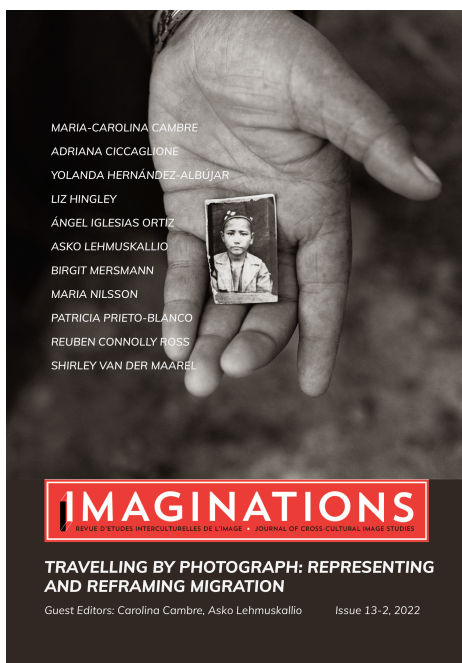


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## Travelling by Photograph: Representing and Reframing Migration

Guest Editors: Carolina Cambre,  
Asko Lehmuskallio

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Cover image: Fazal Sheikh's presentation of a  
portrait shown to him in 1997 at an Afghan  
refugee village in Ghazi, Northern Pakistan, of a  
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THE WALL AND THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION AND  
INCLUSION AT BAJA CALIFORNIA BORDERLANDS: A  
PICTORIAL JOURNEY

ÁNGEL IGLESIAS ORTIZ

The essay considers the border wall between Mexico and the United States as its primary visual, symbolic, and material reference to reflect on the politics of exclusion and inclusion entangled in everyday discourses and practices in Baja California's borderlands. Everyday bordering applies not only to governmental technologies of control but also to these sorts of politics. The essay proposes that the wall represents an exclusionary symbol that is nonetheless challenged by those who attempt to embed inclusion in this context. The pictorial journey shows aspects of common situations next to the wall between the Mexican cities of Mexicali and Tijuana.

Cet essai considère le mur frontalier entre le Mexique et les États-Unis comme son principal référent visuel, symbolique et matériel, dans le but de réfléchir aux politiques d'exclusion et d'inclusion imbriquées dans les discours et les pratiques quotidiennes des régions frontalières de la Baja California (*Basse-Californie*). Le quotidien du voisinage frontalier concerne non seulement les technologies gouvernementales de contrôle, mais également ces types de politiques. L'essai argumente que le mur représente un symbole d'exclusion qui est néanmoins remis en question par ceux qui tentent d'assimiler l'inclusion dans ce contexte. Le journal de voyage en images montre des aspects de situations courantes dans les environs du mur entre les villes mexicaines de Mexicali et de Tijuana.

**T**his essay stages a pictorial journey<sup>1</sup> through Baja California's two main border cities: Mexicali and Tijuana. This voyage along the Mexico-U.S. border begins in Mexicali and follows

the wall, or *la línea*, about two hundred kilometres westward toward Tijuana. In this essay, I consider the wall as a decisive method for shaping lived everyday experience. This function characterizes the Mexico-U.S. border where the wall structures both the space and the everyday experience of people in both countries. Following the idea that particular institutions and forms of visibility define our perception of the world (Mirzoeff 6-9), my pictorial journey takes the border wall between Mexico and the United States as its primary visual, symbolic, and material reference to consider the politics of exclusion and inclusion entangled in everyday discourses and practices in Baja California's borderlands. The essay particularly highlights the entanglement and implications of the border wall's visibility and materiality with the enactment of politics of exclusion and inclusion at the Mexico-U.S. border. Everyday bordering applies not only to governmental technologies of control (Yuval-Davis 71), but also to these sorts of politics. In contexts such as Baja California's borderlands, exclusion is related to the socio-political production of who is deemed "illegal." This discursive formation, built with a number of resources such as images, is used to maintain a representation of "illegal immigration" (De Genova).

