

The Costs of a Wall: The Impact of Pseudo-Security Policies on Communities, Wildlife, and Ecosystems

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This essay was originally published in a volume edited by Natalie Khazaal and N ria Almiron, entitled, [Like an Animal: Critical Animal Studies Approaches to Borders, Displacement, and Othering](#) (Brill Publishers 2020). It was written during the height of Trump’s dark reign over US social and environmental policies and reflects a “total liberation” approach that seeks connections among the oppression of nonhuman and human animals and environmental issues, recognizing that none are free until all are free.

As the world moves into the third decade of the twenty-first century, some of the most contentious global politics involve the issues of migration, refugees, borders, nationalism, racism, and xenophobia. These issues deeply affect Europe, for instance, and threaten to divide nations, pull apart the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and facilitate the rise of toxic nationalism and neo-fascism. There are also intense ideological and political struggles over these issues in the US, which is now possibly more divided than any time since the days of slavery and the civil war (Fredrick 2019). The question of whether to seal US borders from the flow of immigrants both illegal and legal has polarized the country, sharply splitting conservatives and liberals into warring camps. It was decisive in electing a notoriously racist and xenophobic president, Donald Trump, who has in turn inflamed and exploited fear of the Other for his own political agenda and to appeal to a white nationalist and Republican base.^[1] A shocking mass murder targeting Latinx in El Paso Texas, in August 2019, put the issues of migration, borders, and race into stark relief.

The desperate and tragic migration of oppressed people throughout the world, involves not only a humanitarian crisis testing the moral resolve of developed nations, but also a calamity for wildlife and ecological systems. The most simplistic response to immigration is to seal borders, while never addressing the root causes of human movement. But barriers, fences, and walls not only thwart human traffic, they impede the natural flow of nonhuman animals and plants and directly affect their migration routes and reproduction.^[2] This threatens the survival of nonhuman communities and contributes to the growing problems of habitat destruction and species extinction. This in turn affects human interests in crucial ways, and the erection of barriers along borders has a *systemic impact on all communities of life* – humans, animals, and ecosystems.

To a large degree, under the all-absolving rubric of “national security,” the US-Mexico border wall is being erected for the purpose of stopping our neighbors from seeking a better way of life, but it doesn’t even accomplish that.^[3] While no deterrent to desperate people, the wall does impede animal migration and degrade the environment, becoming a contributing factor to the sixth great extinction crisis unfolding on the planet (Kolbert 2014). Already, the southern border wall has had a severe impact on wildlife and ecosystems and its proposed completion will be a death blow to numerous animal and plant species. While real in its effects, the wall also stands as a symbol of division and a totem to appease racism, white supremacism, and xenophobia, while draconian security policies, intensive surveillance, and policing of the borders create a vast *migrant detention-industrial complex* that commodifies human suffering.^[4]

The wall is a pseudo-solution to much bigger problems than migration and security fears. US border policy for the last few decades – from Clinton to Trump – has been an unmitigated disaster for human beings, nonhuman animals, and the environment alike. Yet the border crisis usefully underscores the *interconnectedness* of interests among humans, animals, and the earth, in ways to which refugee/border studies are normally oblivious. To illustrate the full array of intersecting problems that arise with militarizing the border, I will discuss the impacts of building walls and barriers in areas such as the Lower Rio Grande Valley and the El Paso, Texas-Juarez, Mexico border. In contradistinction to the faulty model of “security” that has informed US policy for the last few decades, I contrast a more holistic and ecological model of security that emphasizes the crucial importance of flourishing wildlife and ecological systems to human societies. Against prevailing humanist biases that inform academic studies as well as the state and everyday life, I foreground the impact of security policies and the migrant-industrial complex on nonhuman animals and stress the rights of animals to lives and habitat free of human interference. We begin with relevant historical context.

The Enlightenment in Ruins

Over two centuries ago, the Age of Enlightenment came into the Western world with a burst of optimism, confidence, and enthusiasm. On the heels of the Renaissance and Scientific Revolution, the liberating influences of humanism and critical reason spread throughout the European continent with tremendous force. Skepticism of religious dogmas, criticism of oppressive institutions, experimentalism, and free inquiry all led to the dismantling of the old and inauguration of the new. The proponents of an emerging “Age of Reason” attacked the stifling restrictions of religious dogma and oppressive monarchical regimes and championed freedom of thought and inquiry. Aroused with the excitement of change unfolding in the spheres of science, technology, and philosophy, they embraced novelty and sought to hasten further innovation in thought and politics.

Demands for freedom in the realm of thought inevitably led to demands for greater freedoms in trade and production, as Enlightenment ideas spurred not only a philosophical revolution, but also a political and economic revolution, a shift in modes of production from feudalism to capitalism. The classical liberal theories of political economy that emerged with John Stuart Mill, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and others provided a theoretical basis for emerging capitalist societies rooted in individualism, competition, the separation between public and private sectors, and the pursuit of wealth and personal gain in “free markets.” Smith articulated the paradigmatic philosophy for this new system, arguing that the unfettered pursuit of greed and selfish interest invariably lead to benevolent social outcomes through the “invisible hand” guiding market behavior. In the late-twentieth century, during the 1980s and 1990s, after Keynesian-inspired state interventions emerged to correct anarchic market tendencies, classic liberal emphases on free markets resurfaced as “neo-liberalism” and advanced globally, dismantling regulatory and social welfare systems.

In the midst of dramatic innovations and turbulent change, Enlightenment theorists believed that human beings were making steady advances in the improvement of life, with exciting possibilities on the horizon. Accordingly, many advanced the unprecedented idea that history advances along an inexorable continuum of progress in knowledge, freedom, and prosperity. Thus, we see a pronounced utopian strain to much Enlightenment thinking. A key motif among Enlightenment philosophers of the 18th century was the exalted ideal of a world *Cosmopolis* — a porous globe bound to rational global norms of justice, equality, “perpetual peace,” open borders, stability, and security (Toulmin 1990). As shown by later critical theorists of the Frankfurt school, and sundry postmodernists as well, the liberal dream of a peaceful and prosperous planet without borders has

morphed, throughout the twentieth century, into a nightmare world of global capitalism, fascism, bureaucratic communism, totalitarian governments, concentration camps, genocide, world wars, bloated militarism, degraded social and natural environments, and now the all-consuming threat of climate crisis and the unimaginable social chaos this portends (Best 1995). These are the inevitable results of a Western worldview based on human supremacist values (anthropocentrism and speciesism), and the logics of alienation and predation at their core.

