

Chapter Sixteen

**No Greater Law: Illegal Immigration and
Faith-based Activism**

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Since the late 1990s the Sonora desert in southern Arizona has become the busiest corridor for illegal immigration into the United States (U.S.). Consequently, activism that facilitates and deters migration across the U.S.-Mexico border has surged. Many pro-immigrant groups working to help migrants today trace their grassroots lineage to the North American Sanctuary movement, an amalgamation of faith-based groups that provided refuge for Central Americans fleeing violence and war in the 1980s. Like their predecessors in the Sanctuary movement, many of these activists embrace the notion that humanitarian work serves a greater goal than the consequences of breaking laws that impede migrants' livelihood. This chapter addresses contemporary pro-immigrant activism in southern Arizona and the ways in which gender, the law, and faith-based ideology inform activists' understandings of why they work with illegal immigrants crossing the southern border.¹ I situate contemporary pro-immigrant faith-based activism in Arizona in the context of the North American Sanctuary movement and the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border.

The North American Sanctuary Movement

In the early 1980s, civil unrest in many Central American nation-states, El Salvador in particular, reached a turning point. Widespread human rights abuses committed by governments of these nation-states left many citizens without any choice but to flee for their lives. In total, nearly two million Central Americans left their country during the 1980s (Castles and Miller 2003). Many critics of the Central American crisis identified U.S. foreign policy as one of the major causes of regime brutality because it provided economic and military support to the governments of El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. Therefore, according to these critics, U.S. foreign policy makers were in part responsible for Central American migration to the United States (Tomsmo 1987).

While U.S.-based activists trace their involvement in the Sanctuary movement to a variety of incidents, four events serve as pivotal moments that turned many people in faith-based communities into activists (Cunningham 1995; Lorentzen 1991; Golden and McConnell 1986). These events are the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador in March 1980 (Nepstad 2002); the discovery of thirteen Salvadoran migrants found wandering near Ajo, Arizona in July 1980 (Davidson 1988); the murder of four Maryknoll nuns in El Salvador in December 1980 (Lorentzen 1991); and the Immigration and Naturalization Service's (INS) detainment of a Salvadoran hitchhiker that Jim Dudley picked up in May 1981 in Nogales, Arizona. These events made the Central American refugee crises real and provided personalized accounts of a mass tragedy (Nepstad 2002).

In most accounts of the Sanctuary movement, its origins in the U.S. are traced to two leaders: Reverend John Fife, the pastor of Tucson's Southside Presbyterian Church and Jim Corbett, a Quaker rancher living in southern Arizona (Corbett 1991; Crittenden 1988; Davidson 1988; Tomsno 1987). Reverend Fife became involved when his church, Southside Presbyterian, volunteered to assist the survivors from the Ajo tragedy. In July 1980, thirteen Salvadorans were found lost in the Sonora desert. They had been abandoned by their smuggler and were near death. Some members of the group had been raped, beaten, and left for dead, while others had succumbed to the elements. Those who survived were placed into deportation proceedings by the INS. Reverend Fife's congregation posted bail for the survivors, provided them with housing, food, and clothes, and helped them apply for political asylum. On March 24, 1982, Southside Presbyterian was the first religious organization to publicly announce that it was a Sanctuary for Central American refugees.

Jim Corbett's entrée into the movement is traced to his involvement in assisting the hitchhiker that Jim Dudley picked up and who was later detained by INS. In May 1981, while Jim Dudley was on his way to visit fellow Quaker Jim Corbett, he offered a Salvadoran man a ride, unaware that he had fled for his life. The U.S. Border Patrol stopped Dudley and took the migrant into custody. Troubled by the turn of events, Dudley described what had happened to Jim and his wife, Pat Corbett. The next day, Jim Corbett attempted to locate the detained hitchhiker, and through his initial interactions with the INS, learned that unauthorized Salvadorans were overwhelmingly returned to El Salvador, even when they asked for asylum. Corbett reached out to his Quaker friends across the country asking them for donations for this migrant's bail as well as other detained migrants in financial need. Corbett's persistence in aiding Salvadoran asylum seekers propelled him into a leadership position in the movement.

