A Journey Home:

Witnessing Trauma and Deconstructing Healing on the United States-Mexico Border

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INTRODUCTION

Lucy Zhang: Here we are at the last question. What do you think people like me, who are temporary summer volunteers and don't return to the No More Deaths community—how should we take care of ourselves and how should we heal from the experiences we've had at the camp?

Gene Lefebvre: Well, I will answer the question if you will [laughs]. Umm [pause] I think you are hooked [laughed], I think you are hooked in work with people that is going to be pretty deep stuff. I don't think you're going to be able to live a life that's a ritual. You're trapped [laughs], you've got the plague and I mean there's nothing better. But if you're the kind of person you are, I don't think you're going to be able to satisfy your life with living a typical job and a lot of people, a lot of people do that. It's not just the job, you can have a job that's pretty routine and find other ways to do this kind of stuff—volunteer stuff but you're not going to be happy just to live an ordinary life—you're gonna be into it. So this question for you is really personal, isn't it?

Lucy Zhang: Yeah...

Gene Lefebvre: Yeah it is. It's like how are you going to maintain your sanity doing this stuff? [Laughs]

This thesis is the story of volunteers who provide Latin Americans migrants—those crossing the Arizona Sonoran desert—with direct humanitarian aid. It is the critical analysis of privilege, positioning, and ability within the context of humanitarian aid. I am interested in the power of privilege to enable and deny aid. Privilege allows the aid worker to provide for migrants yet simultaneously places the aid worker and migrant on two different levels of need. Because the aid worker is seen as the one with privilege and ability, his or her emotional and psychological needs are often overlooked or devalued. Additionally, aid work is sometimes so highly praised that many volunteers do not recognize their own needs. Volunteers see themselves as responding to a crisis without explicitly recognizing the consequences they themselves may face as a result of working in a violent environment. This results in a paradoxical othering of the aid worker. In an attempt to respond to the othering of
the underserved undocumented migrant communities on the border, aid workers often other
themselves. Volunteers witness the pain and trauma that migrants experience, causing them
to undervalue their own problems and needs. Moreover, Cultural Anthropology scholars
often neglect the perspective of aid workers with regard to the process of witnessing trauma
and healing from that violence. There is little current research on the perspective of aid
workers and even less information on the trauma volunteers experience.

Traditionally, many people view aid work as an entirely noble entity. Volunteers
come to help others in need—what could be wrong with that? As time progressed, scholars
came to scrutinize humanitarian aid and its organizations more closely. Currently, many
scholars would say that humanitarian aid, while important, is wrought with difficulties and
complications. I seek to both critique this current view of humanitarian aid and also to
expand the critique. Yes, aid work is inherently problematic, and there are numerous
situations and outcomes to consider, but we must also recognize the need for and importance
of academic research on not only the victims but also those who seek to help victims.

While my thesis aims to address the concerns of aid workers, it is also a personal
perspective, or more accurately, a “journey of coming home,” of struggling to make sense of
two worlds and the many borders associated with those worlds. It is a reflexive process that
is continually changing and readjusting.

I argue that the daily tasks involved in working at an aid station on the United States-
Mexico border involves a constant negotiation of identity. The borderlands are unusual
geographical landmarks that are in constant transition—they are the site of a delicate
interplay between aggressors and victims. Without healing, the experience of aid workers is
violent, deprecating, and forgotten. The stories of aid workers have yet to be academically valued and shared. Therefore, the process of healing from these stories and experiences is an uniquely lonely and unknown one.

My thesis begins the conversation on assessing the needs of humanitarian aid workers by using No More Deaths as a case study. Below I have stated the mission of the No More Deaths organization as written on its website:

1No More Deaths is an organization whose mission is to end death and suffering on the U.S./Mexico border through civil initiative: the conviction that people of conscience must work openly and in community to uphold fundamental human rights. Our work embraces the Faith-Based Principles for Immigration Reform and focuses on the following themes:

• Direct aid that extends the right to provide humanitarian assistance
• Witnessing and responding
• Consciousness raising
• Global movement building
• Encouraging humane immigration policy.

No More Deaths is a humanitarian aid organization located in Tucson, Arizona. It was founded in 2004 after participants at a faith-based conference decided that there was insufficient humanitarian aid on the Arizona border. United in their beliefs that current government action that advocated immigration reform through the militarization of the border was inherently inhumane, the participants created No More Deaths in the hopes of

preventting unnecessary death and suffering on the border. No More Deaths seeks to provide basic assistance to migrants, namely food, water, and occasionally shelter. They are mainly an apolitical group which asserts that basic human rights should be provided to all people regardless of citizenship; however, more recently, they have engaged in some political activism due to political pressures spurred on by the Arizona Fish and Wildlife authorities, who are currently writing citations for volunteers who leave water within the Buenos Aires Wildlife Reserve. This is mainly in response to government prohibition against placing water in specific areas such as national wildlife refuges along the border. No More Deaths volunteers fear these citations may affect their overall longterm goals.

**My Thesis as a Personal Piece**

Although mainly focused on the experiences of other aid workers, my thesis is nevertheless personal because of my own experiences as a No More Deaths volunteer. My interpretations of particular scenarios and conversations are framed around my role as a fellow volunteer and aid worker. Acting as both the aid worker and the anthropologist, I experienced my work becoming intensely personal and often conflicted. The act of witnessing another human being's trauma is emotionally fraught. The decision to question and analyze another person's experience of witnessing may also become problematic. As both a participant within the No More Deaths community and a researcher, I am able to

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analyze the stories and experiences of volunteers with a unique perspective.

Moreover, as a first generation American, I found that the stories of other migrants resonated with my own identity and the identities of my parents. Because of this immigrant identity, I have a personal connection to the topic of immigration and border crossing. While on the border as an aid worker, I often recalled the story of my father's own border crossing as a child. When my father was fifteen, he left home with his older brother to migrate to the city of Hong Kong. As the eldest sons, my father and his brother left to find jobs in Hong Kong to support their family. The day they left, they carried with them only a few cups of rice and a steamed chicken. My grandfather had been imprisoned by the Communists because of his involvement with the Kuomintang (the Chinese Nationalist party). The Communists however, mismanaged my grandfather's farm, and soon the family ran out of resources. My father and uncle planned to walk from their rural village to the city, but the police apprehended them before they reached the city. For my father, it is a story he attempts to erase, and unlike his brother, he did not attempt to cross the line again. The process of undocumented migrations is always difficult. I remember my grandmother touching back to this story during family reunions, while my father either denies or brushes it off.

Although this act occurred decades ago in a completely different environment, it nevertheless alludes to universal challenges of political activism, economic freedom, human suffering, and the struggle towards happiness. The belief in a fundamental right to happiness forms the basis of the humanitarian argument. It is also a common story of a person who seeks to provide for his or her family. Because this story is not a geographically bounded experience, it directly reminds me of the many stories that I heard from migrants crossing the
Sonoran desert. In one way or another, families lost their farms and their ability to sustain themselves. They traveled away from their homes, oftentimes selling whatever they could in order to provide for the ones they loved. In this way, the story of a man in Oaxaca, Mexico is also my father's story in Guangdong, China, and it becomes my story in Arizona, United States as well.

Years have elapsed since my father's journey to the city and later to the United States. Today, it seems that I am on the other side of that line. I am no longer an outsider...somehow I have become one of the “haves.” Because of that shift, my work is focused on the perspective of the aid worker. I am not a refugee, a migrant, or even an immigrant. I am a United States citizen engaged in work focused on ending the immediate suffering of migrants. I am concerned with the United States government's plan to deter undocumented immigration through natural structures such as the desert—thus enforcing death as government policy (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2002). I am a humanitarian. I am someone who has the ability to provide aid and the privilege to be free of direct victimhood. Because of my own identity, I am interested in how people of privilege (the privilege of United States citizenship) negotiate their status and power through work with the humanitarian aid group No More Deaths. How do their experiences translate into an emotional discourse that is both violent and empowering?

On July 24, 2009, I conducted the above interview with Gene Lefebvre, a retired Presbyterian minister from Arizona. I remember that day quite vividly. We sat slightly across from each on white plastic lawn chairs. I placed my recorder and beat-up composition book on a green patio table where the heat and sun had begun to chip the paint. Gene wore a straw
hat with a pair of sunglasses that hung from a dusty black lanyard. As the monsoon season sent enormous clouds filled with rain over the hot sand that afternoon I remember, was quite mild. It was a slightly windy day, and I struggled to keep my neatly printed consent forms in order. When I began the interview Gene joked to me about the seriousness of my demeanor and the types of plans I had for research. At the end of my interview, with that last question, I think he understood.

Gene was my both my mentor and friend during the two summers I worked with No More Deaths. He was a gifted mentor; he understood the intricacies of dialogue, human motivation, and action. I think it was skill built on decades of youth group experience. He read people like they were books, and I was no different. I asked this last question to ten different individuals, yet Gene was the only one who made this personal connection. In uncovering this aspect of my research, Gene completely stunned me and exposed a vulnerable side of my work unknown even to myself. I knew I was passionate about my work, but for some reason it had never occurred to me that my passions arose because of my own needs to answer a question. My work became personal because it became a way for me to understand my own internal conflicts through the experiences and struggles of other volunteers.

I was 19 when I first left for the Sonoran desert. I was not sure of what I was looking for or what I could expect. I wanted to help those who traveled through the desert, and I wanted to connect their lives with my own. What I got instead was a whirlwind of emotional grief and internal tribulation. This thesis aims to uncover some of those mental processes. It centers on the above dialogue excerpt, which in only a few words, encapsulates my whole
argument. What is the role of the humanitarian aid worker? How should temporary aid workers readjust and heal from their No More Deaths experience? What is the role of the humanitarian organization in helping its volunteers heal? What responsibility does the aid worker have to heal herself or himself? As Gene said, “It's like how are you going to maintain your sanity doing this stuff?”

