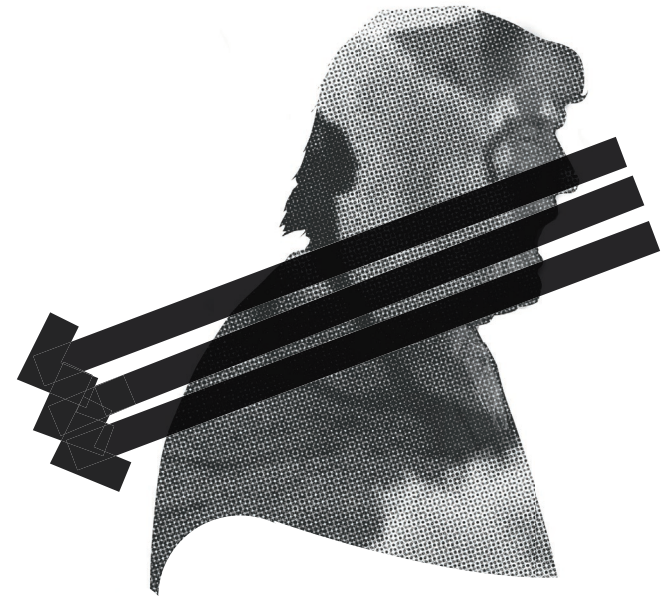


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FIGHTING BORDER VIOLENCE FROM OBAMA TO TRUMP

An Interview with a No More Deaths volunteer

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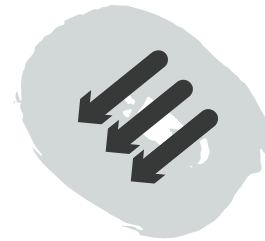
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Crimethinc: Introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about how you got involved with *No More Deaths*.

Maria: My name's Maria; I've been volunteering with *No More Deaths* for over a decade. I initially came down around 2006–2007 to the border, did some work on the US/Mexico border, on both sides, and have been an active participant in the group ever since.

CrimethInc: We're releasing an audio version of our book *No Wall They Can Build*, which goes into an in-depth analysis about the border regime and how it works in terms of global migration from south to north and the flow of people, resources, capital, et cetera across these borders, and also, in relating a lot of personal stories about life doing solidarity work in the desert.

The book was written over a period of many years, but mostly during the Obama era, when there was a president who a lot of people, accurately or not, thought was more of a friend to immigrants and immigrant communities. Now that we're living in the Trump era, Trump's policies about immigration and the border are obviously one of the high-profile agenda items that radicals tend to react against.

I wanted to see if you could tell us a little bit about what continuities and what differences have existed since the time that this was written, since the Obama era through to the Trump era.

For me, that's what I come back to again and again—that we can live in a different kind of world. It takes a lot of work.

Resistance is something that you can do every day. I want to encourage people as they're waking up to the realities of the enforcement of the carceral state, or exploring them for the first time, to remember that as many ways as there are for the state to incarcerate and deport and detain our friends, there are people who are trying to resist. I don't know if we'll ever get there, but liberation is in the process.

Maria: I think if you look at the differences between Obama and Trump's managing of migration and enforcement, the difference is really just one of vitriol in discourse; if you actually look at the infrastructural policies, I think there's a lot more continuity between the Obama era and the Trump era than a lot of people acknowledge. Trump is only able to enforce a much more xenophobic and violent and wide-reaching immigration enforcement system because Obama put in place both the physical infrastructure and the legal infrastructure for Trump to be able to expand the mandates and dictates of the Border Patrol and ICE in our current era.

So I don't actually think there's that much difference between them. It's kind of a soft control versus hard control: where people get taken into custody and in what manner and what kinds of violence they experience at the hands of the state, and then the numbers. Obama played a game that had to do with differentiating between deserving and non-deserving categories of migration; Trump simply shifted those categories. I

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something that we're seeing all over the world as so many conflicts are unfolding all over the world over migration and solidarity, over borders and undoing them. To close, I'm wondering if you want to share any reflections about how the solidarity work you've been involved in on the US/Mexico border fits into the broader struggle for a world without borders.v

Maria: Yeah. Before I started working on the US/Mexico border I was involved in other social movements for freedom of movement in other parts of the world, on the periphery of Fortress Europe and also in South America. At the core, people are saying that there should be a right for basic dignities like the freedom of movement, the freedom to flee from state or paramilitary violence, the ability to provide for one's family, the ability to seek a life in which you can be sure that your kids are safe and have a place to sleep at night and are well fed. Even though the specific polemics around these struggles can be framed in a local context in so many different ways, the common themes have to do with acknowledging other peoples' humanity and being present with them and trying to create space for a more dignified life.

don't think the game that Trump is playing is very different; it's just about how criminality has been employed against undocumented communities in various ways. So the difference is really mostly in rhetoric.