One consequence of focusing on these two men as the central leaders of the Sanctuary Movement is that such an account underscores activists as white, male, and American (U.S.-based). Becky Thompson (2001) argues that while women, people of color, and Mexican and Central Americans were essential to this movement, their participation has often been erased. Without the help of the Mexican, Central American and U.S.-based Latino/a population, the U.S. role in the Sanctuary movement would not have been possible.

Sanctuary movement activists engaged in a range of activities that included smuggling refugees across the border through the desert, operating an underground railroad that moved refugees to safe houses across the U.S. and into Canada, and helping refugees negotiate the legal bureaucracy when applying for asylum. When members of churches, parishes, and synagogues tried to help Central American refugees gain political asylum they often encountered hostility from the U.S. government. INS viewed Central Americans as economic migrants looking for work rather than refugees fleeing persecution. This position was particularly problematic since Congress had recently passed the *Refugee Act* of 1980 that broadened the definition of persecution permitting refugees who sought asylum from non-communist countries into the United States. Over 440,000 Central Americans applied for asylum in the United States between 1984 and 1994 (Castles and Miller 2003). Between June 1983 and September 1986, only 528 or 2.6 percent of the 19,207 asylum applications from Salvadorans and fourteen or 1.8 percent of the 1,461 applications from Guatemalans were approved by the INS. These rates stand in stark contrast to the 60.4 percent of Iranians and 51 percent of Romanians who were approved for that same period (Crittenden 1988).

Although many accounts of the Sanctuary movement depict it as a men's movement (Corbett 1991; Davidson 1988; Tomsno 1987; Loder 1986), women, too, were heavily involved (Lorentzen 1991). The sexual division of labor and the public/private dichotomy is useful for understanding women's activism and their exclusion from leadership roles. Much of the work done by Sanctuary movement activists was "women's work." Women performed private "domestic work" by providing clothing, food, and medical care for migrants. However, their activism was not exclusive to the private realm. Women engaged in dangerous forms of activism by escorting migrants across the border and through the desert to safety. In the public realm, women were often excluded from religious leadership roles, such as priests, pastors, and rabbis. Consequently, men emerged as the leaders of this movement.

Most studies of the Sanctuary movement culminate in the arrests and trials of activists in the United States. In January 1985, the U.S. Government issued a seventy-one count criminal indictment against leaders of the Sanctuary movement (Golden and McConnell 1986). In Tucson, six of the eleven activists who were charged were women (Davidson 1988). These arrests, in addition to the Central American peace agreements in 1987 and the American Baptist Church (ABC) settlement which allowed certain Central Americans to be eligible for asylum in 1991, marked the end of the North American Sanctuary movement (Rader 1999). Over the course of the 1980s, approximately 70,000 U.S. citizens were involved in this movement (Golden and McConnell 1986).

Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border

While the beginning of the 1990s ushered in the end of the Central American refugee crisis, a new migration flow across the U.S.-Mexico border had

increased significantly by the end of the decade. Since the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, the number of Mexicans crossing the border illegally has risen dramatically. Mexican nationals have historically comprised the greatest percentage of immigrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, even during the Central American refugee crises (Portes and Rumbault 2006). However, the total number of Mexicans crossing the border illegally waxed and waned over the twentieth century depending on U.S.-Mexico geopolitics. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, approximately 400,000 Mexicans entered the U.S. illegally between 1995 and 1999. This number rose to 485,000 between 2000 and 2004. These numbers have nearly doubled from the 1990-1994 period when the number of Mexican nationals entering the U.S. illegally was 260,000 (Passel 2005).

