

During this week's reading on the border wall, there was a noticeable absence of commentary on racism, xenophobia and colonialism. Particularly profound was the treatment of the border as fixed line that has always been exactly where it is and that could not be anywhere else. In this (incorrect and ahistorical) model, border-crossers are acting as nefarious infiltrators, and this was especially apparent in the Nieto-Gomez article. When describing earlier method of border protection, he writes "the immigrants had a role akin to that of an infiltrating force behind enemy lines that had to be tracked as prey, while the Border Patrol had the role of a skilled predator in a very complicated 'hide and seek game' being played in the immensity of the American borderlands" (p193).

It seems to be an open secret in border security that the people who *live* in the borderlands do not want the wall - the wall is demanded by those farthest away from the border. The vague collective of "Middle America" is most threatened by the "clandestine actors" and the threats they bring with them but the borderlands communities are most impacted by the changes in border security. Whose voice should matter the most when discussing changes to the border?

The US government gets the final say in boundary disputes (and the government is doing a *lot* of things that people don't want right now) and is the funding source for any changes that may be implemented. However, if the government were removed as the final arbiter and funding were guaranteed, whose claim to the border and its security has the most validity?

There are three main national issues that give the government claim to the border: First, issues of national security and the claims laid by national security agencies - “unsecured” borders can provide pathways for “terrorists” to enter with weapons. If national security were our greatest concern, we would be addressing the terrorism that is already happening within our borders. Second, issues of drug trafficking. Certainly the US-Mexico border is a pathway for drug traffickers. If we were most concerned about the movement of drugs into the country, we would probably be addressing US government support of Mexican drug cartels.¹ Third, issues related to economic migration and the related fears of “immigrants stealing jobs” and “immigrants freeloading on social services” are false² and fueled by media spin and racism.

The people who live by the border, the spokespeople for the animals who cross the border, the environmental stewards who care for the earth underneath the border - all of these groups can also make claims to influence the border infrastructure. In national discourse, we have linked the border only to the aforementioned national issues, and erased the connection between borders and racism, xenophobia and colonialism. As a result, we have lost sight of the humans who live with the border; we have converted humans to immigrants and “illegal aliens.” Without including these local and human claims, we reinforce the border as an apolitical boundary and, consequently, are unable to help engineers understand the bigger picture when campaigning against engineering involvement in border wall construction. If we were to allow border

¹ <http://world.time.com/2014/01/14/dea-boosted-mexican-drug-cartel/>

² <http://www.aila.org/infonet/skip-the-spin-get-the-facts-on-immigration>

communities to maintain and enforce borders, these conversations would be very different.