MIGRANT DEATHS IN THE ARIZONA DESERT

La vida no vale nada
This book is dedicated with profound sadness and deep respect to the thousands of men, women, and children who have lost their lives while crossing the desert in Arizona in search of a better life. May they rest in peace. Recognizing that the deaths of migrants bring great pain and suffering to their families, we dedicate this volume to those left behind as well. May they find peace and the fortitude to carry on.
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INTRODUCTION

¿NO VALE NADA LA VIDA? (LA VIDA NO VALE NADA) (DOES LIFE HAVE NO WORTH? [LIFE HAS NO WORTH])

Cultural and Political Intersections of Migration and Death at the U.S.-Mexico Border

Raquel Rubio-Goldsmith, Araceli Masterson-Algar, Jessie K. Finch, and Celestino Fernández

That uncomfortably hot night [June 8, 2002] Enrique Muñoz’s phone rang with its first report of a deceased border crosser at 9 p.m., said Muñoz, the director of protection Tucson’s Mexican Consulate. . . . By the time the weekend ended, at least 16 border crossers had expired, almost all of them from exposure to the overheated desert, and the deadliest summer of illegal border-crossings had begun.” (“Searing Heat, Soaring Toll: Increasingly Crossers Aren’t Likely to Survive,” Arizona Daily Star, September 29, 2002)

More “deadliest” summers followed the “deadliest” summer of 2002 announced in the news story above. Statistical data on migration has changed since 2002. So has the number of apprehensions along the border, with variability from year to year. Migrants have increasingly arrived from destinations in Latin America other than Mexico, and research shows that more women and children are now taking the journey to the North. The coverage of these deaths has also fluctuated. Its prevalence in the media for a period of time alerted the public to the issue, and scholars, writers, and filmmakers responded to the silence of death. The Devil’s Highway: A True Story, by Luis Alberto Urrea, became a national best seller, and Who Is Dayani Cristal? was one of the most award-winning documentaries in 2013. Drawing
attention as “extraordinary” events, deaths in our desert remain in fact a constant, and their “naturalization,” we fear, is increasingly not news; less value, more silence, and justified impunity embalm “death by migration”—the dead of our desert. This volume grew from the conference “Death in the Arizona Desert: La vida no vale nada,” held in the spring of 2008. Since then, and amid the increasing militarization of the border and growing socioeconomic disparities, our desert continues to render human remains, and with them also our questions remain. Who is responsible? What is a life worth? ¿No vale nada la vida? (Does life have no worth?)

While embracing a variety of disciplines, each contribution to this volume follows its own methodology and expression in the search for answers to migrant deaths. These multiple approaches speak to the complexity of this tragedy as well as to the accompanying disaster: the plight of the missing. Scholars from the sciences and social sciences apply a variety of scientific and quantifiable methods that allow us to address the evidence surrounding migrant deaths. But academic rigor alone can hardly account for the immensity of this reality and its multifaceted effects on those closest to it and on those seeking answers. Thus, essays, poems, prayers, and ethical and spiritual reflections—in other words, the aesthetic—are, we argue, necessary expressions in the quest for new ways of seeing, listening, and pushing against the absence and silence that upholds impunity. From scholars, artists, folklorists, forensic experts, and social justice activists, our aim is to reveal hidden connections between cultural responses and policy effects, to deepen the conversation and move into action.

In a global context, immigration has been a long-standing historical phenomenon. The process of moving a short distance down the trail or traveling thousands of miles over mountains and across deserts and oceans has been a common human experience since people began to populate Earth. Human beings have migrated for a variety of reasons, including persecution, exploration, and adventure, but the primary reason for human migration has always been survival. From our ancient ancestors’ need to find food and water sources to the current dilemma of finding sustainable employment and safe environments, migration has always been part of the human experience. Despite its recurrence and continuity, however, migration remains imbued in controversy and is generally understood as a “problem” if not a “hot” social and political topic.