U.S.-based law makers and corporations that supported NAFTA argued that the proceeds gained by the Mexican government from the elimination of tariffs would be available for investment in Mexico. These investments were to be used to create jobs, build schools, and improve infrastructure. Instead, the Mexican government, the U.S. government, and U.S. corporations cooperated to build U.S.-owned factories in northern Mexico known as the *maquiladoras*. Employees in the *maquiladoras* earned as little as \$5 per day, working as much as ten hours or more a day without benefits. These factories, along with agricultural trade provisions in the treaty, devastated the manufacturing and agricultural economy of Mexico. Consequently, Mexicans are left with few choices—eke out a subsistence living in towns where jobs are scarce, work for low wages in the *maquiladoras*, or risk crossing the border into the U.S. to find work (Nevins 2002). As demonstrated by the data gleaned from the Pew Hispanic Center report, many Mexicans chose to migrate to the U.S. in search of work.

Although NAFTA is, in part, responsible for creating the increased flow of Mexican migrants to the United States, militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border accounts for *where* these migrants cross. In the 1990s, the INS embarked on numerous campaigns to increase border security (Andreas 2000). Two operations in particular included building a wall along the border and increasing the presence of Border Patrol personnel. In 1993, Operation Hold the Line was the first of two militarized plans to stem illegal immigration in U.S. urban areas. Operation Hold the Line, renamed from its original title Operation Blockade, was Silvestre Reyes's, Chief of the El Paso Border Patrol Sector, solution to illegal immigrants coming across the Rio Grande into Texas (Bean et al. 1994). The second initiative, Operation Gatekeeper, took place in 1994 in San Diego, California. The operation was eventually extended from the Pacific Ocean to the San Ysidro border checkpoint covering the entirety of the state of California (Nevins 2002).

The logic behind these two operations was to enhance border security in areas that were geographically easier to cross. Immigration policy makers in the U.S. assumed that migrants would choose not to cross in areas where the terrain is more difficult to navigate and, therefore, these new border security strategies would decrease the flow of illegal immigrants across the U.S.-Mexico border.

On the contrary, these policies did not curb illegal immigration but instead funneled migrants into dangerous areas in rural parts of the desert. Migrants crossing through the rural areas of the desert face a journey where they are limited to the water, food, and supplies that they can carry with them. What few migrants know as they embark on this treacherous path is that it is impossible to carry enough water for their entire journey. Migrants face dehydration, starvation, heat exhaustion, and hypothermia, among other difficulties. The gravest of all consequences is, of course, death (Ramos 2005; Urrea 2004).

Women's Migration across the U.S.-Mexico Border

The geopolitics of the U.S.-Mexico border that include policy changes such as NAFTA and the militarization of the border explain general migration patterns. Yet, one crucial change in migration across the U.S.-Mexico border is the increase in female migrants. While there are no definitive data on the number of illegal border crossers, migration scholars attempt to capture the estimated number of undocumented migrants in the U.S. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, there were three million undocumented women between eighteen and thirty-nine years old, and 1.7 million undocumented children in the U.S. in March 2004 (Passel 2005). These approximately 3.5 million women and children comprise 51 percent of the undocumented population under the age of forty in the United States.

The rise in women's migration is a global phenomenon (Pessar and Mahler 2003). The increase in female border crossers from Mexico into the U.S. can be attributed overwhelmingly to the demand for low wage domestic work in the U.S., such as housekeeping and childcare (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997) and family reunification with parents, spouses, and children (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003). Women's migration within Mexico has increased as well. Currently, most workers in the *maquiladoras* are women who travel from central and southern Mexico to work in northern Mexico border towns. In the Juárez area, many women who work in these factories have disappeared as they travel between their homes and work making employment in the *maquiladoras* particularly dangerous (Segura and Zavella 2007).

Another indicator of the increase in women's migration across the U.S.-Mexico border is the death rate for female migrants. The death rate for female migrants crossing the border has increased significantly since 2000. According to the Pima County Medical Examiner, there were 125 deaths of unauthorized migrants between 1990 and 1999.² Of these 125 deaths, seventeen were women making them 13.6 percent of the total for that decade. Between 2000 and 2005, these numbers rose drastically when the total number of deaths jumped to 802. Of these 802 deaths, 181 or 22.6 percent were women. In half the time period of the ten years of documented data in the 1990s, the number of migrants dying in the desert increased seven times and the number of women who are dying while trying to cross increased eleven times during the first five years of the new

millennium. Women currently comprise about a quarter of all migrant deaths in the Sonora desert (Rubio-Goldsmith et al. 2006).

