More-Than-Human Lifeworlds, Settler Modalities of Geno-ecocide and Border Questions

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Abstract

This article draws on a body of Aboriginal and Native American cosmo-epistemologies that are predicated on deep modes of relationality with more-than-human lifeworlds to question Euro-anthropocentric understandings of the concept of "borders." Situated within this context, I interrogate Western conceptualisations of the border along two seemingly opposed axes: the production of violent border complexes by a settler colonial regime such as the United States and the anti-border activism of such collectives as No Borders. I also examine how, despite discontinuities and differentials, certain elements of the No Borders movement appear to converge with ecological groups such as Earth First! – with its isomorphic motto "nature heeds no borders" – along the topological fold inscribed by the settler colonial state, its racialised relations of power and its Euro-anthropocentric values.

Keywords *Indigenous relationality; O'odham and Hia C-ed O'odham peoples; more-than-human; settler colonialism; borders; national parks; U.S.-Mexico borderlands*

Introduction

This article draws on a body of Aboriginal and Native American cosmo-epistemologies that are predicated on deep modes of relationality with more-than-human lifeworlds to question Euro-anthropocentric understandings of the concept of "borders." Situated within this context, I interrogate Western conceptualisations of the border along two seemingly opposed axes: the production of violent border complexes by a settler colonial regime such as the United States and the border abolitionism of certain aspects of the No Borders movement.

The first modality, I argue, instantiates forms of bordering that often have catastrophic effects on the more-than-human and human lifeworlds that they traverse, divide and violate. The border regimes that undergird this modality are constituted by the nexus of settler sovereignty, racism and anthropocentrism. The second modality, despite its admirable intentions, often works to reproduce *tabula rasa* effects that operate along two intersecting

1

axes: the effacement of Indigenous nations that antedate the border regimes of settler states and the occlusion of the demarcated places of more-than-human entities that are a priori to settler border regimes. The utopic call for "no borders" is, despite its important contestatory charge, often inscribed by a failure to address the ethically challenging question of the border and the other that cannot be reduced to a formulaic slogan – precisely if one wishes to do justice to the complex entanglement of human and more-than-human entities within these fraught spaces. I also examine how, despite discontinuities and differentials, certain elements of the No Borders movement appear to converge with ecological groups such as Earth First! – with its isomorphic motto "nature heeds no borders" – along the topological fold constituted by the settler colonial state, its racialised relations of power and its Euro-anthropocentric values.

Indigenous Cosmopolitics of Relationality

One of the entrenched dogmas of Western culture is its binarised and hierarchised culture/nature distinction (Plumwood 2002). This is a distinction founded on an ensemble of interlocking epistemologies and disciplines – including philosophy, science, economics and law – that work to secure the fiction of human exceptionalism and its doxic belief that only humans have language, law, culture and so on. The fiction of human exceptionalism produced by this biopolitical caesura has lethal effects in the context of more-than-human lifeworlds. The biopolitical caesura refers to the cut that creates a seemingly unbridgeable gap between the category of the human and its absolute other (Pugliese 2013). It is what both licences and legitimates violence against any entity designated as other-than-human precisely because such entities are seen to be deficient or lacking in sentience or rational agency; consequently, they are positioned as fungible "objects" that possess no jural standing – aside from the minimal protections they are conferred when they are legally indexed as modalities of human property. The biopolitical caesura, with its human/other-than-human division, has a long historical

genealogy founded on the violent relations of race, slavery, empire and colonialism (see, for example, Spillers 1987; Wynter 2000). Even as a cluster of diverse movements (including a myriad of ecology and environmental justice organisations, the new materialisms, critical animal studies, the new ethology and actor-network-theory[1]) work to contest this Euro-anthropocentric dogma, the West's foundation on the culture/nature binary still remains largely intact – as evidenced, to name but one example, by factory farming, its industrial-scale violence against animals and the transmutation of animals into those commodified forms of property that Nicole Shukin (2009, p. 6) appositely terms "animal capital." As Gary Francione (2007, pp. 36-42) notes, the West's animal/property nexus finds its originary locus in the orthodox Judaeo-Christian view that humans have, according to Genesis, dominion over the earth and all its other-than-human entities. The moral basis of this right of dominion is founded on the culture/nature binary and the secularised theo-onto-epistemological view that only humans possess the cognitive faculties for moral reasoning, that animals are congenitally devoid of such a capacity, and that they are thus lesser beings on the biopolitical hierarchy – with all the attendant violent non-criminal practices against more-than-human entities that this thus licenses.

In contradistinction to the biopolitical caesura that underpins dominant Euro-anthropocentric worldviews, many Indigenous cultures are founded on a cosmopolitics of relationality in which all entities are seen to be encompassed by the understanding that they are "all our relations" (LaDuke 1999, p. 2).[2] In the words of Ambelin Kwaymullina and Blaze Kwaymullina, "All life – and everything is alive in an Aboriginal worldview – exists in *relationship* to everything else" (2010, p. 196). In Indigenous "cosmopolitical theory," Eduardo Viveiros de Castro notes, the "distinction between society and nature is internal to the social world" (2017, p. 56), thereby overturning the Eurocentric nature/culture binary that relegates nature to an external presocial world. The "diverse type of actants or subjective

agents" include, in this worldview, "gods, animals, the dead, plants, meteorological phenomena, and often objects or artifacts as well" (de Castro 2017, p. 56).