Rapidly advancing in the 1980s, neoliberalism swept the globe, as “free trade” agreements restructured economies and social relations, prioritizing economic growth above all else. The creation of the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) were all designed to stimulate international trade, to further a globalized capitalist system, and to universalize market dynamics. These new treaties had devastating impacts on undeveloped nations. They created poverty, insecurity, conflicts, mass migration, and terrorism, while overriding constraints on the negative impacts of frenzied development on people, biodiversity, and ecosystems.

We can see this clearly in the imperial relation between the United States and its neighbor, Mexico, as the consequences of neoliberalism manifest in numerous ways including migration and the building of a border wall. The tragedy unfolding along the US-Mexico border is not unique, however, given the global scope of capitalism and the human predilection – especially after World War II – to control movement near borders by building barriers (see below). The impact of walls and flawed border security policies on animals and the environment is still a much-understudied problem, but the disastrous consequences are already evident, are rapidly worsening, and can no longer be ignored.

Movement and Migration

The driving force of life is speciation — the production of biological diversity. As Darwin wrote in the nineteenth century, the dynamics of natural and sexual selection propel speciation. As evident in his youthful study of the Galapagos Islands, and copious examples provided in his *Origin of Species* (1857), different environments require different types of adaptation, and thus select for different traits. Natural boundaries such as formed by rivers and mountains that isolate members of a species can yield different traits and species diversity. But dynamic evolution requires not only separation and barriers, but also connection and bridges, such exist along the pathways of migratory routes and wildlife corridors. In the evolution of human and nonhuman life forms, migration and free movement are critical to survival and change, and thus blocking or restricting mobility with impassible anthropogenic barriers can have deleterious effects on species survival and biodiversity.^[5] Animals have to move, genes have to flow. Earth’s physical boundaries know no artificial political divisions, and their shape and flow stem from changing natural forces (and human impacts as well). Not all migrations are alike, and we can draw a salient distinction among three different types of population movement.

First, in the case of *free migration*, populations – humans, animals, or plants – move in ways conducive to their survival, adaptation, and reproduction needs. This mobility is not free from boundaries or obstacles, but it is free to change and adapt for survival and reproduction purposes, although of course survival is not guaranteed. Second, due to natural forces like changing climate, populations may encounter *forced migration*, which drives them to move toward more suitable environments, as drought and hunger compels people from Guatemala to migrate to the US, or as climate change impels fish to travel northward in search of colder waters. In some instances, due to factors such as political violence, human or animal populations are forced to flee their homes and native environments. Finally, in the case of *blocked migration*, populations of all types

encounter human-constructed barriers – in the form of walls, fences, and security boundaries — that obstruct free passage and thwart the movements necessary for survival. Such is the case with the ongoing efforts to build sundry types of barriers along the 1,954-mile US-Mexico border.

In discussing issues of refugees, migration, borders, and state violence, it is imperative to overcome the speciesist biases of traditional border studies and expand the theoretical and political focus to address the grave impact of oppressive security policies on nonhuman animals, to validate their suffering, and to analyze the complex web of interconnections that comprise complex systems and living communities. It is thus vital to grasp that nonhuman animals are not only sentient beings, but have emotionally and intellectually complex lives (Best 2009). Often, their systems of communication can be considered as languages, and their communities as cultures, bound by norms and intergenerational learning. Animals too live in families and communities, and when various species cohabitate, we can consider this multicultural. Without question, their capacity to experience pleasure or pain, and to prefer the former over the latter, makes compelling more demands on humans and endows them with a fundamental equality with any and all rights-bearers. They have basic rights to the necessities of life and a viable habitat safe from human plunder. When expelled from their natural habitat, from their homeland and territory, they can rightfully be seen as victims of forced migration — as *refugees*.

Genealogy of a Wall: 1994-2020

Human and nonhuman animal populations naturally cross borders; they live on both sides, straddle boundaries, and move back and forth. Walls impose artificial barriers, fragment contiguous ecosystems, and invite transgression and resistance. So it has been the case historically, and thus it is with the US-Mexico border, a boundary created between a wealthy and developed northern nation and a poor and undeveloped southern nation, a boundary that moved further north and west with the territorial booty gained through the US imperialist war with Mexico (1846-48). It is natural, moreover, along the boundary that divides the “first world” and the “third world,” for disadvantaged people in the south to seek greater prosperity through working in the more advantaged northern country, to pursue the dream of opportunities glittering on the “shining city on the hill,” as Ronald Reagan once characterized the US. It is perhaps also understandable, especially during times of economic or political insecurities, for nations – or, their elite classes, at least — to patrol and control their borders, although this by no means guarantees rational, humane, just, and ecologically sound security and immigration policies sensitive to human and animal rights and the integrity of the natural world.

The history of the US-Mexico border is a history of these conflicting dynamics – the desire for freedom of movement and life improvement and the perceived need for border security. At times, such as during the Bracero program (1942-1964) — created to fill labor shortages caused by US entry into World War II — there was a relative harmonization between the workers’ need for employment and the capitalist requirement for cheap labor. Mexican workers crossed into the United States seasonally or daily to obtain work and wages, and industries in return reaped the benefits of cheap labor to maximize profits. But various political, ideological, and cultural forces disrupted this short-lived, smooth functioning of the capitalist supply and demand model, and led to sharp conflicts and contradictions, multiple unintended consequences, and disastrous results for humans, animals, and the environment alike.

Trump’s anti-immigration platform builds on a long, disastrous history of failed immigration policies in the US, with modern roots in the opportunistic policies of President Bill Clinton. [\[6\]](#) In order to create a neoliberal “free trade” zone that opened the flow of trade across US borders to the north and south, Clinton passed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on

January 1, 1994 — not coincidentally, the same day as the Zapatista uprising against capitalist globalization began in central Mexico. At the same time as the US flooded Mexican markets with surplus corn, Mexican President Salinas ended long-standing protections for farmers in rural areas. With corn prices dropping and incomes falling, Mexican farmers and workers migrated into the US, looking for work (Schlyer 2012). The unintended consequence of NAFTA was to *increase* immigration, and the response ever since has been to jettison sensible approaches, such as existed with the Bracero program, in favor of draconian and increasingly militarized systems of border control.