The increase in women's migration also affects the number of children who cross and die in the desert. Prior to 1990, there were no deaths of migrant children reported by the Pima County Medical Examiner. There were five deaths of minor migrants reported between 1990 and 1999. This number increased to forty-two between 2000 and 2005. Again, similar to the increase in deaths for adult migrants, there was a dramatic increase in deaths of minor children migrating across the desert. In half the time period of the ten years of documented data in the 1990s, the number of minors dying in the desert increased nine times during the first five years of the new millennium.

These data show that more women and children are dying in the desert, in part because more women and children are embarking on this journey. The sexual division of labor may explain why adult female deaths and child deaths are linked. Children are more likely to be traveling with adult women than men because women tend to perform more childcare than men.³ Another gendered dimension of migration includes the likelihood of death from exposure (e.g., heat, dehydration, and hypothermia). The Pima County Medical Examiner also found that women are nearly three times (2.87) more likely than men to die from exposure.

Women are also more likely than men to experience sexual assault by other migrants or smugglers while in the desert. Along some migrant trails are "rape trees," desert bushes adorned with women's underwear. These rape trees ostensibly are the site of sexual violence where the assailant placed his victim's underwear in the tree as a sign of his conquest. These trees signify sexual access to female migrants' bodies and instill fear in migrant women.⁴ During my interview with a member of the *Coalición de Derechos Humanos*, I was told that many women traveling through the desert with their daughters cut their daughters' hair and dress them as boys as one tactic to thwart potential attacks.⁵

Another gendered phenomenon of migration is that female migrants are more likely than men to be forced into sexual slavery. One of the consequences of militarization of the border is that migrants are often forced to pay a coyote, or smuggler to guide them across the border because the journey is nearly impossible to make without knowledge of the desert terrain (Kyle and Koslowski 2001). Women are sometimes subject to forced prostitution when the responsible party does not pay the coyote, or smuggler's fee. In Arizona, migrants are often held in safe houses in Tucson or Phoenix until their families pay the coyotes.

Contemporary Faith-Based Activism in Southern Arizona

Beginning in 2000, three faith-based groups formed in Tucson, Arizona in response to the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border and its grave effects on migrants. These groups are Humane Borders, Samaritans, and No More Deaths.⁶

Although a variety of activists, including former Sanctuary Movement members, were responsible for initiating these groups, Reverend John Fife was a key figure in organizing these groups' response to the new border crisis (Moser 2003). Similar to the gendered demographics of the Sanctuary movement, the majority of the volunteers are women. Each group is connected to a church in Tucson: Humane Borders hold their meetings at The First Christian Church, Samaritans gather at Southside Presbyterian, and No More Deaths organize their training sessions at St. Mark's Presbyterian. However, unlike faith-based activism during the Sanctuary Movement where churches were the central organizing unit, these organizations operate independently of the churches which they use for meetings and other events.

All of these faith-based groups operate exclusively on volunteer labor. Volunteering with these groups is demanding because they patrol the desert daily. Like their Sanctuary Movement predecessors, these groups advocate policy changes that include the demilitarization of the border in addition to providing humanitarian aid to migrants in distress. The primary goal for each of these groups is to decrease the number of migrant deaths in the desert. Faith-based groups include immigrants (documented and undocumented) and people of color; however, the majority of members are white U.S. citizens.

