or fractures. Do not put your life in danger).

The barred wall not only allows CBP agents to see México through it but also to retaliate through it. Officers often squirt pepper spray through the gaps between the bars to disrupt rock throwers. On October 10, 2012, 16-year-old José Antonio Elena Rodríguez died on *Calle Internacional* in Sonora. A CBP officer fired his pistol through the four inch gaps in the bollard-style wall, hitting José Antonio numerous times in the back (Figure 6). His family said that the teenager was walking to a convenience store where his brother works. The CBP claims that he threw rocks at agents attempting to arrest drug smugglers on the U.S. side of the border. Below a bullet-pocked wall, mourners covered the blood-stained sidewalk with flowers and candles. On *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) in 2012 mourners on both sides of the border overcame the wall by transforming it into an altar with *ofrendas* (offerings) for José Antonio (Figure 7).

Many in Ambos Nogales do not share the CBP’s enthusiasm for the wall. They see a hideous barrier that divides one community. Mexican engineer Jesús Quintanar commented that the Mexican government would never consent to a border wall (McCombs 2011a). He judged the landing mats very ugly, but he found no beauty in the new wall. Olivia Ainsa, president of the Nogales-Santa Cruz County Chamber of Commerce, fretted that the wall makes Nogales, Arizona look like a jail (González 2011).

The increasing militarization of the border with ever-growing delays to pass through the two downtown Nogales gates has led to a 30 percent decline in the number of people legally entering the United States between 2002 and 2011. Merchants in Nogales, Arizona report a 30 percent decline in business during the same period (McCombs 2011b). The merchants of Nogales, Sonora have suffered far more than their compatriots in Arizona. Tourism of all forms has markedly declined, largely due to fear of drug violence.

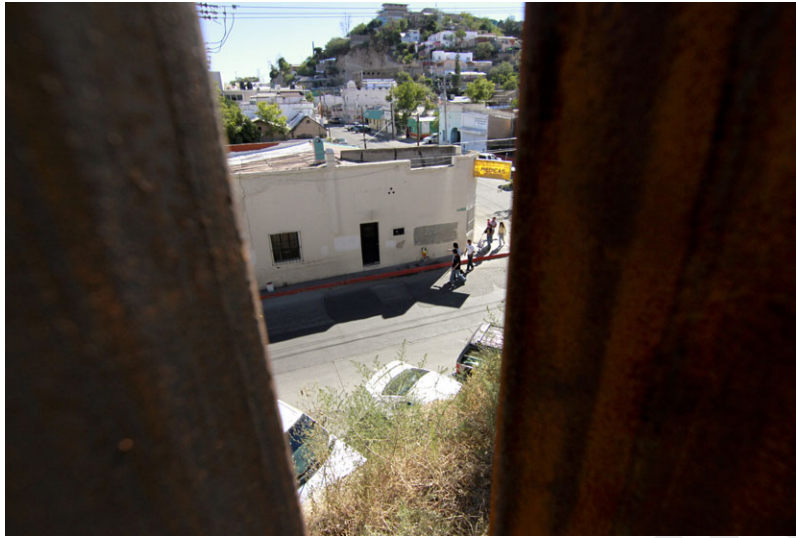


FIGURE 6. Spot where José Antonio Elena Rodríguez died as seen through the bollard-style wall. (Photograph by Murphy Joseph Woodhouse, October 14, 2012)



FIGURE 7. On Día de los Muertos 2012, José Antonio's mother Araceli Rodríguez (facing the camera) and Guadalupe Guerrero console each other through the wall. In early 2011, CBP agents shot Guadalupe Guerrero's son to death as he fled over the border wall in Douglas, Arizona. Guadalupe Guerrero and her son Carlos Lamadrid are/were U.S. citizens. (Photograph by Murphy Joseph Woodhouse, November 1, 2012)

Streams of U.S. day trippers no longer flow through the Nogales gates seeking curios, liquor, dining, dentistry, and prescription drugs. Crossings are down by a factor of 75 percent or more (Ponce 2012). Shuttered stores and abandoned buildings on both sides of the border result from a decline in crossings, and this material ruination furthers that decline as the ruination amplifies the tourists' fears that Ambos Nogales is a dangerous place.

Weizman (2010) noted that Palestinian militants easily transgress the Israeli wall in three dimensions by tunneling under it. Fortification of the border in Ambos Nogales has also inspired a tunnel-building frenzy, creating a clandestine rematerialization of the border that allows drug cartels, migrant smugglers, and others to transgress the border. In

1930–1931, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers built two storm drains under the cities (Banks 2011). These drains are 14 feet wide, 7 feet tall, and run for miles. There are also sewers that carry waste water from Nogales, Sonora to the treatment plant in Nogales, Arizona (Ingram et al. 1995). Smugglers and migrants have used these tunnels for years, despite ever-increasing efforts by the United States to close them. In the 1990s, a transnational youth gang called “*El Barrio Libre*” used these tunnels to move back and forth under the border (Rosas 2012). A 2008 attempt by the CBP to wall off the storm drains resulted in extensive flooding and damage in Nogales, Sonora. In addition to these drains, an unknown number of illicit tunnels run under the frontier. Some of these intersect and use the existing drains, whereas

COLOUR ONLINE,
B&W IN PRINT

COLOUR ONLINE,
B&W IN PRINT



FIGURE 8. *Nogales, Arizona firefighters using their ladder truck to pour water on a fire in Nogales, Sonora, May 10, 2012. (Photograph by Manuel Coppola, photograph courtesy of Nogales International)*

others are totally new constructions. In August of 2010, a passenger bus at the DeConcini gate dropped into the street when a tunnel under it collapsed (Banks 2011).