In response to the new influx of migrant workers into the US, and against the backdrop of increasing concerns about the rise of undocumented immigrants (especially pronounced in California), the Clinton administration launched Operation Hold The Line and Operation Gatekeeper, ramping up security at the major ports of entry in El Paso and San Diego. “No longer would a compassionate view of immigrants lead the debate ... fear and rhetoric has grown so loud and strong that it was now politically expedient to target them” (Frey 2019: 24) and use them as scapegoats for various social ills, including unemployment, decreased wages, and crime. An integral aspect of Clinton’s policy was the punishing strategy of “prevention through deterrence” which intentionally inflicted heavy penalties, suffering, and even possible death on those who attempt to cross illegally into the US. Increased border security and harsher legal treatment forced desperate workers and refugees to travel through the inhospitable terrain of mountains and deserts. Immigrants were often forced to rely on predatory coyotes to guide them, a highly profitable industry that would become organized by the Mexican drug cartels, thus further boosting violence and instability in Mexico.

In full knowledge that these draconian policies could result in the death of many migrants, the Clinton administration pursued it anyway. Indeed, in the last 20 years, over 7,000 migrants have died trying to cross the border (Greenwald [et.al.](#), 2017). The ruthless deterrence strategy did not stop desperate migrants from coming, it simply made their journey more perilous and deadly by forcing them into previously untraveled desert terrain. In pursuit, border security and its damaging infrastructure of roads and vehicles barreled into pristine and protected areas of federal, state, or private land, trampling on the fragile habitats of endangered and threatened species. Adding insult to injury, capitalizing on a “tough on crime” stance that perennially suits political ambitions, Clinton demonized immigrants as criminals rather than victims of his own neoliberal economic policies, making their misfortune and death easier to ignore. Clinton’s methods only increased illegal immigration, as workers who traditionally travelled back and forth for work found it too difficult or dangerous to return, and often brought their families with them to live and work in the shadows.

After 9/11, a shocked and paranoid nation grew obsessed with border security, making the illogical choices of invading Afghanistan and Iraq and policing the southern border. For the first time, “economic migrants, the vast majority of undocumented immigrants, were now considered a national security threat alongside hardened criminals and terrorists ... [9/11] placed all those who wished to enter the country without proper documentation on equal footing” (Frey 2019: 75). Many came to view immigrants not only as a threat to jobs, but to national security as well. Along with the USA PATRIOT Act, the Bush administration launched a series of new security laws and agencies, effectively creating a garrison and surveillance state. In 2005, the US passed the “Real ID Act” which gave the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS) uncontested authority over border policy, including the ability to “waive in their entirety” any and all federal, state, or local protections for human health, animals, and the environment.

Prior to the Real ID Act, laws such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA) required the government to conduct analyses of the impacts of federal actions on animals and the environment and to consider alternatives to plans that could potentially harm either. Beginning in April 2006, however, using newly acquired powers, Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and his successors began to override dozens of applicable local, state, and federal laws — including NEPA, ESA, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act — to prioritize “national security” concerns (see Erickson and Taylor; Greenwald et. al. 2017; Herwick and Nicol). Since then the DHS has issued 8 waivers – 5 times during the Bush administration and 3 times by the Trump administration. The government began constructing a border wall regardless of its impact on humans, animals, and the environment, and their cursory impact studies minimized or ignored the substantive and long-term damage construction would inflict. Decades of binational conservation work on the protection of habitat and species were, and continue to be, nullified. The absolute authority commandeered by the Executive Office and the Secretary of the DHS over Congress, citizens, and science speaks volumes about the US pseudo-democracy and the social origins of natural crises afflicting biodiversity and the natural world.[\[7\]](#)

Just one year after passing the Real ID Act, Congress passed the Secure Fence Act of 2006, which authorized and partially funded the fencing of 700 miles of border barriers, and doubled the size of the US border patrol. While signing the Act into law on October 26, President Bush stated that the barrier would “help protect the American [sic] people and make our borders more secure,” and thereby constitute “an important step toward immigration reform.” Despite his understanding of the importance of migrant work for the US economy, and his affinity for Mexican people, Bush nonetheless caved to political pressure from the far Right for stricter immigrant policies. During his administration, key tensions emerged that have only sharpened with time. One conflict involved the economic need for cheap labor and the growing ideological aversion to foreigners and people of color characteristic of the Right and conservative Americans. Another arose in the clash between the desire for an open immigration policy and the perceived need for greatly enhanced security measures in the post-9/11 era. As racism, resentment, and xenophobia grew to shocking levels during the Trump presidency, ideology triumphed over pragmatism. The tension between open immigration and intensely guarded borders, moreover, was resolved in favor of harsh security measures that targeted foreigners and travelers to the US, catching many in a bureaucratic web and landing others in prison cells (Alden 2008).

President Obama continued the strict immigration policies of the Clinton and Bush eras, as construction of the wall and the military presence on the border continued, but he did not propose building extensive new barriers as Trump did later. Still, Obama expanded family detention centers, along with the defense and private detention industries bound up with them, and his “rate of deportation of immigrants already established in the country was higher than that of any president before or since” (Frey 2019: 161). It is clear today that US support for a southern border wall is not a partisan issue, but rather a consensus among the economic, political, and military elites who control US domestic and foreign policy. Moreover, it doesn’t hurt that anti-immigration policies bring politicians rich rewards in campaign contributions from defense contractors and private prison companies.

Increasingly, the US-Mexico border has become militarized as the state mobilized ever-more security forces and military personnel. Growing first around key urban ports of entry such as El Paso and San Diego, then extending across New Mexico and Arizona, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) became the largest police force in the country, currently staffed by 60,000 people (Frey 2019: 131). Authorization of the military mobilization along the border – a tactic used since 1989 in the “war on drugs” — added increasing numbers of soldiers to the mass of

border police, defying the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 which limited the powers of the federal government to deploy military personnel for law enforcement and civilian affairs. But with increasing militarization, these boundaries erode to conflate immigration policy with national security, transforming the US border with Mexico into a war zone – as people along the boundary lines experience it, witnessing the transformation of their communities “from cross-border exchanges to citadels” (Lind 2019).

Indeed, regions once teeming with wildlife have become increasingly saturated with checkpoints, roads and highways, all-terrain vehicles, helicopters, drones, surveillance towers, and night lights. “What was once a weak show of force and anemic attempt to stop illegal immigration became a more heavy-handed and militaristic approach to catch migrants. A warlike stance began to take shape against a population that was poor and mostly unarmed .. We are using the tactics and machinery of war against all who dare to cross the US-Mexico border” (Frey 2019: 5, 8). With increased military presence and authority came a pervasive “culture of cruelty” whereby Border Patrol agents systematically abused detained migrants and housed them in prison-like conditions without basic care and sanitation. Abuse was just another form of deterrence. The militarization of the border goes hand in hand with the ever-larger role of military institutions such as the Defense Department and the Pentagon; large defense industries including Boeing, Lockheed, and Raytheon; private detention center and for-profit prison industries like CoreCivic and GeoGroup and their many suppliers; large banks such as WellsFargo and JP Morgan; and close partnerships with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) — all working together in the highly profitable business of border fortification and apprehending and detaining migrants, thus creating what I term a vast migrant industrial complex.