Humane Borders

Founded on June 11, 2000, by Reverend Robin Hoover, Humane Borders operates approximately eighty-three water stations in the desert (Scharf 2006). The stations provide water for migrants or anyone else in distress in the desert. Each water station consists of two fifty-five gallon blue tanks with a thirty foot flag hoisted next to the tanks. The flag is positioned so that migrants may locate the tanks from a distance. Approximately 8,000 volunteers, including sixty-five truck drivers, operate the water tanks. Volunteers test the water, fill tanks, and pick up items left in the desert by migrants such as backpacks, clothes, and water bottles in the area daily.⁷ The tanks are located on federal, state, city, and private land and the organization maintains permits for all tanks placed in the desert. During my visit to Humane Borders in June 2007, one of the tanks had recently been vandalized. Stenciled across the tank in Spanish was *Peligro! No Beba El Agua* ("Danger! Do not drink the water"). The tank was removed from the desert for cleaning. During a Humane Borders meeting I attended there was speculation that the vandal may have been a member of the Minutemen.⁸

In addition to maintaining water tanks, Humane Borders has distributed maps to potential border crossers in Mexico (Lange 2006; Martinez 2006). These maps explain the dangers of the desert including the warning "Don't pay the price!" referring to the harrowing journey that lies before them. The maps plot sites for the water tanks and show places that are particularly dangerous, and instruct border crossers to avoid those areas. The maps caused a huge outcry from anti-illegal immigration groups who accused Humane Borders of providing directions on how to enter the United States clandestinely. Members of anti-

illegal immigration groups sent threatening phone calls and emails to Humane Borders regarding the maps. During my interview with Frank, a volunteer from Humane Borders, he responded to what he believed was an unfounded fear from anti-illegal groups that the maps were facilitating migrants unauthorized entry into the U.S. by stating that "it's not like it's a AAA map."⁹ Criticism of Humane Borders' tactics is not limited to phone and email complaints. According to Frank, the organization has received threats of violence against its members and property from anonymous groups claiming they will shoot volunteers and blow up their church.

Samaritans

Samaritans Patrol, or Samaritans, was initiated on July 1, 2002. In 2005, a second Samaritans group was formed in Green Valley, Arizona. The mission of Samaritans is to provide water, food, and medical care to migrants in distress. Unlike Humane Borders that restricts its contact with migrants to those volunteers happen upon while servicing the water tanks, Samaritans takes a more active role in seeking migrants in need of help. They do so by forming patrols, a group of at least four volunteers that includes one Spanish speaker and one trained medical provider, who walk the migrant trails. Rose, a volunteer, describes how Samaritans "go to areas where we are reasonably certain there is a lot of traffic and we start calling out in Spanish: 'Do you need help? We are Samaritans. Do not be afraid. We have food, clothing, and medical supplies.'"¹⁰ When volunteers encounter migrants in medical need they offer to call the U.S. Border Patrol only at the migrant's request.

The group also stops on highways and other roads when they notice that the Border Patrol, or its contractor, Wackenhut Services Inc., has apprehended migrants. Volunteers report mixed responses from Border Patrol and Wackenhut agents. According to Rose, "I have had border patrol agents ask me for help with migrants with bad feet. The ones with bad feet can't walk." The bad feet that Rose referred to are the blisters and sores that migrants get from walking thirty or more miles in the desert for sometimes over a week. Volunteers provide new socks and dress migrants' feet with bandages when necessary.

Samaritans also attend court hearings for migrants who have been detained through the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Operation Streamline program that was established in 2005 to expedite cases of illegal immigrants who are in deportation proceedings. Samaritans also receive requests to search for specific migrants. Through their transnational networks of activists in Mexico and Central America, family members in search of lost migrants contact Samaritans in hopes that volunteers will find their missing loved one while on patrol.

Unlike Humane Borders that uses a humanitarian name, Samaritans derives its name from the New Testament story of the Good Samaritan. Luke 10:25 describes how Jesus Christ replied to the question "Who is my neighbor?" through the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus described a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho who "fell among thieves, who stripped him of his

raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead." Jesus continues the story by describing how a priest and a Levite passed the injured man without offering to help. Then a Samaritan passed who cared for the man's wounds, found him shelter at an inn, and offered money to the host for the cost of the injured man's care. After finishing the story, Jesus turns the question back to its originator and inquires: which of the following was the man's neighbor? The questioner replies that the neighbor is the one who showed mercy. Jesus instructs his listeners to go and do likewise.