Not all transgressions of the border are for illicit purposes. Traditionally, the fire departments of both cities have supported each other's firefighting. In the days of the picket fence, they passed hoses through the chain-link fence or even took the fence down to drive their trucks across the border. Today, firefighters from Sonora and Arizona train together and hold a joint Cinco de Mayo party. Nogales, Arizona Fire Chief Hector Robles says:

We're like a family. In fact, many of us have relatives that have served as volunteers with their department. I had two uncles and a cousin, for example who worked with them. It goes back generations . . . The only thing that separates us is the (international) line. [Coppala 2012]

The rematerialized border has made cooperation difficult, but the fire brigades do find ways to work together. On May 10, 2012, a fire broke out in an abandoned Nogales, Sonora hotel facing the border. The Nogales, Arizona fire department responded by using a hose at the top of their new ladder truck to pour water on the fire across the wall and fed fire hoses through the Morley/Elías gate to Mexican firefighters (Figure 8). Within an hour the firefighters had extinguished the fire.

The people of Ambos Nogales continue to use their ingenuity to exploit the materiality of the wall and rematerialize the border. Drug smugglers breach the barrier by passing thin packets between the bars and by catapulting football-shaped packages over the top (Miller 2011b, 2011c). People also seek to maintain day-to-day interactions that unify rather than divide their community. Families now meet at the bars to share picnics, pass mementos to each other, touch hands,

and maintain the bonds that the wall disrupts (Regan 2011). Lovers cannot kiss through the four inch gap between tubes, but they can hold hands and look into each other's eyes.

CONCLUSION

The materialization of the U.S.–Mexican border through Ambos Nogales emerges dialectically from fortification and transgression. By looking at the material border as an archaeological assemblage, we can see how this dialectic shapes and is shaped by human agency, emotions, and experience. The United States and México materialize and rematerialize the border to control it and to assert their sovereignty. People who live in the borderlands, by contrast, emphasize crossing the border, the creation of community, and the transgression of national agendas. The material border facilitates and restricts the agency of the people of Ambos Nogales, and they rematerialize the border in ways that contravene the interests of the nation-states. This in turn leads the nation-state to rematerialize the border to counter this transgression.

As Brown (2010) notes, walls intensify many of the things that their designers want to control, most notably violence and lawlessness (see also Maril 2011). Fortifications in Ambos Nogales have not inspired a sense of security, but rather have fed paranoia and reduced legal crossings. Violence has increased, with hundreds of people dying in the desert each year. The CBP meant for the landing-mat wall to represent and secure U.S. sovereignty. Transgressors transformed the old wall into a medium to contest that sovereignty and a shield to transgressive acts. The new bollard-style wall gives the CBP better control over their message because they can reach through the gaps between the bars to remove offending art work. These gaps also allow agents to see transgressors and to gun down teenagers



FIGURE 9. A boy playing catch through the bollard-style wall, December 17, 2011.

on Mexican streets. A nearly insurmountable wall results in more injuries to climbers but also in increased transgression, as people tunnel under it. The more see-through façade reveals the decay and separation of each side.

What of the future? The U.S. government's own Congressional Research Service (Haddal 2010) has concluded that fortifying the border will not provide a viable solution to undocumented migration or drug smuggling. As the United States increasingly fortifies the border, the drug and people smugglers move or change their means of entry to transgress it. As border scholars have observed, modern borders are dislocated and ubiquitous (Balibar 2002; Follis 2012). The processes of the border pervade the whole of the society and cannot be understood or confronted only in terms of the borderline. Undocumented labor and illicit drug use permeate U.S. society. These issues cannot be adequately addressed by building more walls, deploying more agents on the line, goading more migrants to die in the desert, or more teenagers dying at the wall.

The people of Ambos Nogales want the steel wall to come down (Kessler 2012). The civic leaders of the two towns struggle to maintain their commitment to each other. For example, Nogales, Arizona firefighters recently used their ladder truck to pour water over the wall onto a burning Mexican building. Individuals and families perform thousands of mundane acts that co-opt the wall as an enclosure that separates them from family and friends. Criminals continue to transgress the barrier for illicit profit, smuggling drugs and migrants through tunnels under it or by catapulting containers of drugs over it, or by simply passing thin packages between the bars.

In December of 2011, I participated in a Christmas border *posada*, a Mexican Christmas ritual that dramatizes the search of Joseph and Mary for lodging, organized by the Kino Initiative, a Catholic charity that provides food and shelter for undocumented migrants deported from the United States. Walking with the binational crowd of supporters following Mary and Joseph along the Mexican side of the line, I noticed two little boys running ahead of the procession playing catch.

As they ran, the one on the Mexican side of the wall threw a ball through the gap between the bars (Figure 9). The boy on the U.S. side of the wall caught it and threw it back again.

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NOTES

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