The Americas have an extensive history of human movements. In the United States, early immigration is associated in the popular imagination with explorers and colonists arriving from Europe since the sixteenth century. However, internal
migrations shape the region’s history well before the European encounter. Furthermore, the Conquest, colonial periods, and national projects throughout the Americas relied on human bodies on the move. The removal and forced displacements of indigenous peoples became tied to those of millions of people arriving from Africa and Asia through the transatlantic and transpacific slave trades that would shape the global economy for centuries to come. In the United States specifically, the predominance of immigrants from Latin American and Asian countries in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries changed the trend of previous centuries when those labeled as “immigrants” were largely of European origin.

This book, however, is grounded in a very concrete location: the Sonoran Desert. Our locus of enunciation to address migrancy is the Mexico–U.S. border and the Mesilla Valley specifically. The voices that emerge from this volume are historically and spatially situated and address how a variety of scales—relationships between global dynamics and lived experiences at the local level—manifest through our limited access to those who never made it across our desert. Yet the migrants crossing our border are actors in a worldwide pattern of populations moving from the global south to more affluent national economies, most of them in the Northern Hemisphere. Hence, their reality is not isolated from other locations that have turned into doorsteps to death vis-à-vis global disparities that beg us to question the conversion of life into “cost” and of death into “value.” Throughout the summer of 2015, thousands of migrants made it to the international press following their disappearance in the Mediterranean. Their corpses an ocean away lay alongside those found in the Sonora Desert. Whose lives have value? How are some human movements celebrated while others are punished? Deep inequalities speak through the celebratory movement of some—those termed *global citizens, entrepreneurs, and professionals*—and the criminalization and annihilation of those unable to cover the costs of “global entry.” In his excellent book *Death and the Idea of Mexico* Claudio Lomnitz, one of the contributors to this volume, writes, “The premium on preserving the life of the citizen above all else has been the guiding principle not only of medicine, but also of the modern state.” What, then, is the role of the state in the migrant deaths that unify this volume?

Inseparable from U.S. history, migration has more often than not become “outside” of history and treated as “choice,” “exception,” or “problem” depending on the specific political and socioeconomic juncture. Thus, it has been condemned, encouraged, and often times promoted *and* criminalized simultaneously
and in contradictory ways. Yet the increasing role of local governments in policies tied to migration and its actors is a major and particularly salient “new” trend since 9/11 fueled by events such as the recent economic downturn of 2008. For approximately the last 150 years, immigration in the United States had been exclusively a federal concern. During the past decade, however, because of inaction by Congress and overly zealous state and local elected officials, many states and municipalities have taken up the issue and enacted numerous laws and ordinances to govern immigration, specifically, unauthorized immigration. In 2011, for example, sixteen hundred anti-immigration pieces of legislation were introduced at the state level; three hundred of these were passed and signed into law. Arizona has been at the forefront of this movement, enacting in 2001 one of the most punitive laws, SB1070 (copied by Alabama with HB56 in 2011). Without a doubt, from state laws to federal levels, human movement has been constrained to the confines of the “legal,” and human lives have been reduced to its violation (“the illegals”)—even when breaking immigration laws is a civil violation, not a crime. The language of legality ebbs and flows through political forces, often becoming an overwhelming tide, as evidenced when bodies began piling up in the Sonoran Desert. For at least the past thirty years, immigration to the United States has been mostly centered in the Southwest. Today, the desert of Arizona raises deadly concerns that permeate the daily experience of the region’s citizens.