Samaritans ground their activism in this Biblical command to show compassion to those in need. Moreover, their use of this story grounds their notion of "neighbor" in compassionate activism, not geographical proximity. The use of the term "neighbor" stands in stark contrast to the term "stranger" that was often used during the Sanctuary movement (Cunningham 1995; Bau 1985). Sanctuary movement activists capitalized on the Biblical command to provide refuge for strangers. Contemporary activists, however, situate their activism in redefining the notion of neighbor.

No More Deaths

No More Deaths started in April 2004. Like Samaritans, No More Deaths orchestrates desert patrols offering water, food, and medical care for those in need. In addition to organizing patrols, No More Deaths runs two other programs. The first program is a permanent camp on private property near Arivaca, approximately twenty miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border, named The Ark of the Covenant and was initiated in 2004. This camp serves as a base from which No More Deaths volunteers patrol migrant trails that are located on the property. Unlike Samaritan patrols that involve a group of volunteers meeting at a designated location, driving to an area to patrol, and then returning home later that evening, most No More Deaths patrols originate from the Ark of the Covenant camp. Volunteers stay for days or sometimes weeks at the camp providing food and equipment at their own expense.

No More Deaths runs a second program in coalition with other Mexican humanitarian groups: an aid station in Nogales on the Mexican side of the Mariposa port of entry that began offering services to migrants in 2006. Migrants who are deported from the U.S. in the Tucson sector are usually transported by the Border Patrol or Wackenhut to the Mariposa port of entry into Mexico. The Border Patrol or Wackenhut agents park the bus adjacent to a gate and open a side door so that deported migrants are forced to exit the bus on the Mexican side of the border. Migrants then walk alongside a gate into an area where they pass the aid station. Volunteers at the aid station provide water, food, and medical care for deported migrants. According to a No More Deaths volunteer, the aid station estimates it serves between 600 to 1,000 migrants per week. The majority of those deported are young men, although the number of women and children are increasing. The day that I visited the aid station one of

the deported women was six months pregnant and another woman was experiencing heart palpitations from the drugs that a smuggler had given her.¹¹ Smugglers often require migrants to take stimulants in order to speed up their trek across the desert.

A central activity at the aid station is caring for migrants' feet. As mentioned earlier, migrants' feet become covered in blisters and sores from walking through the desert. For faith-based activists, bandaging migrants' feet takes on religious significance as well as the practical matter of helping someone who can no longer walk. During my visit to the aid station, one volunteer expressed his work with migrants in the context of the rite of foot washing similar to the way that Jesus Christ washed feet with his apostles during the last supper.

In July 2005, No More Deaths volunteers Shanti Sellz and Daniel Strauss received national news coverage when they were arrested for transporting illegal immigrants from the Ark of the Covenant. Sellz and Strauss were escorting three migrants who were vomiting, disoriented, and had blood in their stools to a medical facility when they were pulled over by the Arizona Border Patrol (Martinez 2005). They were charged with transporting illegal aliens and the migrants were placed into deportation proceedings. According to Section 274 8 U.S.C. 1324 of the U.S. Code, it is a felony to transport undocumented migrants. Their case was dismissed in September 2006. Like their Sanctuary Movement predecessors, border activists in the new millennium also face potential prison sentences for helping migrants in need of medical care. This incident sparked a new campaign for No More Deaths that now advocates the slogan "Humanitarian Aid Is Never a Crime," paralleling Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel's plea that "No Human Being is Illegal" (Chmiel 2001).

Although these organizations operate independently of one another, there are a significant number of members who work among the groups. For example, when Sellz and Strauss were arrested after leaving No More Deaths' Ark of the Covenant camp, they were driving a vehicle owned by Samaritans. When I inquired why volunteers become involved in these groups activists would often give me personalized accounts of various tragedies in the desert. However, unlike during the Sanctuary movement when the stories that propelled faith-based communities into activism were widely-circulated events, the stories that contemporary groups linked their activism to, such as hearing about a migrant's death in a local paper, often never made national media coverage. Frank, a member of Humane Borders, described how each of these groups developed: "For each group it was a small number of people who kept asking 'what more can we do to keep people from dying?'" Each group is independent of the other, yet they all work toward the common goal of alleviating suffering for migrants in the desert.