**Literature Review**

I look to numerous sources when tackling this enormous question. In order to begin this discourse, I break Gene's question into four separate concerns. First, I base my current information and anthropological background of the United States-Mexico borderlands on the writings of Patricia Price, Gilberto Rosas, and Leo Chavez, among others. These prominent border scholars address the current issues of the United States’ southern border, specifically that of Arizona. These literatures provided current facts, figures, as well as background about the border as United States citizens currently experience it. More importantly, these writers share a common political belief that the government's immigration deterrence policy is weak at best, and at worst, a death sentence that directly plays into the beliefs and arguments of humanitarian aid workers.

Second, I unpack Gene's question in terms of the systemic, daily, cultural, and geographic violence of the borderlands. In examining the anthropology of violence, I rely on the work of Veena Das. In *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, Das reverses the conventional understanding of violence by arguing that violence arises out of the
ordinary. The late political scientist Hannah Arendt first discussed the importance of the ordinary through her work on a phenomenon she coined, “the banality of evil.” Arendt theorized that the most evil acts man has ever committed (e.g. the Holocaust) occurred because ordinary people believed these acts were normal (Arendt 1963). Das extended this theory: violence may arise from the ordinary, but that violence does not have to be overtly physical. In fact, it may not be physical at all. It is not a deviation from the ordinary, but rather it is the “ordinary” continual tasks that people endure. Das's literature on social suffering and violence is incredibly important to my research. Aid workers endure social suffering by mentally rationalizing the violence on the border. Das addresses this subsequent violence that causes the privileged to become their own victims.

In looking specifically at the violence on the borderlands, Gloria Anzaldua's book *Borderlands*, which theorizes the role of globalization and violence in culture, is also essential. Viewed as the premier border scholar, Gloria Anzaldua examines notions of identity and violence. Anzaldua uses her personal identity as a queer woman to explain the violence she has encountered on the border. She also addresses the concerns of a writer and how emotions affect the style, perspective, and topic of a particular piece. Mostly, I rely on Anzaldua's writings as a framework for my own: I admire her ability to interweave her personal identity into her critical analysis of the border.

I also look specifically at the work of Rocio Magana who focuses on the same area of the border—between Tucson, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora. Magana's dissertation, *Bodies on the Line* examines the role of death on the border. Although she concentrates on a different humanitarian aid group in Tucson (Humane Borders), her positioning and critique of
humanitarian aid on the border overlaps some of my own. While Magana mainly concentrates on the efficiency of Humane Borders, she also questions similar ideologies of privilege and the relationship between the rescued and the rescuer.

Third, I examine the critiques of humanitarian aid through an anthropologic lens. I use the work of Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss's book, *Humanitarianism in Question*. Barnett and Weiss are editors of this selection of articles that attempt to tackle the question of humanitarianism. Is humanitarianism beneficial or does it ultimately hurt the very communities it seeks to help? Is humanitarianism simply a revised “white man's burden?” What does it mean to be a humanitarian in a globalized world? These questions are clearly related to my own questions of privilege and ability. Additionally, I draw upon the work of Michel Foucault, focusing heavily on the theory of “letting”—the belief that modern societies sacrifice certain members of their community in order to prosper and Giorgio Agamben who introduces the concept of the “homo sacer”—the theory that a body can be sacrificed but not mourned.

Lastly, I look to the anthropology of healing. I use Elaine Scarry's book, *The Body in Pain*, Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman's book, *The Empire of Trauma*, and Fiona Terry's book, *Condemned to Repeat*, to describe the process and effects of witnessing trauma. These sources look at the role of power in relation to pain and suffering. How does the body translate negative mental stimuli into tangible physical pain? Moreover, once emotional or psychological trauma has been introduced, how does the body respond in order to recover from this abuse? Although Scarry and Fassin and Rechtman's books are not particularly concerned with the mental difficulties of aid workers, their books deconstruct the notion of
pain and healing. They examine nuances of stress and how that stress becomes pain that is either healed or exacerbated.

Methods

Research conducted in this thesis was based on two methodologies: participant observation and formal recorded interviews. My fieldwork was done over two summers. In the summer of 2008, I spent almost four weeks with No More Deaths. During that time I collected four formal interviews with time limits ranging from half an hour to almost two hours in length. I also gathered historical information on No More Deaths in addition to information on the general function and operation of the organization. In the summer of 2009, I spent five weeks with No More Deaths. I collected ten formal interviews ranging from an hour to an hour and half in length. When I was not interviewing, I participated in all activities and responsibilities of a volunteer. Throughout the day, I would take field notes in the form of small “jottings” of information that I planned to further expand. In the evenings, I recorded significant events and interactions related to my research topic in a personal journal. I also spent time reviewing my jottings and analyzing some of these pieces. During my second summer, I spent two weeks at the camp, and then went to Tucson to interview in-town informants. After that week, I then returned to work at the camp for two more weeks where I collected two additional interviews.

My informants were all No More Deaths volunteers. Short-term summer volunteers who worked at the desert camp were my main informants in terms of observation and
community participation. I lived and worked with these volunteers, many of whom only stayed at the camp for a week. Short-term volunteers are those who do not permanently reside in Tucson. They travel from across the United States to volunteer with No More Deaths for a minimum of one week. Many of these volunteers are returning aid workers who have worked at the camp before. The majority of my interviews were conducted with in-town, long-term aid workers. These informants tended to be older retired individuals, in contrast to the camp volunteers, whose ages ranged from 19-28. Many of the in-town volunteers had had previous experience working as humanitarians on the border during the 1980's Sanctuary Movement. While the camp volunteers were responsible for the direct humanitarian aid action such as placing water on migrant trails, in-town volunteers were responsible for organizing the camp, publicity campaigns, as well as some political lobbying.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter One, I focus on the concept of the Borderlands as the “in-betweens of the world.” I describe the area of the border where I conducted research as well as the history of the No More Deaths organization. Drawing from Gloria Anzaldua and Joseph Nevin's work, I further their argument on the disconnect often experienced by Border citizens by examining the role of the transitional summer No More Deaths volunteer. From there I will retrace the role of border aid workers by examining the history of the United States-Mexico border by focusing on the emergence of humanitarian aid groups, specifically that of No More Deaths. First, I will examine the physical history of the border. Second, I will look at the history of
labor and immigration on the border. As a result of the intense immigration in the borderlands, I will conclude this section by examining the push factors that lead to the rise of humanitarian organizations such as No More Deaths.

In Chapter Two, I move into the finer details of my research. I describe what type of organization No More Deaths is—its unique aspects or characteristics, the typical volunteers, and the tasks associated with being a volunteer. This is where I introduce the notion of privilege and rescue on the borderlands—how being a No More Deaths volunteer is an essentially privileged and powerful role. With that privilege are numerous responsibilities as well as difficulties. I begin to develop a theory of “two spheres.” Although these two spheres or “worlds” are overlapping, volunteers constantly find themselves traveling between the worlds. The volunteer holds the role of the able, they are the rescuers and yet they are also dispossessed because they neither accept nor acknowledge their own needs.

In Chapter Three, I will reintroduce Veena Das's argument on violence and how it is related to humanitarian aid work. Given the constant negotiation of power and positioning, I argue that the normal becomes inherently violent on the borderlands. I describe the relationships of aid workers to migrants, border patrolmen, and coyotes (human smugglers). The identity and positioning of all these groups creates a uniquely mundane or rather normalized understanding of violence on the border. Violence is systemic, entrenched in history and current policy, and physical—the physical abuse of women and men—in the borderlands. In Chapter Three, I also introduce my hypothesis that a unique paradigm involving privilege, violence, and trauma is formed and upheld by No More Deaths workers.

In Chapter Four, I begin the discussion of trauma and the emotional responsibility
associated with humanitarian aid and the borderlands. I start by asking, what is trauma? I unpack this definition by re-examining the uses of these words, “witnessing”, “secondary trauma,” and “vicarious trauma,” that are often used interchangeably. Then I follow the discussion with examples of inherent violence drawn from my interviews and field notes. I expose the inherent violence associated with working on the border as a No More Deaths volunteer. Why does this happen? How did this happen? To explore the relationship of privilege and identity, I look to the demographics and characteristics of the No More Deaths community in order to begin the discussion.

In Chapter Five, I continue the discussion of secondary trauma by exploring the concept of burnout. I begin by deconstructing the history and use of the word burnout. Then I examine the effect that the word burnout has on No More Deaths volunteers. I ask, what happens after someone experiences the violence of the border? How long can someone some “last” before burning out? Why does burnout happen? What does it look like? Who is affected by burnout? Again, I rely on my analysis of my field notes and interviews.

In Chapter Six, my thesis takes a more critical turn. I begin the chapter by posing the question, why do aid workers often deny their own needs? I answer this question by examining the concept of healing and deconstructing its current connotative meaning. I look closely to the culture of No More Deaths and its stance on witnessing trauma and recovering from humanitarian work. Does the organization value healing? If so, why did I find a large inconsistency between how aid workers take care of migrants, and how they take care of themselves? I explain why this is a pressing concern by highlighting some situations in which aid workers were involved in medical evacuations as examples.
In the final chapter, I conclude by examining how aid workers find resiliency or the strength to return to the borderlands. How have these individuals “journeyed home?” What motivates people to return to the work? I close my thesis by attempting to answer Gene's question once again. The decision to re-engage in No More Deaths humanitarian aid work is a personal one. I examine my own journey back home and return to the desert. “It's like how are you going to maintain your sanity doing this stuff?”
CHAPTER ONE:

History of the Borderlands and the Latino Migrant

The US-Mexico border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition (Anzaldua 1999, 25).