Drawing on critical border studies literature, this exploration of the Mexico-U.S. border is informed by views on the situation of migrants and deportees at this border (Anguiano and Villafuerte, Slack et al.) and the spatial imaginary between these two countries (Alvarez). I also consider critical perspectives on border art depicting the human condition along this boundary (Bonansinga, Regan) and how text and visual imagery react to state border policy (Madsen). In addition, the use of artistic expressions (Pötzsh, Schimanski), and border aesthetics (Rosello and Wolfe 7) allow us to see the wall as a productive element and rethink the border experience. This essay proposes that the wall represents an exclusionary symbol that is nonetheless challenged by those who attempt to embed inclusion in this context. At the Mexico-U.S. border, the wall is one of many elements characterizing immigration interdiction (Heyman 622). The wall, however, conflates different temporalities and symbolisms, thus exposing contingency. As rightly stated by Abou Farman:



"[...] a wall, has an insistent exteriority and definitive materiality. [...] It is in your face. You run into it. [...] You cannot even see the other side. And yet, people always do. People always see through walls, find holes, overspill the bounds of both conceptual and physical limits. The materiality of a wall that is meant to mark the ultimate and simplified limit always falters or falls to the creativity of life" (4).

The journey connects the hard border that the wall materializes with its symbolic and metaphorical dimensions (Vila). Relying on the notion of borderscape (Brambilla, Rajaram and Grundy-Warr), I address the multiplicity of flows, complex conditions, and interactions happening around the border. This entails thinking of the border between these two countries beyond its traditional understanding as an unchanged and definitive structure. Through the lens of borderscape, the journey hereby intertwines amid the divisions actualized at any border while also considering the fluidity of borders and the situation of those experiencing nation-state borders. I also use this notion to address the tensions and paradoxes emerging from the politics of exclusion and inclusion and to reflect on different strategies of resistance against hegemonic discourses (Brambilla 19-20). It is argued that in these borderlands, the everyday normalizes part of the exclusionary dimension of the hard border. Nevertheless, despite this context of division, the politics of inclusion appear in specific expressions, namely border art and other written and visual testimonies displayed on the wall. The everyday thus projects the tension between the security infrastructure preventing or diverting migration and the hopes that accompany human mobility. The everyday connects with the concept of borderscape through the varied and differentiated encounters taking place at the borders (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr xxx).

Structured around the three stages of the journey, the essay will show the entanglement of the politics of exclusion and inclusion through pictures, personal observations, and informal conversations and interviews made during the journey. Overall, I aim to present the subjective experience of some social phenomena through the picto-

rial journey (Banks 96-97). The visualization of the wall guides the reflection of the everyday and the politics of exclusion and inclusion. Before presenting the stages, I will briefly sketch my analytical approach and the general context behind the journey. I then describe the first stage of the journey, covering my first encounter with the Mexico-U.S. border in Mexicali. This stage shows different aspects of the everyday in this city. The second stage presents the natural scenery between the two cities and its implications for migration movement. The last stage focuses on a specific area of Tijuana where I reflect on the main topics addressed in this essay.

### APPROACH AND CONTEXT

The photo-essay explores the everyday in the cities of Mexicali and Tijuana and highlights the multiple conditions, paradoxes, and tensions, such as bordering practices and structural violence, emerging from the politics of inclusion and exclusion. For this, I draw on the co-constitution of visibility and materiality in order to address issues of hierarchies and discourses of power (Rose and Tolia-Kelly 4). With this practice-oriented approach, I question what is made visible and study the constitution of visibility and materiality. The configuration of visual and material practices connects with processes, embodied practices, and technologies (Rose and Tolia-Kelly 3). In my analysis, I address how a process, such as bordering, and embodied practices, such as the everyday near the wall, take place in this social setting. These sorts of processes and practices are contrasted with the current situation of persons who have endured deportation from the United States and live in Tijuana. For instance, during my fieldwork, I observed that deportees embody and experience different forms of exclusion. Through different interviews with deportees in Tijuana, I confirmed the exclusionary experiences they endure during and after the deportation process. I rely on a methodological approach that combines an ethnographic and visual-discursive perspective, concentrating on everyday life and the related social context (Jenkins 5). For the content of the pictures, I employ the compositional interpretation approach which pays attention to the elements and content of the picture (Rose 62-63).

The wall is part of the U.S. general deterrence strategy which started in the 1990s and early 2000s. During Donald Trump's presidency, the wall was renovated in different border areas covered in this essay. The context behind the journey is related to the situation experienced during autumn 2020. The number of persons reaching the Mexico-U.S. border has declined due to the mobility restrictions prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic and because the Mexican government has imposed stricter controls on its border with Guatemala after the migrant caravans of 2018 and 2019. These measures can be framed into the strategy of "pushing the borders out" (Johnson, et al.) applied by the U.S. government. During the journey, it is possible to notice certain differences about the presence of migrants between the two cities. Due to the restrictions, the presence of recently arrived migrants seems reduced in Mexicali. I asked local people about their arrival, and all agreed that very few new migrants had reached the city in 2020. The majority of migrants in Mexicali who arrived with the caravans stayed in local shelters. Nowadays, it is still possible to see them experiencing conditions of homelessness in different parts of the city. In Mexicali, the number of migrants on the streets is clearly lower than in Tijuana. The majority have moved to other border cities. In Tijuana, the arrival of migrants is continuous, but it is more difficult to specify their number. The population of almost two million inhabitants and the size of the city conceals the number of unregistered population.