Gender, Faith-Based Activism and the New Border Crisis

At least five shifts have taken place between the 1980 Central American refugee crises and the new millennium border tragedy. These shifts are the gendered dynamics of border crossers and border activists, migrants' motivation for leaving their country, the ways in which migrants experience violence and injury regarding movement across borders, volunteers' motivation for action, and the use of the terms "stranger" and "neighbor" to justify activism.

The greatest gendered change in the new border crisis is the increase of women who cross and die in the desert. One of the effects of the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border is an increase in violence for female migrants. Female migrants are subject to sexual assault including rape and forced prostitution to pay their smugglers' fees. Another gendered phenomenon is the demographic of the volunteers and leaders of humanitarian groups. Like Sanctuary movement volunteers, the rank and file members of these organizations are mostly female. Yet, compared to the Sanctuary movement, women have taken on greater leadership roles in contemporary organizations. While the media continues to portray Revered John Fife and Reverend Robin Hoover as the leaders/founders of these organizations, it pays far more attention to the efforts of women in the pro-immigrant movement. This may be attributed to the increase in female leadership positions of organizations, such as *Coalición de Derechos Humanos* and Border Action Network.

The second difference is that migrants' motivation for crossing the U.S.-Mexico border has shifted from fleeing human rights abuses committed by their government to migrants leaving their countries in search of work. In the 1980s, INS refused many Central American applications for asylum on the grounds that the applicant was leaving for economic reasons rather than political. According to Citizen and Immigration Services (CIS) policies, Mexican migrants who come to the U.S. in search of work are ineligible to apply for asylum because lack of employment opportunities does not meet the criteria for fleeing persecution.¹² Sanctuary movement activists had a legitimate complaint against the U.S. government for denying Central Americans asylum. Current faith-based activists cannot rightfully argue that the U.S. government is applying its immigration laws unfairly because Mexican migrants are economic migrants, not refugees.

The third shift is how migrants experience violence and injury regarding movement across borders. In the 1980s, Central Americans were overwhelmingly tortured in their own country, causing them to flee. The location where the harm took place was outside of the United States. Currently, the harm overwhelmingly takes place on the U.S. side of the border. Pro-immigrant activists argue that the border is not a line between two countries, but instead a region that includes whole communities. Crossing the "line" that demarcates Mexico from the United States in southern Arizona is relatively easy compared to the journey from the U.S. side of the border to the migrants'

destination. One shift from the 1980s to the present is that in the past the abuse was perpetrated by Central American governments which caused people to flee. Currently, the cause of most migrants' deaths is the act of migration itself.

The fourth variation between Sanctuary movement activists and contemporary faith-based activists is that pro-migrant advocates trace their involvement in these groups to a desire to change a generalized border crisis rather than publicized events like those that galvanized supporters of Central American refugees, such as the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero. The volunteers I interviewed often told personal accounts of why they entered this movement, such as how their religious beliefs regarding helping others mandated their activism. Members of faith-based groups overwhelmingly contextualize their motives by referencing the number of migrant deaths as the impetus to their activism—making the amalgamation of border fatalities rather than any one particular instance as the root cause of why they joined a faith-based group. Therefore, none of their stories were linked to an event that had received international or national attention such as those during the Sanctuary movement.

The last distinction is the use of the term "neighbor" rather than "stranger." During the Sanctuary movement, activists from many different faiths deployed the term stranger in order to justify their defiance of U.S. immigration laws that defined Central Americans as economic migrants rather than refugees. Contemporary faith-based activists rely on a transnational notion of neighbor that defines themselves as neighbors to migrants in need because of their plight rather than geographical location. According to this definition of neighbor, actions rather than physical proximity define social relationships.