This book responds to the consternation and dismay of a growing number of people living in Southern Arizona in the face of the above reality. By the years 2000 and 2001, many involved in migration and human rights issues began calling for an end to increasing numbers of migrant deaths along the Sonora/Arizona border. The humane crises along the border made the national news in 2001 following the deaths of fourteen migrant workers in the desert in western Arizona (documented by Luis Alberto Urrea in the aforementioned *The Devil’s Highway: A True Story*). Several new border rights community groups joined older organizations, and the demands for humane borders became in fact a call for the right to live. The summer of 2005 broke heat records, with daytime highs reaching well over 100 degrees and lows in the 80s. But to many, it is remembered as the year when more human remains of undocumented border crossers were found in the Arizona-Sonora desert. The tie between migrating and dying became evident, and the outrage among immigrant rights advocates as well as religious leaders and academics echoed in daily news reports drawing attention to and calling for social action in response to migrant deaths.
Death by migration in general, but specifically along our homes in the Sonora-Arizona desert, raises a plethora of questions. Why are so many people dying here on our border? Who are they? Why do they come, and where from? Why do men, women, and children risk their lives in this way? How many die? What are the causes? Is someone responsible for the deaths? What of those who are never found or identified? What do their families know? When there are remains, how are they treated; are they given proper burial? ¿Qué velan las familias (What are the families worth)? What in fact remains?

This volume reflects upon these questions, keeping its grounding on one specific location: the Arizona desert. Why and how has this physical space become the end of life and burial ground for so many people on their way to the United States? Most contributors to this volume live and work from this space, and for some of us this desert is our native land. We speak from this border as engaged academics but also as its people—as those who disrupt the narratives of the borderlands as “no man’s land,” empty territory to conquer, or a limbo that migrants cross. Thus, one of the premises of this project is that looking at migration patterns over time and with a focus on Sonora-Arizona borderlands is an analysis of the present but also an exploration into the continuities and persistent legacies of the past. Addressing this reality from the context of Europe, Paul Gilroy reminds us that “migrancy is not about social policy and discussions on diversity and political correctness, but about race.” The voices from the border, as Rubio-Goldsmith notes in her piece, speak “the markings of its history.” Perhaps they are silenced because it is these markings (memories, remains) that, as she suggests, may “provide a clue into why it is this desert that was pinpointed for harsh closings of the U.S. Border.” Those of us from the U.S. borderlands know that the dead bodies in the desert are not “nowhere.” They happen on U.S. territory, sometimes less than fifteen minutes from our homes. We also know that dying in the Sonoran Desert is not a “natural circumstance,” and we face, as Alex Nava beautifully lays out in his contribution to this volume, having to reconcile its “stunning, even at times, ecstatic experiences of beauty with the horror of history, the experiences of exile and poverty, of violence and war.”

The goal of the conference in 2008 was to raise awareness of an already rising concern: the increase in migrant deaths and violence along the U.S. southern border. Nearly a decade later, to our dismay, this volume shares the same purpose. As both part and continuation of the conversations of 2008, it brings together scholars, artists, poets, and others to share the stories and facts about
death on the border. But at the center of this volume are human remains, and too many questions remain. Can Gayatri Spivak’s seminal inquiry “Can the Subaltern speak?” be asked about the dead? Can they speak? How do we account to what is considered nada (nothing)? Who speaks for the dead and disappeared, and how? It seems that politicians, federal policies, and enforcement agencies have decided that these lives have no worth (“la vida no vale nada”) (life has no worth). We disagree. Does being a poor immigrant relegate one’s life less worthy? We think not.

The density of the absence of the dead and the disappeared runs in stark contrast with the lack of answers, and the air-conditioned spaces of our offices serve as one more reminder of our physical proximity and simultaneous distance from the lives attempting to cross the desert as we write. Yet this only accentuates our awareness of the ways in which the bundles of remains stored in the medical examiner’s office and the silences of the missing are part of our history. We are part of the history of those remains, and accountability, including ours, is much overdue.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ACCOUNTABILITY, RESPONSE, AND THE UNQUIET SILENCE

This volume is a journey that works through the silences and absence of the dead and the missing. Yet it holds onto unquestionable truths; some traces speak the language of evidence. Studies clearly demonstrate that increased U.S. immigration enforcement has resulted in a twentyfold increase in desert immigrant deaths since 1990 (increasing from a yearly average of fifteen to over three hundred). In 2006, an examination of the records of the Pima County Medical Examiner concluded that people were dying here—in this desert—because of an enforcement strategy launched in 1994 by the U.S. Border Patrol and that extends to current immigration policy. This “lethal plan” is enforced by closing off urban points of entry (beginning with Operation Gatekeeper in El Paso and continuing to San Diego, Douglas, Nogales, etc.) and “funneling” migrants away from urban-accessible locations and into harsh geographic areas.