And then also, there's been a lot of coverage in the news lately about the undocumented minors crisis, and US officials taking children into custody. It's really important to point out that this policy was put into place under the Obama administration, and facilities in Pennsylvania and Texas already existed to incarcerate minors. The zero-tolerance policy under Trump would not have been possible, even just logistically speaking, without the infrastructural investments of the Obama era.

CrimethInc: Speaking of that difference you mentioned between hard and soft power... I'm been thinking about that difference as a way to make sense of the crisis going on in national politics around Trump's effort to force the construction of a border wall, and the way that Democrats are positioning themselves as if they're resisting Trump and talking about something totally different. Whereas, if you actually look at the proposal, it still involves more militarization, more funding for border enforcement, but just with the absence of a physical wall. So... given that this has been such a major national controversy, I'm wondering if you could tell us a little but about how that's played out on the border itself: how folks in Arizona are experiencing it, how they're responding to it, what impact it's having on migrants, and what kind of

been an increase in enforcement, there's also an opportunity to resist that enforcement in whatever way the local community finds to be most salient. And there have been a lot of coalitions and faith-based organizations standing up for folks in their communities who are being targeted or who are most vulnerable to this kind of state violence.

So you don't have to be on the border to resist the border. You can connect with a local group in many places around the country where people are realizing that border enforcement is negatively impacting people that they love and are trying to do something about it.

CrimethInc: I have the sense that in recent years, it's become increasingly prominent among anarchists—in our sense of who we are and what it is that we're about—that we are fighting for a world without borders. While obviously that struggle is happening for us here on the US/Mexico border in one of the most intense ways, it's also

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responses you're seeing to that rhetoric along the border.

Maria: The damage of an increasingly militarized border, the human toll, has been lived. I mean, the urban centers were sealed in the 1990s and traffic was funneled out into remote areas. That really was a gift to the cartels in terms of consolidating human trafficking. So you're correctly highlighting that the difference between the Republican and Democratic approaches to border enforcement just has to do with physical infrastructure, which Trump is obsessed with—an actual quote/unquote “wall”—versus other means of enforcement that the Democrats are more than happy to fund. It's important to remember that there have been studies done that correlate border militarization and infrastructure and the quantity of [human] remains that are found. And we do find with an increase in militarization, we find an increase in people dying during the crossing. So that is one of the primary effects that this has on people trying to cross through the borderlands: any amount of enforcement and militarization and funding of military and honestly paramilitary infrastructure on the border does concretely lead to loss of life.

It's been kind of Kafkaesque to hear Trump and the Republicans utilize this verbiage about how there is a “crisis” on the border for their own ends—honestly, in order to create more crisis on the border. Because, you know, there is a crisis on the border: there's a crisis of death and disappearance, and there have been a lot of lives lost and families affected by missing

their own deportations. I encourage folks to look up our cases; theintercept.com is doing really great coverage if you want to follow the cases in detail. Looking at the organizations and journalists and other groups that we work with in southern Arizona, you'll see that we are facing a level of repression that is being echoed in other communities, that other activists are also facing. It's just part of the general reign of terror, I would say, that the Trump administration has unleashed against undocumented communities and anyone in solidarity with them.

CrimethInc: At the same time that this reign of terror has been going on, we've also seen folks undertaking a wide range of actions over the last couple of years—from airport occupations to ICE shutdowns to all sorts of other forms of solidarity. Would you like to highlight any of these tactics or groups or initiatives in particular? Do you have any ideas about other ways that folks can show solidarity in the places where they are?

