

Bare Life at the Border:
The Complexities of Power, Violence, and Resistance in Nogales, Sonora

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A fence runs across the city of Nogales, Sonora, in northern Mexico. On the other side of the fence is the town of Nogales, Arizona, in the United States. The two urban centers are collectively referred to as ‘Ambos Nogales,’ and are connected by infrastructural, familial, and political ties. Yet they are also distinctly designated areas, lying on opposite sides of the international borderline which runs through the Sonoran Desert. The fence, constructed to deter unauthorized crossings, bisects Ambos Nogales with a line of rusty metal. It is a structure which embodies the power and will of the U.S. state, and which makes possible a dual spectacle of control: the enforcement of a political regime of exclusion and marginalization, and the regulation of economic flows between the United States and Mexico. The militarized barriers of the border are intended to shape the movement of legal, state-approved economic traffic, and to inhibit—as well as highlight—the movement of commodities and people deemed illegal. However, the fence is also a site where the power of the U.S. state is contested. Migrants, smugglers, U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) agents, and residents of Ambos Nogales encounter each other in the context of the fence, sometimes resulting in violent confrontations. One such confrontation took place on the night of October 10, 2012. Jose Antonio Elena Rodriguez, a sixteen-year-old resident of Nogales, Sonora, was shot and killed by USBP agent Lonnie Smith. Smith, standing in the United States, fired through the bars of the border fence into Mexico. He would later claim that Rodriguez was throwing rocks across the fence, thereby providing justification for the use of deadly force. Though the killing was the work of a single night, it has given rise to a legal battle which continues to the present day, and has prompted art pieces, news coverage, and political struggle in the Sonoran Desert and beyond.

The murder of Jose Rodriguez by Swartz, and the subsequent prosecution of Swartz in U.S. courts, provide a lens through which to view and examine the mechanisms of state control, domination, and violence at play on the border. This essay applies the political theories of Giorgio Agamben to the incident, analysing cross-border violence as a means to, and articulation of, sovereignty for the U.S. state. However, the events surrounding Rodriguez's death also call for an exploration that moves beyond Agamben's notions of bare life and legitimate killings. The responses to the murder by politicians, artists, and Rodriguez's family demonstrate that efforts by the state to control border regions are contested. State sovereignty is made and remade continuously, even as its violent articulations are undermined by those who seek justice and closure. The work of anthropologists such as Nicholas de Genova and Jean Comaroff demonstrate the contingency and fluidity of state power, and call for political thought which accounts for the everyday resistances and actions of non-state actors. An anthropological approach brings to light the contested nature of power, revealing forms of resistance which are lost in Agamben's theorizations.

Spectacular Violence Across the Border

If the incident which culminated in Rodriguez's murder is to be analysed, we must first examine it by excavating the contradictory narratives of violence which emerged after the shooting. One such narrative, gradually established by USBP reports and interviews, frames the killing as a justified response to an attack on Border Patrol agents. On the night of October 10th, two men were spotted climbing the border fence into the U.S., ostensibly carrying bundles of drugs. Lonnie Swartz, along with several other border agents, reached the fence to find the supposed smugglers already crossing back into Nogales, Sonora. As they attempted to capture

the men, agents were met with a barrage of rocks, thrown across the fence as a distraction by Rodriguez and other accomplices in Mexico. Swartz responded by firing several shots at his assailants, striking and killing Rodriguez. However, this sequence of events would be challenged by other narratives which developed in the wake of the event. Witnesses reported that Rodriguez was merely a passerby, unaffiliated with the rock-throwers and posing no possible threat to agents on the U.S. side of the fence. Moreover, the agents' reliance on the physical threat of projectiles as a justification for opening fire was questioned by commentators, who noted the extreme difficulty of throwing rocks over or through the fence at the particular location of the incident. Finally, an autopsy report told a different story than that constructed by the USBP: Rodriguez had been shot ten times from behind, with some of the wounds possibly inflicted when he was already lying on the ground. In light of these counter-narratives, the attempts by Swartz—and the Border Patrol generally—to justify the shooting appear extremely tenuous, and are treated in the following pages with great skepticism. At the same time, the 'official' version of events as described by the USBP provides insight into the ways in which the border is discursively constructed by the U.S. state as a place of lawlessness, criminality, and dangerous anti-state violence. (Binelli 2016, O'Dell 2017).