In the summer of 2007, for the first time in more than a decade of immigration debate, two divergent statistical measures converged: while the number of law enforcement apprehensions at the border showed a significant decrease, the number of deaths among migrants crossing the Arizona desert was the highest
ever (the remains of over two hundred bodies were recovered in Pima County alone, excluding other counties such as Yuma, Santa Cruz, and Pinal, where remains of border crossers are also commonly found). With this, the underbelly of a deeply troubled policy is exposed. This is the truth that weaves through this volume: deaths in our desert are, as summed up by Robin Reineke, “preventable, predictable, and violent.”

Armed with this knowledge, we seek further answers. Is there something inherent in the particular stretch of the Sonora-Arizona border that opens the door to this travesty on human life? That is to say, what can we learn about the political, social, and cultural life on this border that allowed immigration officials to think that they could bring death to our doors? Was the assumption that we, as inhabitants of this desert, would not notice them? Or was it presumed that we would not question them? Perhaps the underlying idea was that it would be easier to get away with these preventable deaths in our borderlands. Is it possible to find a place on our border where its residents, all of us, can demand an end to the implementation and enforcement of policies that kill?

This volume is a pilgrimage mapped onto that hope. Its voices join in the shared belief that the value we place on death is inseparable from that placed on the living. They also share the need to articulate feelings of helplessness and distress into acts toward “proper” burial, understood as the right to live, to be, and, it follows, to be remembered. The human remains that urge this project on are the presence of an absence. Their silence is a statement to persistent systems of power that are both global and local and where life has cost but no worth (“no vale nada la vida,” “la vida no vale nada”) (life has no worth). Human remains in the desert hold traces of life, of the life of those who died and of those who remember. They are traces of lives lived, of their personal hopes and actions. But these dead are, as Robin Reineke notes, “unquiet.” Their voices join those of the “missing” and could, she argues, carve a space that potentially escapes the control of state narratives. They are markings to larger inquiries about the remains of a colonial history (Rubio-Goldsmith), of global trade from below (Martínez, Prescott, O’Leary, Reineke), of legal frameworks where “human rights” are too often a placeholder for “humans” who have no rights (Durán), and of deeply rooted systems of inequality working through ideologies of class, race, and gender that celebrate free trade, travel, and cosmopolitanism too often at the cost of human lives. As various contributors to this volume show, migrant bodies, turned bundles of absence, fill the arks of many. Javier Durán, for example, shows how “human trafficking and the economic value of migrant life has
become increasingly profitable.” In response to a context where the “high profits” of migrant crossers show a direct correlation to their increasing candidacy for death, each contribution in this volume is an effort to think from the lives lost in the desert while critically asking “what they are worth.”

Speaking the “unquiet silence” requires many voices, and thus, this volume is a polyphonic effort. Some of us initiated research projects with the objective of providing immigration rights organizations factual evidence to buttress policy recommendations. Others worked the immensity of these deaths through attention to the aesthetic as the means to render the countable and the uncountable (and unaccountable), the material evidence and its missing traces, the observable and its “markings” in memory and affect. Any search for truth must challenge the “object” of research to maintain its “vitality.” And in order to do this, Edward Said reminds us of the absolute need for the “realm of the aesthetic.” In his words, “only the aesthetic rendered the meaning of experience as lived experience.” Thus, it is through the aesthetic—religious expression, song, word, and kitchen conversations—that we maintain the dead alive and ourselves—researchers, community members, activists—fully accountable.

