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# The Influence of Place Meanings on Conservation and Human Rights in the Arizona Sonora Borderlands

Rachel Shellabarger, M. Nils Peterson, Erin Sills & Frederick Cubbage

*Conservation and human rights are currently threatened by direct and indirect effects of border enforcement practices on the US–Mexico border. Increased border enforcement in urban areas has pushed migrants into remote conservation areas where thousands have died. Migration, smuggling, border enforcement, and aid provisioning contribute to ecological degradation of protected areas on the border. In this study we explore the discursively created physical, social, and cultural dimensions of place among land management personnel and humanitarian aid volunteers who were attempting to address the socio-ecological crises wrought by border enforcement in the Altar Valley region of southern Arizona. Land managers described physical place as an eroding ecosystem whereas humanitarians described physical place as a fragmenting system. Land managers saw crime as the defining social process while humanitarians pointed to social injustice. Finally, land managers viewed uncertainty as the primary cultural meaning, but humanitarians described empathy as the primary cultural meaning. We describe how these differences explain counterproductive conflict between humanitarian and land management groups, how viable local conservation solutions can emerge from an understanding of place, and how challenges arise as these solutions are scaled up to regional and national level policy. We suggest that the concept of culturescape integrated with place allows for an analysis of discourse that is especially local, and can be used to understand and improve upon natural resource conflicts that stem from attachments to place.*

*Keywords: Altar Valley; Conservation; Culturescape; Immigration; Mexico; Migration*

Rachel Shellabarger is a graduate student in Forestry and Environmental Resources at North Carolina State University. Nils Peterson is an Assistant Professor of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Biology at North Carolina State University. Erin Sills is an Associate Professor of Forestry and Environmental Resources at North Carolina State University. Fred Cubbage is a Professor of Forestry and Environmental Resources at North Carolina State University. Correspondence to: M. Nils Peterson, Turner House, Box 7646, Raleigh, NC 27695-7646, USA. Email: nils_peterson@ncsu.edu

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## Introduction

Place meanings are often at the heart of natural resource politics, and help to explain why natural resource conflicts can become heated and emotional (Bott, Cantrill, & Myers, 2003, p. 244; Cheng, Kruger, & Daniels, 2003). Attachments to place can help create community support for conserving natural resources that define place, since attachment to particular resources can motivate persons to preserve their quality. At the same time, if a particular place and its characteristics are imbued with memories, values, and social contracts, altering that place through a change in land use can be a challenge to the feelings associated with it (Said, 2000). Place attachments contribute to the complexity of natural resource decisions, because plans to change resources to which people ascribe meaning may be met with especially strong opposition. Further, place meanings at multiple scales constrain viable conservation solutions, and regional and national scale place meaning may clash with local place meanings. Understanding place meanings is therefore a necessity for effective negotiation of natural resource conflicts (Bott et al., 2003; Cheng et al., 2003).

Conflicts over balancing human rights and natural resource conservation along the United States' (US) southwest border highlight the central role of place in managing environmental conflict. Places have been altered significantly along the US southwest border by a shift in border enforcement practices starting in 1994. The new practices concentrated enforcement efforts such as patrol agents, fences, and surveillance technology at population centers (e.g., Tijuana-San Diego and Ciudad Juárez-El Paso). Coupled with economic opportunities to the north, this forced migrants into remote regions of the borderlands with less border enforcement (Andreas, 1998–1999; Cornelius, 2001; D.S. Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2002) where 3,861–5,607 migrants died between 1994 and 2009. Most of these deaths occurred in remote regions of the Arizona borderlands (Jimenez, 2009). Increased traffic in remote regions has contributed to ecological degradation of vulnerable ecosystems protected by federal parks, refuges, and forests through impacts of migrants and smugglers as well as border enforcement efforts. This context creates an opportunity to study communication interactions between immigration and conservation using personal discourses of place.

In this article we utilize the concept of *culturescape* to define and explore the discursively constituted place-shaping conflict over human rights and natural resource conservation in the Arizona borderlands. We use Carbaugh's (1996, p. 16) definition of culturescape as "the larger system of communication ... of which any one particular situated practice is a part," and which influences personal decisions. We integrate this communication construct with cultural theories of place by treating three fundamental components of place—physical attributes, social processes, and cultural meanings (Canter, 1977; Cheng et al., 2003; Relph, 1976)—as three dimensions of a discursive culturescape in the borderlands. Since most communication studies of immigration focus on political rhetoric (Demo, 2004; Flores, 2003; Ono & Sloop, 2002), our analysis of local, non-mediated discourse rooted in place addresses a gap in communication research. A place-integrated culturescape provides

a framework for understanding the roots of local environmental conflicts—which often come out of, and are fueled by, both discourse and attachment to place.

In this article we analyze how the discourse of land management personnel and humanitarian aid volunteers constituted culturescape in the Altar Valley region of Arizona's borderlands, and how this discursively created culturescape has shaped conflicts over migration and conservation. Specifically we examine how those personally engaged in protecting ecosystems and human rights describe themselves and the subjects they are fighting to protect within the larger environment, and how that discourse differs from national place meanings which implicate terrorism, national security, amnesty, and social justice.

## Study Area

In February 2008 land management personnel (law enforcement officers) on Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, which lies along the US–Mexico border, first cited a humanitarian aid volunteer with littering after he left jugs of water along migrant trails with the aim of preventing migrant deaths. In the year and a half following the first citation, 14 more volunteers were cited with littering for the same action. The heated court trials associated with these littering citations reflected broader conflicts over immigration policy brewing in the region for the past decade.