At the first look at the border, it might not seem like it's a zone of conflict particularly people who are far away but over time one begins to see [pause] what we would call “low intensity conflict” that eats away at you at a day in and day out basis, the seeing of traumatized people, the ongoing presence of military, the ever presence of being interrogated, and the planes going over. Seeing the impacts of people's wounds, of people's suffering, those begin to insinuate themselves into one's psyche—to my psyche for that matter. - John Hyde

The Borderlands

Personal

Saturday, June 27, 2009. I arrive in Tucson at approximately 9:45AM. As soon as I step off the plane and out of the airport, I feel the hot dry Southwest sun on the nape of my neck. I go to the same baggage claim area as last year, pick up my beaten up navy blue gym bag and proceed to the bus stop. I shuffle through my large handbag which on that day was the exact shade of crystal blue as the Arizona morning sky. Finally, I find the directions needed in order to reach Southside Presbyterian church where my orientation would be
taking place at noon. I look at my cell phone and see that I had easily two hours to spare for what would be only a twenty minute bus ride. I decide to put my belongings down and sit on a shaded concrete bench which is surprisingly warm. Within ten minutes I realize I ran out of water and notice how thirsty I am. I go to refill my bottle and thinking I had ample time, I spend a little over an hour on my phone catching up with friends and family about my trip.

Finally I decided to get on the bus—I thought there was only one bus line leaving the airport. I was wrong. The scenery of Tucson quickly disappeared into something strange. After about twenty minutes on the bus, I finally accepted the suspicion that I was traveling in the wrong direction, and I realized I was not going near anything familiar. I approached the bus driver and told him I would like to get off at the next stop. He looked at me up and down, surmised I was not local and told me that that would be a terrible idea and that this area was “not safe” and I needed to wait. I looked out the window and I did not see anything particular about the spot. The same squat looking clay houses with their typical desert saguaros canvassed the window of the bus. I saw nothing unsafe or dangerous about the spot, except that it was peculiar that a bus stop would be across a four lane road. It did not seem like the ideal spot to stop on a busy day but today the road was empty.

The bus driver, an elderly man with curly white hair and dark freckles refused to let me off the stop so I sat back down. He told me he would answer my questions at the end of the line which would not be for another thirty minutes. When we finally arrived at the end of the route which was a strangely designed business park made to look like a suburban neighborhood, he asked me where I wanted to go. When I showed him the bus directions to the church, he instantly began to shake his head. First and without surprise, he scolded me
for not getting on the right bus at the airport. Then he looked me straight in the eye and he said, “Why would you want to go there? That area is worst than where you wanted to get off!”

This struck me a little strange, since I had been in that area before—in fact it was one of the sites of my Duke Engage program. This bus driver was slightly terrified of an area where I felt comfortable and safe. When he dropped me off at the central bus transit, he told me “good luck” in a seemingly sarcastic tone before muttering again, “I don't know why you want to go there.” I realized then that this was my first experience with someone from Tucson who was not intimately involved with immigrant advocacy. To them—probably the majority of Tucson residents—the borderlands are an incredibly dangerous place in which people are protected solely by where they are geographically located. There are places where people are allowed to be and places where no one with privilege should want to traverse. This I thought would be the first step to traveling and working on the borderlands. If I wanted to study and write about No More Deaths, I would have to accept that adventuring into discomfort would be an everyday experience.

*Internal*

“...you’re leaving the center and coming down to the edge...literally, coming to the border. Once you’re at the border of our country, you see its face and it’s this terrible wall that we’ve built across our desert, it’s these people starving and walking and dying of heat exposure.” - Thomas Smith

Volunteers like Thomas often feel shocked at the sight of the borderlands. What they know as quintessentially “American” can completely disintegrate. United States citizens know that there is a wall between their country and Mexico yet when they witness the wall

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4 Name Changed
and the border communities surrounding it, they are unsure of where they belong. In *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa artfully incorporates a thoughtful reflection on the violent history of the borderlands. Anzaldúa interprets the borderlands as a violent geography due to her own identification as a person who belongs to two worlds that are constantly engaged in battle. As a result, Anzaldúa concludes that she belongs to neither place. Inhabitants of the borderlands are essentially refugees, cast away by two cultures and societies. Those who have lived or experienced the border feel its violent pulls. This causes the border to become an open wound. Territorial expansion and conquest coupled with imperialist ideology left the borderlands as a place when wrongs were never written and apologizes never voiced. As a result, the people of the border are unclear as to whose policy or politics to follow. Chicanos know that the borderlands were in fact Mexican lands in the past. Those who are now considered “aliens” or foreigners are in fact the historical citizens. This violence that occurs when discussing issues of ownership makes the borderlands a vague and undetermined place. There is a constant struggle between what is legally right and what is ethically right. All inhabitants experience the violence through geography, as generations of Mexican Americans watch their rights and respect dwindle.

Anzaldúa is able to vividly describe the pain on the borderlands. Particularly striking to me about her work is its emphasis on writing as a personal journey. The borderlands are not simply a place in the Americas; rather it is a culture, a landscape, an ecosystem, and a community. Working in the borderlands is an expressly emotional and personal experience. The constant negotiation of insider and outsider, wanted and unwanted, produces a different type of perspective—one that is continually changing. “Landscapes not only allow us to tell
stories about ourselves to ourselves and thereby construct collective identities; they also allow us to write them down” (Price 2004, 23). The borderlands are an area of the United States where one constantly has to reconstruct his or her identity.

Living in the borderlands, Anzaldua focuses on writing as a type of mythical rite or tradition where the act of writing is essential for a balanced life. For Anzaldua, healing begins with the writing. Anzaldua’s use of the word “trance” is particularly interesting (Anzaldua 1999, 92). The act of writing overtakes Anzaldua in a way that it possesses her body and mind. If she does not write, she then becomes ill, as if the lack of writing is also a denial of therapy to treat trauma. For Anzaldua, the borderlands are a lifestyle that physically and mentally overtakes a person. This lifestyle is one of strife and hardship that never truly heals but rather enters a cycle of pain and awareness, “that transforms living in the borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience” (Anzaldua 1999, 94-95). Through this thesis process, I have also experienced the pull that writing exerts on the writer. When witnessing events on the border, I was initially only able to write small “jottings” to describe what I saw and how I reacted. Only through deliberate grappling with these experiences, was I able to translate these jottings into long narratives.

External

The southern borderland of the United States is approximately 2,000 miles. It spans the distance of four states: California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Throughout much of American history, the borderlands have been an area of continual conquest. Before European settlers arrived in the Southwest, the area was mainly inhabited by Native Americans who

5 http://www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/history/index.html
did not enforce strict borders. Then in the mid 1500's Spanish explorers arrived in the Americas and claimed hold over much of the borderlands. It was not until 1819 when a formal agreement, the Adam-Onis Treaty, was made between Spain and the United States. This treaty established the first boundary between the United States and Mexico. In 1821, Mexico seceded from Spain and became an independent republic. The battle for the borderlands continued, beginning with the fight for Texas and resulting in the United States-Mexico War in 1856. In 1848, the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the United States-Mexican war, and Mexico was required to cede half of its territory to the United States. This included modern day California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas—all areas of today's borderlands. As border scholar Patricia Price wrote, “Overnight, Mexicanos became second-class citizens in a foreign land, subject to discrimination, harassment, brutality, and land theft (Price 2004, 47).

The borderlands had forever changed. A power dynamic had been turned on its head, one that dispossessed dark skinned people from their lighter counterparts. “The power of place lies in the politics of its production, and that such politics is suffused with, not apart from, narrative, myth, and ritual. Claiming space, the ownership of sacred symbols, and the right to name, can constitute powerful authorial gestures in the scripting of collecting identity” (Price 2004, 31). The North became wealthy as the South dwindled. An informal labor relationship between Mexicans and Anglo Americans formed and culminated into the 1940's Bracero Program, a precursor of today's migrant labor program: the H2-A.

The use of temporary laborers or migrants changed the border effectively creating a new relationship between people and their landscapes. The border became more than an area
of change or identity negotiation; it became an area of temporary existence. A limbo of sorts, the borderlands have come to symbolize a place of uncertainty and a gamble on life. The stories and identities of those lost in the borderlands—some never making it north—some passing through only to discover more borders—and some trapped forever in the borderlands. These bodies withered in the heat of the sun. The stories of all these people became melded into the land and formed a collective experience.

In *Dry Place: Landscapes of Belonging and Exclusion*, Patricia Price reveals the irony of the borderlands specifically the United States-Mexico desert. It is a place of extreme destruction and grief yet also a place of beauty and life. Price argues that this contrast enables the violent characteristics of borderlands. She claims that the constant struggle between identity and possession results in a raped geography. This act of “rape” in turn results in a place of constant hurt and healing—a characteristic of the border that Gloria Anzaldúa also spoke to. The border is an unnatural place, where hopes collide with fears and dreams become nightmares.

Today the fight for border “sovereignty,” is stronger than ever. In the 1800's, the argument was centered on the physical possession of the borderlands. Today, it is a fight over identity. Undocumented immigration is at the forefront of political debates. United States citizens are polarized by their opinions and beliefs surrounding the very notion of “Who is human?” Anti-immigrant groups call for “illegals” to “Go back to Mexico,” claiming immigrants hurt the “American way of life” while pro-immigrant groups counter with arguments framing migrants as “economic refugees” and essential to maintaining the
comforts of the “American way of life.”