To address impunity and injustice we must engage in the production of history. But, as argued by Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “In history, power begins at the source.” Our sources are human remains and missing humans. In response to this “incomplete evidence,” the work of Bruce Parks and his team in this volume reveals the possibilities of identifying human remains through new developments in forensic medicine. Yet, questions remain. As researchers, advocates, and community members, we cannot speak for anyone, much less the dead. Continuing with Trouillot, we must remain critically aware of the ways in which we inevitably partake in “generating silence while attempting its retrieval.” Stuart Hall also reminds us that in order to access the past—our dead—we must necessarily engage in its “retelling,” a process that he argues is necessarily cultural. Thus, any effort to unveil a truth demands, in Hall’s words, “the most complex of cultural strategies.” And thus, in order to move away from the master narrative, the aim of this volume is to cross disciplines and challenge the boundaries of the archive, opening spaces of enunciation, shifting, moving, crossing, and bridging matter with absence, fact, with feeling.

During his Nobel lecture on December 8, 1982, Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez explained his reference to the soledad (solitude) of Latin America:

Poetas y mendigos, músicos y profetas, guerreros y malandrines, todas las criaturas de aquella realidad desaforada hemos tenido que pedirle muy poco a la
imaginación, porque el desafío mayor para nosotros ha sido la insuficiencia de los recursos convencionales para hacer creíble nuestra vida. Este es, amigos, el nudo de nuestra soledad. (Poets and beggars, musicians and prophets, warriors and rogues, all of us creatures of that immeasurable reality have not made large demands on the imagination, because our largest challenge is the insufficient conventional resources to make our lives credible. This is, friends, the knot of our solitude.)

Through his speech, García Márquez claimed a place for writers—*inventores de fábulas* (inventors of tales)—to respond to this “solitude” with a “nueva y arrasadora utopia de la vida, donde nadie pueda decidir por otros hasta la forma de morir” (a new and raging utopia of life, where no one will decide how others live, including how they die). The contributors in this volume claim such a space, aware that academic rigor is not enough to respond to the *realidad descomunal* (colossus reality) of lives reduced to traces in the desert and of hopes reduced to survival. Thus, during the conference in 2008, musicians, painters, playwrights, and poets blanketed public sites. Through the arts and humanities they widened research possibilities and paved new grounds from which to theorize and “crunch” the data on the tragedies covering our beloved desert. Some of these contributions, such as that of Juan Felipe Herrera, the 2012 Poet Laureate of California and recently U.S. Poet Laureate, made it into this volume, but many others did not. Yet the plays, music, and visual art that could not fit its pages are nonetheless within them. And so are the altars, the crosses, the prayers, and each of the signs of collective “truths” that speak from the experience of loss.

**OUTLINE OF THIS VOLUME: PILGRIMAGE TO THE DEAD**

With attention to the complex interrelation between evidence and its absence and between the physicality of human beings crossing the Sonoran Desert and the dense aporias and aura of mystery and suspicion surrounding their death or disappearance, this volume is in a way a pilgrimage. It holds to firm beliefs that rely on both evidence and on the belief that we can trace what is no longer there and open new venues to address the humanitarian crises on our border. Its five sections are named “stations” (*estaciones*), the term used to address each of the successive markings of the pilgrim’s journey. These stations are linked together through the prayers gathered at weekly vigils led by Father Ricardo Elford for the dead and disappeared in the desert in Tucson’s Barrio Viejo and specifically
at the local shrine of *El Tiradito* (He who was thrown away). Its adobe structure, varnished with layers from the wax of many candles, holds wishes that span over a century. Its patron, Juan Oliveras, earned the status of “local saint” for nothing other than making mistakes. For loving the wrong person, he was left without proper burial—thus the name *El Tiradito* (He who was thrown away). Also known as The Wishing Shrine, this space earns its power not from past miracles but because it is what Raquel Rubio-Goldsmith addresses as a “memory with warnings.” The prayers in these vigils are an expression of collective despair, resonant expressions against forgetting, and, above all, one more historical registry of violence in the borderlands. This volume calls for that kind of pilgrimage. It is a statement against the violence on our borderlands, against the price placed on human lives, and, we hope, one more marker in a long history of voices against impunity; a warning that, even if silenced, the histories of our communities endure.