A number of Indigenous cosmo-epistemologies articulate with compelling lucidity precisely what it means to have an ethical obligation to trees, rivers, mountains and so on. Furthermore, Indigenous kincentric ethics are enshrined in law. Whereas in Western cultures law is seen to issue in a unidirectional vector from humans to more-than-human entities, in Indigenous systems of law, more-than-human entities are seen to possess their own law and this determines, in turn, human actions and behaviour. In the Yarralin people's law, for example, "all species have a Law and culture, free will; the burden of responsibility is shared among all living things" (Bird Rose 2009, p. 57). In her writing on Aboriginal law, Irene Watson notes: "Our [Nunga] law embraces all things in the universe, a different idea to the states' concept of sovereignty.… As law holds no outer or inner place, it is in all things" (2002, p. 269); thus, in Nunga law, all more-than-human entities have jural life and standing. Overturning Euro-anthropocentric understandings of law as what governs diverse entities which are ordered along speciesist hierarchies, Aboriginal law pivots on maintaining and nurturing relational networks: "Law," Kwaymullina and Kwaymullina underscore, "extends beyond human beings to all life in country, *with the relationship – rather than the species – being the primary creator of legal categories*" (2010, p. 203).

Indigenous understandings of law at once refuse the nature/culture binary and overturn the Euro-anthropocentric locus from which law is made, issued and deployed. "Thus habitats and ecosystems are better understood," Vanessa Watts explains, "as societies from an Indigenous point of view; meaning that they have ethical structures, inter-species treaties and agreements, and further their ability to interpret, understand and implement. Non-human beings are active members of society. Not only are they active, they also directly influence how humans organize themselves into that society" (2013, p. 23). Watts' illumination of more-than-

human lifeworlds as constituting types of "nations" (LaDuke 1999, 137) interrogates Euro-anthropocentric understandings of more-than-human entities as congenitally deficient (they have no language, law and so on) or as wholly captivated by instinctual drives (Heidegger 1995, p. 249) and embedded in an undifferentiated nature that lacks any attributes of politics or culture. Moreover, in Indigenous cosmopolitical understandings of the more-than-human, such entities shape and influence human agents and their societies. In what follows, I want to examine the complex interlacement of more-than-human lifeworlds and Indigenous nations in the context of a settler colonial state, the United States, and its violent border regimes, with specific reference to former President Donald Trump's U.S.-Mexico border wall.

Biopolitical Interlacement of Settler Borders and Geno-ecocide

Patrick Wolfe's formulation of the logic of Indigenous elimination as what drives regimes of settler colonialism can be seen to encompass, by definition and in practice, the very lands and ecosystems that sustain and nourish Indigenous and more-than-human life. Situated in this context, settler biopolitical practices of ecological destruction emerge as intersectionally linked with settler ambitions of territorial expropriation and consolidation. This settler-biopolitical nexus is implicit in Wolfe's assertion that "Land is life – or, at least, is necessary for life. Thus contests for land can be – indeed, often are – contests for life" (2006, p. 387). In other words, settler practices that entail the clearing of Indigenous peoples from their land are critically interlinked with the deployment of ecocidal strategies, thereby generating lethal modalities of eco-genocide (LaDuke 1999; Grinde and Johansen 1995). Kyle Powys Whyte (2016, p. 171) speaks to what is at stake for Indigenous peoples when contesting settler eco-genocidal regimes: "settlers can only make a homeland by creating social institutions that physically carve their origin, religious and cultural narratives, social ways of life and political and economic systems (e.g., property) into the waters, soils, air and other environmental

dimensions of territory or landscape. That is, settler ecologies have to be inscribed into indigenous ecologies." The correlative of this, he concludes, is that "settler colonialism can be interpreted as a form of *environmental injustice* that wrongfully interferes with and erases the sociological contexts required for indigenous populations to experience the world as a place infused with responsibilities to humans, nonhumans and ecosystems" (2016, 159). Powys Whyte here brings into focus the intersectional relations that bind the key categories of settler colonialism, eco-genocidal practices and the attendant destruction of ethical responsibilities to more-than-human entities and their lifeworlds.

As a settler colonial state such as the U.S. is founded on the double logic of Indigenous land expropriation and the usurpation of Indigenous sovereignty, its foundational illegitimacy is effectively occluded through acts of border making, control and governance: no control over one's borders, no state sovereignty.[3] Ned Norris, tribal chairman of the Tohono O'odham Nation, speaks to the fact of unceded Indigenous sovereignty in defiance of the imposition of settler borders and apparatuses of colonial governance: "even though the area is controlled by the U.S. government, 'we have inhabited this area since time immemorial…. It's our duty to do what is necessary to protect that'" (BBC News 2020). Settler border making, as a material form of power-in-spacing, instantiates and continues to re-assert the settler state's (illegitimate) sovereignty. In the context of the Indigenous nations located on and across the U.S.-Mexico border, the violence of this settler border making finds one of its most graphic instantiations in the building of the Trump wall.

Seeking to concretise one of his key election promises, in January 2017 Trump signed Executive Order 13767 which licensed the funding and construction of a wall that would stretch along the length of the U.S.-Mexico border. In the process, through its invocation of the *REAL ID Act* (2005), the Department of Homeland Security suspended 28 laws, including: "the National Environment Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, and the

Archaeological Resources Protection Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act" (Whitman 2019). Activated in the suspension of this constellation of laws is the biopolitical designation of both more-than-human and Indigenous lives as outside of law (and its presumptive protections) and thus, as I discuss below, nonnegotiably exposed to settler acts of axiomatic violence.