Price voices these concerns by United States citizens when she writes,

“A rising tide of racialized Anglo-nationalism in the United States has, of late, shaped conservative political campaigns, of civil rights gains, and led to a hardening of the very infrastructure of the border itself. Do-it-yourself border vigilantism is on the rise by property owners on the U.S. side of the line, while thieves of all stripes prey on migrants on the Mexican side. From Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego to Operation Hold the Line in El Paso, fortified urban borders have diverted immigrants, particularly families on the move, into desert areas when hundreds die each year from thirst, heat exhaustion, and exposure.” (Price 2004, 91)

The United States foreign borderlands policy is simply to keep migrants out. Beginning with Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego to Operation Streamline in Tucson, immigration officials are working hard to enforce border policies. Yet their policy is simply to use death as a deterrent. Since the mid-1990's, with the onset of these border enforcement policies, bodies recovered from the United States-Mexico border have exponentially increased and today exceed over 4,000 deaths (Nevins 2008). Unfortunately, as Joseph Nevins notes, “But more typically, the deaths bring about little to no reaction. To the extent that they are reported nationally, silence is the typical response. In many ways, migrant deaths have become a way of life in between 'first' and 'third' worlds” (Nevins 2008, 168). Walls have been build across the southern United States border so as to funnel migrants into the most dangerous parts of the borderlands, areas where food, water, and protection from the elements are scarce if existent (Magana 2008, 12; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2002).

The Migrants

6 Summary of American responses toward undocumented immigration taken from the movie “Crossing Arizona” produced in 2006
While I was collecting fieldwork in Arizona, I heard from many older volunteers that they remembered a time in their childhoods when the borderlands were once free, when migrant workers would simply cross the line in order to work in the fields or act as handymen and construction workers. Brother towns decorated the border as families and friends crossed freely to celebrate holidays and festivities.

Today the borderlands have become only a stopping point for the majority of Latin American migrants. These migrants are in search of economic stability. They travel to “El Norte” in order to find jobs as laborers: gardeners, farmworkers, nannies, housekeepers, meatpackers, etc. They do all of this to support their family members in Latin America. Often times, families are separated because one member remains in the United States much longer than anticipated. Sometimes those in the United States form new families including children. Thousands of migrants find themselves trapped by invisible borders that separate them from their families, friends, and happiness.

The impetus for this massive migration of Latin Americans into the United States is mostly fueled by the North American Free Trade Agreement or NAFTA (Magana 2008, 4-8; Nevins 2008). Formed in 1994, this trade agreement effectively removed trade tariffs and restrictions among Mexico, Canada, and the United States essentially forming a free market. The idea was that the economies of Canada and the United States would cause an economic revolution in Mexico. Each country would only produce what was most efficient and desired by the other two countries. The market would decide what these items were and stabilize each country’s economy. This unfortunately did not happen. NAFTA made a small group of
Mexicans very wealthy while leaving small peasant farmers or campesinos with little or no protection. After NAFTA began in 1994, cheap subsidized United States genetically modified corn flooded the Mexican market. “The country still suffered from the effects of its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression that began in late 1994, the year that NAFTA began. Mexicans in Nogales, Sonora, and throughout the country commonly referred to this economic downturn as la crisis, as it marked an intensification of the urgent need to migrate” (Rosas 2007, 87).

Ironically, during NAFTA's negotiations, the United States and Canada petitioned to keep all of their agricultural subsidies while Mexico elected to have none. The result was that Mexican corn cost Mexicans more money than subsidized corn from the United States. As a result, the Mexican corn market plummeted. Mexico's agricultural industry comprised of campesinos or small plot farmers. Because of the trade agreement, many campesinos lost their land and way of life. Corn was for sale, but there were no buyers. As more and more farmers lost their land, unemployment and poverty became rampant. The peso plummeted and Mexico was left with a large population of empty handed farmers.

In Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society, Leo Chavez examines some reasons why migrants may choose to expose their own vulnerabilities and decide to work in the United States. First, there may be a family history of migratory work. The United States government instated programs such as the “Bracero program” in order to bring cheap and ample labor to the agricultural industry. Second, because of the poverty in Mexico and Central America, many migrants came to the United States in search of economic stability. Third, many believed they could achieve the “immigrant’s dream” in
which they would become financially wealthy and socially rich. Another reason for migration was to avoid family conflicts in their home country or to reunite with love ones in the United States—a phenomenon known as “chain migration.” Lastly, many migrants came to the United States simply for adventure or curiosity.

Chavez also speaks to how migrants may attain ownership. He (the migrant) is first separated from his own community. Then he must negotiate new rituals and actions in order to incorporate himself. Lastly, he may choose to bring his family and friends over. Many complications arise however, once families are reunited. The children may become more American than Mexican yet because of their undocumented status, are still seen as foreigners. Many of the women Chavez interviewed were heavily affected by the power dynamics they faced when working as nannies and housekeepers. Moreover, many migrants did not see their living conditions in Mexico or Central America as different from those in the United States. One of Chavez’s chief sites of research was Green Valley, a makeshift migrant campsite where homes were made from plywood or cardboard. Many of the women told Chavez that at least in their home countries they had access to running water and electricity/gas.

The majority of migrants crossing the borderlands are from the southern tip of Mexico. They are campesinos who have lost their small farms and are now looking to enter the undocumented labor force in the United States. Most of them are men ranging from 20-35 years old. Some women cross to rejoin with a love one and even some children cross in search of parents who they believe have abandon them. The border has become an area of hope—a place to cross in order to support one's family but also a place of death and
destruction where the biggest gamble is one's life. “Borders are those places where the power of the state becomes most tenuous, most dissipated, most challenged…the line itself signals this uncertainty: do we choose violence when our fears cannot be resolved, or do we jump the wire, and our fears, to search for new alternatives” (Price 2004, 148).

Death is not uncommon in the borderlands: in the hopes of achieving one's dreams many have failed to achieve their ultimate destination. Immigration policy has forced migrants to cross in only the most dangerous portions of the border. “These included attempting to navigate the unforgiving deserts of the southwest where the Border Patrol was freed from antagonizing U.S. citizens of Mexican descent. Current estimates hold that some 25 percent of migrants cross the border via what I have elsewhere called the ‘killing desert,’ where over 3,600 corpses have been found since the late 1990’s” (Rosas 2006, 338). Billions of dollars have been invested into “securing our borders” yet there seems to be no slowing down this labor migration. And even those who are fortunate enough to reach a job or family member “on the other side,” face numerous difficulties in a country that depends on their labor yet refuses to acknowledge their presence or importance. In many aspects, undocumented immigration has caused the entire United States to be one long and restrictive border.
CHAPTER TWO:

Aid Workers and the Motivation to Help

“People should not die of stupid things.” - (Redfield in Barnett and Weiss 2008, 202)

“A morally intolerable situation inspired a remarkable humanitarian movement in Southern Arizona in the spring of 2004. Driven by economic inequality, thwarted by ill-conceived US border policy, and ignorant of the harsh conditions of the Sonoran Desert, more than 2000 men, women, and children have died trying to cross the Mexican border into the United States since 1998. Most of the deaths occurred in the brutal heat of the summer months. With another summer of inevitable deaths looming, diverse faith-based and social activist groups—along with concerned individuals—felt compelled to act to stem the death tide and attempt to save at least some lives. The result was the converging of hundreds of volunteers—local, regional and national—who came together to work for one common goal: No Más Muertes: No More Deaths.

In October 2003, frustrated that despite the efforts of some well-established and well-organized humanitarian groups, lives were still being lost regularly in the Sonoran Desert, two groups of religious leaders in Tucson began meeting to search for a solution. One group, convened by Bishop Gerald Kicanas of the Roman Catholic Diocese and representatives of the Jewish community, sponsored several catalytic trips to Altar in Sonora, Mexico—a staging area for migrants and ground zero of the border crisis. In March 2004, the Multi-Faith Border Conference was held. At that March conference, the group, No More Deaths, presented its principles for immigration reform and the opportunity for involvement in the campaign for summer, 2004. On April 19, 2004, Arizona Interfaith Network pastors and leaders joined Bishop Kicanas and many multi-faith representatives on the lawn of the Arizona Capitol Building to urge the government to enact these principles for immigration reform.” -History of No More Deaths

The Aid Workers

Peter Redfield's blunt quotation that people should not die of stupid things fully encompasses the views of No More Deaths volunteers. Dying from the lack of water while in a developed country seems to be a pretty “stupid” way to die because it could be so easily prevented. United States citizens do not think that people could die from such seemingly archaic problems—today's killers are more evolutionary malicious. AIDS, cancer, stroke, and heart disease rank on the top of death fatalities in the United States. Dying from thirst just does not fit. As written in the history of No More Deaths, volunteers sought to band together in order to respond to the rising number of deaths.