Station 1, “The Markings of History,” sets the tone for this volume. How can we speak of the dead and missing? How do their dim traces walk historical continuities? With attention to history, both authors in this section address the politics of the archive. How can we read the markings of histories with no archive? Claudio Lomnitz asks us to search for these “animas solas,” people who die and whom we do not know but who “touch the social life and cultural expression across Mexico and the U.S.” These deaths, he argues, are the object of a new political life working through unmarked graves that call for recognition but that simultaneously serve “as a pretext for misrecognition.” This volume fights against the latter threat.

Self-defined as a “daughter of this border and students of its history,” Raquel Rubio-Goldsmith speaks from La Mesilla, the terrain that grounds these graves and that demarks the Arizona-Sonora border. “Why this violence upon our peoples?” she asks. Rubio-Goldsmith questions migrant deaths as inseparable from a genealogy of two hundred years of borderlands history marked by complex ethnic relations and long standing conflicts over its resources. Her piece is a call to “remember.” Through her work, the outcome of almost forty years of oral histories, “death by migration” reveals itself as part and parcel of the history of the borderlands, where U.S. sovereignty has worked through violence, injustice, and most of all, impunity. In response to the “code of silence” that is prevalent in law enforcement agencies and well known in border communities,” Rubio-Goldsmith turns to sources beyond the limits of the archive. Above all, this author suggests that the dead in the desert have “sparked memories”
in the populations of the borderlands that can shed light on migrant deaths. Hence, she expands narrow definitions of *migrancy* as a journey from origin to destination to the experience of “dwelling in displacement” of borderlands communities as described by James Clifford. Through the lens of *diaspora*, a term she does not use but that is implied, Rubio-Goldsmith links migrant deaths to the political struggles that define the U.S. borderlands “in historical contexts of displacement.” The deaths in the desert speak to ongoing continuities and persistent legacies of the past that challenge master narratives of U.S. national history.

At the starting point of our pilgrimage, Lomnitz and Rubio-Goldsmith open spaces to ask/read/trace the dead through the cultural practices of the living in a shared effort to address the absent while placing them as historical actors. They push the reader to turn history into a question, to move beyond narrow definitions of historical and scientific “evidence,” and to trace the “missing archives” in the historical markings of memories audible in “trusted bars, kitchen tables, and back porches” (Rubio-Goldsmith).

Station 2, “Crossings,” interrupts definitions of *migrancy* as tied to movement, calling attention to its very opposite: detention and death. The prayer transitioning to this stop in our pilgrimage speaks to the dreams, frustrations, and plans of migrants in shelters along the Arizona-Sonora border. These are locations of hope and failure, were movement and fixity flow into each other. Prescott Vandervoet and Anna O’Leary walk us through the narratives emanating from shelters in Altar and Nogales respectively—spaces at the “intersection” of movement across the desert and “detention” by law enforcement. Through the work of these authors, the general label *migrant* proves to be inadequate to describe the diverse human experiences that make way across the Arizona desert. Both contributions highlight the correlation between migrants’ increasing exposure to danger and higher economic profits. Thus, the lower the value of migrants’ lives, the higher its “value.” Women, more to die, cost more. The currency of the migrant—their “peso en la frente” (peso on the forehead), as O’Leary highlights in the title to her essay—can be cashed for millions. The voices in O’Leary’s piece trace complex economies packed in the silence of the dead. The dried scraps of clothing that adhere to human remains find threads to the pockets of money-lenders, business owners, Mexican police, and officers in detention centers. In life, they sustain hundreds of “hotelitos” (small hotels) in borderland towns, assure the livelihoods of smugglers charging averages of $3,000, and keep cash flowing into Western Union stores (with wire transfers amounting to $28 billion...
in only two months in Nogales). Following from O’Leary, we add the lucrative business around “deportability,” including the profits reaped from cheap labor with no rights. Furthermore, the commodification of “deportable” lives averages $200 per migrant per day and lines the pockets of corporate for-profit prison operators along our border.