In the context of the Carrizo/Comecrudo Nation that straddles the Texas-Mexico border, the construction of the Trump border wall has situated the Indigenous burial ground of Eli Jackson cemetery in an enforced exclusion zone between the wall and the border. Speaking to this latest act of desecration, Juan Mancias, tribal chairman, brings into focus the layered histories of settler violence that attend the building of the border wall: "The colonizers cut off our hands and feet, killed us, and took our land…. It's the constant connection with our land and ancestors that sustains and strengthens our identity and culture, not what the U.S. federal government decides, and that's what we're struggling to save" (quoted in Lakhani 2019). In the process of the building of the wall, construction crews have blasted the Indigenous sacred site of Monument Hill, which includes O'odham burial sites (Devereaux 2020; Derysh 2020). Mancias articulates the historical and contemporary intertwining of the settler logic of Indigenous elimination, consequent land expropriation and the assertion of settler sovereignty through the violent imposition of colonial borders: "The border with Mexico divided our people and now, this new wall shows no regard for our ancestors, beliefs or culture which are tied to these lands. They are trying to erase us, and that's genocide" (quoted in Lakhani 2019). In his condemnation of the building of the wall, Mancias materialises the "cycles of conquest" (Spicer 2020, pp. 4-8) that have impacted on the Indigenous peoples of the Southwest and how both past and contemporary settler border operations work in the biopolitical production of eco-genocidal effects for his people, the land and its more-than-human communities.

In keeping with Indigenous cosmopolitics that challenge anthropocentric understandings of violence, I include more-than-human entities under the rubric of genocidal violence. A number of Indigenous cultures name and condemn animal and tree genocides, such as "the great massacres" by U.S. settlers of the bison, mass killings of what Winona LaDuke calls the "Buffalo Nations" (1999, p. 137-43). "The genocide of trees in Australia," write Gladys Idjirrimoonya Milroy and Jill Milroy, Palyku peoples, "leaves a bloodied landscape" (2010, p. 38). Nellie Jo David, an O'odham activist contesting the destruction of her lands in the Pipe Cactus National Monument, speaks to the violent felling and uprooting of the saguaros in the wake of the wall's construction (figure 1): "the saguaros are not just sacred, they are people unto themselves…. In O'odham, the word for saguaro is Ha:sañ. Everywhere, in the space where David spoke, were butchered Ha:sañ remains" (Devereaux 2019, p. 2). Articulated in this O'odham instantiation of an expansive ethics of considerability is an overturning of the Euro-anthropocentric hierarchisation and partitioning of life along an anthropo-supremacist vertical axis, with the attendant non-criminal violence toward more-than-human entities that this at once licenses and enables.

Many of the butchered saguaros, in terms of their age, precede, as do the Indigenous nations of these borderlands, the imperial imposition of the U.S.-Mexico border (Luna-Firebaugh 2002). The violence unleashed by the construction of the border wall is acutely captured in the words of Verlon M. José, governor of the Tohono O'odham Nation in northern Mexico: "This wall is already putting a scar across our heart" (quoted in Romero 2020). Emerging in the violent wake of the building of the wall, this scar cuts across the soil, mountains, saguaros, waters and the Tohono O'odhoma people of the Sonoran Desert. Moreover, the wall is amplifying its eco-genocidal effects by thwarting the O'odham and Hia C-ed O'odham peoples from exercising their care of country through, for example, Water

Protector practices that contest the destruction of rivers and aquifers in the process of the building the border wall (Devereaux 2019, 19).

Figure 1. Butchered saguaros left in the wake of the construction of the Trump border wall. Image credit: Laiken Jordahl.

Hon'mana Seukteoma, Tohono | Hopi | Navajo, writes of the scale of the eco-genocide unleashed on Indigenous communities and their more-than-human relations in the wake of the building of the Trump border wall. She identifies the intersectional nature of settler violence deployed across the Indigenous lands harrowed by the border wall: "Trump's wall has devastated communities and wildlife all along the border…. Our tribal members have suffered deep psychological trauma at the hands of Border Patrol agents, National Park Service police and Arizona Department of Public Safety officers. They attacked, tear-gassed and shot us with rubber bullets while we stood in prayer protecting our sacred sites from ruin. Dozens of us

were arrested for defending these holy lands, which had been abandoned by the people and laws that were supposed to safeguard them" (Seukteoma 2021). Delineated here are the various agents of the settler state (Border Patrol agents, National Park Service police and Arizona Department of Public Safety officers) who are ostensibly employed to safeguard and protect its citizens; yet, as Seukteoma (2021) evidences, these same figures are mobilised to operate as the settler state's paramilitary agents, further traumatising and criminalising the Indigenous peoples attempting to protect their "ancestral homelands" in the context of a "wall that has ripped our homelands apart." Encapsulated in this matrix of settler violence are those very agents that historically have been on the front line of violently securing settler sovereignty across both its illegitimate borders and its national park formations. In the U.S. settler context, both military and paramilitary settler violence was foundational in the creation of the early national parks. In the process of the U.S. Government's creation of Yellowstone National Park, for example, the Shoshone Sheepeaters of the area were forcibly removed from their lands, with many hunted down and killed by the cavalry, and a military fort was built to prevent their re-entry onto their traditional lands – a literal enactment of the practice that has come to be known as "fortress conservation" (Merchant 2007, pp. 165-66). That O'odham and and Hia C-ed O'odham peoples are effectively cast outside the very regime of law that should putatively protect them further evidences how settler law, both historically and in the contemporary context, has played an instrumental role in consolidating the illegitimate settler state and its various operatives precisely by outlawing, criminalising and sanctioning the elimination of Indigenous peoples caught in its lethal dragnet (see Watson 2016 and 2002).