Humanitarian aid is based upon core values like empathy and remorse—a feeling that something should be done in order to correct a particular wrong. As Michael Barnett argues, “Humanitarianism concerns the attempt to alleviate the suffering of distant strangers” (Barnett and Weism 2008, 237). Aid workers on the United States-Mexico border view themselves as politically aware individuals who seek to provide immediate aid to migrants crossing the desert. As mostly United States citizens, they see themselves as possessing some privileges such as citizenship which is withheld from migrants. They have the freedom and the right to work. They also have the right to be a happy—a universal value to aid workers. They see the plight of these “distant strangers” and they feel that it is their responsibility as citizens to stand up for what they believe is morally wrong. Because of the hundreds of deaths that occur each year, they believe there is substantial evidence that the United States government's immigration policy is incredibly flawed. Volunteers assert that basic assistance such as food, water, and shelter should be afforded to all people.
No More Deaths is only one of a handful of humanitarian aid organizations on the borderlands. They like the other organizations, hold many of the same values towards migrants and undocumented immigration. “These organizations underscore the border as site of convergence of people engaged in social struggle and everyday practices or resistances to the state of exception of the borderlands” (Rosas 2006, 341). They recognize that their work is often referred to as a temporary band aid. While their job is only to provide immediate relief, many volunteers work for better alternatives.

No More Deaths is a diverse community of people. The Tucson based organization includes “long-term in-town volunteers,” those who, as the name implies, live in Tucson and have a committed interest in No More Deaths. Then there are “temporary summer volunteers,” who come from across the United States to volunteer as aid workers for a minimum of one week with No More Deaths. Although there are in-town opportunities for temporary summer volunteers, the majority of summer volunteers work in the aid stations located directly on the United States-Mexico border in Nogales, Naco, and Agua Prieta or at the desert camp located in Arivaca.

In-town volunteers are split between two highly distant age groups. Many of the volunteers are retired Presbyterian pastors who participated in the 1980's Sanctuary Movement where churches declared their grounds as sanctuary to all El Salvadorian political refugees (Davidson 1988). The other group of in-town volunteers are 25-30 year olds who have been involved in border work and are essentially young activists. In-town volunteers

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8 Referring to immigrant advocacy groups such as “the Border Action Network, No More Deaths, the American Friend’s Service Committee’s Immigration Law Enforcement Monitoring Project, and the Coalición de Derechos Humanos/ Alianza Indígena sin fronteras (the Human Rights Coalition/Indigenous Alliance without Borders)” (Rosas 2006, 341).
manage the logistics of the organization. Their tasks range from organizing and leading the
desert aid camps to writing news releases and creating border awareness campaigns.

Summer volunteers tend to be younger than the long-term in-town aid workers. Their work also tends to be more immediate. Summer volunteers are roughly 19-30 years old and spend the majority of their time at the border aid stations or the desert camps. They are responsible for providing the direct assistance—food, water, medical assistance, and shelter to migrants. Many of the summer volunteers are university students whose organizations or classes have led them to one aspect or another of border education and activism.

Although the work of each individual aid worker is incredibly short lived, many volunteers argue that it is the stories and experiences they bring back to their home communities which will initiate the most change. For many United States citizens, the notion of the borderlands as an area of militarization or death is unfathomable. “To assert that places are narratively constructed is in fact to assert that they are power constructs, always processual, usually contested, and deeply performative. Stories can be powerfully real and really powerful” (Price 2004, 22). As Price argues, stories are powerful pieces of oral narrative that can be shared. For volunteers, these stories are even more important as they are able to increase awareness of the reality of the border, elicit empathy, and even lead others to act.

Aid Work and the Theory of “Letting”

“Working with undocumented immigrants poses unique problems and challenges for anthropologist and other social scientists. Often, as in this case, migrants leave Third
World countries (those with undeveloped or developing economies) for countries with highly developed, technology-based economies such as that of the United States. As a result of such movements, we are faced with a number of paradoxes...I was in one of the most affluent regions of the United States, an area known for its modernity: It has expensive tract housing, a major research university, and a growing high-tech industry. Yet here I sat talking with men who slept under the bushes and cooked over an open fire...how do we conceptualize this movement of people between such disparate realities” (Chavez 1998, 3)?

As Chavez witnessed, the anthropologist must confront the physical possession of land with the mental idea of ownership. These two notions divide communities in the borderlands. These political borders are defined by laws and forbid one group from passing into the next territory. Because of these political constraints, the separated communities do not feel connected or relevant to one another, giving rise to an insider/outsider complex in which migrants struggle to find community ownership in the United States.

Aid workers also face these paradoxes when working with migrants: often there seems to be no connection with “Tucson” and the Sonoran desert. Walking into a mall at the end of my first experience with No More Deaths in the summer of 2008, I experienced a mild cultural shock:

“On that Friday night, the seven other Duke Engage participants and I went to the Tucson Mall to watch the new Batman movie. I didn’t feel particularly foreign to the mall until I stepped inside. I was surprised to see so many people inside one building. They were talking, walking, picking up pieces of merchandise—all normal actions in the mall—but it seemed so strange and ill-fitting to me. I didn’t understand their purposes. Why were they all here? How could they act so busy while they weren’t actually doing anything? I became very confused and then upset. I turned to my friend Karen and remarked angrily, “How can they be here and buy all these things?” She looked at me awkwardly. She didn’t understand why I would be so angry towards the very purpose of the mall. At that moment, I didn’t understand why I was so angry either. All I felt was disgust. Every time I passed a person holding shopping bags, I wanted to tell him about the violence on the border—the border that was only an hour away.

I didn’t understand how these men and women could live such closed off lives.
They were so close to the border...so close to the camp, yet the events I witnessed—they would probably never even hear about. At the same time, I was shocked at the amount of money being spent at the mall. I thought about the sparseness of the camp and the prosperity of the mall. I had never understood the concept of being a radical, but at the mall I felt like one. Somehow, the most familiar places were now foreign and uncomfortable. Daily conventions and actions seemed wasteful and unnecessary. I realized I had changed, and I couldn’t understand why other people couldn’t do the same.”

I now look back on that memory, and I recall feeling rather confused. I knew that the mall was a reality of the “American normal” and yet I could not place it within the reality I had now created, which included the violence on the border. Aid workers must constantly negotiate between these two worlds—both real and dependent on the other—yet so obviously distant. It can be easy, as it was for me, to simply become mentally stuck in one world while physically thrust into the other one. It is a never-ending challenge for aid workers to smoothly travel and work between these two worlds, to somehow know how to be a citizen to both worlds and yet never belong to either. Danielle Alvarado, a young activist in her mid-twenties from California, shared a story of repeatedly experiencing déjà vu as a result of her work with No More Deaths. She said, “Something will remind me of someone and then I remember that I have no idea where they are.” Walking down the street, sitting on a bus, going to see a movie, aid workers are bombarded with memories of their other reality while traversing the mundane. In this way the mundane can become as painful, violent, and traumatic as the desert itself.

From the mundane the profound can also arise, Michel Foucault proposed a theory of “letting” and its intersection with racism which describes the relationship between government authorities such as the Border Patrol to local citizens and undocumented people. Foucault argues, “letting a particular population die requires an appearance of biological
difference between those who must live and those who must die. Racism constitutes this fissure between those subject to optimized life and merciless disposability” (Rosas 2007, 83). Essentially, the efficiency of modern globalized governments calls for the destruction of some humans in order to foster the progress of others.

The process of “letting” highlights the transient nature of the border. People, goods, and even cultures are constantly coming and traveling across. Moreover, the drastic contrast between those who “must live and those who must die” is highly apparent on the border. Clearly, migrants have died in an attempt to cross the border. These deaths have not always been publicly or widely recognized and grieved. Rosas argues that these silent deaths further his argument about a violently anonymous community: “Foucault couples this form of biopower to racism; letting a particular population or subset of a population die constitutes racism” (Rosas 2006, 338). Because these migrants’ deaths go without public grief or concern, they demonstrate the reality of the racism on the border and within the United States.

Aid workers seek to prevent this “letting” from occurring. Their values are rooted in the protection of all human beings regardless of citizenship. Their beliefs that migrants are economic refugees coupled with their guilt and privilege as mainly white, middle class, and educated individuals cause aid workers to remake the culture at the border. Notions and beliefs about equality and social justice motivate aid workers to rework ideals of fairness and justice. “Instead of allowing the survival of the fittest to advance humanity, humanitarians often sought to protect the weakest humans” (Calhoun in Barnett and Weiss 2008, 80). For volunteers, migrants are not invaders. They do not dehumanize migrants, and in fact very
often an inverse relationship forms, one where the needs of the migrants take priority over those of the volunteer.

Aid work on the border seeks to relieve suffering and unnecessary deaths. As Peter Redfield wrote, “...humanitarianism works 'against' the sort of human sacrifice routinely practiced by an international political order that accepts that certain populations may die” - (Redfield in Barnett and Weiss 2008, 196).9 While providing humanitarian aid does not ensure long-term safety or protection, it is an attempt to do something in response to the violence on the border.

**An Unlikely Relationship**

*Who is the Rescuer? Who is the victim?*

“If your children were starving, how far would you walk to feed your children?” - Debbie McCullah as told to Thomas Smith10

The relationship between humanitarian aid workers and migrants is an unlikely one. It is rare that those in extremely privileged circumstances would want to not only help but also closely associate and even defend those in comparatively impoverished states. As my bus driver asked me, “Why would you want go there?” There is an assumption in the United States that people want only to do what is best for themselves or for their love ones. Many people would offhandedly blame this perspective or value on the capitalist orientation of the United States. Yet what remains is that humanitarian work is driven by the values of empathy and sympathy. Aid workers espouse a notion of social justice or equality that should be

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10 Name Changed
present in the world. They see it as their own goal to correct what is wrong in the world and to protect those people who have been wronged. Aid workers create an emotional relationship with the migrants that they meet and also those that they have simply heard about from another volunteer.