In Station 3, “Found Remains, Missing Graves,” Daniel Martínez creates the backdrop by highlighting two unquestionable “truths” tied to the dead and the missing: (1) the increase in migrant deaths in Southern Arizona was “a foreseeable and preventable consequence of enforcement efforts of the 1990s,” and (2) the deaths call “for greater attention to issues of structural inequality that force undocumented migration in the first place.” Bruce Parks and Robin Reineke, following Martínez, offer two different venues to trace the realities surrounding the dead and the missing. Bruce Parks and his team apply their knowledge to the Pima County medical examiner’s office. A native of Arizona and well aware of its social realities, Parks, together with his team, has worked to develop scientific techniques that increase the likelihood of identifying human remains. Their work traces the “living” through anthropologic examination of what remains. The silences of the migrants speak through levels of fluids, glucose, and electrolytes—the complexity of their stories finds its limits in the mummified, skeletal, and decomposed state of that which remains. Reineke, in an effort to reconstruct the story of those who are missing, traces the memories and experiences of those who knew them. The violence of the dead in the desert is inseparable from the violence of the disappeared, those who Reineke describes as “survivors of an absence of something.” She effectively shows how the voices of the missing are traces into a regime of state terror that relies on sustaining an intimidated workforce in the interior of the United States; “deportability” therefore becomes the condition from which to generate a surplus out of the commodification of bodies, if necessary through detention and ultimately through disappearance and death. As Reineke explains, “those who cross the border are already missing persons in an international biopolitical system that appropriates them as exploitable bodies.”

The prayer that transitions into this section addresses the desert landscape (“we pray for all the migrants who have died in the desert”). In the hope to comfort the dead, this prayer reaches out to the families that mourn them (“comfort their families who mourn”) and inserts them in its rugged terrain. Like the contributions of this volume, this prayer does not shy away from speaking against violence and xenophobia (“turn hearts from violence and xenophobia”). The
three essays in this section reveal multiple expressions of this violence, from the increase in expenditures for more refrigerators to house growing numbers of dead bodies (Parks) to the violence of “not knowing” if loved ones live. There is the violence of those mourning their dead and of others afraid to mourn their “disappeared” for fear that if they assumed they have died, they might be participating in their killing (Reineke drawing from the work of Rita Arditti), and, above all, the violence of U.S. policies that cash in deaths as tools of “dissuasion,” as means to an end that they conceive more valuable than life (Martínez). These three contributions alert not only to the cost of life but to the expenses tied to its absence. Alive, missing, or dead migrant bodies cash profits.

In Station 4, “Metaphors,” Alex Nava and Jane Zavisca turn to the traces of language. Nava reflects on the metaphor of the desert in the biblical corpus, and Zavisca analyzes the language of the press as a means into the ideological encodings underpinning public response to migrant deaths. She finds a complex gamut of metaphors that work to naturalize migrant deaths. The desert is portrayed as the agent of death, while migrants become animals, bush, and water, their journey north a “gamble,” and their trajectories summoned as “flows.” The border, like the desert, takes on human qualities, putting “plugs” on itself and “squeezing” immigrants into its interior. Alex Nava for his part rescues the desert from its metaphorical use in the biblical corpus and articulates it into the terrain where he was born and where he lives. His love for the beauty of this landscape becomes unsettled with the historical processes that speak through the bodies that are washing up onto his doorstep. How do we, he asks, inhabitants of this desert, reconcile its beauty and vitality with its tombs? Like Raquel Rubio-Goldsmith, Nava navigates the porous boundaries between history and memory, and while his argument is broad, there is no losing site of the terrain of the borderlands and its actors.