In Indigenous understandings of more-than-human nations – as constituted by their own laws, languages, territories and cultures – such lifeworlds are not amorphous and borderless spaces; rather, they are *places* inscribed by their own cultural territories, borders, treaties and textured topographies (Watts 2013, p. 23). In other words, what such Indigenous

understandings do not do is to biologise the borders of more-than-human lifeworlds by embedding them within the fields of natural history or zoology – thereby validating them through the invocation of scientistic or biologistic truths that, within the context of racist-nationalist formations, often advance the anti-immigrant arguments of ecofascist groups (Hultgren 2015; Uekoetter 2006). Indigenous cosmopolitical understandings of more-than-human lifeworlds – as always already political and cultural – preclude the biopolitical dangers posed by "naturalising" more-than-human lifeworlds and their bounded territories, thereby making them homologous to Eurocentric understandings of nature as unmediated by either politics or culture.

Terra Nullius of "Wilderness"

In filing a cease and desist order to the U.S. government to stop the building of the wall, the Carrizo/Comecrudo Nation has stated: "We don't want any more division being caused, any more digging of our ancestors. We don't own the land, the land owns us … It identifies us" (Lakhani 2019). Encapsulated here is an overturning of Euro-anthropocentric understandings of human sovereignty, property and identity. In Carrizo/Comecrudo cosmopolitics, it is the land that owns the people and that invests them with their identity. In contrast, in dominant Euro-anthropocentric schemas, it is humans who own land, possess it as property and invest it with identity. Outside of the Euro-anthropocentric configuration of propertied identity lies the realm of "wilderness." Indigenous scholars have emphasized how the term "wilderness" re-instates the "legal fiction of *terra nullius*": "The popular definition of 'wilderness,'" Marcia Langton (1996, p. 17) underscores, "excludes all human interaction within the allegedly pristine areas, even though they are and have been inhabited and used by Indigenous people for thousands of years"; *terra nullius* refers to a settler state's foundational legal fiction which effectively declares an invaded land devoid of a civilized people, thereby rendering Indigenous

people as nonhuman subjects embedded within the racialized continuum of "wild nature" and thus available to be subjugated or exterminated as "wild beasts." The etymology of "wilderness" discloses this zoopolitical coextensiveness: "The word is derived from the Old English word *wilddeoren*, meaning 'of wild beasts'" (Hall 1992, p. 58). Situated within settler colonial contexts, wilderness functions as "a mystification of genocide. Where Aboriginal people had been brought to the brink of annihilation, their former territories were recast as 'wilderness'" (Langton 1995/96, p. 16). Simultaneously, from an Aboriginal perspective, "wilderness" is counter-discursively resignified and inverted to represent the ecological devastation of country wreaked by settler colonisation. Deborah Bird Rose (2008, p. 52) recounts Daly Pulkara, Yarralin and Lingara communities, looking over the ecocidal effects of that have resulted from the settler colonisation of country – "bare soil that was washing away down the gullies … dead trees, scald areas, and sickly cattle" – and remarking: "this country … 'It's the wild. It's just the wild.'"[4]

It is at this critical wilderness/*terra nullius* juncture that I want to discuss two seemingly progressive movements – Nature First! and No Borders – that are, in different ways, co-implicated in neocolonial moves that fail to address extant Indigenous nations in the context of their respective agendas. Earth First! is an eco-activist movement committed to a "front-line, direct action approach to protecting wilderness" and to mobilising activist interventions "in defense of the last wild places" (EarthFirst.org. 2020). In his "Earth First! A Founder's Story," Howie Wolke (2006) narrates how the founding group was driven by a vision to "restore a substantial measure of the bygone but not forgotten American wilderness." "We founders," he adds, "were primarily about the wilds" (Wolke 2006). The Eurocentric trope of "wilderness" works to efface the fact that these "wilds" are situated on Indigenous lands. In tracing the inception of the movement, Wolke (2006) speaks of how the "founding story of Earth First!" found its point of origin in "the sweeping basin and range of expanse of the Cabeza Prieta

National Wildlife Refuge and Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. Together these areas constitute one of the wildest and most ecologically intact regions of subtropical desert left on Earth." Nowhere in this origin story is the Tohono O'odham Nation mentioned. It is the very Indigenous nation that straddles the U.S.-Mexico border and that encompasses Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument.

