ONE

ON THE FRONT LINES OF CLIMATE AND BORDERS

I think the notion of dreaming in a time where we are told that it is foolish, futile or not useful is one of the most revolutionary things we can do.

—Harsha Walia

On the coast of the small Philippine island of Marinduque, a man in a black shirt and blue shorts walks up the shore carrying a baby in his arms. Just as has been forecast by climate scientists across the world, littered all around him are bits and pieces of the "future." There is a house so devastated by the rising sea and surging waves that its exposed frame looks like ribs puncturing its crumbling wall. An uprooted palm tree lies nearby like a corpse in the gravelly sand. Soon the sea will entirely claim the ruined house and, most likely, many more homes, farms, schools, and businesses farther inland. This small community, Balogo, which is on the island where my grandmother was born and raised, appears, like so many others across the globe, to be on the verge of being completely washed away.

The father and child look out into the gray, stormy sea. Typhoon Ineng's center is far away in the northern Philippines, but the waves still come crashing in. This storm will kill 14 people after battering communities with sustained winds of 80-plus miles per hour. The punishment includes tornadoes, flooding, and landslides that temporarily displace 34,000 people. Horrific as this may sound, by Filipino standards, this is a minor storm. Following super-typhoon Haiyan, everything is relative to that 265-mile-wide machine of wind and water that smashed the island of Leyte in November 2013, killing more than 10,000 people and uprooting hundreds of thousands more.

When I ask Edmund Oracion, a fisherman from Balogo, if the ocean is moving in, he doesn't hesitate: "Big time." Oracion wears a brown tank top and talks above the sound of rushing waves, which are as gray and stormy as the sky. Children are laughing and playing in the encroaching foamy sea behind him. Oracion tells me that he has been living here for 45 years—his entire life. The slow advance of the sea, of course, doesn't happen in one day. On the global plane, sea level reached its highest recorded level in March 2016, 3.48 inches higher than the 1993 average (with an overall trend of a 0.13-inch rise per year since 1993).[1] As of March 22, 2017, Arctic sea ice had melted down to its lowest level in recorded history.[2]

The fisherman points to a buoy that is rocking 25 yards away in the waves. "The shore used to be there. The water is getting close to us," he says. "It's a big concern." He says that the people of the region might have to relocate farther inland, a move that would not earn them climate-refugee

status, since such a status does not yet officially exist. Behind him, as he talks, sit long fishing boats under skinny coconut palms. Like fishing, coconuts are one of the primary sources of income on this island of more than 200,000 people, 40 percent of whom live below the poverty line. According to the book *Power in a Warming World*, people who live in the 48 "least-developed countries" are five times more likely to die in a climate-related disaster than the rest of the world.[3]

As I watch the waves consume the destroyed house, I realize that this is the first tangible casualty of sea-level rise that I have witnessed with my own eyes. And it was happening on my grandmother's island. In just a few days climate change went from the theoretical and futuristic to real, raw, and immediate. Even the night before, when I met with Rollie Josue of the Marinduque government's disaster management division, who explained all the potential hazards projected for the year 2050, the reality of it didn't hit me as hard as it did seeing the house as the sea ate away at it, and that small child in his father's arms, his black hair blowing around in the gusting wind.

As Filipinos reminded me day after day, their island homes are on the front lines of the world's most urgent issue. In his office, Josue told us that the projections for 2050 were dire. There will be more landslides. There will be more flooding. There will be ever-increasing possibilities for earthquakes and tsunamis. At least one Haiyan-strength typhoon is now expected to make landfall every year. The 2013 superstorm was so powerful and destructive that I thought that I must have misheard him. "One per year?" I

asked. He smiled, as if that was the only thing he could do. "Yes," he said.

According to a survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations in March 2013, 85 percent of Filipinos already believed that they had experienced impact from climate change, this was even before the devastation of the super-typhoon. Many in the Philippines, including Greenpeace's Amalie Obuson, credit the rapid increase in climate awareness to the devastation caused by the annual super-typhoons that have hit every year since Ondoy in 2009. The typhoon dumped more rain in Metro Manila in one day than ever before in the recorded history of the region. The capital, already used to being submerged in water, had never been so inundated. It was a "rude awakening," said Obuson. There was Megi in 2010, Nesat in 2011, and Bopha in 2012, which leveled Obuson's home province, Mindanao, a place known for U.S. military bases, not typhoons.