In late 1993, border control forces started concentrating on reducing undocumented migration at urban points-of-entry. Starting with Operation Hold-the-Line in El Paso, TX, operations then spread to San Diego, CA, in 1994 with Operation Gatekeeper, to Nogales, AZ, in 1995 with Operation Safeguard, and to McAllen, TX, in 1997 with Operation Rio Grande (Andreas, 1998–1999; Cornelius, 2001). Since border migration is supported by social networks that have been in place for centuries and are resilient to policy interventions (Anzaldúa, 2007; D.S. Massey et al., 2002), the new enforcement measures simply diverted border-crossers away from traditional points-of-entry to parts of the border with fewer enforcement resources (D.S. Massey et al., 2002). This increased migrant traffic through remote areas such as the Altar Valley region between the border towns of Nogales, AZ/MX and Sasabe, AZ/MX (Rubio-Goldsmith, McCormick, Martinez, & Duarte, 2006).

After Operation Gatekeeper failed to prevent undocumented migrants from entering, officials in Arizona started charging more migrants with crimes, as a means of further deterring them from entering the US illegally. Operation Streamline, first instituted in 2005, was an attempt to criminally prosecute more undocumented border-crossers; many Streamline defendants plead guilty *en masse*, in groups of 50, 60, or more (Lydgate, 2010). Arizona's controversial SB1070 bill (2010) required law enforcement officers to question any "suspicious" person who is stopped for other reasons about their immigration status.

The Altar Valley region of Arizona includes an 80-kilometer section of the 3,200-kilometer US–Mexico border that saw marked increases in undocumented migrants and federal border enforcement operations after the mid-1990s. This area includes lands managed by the US Forest Service Nogales Ranger District of the Coronado

National Forest (CNF), the Fish and Wildlife Service's Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge (BANWR), and the desert camps of the humanitarian aid group No More Deaths. Personnel from CNF and BANWR, both on-site and in nearby Tucson, and volunteers from No More Deaths partnered in this study. The two groups of land management personnel and the humanitarian aid volunteers were asked to participate in this research because their spatial proximity enabled them to witness similar trends in border activity, they were integrally involved in actions affecting migration, and they had direct experience with the interactions and conflicts between conservation and human rights concerns in the case study area.

The Nogales Ranger District of CNF totals 140,000 hectares at the eastern edge of the study area near Nogales, AZ, with 48 kilometers of international border. BANWR covers 48,000 hectares at the western edge of the study area, near Sasabe, AZ. Refuge land includes 7.2 kilometers of international border with Mexico. Starting in 2006 refuge land along the border and 1.5 kilometers inward was closed to the public due to the threat of violence from border bandits and smugglers. No More Deaths runs a camp near Arivaca, AZ, which is situated at the intersection of BANWR and CNF lands. About 10–20 volunteers at a time live in the camp, which sends out groups of hikers twice a day to leave water along migrant trails and provide first aid to any migrants in distress. Volunteers access migrant trails both on and near agency lands.

## Theoretical Background

In this study we treat place as a three-dimensional discursive construction, including physical, social, and cultural attributes which each play roles in place-making as a communication process. This approach is rooted in both Carbaugh's (1996, p. 158) concept of place as a discursively constituted culturescape out of which persons make decisions and Cheng et al.'s (2003) three components of place—physical attributes, social processes, and cultural meanings. Though presented as three components, each element of place interacts with and is dependent upon the others.

We utilize a traditional definition of discourse: text or verbal communication above the level of sentences (Krippendorff, 2004). Although our constructivist approach treats place as discursively constituted (Gergen, 1985), we recognize that place entails a physical space in which people invest meaning (Williams & Stewart, 1998). The attachment to a physical space expressed in discourse is not limited to residents of the physical space, but may be felt by a broad range of groups at different scales who have an interest in that place (Cheng et al., 2003; Yung, Freimund, & Belsky, 2003). Understanding place meanings allow insight into the strong attachments that people form with physical spaces, and gives perspective on their decision making (Carbaugh, 1996; Williams, Patterson, & Roggenbuck, 1992).

The physical attributes dimension of place reflects how people interpret and connect to physical aspects of a landscape. Places are often most immediately linked to physical attributes such as rivers, mountain formations, buildings, roads, valleys, and grasslands. The diversity and movements of flora, fauna, and people in an area, nutrient availability, and climatic patterns also contribute to place meanings. The

study area is a rugged, mountainous region on the US border, which provides vast terrain, excellent opportunities for crossing the border, and forbidding conditions. The ways that people connect to these physical attributes are in part determined by the other two dimensions of culturescape: social elements like national parks or enforced borders, and the cultural behaviors expected there. Physical attributes also have an effect on the other dimensions: for example, rugged terrain limits the structures that can be built in the area, and necessitates that people traverse the area with caution.

Interpretations of social processes form the second dimension of place. In a globalized society, the political decisions made by individuals across a continent can impact ideas of a place through the creation of a nature preserve, the decision to extract valuable underground resources, or the enforcement of political boundaries. Social processes in the borderlands are often framed by histories of multicultural interaction and the existence of an international border. Vehicle checkpoints on roads and frequent Border Patrol helicopters overhead highlight the desire to keep "others" out, and are juxtaposed with road signs in kilometers, *paleta* (popsicle) stands, and Spanish or O'odham town names, which show a history of cultural interchange. The social processes that support interstate checkpoints or create multilingual landscapes can enhance or degrade physical attributes of the environment in an area, depending on one's perspective. They can also influence the cultural dimension of place by suggesting how people should behave—*paleta* stands invoke enjoyment, while SB-1070, the bill requiring law enforcement officers to question "suspicious" people about their immigration status, tells people of color to be cautious.