In the fraught context of the borderlands and its national parks and nature reserves, the invocation of the "national heritage" value of these "pristine" sites works, as Juanita Sundberg and Bonne Kasserman (2007 p. 729) note, "to cast nature as the national embodiment of the 'American' nation and its national heritage. The notion of heritage … serves to delimit the body politic as Anglo-American and cements the community's claims to territory." Furthermore, it is not coincidental that the world's first and second national parks were created by settler-colonial states, specifically, the United States (Yellowstone [1872]) and Australia (Royal National Park [1879]).[5] National parks were founded on the back of the settler-colonial exercise of biopolitical power after the fact of the attempted elimination of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands and the securitization of the remnant population by corralling them within the confines of reserves.[6] Yellowstone established the settler template for the twin operations of Indigenous removal and the consequent expropriation of Indigenous land for "wilderness" reserves: "the now universal Yellowstone model of the national park," Marcia Langton (1996, p. 18) underscores, "is a disguised and politically acceptable dispossession of indigenous people."[7] Hon'mana Seukteoma (2021) writes of the complicity of the National Park Service in their failure to protect the destruction of Indigenous land and life during the construction of the Trump border wall, even in the context of the so-called "national parks" that they administer: "We watched in horror as the construction crews dynamited our ancestors' gravesites, chopped ceremonial plants to bits, and cleaved our sacred lands in two with a deadly mass of metal…. We mourned the destruction of burial grounds and sacred springs at Organ

Pipe Cactus National Monument. We watched with horror as the National Park Service failed to protect our cultural heritage and sacred sites, then aided in the violent oppression of our people."

Earth First!'s exhortation, "nature heeds no borders" (Hultgren 2015, p. 198), achieves its intelligibility through a posited culture/nature binary in which "pristine wilderness" emerges as a type of *tabula rasa* devoid of any cultural inscription. At the very moment that Earth First!'s nature appears to abolish and override all borders, the nature/culture border is installed. At the very moment that a putative anti-anthropocentrism is articulated, in which nature emerges as a purposive political agent, a hegemonic Eurocentrism is reproduced through the tacit bipolar couplet nature/culture which, by definition, positions nature as deficient of all the political attributes of culture. Nature, in this Eurocentric script, is inchoate, instinctual and borderless; it is what stands in contradistinction to culture, rationality and borders. Nature, as "wilderness," is what has no borders and what, in its instinctual and culturally unmediated drives, overrides all borders. In keeping with a long-standing Eurocentric mythology (see, for example, Rousseau 2012 [1755], pp. 64-5), nature stands as the wholly good and uncorrupted in contrast to a culture marred by degeneracy and wickedness. In this secularised theological narrative, the fall into culture imposes the original sin of borders and the resultant loss of a utopic space devoid of any cultural inscriptions or demarcations. Nature, as the wholly other, is the absolute externality to the interiority of borders – as the domain circumscribed by culture, the nation and the state.

In other words, the Earth First! platform reinstates by default a *terra nullius* system of conceptuality that generates a double erasure: on the one hand, it expunges the extant Indigenous nations situated in so-called "pristine wilderness" areas while, on the other hand, it effaces the biocultural worlds of more-than-human entities with their own designated intra- and interspecies societies, cultures and demarcated territories. Through this move, both

Indigenous and more-than-human entities are embedded with an unmediated nature continuum that positions them as precultural and prejuridical. They are thereby relegated to an abstracted and undifferentiated space marked by the utopic sign of illocality. Yet another erasure inscribes this narrative: as with the majority of places designated as "national parks" in settler states, the vision of pristine nature that is celebrated by Earth First! is actually the result of attentive Indigenous cultural practices that pivot on care for country and its ecologies (Pascoe 2018, p. 161-76). The enforced removal of Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands has, in fact, often resulted in the collapse of the so-called pristine ecosystems of innumerable national parks across the globe (Dowie 2011).

The politico-epistemological forces at work in the slogan "nature heeds no borders" can thus be seen to operate at the level of two disjunctive strata that topologically fold into each other: on the one hand, there is the received meaning of "nature" that establishes an hierarchised fault line between culture/nature and that ineluctably draws its operating logics from the *doxa* of Eurocentric epistemologies; and, on the other hand, there is operative the occultation of the cultural forces that constitute the very conditions of possibility of this conceptual caesura. Earth First!'s nature is always already constituted by its own disavowed and occluded culture – as designated and circumscribed by the hegemonic field of Western metaphysics and as enforced, in this instance, by U.S. settler society. It is not coincidental that the "founding story of Earth First!" has its point of origin in "one of the wildest and most ecologically intact regions of subtropical desert left on Earth" and that its slogan will be "nature heeds no borders" – this is a slogan, I suggest, which emanates more than a whiff of Manifest Destiny, cast, in this instance, in the racialised register of eco-imperialism. The whitewashing of the Tohono O'odham Nation from this founding myth is what enables the entwined logics of "pristine wilderness" and "no borders" to give birth to the movement.

Terra Nullius of "Nomads"

The neocolonial epistemologies and Eurocentric metaphysics that inscribe Earth First! can be seen to be reproduced in different, but related, ways in a particular example of the No Borders movement. Even as I celebrate the contestatory and social justice ethos that underpins this activist movement, I am concerned by the sort of violent erasures that certain elements of this movement reproduce once they are situated within the context of the settler state. I examine this argument by drawing on James A. Chamberlain's "Minoritarian Democracy: The Democratic Case for No Borders." Before proceeding to analyse Chamberlain's particular version of No Borders, I want to emphasise, following Goldie Osuri's critique of the Australian version of No Borders, that "The no-borders movement is not homogeneous. Other theorists, such as Nandita Sharma have referenced the notion of negotiations and alliances between Indigenous and migrant communities" (2009, p. 140; Sharma 2002). Furthermore, the urgent valency of the No Border movement is expressly evidenced in abolitionist moves that focus on the practical elimination of lethal state border apparatuses such as "migration controls, detention centers and other punitive measures that punish mobility and create precarity" (Burridge 2014, p. 465).