The story of Rodriguez's death at the hands of a U.S. state agent, while shocking, is not unique. Violence at or across the international border between the United States and Mexico occurs on a regular basis, and the border has been a focal point for a tremendous concentration of state power and policing. Anthropologist Nicholas de Genova has characterized this production of a zone of violence and danger at the border as "The Border Spectacle," writing that

Mexican migration in particular has been rendered synonymous with the U.S. nation-state's purported 'loss of control' of its borders and has supplied the preeminent pretext for what has in fact been a continuous intensification of increasingly militarized control. (De Genova 2005: 242)

Indeed, since the mid-1990s, the U.S. state has dramatically increased the membership of the Border Patrol and invested in new military-style weapons, vehicles, and physical barriers to prevent entry into the U.S. Over the course of roughly a decade, the number of Border Patrol agents in southern Arizona has been increased tenfold (Binelli 2016). According to de Genova, the “spectacle of enforcement at the border...renders a racialized Mexican/migrant ‘illegality’ visible, and lends it the commonsense air of a natural fact” (De Genova 2005: 242). De Genova is specifically concerned with border enforcement and militarization in the context of migration, rather than cross-border violence. Yet the events surrounding Rodriguez’s murder were closely tied to movement across the border, and to the notions of “illegality” that de Genova describes. Though the official Border Patrol account of the shooting has varied, Rodriguez has consistently been framed as embodying illegality, by virtue either of throwing rocks at Swartz and other agents or of supposedly being involved with drug trafficking. De Genova’s observation that “‘illegality’requires the spectacle of enforcement at the U.S.-Mexico border” suggests that the subjectivation of illegal subjects like Rodriguez is made possible in large part by the hypervisible state violence which takes place in border regions (De Genova 2005: 245). At the same time, de Genova’s statement can be tellingly inverted with regards to the murder: enforcement requires an illegal subject in order to perform its mission of spectacular violence. Barring the existence of a plausible biopolitical subject on whom can be projected the spectre of illegality, agents of the Border Patrol are only too willing to create such a subject.

The subjectivation of Rodriguez as a victim of political violence must also be viewed in light of the regimes of economic control in place at the militarized border fence. The USBP’s invocation of smuggling activity to justify their agents’ violent actions on the night of the shooting reminds us that the heavy policing of border regions is meant to deter not only the free

movement of people across the border, but also the movement of products and labor-power which fall outside the explicit embrace of state-approved free-trade policies. The flourishing of U.S. sales to Mexico under NAFTA (and the accompanying destruction of Mexican agriculture and industry by U.S. competition) is made possible in part by the imposition of a physical and symbolic boundary at the international borderline, embodied in the border fence. Moreover, as de Genova reminds us, control of the border entails power over an easily-exploited labor force of undocumented migrants within the U.S.: “The operation of the revolving door at the border that is necessary to sustain the “illegality” effect always combines an increasingly militarized spectacle of apprehensions, detentions, and deportations with the banality of a virtually permanent importation of undocumented migrant labor” (De Genova 2005: 242). The specter of smuggling activity, carried out beyond the carefully circumscribed bounds of legally sanctioned economic goings-on, provides a convenient means of justifying state violence. Ascribing the vague but damning characterization of illegality to Rodriguez allows for the economic imperatives of the U.S. state to be carried out by means of legally sanctioned murder.