The expected behaviors in a place influence how people perceive it, and these cultural meanings constitute the third dimension of place. Cheng et al. (2003) give the example of a dinosaur skeleton to illustrate this point: "an artificial dinosaur skeleton in a municipal park invites people to play on it; the same skeleton in a museum of natural history invites people to learn about prehistoric life" (p. 90). The border has developed local cultures and expectations about land ownership and use, government and private property rights, safety and security, and environmental conditions. The prevalence of open range cattle on Arizona lands necessitates that individuals leave gates as they are found (open or closed), and the pursuit of drug smugglers means that individuals driving rental cars can expect to be stopped by Border Patrol agents.

## Data Collection and Analysis

We used an ethnographic approach (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Mason, 2002) to understand the culturescape among conservation and humanitarian groups in the study area. Although immigration is shaped by national and global forces, migration is situated in a spatial and temporal place in the borderlands, one which ethnography is well-suited to explore (Englund, 2002; D. Massey, 1995). One of the authors (whom we will refer to as Researcher A) conducted all fieldwork reported in this article. In order to engage more fully in the research environment, the research

included volunteer work with CNF for four weeks in May and June 2008, with BANWR for the month of July 2008, and with No More Deaths from June to August during summer 2007, and for three weeks total in June and July 2008. The proximity of the three groups also allowed for intermittent travel among all three sites.

We used triangulation by reviewing documents, interviews, and participant observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2001). Document review was carried out before, during, and after fieldwork, extending into 2009 in order to follow the littering court trials. Reports and press releases from the three groups, literature from similar human rights and conservation groups in the area, local news stories, and government reports were assembled to create a better picture of community responses to migration. Field notes taken during volunteer work with each of the three community groups provided data on behaviors related to conservation or human rights.

Researcher A conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews with 27 community members from May through July 2008. Interview notes were taken using pseudonyms to promote confidentiality. Employing snow-ball sampling methods, informants within each community were consulted until the possible number of sources had been exhausted or until it was clear that data exhibited saturation within each sector of the community. Within each of the three participating groups, interviews were conducted with 9 individual informants. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 3 1/2 hours. Informal conversations and interactions with all 27 informants were used to clarify data and evaluate themes that emerged during the interview. An interview guide was used, but we allowed informants to guide and direct the flow of conversation. In this way, the informant's view of the situation emerged throughout the interview (McCracken, 1988).

Continuously interrogating the data throughout fieldwork allowed us to recognize and pursue themes as they emerged among informants (Draucker, Martsolf, Ross, & Rusk, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Peterson et al., 1994). Analysis involved systematically identifying and grouping similar pieces of data (e.g., quotations and observations reflecting safety, environmental harm, etc.) into themes. Although themes emerged from the views of informants, we organized them into the three dimensions of culturescape—physical attributes, social processes, and cultural meanings. Verbal repetition (both within one conversation and across interviews), repetition among sources (interviews, observation, and documents), and the role of context (e.g., some themes were rarely expressed verbally because informants were uncomfortable talking about them) all shaped the development of themes. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, participants were allowed to review individual interview notes, asked to confirm themes, and asked to suggest further avenues for research as a means of ensuring the quality of the data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; McCracken, 1988). Informants confirmed all quoted statements.

We use a naturalistic approach to report results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This reflects our purpose: to understand and explore the meanings and processes as informants lived them. The naturalistic approach aims not to generalize over multiple

meanings with numerical representations, but to recognize and explore the multiple realities that inevitably arise from social circumstances (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When quoted, informants are referenced using a pseudonym, followed by "LM" to identify them as land management personnel or "H" to identify them as humanitarian volunteers. Quotations from participant observation are followed by "Field Notes."

## Land Management Personnel

### *Physical Attributes: Eroding Ecosystems*

Land managers in the borderlands were tasked with protecting the quality of forest and refuge lands, but the prevailing discourse of land management informants described the Altar Valley as an eroding ecosystem. Erosion was both literal and representative of other forms of ecosystem degradation. Thus the discourse associated with physical place was intimately tied to the social and cultural dimensions which defined places to be protected (e.g., refuges and national forests) and defined threats to those places (e.g., migration and border enforcement).

Land management personnel often spoke about desert grasslands and riverbeds eroded by migrant trails. Dell (LM) stated, "Human activity in these riparian areas threaten[s] the animals as well as the vegetation. In some circumstances, people traveling through drainages ... represent a threat to the endangered Masked Bobwhite Quail" (Dell-LM). Another informant described migrant trails as growing "from cattle trails to super-highways" (Field Notes, LM). While discussing the eroded landscape, informants argued that fence cutting by migrants allowed open range cattle in southern Arizona to roam and graze in areas where they should have been excluded, including refuge and national forest lands. Informants in both agencies cited the GIS study conducted by a BANWR biologist that determined 113 hectares of refuge land (of 48,000 hectares total) was denuded due to off-system paths.