Trump Tower South: The Wall as Xenophobic Totem

Currently, the Trump administration is literally bulldozing ahead with its plan to construct barriers across the entire US-Mexico boundary, from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. What others started, Trump promised to finish – in true Trumpian style – by making the wall bigger and better than ever. Before Trump made his iconic descent on the escalator at Trump tower to announce his presidential candidacy, which he began by railing against lax immigration policies and Mexican people, dark forces with names such as Stephen Miller, Steve Bannon, and Jeff Sessions were already organized, ready to take back the country from liberals and conservatives soft on immigration. Fervently believing that immigrant “invaders” were threatening the economy, jobs, culture, and national security, and rooted in white supremacist views, they broke with the conservative policy of winning support from people color to exploit the fears of disaffected white voters. Polling numbers told them that they could take back the White House and nation by fearmongering and scapegoating immigrants. They were looking for a “vessel” to embody their racism, xenophobia, and radical anti-immigration views, and they found it in Trump (David and Shear 2019), an abrasive figure with a long history of demagoguery and racism.

Ending legal and illegal immigration and building a wall across the southern border were key promises of Trump’s presidential campaign, and the Ariadne’s thread running through his first term in office. When Trump took his oath of office on January 20, 2017 he gained control over a thoroughly militarized border and bloated DHS budget of over \$70 billion. Walls and fences already covered 654 miles of border (roughly one-third), serviced by 5,000 miles of roads, not counting the undesignated routes for off-road patrol vehicles, and he promised to build an additional 500 miles of wall by election day 2020. Just days after taking office, on January 25, 2017, Trump issued an executive order to “secure the southern border of the United States through the immediate construction of a physical wall.”^[8] To build his “big, beautiful,”

“impenetrable,” and “powerful” wall, a Trump Tower thousands of miles long, Trump stopped at nothing. He declared the “migration crisis” to be a “national emergency,” he diverted over \$6 billion in funds from the Defense Department budget, he shut down the government for 35 days (the longest period in history) to demand additional funding. Presuming himself to be more King than President, Trump defied the constitutional separation of powers, battled the courts that thwarted him, and urged private contractors to build in defiance of the law if necessary, promising that he would pardon them later. In addition to championing a continuous border wall, Trump issued bans on Muslim countries, he asked Congress to deny welfare to all immigrants for the first five years in the country, he cancelled the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, and he attempted to revoke the “temporary protected status” of immigrants fleeing violence.

Thus, the urgent national “crisis” was immigration, the dangerous security threat was unarmed poor people, and the answer was sealing the border with a wall. Both the alleged problem and solution were utterly misconceived. Trump shrieked about the dangers of immigration, despite the fact that immigration numbers had levelled (they rose from 3.6 million in 1990 to 12.2 million in 2007, then stabilized [Brown [et.al.](#) 2017]). Moreover, the real security problem was not illegal immigration, but rather people overstaying visas, as did at least two of the 9/11 attackers. Migrants continue to shift entry strategies as well; instead of trying to enter illegally, thousands began to surrender themselves as refugees to US border agents in the hope to receive asylum. Increasingly, people crossing the border are families and children. Many immigrants who cross are referred to as “non-impactables” – people whose lives are so desperate nothing can deter them (Lind 2019). A majority of drugs come through official border entry ports for which walls are irrelevant. Walls do not stop the movement of people or drugs into the country, they only provide a distraction from underlying problems and an illusion of security, as their effects on life communities are all too real.[\[9\]](#)

But simplistic solutions attract superficial minds, and a massive wall – the largest US infrastructure project since building the highway system — appealed to the egomaniacal builder in Trump, who boasted, “Who can build better than Trump? I build, it’s what I do ... Fences are easy – believe me” (cited in Davis and Shear 2019: 24). Moreover, the concept of a wall appealed to his base of disaffected, uneducated white workers facing diminishing prospects amidst a changing economy and demography. They took their frustration out on the convenient scapegoat of immigrants allegedly flooding into the country and taking jobs, driving down wages, eroding (white) “American” culture, even posing a security risk. Trump denounced southern nations as “shithole countries.” Time and time again, especially evident in his mega-rallies, Trump exploited fear of the Other and mobilized anger and hatred to advance his agendas. Trump demonized migrant families fleeing misery and seeking a better life in the US as criminals, rapists, and drug pushers. He depicted the “migrant caravan” of people fleeing from Central America as a hostile invasion and dire threat to national security, rather than desperate people seeking to survive the ravages of climate change, drought, hunger, poverty, political violence, and neoliberalism. He frequently portrayed immigrants from the south as invaders, suggesting they were insects and animals.[\[10\]](#)

El Paso was the first experimental laboratory in border security technologies that were later applied to other hot zones such as San Diego and along the Arizona-Mexico boundary. It was one of the first heavily fortified border zones in the war on immigration. El Paso is situated in the middle of the Chihuahuan Desert which stretches from upper Mexico through Texas and into lower New Mexico. The Rio Grande river forms a natural boundary line separating El Paso from Juarez, Mexico, but the borderland – *la frontera* – is highly fluid crossing for students, workers, families, and industry on both sides. El Paso is a large community of nearly 800,000 people, a

city comprised of 80% Hispanics, and one of the safest cities in the US. It is a dynamic area where people cross the border every day for school and work, and where families live on both sides. Yet it is a city that Trump vilified as dangerous and used as demagogic stage to peddle racism and xenophobia to the nation in various televised speeches. And it is, of the course, the city that was targeted by a white supremacist killer inspired by Trump’s rhetoric, when he drove from Dallas to El Paso to murder as many Hispanics as possible.