In the introduction to his article, Chamberlain states that his "modest goal is to show that a commitment to democracy can support opposition to borders and efforts to envision and construct a world without them" (2017, p. 142). He builds his case by drawing on two Deleuzian concepts: "Minoritarian democracy, as I elaborate it, entails a deliberate effort to dismantle majoritarian identities in favour of becoming-minoritarian of everyone, and thus the elimination of borders. The figure that corresponds to minoritarian democracy is neither the settled citizen nor the migrant but the nomad" (2017, p. 142). The Deleuzian figure of the "nomad" plays a pivotal role in Chamberlain's article. It is the figure that stands in antithetical opposition to the "sedentary norm": "As Étienne Balibar writes, modern territorial nation-states

'define and represent themselves as communities of sedentary citizens, rooted or established on the territory'" (2017, p. 148). The figure of the "nomad" is freighted by a dense and troubling colonial history. As Jo Rey (2021) notes, "Nomad is a nomenclature enforced through ignorance of Indigenous obligation."[8] It is a figure that has been strategically deployed by the settler state to construct Indigenous people as tantamount to roaming vagrants who, because of their tendency to go "walkabout," lacked the requisite civilisational qualities of Western culture, including a rootedness to place, territorial boundaries and the appurtenant institutions of law and government. In bringing this colonial history into focus and in proscribing the use of the term "nomad," the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Handbook* (Queensland Studies Authority 2010, p. 21) states: "The purposeful and seasonal movements of Aboriginal people have long been inaccurately portrayed as being random wanderings, rather than the expression of, and spiritual connectedness with, their land. Terms such as 'nomad' and 'walkabout' are deeply associated with this inaccurate view." The figure of the nomad effectively effaces the borders that define First Nations and their inextricable relation to country.

The concept of the "nomad" was instrumental in enabling the violent displacement and removal of Indigenous people from country and the consequent settler expropriation of their lands: "The European belief that all land was the same to the Aboriginal groups 'wandering' across it, rather than specific areas belonging to particular Aboriginal groups, also served to justify the invasion and appropriation of lands" (Queensland Studies Authority 2010, p. 21). Situated within a settler colonial framework, nomadism constructs Indigenous people as lacking "land tenure or anchorage in land, and this has been coupled with the idea that Aboriginal people did not really occupy the land, but only roamed over it. The extension of the doctrine of *terra nullius* was based on this kind of distinction" (UNSW Teaching 2019, p. 6). In stating that, "To be clear, by No Borders I mean the elimination of both territorial and civic

borders," Chamberlain's (2017, p. 143) assertion, once it is grounded within a settler context, reproduces the colonial trope of *terra nullius*, while simultaneously re-activating the colonial fiction of the borderless nomad. In her trenchant critique of the disavowed colonial moves that continue to undergird this Deleuzian fantasy of the nomad, Jodi Byrd (2011, p. xxi) underlines how this seemingly "deterritorializing" figure in fact works to transform "indigenous peoples into the *homo nullius* inhabitants of lands emptied and awaiting arrival."

In her critique of the Deleuzian figure of the "nomad," Julie Wuthnow (2002, p. 184) contends that such "Deleuzian frameworks are potentially counterproductive to effective indigenous politics and, moreover, that central notions of Deleuzian thinking, such as 'nomad thought,' can operate to enact what Vandana Shiva has termed a 'politics of disappearance' of local or indigenous knowledge systems." Eve Tuck (2010, p. 646) elaborates on what is at stake here when she calls to account Deleuze's failure to acknowledge how the notion of rhizomatic "interconnectedness has been a mainstay in many Indigenous frameworks" "for hundreds and thousands of years." "It's an issue of false inventions," adds Tuck (2010, p. 646), "and giving credit where credit is due." Jody Byrd at once interrogates and punctures any claims to the anti-statist radicality of the borderless nomad precisely by exposing its effaced but constitutive a priori colonial logics: "What we imagine to be outside of and rupturing to the state, through Deleuze, already depends upon a paradigmatic Indianness that arises from colonialist discourses justifying expropriation of lands through removals and genocide" (2011, p. 14).

Building on Byrd's critical insight, my argument is that Chamberlain's conceptualisation of the No Borders movement enacts a politics of double disappearance of both Indigenous and more-than-human subjects and their connectedness to demarcated place. Moreover, the concept of "no borders" posits an untenable zero point of borderlessness that, by conceptual default, is dependent upon disavowed discursive bordering operations that structurally enable the intelligibility of the semantically bounded category and its iterative embodiment through

various slogans: "No Borders," "nature heeds no borders" and so on. In the analysis that follows, I want to pursue the spectral borders that continue to inscribe the posited borderless "smooth space" of No Borders.

In the "smooth space" from which all borders have been erased, Chamberlain writes, "one can rise up at any point and move to any other place" (2017, p. 148).[9] Once this "smooth space" conceptualisation of No Borders is situated within the racial frame of the U.S. settler state, it emerges as effectively underpinned by the modality of a disavowed but insistent whiteness – as the strategically unmarked figure vested with a freedom of movement that, due to its sedimented privileges and entitlements, is unencumbered by the panoply of borders that ensnare, penalise or kill other racially marked subjects. Once positioned within this racially un/marked context, the No Borders vision advocated by Chamberlain emerges as a utopic space that is nowhere to be experienced except in the locus of an embodied, yet denegated, whiteness that is always already coextensive with the figure of the *universal anthropos*. Operative here is a characteristically Western move that advocates that the "vision of a particular ethnic should be taken as universal rationality," thereby imposing "provincialism as universalism" (Quijano 2007, p. 177).