If the spectacle of the border—a spectacle which produces, and is produced by, violence and notions of illegality—works to legitimate the existence and control of the U.S. state through hypervisibility, it is also characterized by a paradoxical opacity. Though the shooting added fuel to the fire of internal USBP conflicts over the agency’s mismanagement of enforcement and constant reliance on violent disciplinary measures, little or no information was publicly released about the event. It was not until two years after Rodriguez’s murder, when his family began to move forward with legal proceedings against the Border Patrol, that Swartz’s identity was brought to light. Most striking is the case of the USBP’s refusal to release a video of the shooting which was captured by Border Patrol security cameras near the border fence. This potentially

incriminating documentation has remained in the hands of the Border Patrol, and, as of early 2017, had still not been seen in court. In fact, a recent filing by Swartz's defence attorney revealed that the original footage had been destroyed, leaving only poor-quality copies. Ironically, the very cameras which litter the international border and which witness and record frequent acts of spectacular violence fail to produce true visibility. The spectacle of the border relies as much on careful control and selective obscuration as on the production of startling imagery and information (Binelli 2016, O'Dell 2017).

The Paradox of Cross-Border Violence

The paradoxical nature of the border spectacle is mirrored by the paradoxes which surround Rodriguez's death. An article from the New York Times, written in 2016 in the midst of the Rodriguez family's legal struggle, sums up the contradictions of violence performed across an international boundary-line:

The complexity of cross-border shootings confounded José Antonio's case even further. Had the Border Patrol agent been in Mexico....he could have been arrested and tried by Mexican authorities; likewise, had José Antonio been standing on American soil....he would have had constitutional rights. But the presence of the border fence created a strange extralegal limbo. (Binelli 2016)

These complexities would shape the legal cases that ensued from the shooting. Swartz was eventually indicted for murder, and in an ongoing courtroom battle, is being prosecuted by the U.S. Department of Justice. However, questions about the nature of cross-border violence remain, and the ability of U.S. courts to determine the case is still contested.

Swartz's murder of Rodriguez was, in one sense, brutally straightforward. Ten bullets, fired by Swartz, passed through the border fence, striking Rodriguez from behind. However, the act also brought to light the complex, and sometimes contradictory, deployment of violence by

the state in border regions. Swartz, standing within the U.S. and acting with the sanction of that country's government, committed an act of violence against a person legally outside his jurisdiction. Simultaneously, Rodriguez, ostensibly a legal 'Other' beyond the reach of the U.S. state, was inextricably drawn into the mechanisms of that very state even as he was gunned down. We can begin to make sense of this paradox by considering De Genova's analysis of citizenship and sovereignty:

If the institution of citizenship defines a kind of membership to the state and so appears....to be broadly directed toward inclusion, it is likewise always also a definition by default of those who are *not* citizens, and thus outsiders, 'foreigners,' or 'aliens'....citizenship--in the guise of sovereign self-government by the insiders--justifies the coercive rule of the state over the excluded." (De Genova 2005: 216)

In De Genova's view, the inclusion of "citizens" and the exclusion of "foreigners" are two sides of the same statist project of self-definition. A similar dynamic of is suggested by Giorgio Agamben, who writes that "Western politics first constitutes itself through an exclusion (which is simultaneously an inclusion) of bare life" (Agamben 1995: 7). If we give credence to Agamben's view that "the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power," Swartz's act of violence was not an aberration or a failure of the state (Agamben 1995: 6). Rather, it was an example of the essential, if hidden, violence on which the state is inevitably built and rebuilt.