#### FIRST STAGE: THIS IS LA LÍNEA

*La línea* stands a few kilometres away from Mexicali's international airport. The road from the airport heads north, and metres before the wall, it turns left. The closest part of the wall before the turn has barbed wire on top. Barbed wire is one of the main "security components" constantly present in this borderline. After the turn, the road follows a straight line, and the wall seems never-ending.

In fact, it is almost uninterrupted until Tijuana's beachside. At first sight, the massiveness of the wall seems unreal. The presence of the wall is visually striking, and the feeling of a hard border is constant.



Figure 1: First view of the wall in Mexicali

When a material object defines identities, it becomes a political aesthetic project (Farman 4). After some kilometres, the name of the road makes an ironic pun. *La Avenida Cristóbal Colón* (Christopher Columbus Avenue) is the main street along the border. In Mexican school textbooks, Columbus is referred to as the “discoverer of America,” and his figure is not questioned in official/government discourses. The debates about decolonization going on in different parts of the world are not taking place here. This avenue bears witness to one of the most notorious divisions within this continent. This is one of the many places where the “Global North” physically prevents the “Global South” from entering. Here, the wall concretizes the division, but this sort of geographic taxonomy also enacts discursive borders that conceal the social inequalities and exclusions between regions.



Figure 2: First view of the wall in Mexicali

Beyond the euphemistic, and even colonialist, taxonomy, it is necessary to see the symbolic dimension of the wall, which grounds discourses of negative difference associated with the inhibition of mobility.

Just in front of the wall, on the left side of Columbus Avenue, the type of housing grabs my attention. The first example of the everyday next to the wall shows houses that seem to match a middle-class income level, and after some kilometres, there are also professional services and business-related places. A marked contrast to this housing appears after passing one of Mexicali-Calexico ports of entry. At the end of the second border street, *La Calle Internacional* (International Street), the houses are made of cardboard and pieces of plastic and wood. Some other constructions are abandoned and broken.

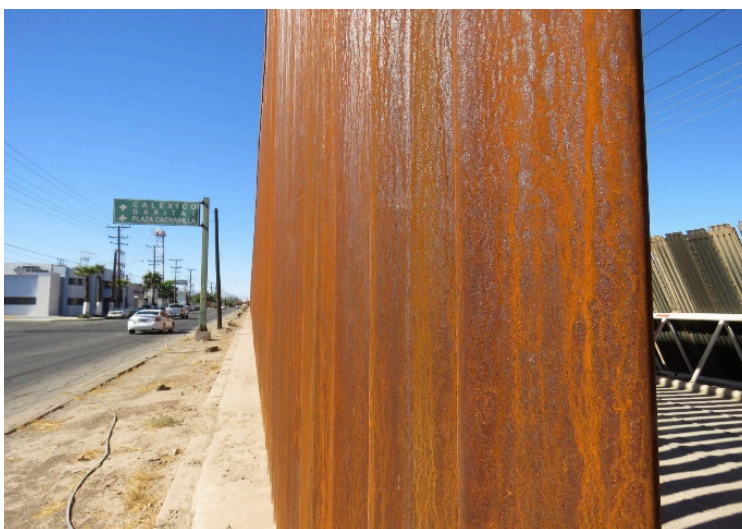


Figure 3: Columbus Avenue, Mexicali

Overall, the housing types along Columbus Avenue and International Street exemplify the socioeconomic disparities common in countries like Mexico. These contrasts are part of the structural violence that has been normalized in the everyday.

As I stand next to the wall and look at both sides, the longitude of the wall seems surreal. It has been reinforced and renovated, and in some parts there is a secondary wall. At the end of October 2020, the U.S. government celebrated the building of nearly 650 kilometres of new “border wall system” between these two countries (U.S. Department of Home Security). At some point on the “old wall” reads the words *Mexicali, calor del bueno*. The expression refers to the extreme heat conditions and may also hint to the warmth of local people. The desert climate of the area causes an average temperature of 40 degrees centigrade during the springtime and summertime, with maximum records of 50 degrees centigrade.