Trump stigmatized El Paso as a capital of crime and murder, when in fact it is one of the safest cities in the nation (Edwards 2019).^[11] Generally, undocumented migrants have some of the lowest rates of crime. Flexing the muscle of his “zero-tolerance” of illegal immigration policy, Trump unleashed ICE agents throughout the country in search of illegal workers and he separated children from parents and forced thousands into filthy concentration-camp like areas. His hateful, racist rhetoric was sure to have consequences, and it did in the neo-Nazi marches through Charlottesville, Virginia and in El Paso, where a shooter—whose “manifesto” reflected Trump’s racist rhetoric – came to gun down those who were faces of the “Hispanic invasion of Texas.” The El Paso Latinx population now lives in fear, feeling they have a target on their backs. Generally, with his hateful and violent rhetorical attacks against people of color, immigrants, and journalists, Trump has legitimated and emboldened white supremacists, neo-Nazis, and a pervasive culture of violence. Indeed, white supremacy, not international terrorism or migrant criminality, has become the greatest security threat in the US (Chalfant 2019).

Consequently, the border wall is less a real form of “security” than a symbol and a political tool to provoke fear, to demonize the Other, to promote political agendas, to coddle a xenophobic base, and to legitimate spending countless billions on the migrant-industrial complex that enriches corporations and robs taxpayers. As Christine Slessor notes (2019), “Walls are merely the most visible manifestation of a larger apparatus of militarised surveillance and technology employed to defend territory and keep people in their place.” While their ability to deter human migrants is dubious, they unquestionably have catastrophic effects on flora and fauna.

It’s important to appreciate that Trump’s border policies innovated little and built on the provisions of Clinton, Bush, and Obama. Before Trump even took office, for instance, federal law mandated that the border wall be extended nearly 50 additional miles. What Trump did was to ramp up the rhetoric, increase the fear and hate, make implicit racist biases explicit, attack immigration and push deportation with unparalleled zeal, and call for completing an already expansive wall across the entire southern border.

Thus, the commandeering authority of presidential power and the military-industrial complex, the demonization and criminalization of immigrants, the walling and militarization of the border, the political exploitation of xenophobia, the scapegoating of undocumented workers, and the sadistic deterrence policies that led to confinement, abuse, and separation of families – all this began with Trump’s predecessors and had consistent bipartisan support (Lu 2019). The punitive, harsh, and militarized policies that declared war against immigrants “had their genesis in the Clinton White House, and were amplified after 9/11 and then again in the Trump era, but the blueprint was laid out decades ago” (Frey 2019: 54). The days of Mexican nationals being able to freely travel back and forth across the border for work and being viewed in benign terms are long gone.

A Wall to Oblivion: The New Front in the War on Wildlife and Wilderness

For two centuries, farmers, ranchers, miners, hunters, and trappers have waged war on wildlife and habitat in the US, with deadly consequences — wiping out numerous species and leaving others barely intact (see Jacobs 1992, Rifkin 1993, Ketcham 2019). Where ethics, science, and

compassion require protection of biodiversity and the environment, politics, profits, and idiocy are destroying what fragments remain. Instead of peaceful co-existence with the natural world, US power elites have opened up a *new front* in the war on wildlife and wilderness. Border walls, fences, barriers, roads, and traffic are ripping apart national parks, wildlife preserves and refuges, conservation areas, and sundry ecosystems, already strained by centuries of frenzied development and decades of “border security.”

The US-Mexico borderlands are as rich in biodiversity as they are unique, beautiful, and sensitive to human stampeding. There is a widespread misconception that the southern border is a monotonous expanse of lifeless deserts and wastelands, but in fact it is teeming with life, flush with biodiversity, and resplendent with beauty. Stretching nearly two thousand miles, from western California across Arizona and New Mexico to south Texas, the borderlands “traverse six ecoregions containing vegetation types that include desert scrub, temperate forests and woodlands, semi-desert and plain grasslands, subtropical scrublands, freshwater wetlands, and salt marshes ... and support extraordinary biological diversity (Peters [et.al.](#) p. 740). The southern border “bisects the geographical ranges of 1506 native terrestrial and freshwater animal ($n = 1077$) and plant ($n = 429$) species, including 62 species listed as Critically Endangered, Endangered, or Vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List... Five Borderlands Conservation Hotspots identified by Defenders of Wildlife represent top-priority areas of high biological diversity and binational investment in conservation that are threatened by border wall construction” (ibid).

The Sky Islands mountains regions in southeastern Arizona and northern Mexico, for instance, are host to over 7,000 plant and animal species including cacti, juniper, pine, spotted owls, black bears, mountain lions, bighorn sheep, red squirrels, and over half of the continent’s bird species (Carswell 2017), but all are imperiled. On or near the border are numerous wildlife refuges, national parks, tribal lands, wilderness areas, and conservation areas, many of which overlap national boundaries (Barclay and Frostenson 2019). This vast borderland, says Stanford biologist, Rudolfo Dirzo, “is an ecological theater where evolution has engendered a plethora of plays. A multitude of factors — climate conditions, topography, geological history, soil types – converge to array an amazing mosaic of ecosystems. A constellation of Northern temperate and Southern tropic lifeforms and lineages coincide with endemic species, as in few areas of the globe. This means these borderlands are a global responsibility” (cited in Jordon 2018). Thus, border areas stretching across four US states and two nations are among the most fragile, diverse, rare, threatened, and critically important habitats on the continent, and many species exist in these regions and nowhere else. A barrier stretching from San Diego, California to Brownsville, Texas would cut through deserts and grasslands, rivers and wetlands, mountains and valleys, glistening sand hills and white waves. It would further fragment and divide the habitats of bison, bobcats, jaguars, jaguarundi, prairie dogs, great horned owls, mud turtles, the desert tortoise, roadrunners, sandhill cranes, deer, low-flying birds, insects, and sundry other species. Because of long stretches of border wall that bisect habitat range, the survival of imperiled species — such as black bears, ocelots, pygmy owls, Sonoran pronghorn, and numerous types of butterflies and cacti — is already severely stressed and continuing the wall would consign them to oblivion. A completed wall that seals off remaining migration pathways would be a “deathblow to already endangered animals on both sides of the border.” It would affect “93 threatened, endangered, and candidate species” and “degrade and destroy critical habitat for 25 species, including a total of 2,134,792 acres that occurs within 50 miles of the border” (Greenwald et. al. 2017).

The wall discourages or impedes animals from accessing food and water resources. It disrupts natural breeding patterns and gene flows, leading to inbreeding and genetic disorders. It fragments already disjointed areas of land, severs critical wildlife corridors, and blocks seasonal

migration routes. Barriers impede travel necessary for the survival of endangered and threatened species like the Mexican Gray Wolf, the most endangered mammal in North America, and the jaguar, the third largest cat species that lives not only in the jungles of the amazon, but also in the borderlands of Arizona and New Mexico. Moreover, the wall prevents numerous species from migrating northward in response to the drought and heat brought on by climate change, literally entrapping them in the dystopian prison house of anthropogenic warming that marks the new age of the Anthropocene. In too many cases, these imperiled animals are what Paul Ehrlich calls “zombie species” – the walking dead on the brink of extinction.