Land management personnel also described Border Patrol practices as a source of erosion. Aaren (LM) linked the expanding web of roadways to enforcement agents creating new vehicle trails for patrols which then attracted recreational users, saying: "roads have become more pronounced. Some are entirely new, as in created through enforcement or smuggling efforts. Others are old roads that used to be lightly-used, but are now heavily-used." When describing the eroded landscape, Dell (LM) said: "BP (Border Patrol) uses large heavy rubber tires to drag the roads, then they park on the side of the road, often right by an entrance or turn, and this creates a bald spot. It begins to look like a parking spot, and then everyday users use it to park because they think it's supposed to be there—it turns into a parking lot."

Land managers also described the landscape as being degraded by an altered fire regime associated with migrant traffic. Their discourse suggested migrant cooking, warming, distress, or distraction fires spread out of control and constantly threatened the physical places land managers were charged to protect. Informants at BANWR said the construction of sections of the border fence moved migrants towards more

mountainous areas, and increased fires in those areas (Field Notes, LM). "The last two years we've had one mountain fire each year; that's more than the average. This may become the average because the fence is pushing more traffic into the mountains" (Tom-LM). Informants stated they did not have data to support the assertion that wildfires caused by migrants were increasing, because it was considered politically taboo to state in the fire report that a fire was started by migrants (Field Notes, LM). Yet personnel in both agencies commonly made statements like Aaren's (LM), that "before the immigration problem human-caused fires were rare; now they are prevalent." Despite believing migrant-caused fires consumed as much as 20% of the program costs (Tom-LM), land managers did not openly discuss the issue because personnel believed they would be reprimanded for highlighting national level issues that were socially and politically charged.

The land managers' perspectives on physical place being a threatened ecosystem probably stemmed from both the ecological damage being wrought along the border, and the social and cultural baggage associated with protected areas. As a social phenomenon, "protected areas" reflect a broader discourse of physical places in need of protection from degradation. A perfect storm of well-known threats to protected areas has converged on Altar Valley. These threats include immigration, questionable policy, social injustices, and an international drug war (see Vol. 14, No. 1 of the journal *Parks*).

*Social Processes: Criminal Activity*

Although protected areas helped define how land managers viewed physical place, crime was far more prominent in discourse regarding the social dimension of place. Land management informants described various types of criminal activity (e.g., human and drug smuggling, illegal entry, creating off-system trails on protected lands) as persistent threats to personal and community security, and as motivation for defensive action. Informants from BANWR often recounted an unusually intense crime wave occurring in 2005 when law enforcement documented 4 homicides, 5 rapes, and 5 vehicles stolen (4 government, 1 personal) as part of migrant related crime on the refuge.

For land managers, crime, especially human and drug smuggling, made human death and distress inescapable aspects of place. Land management personnel found migrant bodies during work activities, and while driving in the field some personnel pointed to spots where they had found bodies. One worker lamented, "How many dead bodies do we have to find before there's a better way for them to get here?" (Field Notes, LM). Lee (LM) stated, "I'm surprised I haven't found a dead body yet. So many people have, there are so many bodies out there, and I go into so many remote areas for surveys." In addition to deaths, informants also expressed concern over the high incidence of rape involving migrant women and girls (Field Notes, LM). Tom (LM) explained another disturbing incident of migrant distress, saying "One man was shot 5 to 6 times, and started a fire to get help. He had packed his bullet wounds with mud in order to keep going."

Crime as a defining characteristic of place also permeated discourse associated with life at home. Informants told stories of their own homes being broken into by migrants in search of food, water, or money, and several informants paused during their interviews to count the number of times their homes had been broken into by undocumented persons (Field Notes, LM). Other informants explained how people would stop at their homes for food, water, or other needs.

> We saw drug runners several times at the house. They didn't ask for water, but went to the spigot outside the fence . . . got their water and left within a few seconds. They had obviously been there before, knew where the water was and did not want to be seen. They headed south after getting water. They may have been regular illegals, but I don't think so. Their behavior was so different and sometimes I saw a burlap sling, for hauling drugs (Lee-LM).

This discourse differentiated "regular illegals," victims of circumstance, from criminal illegals.

Crime, as the key social dimension of place, also shaped the physical dimension of place both by changing the physical environment (e.g., altering where fires burned or promoting construction of secure compounds), and by changing what elements of the physical environment natural resource managers could experience (e.g., through closing land). Land management agencies mandated additional security measures specific to fires along the border. The "report of a fire after hours now must be called in to [law enforcement], where we wouldn't have to before. It adds another level to any incident on the refuge" (Tim-LM). The precautions reflected the widely accepted perception that violent activities largely took place at night, when most smugglers moved through the desert. Personnel stated that these extra precautions made it harder to control fires on the border: "If a fire breaks out at night and we don't have [law enforcement] available, we will pull firefighters from the fire for their own safety. This allows the fire to get bigger overnight, and night is the best time for them to fight and get control of a fire because there's lower temps, more moisture, no sun" (Tom-LM).

Concern about crime drove closure of refuge land closest to the border in 2006. Personnel were still required to enact extra security precautions if they entered the area in 2008. During the same period heavier fencing and razor wire were placed around agency buildings, including some personnel homes on the refuge, and bars were put over windows and doors. The move seemed to make some informants feel safer, as one informant stated, "When sitting in my yard at night, I used to wonder whether I was being observed or whether people were hiding in the brush. Now with a 7-foot fence and razor wire, my yard is secure. I feel pretty safe in general" (Leslee-LM).