The politics of exclusion is also constituted by the climate and topographic features of the area. These features are used in the U.S. secu-





Figure 4: Columbus Avenue, Mexicali

riety and immigration strategy. The Baja California-California border has been sealed in order to channel migration to the Sonora-Arizona desert. As part of my fieldwork, I went to the wall on many different days to see the daily activities. From the first visit, I noticed that very few pedestrians, not migrants, were in Columbus Avenue and International Street. Only a few people walked where the boulevard ends near Mexicali's old city centre. It was not until the third visit that I saw some migrants. They were four men from Central America, standing on the street waiting for someone to offer them any kind of job. This is a common way for migrants try to earn some money. It is also common that the only assistance that migrants get comes from activists and religious organizations. The lack of governmental attention to migrants and deportees increases the precariousness of their situation.

With the following six pictures, I illustrate different aspects of Mexicali's daily activities beside the wall. The pictures offer a view into the common situations and social conditions in the city. Firstly, figures five and six show a mural condemning violence towards



Figure 5: Mural in Columbus Avenue, Mexicali

women. The mural is dedicated to the victims and demands a better future for all women. Although it does not directly address other forms of violence or social concerns, this issue is entangled with structural practices and expressions of violence affecting Mexican society and these borderlands.

The mural resonates with the events of direct violence that women have endured in other Mexican border cities such as Ciudad Juarez. This mural can thus be projected into a larger context in which different forms of violence are entangled. For instance, women are the main workforce in the *maquiladoras*, or manufacturing plants, along the Mexico-U.S. border. Even though these factories are linked to the





Figure 6: Mural in Columbus Avenue, Mexicali

discourse of neoliberal economic development and free trade, they fail to provide sustainable economic development for the workers and have instigated new practices of structural violence such as low salaries, precarious labour rights, territorial violence, and slum-like housing conditions (Méndez and Berrueta). I consider this mural as an example of what Chiara Brambilla defines as a counter-hegemonic borderscape (20). The mural, which stands facing the wall, opens a sense of resistance against forms of control enforced by direct and structural violence.

Figures seven and eight exemplify the daily activities that take place one block away from the wall. A contrasting view shows a high-end German-styled restaurant and a street vendor. The restaurant is regarded by locals as an “exclusive place,” while the vendor personifies labour precariousness.



Figure 7: Social contrasts beside the wall 1

Street vending is a common activity for locals and also for migrants. As I talk with locals about migrants who have arrived in recent years, the conversation irremediably distinguishes between “good” and “bad” migrants. Haitians are regarded as hard workers and honest and likable people. Some people from Central America who arrived in the last migrant caravan are seen as the opposite. Drawing on what Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr (xxx) write about differentiated encounters in a borderscape, it is necessary to map the contradictions and borders that emerge in different situations. In this case a specific conjuncture, such as the arrival of the migrant caravan, triggers contradictory encounters and a sharp differentiation process. Social distinction, made by the informal categorization of “locals,” shows a double process of bordering by elaborating a normative taxonomy of who is valuable or not, and by othering the ones considered to be non-locals. I notice during the in-



Figure 8: Social contrasts beside the wall 2

formal talks, that this way of bordering “the other” is unnoticed by the persons doing the categorization. Social disparity is in fact a border, institutionally normalized and maintained through daily practices, which further segregates people. The categorization portrays the overlooked entanglements of the politics of exclusion and inclusion in the everyday.

The last pictures from the first stage illustrate the routine in the ports of entry between the two countries. Long queues, surveillance, barbed wire, and the “visa regime” are the elements grounding the politics of control and exclusion. For instance, Mexican citizens re-

quire visas to enter the United States, and the Mexican government demands the same for citizens of all Central American countries except Costa Rica and Panama. Both governments prioritize a person’s economic situation as the primary requirement for entry. This modality of bordering rewards personal economic advantages and increases the ubiquity of the wall. In the current situation of pandemic restrictions, only persons with residency and workplaces in the United States are allowed to cross, while for the rest of population, the border is closed. These restrictions create further distinctions between inclusion and exclusion. The requirement of visas is part of the normalized procedures of the spectacle of enforcement against “illegality” (De Genova 1181).



Figure 9: Mexicali-Calexico Port of Entry





Figure 10: Mexicali-Calexico East Port of Entry

Street vendors, endless queues to enter the United States, barbed wire, and concrete blocks coexist day by day at one of Mexicali's ports of entry. These blocks (figure 10) were used to prevent persons of the migrant caravan from approaching the port on the Mexican side. These blocks represent the extension of the hard border and the materialization of more stringent measures against migration. The combination of sovereignty, national security, and social distinction enact the politics of exclusion on the everyday at this borderline. This social context is another example in which hierarchies and privileges restrict social equality.