I recall one afternoon in which a monsoon shower had just poured over the camp. Standing under the tarp kitchen area in my black raincoat, I listened in on a conversation between two veteran volunteers, one local and the other from California. The two volunteers and I grasped our various clay coffee mugs filled with hot tea and watched in our wet shoes, the clouds separated in the sky to reveal a beautiful wonder of the Arizona desert—a double rainbow. The local volunteer turned to the other and said, “Wow that is so beautiful.” To which the other responded, “That's Josselina, that's her rainbow. Do you think she can see us from here?” This response somewhat shocked me but then I heard the local volunteer reply, “Yes, of course.” It occurred to me again that aid workers were some of the most empathetic people I had met in my life. A natural wonder—something as simple as a rainbow can conjure up images of a migrant. In this case Josselina was a fourteen year old El Salvadoran girl whose body was recovered by three No More Deaths workers. Her story is told repeatedly to explain why the border policy needs to change and why aid workers must remain in the desert with the right to provide food, water, and medical assistance. Josselina's body laid in a wash between two of the most active trails in the Coronado State Park, and yet she was never discovered while alive. The second volunteer felt closely associated with Josselina—a girl who would never become a woman. Josselina was never able to see her future because of the violence on the border. Aid workers carry these stories close to their
own hearts and use them as “reasons why” they are so intensely and intimately involved.
This reinforces Debbie McCullah's question, how far would someone walk to feed another?
What actions would they take to meet those needs?

More than just empathy is involved in aid work however, the relationship of aid
workers and migrants is also built on our understanding of power and authority (Magana
2008, 31). Aid workers are privileged individuals with the ability and opportunity to travel
and work. More importantly, they have the freedom from being migrants and direct victims.
They are the rescuers and because of that role, certain power structures and positioning are
invoked. Migrants on the other hand, while still having some agency, have far fewer rights
and abilities than aid workers and must, on some level, rely on others for help. The position
that the organization calls for in its volunteers is to accept this power structure but to invert it
while working with migrants. The purpose of No More Deaths is to aid migrants—not to
collect personal experiences or benefit from the migrant's plight. Aid workers are not the
priority, migrants are. Thomas Smith, a volunteer from my first summer with No More
Deaths commented,

“It seemed like if you were tough enough and willing, you could make an actual
contribution whereas so many volunteering things I’ve been involved with are all
about giving you the learning experience, exposing you to the issue. There is some of
that here but it’s really more about having bodies here to haul water.

An example that comes to mind of how volunteers react when aid work and migrants
are not the primary focus concerns a Photo-journalist whose only goal while working with
the organization for a week was to take pictures of aid workers giving medical aid to
migrants. With his professional camera and need for the perfect shot, one volunteer frustrated
said in a camp meeting, “It feels like a goddamn safari in here!” Volunteers did not
appreciate the photographer's insistence and disregard for the delicate power play that often occurs between aid workers and migrants. I witnessed firsthand how migrants who received medical aid from volunteers felt obligated to also have the photographer take pictures of them. It was as if the volunteers gave the migrants something so now the migrants had to return the favor which did not seem fair to me or any of the other volunteers.

Commenting on these situations, Rocio Magana wrote in her dissertation, *Bodies on the Line* that the relationship that aid workers hold with migrants is an “awkward” one at best (Magana 2008, 166). Aid workers often come in contact with hopeful migrants who are ultimately handed over to the border patrol. In the last moments between aid worker and migrant, the two individuals attempt to say goodbye, unsure what will happen or become of the other. Moreover, the aid worker comes to help migrants and yet in order to help a migrant, he or she must be in serious physical harm. Here Magana aptly writes that there is an awkward conflict about these situations, “We turned around to meet him, conflicted by our own hopes that he might need our help” (Magana 2008, 163). Being able to help a migrant is predicated solely on the fact that he is endangered and needs help. Although this seems to be a frankly obvious statement, there are many underlying factors in place. Wishing to help a migrant is not the same as wishing a migrant were hurt so that one can help him, yet the two are incredibly close—almost touching. Days when volunteers did not encounter a migrant (in need or not) caused much internal conflict. Volunteers were unsure if this meant the migrants did not need their help or if the volunteers were simply not in the place of most need. These types of situations set up a crucial question and concern. Does assuming there is a need for aid workers in the desert also victimize migrants even more by assuming that
migrants need to be helped?

Although I agree with many of Magana’s claims, I am unsure whether she is correct in assuming that aid workers must “objectify” migrants in order to create border interventions with medicalized migrants (Magana 2008, 145). Magana writes aid workers objectify migrants in order to claim their status as patients in which some humanitarian protection can be afforded to. This objectification is inherently political according to Magana. I would respond by saying the “objectification” is political but it occurs far before aid workers are involved. In their home countries, migrants are forced to leave their communities in order to provide for their families. This identity as an impoverished population incites objectification and judgment from financially rich and privileged individuals, academics, government officials, and aid workers. The use of the word “objectify” would signify that aid workers devalue migrants and treat them inappropriately—something that I have never heard or witnessed. Moreover, No More Deaths veteran volunteers heavily emphasize the importance of respecting migrants and treating them as individuals. They work to debunk the romantic assumptions of a being an aid worker/ rescuer which Magana identifies in her thesis as a rampant problem in aid work.

Magana then argues that aid workers are not only medically ill-prepared (if prepared at all) but that their sole “life-saving competence comes from reaching out to those who have fallen in despair” (Magana 2008, 147). Again, I must dissent. First, many aid workers have more than the basic training afforded during orientation. These are not reckless individuals, and in fact some volunteers become more committed to attaining medical skills after spending time with No More Deaths. Additionally, once or twice a year No More Deaths
offers a Wilderness First Responder course free to volunteers. The organization responds to the need for safe and appropriate medical aid. Some educational experience is gained in the field but that is not all the experience that aid workers are offered.

Lastly, Magana states that the bulk of the work of the organization does not occur in the desert but rather in the “eye of the public” (Magana 2008, 159). I do not know if that is entirely true. Speaking from the perspective of an aid worker and a writer, I would argue that the bulk of the work does occur in the desert. The primary role of humanitarians is to serve those in harm not to garner attention toward their work. For No More Deaths in particular, I would easily guess that the number of migrants served, gallons dropped, and food boxes filled far exceeded the media attention received. Although No More Deaths and other organizations have an interest in educating the public, this is not their first goal even if it is the most visible. One has to remember that without direct humanitarian aid in the desert, there would be no stories to pass onto the public eye.

A Typical Day: Redefining and Deconstructing “Typical”

“Most importantly, [pause] we’re helping people. Someone is walking in the desert and they found this bottle and you brought it there. You huffed it on your back, left it there wrote ‘good luck, have faith, we believe in you’ and to think some person found that. That wouldn’t have been there if you hadn’t been there.” -Thomas Smith

Of the five weeks I spent on the border with No More Deaths, there were no “typical” days. The only consistency that occurred in terms of the work of No More Deaths is described by Thomas's quote above—all that could be expected is that aid workers attempted to help others—to carry clean water to people who otherwise would have none. The actual
events of the day itself were less predictable or inspiring. One day we might have encountered twenty migrants walking together, on another day there were none. And while the days varied, the mornings always started the same. Volunteers woke up from their tents at approximately 5:00AM. Usually the camp coordinator would signal the wake call, make coffee, and put the various breakfast foods out onto the tables. Volunteers had an hour to eat breakfast, brush their teeth, and conclude any remaining personal responsibilities.

Destinations were delegated by group leaders, the individuals responsible for ensuring enough water, medical, and food supplies were loaded into the cars. These decisions were made after dinner the night before bed, ensuring an efficient use of time and energy. Volunteers were also assigned their designated responsibilities, which included specific trail patrols or if they were staying back in camp, to welcome new migrants or currently host those already at camp.

Depending on the trail patrols, each vehicle—typically a flat bed truck—would hold four to six volunteers and about sixty to a hundred gallons of water. The ultimate goal of the patrol was to place water along key GPS wave points, where they would be counted and marked. Volunteers were responsible for refilling the “water drops,” documenting bottles that had been taken, and refilling food boxes when available and necessary. If a vehicle had over three aid workers, the teams would split up and patrols were dropped along trail heads leaving two volunteers to finish the water drops. There was a minimum requirement of two people per walking patrol. A patrol team was equipped with a GPS, food, water, and a medical kit. Volunteers had to identify their own skills such as Spanish language and medical first aid; these volunteers were divided equally among groups. Thomas Smith described his
experience with the patrols as the most intense aspect of the work.

“But I think the most intense aspect is the responsibility. There [pause] there [pause] there aren’t that many times in life where you are responsible for [pause] such [pause] important [pause] things, you know. I mean, man we’ve got three or four people, we need to go out in kinda dangerous country, we need to get them back home, plan our patrols around people who really need the water, we try to get the water out, carry medical supplies…it’s no joke.” - Thomas Smith

Like Thomas, volunteers did not see the patrols as simply a walk through the desert. Aid workers were expected to constantly call out to migrants in need of help yelling in Spanish, “Hello! Good morning! We are volunteers of the church! We have food, water, and medical aid. Please call out if you need help!” Patrols might include picking up trash, aiding migrants, filling water stations and food boxes, recording the amount of water taken/ left/ or destroyed, and attending to automobile emergencies. This was serious work, and volunteers needed to be prepared for the unexpected.