Circumscribed by the provincialism of a racially delimited locus which aspires to an unbounded universalism, Chamberlain's call for the abolition of borders operates on settler ground that, in the U.S. context, has already more or less accomplished this exercise in the partial or complete extinguishment of Indigenous borders and sovereignties. This historically prior violence, which has been relegated to the amnesic dust heap of settler history, at once haunts and enables his border abolitionist call, even as it endures as a lived history for the targeted Indigenous people of the colonial present. The imperial injunction for "the complete removal of civic and territorial borders" is shadowed by precedential settler acts of border erasure that constitute the conditions of possibility for this posited jurisdictional power over an

entire field of extant demarcated territories. What is encoded in this border abolitionist call, then, is a re-appropriative violence that, in its unmaking of Indigenous nations, consolidates what has already been expropriated by the settler state: animating this very movement to abolish all borders is the restitutive telos of settler power that works to reinscribe its foundational violence.

Fault Line Border Questions

As I write, the construction of the Trump border wall has paused due to a directive from the new Biden Administration, even as the lethal effects of this border wall continue to unfold. The Trump border wall is creating a division that will work to consolidate the settler cut of the U.S.-Mexico border through the Tohono O'odham and the Hia C-ed O'odham Nations (Luna-Firebaugh 2002, pp. 166, 170-2), while at the same time causing profound eco-genocidal effects across the Indigenous and more-than-human lifeworlds that straddle the borderlands. Victor Garcia, Hia-Ced O'odahm Nation, speaks to what is stake: "We as people need to remain dedicated to the voice of the Earth. And the Earth speaks… This border wall, what purpose does it serve but a separation of people, of animals, of plants?" (quoted in McSpadden 2020). The Earth, in this Indigenous cosmopolitical frame, stands as a geopolitical subject that speaks in dialogue with the Hia-Ced O'odahm people and the border wall emerges as a modality of divisive violence that will work to shatter the binding relationality of all life that inheres within this Indigenous worldview. The border wall cuts across Tohono O'odham and the Hia C-ed O'odham lands like a brutally exposed endoskeleton, a mineralized spine with steel vertebrae and spinous ligaments of razor wire. Its thoracic curvature courses across Indigenous and more-than-human nations, dividing and thwarting the free movement of Indigenous peoples, asylum seekers, animals and plants (figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2. Trump border wall, Southern Arizona. Image credit: Laiken Jordahl.

Figure 3. Trump border wall, Arizona-Nogales. Image credit: Public domain.

Through the construction of the border wall, the U.S. settler state's sovereignty has been literally rendered into a steel and concrete partition that interdicts and constrains freedom of movement along interlocking spatio-temporal axes: the wall traverses and divides space,

people, nonhuman animals and so on. As a steel and concrete proxy of the U.S. settler state, the border wall works to stop, surveil and divide its target subjects, precisely as it embodies the panoply of U.S. state and non-state actors crucial to the exercise and maintenance of settler power.[10] Viewed in this light, the Trump wall interrogates facile understandings of the more-than-human as intrinsically "good" and as what stands in binarised opposition to the nefarious operations of human culture. Indeed, it is because the Trump wall operates on the topological fault line of the border that it refuses simplistic culture/nature, human/other-than-human binaries and that it proceeds to generate a series of unsettling effects. The very topological forces that inscribe all borders work to interrogate the otherwise naturalised figure of "the border" – determining figure of power, placement and control. The border, as always already fraught locus, works to generate *border questions* because, even as it labours to secure indivisible lines – of categories, concepts and subjects – its operations are interrogated by the topological fold that inextricably binds the one with its denegated and hierarchised predicate: that is, whatever is posited as exterior to it and designated as *the other*, in a series such as citizen/alien, human/animal, culture/nature and so on.

The Trump wall, however, does not stand as a unilateral more-than-human agent that is impervious to other-than-human contestations. For example, the section of the wall that straddles the San Pedro River has already been battered by other-than-human forces such as flash floods that have clogged and damaged sections of the wall with accumulated debris, downing a portion of the wall (Whitman 2019). The San Pedro River, in such instances, embodies and enacts its own histories inscribed with memories of place and agentic returns to its original courses. The San Pedro River powerfully evidences Wabinoquay Otsoquaykwhan's, Anishinaabe Nation, spiritual philosophy on the agentic power of water: "Water isn't just for drinking or washing. Water has spirit. Water is alive. Water has memory. Water knows how you treat it, water knows you. You should get to know water too" (cited in

Indigenous@AmericanIndian8). Reflecting on the layered histories of the Mississippi River, Toni Morrison offers this apposite meditation on the anamnesic power of water: "You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. 'Floods' is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was" (1995, p. 99). Morrison here materialises the distributed cognition of more-than-human entities and their contestation and undermining of different modalities of anthropocentric governance. Remembering where it used to be, the San Pedro River, through recursive returns, retraces the sedimented contours of its locus in the Sonoran Desert. The river, thus, emerges as an inscriptive entity that renders space as intelligible in terms of an historically configured place.