#### SECOND STAGE – IN THE MIDDLE OF...

**T**his intermediary stage presents the landscape of these borderlands. As with other “natural barriers” seen around the world, the topographical and climatic conditions become part



Figure 11 Mexicali-Tijuana highway

of the immigration interdiction. The road between Mexicali and Tijuana crosses some areas of the Sonoran Desert of Baja California.

The dryness of the area adds a sense of helplessness to the landscape. To my surprise, it is possible to find personal belongings such as shoes, clothes, empty backpacks, and even suitcases. This means that the border is not far. In fact, it is located about six kilometres away on right side of the highway (figure 11).

While this inaccessible and isolated region attracts cross country runners, it is a high-risk area for migrants because of the challenging conditions of climate and terrain. Finding the belongings, presumably of migrants in transit, is distressing. The personal belongings attest to the unrelenting human toll of crossing the border, where the security structure and natural conditions are a deadly combination. At this remote borderscape, the fluidity of the border seems inexistent, and the wall appears to prevail.

Continuing on the way to Tijuana, concerns about the presence of criminal organizations and security appear at the military checkpoint before the ascent to the mountains called *Sierra de Juarez*. All vehicles must pass through the checkpoint, but only the ones chosen by the personnel are searched meticulously. The selection is arbitrarily applied, but buses, trucks, and pickups are selected more often.



Figure 12: Personal belongings

Mexican society is still suffering the consequences of the failed strategy known as the “war on drugs” enforced some years ago. As the journey continues, very impressive views of the wall between Mexicali and Tijuana appear in the mountain road named *La Rumorosa*.

Even the desert landscape contributes to the feeling of being in the “middle of nowhere,” and the presence of the wall emerges as an all-pervading, dividing structure. This picture is a blunt reminder of the hegemonic logic that exacerbates difference in its negative and exclusionary dimension.

### THIRD STAGE – BIENVENIDOS A TIJUANA

**T**ijuana’s reputation and media representation are commonly linked to criminal activities, direct violence, and migrants trying to cross the border. This public image is a simplistic



Figure 13: Personal belongings

reduction of a city of almost two million inhabitants. The complexities affecting Tijuana's social context are known, but the spectacularization and exoticization in the city's public image conceal all the aspects of the everyday. Direct violence, in the form of homicide, is a constant feature in everyday Tijuana life. This situation necessitates a broader explanation of the social and political context of the country and Mexican border cities. Structural violence remains the key factor from which other forms of violence develop. Endemic poverty, social marginalization, economic disparities, institutional corruption, the partial and precarious rule of law, and plenty of institutional weaknesses are the coexisting conditions that affect the social con-





Figure 14: View of the wall from la Rumorosa mountain pass

text. Direct violence is the consequence of the sum of the issues previously mentioned. Despite this complex scenario, Tijuana is a growing cosmopolitan city that challenges common historic stereotypes of it (Alvarez). Tijuana exemplifies a range of differentiated encounters between the arrival of deportees and their intrinsic exclusion with the cosmopolitan features of the city.

In the past, Tijuana was one of the main points of entry into the United States. However, the strong securitization implemented on the Baja California/California border in the early 2000s and the massive number of people deported from the United States have changed its status. At the present moment, it is the Mexican city that receives the biggest number of deportees from the United States; thousands of people remain and wait in the city (Albicker and Velasco 100). Deportees face all kinds of personal and legal problems upon their arrival. Their new lives start in precarious emotional and material conditions. I interviewed the activist Maria Galleta,<sup>2</sup> and according to her

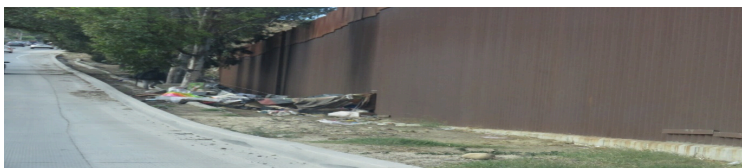


Figure 15: Homelessness in Tijuana

experience, deportees arrive in a state of denial; they are in shock, feeling that they have lost their entire lives. After deportation, people encounter extremely critical conditions during their first days in Tijuana. The conditions include not only the search for places to stay and eat, which shelters provide, but also the emotional distress that affects them. If people do not receive economic support from their families or friends after deportation, shelters give them their only opportunity to get a place to stay. But not all persons get places or stay permanently at the shelters.<sup>3</sup> The picture below illustrates the level of precariousness that homeless persons endure in the city.

