



Roundtable II: Responses by Caitlin Blanchfield & Nina Valerie Kolowratnik

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April, 2017



What are the intended/unintended consequences of anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies?

Anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies have far reaching impacts in borderlands communities. For the Tohono O’Odham tribe, which spans the US-Mexico border, border enforcement has led to increased surveillance and militarisation of their homeland and severely impeded cross-border traditional practices and the cross-border mobility of daily life.

The vehicle barrier along the Tohono O’Odham stretch of the international border is merely a fraction of the border’s depth and of the security apparatus on the nation. On the U.S. side, what follows the fence is the 60-foot ‘Roosevelt Reservation’, border patrol roads and officers on the ground, ground sensors, helicopters, checkpoints, and random stops and searches. All of this is within a 100 mile legal “border” zone, where border patrol has extra-constitutional authority.

With more and more border patrol officers on the ground and surveillance



infrastructure increasingly pervasive, open space has become hostile in the borderlands. Infringing on the territorial rights of indigenous people, border enforcement practices are impeding Tohono O’Odham members’ mobility within their own territory. Often the private interior is the only space outside of the watch of the border patrol.

With the increasing confinement to the individual home, personal movement is altered and traditional tribal practices impeded, thereby disrupting the tribe’s cultural connection to the land. Frequent car stops and attempts to search homes are based on the assumption that locals are involved in criminal activity. This produces a culture of fear among the O’Odham and infringes on indigenous sovereignty by attempting to act as a law enforcement agency within the O’Odham Nation. .

Are border fortifications/restrictions a useful or counterproductive response to mass movements of people?

International border fortifications are hardly ever continuous; they are constructed at strategic stretches of the border in order to deviate migrants’ movements, thereby creating more dangerous passages. On the US-Mexico border, the Southwest Border Strategy (started in the 1990s) directed substantial border enforcement resources to urban areas with the aim of “prevention through deterrence”. This funnels migrants through remote, rugged desert as a means of stymying their flows. The result was not reduced migration, but rather a rising death toll and an even more elaborate smuggling system as people still pursued a better life elsewhere, now through a harsh and rural landscape.

As border patrol now increases enforcement efforts to these perceived deserted borderlands in an attempt to crack down on the migration patterns they have produced, they assume a homogeneity to cross-border movement and a one-directionality that ignores the active lives of local communities that span the border. This is the case in the Tohono O’Odham Nation, which has been afflicted both by the effects of illegal drug trafficking pushed through their lands, and now



by increased border fortification. By assuming that a mass of people move with the same motivations and in the same ways, fortifications infringe on rights to mobility and access to land.

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