"We haven't had the experience of strong rains until recently," Obuson said. She shared a video of a man telling the tragic story of how he lost his infant son in Mindanao during Typhoon Bopha. The man described how he was cradling his son in his arms when debris struck and split the child's head open. He lay limp in his arms, not breathing. Seeing other family members caught in the swirling water and in need of help, the father released his beloved child and watched the water carry him away. In the video, he could barely tell the story. He could barely talk.

"It used to be just adaptation," Obuson said about the Philippines. "It's way past adaptation. It's really a question

of survival now." Since 2013, typhoons and storms have displaced nearly 15 million people.

The most common number now used by scientists to project sea-level rise, based on the accelerating pace of melting ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland, is three feet over the next 80 years. If this projection holds true, Pacific islands such as Tuvalu, Kiribati, and Tokelau will soon be swallowed by the ocean. Kiribati's government bought 20 square miles of land in Fiji to relocate its people. Many people from the Marshall Islands have already migrated to the United States, and a good percentage live in the town of Springdale, Arkansas. In 2016, the United States government extended a $48 million grant to relocate 60 people from Louisiana's increasingly flooded island Isle de Saint Jean.[4]

According to the United States Geological Survey, Louisiana lost 1,900 square miles of land between 1932 and 2000—the equivalent, as journalist Brett Anderson describes it, "of the *entire state* of Delaware dropping into the Gulf of Mexico."[5] If trends continue, by 2064 rising water will take from Louisiana another landmass larger than Rhode Island.[6] The state's shape on today's maps is no longer accurate; the once familiar boot shape has increasingly appeared more chewed up and dissolved into islands. As it stands, the disfiguration will only accelerate.

The *New York Times* has called people from the Isle of Saint Jean the first U.S. climate refugees.[7] This is a disputable claim, of course, considering all the people who evacuated New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and never came back; all those forced to leave their homes after Hurricane Sandy; and the unknown numbers who have

fled California to escape either the years of drought or the floods of early 2017.

Climate change means either too little or too much water, and we are already experiencing both. A March 2016 report titled "Contribution of Antarctica to past and future sea-level rise"[8] shows that future sea-level rise might even be more pronounced than originally thought. If greenhouse gas emissions are not sufficiently cut, the sea will likely rise more than six feet by 2100, double the commonly cited forecasts of the United Nations climate science body. If this occurs, due to atmospheric pressure that will accelerate the melting of polar ice, we will see an inundation of densely populated mega-cities and millions of acres of low-lying areas inland. "At that point it becomes about retreat" from cities, one of the lead co-authors, Rob DeConto, told *The Guardian*, "not engineering of defences."[9]

One-third of the world's population lives near a coast. Looking specifically at low-elevation areas most vulnerable to rising seas, that means close to 700 million people are at risk. To grasp what this means exactly for U.S. coastal cities and areas, there is an interactive map from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency that visualizes the impact of rising water in places such as Miami, New York, San Juan, or the Florida Keys which, in a five-foot rise scenario, will completely vanish into the ocean. Miami, already spending millions of dollars on saltwater sea pumps, will eventually become the northernmost Key, much like nearby Biscayne. All this is happening now.

Sea level in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia has risen 18 inches since the beginning of the 20th century.

"Hundred year" flooding events are happening now with such frequency that a redefinition may be in order. One resident named Elisa Staton, whose house had lost half its value after being flooded, told reporter Brooke Jarvis, "I hate that house—that house has been my nightmare for ten years."[10] What Staton is describing is not only the most common, but the most expensive disaster in the United States—flooding. On a global level, floods are now impacting 21 million people worldwide annually. By 2030, a "double exposure to inundation"[11] is expected, and will impact more than 54 million.

The future potential for havoc becomes more pronounced when you add to the DeConto report another one titled "Ice melt, sea-level rise, and superstorms," whose lead author, climate guru James E. Hansen, is the person who famously brought climate change to the attention of the U.S. Congress in 1988 when he was a top scientist at NASA. Hansen's latest report focuses on how the incoming cool, dense water from melting ice sheets will impact the ocean's circulation patterns.[12] Such shifts will also likely further accelerate the speed at which the ice is melting. The result: faster-rising seas coupled with the most violent superstorms ever experienced in recorded history.