It is beyond absurdity that the wall is used to hold the “tent” of the person staying there. Homelessness, depression, and alcohol and drug consumption are constant situations in deportees’ everyday lives. For instance, in the area known as *el bordo* (dam)<sup>4</sup> hundreds of homeless persons live in extremely precarious conditions. A study shows that 91 percent of them were deported (Velasco and Albicker 8-9). In 2018, a local newspaper reported that about three thousand homeless persons were living in Tijuana’s central area (Torres).

The personal stories reveal similar patterns despite distinct particularities. I talked with Mexican deportees who have lived in Tijuana for some years. Their stories start with the physical and psychological mistreatment they suffered when they were arrested and held in the detention centre before deportation. They undergo family separation when the U.S. federal government imposes a “period of inadmissibility.” This means that these people are banned from re-entering the United States on the grounds of the legal circumstances that supported the decisions to deport them. The ban lasts three to

ten years and may even result in permanent expulsion (USCIS 2020). These measures are part of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA) of 1996. Consequently, thousands of families endure long periods of instability and separation. It is common for the members of these families to have different residency statuses in the United States. For instance, I interviewed a deportee who had one son who arrived in the United States during his childhood. These cases are known as “dreamers,” and these persons have certain rights and permission to stay in the United States under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Her other two sons have U.S. citizenship. Due to different residency statuses, the spouses and/or children of deportees do not visit them while they are living in Mexico. For this reason, many deportees will try to cross again into the United States, and this is when the hard border materialized by the wall and the attendant security structure create a rupture from their previous lives. Considering the politics of inclusion and exclusion, people who have been deported endure double social rejection. In the United States, they have been referred as “illegal aliens” and will be prosecuted with federal charges if they cross and are arrested again in the U.S.; in Mexico, *deportado* (deportee) joins a social category associated with stigmatization and certain disregard. Deportation conveys a permanent bordering process in which the person completely endures the politics of exclusion. Yet there are many cases of people<sup>5</sup> who have been able to resume their lives in a positive way after deportation.

Out of all the areas of Tijuana, I decided to focus on the one called *Playas de Tijuana*<sup>6</sup> because of its particular features. Playas has been a historic place registering the dynamics and changes along the Mexico-U.S. border. Natural, structural, and emotional elements make a unique landscape that complements the thousands of life stories of those who have passed through this place. Before presenting this iconic place, I show two pictures that were taken on the way to Playas.

Empathy is overshadowed by one of the most impressive views of the hard border.



Figure 16: Via de la Juventud Avenue, Tijuana



Figure 17: View of the double wall, Tijuana

Ultimately, the view of double fencing in such shape sends an unequivocal statement about bordering. The wall becomes a sort of metallic reptilian fortification, crawling over and dividing the land; it is an emotionless construction to discourage and separate peoples. Nicholas De Genova impeccably explains the view on the previous

picture: “The Border Spectacle, therefore, sets the scene – a scene of ostensible exclusion, in which the purported naturalness and putative necessity of exclusion may be demonstrated and verified and legitimated, redundantly” (1181).

Finally, the last stage of the journey reveals the aesthetic, emotional, and natural elements that make *Playas de Tijuana* an exceptional place because of the entanglement of varied and differentiated encounters. *Playas* is characterized by rather powerful aesthetics on display and for being a “meeting place.” On the weekends there are families and couples attempting to meet through the wall. *Playas* attracts locals and visitors and has a different environment from the other areas of the city. A more “touristic and relaxed” atmosphere is experienced. This atmosphere may conceal, to a certain extent, the heavy symbolism of the wall and the movement of persons who may attempt to cross the border. At this borderscape, the greatest contrast is between the structures of surveillance and division and the attempts to overcome this division. In other words, the wall that stands in *Playas* exemplifies a borderscape’s notions of different encounters, their paradoxes, and the ways hegemonic discourses and practices are challenged. The whole wall and area are permeated by an in/visible emotional burden.

For instance, a number of people are seen leaning on the wall in figure 18. In this area, I witnessed the very brief encounter of a family. Four adults and one child were waiting at *Playas*. Suddenly, two people on the U.S. side approached the wall before the Border Patrol had noticed them. The encounter lasted less than two minutes. Two units of the Border Patrol arrived and removed them. One of the members of the family remained leaning on the wall watching the Border Patrol leaving. This situation made visible the emotional burden at this place.