Just as the creation of a citizenry relies on the relegation of non-citizens to the margins or exterior of the state, so too do the state's attempts to provide for the safety and health of its members depend on that state's ability to strip away these very trappings of bodily well-being, reducing certain beings to what Agamben terms "bare life." As an agent of the USBP, Swartz represents a key actor in these processes of state definition and control. Like all Border Patrol agents, Swartz was tasked with patrolling the international border between the U.S. and Mexico,

demonstrating the state's commitment to forceful exclusion and spatial regimes of population control. In shooting Rodriguez, Swartz implicated himself in the reduction of foreign 'others' outside the state to a status of bare life. At the same time, his actions constituted an "inclusion of bare life in the political realm," in which Rodriguez, as a subject of state violence, was necessarily drawn within the sphere of the U.S. state and legal system (Agamben 1995: 6). Such an act, according to Agamben, "constitutes the original--if concealed--nucleus of sovereign power" (Agamben 1995: 6). Violence by the state, through proxy agents like Swartz, strips targeted individuals of the trappings of meaning and affect, reducing them to a bare, biological essence. This power to strip and reduce belongs exclusively to a sovereign state, and must be carried out if the state is to maintain its control and sovereignty.

Bare Life and Social Meaning

Invoking Agamben's notion of bare life as a product of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion allows for an analysis of the underlying dynamics of state power, revealing the violence inherent in creating and exercising sovereignty. Still, it is necessary to step beyond the theoretical bounds of Agamben's work in order to examine Rodriguez's death not only as a moment of hegemonic violence, but also as an event which has demanded resistance and the creation of meaning outside the bounds of the state. As anthropologist Jean Comaroff has noted, "While the will to power or the effects of structural violence might significantly sever life from civic protection and social value, no act of sovereignty--save perhaps in the fantasies of philosophical absolutists or biological determinists--can actually alienate humans from entailment in webs of signs, relations, and affect" (Comaroff 2007: 209). The hegemonic power attributed to state entities by Agamben is, in fact, far from immutable. Comaroff's

anthropological engagement with Agamben reminds us of the contingencies of the state, and of the resilient, fluid systems of meaning with which state violence must contend. Indeed, it is tempting to unquestioningly accept the ability of the state to reduce, to strip away, to create bare life where there once existed a socially embedded individual. The strength of Agamben's critique lies, in part, in the fact that it pulls away the veil of civic belonging and patriotic justice which is deployed so effectively by the state; once the violent techniques of domination which lie beneath are revealed, it is difficult to look away. However, we must be wary of a fixation on violence and bare life, lest we begin to fetishize the very stripping away of meaning which we aim to criticize.

Since Rodriguez's murder, the seemingly unassailable frameworks of power-enforcement regimes, transnational exclusivity, state regulation—which contributed to his death have proven, after all, to be contingent and contested. One need look no further than the continuing success of Rodriguez's family in American courts to see that the very systems of power which constitute and support the U.S. state can provide opportunities to undermine that very state. Beginning in 2014, Araceli Rodriguez, Jose's mother, along with other family members, began a civil suit against the as-then unknown agent who had killed Jose. The case is ongoing, and questions of the peculiar nature of cross-border jurisdiction and legal application remain. But judges in lower courts have ruled that U.S. constitutional rights did apply to Rodriguez, opening the possibility of a successful lawsuit against Swartz (O'Dell 2017). At the same time, the case has revealed the fractured nature of the U.S. state itself. Internal regulatory bodies have put pressure on the agency to change its disciplinary practices, and the U.S. Department of Justice has filed a separate suit against Swartz, charging him with second-degree murder (Binelli 2016). As with the marginalization of AIDS activists described by Comaroff, the repressive instruments of state power which enact violence across the border may also have a role in “producing new political

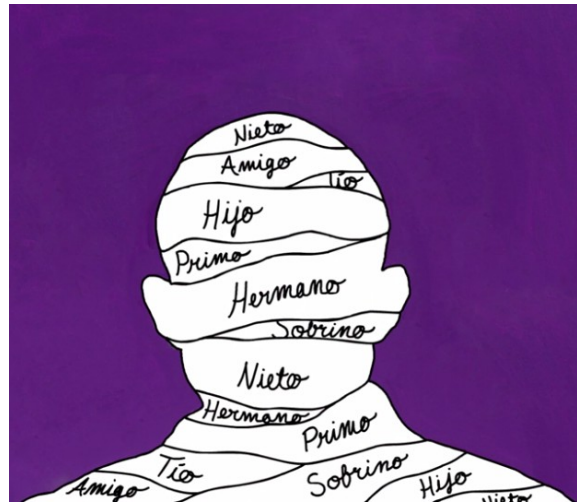
subjectivities and sources of mobilization”, inevitably sparking resistance and counter-struggle wherever they are put into use (Comaroff 2007: 211).