"I think the conclusion is clear," Hansen said after the report was released. "We are in a position of potentially causing irreparable harm to our children, grandchildren and future generations."[13]

Rising sea levels are just one of multiple ecological factors projected to dislocate unprecedented quantities of people. Though the numbers are often disputed, the most

common projection used by the United Nations is that 250 million people will be displaced by 2050. In a *New York Times* front page report in February 2017 about climate change and water shortages in Mexico City, Michael Kimmelman cited a report that suggested the number may be much higher: 750 million.[14] Another study referenced in Kimmelman's article predicts 10 percent of Mexicans between 15 and 65 could eventually migrate north due to rising temperatures, droughts, and floods.[15]

"Although the exact number of people that will be on the move by mid-century is uncertain," stated Koko Warner et al. in the report *In Search of Shelter: Mapping the Effects of Climate Change on Human Migration and Displacement*, "the scope and scale could vastly exceed anything that has occurred before."[16]

An average of 21.5 million people were displaced every year between 2008 and 2015 from the "impact and threat of climate-related hazards."[17] In the same time span, 26.4 million people are estimated to have been displaced each year by disasters more generally. This number means that one person is forced from their home every second, and according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, a person is more likely to be displaced by environmental forces than by war.[18] When you correlate the origins of the United Nations' 64 million "persons of concern"—a number that refers to refugees and has tripled since 2005—with the geographic locations of climate turmoil seen in data from NASA's Common Science Climate Index, as journalist Jessica Benko has done, the overlap is "striking" and vivid on a map.[19] And while many displaced people will try to stay

close to home, approximately 244 million people currently live outside their country of birth, up from 80 million in the 1980s (and a 41 percent increase from the year 2000). Since so many people are undocumented, and therefore uncounted, the actual number is likely much higher. People are traveling across borders in unprecedented numbers, and expectations—including those of people who live in vulnerable areas—are that this will continue. According to a 2010 Gallup poll, 12 percent of respondents—a percentage representing 500 million families[20]—stated that they thought environmental problems would force them to move within five years.

The upsurge has multiple factors, including, as described by sociologist Christian Parenti, a 30-year-long economic restructuring that has produced unseen levels of poverty and inequality. Volatile political and social situations often worsen economic processes that enrich a few while impoverishing many. Climate change will only intensify these inequalities and widen the gulf between those who are environmentally secure and those who are not. Parenti calls this the "catastrophic convergence."[21] The economic, political, and ecological factors are not separate; rather, they compound each other to create increasingly untenable situations over vast swaths of the Earth.

With the forecast, Koko Warner does not mince words: "In coming decades, climate change will motivate or force millions of people to leave their homes in search of viable livelihoods and safety."[22] It will be "staggering" and "surpass any historic antecedent." Despite predictions of such startling magnitude, there is no legal framework for climate

refugees. Not in international law, not in the laws of specific countries. Instead, there is more spending on border reinforcement than ever before in the history of humankind. And as the Donald J. Trump administration takes power in the United States, there is only more of this to come.

Back in Marinduque, Josue showed me the sea-level rise map where a red band—located smack dab in the middle of the Philippine archipelago—circled the heart-shaped island like a noose. Officials project that Balogo, where I watched the man hold his child near the crumbling house, will eventually be swallowed by the sea.

I was only on the island of Marinduque for three days, but it felt like I was there for a lifetime. This is the island from which my grandmother migrated to the United States in the early 20th century. She was only 16 years old when she left. I quickly became enchanted with the island's verdant green hills and the swaying coconut palms that I had heard about all my life but had never seen in person. Marinduque is the home of the annual Moriones Festival, in which residents re-create the Passion of Christ by dressing up in the garb of biblical-era Romans. As with the rest of the Philippines, you can still see indications of the U.S. occupation that date back to my grandmother's era. Roadside signs are in English in a place where everybody speaks Tagalog. In the small town of Santa Cruz, where my grandmother is from, a billboard advertises a cream promising "fresher and whiter underarms." The sign hangs over bustling market stalls where butchers chop meat on wooden slabs and bored fish vendors play poker on a cardboard sheet over the day's catch. As I walked through the market, I could smell the chicken

adobo—my grandmother's specialty, made with a sauce of vinegar, soy sauce, and a bay leaf—at every corner.

As I looked at the father tenderly holding his child, I knew that one day this boy, if he stays, could easily be one of the millions who will be displaced. It could be the slow, steady advance of the sea. It could be a violent superstorm that assaults his home, his community, and the landscape itself. It could be the impossibility of irrigating the rice fields with the inundation of saltwater that destroys freshwater supplies. It could even be a repeat of the copper mine spill of 1996, when 1.6 million cubic tons of toxic sludge poisoned Marinduque's river system and reached the small community of this child, oozing onto the beach and boats and palms and houses, killing animals and ruining harvests. Perhaps Balogo got off easy. Six feet of poisonous sludge buried a nearby town, displacing 400 families. With rising seas and surging storms, with skin disease and lead poisoning, my grandmother's island has become another tragic example of Parenti's "catastrophic convergence."