As with other parts of the physical structure separating both countries, the border wall becomes a canvas (Regan 151). This is the productive aspect considered from a border aesthetic perspective. The wall in *Playas*, named *Mural de la hermandad* (Fraternity mural), is known for the paintings, messages, murals, thoughts, and names of





Figure 18: Playas de Tijuana 1

migrants written on it. Many of these names refer to the ones who passed away or disappeared. Thus, the mural on the wall becomes a memorial in remembrance of those who are missing, but also a commemoration that envisions a different future. The paintings and messages mobilize imaginaries and symbolic resources that appeal to different temporalities. The wall registers the names of the past, the needs of the present, and the hopes for the future.

As considered in the conceptualization of a borderscape, there are differentiated encounters happening in this area. One example of the encounters takes place in the “door of hope” (figure 20). Since 2013, the pro-migrant organization Border Angels has arranged meetings authorized by the U.S. Border Patrol. The door is next to the U.S. flag, with a red heart painted in the centre. It can only be opened from the



Figure 19: Playas de Tijuana 2

U.S. side. The park next to the wall is the *Friendship Park San Diego-Tijuana*. It seems hard to believe that friendship can flourish surrounded by surveillance cameras, barbed wire, and all the paraphernalia that characterizes immigration interdiction. But sometimes, the physical barriers are suspended on the rare occasions that the door of hope opens.<sup>7</sup> During these meetings, separated families are allowed to be together for a few minutes. However, these meetings do not wipe away the consequences of the hard border.

The other pictorial elements near the door, the silhouettes of human faces, three persons representing a family, and two fingers intertwined, appeal to the human factor undermined by the politics of exclusion. The drawings, murals, and messages make visible the self-representation of those who challenge the hegemonic logic of the



Figure 20: Mural de la Hermandad 1

dividing wall. In line with Brambilla, regarding the counter-hegemonic aspect within a borderscape, I suggest that the human factor, mobilized by these kinds of symbolic expressions at the wall, opens a space for the politics of inclusion. The symbolic humanisation of the wall challenges the dominant logic of the hard border. In other words, the human factor is a counteracting force that appears in the everyday of these borderlands.

On the other hand, a secondary encounter takes place between the deportees' hopes and the politics of exclusion. There is a permanent tension between those who meet on both sides of the border and the surveillance paraphernalia enforcing the division. Those who want





Figure 21: Mural de la Hermandad 2

to overcome division have made the *Mural de la hermandad* as a collective instrument to rethink the border experience.

The picture below is another example of the tensions and encounters coexisting at this point of the border. The wall dividing the beach and continuing to the Pacific Ocean is one of the most iconic views along the entire Mexico-U.S. border. Currently, the wall has human faces,<sup>8</sup> which re/represent the stories of deportees who arrived in the United States as children.

These faces convey personal dreams that are broken by the exclusionary enactment of distinction. The picture also exemplifies the co-

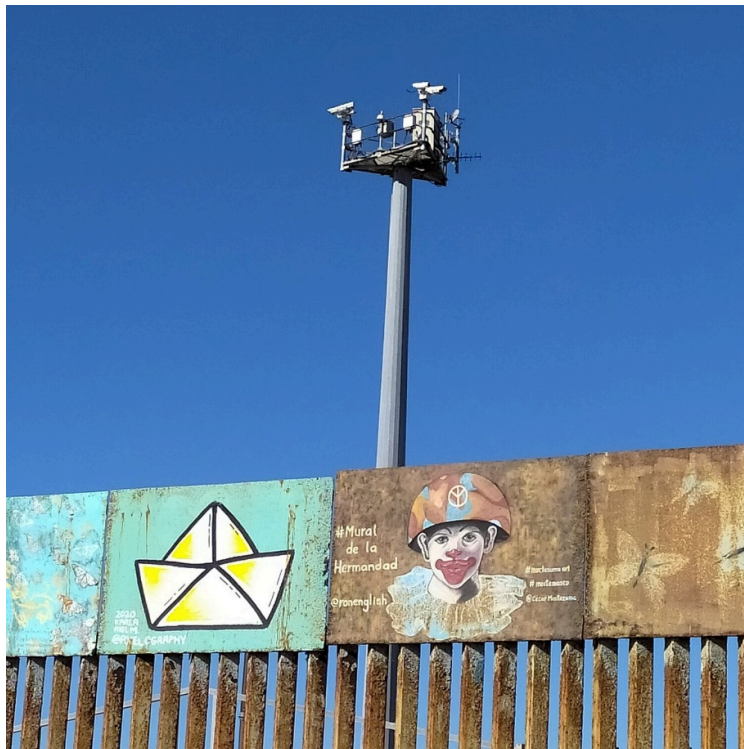


Figure 22: Mural de la Hermandad 3

existence of security infrastructure, which acts as an instrument of exclusion, and the drawings and messages of inclusion written on the wall. Thus, the wall symbolizes division yet encourages endeavours to maintain unity. It is also a place to write that there are no borders and to dream of flying towards freedom. This complex multiplicity is part of the politics of exclusion and inclusion that occur along any border.