Maria: Yeah, definitely. The internalization of the border provides us some interesting opportunities, as police departments are deputized across the country to check immigration, as ICE is getting more strong-armed in collaborating, doing more raids, and as the rest of the country starts to resemble a place like Arizona where a traffic stop can lead to incarceration and detention. There's also a proliferation of rapid response networks that are trying to address and trying to intervene in that point of enforcement. Anywhere that there has

loved ones. But the crisis is the one that's being created by Border Patrol, by ICE, by the state as an enforcer. That is who is enacting violence on the border; that is where the real crisis lies. And this crisis isn't just unfolding

“BUT THE CRISIS IS THE ONE THAT’S BEING CREATED BY BORDER PATROL, BY ICE, BY THE STATE AS AN ENFORCER.”

in the desert; it's happening at detention facilities, where there are conditions that are subhuman. It's important to try to check the really uncritical dialogue that people are trying to have about the border, and to understand where that

violence is really coming from, what its sources are. By and large, it is coming from the state.

As far as what people are trying to do to address that... we're here, we're doing the same work that we've been doing for the last 15 years, albeit under a heightened environment of surveillance and repression. But people are going to continue to do what they've always done, which is to help other people in the borderlands and to reach out in solidarity to directly affected communities. So we'll see. At the end of the day, the amount of money that is appropriated—or rather, misappropriated—to increase border militarization is a problem. We need to resist it. It does concretely lead to death and disappearance.

there are these beacons that get put out on Cabeza—there's not very many of them—and that somehow, pushing a button in a very remote area where there is no water, in a way that will lead to a person being incarcerated and referred into the deportation and immigration detention facilities, is somehow “humanitarian.” They're saying that we don't need to put water out because there are beacons for folks who are lost. It's been challenging to push against this very recuperative and bizarre narrative that somehow this agency—that is by their own admission a paramilitary agency—somehow they are playing a humanitarian role in this scenario.

Of course, this is a position that is widely discredited internationally. Most aid organizations are very, very clear that you must separate the provision of humanitarian aid in low-intensity war zones from any groups that are actively militarizing or enacting violence in those areas—and the border patrol definitely fits that definition.

CrimethInc: So what can folks do to show solidarity with the people who are still facing legal charges as a result of their humanitarian aid work?

Maria: You can look up the case—*No More Deaths* has an Instagram and a Twitter account. Also, I would like to say that Scott Warren is not the only person facing prosecution in this country for being in solidarity with undocumented communities, and there are plenty of activists across the country who are fighting against

CrimethInc: You mentioned the increasing climate of surveillance and repression confronting *No More Deaths* in particular. I know one of the things that y'all have been dealing with there has been these legal cases against some of your volunteers, and there have been some developments regarding those over the past few weeks. Could you give us a little bit of background about the arrests and the charges, the first wave of trials, and what's coming up in the next few months?

Maria: We're about halfway through the trial process for our volunteers. The only outstanding defendant now is Scott Warren; he's facing a misdemeanor and a felony, and the felony is related to charges of conspiracy and harboring. We are finished with a series of misdemeanor trials that had to do with putting water out on the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge. We've been having discussions (and conflicts) about accessing the really remote areas where we put out water. One of those places is Cabeza Prieta, which is a National Park. In order to cross in that extremely, extremely hot area, people have to walk across a bombing range.

Cabeza Prieta, the wildlife refuge where we put out water, is the closest place we have access to in order to provide water to folks who are crossing in that area. So the charges that we were dealing with had to do with driving on restricted roads; basically, the wildlife land managers changed their permit to explicitly forbid humanitarian aid, when that had not

previously been policy, and then pursued these cases, harassed our group, and then

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referred people for prosecution. So the government has been prosecuting humanitarian aid volunteers for putting water out, while largely ignoring the deaths and disappearances that are taking place in these areas. These are some of the most extreme, the most remote, and the most fatal areas where

we work.

What has been shown in both the misdemeanor and the felony case is the level of collusion between different government agencies to carry out surveillance on our organization in order to interfere and intimidate and try to stop the humanitarian aid work that we do. And then, as we've been going to trial, we have been finding this counter narrative that's hard to push against in court—that Border Patrol is somehow also providing humanitarian aid, that there's somehow a humanitarian component to their mission of enforcement. In one of the arguments we had during the last trial, the government was saying that