There are multiple levels of impact that a border wall and border militarization have on ecosystems and wildlife. It is not only the wall itself, which restricts free movement and bisects continuous ecological zones, but also infrastructure development around it — checkpoint areas and bases, thousands of miles of patrol roads and highways on formerly wild landscapes, frenzied movement of personnel and traffic, the roar of helicopters, blazing and disorienting night lights – the total imposition of the human boot on imperiled species and fragile ecosystems. Building the wall not only overrides crucial environmental protection laws, it also impedes binational scientific research and undermines decades of conservation work in numerous areas. [\[12\]](#)

Biodiversity is extremely important to the health of ecosystems. There is a cascading effect with the loss of large predators that ramifies throughout ecosystems. According to Dr. James McCallum, who co-authored a report on impact of fencing on wildlife and ecosystems: “Once there is a disruption of the complex ecosystems in this way, there is a risk of triggering a cascade of secondary effects ... Simply put, less apex predators leads to more deer, which leads to great vegetation predation, which leads to less pollination with a further effect on bird species and insects.” (cited in Freeman 2017). Furthermore, the digestive systems of animals are important means of seed dispersal and their ability to travel is critical for the dissemination of plant diversity. Only the crudest anthropocentrist could not see that, apart from the intrinsic value of animal lives and a thriving environment, it also affects the economy and human interests, as “biological resources account for at least 40% of the world’s economy ... This estimates to be 33 trillion dollars per year in the U.S. economy” (Brown et. al.).

To underscore just how flawed, cynical, and destructive political ideologies and security policies can be, consider the case of “one the most biologically and culturally regions of the continental United States” (Burnett 2019). the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, an International Biosphere Reserve on the Arizona-Mexico boundary. This area, ironically, was created in 1976 specifically to conserve biodiversity and to test how humans can possibly live in balance with it. In October 2019, construction of a border wall along the Arizona-Mexico boundary in this region began. Despite the warnings of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service that the wall could imperil 23 endangered and at-risk species, and of the National Park Service that construction could destroy 22 archaeological sites, the government waived sundry environmental laws to further realize Trump’s campaign promise to build more walls. In addition to numerous endangered species, construction in this area also affects native peoples, such as the Tohono O’odham Nation, which straddles both sides of the US-Mexico border and whose tradition of moving freely back and forth abruptly ended with Operation Gatekeeper. “The vast Tohono O’odham Nation — nearly as big as Connecticut — shares 62 miles with Mexico. The tribe vehemently opposes the border wall. Several thousand tribal members live south of the border, and are permitted to pass back and forth using tribal IDs... a full-blown 30-foot wall would make it that much difficult for our tribal citizens in Mexico and in the U.S. to be able to actively participate with family gatherings, with ceremonial gatherings” (Burnett 2019; also see Weingarten 2019 and Herweck and Nicol).

To give another example, the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge, near McAllen Texas, preserves 90,000 acres of habitat for a rich abundance of wildlife and plant diversity including many threatened and endangered species on both sides of the border (Gaskill 2018). It provides a vital corridor for migrating plants and animals, one of countries largest remaining population of ocelots and perhaps the only place that jaguarundi still exist (Barclay and Frosterson 2019). The Rio Grande Valley hosts one of the most spectacular convergences of two major skyways for migratory birds, and people worldwide come to view some of the 500 bird species. None of this deterred DHS, for a line of 18-foot-tall steel posts four inches apart cuts right through this ecological wonderland, affecting “as much as 70 percent of the valley’s three national wildlife refuges” (Gaskill 2016). Extending the wall would block access to large areas of federal, state, and private lands and historic sites across three counties (Clark 2018). Defenders of Wildlife found that a wall would fragment and sever over 2,750 acres of the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge in Hidalgo County (Grandoni and Eilperin 2018). It would also barge through the National Butterfly Center, a 1,000-acre sanctuary in Mission, Texas, with nearly 70 percent of its land on the Mexican side.

Like many areas affected by the building of a southern border, biodiversity and beautiful habitats are a vital economic resource for local communities here. “Nature tourism in the Valley generates upwards of \$463 million annually in sustainable economic activity for Hidalgo, Starr, Willacy and Cameron counties, supporting more than 6,600 jobs” (Clark 2018). According to a *Washington Post* expose, the Trump administration blocked the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from making public numerous concerns it had about the impact of additional wall in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, as it pushed ahead with construction efforts (Grandoni and Eilperin 2018).

To date, roughly two-thirds, or 1,350 miles, of the border remains unfenced, while republicans continue to supply Trump with billions of additional dollars in funding (for an overall total of nearly \$10 billion since January 2017) and a privately funded builder, endorsed by DHS, moves into Mission, Texas to declare war against the “butterfly freaks” and illegally clear land “under siege by cartels, criminals, and illegal aliens” (Sommer 2019, Miroff 2019b).

Nonetheless, Trump has faced opposition from all sides and is far behind on his pledge to build 500 hundred miles of new fencing by November 2020. In October 2019, ominously, with only 57 miles of replacement barrier and nine miles of secondary barrier having been built, construction of a new levee wall system began in the Lower Rio Grande Valley area which not only has ecological riches but also the highest number of illegal crossings (Rodgers and Bailey 2019). Determined to fulfill his campaign promise, Trump will continue to ignore social and environmental considerations, legal restraints, and private property claims. Even amidst the dramatic economic and social crisis of the recent coronavirus pandemic of 2020, Trump has continued to push to build the wall, insisting it will help control the spread of the virus.

Walling Off the World

From the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge to the Tijuana Estuary, everywhere along the 2,000 miles-long boundary one sees the same dynamics playing out — politically-motivated, irrational border “security” policies are degrading sensitive ecosystems, violating the rights of humans and animals, harming local communities, defying science and citizen will, and suffocating life and beauty. Few things show naked state power as dramatically as the construction of this wall.

A key purpose of the southern border wall is to prevent suffering peoples from migrating into the US, but much more it impedes travelers, academics, students, scientists, conservationists, and the

free exchange of ideas and culture – an odd consequence for neoliberalism. Often the plight of immigrants receives sympathetic coverage, but — given the speciesist biases of mass media and the dominant ideologies — precious little national attention has been given to the effects of the border wall on biodiversity and ecosystems, as if misguided immigration and security policies only have social implications and not systemically catastrophic effects.