### *Cultural Meanings: Uncertainty*

Uncertainty framed the cultural meaning of place for land management personnel. They suggested "It's like the Florida coast waiting for the next hurricane" (Charlie-LM). This uncertainty was linked to the presence of migrants and crime associated with

smugglers. Informants often described an unsettling feeling when undocumented persons came to their homes. Being so close to the border, informants stated that it was common to see migrants on the side of the road—those who had given up moving north to find work, or drug runners who had just dropped a load—trying to get rides south to the border. "In the past 21 years, it has changed too much—two guys were waiting at my kids' bus-stop for a ride back to Mexico one day. It affects everyone's lives directly, everyday. It's a different life than I grew up with. Used to be quiet, rural, communities trusted one another, now we have to lock everything" (Aaren-LM).

Land management personnel described uncertainty associated with how to interact with migrants, and this was reflected in the language they used to discuss migrants. Some informants described migrants as "coming over here" and referred to the US as "absorbing another nation," referring to Mexico (Field Notes, LM). In most references to migrants, land management informants used acronyms or other terms that clearly described the migrant as an uncertain other: undocumented aliens, other than Mexicans, illegals, aliens, or illegal aliens. The language used often excluded the migrants from being fellow participants in the land managers' experience of place.

Much of the uncertainty expressed in discourse about cultural meanings of place was related to perceived difficulty in differentiating between who was dangerous and who was not. At a BANWR security briefing for volunteers, the presentation attempted to distinguish between migrants coming to work and those coming with criminal intent (smuggling, theft, or other crime). The presentation made the point that those coming for work did not present the same risk as those with more violent intentions, but also emphasized that the distinction was not easy to make. Another land management informant explained that "[We're] mostly concerned with the safety issue: who is an endangered person vs. who is a drug trafficker. You never know" (Aaren-LM). David (LM) described the uncertainty that came with their work, "Forest Service employees working in remote areas must have the situational awareness of their surroundings and be on the lookout for something that's just slightly off, and even when things look right they might not be right. There are a lot of unknowns."

Land management personnel believed smugglers and migrants faced similar cultural meanings of place rooted in uncertainty. This belief was often expressed when informants worried about being confused with Border Patrol agents. Several personnel discussed concern over wearing their uniforms when working in remote areas, suggesting that smugglers might confuse their government uniforms with border enforcement agents and provoke a conflict. This was primarily a concern for Forest Service informants, whose dark green uniforms looked similar to the green uniforms of Border Patrol agents.

Repeated stories about border violence that circulated among land management personnel helped to perpetuate uncertainty. A commonly referenced icon within such stories was that of mesquite trees decked with women's underwear, found throughout the desert. Researcher A was told several interpretations of what this symbolized, but the only interpretation repeated within and across groups was the "rape tree" concept, suggesting that the trees with underwear were signs that a migrant woman was raped at

that spot (Field Notes, LM). Researcher A was also warned repeatedly of a strategy in which migrants placed rocks across a local road (Field Notes, LM). When the passenger of the car got out to remove the rocks, she was attacked and the vehicle taken.

For land managers culturally appropriate behavior emerged from all three dimensions of place: a threatened physical place, crime defining social processes, and cultural meaning of uncertainty. Cautiously following regulations was described as the only safe and appropriate means for addressing human suffering and ecological damage. Jack (LM) stated "We're the last people who want deaths out here, but there have to be protocols in place to do it the right way." Charlie (LM) appealed to agency water regulations as he explained the appropriate way to address migrant deaths. "Legally, I can't let [humanitarians] put water on forest land—I have to be able to guarantee that any water given is safe . . . and when water is left out and those who left it walk away, I can't ensure the quality of that water." Informants appealed to littering regulations when they said: "Want to help people get out of the desert? Fine. Want to hand them water and other things? Fine. Want to leave water in the desert and walk away? That's a problem" (Field Notes, LM). Some informants suggested stationary water tanks as a potential compromise within the bounds of current regulations. "Personally, I feel that if we can help get water, like with Humane Borders stations, that's good . . . It's not just an issue with leaving water, though, but also leaving big bags of food, and we can hardly keep up with the trash" (Cody-LM). Runar (LM) summed up the culturally appropriate response to migration saying: "during my day to day job, I may encounter people, and will give them water and call Border Patrol." Land manager discourse highlighted the disconcerting nature of contexts that did not lend themselves to cautiously following rules (e.g., apparent migrants at a child's school bus stop). Tom (LM) stated, "How do you deal with someone at your door? I know people who would live down here but don't because of that. It's a big concern for me."

## Humanitarian Volunteers

### *Physical Attributes: Fragmented Systems*

When humanitarian volunteers spoke about physical attributes of the borderlands, they described a socio-ecological system that was fragmented by immigration policies. Their discourse repeatedly returned to problematic social policies as the reason for both social and environmental distress in the borderlands. Cole (H) described this mindset, saying:

> By forcing migrants into more remote and rugged areas U.S. policy has had an effect on these ecosystems . . . What we are talking about is a system of policies that have led to increased human impact on sensitive areas . . . Population mobility has been a critical part of the human experience for thousands of years. Instead of engaging this mobility in a positive and formative way U.S. policy has criminalized this part of the human experience.