Up to this point I had only thought of Marinduque as a place in my family's ancestral past. But it wasn't until I set foot on this beautiful, verdant island of rice fields and jungle that I understood that I was getting an unfiltered glimpse into the future of an escalating crisis, not only for the Philippines, but for the world.

Families like those of the father and child I saw will increasingly move farther inland to the provincial capital Boac, or across the sea to Luzon to the expanding mega-city of Metro Manila. Perhaps they will dare to cross, like so many others, one of the many heavily armed border zones

proliferating across the world. Perhaps they will see the walls, the surveillance towers, the razor wire, the armed guards, detention centers, and refugee camps. Indeed, this is what I set out to explore in the pages ahead: an increasingly authoritarian world in which climate change, the displacement of people, and border militarization define the experiences of untold millions in the 21st century.

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Just east of Agua Prieta, in the Mexican state of Sonora, is a section of the U.S. border wall that looks as if a gigantic hand tossed it a quarter mile inland in disgust. The Normandy-style barrier that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) uses to stop vehicular traffic from crossing the Silver Creek Wash, is now covered with debris. It is covered with cobwebs. It is covered with dirt. The earth is slowly consuming it. Small purple flowers are growing on the metal structure once meant to keep the "unwanted" from entering the United States. It looks like an archaeological ruin destined to be included in a future museum on failed forms of social control.

In 2014, Hurricane Odile unleashed a torrent of rain over the Chiricahua Mountains. Unable to be absorbed by the southern Arizona land parched with drought, barren of vegetation, and overgrazed by cattle, a ferocious river raged through the region. As in many hurricanes of our day and age, the rain poured into Arizona with unprecedented force, and when the deluge arrived at the international divide, it swept a portion of the U.S. border wall deep into Mexico. It

was only one small section of the approximately 700 miles of wall along the 2,000-mile border, but it was an indication of how the wall is standing up to the primal forces of our changing climate.

The way the dislocated section of wall was situated, semi-buried, in the bed of the Silver Creek Wash, it was as if we were in the year 2218 and I had discovered a relic from a long-vanished civilization. If it was, it probably wouldn't take archaeologists too long to piece together the much bigger story: the half-buried piece of metal was just one vestige of a powerful regime that expanded from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean through the late 20th and into the 21st century. Perhaps a confused future archaeologist might think this massive apparatus had been meant to stave off the onslaught of heat waves, dust storms, wildfires, and drought hitting the region. However, such theories would quickly dissipate with the discovery of the guns and stockpiled ammunition, revealing the principal purpose: to keep people out by force.

Just like super-typhoons, rising seas, and heat waves, border build-up and militarization are by-products of climate change. Just as tidal floods will inundate the streets of Miami and the Arctic ice sheets will melt, if nothing changes we will find ourselves living in an increasingly militarized world of surveillance, razor wire, border walls, armed patrols, detention centers, and relocation camps. Such a world already exists, but the militarization will intrude ever more deeply into our everyday lives, our schools, our transportation, our communication, and our sense of citizenship, community, and humanity itself. A future

archaeologist will find not only a world deeply altered by the impacts of climate change, but also communities scarred with unprecedented militarization, and not only in the United States but throughout the planet, where more securitized borders divide the Global North and Global South than ever before. As it stands now, border enforcement is not only growing, but is increasingly connected to the displacement caused by a world of fire, wind, rain, and drought. These are among the most powerful dynamics that are reshaping places and the experiences of millions of people in the world today.

In a 2003 report commissioned by the Pentagon called *An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and Its Implications for United States National Security*, authors Peter Schwartz and Doug Randall assess what they call the "unthinkable." In a world afflicted with climate cataclysms:

> The United States and Australia are likely to build defensive fortresses around their countries because they have the resources and reserves to achieve self-sufficiency. With diverse growing climates, wealth, technology, and abundant resources, the United States could likely survive shortened growing cycles and harsh weather conditions without catastrophic losses. Borders will be strengthened around the country to hold back unwanted starving immigrants from the Caribbean islands (an especially severe problem), Mexico, and South America.[23]

Since this crude Pentagon report was issued in 2003, the United States has more than doubled its number of armed Border Patrol agents. It has added over 650 miles of walls and barriers along the U.S.-Mexico divide, including the section that got swept into Mexico with the surge of storm water from the hurricane. The United States has poured billions into advanced technology, radar systems, drones, and tethered aerostats. Australia, too, has inaugurated a 6,000-strong border force. According to geographer Elisabeth Vallet, there were 16 border fences when the Berlin Wall fell in 1988. Now there are more than 70 across the globe, a number that accelerated after 9/11 and includes Hungary, Greece, Spain, Morocco, Turkey, and India, to name a few, among the countries that have also constructed border walls.