Unless a medical emergency or border patrol evacuation occurred, volunteers return to the camp by 1:00PM. The camp was located 14 miles north of the border, and trail heads required a minimum of 45 minute to a maximum of 1.5 hours of travel time. Depending on their drop-off point volunteers would hike from two to four hours, covering up to eight miles in a morning. The two volunteers who remained at camp were responsible for morning chores as well as preparing lunch. After lunch, a brief meeting was held to organize patrols once again. Cars, group leaders, and materials were assigned to volunteers. Patrols would leave camp for a shorter afternoon patrol around 2:30pm or 3:00pm and return by 7:00pm. Dinner would be collectively served, and a meeting to organize the next morning patrol followed. Volunteers had free time after the organizing meeting. Many would read, socialize, or play soccer in the evening. Around 8:30 or 9:00PM, a final reflection meeting would
conclude the day. During this time volunteers would share their opinions of the day, particular highs and lows, and what they hoped for while at camp. Although many days did not allow for this reflection process, it was one way of allowing humanitarian aid workers to unlock their emotional anxieties and grievances. In a busy and stressful day, aid workers know this work “isn't for everyone.” They are rooted and loyal to their work by believing empathy and enough hope can make a difference. Volunteer Danielle Alvarado describes some of the characteristics that make No More Deaths volunteers slightly different from the average United States citizen.

“I think it's really attractive having met people and having a better sense of the real life human impact of all of these big policies and trade agreements of all the things we have talked about. Knowing how much it affects the individuals and families and REAL people. The ability to provide direct aid to real people in an immediate way. I think it is also really attractive because it's not something everyone wants to do. In a sense, that even people that are supportive...it's really hard. [pause] It's kinda not the glamorous work. We have to drive around in broken down trucks and be really dirty and go out to the middle of nowhere. All those things are things that not everyone else wants to do, but it's something that I don't mind doing. So I think it's really attractive to fill the need that I see, but I don't see a lot of people clamoring to do this necessarily.” - Danielle Alvarado

In addition to early wake up calls, intense hike mileage, unexpected crises, and automobile problems, volunteers endured the daily hot sun and temperature, random monsoon showers, getting stuck behind washes, bug bites, inability to shower daily, lack of running water and electricity. While discussing these characteristics of No More Deaths work, veteran volunteer Gene Lefebvre told me candidly that migrants often ask why aid workers remain in the desert when they have the privilege to go elsewhere. In contrast to my shock at the bus driver, Gene joked, “They [migrants] have enough sense to know...this is crazy! Only crazy people would be doing this [laughs].”
CHAPTER THREE:
The Paradigm: Privilege, Violence, and Trauma

Two Stories

It's mid-afternoon in Tucson, Arizona. I am interviewing Sue Lefebvre about her experiences with No More Deaths. We move into her specific roles and responsibilities within the organization before easing our way into a discussion of the nature of witnessing trauma within the No More Deaths community. Sue speaks about her personal encounters with stress. She begins to tell me about another volunteer before suddenly recalling a story. Sue tells me about a group of volunteers who discovered a stretcher off the side of a road. This road was a popular “pick up” stop for migrants to be transported to the next part of their migration within the United States. Sue describes to me how the stretcher was constructed with sticks and pieces of clothing. It was clear that migrants had made the stretcher in order to carry a member of the group who had gotten hurt along the way. Once the migrants had reached the pickup destination, they left the stretcher behind.
To Sue and many of the other volunteers, this act demonstrated and reinforced the notion that migrants were victims of an international policy issue. As Sue told me, the general response to the stretcher was that it revealed the “courage” of the migrants. It demonstrated that they were loving, honest, considerate, and good natured people. One would think that the nature of the journey would force migrants to leave others behind, but this story revealed the deeper emotional values of migrants. The stretcher not only symbolized the harshness of the trail but also the compassion that migrants have to sacrifice their own comforts for another human being’s well being. In an incredibly difficult and highly pressured situation, migrants chose empathy over personal gain.

It is also equally clear that the aid workers valued the stretcher, both physically and symbolically, yet a question remained. What were the workers going to do with the stretcher now that they had discovered it? Sue described this ethical situation to me. Sue spoke in a low and thoughtful tone and it appeared that she was also caught in this ethical conundrum. There was not an obvious right answer. The volunteers split into two fractions. One group of volunteers believed they should leave the stretcher in the desert. They believed it would be disrespectful to the move something that did not belong to them. They argued that to leave the stretcher alone was the most honorable and respectful action they could do. The second group believed that No More Deaths should take the stretcher and use it as a learning tool. The stretcher could speak to the character of migrants and make other people sympathetic to No More Deaths’s mission. It would be tangible evidence of the suffering in the desert. The second group saw no usefulness in the stretcher remaining in the desert and believed that it would be best served in the public.
Which group was right? Sue was not sure and neither was I. This story did however, remind me of a similar ethical dilemma in the summer of 2008. I, along with three other volunteers, discovered an area where it appeared that migrants had been discovered by border patrol and as result fled the area. Another volunteer and I discovered personal letters in this dispersal area. That night during a debriefing meeting, I shared the letters with the group. I thought it would be helpful and thoughtful for other volunteers to see the letters. Many of the volunteers were curious and felt the letters helped them understand and empathize with the perspective of a migrant. Some of the volunteers including myself cried when we read the letters. Another group of volunteers however, felt incredibly uncomfortable reading another person's personal belongings. They did not believe it was my place to share those letters. They did not think I should have picked the letters up. To them, what I was doing was a significant violation of privacy.

We spent the rest of that night discussing the letters situation. We couldn't come to a consensus, except to say that both positions were valid. At the end of the meeting, I became immensely upset with myself. I thought, how could I have been so inconsiderate? I decided to keep my letters private, and they remained in my backpack until I returned to North Carolina many weeks later. The other volunteer decided to place her letter on the camp shrine that volunteers had built to honor all migrants. It was monsoon season then and later that evening a rainstorm broke out in the camp. The other volunteer's letter disintegrated in the storm, while I still have my letters today. I have used my letters in numerous talks and even in a student photography exhibition at the Duke Center for Documentary Studies. Whether or not I should have kept the letters, I tried to remind myself that the greater good was to spread
awareness. I, like so many aid workers hoped the letters would touch other people and catalyze some sort of action that could potentially lead to a future change in policy. If nothing else, I just wanted people to know and maybe care.

Yet today I still don't know if what I did was right. Just like the aid workers who found the stretcher, I felt conflicting interests. I didn't know what was right or if a situation like this could even be right. Would the person who wrote the letter or the person who the letter was address to, be upset with my decision to share their belongings? Would they be happy that people knew their story? Is it even in my place to make that decision? Can it also be seen as disrespectful not to share something that can potentially provoke thought or even change in other people? What are my responsibilities as a humanitarian?

In attempting to answer these questions, I am drawn back to my two stories. When I compared these two stories again, I discovered an essential paradigm facing all humanitarians. It is based on a set of assumptions. First, all humanitarians want to help community members most negatively affected by a particular situation. In the case of No More Deaths, aid workers aim to help undocumented Latino migrants who as a result of poor economic policy have been pushed to find jobs in the United States. Second, although humanitarians want to help, no humanitarian is sure of the best and most effective way to help. No aid worker can be sure that their method is the best method because it is impossible to accurately know how people are being helped. It is also impossible to define the “best method.” Is the best method the most efficient, the largest, or the most dedicated? For these reasons, no aid worker is ever wholeheartedly sure of his actions or decisions. It would also be impossible for humanitarians to accurately measure the positive effects of their work. No
More Deaths volunteers will never know exactly how many people they saved. As a result, there is always the mentality that something else could have or should have been done. Third, humanitarians do not represent the perspective, views, or opinions of the people they seek to help. Humanitarians are the helpers not the people needing to be helped. Although they may work in solidarity with victimized groups, they can never accurately espouse the viewpoints or decisions of those groups. A No More Deaths volunteer will never know the experience of being a migrant. Aid workers must constantly be aware of their own interests and ensure that they do not conflict with the interest of migrants. This is a great irony in itself, as aid workers will never know if they have disrespected migrants as the perspective of all migrants is greatly varied and no decision could appease this vast array of opinions.

These issues of disrespect and objectification are important to aid workers because to some extent aid workers represent the migrants who cross the desert. Since aid workers see migrants as innocent victims of an economic policy, they subsequently also seem themselves as protectors of the migrant's public image. Although the outcome of the stretcher and my letters would not affect the owners themselves, aid workers feel responsible to accurately portray migrants to the public. Additionally, aid workers believe migrants are victims of trauma and suffering therefore volunteers subscribe to a “do no harm” mentality.

Given these basic assumptions on the nature of aid workers laid, I theorize a paradigm in which privilege, violence, and trauma are connected. Below is a diagram describing the flow the paradigm.
In the next section, I define these three terms and then set the framework for how this paradigm arises. I also explain why this paradigm fits within the discussion of humanitarian aid. I cite key ethnographic data that I have collected and draw from anthropologic theories.

**Privilege**

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, a basic element of being an aid worker is having the ability and choice to be one. Ability and choice form the two components of privilege. I define privilege as the ability to choose where others are unable to. In other words, a person with privilege has the freedom and ability to choose from more options than a person without privilege. People with privilege also have more resources than those without. Money, education, and the access to multiple career pathways are indicators of privilege. It is unsurprising that I hold, as many other scholars do (Barnett and Redfield 2008; Terry 2002; de Waal 2008), that humanitarian aid workers are a privileged group of individuals.

