

Table of Contents

Desert Crossroads (Rising Resistance to Corporate Globalisation and Deadly Borders) 1

Desert Crossroads (Rising Resistance to Corporate Globalisation and Deadly Borders)

Byo.r.g.a.n.i.c.

As xenophobic border regimes around the world rigidify, activist groups are joining forces to denounce them and the neoliberal economics on which they stand. Amidst a worsening climate of vigilantism, San Diego based anarchist collective o.r.g.a.n.i.c. report on recent antiborder actions in the towns, desert wastelands and graveyards along the US/Mexico border

[IMAGE]

You know that you live in the desert when your car collects a thick coat of yellow dust if it goes without a regular wash. Living in the area of the borderlands currently known as San Diego, you cannot help but notice this. The desert is like that: it plays a huge role in any story about the US/Mexico border area. Most of that border is embodied in a vast, hot, deadly desert. Day after day, people die trying to migrate across that line into the United States. Many people living in these borderlands continue to take action against the border as well as the ideas and individuals that seek to uphold it. There are endless groups that take these tasks upon themselves. Below are some stories and thoughts put together from members of one of these groups, the o.r.g.a.n.i.c. collective.

Who We Are?

In September 2003 as the WTO was holding its Fifth Ministerial, a group of people came together to organise a San Diego/Tijuana mobilisation as one of the many solidarity actions worldwide. Out of this effort, the o.r.g.a.n.i.c. collective was born. Currently, o.r.g.a.n.i.c. is working on a campaign that not only strives to stop the Minutemen, their clone vigilantes and Border Patrol involvement in our communities but focuses on other issues around the border such as challenging the building of the triple fence and supporting human rights for migrant people.

As an anarchist group, o.r.g.a.n.i.c. has always tried to expand people's understanding of the border and migration. A lot of well-meaning people working on various radical or progressive causes have a very narrow understanding of the border. We feel that we are only starting to understand a small part of it after organising to bring about its end for years.

The Minutemen

In April, a group of armed vigilantes calling themselves the Minutemen Project announced their plans to engage in armed civilian patrols of the US/Mexico border in Arizona. While these kind of vigilante patrols have been done for years, what was different here was the scale of the project and the large amount of attention the project was getting in the corporate media. In July, a similar group – the California Minutemen – began their first operation on the border in California. Yet another group, the Friends of the Border Patrol, announced plans for a much larger operation (also in CA) on Mexican Independence Day, September 16th.

The No Border Encuentro

The No Border Encuentro, held in San Diego at the end of August 2005, was planned to take place in between the two California groups in order to reflect on our efforts to stop one and create an effective network to stop the other. It attempted to create a space for both learning and strategising against borders and racism. 'Encuentro' is Spanish for 'encounter'. The word was chosen in the spirit of the

Zapatista encounters, which seek to create a space for people to meet and work towards new worlds together.

Saturday was spent mostly on a Maquiladora tour and then, later in the evening, a concert. Sunday was broken down into several workshops and strategy sessions. Over 100 people came to the conference from San Diego, Tijuana, Portland, Los Angeles, Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara, San Francisco and other places.

When talking about the US/Mexico border, there is always more than enough to say. When talking about borders in general, there are endless topics including nationalism, gender and freedom of movement to only name a few. At the No Border Encuentro, there were a few major themes covered including panels on: the history of the US/Mexico border and the vigilantes on that border; how the border splits indigenous communities given by members of four indigenous nations; Border Disturbance Art and a final keynote by Ashanti Alston, a former Black Panther who currently identifies as an anarchist and does support work for the Zapatistas.

[IMAGE]

Throughout Sunday, participants discussed what tactics and strategies could be used to stop the Minutemen, including direct action trainings and Electronic Civil Disobedience at SWARMtheminutemen.com as well as a longer strategy session aimed at including all Encuentro participants but broken into different spaces for people to choose their own focus. Among other things, we dissected maps, discussed messaging and outreach, evaluated past actions and proposed solidarity work outside of the SD/TJ area. We left the meeting with a plan to shut down the Friends of the Minutemen training session the next day.

It's Always Too Early

(lotu5 on the organised disruption of the Friends of the Border Patrol training meeting – morning 9.17.05)

We're on our way to the hall where the Minutemen are doing their training. I'm rushing because I slept too late. It's early. It's always too early. In Miami at the FTAA meetings we had to meet at 6:30am to try to shut them down. This time, we only have to get up at 7am to make it to the site of the Minutemen training by 8am to disrupt their sign-in and stop the training for the whole day. I'm really hungry, wishing I had time for breakfast.

The night before we were up late at the spokescouncil meeting. The meeting was exciting, with lots of ideas buzzing from all the people who had travelled from far away to come and help stop the Minutemen, reject racism and challenge the idea that fences and guns keep us safe. At the meeting, we had planned this action and agreed on what we thought would be the best way to stop this new group of vigilantes.

This group was called the Friends of the Border Patrol. Part of what makes working against the Minutemen more difficult is that they have a structure somewhat like ours: many different small, private groups popping up in different places. In July, we had spent 3 weeks facing off with a group called the California Minutemen. For Mexican Independence Day, the Friends of the Border Patrol were organising their own civilian border operation.