Finally, Station 5, “Expressions from the Living Dead,” turns again to the question of the “trace,” and invites us to read, view, and listen to the cultural expressions—textual, visual and sonic—that emanate from the reality of migrant deaths, that is, expressions from the absence of the source. Javier Durán notes the inviability of the testimonio, arguably the most politically engaged expression emanating from the Latin American literary tradition, to denounce migrant deaths. Once again, we can only engage in (re)presentations and (re)tellings. Durán picks up various threads present throughout this volume (biopolitics, the migrant as commodity, the significance of borderlands history) and, resorting to the tools of cultural analysis, extends our reflection to the Guatemala-Mexico
border. Under this light, the militarization of the U.S. border and its deadly practices emerge as a “cultural export,” part and parcel of the *dissemiNation*—to borrow Homi Bhabha’s term—of social, political, and economic practices that are historically specific and tied to complex processes of production and consumption. In this piece, Durán reiterates the question by Carlos Mosiváis: “¿Adónde vas que más valgas migrante?” (Migrant, where are you heading to raise your cost?) This simple expression of concern, while personal, is in fact denouncing the ways in which the global economy is mapped through the commodification of the migrant’s body.

Turning to the lyric and sonic, Celestino Fernández and Jessie K. Finch trace the language of migrancy through attention to music from traditions in both the U.S. and Mexico. Their focus on *corridos* (ballads) is one more invitation to “hear” the missing archive. Engaging in the tradition of the *corrido*, Fernández folds his personal history in the collective pasts and presents of the borderlands to enact his concern with migrant deaths. In composing his own *corrido*, Fernández enacts what Rubio-Goldsmith terms in her piece “memories with warnings”; voices absent from the archive but who made room for themselves through cultural expression tied to survival.

This is also James Griffith’s search. His essay walks us into the violence of the borderlands through material expressions tied to the sacred. Here, the traces of the dead manifest through heavily sensorial experiences that are grounded locally: altars, crosses along the roads, living and dead saints, channelings, curations, and ultimately the veneration to Death itself through its materialization in La Santa Muerte (Holy Death). Delineating the tradition of the pilgrimage, Griffith’s piece leads the way to the closing contribution of the volume, “The Last Lords of the Border: A Hip-Hop Day of the Dead,” by Juan Felipe Herrera, where the sacred and the material, the traditional and the emergent converge in response to migrant deaths on the border—one more effort, the last one in this volume, to trace the dead and track the missing.

Writing from the sensorial immediacy following the various sessions at the conference and in an effort to digest the inedible, Juan Felipe Herrera introduces his piece as the outcome of “footprints baked upon layers of more caked footprints,” “wiry tangles” and “charred branches of ink.” His point of departure is three bits of information extracted from different sessions in the conference: *animas solas* (lone spirits), nine thousand children in the United States who have lost their parents to deportation, and the new freezer to store dead
border bodies. It is clear, then, that as in each and every one of the contributions to this volume, Herrera’s departure is cloaked in the absence of what “remains.”

Through what he terms SPO-BOMO (Spoken Word Border Movement) Herrera recreates the mystic representation of the desert into the underworld of the Popol Vuh. In his piece, the two twins follow a ball of “remains”—bits of clothing, pieces of those dead in their journey to “North-Country.” The piece rearticulates the “crossing” from a linear trajectory to cycles of death and rebirth. The twins return following each of their deaths, and each time they return, they perform. Their bodies are beheaded, frozen, ground, and dumped into the river, where they turn into fish and later into clowns. But because every vestige—every remain—holds the power of dancers to be, the twins ultimately win over the Lords. The “ball of remains” becomes the sun (thus, what served as evidence of death becomes a source of life), the Freezer cracks open, and the migrants head “home,” which is both north and south. And the river flows, and this image returns us to El Tiradito through the prayer that transitions into this station, the last stop of this volume. We let this prayer, the last one in our pilgrimage, mark the transition to its beginning:

Flowing out of you and me,
Flowing out into the desert,
Setting all the captives free.
Hope is flowing like a river . . .

NOTES

1. Lomnitz 2005, 16.
2. Even a low of eighty is somewhat deceiving because summer nights remain quite hot; that is, after dusk the temperature drops very slowly so that at midnight it can still be in the nineties, continuing its slow decline, reaching eighty degrees by around 5:00 a.m. and remaining there for only a few minutes, soon rising to ninety degrees by 9:00 a.m.
7. Ibid., 27.
9. Ibid., 234.
12. Ibid., 308.