Moreover, we should recall that Rodriguez’s death took place not in a vacuum of unhindered state control and bare life, but in the matrix of symbolic meanings and social significations which constitutes cultural life. Efforts to make sense of the murder by Rodriguez’s family and the community of Nogales, Sonora at large have occurred not only within the U.S. legal system, but in everyday forms of meaning-making and resistance, from artistic creation to simple acts of remembrance. Consider the short animated film “Of Rocks and Bullets,” produced in 2017 by a Tucson, Arizona artist. The film is partially based on interviews with the Rodriguez family, and, according to the artist’s website, attempts to grapple with “the complexity of Border Patrol violence in reference to the 2012 murder of Jose Antonio Elena” (Creigh 2017).

“Of Rocks and Bullets” depicts the living relatives of Jose Rodriguez—his mother, nephew, brother, grandmother—alongside Rodriguez himself; each individual is painted in the same detailed, lifelike style. In one of the animation’s most striking sequences, long, wispy speech bubbles emerge from the chests of Jose Rodriguez’s family members. Each bubble contains a single word, designating a particular relationship to Rodriguez: *Hijo, Nieto, Hermano, Tio*; Son, Grandson, Brother, Uncle. The words, signifiers of familial and social meaning imbued with a life of their own, fly through the hillsides of Nogales. Already, the film draws attention to the continuing potency of bonds of affect and familial belonging, even in the face of destructive state violence.

As the scene continues, an image of Rodriguez fills the screen, with the lines of speech floating behind him. A pile of hand-drawn bullets covers the image, which is replaced with a drawing of a handgun. When Rodriguez reappears, he has been transformed, evidently by the

violent power of the weapon just depicted. However, this is no reduction to bare life. Instead, the bubbles of speech which designate Rodriguez's place within webs of social meaning have surrounded and covered him, forming a sort of shroud. The scene suggests a challenge to Agamben's notions of bare life, as it reinstates a biopolitical subject of state violence into a fabric of meaningful living which is anything but bare. For those attempting to make sense of an incomprehensible death at the hands of state agents, "the will to assert visibility, dignity, kinship, and attachment fuels the task of everyday survival" (Comaroff 2007: 209). Bare life, if such a thing can be said to exist at all, is not the destruction of an individual's existence as a meaningful set of relationships and social ties, but a violation which calls for the affirmation of such ties in the face of physical death. In a later scene, the animated phrases of kinship take on even greater significance. Moving past the street corner where Rodriguez was killed, they float to the nearby border fence, weaving between the bars as they continue their journey into the desert. As the words move effortlessly from one side of the border to another, the fence is framed not as a formidable barrier to movement, but as a permeable and contingent edifice, easily overcome by the very bonds of affect which it purports to overcome by means of spatial separation. Written on the animated fence itself are graffitied messages which push back against the violent injustice and physical separation enabled by the fence: "*Somos un pueblo sin fronteras*" ('we are one town without borders') and "*Justicia para Jose Antonio!*" ('Justice for Jose Antonio!') (Creigh 2017).