These examples interrogate the anthropocentric claim that "nature heeds no borders" – a claim that scripts more-than-human entities, such as rivers, as deficient of such things as spatialised memory, inscriptive powers, layered histories of place and the delineated topographies of their own lifeworlds. Anterior to regimes of statist governmentality, more-than-human entities may override and demolish the state's apparatuses, intentionalities and its array of other-than-human delegates. The hundreds of storm gates that have been installed to prevent flash floods from demolishing the border wall have, as yet another example of more-than-human agency, undermined Trump's boast "that his new 'border wall system' will be an impermeable" barrier as the "open, unmanned gates in remote areas already have allowed for the easy entry of smugglers and migrants into the United States" (Miroff 2020).

Figure 4. A dead bird caught in the border wall at Organ Pipe, Arizona. Image credit: Laiken Jordahl.

The entangled topology of state/non-state, human/more-than-human actors that I have been mapping in the fraught context of settler borders compels the thinking through of the principles of ethicality that must attend the formulation of categories of considerability. In the context of Trump's border wall, the settler state overrides the lifeworlds of both more-than-human and targeted human subjects: they have no ethico-jural standing and thus, through both the construction and concrete extension of the wall, they may be eliminated without compunction under a settler regime that authorises and enforces these lethal acts as non-criminal. Thus ancient saguaros are uprooted, hacked to pieces and discarded as so much rubbish in order to clear the ground for the construction of the wall; precious desert groundwater is contaminated and depleted in the mixing of the wall's concrete; and birds become entrapped in the wall's barrier and die affixed to its steel grids (figure 4), emblems of a necropolitical settler sovereignty which extends across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and that

fatally encompasses the lives thousands of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants (Slack and Martinez 2019). The fact that the bird in figure 4 has been killed by the more-than-human agency of the border wall, as a proxy of the U.S. state, exemplifies the entanglement of human/more-than-human agents and the complex biopolitical effects that ensue from such a matrix (see Sundberg 2001).

In thinking through the dynamics of power that inscribe the entanglement of human and more-than-human agents on the U.S.-Mexico border, power emerges as something that is not homogenous to the U.S. settler state, its repressive delegates or violent border regimes. The settler state's aspiration toward univocal and arrogative exercises of power, and its labour to concretise its power through the construction of a unilinear border wall, is contested by a complex assemblage of human and more-than-human agents that may be at once heterogeneous to the state, refractory to its borders and heteronomous to its laws. In the borderlands – there where borders, nations and lives are made and unmade – this contestatory assemblage includes insurgent more-than-human agents (San Pedro River) and the O'odham and Hia C-ed O'odham peoples continuing to exercise their unceded sovereignty in the face of the settler state's regimes of eco-genocidal border violence.

Notes

[1] For a detailed discussion of the Eurocentrisms that continue to animate such different movements, see Pugliese 2020.

[2] I want to underscore that I do not envision Indigenous cosmo-epistemologies of relationality as somehow homogeneous and essentialised in terms of their address of the more-than-human and related ecological concerns, thereby constructing, by default, yet another iteration of the trope of the '"noble savage" in harmony with the environment. Indigenous nations are, it goes without saying, inscribed by internal differences and contradictory positions on these matters, including positions that advocate such things as the mining of country: see, for example, Birch 2018, and Vincent and Timothy 2016.

[3] For detailed analyses of the nexus between the settler usurpation of Indigenous sovereignty and violent border regimes, see Bui et al 2019; Giannacopoulos 2007 and 2018.

[4] I am grateful to Donna Houston for bringing Bird Rose's article to my attention.

[5] In the U.S. context, Yellowstone National Park (1872) was created in the wake of the establishment of the Indian reservation system (beginning in 1851 with the *Indian Appropriations Act*, which set the precedent for the creation of Indian reservations), its attendant forced removal of Native Americans from their traditional lands (Limerick 1998) and attendant massacres in the very creation of a number of national parks (Merchant 2007).

In the Australian settler context, the state of New South Wales enacted the contemporaneous subjugation and quarantining of both Aboriginal people and nature through legislation that enabled: (1) the segregation of Aboriginal people to reserves (beginning in New South Wales in 1850 – see Goodall 2008, pp. 61-65), and (2) the establishment of the Royal National Park (1879) south of Sydney, following the violent removal of the Dharawal people from their traditional lands (see Bursitt et al 2016, p. 45) and the placing of the bounded "wilderness" under another form of paternal white protection. In both the U.S. and Australian settler colonial contexts, the impetus to establish national parks and attendant settler revalorizations of "wilderness" were critically predicated on this double-movement of enclosure and quarantining through the construction of Indigenous and nature reserves – see Cronon 1996.

[6] For a detailed discussion of what he terms the "dual 'island' system of nature preserves and Indian reserves" deployed by the U.S. settler state in its management and control of both Native Americans and "wilderness," see Spence 1999.

[7] See also Langton 1995/96, and Perera and Pugliese 1999.

[8] Dr Jo Rey, Macquarie University Fellowship for Indigenous Researchers, Department of Indigenous Studies, Macquarie University, personal correspondence, 27 July 2021.

[9] To be clear, I am not arguing here that Chamberlain's use of "smooth space" is homologous to Deleuze's complex conceptualisation of this spatial figure.

[10] As Inda (2018) contends, such settler border control structures as the Trump wall must be seen as augmented by practices of "interior enforcement, or what could be called the bordering of the interior" through which a "continuum of border security" works to construct "the territorial boundaries of the U.S. and the interior as a seamless security space."

Acknowledgements

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