Border security is becoming a "globally sung mantra," says April Humble, a researcher from the Secretariat of the Earth League, and enforcement regimes are spreading faster and to more places than ever before. The reasons cited for these border build-ups are like the tripartite mission of U.S. Customs and Border Protection: stopping terrorists, stopping immigrants, and stopping drugs. However, now there is more to it. As Humble says, this is a "situation of border fortification in a warming world," a warming world where there is no legal protection for families who are suddenly displaced due to climate. It is a situation, she says, that is "highly toxic."

This suggests that the theater for future climate battles will be the world's ever thickening border zones and not, as national security forecasts constantly project, in

communities where individuals fight each other for scarce resources. "Battle," however, is probably an inappropriate term. While one side will deploy well-armed border guards to enforce borderlines (that in almost every occasion were drawn by colonial powers, dividing once unified communities), on the other side will be ever-larger masses of people fleeing from ecological, political, and economic catastrophes.

Thus, one of the most reliable forecasts for our collective future is that vast numbers of people will be on the move, and vast numbers of agents will be trained, armed, and paid to stop them.

"Border controls are most severely deployed by those Western regimes that create mass displacement," writes author Harsha Walia in the book *Undoing Border Imperialism*, "and most severely deployed against those whose very recourse to migration results from the ravages of capital and military occupation. Practices of arrest without charge, expulsion, indefinite detention, torture, and killings have become the norm in militarized border zones."[24] Walia's analysis takes into account the disturbing correspondence between the fact that the world's biggest polluters—including the United States, which has emitted more metric tons of greenhouse gas pollution than any other country since the Industrial Revolution—are the same countries constructing unprecedented border regimes.

In *Storming the Wall*, I report from the flashpoints where climate clashes are beginning to play out, and those places where future battles will most likely erupt. I have set out to chronicle the way a massive system of social and economic

exclusion militarizes divisions not only between the rich and the poor, but between the environmentally secure and the environmentally exposed.

The pages ahead explore how the idea of fixed and linear borders—and the categories of people borders are supposed to protect against—have changed. Border enforcement zones now claim wider swaths of territory and blend into the very real war being waged against an ever-shifting category of people who are deemed "unwanted."

At an August 2016 Republican presidential campaign rally in Tucson, Arizona, the crowd erupted into a loud cheer when Mike Pence stated that if elected, the Donald Trump administration would, without a doubt, build a border wall. I was in the process of writing this book when I attended that rally, and it was uncertain who would win. Outside it was baking in downtown Tucson, another day in the hottest year on record. Humankind is now, perhaps for the first time in history, truly the proverbial frog in a steady, but ever-quickening pot of boiling water.

Under the presidency of Trump, "wall" continues to be one of many bigoted code words thrown like red meat to a voracious constituency. While Trump may add sections—even in the form of an imposing cement fortification—to the preexisting border wall, he will not build a contiguous 2,000-mile barrier. What he will do is far worse: militarize the country with more cameras, radar, drones, roving patrols, guns, bullets, and checkpoints clogging every vein and artery that enters the United States, a process that has been going on now for many years that will gear up and go full throttle.

In a February 2017 communiqué titled "The Walls

Above, the Cracks Below (And To The Left)" the indigenous Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico, wrote that "Borders are no longer just lines drawn on maps and customs checkpoints, but walls of armies and police, of cement and brick, of laws and persecution. In the world above, the hunting of human beings increases and is celebrated with clandestine competitions: whoever expels, incarcerates, confines, and murders the most win."[25] Perhaps there is no better way to describe what is coming the world's way.

Indeed, as Trump nuked every single mention of climate change from the White House's website on inauguration day 2017, and then—a few months later—backed out of the Paris climate agreement, it could be understood that, as the Zapatistas surmise, from a U.S. presidential perspective, the crises caused by a rapidly warming world will be addressed with walls, bullets, drones, cops, and cages.