Figure 23: Playas de Tijuana Mural Project

## CONCLUSION

**T**hrough the different stages of the Baja California borderlands, the paradoxes happening in the everyday and the entanglements of the politics of inclusion and exclusion are apparent. These paradoxes unravel at the place where the division enforced by the wall and related infrastructure coexists with the hopes and personal losses of migrants and deported persons. From the perspective of border aesthetics, the wall is a canvas that expresses alternative visions against the politics of exclusion. The wall in *Playas de Tijuana* is a productive space that opens a window of resistance to the hegemony of the hard border. The paintings on the wall of kites,





Figure 24: Part of the wall in Playas de Tijuana

butterflies, and children playing have a performative force on the politics of exclusion. However, few deportees have the possibility of reuniting permanently with their families. In these borderlands, the social context develops between conditions of social disparity and processes of bordering, alongside attempts to overcome the exclusions and familiar forms of violence. Despite the hard border seeming to prevail, the meetings in Playas and the messages written on the wall keep the hope of reintegration open.

Considered as part of a borderscape, certain experiences around the border become factors for change and resistance. In this essay, I have linked the politics of inclusion with the human factor and shown how this is displayed on the wall. One aspect of change is the need to humanize borders through the experiences of those who inhabit



Figure 25: Part of the wall in Playas de Tijuana

them (Brambilla 217). The wall has a dominant meaning of division, but there are further tangible and intangible divisions and exclusions in the societies of both countries. In contrast, the murals and paintings turn the wall into a means of expressing what inclusion implies for those who have been excluded.

The work of activists, academics, and deported persons challenge intangible borders and exclusions. In these borderlands, the project *Humanizando la Deportación* (Humanizing Deportation) shows the contrasting experiences of people whose lives have been deeply impacted by the politics of exclusion. Deportees endure negative social bordering on both sides of the wall. They have become the forgotten



Figure 26: In the wall reads: Todos somos migrantes (we are all migrants).

people of migration. As exemplified by deportees, the quest for inclusion not only consists of questioning the different walls, such as security infrastructure and discourses of sovereignty, but also requires an increased social awareness about the needs of a neglected population. The politics of inclusion thus also entail the possibility for family reunions and deportees' hopes of no longer being considered unlawful. Humanizing this social context requires visualizing the overlapping politics of exclusion and inclusion around the wall and dismantling the hierarchical structures and border regimes that decide who is accepted and who is rejected.

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## NOTES

1. The journey is related to the fieldwork of the research project “Everyday Entanglements of Violence and Peace at the Limit(s)”. I want to thank Kone Foundation for the financial support. The journey took place during November 2020. There were mobility limitations and difficulties making interviews due to the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic.↵
2. She is the founder of the organization *Madres y Familias Deportadas en Acción* (Deported Mothers and Families in action). This organization helps migrants and deportees have a place in shelters, make free phone calls, and get psychological assistance.↵
3. Shelters have very strict rules on the consumption of alcohol and drugs. The place in the shelter can be denied or revoked if the rules are not complied with. The majority of shelters are managed by religious and charity organisations. The Mexican federal government and Baja California government established a shelter for arriving migrants in January 2020.↵
4. This refers to the dam or channel in which the Tijuana River is funnelled. The dam goes across the city and the borderline. The majority of homeless people stay in the area near Tijuana’s city centre and next to the border.↵
5. See for instance video stories about deportees by the project *Humanizando la Deportación* run by the University of California, Davis. For information about the project, see: <http://humanizandoladeportacion.ucdavis.edu/en/about-the-project/>. Accessed 19 December 2020.↵
6. I am referring to the beachside area near the wall. Playas de Tijuana (Tijuana Beach) is a growing neighbourhood which also has socioeconomic disparities. The area near the Pacific Ocean is expensive while the one farther from the beach registers limited economic development.↵
7. This event had been arranged since 2013, but it was suspended after 2018. The “meetings through the wall” taking place during the weekends have also been cancelled because of mobility restrictions related to the current pandemic.↵

8. As part of the *Playas de Tijuana Mural Project*, started in 2020 and completed in 2022, the question posed by this mural is: “Who counts as a childhood arrival to the United States?” For information, see the artist’s website <https://lizbethdelacruzantana.com/about>. Accessed 27 December 2020. ↵