This belief—that immigration policies have fragmented what was an otherwise integrated system of flora, fauna, and people—was common among humanitarian

volunteers. Another informant pointed to the border wall specifically, suggesting "the wall is a huge symbol of antagonism towards migrants, and a practical inhibitor of migration and disrupter of wildlife systems in the area . . . the well-being of humans and of wildlife and ecosystems is so intertwined, and humans are a part of these systems" (Annina-H). They framed their policy criticisms using environmental terminology, as well, invoking terms such as "environmental justice" to describe the effects of the border wall. This illustrated their perspective of the border as an integrated system, and the belief that actions which affect the migration of humans have implications for traditionally "natural" elements as well. As Sol (H) stated, "Rescuing life in the desert does not mean just migrant life, it's all life in the desert."

Volunteers' discourse about their work to solve humanitarian problems on the border reflected their view of the physical place on the borderlands as a fragmented system. They believed their work to remedy social policies would solve the environmental concerns, as well. One volunteer stated, "In the larger picture, if we can get just immigration reform passed we won't have people moving through the desert, leaving trash, etc" (Shayna-H). Annina (H) said, "People in this work agree that we don't want people tracking through the desert, and it's more beneficial to everyone if people enter the country in more safe, less fragile, harsh places." No More Deaths' volunteers recognized their efforts to provide aide were constrained by environmental regulations for protected areas, but argued the reform of immigration policies would end the environmental impacts of both aid workers and migrants.

Humanitarians recognized that their efforts to address the symptoms of a fragmented system had environmental consequences. Hallie (H) said: "personally . . . I see a sacrifice of environmental concerns for [No More Death]'s work. We drive SUVs, trucks, and migrant packs create a lot of trash. The amount we pick up is nothing compared to what we put out." As Marilyn (H) stated, "[No More Deaths] is at least not contributing to the problem with what we leave, but perhaps we're also not alleviating it . . .." Atticus (H) said it would be beneficial "to look at environmental factors in immigration causes, also in how we operate in delivering water, patrolling, etc. I see it in informal discourse between particular individuals, particularly the younger individuals. Never see it in an official context." The lack of written discourse regarding environmental impacts of humanitarian activities reflected a similar phenomenon among land managers where fear of social repercussions prevented open discussion of some threats to the physical place. Although humanitarians' discourse associated with physical place differed greatly from that of land managers, the ultimate characterization was surprisingly similar. Where land managers saw an ecosystem degraded by migration and border enforcement, humanitarians saw a socio-ecological system degraded by fragmenting policies.

### *Social Processes: Social Injustice*

Humanitarian volunteers described injustice as the dominant social process of the borderlands. Both the lack of social justice and the need for it dominated

humanitarian discourse, and this shaped both perceptions of physical place (fragmented) and the tendency for cultural meanings of place to focus on empathy. Humanitarians saw "clear ties between increased border militarization and deaths" (Atticus-H), referencing the idea that enforcement was pushing migrants into remote areas, leading to their deaths from dehydration and exhaustion. Informants pointed at "the growing disparity between the rich and the poor" saying "this is acted out on the border" (Sol-H). They stated that "The economy benefits from cheap, undocumented labor. The money put into border enforcement could be put elsewhere, into Latin America or Central America, for instance, and the problem wouldn't exist" (Hallie-H). Volunteers described the injustices against people and their environment as arising in part from globalization:

> The tensions, conflicts, and integrative aspects of globalization are played out on the human body (fashion, mortality rates, value standards of beauty and success, poverty-aggravated illness, etc.) and the earth's body (ecological devastation, areas of dense population, protected wilderness areas,'natural disasters,' etc.). The border stories show this... blistered feet and a desert scarred by walls and human traffic, are the marks of the conflict in our changing world (Carma-H).

Cole (H) articulated the oft repeated belief that humanitarians were accepting accountability for social injustices perpetrated by their own country saying:

> If I hurt you through my actions, directly or indirectly, I have a responsibility to make sure you are OK. We teach this idea to all of our children at a very early age. Why is it different in the global community? What is so special about countries and institutions (corporate or otherwise) that they are held to a different standard?

Humanitarians described the social injustice that defined social processes in the borderlands as beyond the control of local people. The parable of the babies, told one night at the desert camp to a group of visiting students (Field Notes, H), was used to explain how provision of direct aid (food, water, and first aid) was an inadequate response to social injustices perpetrated on national and global scales. In the parable, a community is situated alongside a river. One day a baby is seen floating down the river, and a villager goes in to save the baby. As days go by, more babies continue to be seen in the river. The community organizes a monitoring system to detect and remove any babies in the river, with this system growing more complex. Finally, someone decides to go upriver, find out why the babies are being put in the river, and stop this from happening. The parable-teller explained that No More Deaths constituted the villagers going into the river to save the babies, because this was the most urgent need. He then asked the visiting students to be the villagers who go upriver and stop the forces sending the babies into the river. Atticus (H) expressed this perspective more directly saying: "Overall, I feel that the work of [No More Deaths] is crucially important in mitigating migrant deaths and abuses, though recognize also that it is a band-aid solution." Volunteers hoped to "work themselves out of business" (Field Notes, H) by promoting awareness of suffering on the border. Sol (H) suggested "That may be our greatest contribution to the larger issue of immigration reform-making others aware of the suffering and death on the border."

As in the case of physical place, humanitarian discourses about social process paralleled those of land managers. While land managers described traditional crime as a defining social process, humanitarians described widespread atrocities tolerated by a government as a defining social process. Both groups believed these social processes constituted threats to physical places they valued, and both groups recognized a larger more systematic international problem was driving those threats.