In two stills from Wesley Fawcett Creigh's "Of Rocks and Bullets," speech bubbles signifying familial affect and social bonds surround and cover Jose Rodriguez. (Creigh, Wesley F. 2017. "Of Rocks and Bullets." Accessed May 29. <https://wesleyfawcettcreigh.com/2016/04/25/607/>)



Fawcett's animated speech bubbles fly through the border fence, which is covered in graffitied messages. (Creigh, Wesley F. 2017. "Of Rocks and Bullets." Accessed May 29. <https://wesleyfawcettcreigh.com/2016/04/25/607/>)

This depiction of the border fence as a location of resistance is by no means merely a product of artistic license. Indeed, in the years following Rodriguez's murder, the fence, ostensibly a functional and symbolic tool of state control, has become a site for protest and meaning-making. Less than two weeks after the shooting, a small group marched through Nogales, Sonora to the border fence, eventually reaching the spot where Rodriguez was killed. The marchers, including members of the Rodriguez family, voiced demands for justice and decried the endemic violence of the border (Morgan 2012). This was only the first of many such events: local media sources recount ongoing religious services, vigils, and protests which have served to commemorate the shooting. Such actions have likewise made use of the fence as a spatial focal point for memorializing Rodriguez's death and protesting the ongoing atrocities committed by USBP agents. That protests center on the border and its spectacular structures of control is, in some sense, inevitable. Rodriguez's very proximity to the fence was a factor in his death, and any attempt at addressing the murder must involve a reckoning with the spatial regimes of control in place at the border.

Yet many protests have also served to illustrate the contingencies of the border, mobilizing participation on both sides of the fence to combat the seeming impermeability of the barrier. In a 2013 march on the anniversary of Rodriguez's death, groups from Arizona and Sonora converged on the fence from both sides, chanting, dancing, and conversing with one another. Another anniversary march in 2014 featured a similar cross-border effort, in which Sonoran protesters were met at the fence by a delegation from the Arizona Tohono O'Odham tribe (Prendergast, 2013; Kienitz, 2014). One Arizona resident, watching from the U.S. side of the fence as a 2016 religious service at the site of the shooting took place, described their attempt to overcome the physical separation imposed on participants: "I kept putting my hand through

the wall and waving to the people on the other side....We are one. The wall isn't here" (Joffe-Block 2016). Such multinational efforts at resistance are constrained by the militarized boundary between the United States and Mexico. However, by employing cross-border strategies of solidarity and shared experience, participants seek to overcome the facade of policed exclusion which is produced at the border.

Even as the border fence's practical functions of control are challenged by the actions of protesters on both sides of the border, the spectacular power of the fence has been contested by artistic works which have repurposed the visual significations of the fence itself. Over the course of the half-decade since Rodriguez was shot by Swartz, the section of fence near the site of the murder has provided a canvas for art pieces regarding the incident and handwritten messages demanding justice. One mural depicts a USBP agent as a hooded grim reaper with an automatic rifle; another is comprised of a row of candles painted on the bars of the fence, implying a vigil of sorts. Phrases such as "*¡No mas muertes!*" ('No more deaths') and "*4 Anos sin justicia*" ('4 Years without justice') are written in paint on the concrete base of the fence. One of the most striking pieces is a large painting of Rodriguez's face, erected on the steep cliff below the fence at the location of the shooting. (Booth 2016). The work challenges the fence's role as a catalyst of deadly state violence, reconfiguring it as a site which memorializes Rodriguez as a victim of the USBP.



*A large mural of Jose Rodriguez, erected below the border fence at the site of his murder. (Booth, Norah. 2016. "Justice Suspended: Photo Essay." *Occupied Tucson Citizen*. November 9. <http://occupiedtucsoncitizen.org/?p=5505>)*

The contested spectacle of the border is imbued with yet another layer of paradox, and the international boundary-line emerges not only as a site of prevention and control, but also of possibility. The border fence, despite its imposing, militarized construction, is an object of contested purpose. On the one hand, it demonstrates the commitment of the U.S. state to enforce its sovereignty with a heavy hand, as both political and economic regimes are upheld by the USBP's extreme acts of violence. The physical and conceptual boundaries between formal and informal, legal and illegal, Arizona and Sonora, are brutally maintained by state agents who wield the sovereign right to kill. On the other hand, those who seek justice for Rodriguez's death

have reformulated the border as a site where an “insistence on positive life--life imbued with ordinary, future-oriented expectations”--can be expressed (Comaroff 2007: 210). The spectacle of the border is turned in on itself; eyes which looked to the Sonoran Desert for a reminder of the danger waiting for them outside the protective bounds of the state are forced to witness the results of violence inflicted in the name of their own security and safety.