The consequences of these shifts in migration patterns for contemporary faith-based activists is that their activism addresses gendered violence, the causes of migration which includes a critique of U.S. corporations and international treaties such as NAFTA, as well as the U.S.-backed militarization of the border, and nation-state responsibility for violence and injury that occurs within its borders.

Conclusion

This chapter contributes to the field of gender, religion, and migration studies because it examines the increase of women crossing the U.S.-Mexico border and the gendered character of faith-based responses to illegal immigration. I have provided a gendered analysis of border crossers, activists, and institutions, in addition to the ways in which gender structures the geopolitical climate that gives rise to illegal immigration at the U.S. southern border. This analysis shows how illegal immigration is deeply structured by gender, race, class, and nation. This intersectional approach to social life is useful as well for understanding the ways in which faith-based activists understand their responses to the new border crisis.

Faith-based groups are often the first point of contact with illegal immigrants crossing the Sonora desert. These groups are the initial site of integration for illegal immigrants rather than state agencies. Faith-based groups, therefore, stand in opposition to the nation-state regarding the facilitation and welcoming of illegal immigrants. Contemporary pro-immigrant faith-based activists in southern Arizona do much more than simply provide water and medical attention to migrants in the desert. They stand in opposition to the laws and policies of the U.S. government and practices of U.S. corporations that have created a catastrophe for migrants crossing the border. And they do so because their activism is driven by the belief that a greater commandment than U.S. immigration law requires human beings to act with compassion and mercy toward all human suffering.

Notes

1. This paper is part of a research project on responses to illegal immigration and border activism in the United States. I collected data through qualitative methods using in-depth interviews and participant observation of faith-based groups in Tucson, Arizona. Using a semi-structured interview guide, I interviewed members of three faith-based groups, Humane Borders, Samaritans, and No More Deaths, and two pro-immigrant groups, *Coalición de Derechos Humanos* (The Human Rights Coalition) and Border Action Network. I also participated in these groups' activities which include filling water tanks and bottles, walking migrant trails in search of those in distress, and caring for migrants who are deported at the Mexican border, as well as attending meetings and events sponsored by these organizations. All interviews and references to participant observation of these groups were conducted on June 11-22, 2007.
2. Pima County is one of four border counties in Arizona.
3. Some minors do travel alone. For example, Nazzario documents a young Honduran boy who crosses many borders in order to find his mother in the U.S. See Sandra Nazzario, *Enrique's Journey* (New York: Random House, 2006).
4. These rape trees do exist; I saw one on the migrant trails on private property in Arizona. However, there are no definitive sources that attribute bushes with women's underwear to sites of sexual violence. During my phone interview with a sexual assault counselor for immigrant women in Arizona on June 21, 2007, she told me that while none of her clients had described the trees, nearly all had confided at least one sexual assault during their passage across the border.
5. Interview was conducted on June 19, 2007.
6. There are numerous organizations in southern Arizona that work with migrants and border communities. I focus on these three because they are explicitly faith-based.
7. The language of belongings/trash is highly politicized at the border. Pro-immigrant groups such as those discussed in this chapter are critical of the term "trash" to describe the things that migrants discard in the desert. Anti-illegal immigrant groups refer to these items as trash.
8. The organization they referred to is the Minutemen Civil Defense Corp (MCDC), an anti-illegal immigration group that operates border patrols on private property in southern Arizona and alerts the U.S. Border Patrol when they encounter migrants. This meeting occurred on June 13, 2007.

9. All interviewee names are pseudonyms. Interview was conducted on June 19, 2007.
10. Interview was conducted on June 11, 2007.
11. I observed this on June 12, 2007. All references to the No More Deaths Aid Station occurred on this date.
12. Some Mexicans are eligible for asylum such as those who claim persecution because of domestic violence or sexual orientation. In May 2008, Mexican law enforcement personnel applied for asylum because they were targeted by the drug cartels. See James McKinley Jr., "Mexico: Police Chiefs Seek Asylum," *The New York Times*, May 15, 2008, 11.

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