### *Cultural Meaning: Empathy*

The cultural meaning dimension of place for humanitarian volunteers was rooted in empathy. For humanitarians, the borderlands were a place to be empathetic, not uncertain and cautious, and the perspective was evident in their behavior. Humanitarians spent their time traversing rugged desert terrain in the busiest smuggling corridor along the US–Mexico border. Grounding culturally appropriate behavior in empathy seems reasonable given that the physical place was seen as fragmented. Recognizing and sharing the feelings of others was a step towards bridging the divides in physical place. Similarly, empathy represents a visceral response to the social process of injustice.

Both empathy and attempts to create it were reflected in how humanitarians spoke and interacted with migrants. Volunteers would engage in conversation and other friendly activities with migrants while waiting for Border Patrol agents to arrive or while administering first aid. They tried to learn about the individual's families, would play with migrant children, and play music or card games with migrants. Among volunteers, migrants were referred to as "friend," "*amigo/a,*" "migrant." or "*compañero/a.*" The slogan "No Human Is Illegal/*¡Ningún Ser Humano es Ilegal!*" and its variations were seen on shirts, posters or buttons around the camp. The Truman Capote quote "Love, having no geography, knows no boundaries" was placed prominently on a trailer at the desert camp. Annina (H) argued "No matter of particular characteristics, people deserve respect, medical treatment, opportunities, family, a chance to succeed." The humanitarians' empathy and focus on developing the capacity to understand migrants reinforced desires to aid migrants, and in turn their willingness to violate laws and be less than cautious in doing so.

### *Clashing Views of Culturally Appropriate Behavior*

Nuanced differences in the physical and social dimensions of place combined to create clashing versions of the cultural dimension of place: one defining culturally appropriate behavior as cautiously following rules and the other defining culturally appropriate behavior as boldly violating rules. The different cultural meanings ascribed to by land managers and humanitarian volunteers led directly to the littering citations and court cases; the conflict was a logical result and emblematic of their differing views. This was reflected as well in the language used by the two groups in the court case and media coverage, with the water jugs labeled as "aid," "life-saving," and "a godsend" by the humanitarians, versus "trash" or "litter" by the land management personnel. Humanitarians emphasized how water jugs saved lives in the

face of social injustice and what the water bottles meant to the migrants (an expression of their view of cultural place). Land managers emphasized how the water bottles threatened the ecological surroundings (an expression of their view of physical place), and were a type of crime, which they responded to by following procedure and regulations.

## Discussion

The place-integrated culturescape concept provides a valuable new tool for assessing and managing environmental conflict. Specifically, the framework provides a contextually rich means to document the evolution of divergent norms for culturally appropriate behavior and design interventions for conflict management. Using place-integrated culturescape to investigate local perspectives helped reveal personalized origins of the conflict that were hidden behind broader political discourses. National discourses about terrorism, national security, amnesty, and even social justice utterly failed to address the place based subtleties dictating conservation and humanitarian strategies in Altar Valley. Local discourse, particularly of voices that are left out of the dominant narratives, is essential to truly understand conflicts associated with immigration (Ono & Sloop, 2002). The acrimonious litigation over water bottles documented in this study reflects the tendency for divergent place meaning to emerge in the form of adversarial behaviors (Cheng et al., 2003; Yung et al., 2003).

As in previous research using the culturescape construct (Carbaugh, 1996, p. 189; Canada, 1997) this study revealed nuanced localized knowledge of place-making, and its impacts on environmental decision making. In the Altar Valley case humanitarians saw the land managers' emphasis on cautiously following regulations as excessive and even inhumane, and the land managers saw humanitarians violating laws as naïve, dangerous, and providing incentive for more migrants to cross in dangerous areas. Following regulations seems eminently reasonable to land managers faced with balancing their professional charge to protect natural resources and endangered species with the moral demands created by a humanitarian crisis. Their enforcement of laws became important in such a morally and politically charged context of uncertainty. The humanitarian response follows in a long tradition of civil disobedience in response to governmental failings and abuse. The fact that breaking a seemingly minor law could save a human life makes such behavior seem eminently reasonable to the humanitarian volunteers.

This culturescape analysis of conflicting perspectives regarding a specific place enabled us to document how an interaction between scale and both physical and social discourses of place promoted conflict over water provisioning. Although land managers and humanitarian volunteers appeared to share discourses of the physical and social dimensions of place as threatened systems, their discourses diverged when scale was considered. Land managers described erosion of local ecosystems as the threat, and humanitarians described fragmentation of the local socio-ecosystems in Arizona from those in Mexico as the threat. Similarly both parties focused on crime as a defining social process, but scale-based differences in conceptions of crime

explained the conflict over littering. Land managers focused on the smaller scale crimes they faced at work, home, and their children's bus stops including murder, rape, theft, smuggling, trespassing, and littering. Humanitarians focused on larger scale crimes against humanity. Accordingly, law breaking violated norms among land managers, but breaking laws was the only recourse for humanitarians responding to an antagonistic, or at least indifferent, government. Land managers considered the rule of law an appropriate response to theft and murder, whereas humanitarians considered civil disobedience an appropriate response to crimes against humanity perpetrated by a government.

The culturescape concept also helped explain how and why scale drove different conceptions of place. Land management workers typically lived in the study area, and their concern about crime and sense of uncertainty was linked to experiences at work, at home and at the bus stops serving their children. Humanitarian volunteers, however, often lived outside the direct area of the borderlands during much of the year (Field Notes, H). Their concern about social justice and sense of empathy was tied to both personal experiences in the borderlands and views developed outside the borderlands where they adopted national discourses about social justice and human rights.