I park my car down the block from the hall and we get out and walk over, just as planned. At 8am on the dot, we walk up the driveway to a table where the Friends of the Border Patrol are signing up attendees for the training. The group of demonstrators uses lots of different tactics, from face-offs with the volunteers, parading inside of the hall with bullhorns and blocking the entrance. We do what we can to stop the racists in this city.

One volunteer tackles a demonstrator but the crowd still doesn't use the same kind of aggression in response. After almost half an hour of intense confrontation, the police arrive and arrest two activists who the Minutemen accuse of assault. Later, they are both released but the activist of colour is cited and the white activist is not.

[IMAGE]

Up Against the Fence

(owl on the Calexico/Mexicali mobilisation – afternoon/evening 9.17.05 - with memory assistance by lotu5)

This is a much longer drive. I cannot help but think about the resources - the gas - used in all these trips out to the desert. In July, we had travelled to Campo to confront the California Minutemen; Campo is still in San Diego County, about an hour east of town straight out on the 8. Now, we're dropping down the hillside into Imperial County, the vast valley stretches out for miles east; now it's two more hours to drive. This is the weekend the Friends of the Border Patrol claimed that they would be starting their patrols of the US/Mexico border.

We drive into Calexico, a US town that sits right on the border across from Mexicali (a much larger Mexican town), and park quickly because we're late. Still, we are just in time to meet up with folks at a park that local organisers have secured as a meeting spot and start the march. There seem to be many different types of folks – everything from the stars and stripes to anarchist flags are flying; everyone against the Minutemen. Within a few blocks, the march rounds the corner and comes upon the border fence. A rush hits me and within seconds we're at the fence. The Frente Zapatista and some Anarchists in Mexicali have organised a rally on the other side. Between both groups, there are well over 500 people.

In minutes, we have armed ourselves with rocks and poles from our flags and are beating and scratching at the rusty fence. On both sides, folks are climbing the fence and chanting 'Sin Capitalismo, Sin Fronteras!' I have the wooden pole that my circle A flag is mounted on, metal-tipped at the bottom, and I'm beating at the fence, over and over. As the rust flecks off onto my arms and face and neck, I want it to be pieces of the border falling down around me. I look to my left and another protestor is scratching letters onto one of the fence's support beams with a soft rock. I look ahead and I see a face just a foot away but separated by this wall. I think about these two populated areas split down the middle by this monstrosity; I think about the families and friends that come here to talk to those who cannot cross over.

[IMAGE]

Above me a young punk-looking guy climbs to the top, his face masked, he straddles the wall and two comrades come to either side of me and hoist me up to hand him my circle A flag. As he waves it back and forth, the crowds cheer. As I come down, he hands me back my flag and proceeds to wave a Mexican flag and finally his own which reads, 'Rompos La Frontera' ('Smash the Border').

As a volleyball flew back and forth overhead, some people hid amongst the crowd and broke holes in the fence. We all knew it wasn't coming down that day, but it was long past time to make the marks evident of a future without its presence.

The march slowly and brokenly continued on with many of us unwilling to leave those who had met us from the other side. Eventually most of us made it to the park where the route ended and a few speeches were planned as well as instructions to camp. Surprisingly (or not), we almost made it out of there without confrontation from the local law enforcement. Instead, two undercover caught a guy spray painting and whisked him off into the police station in a matter of seconds. A stand-off ensued and the age-old, internal conflict about tactics and attitudes toward the police followed. In the end, the

tagger and all with him were escorted out of town. By the time this news hit camp, it was too late. A slow trickle of folks eventually found their way to our camp across town.

[IMAGE]

I must take a moment now to talk about camps. For the weeks that we confronted the California Minutemen in Campo, many people travelled back and forth from all over southern California. What made this possible, was mostly the work of two amazing people. While I have not asked them for permission to use their names in this piece, all who have been involved in this know who they are. They secured and held the camps in Campo and Calexico and have been unwaveringly committed to stopping the Minutemen. They have made this fight not only possible but successful and I am forever grateful for all they have taught me. They are true elders in this community and all of us stand to learn from them. Thank you, M. and V.

After a taco dinner was prepared for all of camp, we attempted to hold a spokescouncil meeting. The night before, one had been started in which we broke down into the beginnings of affinity groups and mapped out where we wanted to patrol for the Minutemen. I will not go into how painful and frustrating the attempt at continuing that process was. Many people, upon hearing a rumour that there might be other Minutemen an hour west, took not only a stance against a non-hierarchical decision making process but against what folks had been organising based on solid research. In the end, there were no Minutemen where they ran off to find them. Luckily, there were not any in Calexico either. Many scouting missions confirmed this in and around the town. If there had been, we would only have had half of the people we could have brought out to confront them. In the end, though, we were more than lucky. We had challenged them every step of the way and they couldn't get it together to show up. We had won, even if it was a quiet victory.