The wall stops animals from accessing food, water, and breeding mates; it traps them to drown in floods; and it prevents them from escaping the effects of climate change. The wall and sadistic deterrence policies shift migration and its impact onto sensitive habitats, where this security model kills desperate and determined people, as it devastates animal populations, fragments their habitats, and degrades the environment. The wall divides families, towns, and tribes, and hurts local communities and small businesses in sundry ways. The wall poses serious hazards such as flooding, and indeed flash floods in Nogales and Organ Pipe National Monument in Arizona resulted in two deaths and millions of dollars in property damage (Barclay and Frostenson 2019).

Construction of the wall devours public lands and threatens private lands as well through the force of eminent domain. The wall is a \$25-70 billion-dollar boondoggle, a prodigious waste of resources and taxpayer money. It is a cynical and opportunistic political tool used for demagoguery, scapegoating, and pandering to irrational fears to win elections and resist multiculturalism. It is part of a vast infrastructure and security paradigm deployed to enrich banks, corporations, contractors, the military, and the private prison industry, at the expense of civil liberties. It is a mirage of actual security, a manufactured pseudo-crisis masking real social and environment crises, such as corporate power, economic inequality, dysfunctional political systems, and climate change. The border wall is a gigantic symbol of bureaucratic sclerosis and idiocy and a monument to racism, xenophobia, and speciesism. The wall is not only physical — brick, mortar, or steel — it is also psychological and cultural. It is a towering totemic sign of the *Us Vs. Them* mentality that informs every hierarchical society and pervades US culture. The wall refutes progressive principles of unity, community, ecology, and the rights of animals and the earth. The wall is the dream of the Enlightenment strangled with concertina wire, a postmodern coda for faded empires and dying civilizations. Fascists and terrorists hate diversity, whether human or nonhuman, cultural or biological, and yearn for the monotony that is death. The wall epitomizes this; it is everything but what the state intends it to be.

The southern border wall standing for decades is already a disaster, and plans to build a continuous barrier from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific coast would damage countless communities and consign innumerable plant and animal species to oblivion. If Trump’s wall is built, Mexican conservation biologist Rurik List observes, it “will rewrite the biological history of North America. A history that for millennia allowed animals to travel along the grasslands and forests from Mexico to Canada” (cited in Kessler 2019). Whatever legitimate security concerns exist on the US-Mexico border, sensible policies were abandoned decades ago. If border security is a priority, the state ought to better address the problem of people overstaying visas. If surveillance is needed, less disruptive virtual technologies should be employed. Wherever a boundary or checkpoint might be necessary, government must respect the potential impacts of barriers of any kind on all living communities, and pursue alternatives when harm is possible. Plans and policies must receive public input and be based on science, not politics. Protection of biodiversity, endangered species, and ecosystems must become a top national priority. State parks, wildlife refuges, wilderness areas, and public lands should be protected, not endangered. Wildlife corridors should be increased, not fenced off, and designed for maximum permeability. Binational conservation efforts should be enhanced, not impeded.

Walls solve nothing. They don't stop desperate people, address the causes of migration, or blot out promise of a better life. They are a feeble technofix for deep-rooted social, political, and economic problems. They benefit no one but the nefarious agents, agencies, and corporations behind the migrant-industrial complex. Any serious policy approach to immigration would address the systemic causes of migration, not tinker with its effects. For the mass migration of desperate peoples are driven by global capitalism, neoliberalism, the imperialist reordering of southern nations, and the military-backed plundering of underdeveloped countries. The current global order requires harsh exploitation, drastic inequality, political violence, suffering and immiseration — all now exacerbated by runaway climate change.

From a global perspective, one finds that dozens of countries are aggressively trying to control border crossings with walls and barriers, often with harmful consequences to animals and habitat. These barriers are erected not only due to territorial disputes or conflict, but also because of instabilities created by economic inequalities and different levels of development between adjoining nations, which engenders unwanted immigration (Carter and Poast). This certainly is the case on the US-Mexico border, and currently there are about 70 sizeable border barriers worldwide. These walls are “symptoms of a rift in the world order, as manifestations of the failings of international cooperation ... At the end of the Cold War there were just 15 walls delimiting national borders; today, with 70 of them in existence around the world, the wall has become the new standard for international relations” (Vallet 2017).

Thus, the momentary return (in the Western imagination) to an Enlightenment utopia of an open, transparent, and fluid global community after the fall of the Berlin Wall – signaling the end of the Cold War and the birth of the “New World Order” — was an ephemeral dream that ended with an increase in sealing off nation states into separate security compounds.^[13] Whether it is the influx of refugees and migrants from Africa to Italy or from Syria to Turkey, Europe as well is rushing to consolidate its border infrastructure, while bracing for even greater floods of desperate humanity fleeing the ravages of climate change. Indeed, by 2050 there could be up to a billion climate refugees seeking shelter from the wrath of nature awoken by anthropogenic warming of the globe (Lowell 2007).

These walls come at a huge price, the economic expense – which is enormous (Valet 2017) — being the least of it. The greatest cost of walls and barriers are the toll they take on communities – human, animal, and plant. On a planet increasingly threatened by climate change, walls, borders, nationalism, isolationism, nativism, and right-wing populism can be seen as malignancies the global biocommunity can no longer afford, and instead nations must immediately foster strong ties of international cooperation to avert the worst effects of climate change. Or perish. Yet now, with the rapid spread of the coronavirus, nations are sealing borders more intensely than ever.

Enlightenment dreams and modern utopias continue to crash and burn, as postmodern walls arise from the ashes. The problems afflicting the natural world stem from crises haunting the social world and cannot be overcome until their root social causes are engaged and resolved. Moreover, the accelerating climate emergency is aggravating all social and environmental problems and dramatizes the urgency for addressing the underlying social and political causes affecting all life. These causes stem from an unsustainable global capitalist system based on grow-or-die imperatives, a massive industrial complex powered by fossil fuel, elite control of dysfunctional political systems, and sufficiently pacified and depoliticized populations that allow the perpetuation of profit-driven markets and industrial death machines.

The construction of the southern border wall and its systemic impacts provides an excellent example of how deeply intertwined are the fates of humans, animals, and the environment, and

how all interests must be fought for as one in a movement for total, planetary liberation (Best 2014). It is vital that nations worldwide rethink their definitions of security, understanding that there is no human, social, or political stability without a stable and flourishing natural world. The current climate emergency is dramatic proof that a wounded and destabilized planet has drastic consequences for human security, as heat, drought, floods, superstorms, melting ice sheets, and rising sea levels pose severe dangers to human existence worldwide, causing mass migrations, terrorism, and overall social breakdown and chaos.