Given the strong emotions expressed from both sides of this conflict, compromise might seem impossible. However, the two local groups did take a constructive step in that direction with the collaboratively developed "Draft Compatibility Determination: Establishment of Drinking Water Stations, Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge" (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2010). This Draft Compatibility Determination proposed "allowing humanitarians to establish and maintain drinking water stations" in ecologically sensitive areas of the refuge. The plan was supported locally because it allowed humanitarians to provide aid and thereby address social injustices, it committed humanitarians to follow laws governing aid provisioning and thereby addressed land managers' concern with crime, and it addressed cultural meanings by both providing more certainty for land managers and demonstrating empathy for migrants.

The ensuing rejection of the Draft Compatibility Determination at the national level highlighted the critical role of scale in coupled human-natural systems (Liu et al., 2007). As proposals are processed from local to regional and national scales, recognition of the physical, social, and cultural dimensions of place as constraints on viable solutions often fades. Locally viable solutions may be rejected because of apparent conflicts with federal mandates and regulations. Further, urgency associated with such solutions dissolves along with the personal and embodied experiences of local participants when proposals slowly move from local to national levels.

The place-integrated culturescape framework revealed several clues for ways to address conflict in borderlands. Although the US–Mexico border is a place "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 25), several factors make ameliorating conflict among land managers and humanitarians possible. First, if land managers and humanitarians can rearticulate their culturescapes at matching scales, they may find they share objectives. At national and international

scales they both hope for policy change that saves lives and protects the environment by moving migration out of wilderness areas. At the local scale they want to reduce crime, human suffering, and ecological degradation. Land managers and humanitarians also shared a common frustration with having their environmental concerns muzzled by an organizational culture of silence on the issue. Land managers feared repercussions from higher officials, and humanitarians likely feared that highlighting the environmental impacts of themselves or the migrants might undermine their cause. Acknowledging their shared frustrations may provide some common ground for collaborative decision making.

The cultural conflict between humanitarian volunteers and land managers may be ameliorated by collaborative processes that help participants develop empathy through critically viewing their own motivating discourse and exploring the motivating discourse of other parties (Ono & Sloop, 2002; Peterson, Peterson, Peterson, Lopez, & Silvy, 2002). In the Altar Valley case, invoking new phrases and reframing concerns in a manner that expunges overtones from the national immigration discourse may help humanitarians and land managers to envision alternatives—in this case, an alternative culturescape (Slocum-Bradley, 2008). Although both groups criticized national discourse for ignoring local experience, they both deferred, at least in part, to national perspectives. Notably both groups adopted elements of the Mexican peon and Mexican problem discourse that has dominated discussion of Mexican immigration at a national level (Flores, 2003). The Mexican peon discourse associates migrants with cheap, passive, and easily controlled labor whereas the Mexican problem discourse associates migrants with criminal activity. The distinction between "regular" migrants who were passive victims of unfortunate circumstances and criminal migrants who were raping, murdering, and running drugs along the border reflects the distinction between the peon and problem rhetoric. Although the humanitarians largely avoided the criminal discourse, they often described migrants as being acted upon by larger forces rather than as actors determining their own fate.

Highlighting or avoiding discourse that obscures the individuality and humanity of migrants may allow humanitarian and land manager culturescapes to converge (Ono & Sloop, 2002). For instance, some of the language land managers used described migrants as akin to foreign enemies (e.g., invading, absorbing a foreign nation). This discourse should be acknowledged as reflecting the Mexican problem discourse and be avoided to improve relationships with humanitarian groups whose cultural dimension of place defines appropriate behavior as empathy (Ono & Sloop, 2002). Similarly, since migrants are, in a very visible way, degrading the landscape in the borderlands, humanitarians should not treat statements describing environmental degradation caused by migrants as scapegoating migrants. Denying that migrants have any responsibility for their environmental impacts partially accepts the Mexican peon discourse by discounting the possibility that migrants are actors making decisions with consequences they are choosing to accept. Ignoring the visible impacts of migration on the environment will hurt relationships with land managers, a group whose sense of place is directly tied to protecting ecosystems along the border.

People with drastically different place meanings can develop a shared vision of place given a shared problem and shared power to solve it. Examples include parties from economic development and environmental protection perspectives uniting to create a land-use plan (Carbaugh, 1996), or a Klan leader and a black civil rights activist uniting to plan the desegregation of schools in Durham, NC (Davidson, 1996). The Draft Compatibility Determination mirrored these scenarios, but ultimately failed because the participants did not in fact have the power to implement their solution, which clashed with the vision of place held by decision makers at a broader scale.

For researchers and land managers alike, working with place meanings is a potentially heated and emotional endeavor (Williams & Stewart, 1998). However, by doing so we may engage the energy that people invest in places, resulting in more broad, democratic participation in natural resource politics (Cantrill & Senecah, 2001; Cheng et al., 2003; Williams & Stewart, 1998; Yung et al., 2003). By combining place meanings—which are often at the root of natural resource conflicts—with the discursive culturescape—which illustrates our conceptions of place meanings and influences our actions—we can better understand the conflicts that arise from people in places. This broader picture of conflict can facilitate resolution locally. Ideally, efforts to improve conditions and reduce conflicts at key local places will also help inform or shape national policy and dialog. For environmental conflicts on borders, national policies that reflect local culturescapes would be a welcome change.

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