The next day, Sunday, we visited a cemetery in Holtville, another small town near the border in Imperial County. When we drive up, it looks like any other small cemetery; green with polished stone grave markers strewn with flowers, flags and gifts to the remembered dead. We walk through with dozens of flowers in our hands; through the path that winds between the graves to an empty dirt lot. Between the dirt lot and the neatly kept cemetery is a row of trees; between the dirt lot and the one after it is another row of trees. Visual barriers to what lies beyond; another muddy lot with rows of bricks, each given a basic stamp of a name, usually John or Jane Doe. This is a migrant graveyard and those buried in it died crossing the border. I don't remember much time that I wasn't crying. We walked amongst them, quietly laying down flowers. After a while, we discovered a trash heap on the far side where previously placed crosses had been removed and dumped. We pulled them out and with the fresh ones we had brought, dug them into the ground with our hands. It didn't matter that I wasn't religious; it was about leaving something to show that these are not forgotten people. They are human beings with families and friends whose only crime was movement across a line in the sand.

There are countless thousands of victims of that border and graveyards filling without end. Criticism had come from many in the activist community concerning our confrontational approach to dealing with these violent, racist vigilantes. We have been the ones called violent all too often, though we have never advocated nor used violence. Their accusations of violence only serve to distract from the real violence of the border.

[IMAGE]

The Border, Globalisation and The War on Terror

The Zapatistas have inspired the work of o.r.g.a.n.i.c. in that they 'walk while asking'. They have shown a path for resisting corporate globalisation. The US/Mexico border is fundamentally tied to such globalisation.

Operation Gatekeeper, a plan by President Clinton to increase the militarisation of the border by adding fences, lights and agents, began in 1994, the same year that NAFTA began and the Zapatistas rose up against it. Since 1994, over a million and a half Mexican farmers have lost their farms as a result of cheap US corn flooding the market. Undoubtedly the 'finance bomb', as Marcos has called NAFTA, has devastated Mexico and caused people to flee in search of greater prosperity elsewhere.

The neoliberal agenda of free trade demands that goods cross to and from Mexico freely and yet day after day, humans attempting the same journey into the US die in the desert for lack of water or food or are gunned down by US Border Patrol agents. To date, the number is somewhere over 3,500 deaths since 1994 (when Operation Gatekeeper began). Still, people realise that that number is far lower than the real toll. The 3,500 figure comes from the Border Patrol who only report the remains that they find which fit particular characteristics. They do not search for bodies but only report the ones they come across while patrolling. Many estimate the number to be as high as 10,000 deaths in the last decade.

The war on terror resulted in the construction of an enemy. It drew an artificial line, further establishing the make-believe categories of 'us' and 'them'. This has had a profound effect on the borderlands. Migrants in particular and people of colour in general, have for so long been considered 'them' or 'the other'. Now, those who cross the border are more than ever associated with a new mythic enemy, in a new and endless war.

The bloody stumblings of the imperial project in the Middle East have done considerable damage to the already flimsy ideological premise for the war on terror. The borderlands, already a place of myth, contestation and warfare, have been dragged into this war, with all of its religious, racial and colonial underpinnings. Construction of a mythic enemy allows for the construction of the mythic homeland. This process is created and recreated constantly – a permanent construction zone. Equally as powerful as the construction of an enemy is the construction of the uncontested 'us'. This problem/phenomenon is amplified in the borderlands.

The US/Mexico border is a critical component of the construction of the white supremacist myth of a safe, healthy, law abiding 'white America'. Everything that is bad, dangerous, diseased and illegal comes from the brown people outside of that 'white America'. Despite their ever-present rhetoric of inclusiveness and diversity, the Minutemen continue to exploit these myths for their own gains, whether that be a political career (Jim Gilchrist – co-founder of the original Minutemen Project – is currently running for US Congress in Orange County, CA) or simply a reason to play commando with the good ol' boys. Their presence has coincided with record deaths at the border as well as unexplainable murders near their patrols. They have encouraged a significant and noticeable rise in fascist activity in the area and have furthered a inspired racism throughout the country.

But, the presence of the Minutemen and their Friends have done something else. They have helped unify their opposition.

As o.r.g.a.n.i.c. and other groups look towards the future, proactive plans are in the works. The mass of groups that have come together over the last few months are beginning to plug into a No Border Network organised jointly by o.r.g.a.n.i.c. and Anarchists in Mexicali, Santa Cruz, San Francisco, Portland and Arizona. This will develop dialogue that will build towards a proposed No Border Camp next year. Our events to date have used the People's Global Action (PGA) hallmarks that were used for global days of action against the WTO in 1999, against the G8 in Scotland this year and against other institutions that perpetuate capitalism. If these are adopted by the larger No Border network, this may be the beginning of a resurgence of PGA organising in the US.

In the summer of 2006, the Zapatistas will be passing through the North of Mexico, including Baja, as part of the Other Campaign. We hope to organise our next No Border camp near this time, to bring more people to both events and also to broaden the understanding of the connection between corporate globalisation and militarised borders. Both are atrocities and both must be ended.

no human is illegal no border is legitimate no racism is justified

For more info, see:

deletetheborder.org
organiccollective.org
sandiego.indymedia.org
anarchistaction.org