Border zones are increasingly far more expansive than any actual boundary line, such as in the United States, where border enforcement and immigration checkpoints extend 100 miles inland. The international boundary line is "neither the first nor last line of defense" says former Border Patrol chief Mike Fisher. The militarized atmosphere that results from this furthers the feeling that we are living in what the American Civil Liberties Union calls "Constitution-free zones."[26] In these zones, Homeland Security agents persistently stop and interrogate people even during routine and mundane daily events, such as when they are going to the grocery store or to school. In the event of massive upheavals in the United States—with vivid past examples that include the 1936 Bum Blockade set up on the California state

borders to stop Dust Bowl victims from crossing into the state, or climate catastrophes such as Hurricane Katrina that included Border Patrol agents policing black neighborhoods in New Orleans—a constellation of armed checkpoints can quickly attempt to establish authoritarian domination over a population. After all, as sociologist Timothy Dunn shows quite clearly in the book *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border*, these border zones operate under a Pentagon doctrine of low-intensity conflict.

But the idea of homeland security is far bigger than this, connecting law enforcement and the military via an increasingly pervasive surveillance grid that serves and connects both. Border enforcement is but one component of many in this homeland security apparatus. As constitutional lawyer John Whitehead says, the United States is ruthlessly building a "standing army on American soil." With its 240,000 employees and $61 billion annual budget, Whitehead points out, the Department of Homeland Security is militarizing police units, stockpiling ammunition, building detention centers, and spying on American citizens. In the pages ahead I examine not just the booming homeland security business that serves border enforcement, but also its many components that can be used in a variety of ways, including crowd control, biometric ID readings, and surveillance. According to economic reports, the national security industry will mushroom into a $546 billion market by 2022. As it stands right now, accelerating climate destabilization goes hand in hand with accelerating militarization and border enforcement.

Among the many things that go underreported but

should be common knowledge, is the torrent of resources gushing into the global security apparatus and its industries, while only a trickle is marshaled to deter and prevent the human activities that cause global warming and climate change. As Ben Hayes says in the book *The Secure and the Dispossessed*, the "fundamental problem with 'security': at its core is the essentially repressive goal of *making things stay the same*—no matter how unjust they may be."[27] As Hayes writes, the very same institutions that issue warnings about the security implications of climate upheavals are "spying on perfectly legitimate and democratic activity to make sure that it doesn't get in the way of business as usual."[28]

This is why the image of a border barrier, semi-consumed by Mother Earth and covered with small purple flowers, is so important, for it is a testament that the course we are currently on is not the only option. In today's climate era—some are calling it the Anthropocene—there are millions of people who are opting for sustainable lifestyles and practices, opting to organize against climate change, against militarization, and against the suicidal business-as-usual scenario. There are environmental activists who have risked—and even lost—their lives to raise awareness about the urgency of the current ecological crisis, and to champion sustainable, just, and cooperative living.

As the world becomes more environmentally, politically, and economically volatile, and more and more walls go up, increasing numbers of ordinary people are coming forward to extend solidarity across borders of nationality, race, and class. Against all odds, hope, optimism, and solidarity drive great change. I was surprised and inspired multiple times

while researching and writing this small volume by the many people who have launched political, social, and economic projects at a grassroots level, often making connections between people on opposite sides of militarized borders.

One such cross-border project was happening where I stood just east of Agua Prieta. An organization known as Cuenca Los Ojos was using ancient water-harvesting techniques to restore diverse plant life, flowing ponds and creeks, and animal life in ecosystems shared by the United States and Mexico. Around where that discarded border barrier lay were galvanized wire cages, called *gabions*, on the banks and beds of the wash. The *gabions* were filled with rocks and went as deep as 18 feet into the ground. At first glance, they had the striking appearance of intricate stone walls. But instead of keeping people out, they were built to be sponges shaped to the contour of the riverbank, slowing the water and replenishing the soil with life, miraculously recharging the water table in a place stricken with a 16-year drought.

Another border wall, indeed, is possible.

It is in these sorts of acts of hands-on "imagination," in the term of the most preeminent nature writers in the United States, Barry Lopez, that hope is germinating. "Our hope," he states, "is in each other. . . . We must find ways to break down barriers between ourselves and a reawakened sense of power to do good in the world."[29]

As challenging as these times may be, despite the walls, the guns, and all the corruption, a reawakened sense of life, connection, and power is deepening and spreading. The little purple flowers continue to bloom. There are many ways to storm the wall.