Nothing – not indigenous peoples’ lands or grave sites, not public or private property, not devastated communities, not dead babies in the rivers and deserts, not wildlife sanctuaries or wilderness areas, not species hanging on by a thread – has stood in the way between Trump and his obsession to build a continuous border wall. But resistance is growing. Conservationists and scientists; environmental, animal protection, and human rights organizations; native tribes; border businesses, communities, and private landowners as well are battling the US government over the border wall. These disparate voices have developed research, organized petitions, issued restraining orders, and filed lawsuits. Thanks to the REAL ID Act, however, which prioritizes “security” above all else, and various levels of hostile courts (including the Supreme Court), little legal leverage is available, suggesting change cannot come only from within the system. At Organ Pipe and elsewhere, citizens organized protests against the wall. It is an irony that Trump’s divisiveness has united people along the border regions, with unlikely alliances forming groups such as ranchers and environmentalists (Allison 2019). Indeed, a new social movement is forming, based on broad alliances and coalitions, using direct action tactics with the goal of abolishing ICE and the vast migrant industrial-detention complex while promoting human and labor rights (Dayen 2017).

Thus, the US-Mexico border is not only a geographical and political boundary, but an emerging *front line of struggle* in the battle against state tyranny and the war on animals and the environment. The wall must not only be stopped, it must be dismantled in order to re-open migratory flows of life and to rewild damaged habitats. If tribes shattered Hadrian’s Wall, and citizens sledge-hammered the Berlin Wall, people can raze Trump’s Wall as well. Given the fact that “about 66% of land along the US-Mexico border is either owned privately, by Native Americans, or by individual states” (Rodgers and Styllanou 2017), further appropriation of needed land will be tied up in struggles and legal battles for years or decades to come, allowing time for, hopefully, a greater resistance movement to form.^[14]

Of course, the problem is not only Trump’s Wall, which is but *a symptom of the underlying disease of a corporate-state power complex stifling democracy and threatening all life*. This poses the much larger task of systemic social transformation, while contending with *the dark forces of the US psyche and the impulses of fascism becoming ever more manifest*.

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Notes

1. On the racist and xenophobic outlook of Donald Trump, and the insidious forces that mobilize it, see Davis and Shear (2019).

2. The terms “human animals” and “nonhuman animals” are meant to underscore the fact that humans are animals and to avoid any speciesist bifurcation between “us” and “them.” The terms “humans” or “animals” are merely of convenience and do not imply any such dichotomies. Likewise, I often use the term “community” broadly, to include humans, animals, and plants as interconnected and interdependent among themselves and as one vast biocommunity of life.
3. I often use the term “wall” in the singular, understanding that along the US-Mexico border the government deploys multiple kinds of barriers for different purposes and types of terrain. These barriers include concrete, wire mesh, razor wire, post and rail, sheet piling, and levee wall with 18 to 30 feet tall steel bollards (for images see US Customs and Border Protection, 2011). It is clear that the choice of terminology is semantically charged, fluid, and has political implications, as, for instance, Democrats will not support a “wall,” but do support building more “fence” (see Thrush 2019). Roughly one half of the existing border wall uses “pedestrian fencing” impassable to pedestrians and vehicles, typically 15 feet or higher, often with “primary” and “secondary” walls on both side, and the other half is “vehicle” barriers which “do not block the migrations of most wildlife species or cause or exacerbate flooding along the borderlands” (Greenwald [et.al.](#) 2017). Moreover, barriers are created and policed not only with physical boundaries, but also with cameras, heat sensors, movement detectors, helicopters, drones, patrol personnel, dogs, and robots. One half of the 2,000-mile border is comprised of rugged “natural barriers.”
4. Hereafter, I shorten this phrase to “migrant-industrial complex.” On the concept of “industrial complex,” and its numerous types, see my Introduction to Best et. al. (2011). For an overview of the sundry components of the migrant-industrial complex, see Dayen (2017) and Nickel (2019).
5. The fact that it is theoretically possible for a new species to evolve due to human-imposed barriers hardly compensates for the overall loss of biodiversity and damage to ecosystems they cause.
6. Throughout the history of US immigration policy, dating back to the eighteenth century, a common theme prevails: ambivalence — the tension between a desire for openness and multiculturalism and a fear of the other and need for security, between isolationism and internationalism. One traditional way the US state has squared the circle has been to draw a distinction between “desirable” immigrants who help build the country and “undesirable” immigrants who threaten its values and security. As Alden notes (2008: 59), “The country has swung from open-door to closed-door policies as that perception of benefits and threats has shifted.” Whereas earlier Chinese immigrants and European radicals were demonized and scapegoated, Trump has vilified the perception of Latinx people, in sharp contrast to previous republican presidents George W. Bush and Ronald Reagan.
7. Thus far, the courts stand behind the power of the DHS to waive any protection law in their way, as in February 2019, when a Federal appeals court in California ruled that the DHS has “a broad grant of authority” and the Trump administration was within its rights to waive dozens of environmental laws to fast track 14 miles of fencing border in southern California” (Schwartz 2019).
8. Executive Order on “Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements” (Jan. 25, 2017).
9. At the most literal level, walls do not work, determined transgressors always find ways to climb over, burrow under, or cut through it (Valet 2017). Indeed, a simple cordless power toll is enough for smugglers to make mincemeat of Trumps “impenetrable” steel walls in minutes (Miroff 2019a).

10. Liberals rail against “dehumanizing” language that “treats people like animals,” without ever addressing the speciesist biases that assume it’s acceptable to treat *animals* “like animals” – that is, to abuse them.
11. It is worth noting that people in El Paso and other border cities have very different experiences than how Trump depicts life on the border as one of fear and lawlessness, and are least inclined to support border militarization and walls (see Lind 2019)
12. “US and Mexican scientists have shared distressing stories of being intimidated, harassed, and delayed by border security officers. Binational meetings and other collaborative activities become inconvenient and constrained by the hours required to pass border security checkpoints” (Peters et. al.).
13. Building walls for security has a long history of failure and disaster (e.g., the Berlin Wall) and security fences in other areas, such as along the India-Pakistan border, have also affected wildlife and led, as well, to increased human-wildlife conflict (see Pahalwan 2007).
14. On the battle between private landowners claiming property rights on one side, and the state claiming eminent domain on the other, see Belmonte 2019.