We should rightly question our own motives as we engage in a close examination of the border, and of events like Rodriguez’s murder. The spectacle can hold sway even over works which purport to critique, and a fascination with the violence of the state can lead us to seek pleasure in the pain of bare life. As social critic Susan Sontag notes, “there is shame as well as shock in looking at the close-up of a real horror.” When we gape at the brutal killing of a young man and grope for theoretical explanations for what we see, we “are voyeurs, whether or not we mean to be” (Sontag 2003: 42). However, we are also bound to look, to examine, to critique, and, if possible, to take action. As De Genova reminds us,

we are historical actors inescapably engaged in the everyday work of producing our own sociopolitical circumstances....this historicity is inextricable from our distinct location within the tangled historical trajectories that we have inherited, which implicates us in either reproducing or rectifying the enduring consequences of the past. (De Genova 2005: 213)

Each of us must come to terms with our own embeddedness in the systems of meaning, power, and violence which surround us, and with our possible complicity in the processes which led to the state-sanctioned murder of an unarmed 16-year-old. Anthropology’s claim to render the strange familiar and the ‘Other’ knowable is fraught with the possibility of violence in its own right, whether through misrepresentation, appropriation, or exoticization. However, anthropological interventions such as Comaroff’s also offer the potential for understanding oppression not as a hegemonic institution, but as a social force which is contested and open to

resistance. Comaroff invites us to “build a coherent, critical social etiology,” and to recognize that “the colonial frontiers etched across the ostensibly integrated landscape of our brave neo-world” should not be forgotten in our excited rush to analyse ‘biopolitics’ or ‘globalization’ (Comaroff 2007: 211, 215). We should not forget that Jose Rodriguez was killed in an act of brutal violence, but we should also make ourselves aware of the complex outcomes of Swartz’s murderous act, and of the many ways in which resistance has been expressed and justice sought by those with ties to Rodriguez.

Today, both the space of the border and endpoint of the Rodriguez family’s legal battle remain contested. Swartz, currently on administrative leave from the USBP, will face trial in June of 2017, nearly five years after the murder took place. Meanwhile, the U.S. government under Donald Trump has moved to expand the already-bloated USBP and similar enforcement organizations, and Trump’s infamous ‘border wall’ may soon become a reality (Gonzalez 2017; Margaret 2017). As border security continues to expand and violence across the international borderline continues, Agamben’s fears with regard to “Modern democracy’s decadence and gradual convergence with totalitarian regimes in post-democratic spectacular societies” seem alarmingly plausible (Agamben 1995: 10). Still, as we watch the emergence of new forms of hegemony and domination, we must keep in mind that such forms are by no means inevitable. “All too often,” writes Comaroff, “complicated local histories and sociologies....are obscured by grand allegories of exclusion, crisis, and apocalypse” (Comaroff 2007: 209). It is in these ‘local,’ contested spaces--the borderlands, the city split in two by a fence, the shrine in remembrance of a spectacular victim--that the fissures in a state apparatus begin to appear; it is here that “bare life asserts a stubborn connection to socially meaningful existence” (Comaroff 2007: 209). If we hope to develop an anthropological approach to understanding these spaces and the social webs

which inhabit them, we must seek one which accounts for complex interplays of power and meaning, and for the routine resistances which give lie to the self-reifying myth of the sovereign state.

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