Aid workers have the ability to choose to volunteer for No More Deaths. They are not constrained to earn income during the summer or fulfill other responsibilities that might make it impossible for them to volunteer. Many volunteers are retired professionals who have settled in Tucson, which in itself is an obvious privilege. The majority of summer volunteers are non-local, meaning they must travel from their home states to the Arizona border. Travel expenses, time, and camp fees are incurred by the volunteer. Moreover, volunteers are highly educated. The majority of aid workers hold a baccalaureate degree. All fourteen of my interview informants attended a university, and many pursued further schooling. Ironically, it
was from this educational privilege that many volunteers learned about No More Deaths and decided to volunteer with the organization. I believe that a certain level of privilege can enable the formation of a particular type of awareness. However, this self awareness of privilege can also cause guilt in the individual. In the humanitarian community, this guilt is then expressed as a form of responsibility to those that are less privileged. Teresa Simone gives evidence of this theory when she says that the work of No More Deaths is inherently privileged:

“Most people who do this type are basically in a privilege position anyways. They have 'pleasure time' and they have healthy bodies to do difficult and strenuous work. They have generally nice backpacks and sleeping bags so already when you go out there, and you encounter the people. You realize you already, and so clearly, have so much more than them, so it creates I think a feeling of responsibility. I think guilt drives a lot of it. I think as a whole, the people in the group are aware of the blessings that they have. I think they have a lot of gratitude. No More Deaths don't seem to be like 'consumerist' people. They live fairly simple lives, but when they encounter with people who have so little, for me personally, you feel...and that's just the 'stuff' aspect, I'm also talking about the 'psychological comfort.' And most people in the group are not completely alienated, they have people to comfort and take care of them, too, so you recognize that aspect, too.”

As Teresa describes, the recognition that aid workers have more or better resources causes an imbalance in the way that they originally viewed themselves. Before meeting a migrant, a volunteer might explain that her favorite hobby is camping. Therefore, she puts more value into her equipment and spends more than other people might. When confronted with the resources that migrants have for the journey, the volunteer may no longer see her equipment as simply an indicator of a hobby or value but as the privilege to have this hobby and to value expensive equipment. The comparison of what is valued by aid workers and what is valued by migrants can be so stark that volunteers feel immense guilt because of their privilege. In trying to reconcile themselves with this guilt, volunteers reinterpret their
privilege to symbolize responsibility. They believe that because they have this privilege and therefore resources, they must redirect their privilege to help migrants. Not only does Teresa identify the resources and the ability to help as privileges, she also mentions that psychological privilege can also exist. Aid workers can seek help from peers, colleagues, and even professionals while migrants may not be able to do the same.

One of the most obvious explanations for why aid workers experience guilt and then responsibility rests on the understanding that the mere ability to not be a migrant is itself a fundamental privilege. If recognition of privilege spurs guilt and then responsibility—how do aid workers come to accept their privilege? Although one can argue that the recognition occurs the moment a privileged person interacts with a migrant, I believe this self reflection occurs much earlier. As I described in Chapter Two, aid workers are inherently motivated by their internal beliefs, which envisions a world of equality and justice. In this world, all people are seen as connected, of the same worth, and treated fairly. Our personal world simply exists because of the random nature of who our parents are. This however does not mean that one person should deserve more or less. Aid workers seek to fill this disparity by empathizing with migrants and imagining how they would like to be treated if they lived in a different world, if they were less privileged. To aid workers, all people are the same and therefore deserve the same rights and privileges.

Giorgio Agamben touched on this idea of a separation of human value in his book *Homo Sacer*. Agamben further explored the theory of Foucault's “biopolitics.” He sought to define the value of human life and understand the many paradoxes that occurred in the modern world such as the co-existence of two seemingly opposing ideals: the protection of
life and the sovereignty of countries that commit genocide against its people. Moreover, Agamben is concerned with the term *homo sacer* (sacred man), someone who in modern societies can be killed but not sacrificed. Their life is lost yet their death is not mourned. “The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life—that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed -- is the life that has been captured in this sphere” (Agamben 1998, 55).

Agamben also explores the notion of sovereignty and its inherent problems—does sovereign always mean “right?” Sovereignty is problematic for Agamben because it is based on the view of individuals. It is imperfect in that it requires people to make sense and rule out of chaos. As a result, sovereignty is in constant negotiation with the concept of language. Agamben uses the work of the classical philosophers to build his argument about how life, death, and to some extent government work together. According to Agamben, laws and norms are often based on exceptions. “There is no clearer way to say that the first foundation of political life is a life that may be killed, which is politicized through its very capacity to be killed” (Agamben 1998, 59). What is normal can be the exception, what is the exception is often only a reflection of thresholds. This idea of the homo sacer ties directly into the perspectives and beliefs of No More Deaths volunteers, who seek to put value into the homo sacer—to change it from the irrelevant to the significant. They seek to answer Agamben's question, “What is the status of the living body that seems no longer to belong to the world of the living” (Agamben 1998, 64)?

The concept of homo sacer is translated into the work of No More Deaths when Jim Marx candidly describes the beliefs of many aid workers and their motivations for getting
involved:

“We put ourselves in another being's shoes and in this case when another human being is treated this way and we have policies that are supposed to deter them from crossing and we see how they are treated. I think anger is just a very natural emotion to arise in us. It's indignation! How could they do that? Because that could be me, that could be my family you know—except for birth and the privilege of being born in this country and not that country. I think at the highest level of spiritual awareness is that we're all brothers and sisters—that we're all connected and what's happening to them is happening to me.”

In attempting to cross the desert, migrants become invisible bodies—alive but unknown.

Volunteers like Jim want to bring light to the unknown. Their intent is not to expose migrants but to reveal how the lives of migrants are tied to our very own—a concept that would prevent the formation of a homo sacer.

A common critique of Jim's statements however, is that humanitarian aid work is self-obsessed. Why does it matter how Jim feels? Is not it a lofty assumption for Jim to say that he could have been a migrant? Is Jim's act of putting himself in another person's shoes thoughtful or haughty? To respond to these critiques, I draw once again on Jim's interview.

“We're a culture of privilege. We are obsessed with collecting experiences. People can't just go collecting experiences without having an understanding—empathy—an awaking within. We can't say I'm really something because I've had that experience.”

Here Jim is essentially responding to the very critiques that are often raised. Jim readily identifies the critique and accepts it as a problem in the humanitarian field. He disagrees with people engaging in humanitarian acts solely to gain personal experiences. This, he reasons, would be no more than collecting more privilege while simultaneously disrespecting the community that one supposedly sought to help. For Jim, aid workers must accept and come to terms with their privilege. They must act accordingly with serious consideration for the
work that they do. Aid work is to serve others, not to benefit oneself. Volunteers work because they can, not because they wish to achieve some sort of praise or distinction.

Peter Redfield's work in *Doctors, Borders, and Life in Crisis* expands on Agamben's concept of the homo sacer and is relevant to Jim's second statement. Redfield:

“explores the distinction between *zoe* (a state of being, common to all animals) and *bios* (elaborated human experience) that Agamben makes by resurrecting a moment of Greek etymology originally noted by Hannah Arendt. [Agamben] use[s] these terms to identify an inherent tension within the value of 'life' that humanitarians seek to defend, between the maintenance of physical existence, on the one hand, and the defense of human dignity, on the other hand” (Redfield 2005, 330).

Redfield questions the motives of aid workers like Jim who seek to place societal value on victims by giving them personal and emotional importance. To Redfield, these motives are complex and often conflicting. Redfield refers to the work of Michel Foucault to further his argument, “One might say that the ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (Foucault 1990, 138; see also Foucault 2003:240–241in Redfield 2005, 339). “The political apparatus governing physical being, in other words, should now include finer instruments than a sword” (Redfield 2005, 339). As our modern communities continue to expand and globalize, volunteers like Jim will need to invoke these “finer instruments” and find ways to “foster life” in migrants and themselves in order to dissuade spiritual and physical death.

For Jim, humanitarian aid should not be praised because it is a necessity that has arose due to unfortunate situations. Another volunteer, John Hyde describes a similar viewpoint, “Being in solidarity and supporting them not as an act of charity but as an act of justice.” The work of volunteers is solely to help and respect migrants. Aid workers should not attract unnecessary attention to themselves. Maureen Marx also addresses a critique in
humanitarian work. While the work may only be temporary, if that is the extent of action that she is able to take, then that is what she and other volunteers will carry out. Aid workers believe that sympathy and an active response outweighs a lack of response. Maureen's statement is simple yet powerful because it reveals an inherent flaw in the humanitarian critique. Although humanitarian aid work is inherently imperfect, the mission of providing food, water, and medical supplies overwhelmingly trumps a seclusion viewpoint where no aid is delivered at all. In other words, imperfect aid is often better than no aid.

"Because other work is there and someone has to do it. I can be one of those people. I'm saying that if I don't do it nobody else will. But this is something that I feel very strongly about it that if there are people dying out there in the desert. I can't just sit and watch that happen. I've got to do something as little as it is or as 'band-aidy' as it is. People say it's just a band aid—you're not doing anything but if that's all I can do then that what I'll do. My conscience says I have to."

The work of No More Deaths volunteers is to support migrants and advocate for justice not to give charity or pity community of people. Jim, John, and Maureen's statements are strong pieces of evidence that show the accountability, thoughtfulness, and consideration of aid workers. Aid workers are fully aware of the humanitarian critique and they seek to account for it appropriately.

In fact a volunteer may so clearly confront the humanitarian critique by unabashedly accepting their privilege and attempting to literally redistribute it.

"Ok what I'm going to do is to try to redirect all these resources of privilege, as I can, to No More Deaths. So I'm unpacking the power structures that I perceive as well off...I'll use their car and I can pay for the gas by working at summer camp. So I'm redirecting those resources to No More Deaths and also redirecting human resource. Then I thought, 'Hey Hamilton is a pretty wealthy school. How can I redirect those resources?' Then I did the endowment things and got a lot of money and the left over money went to No More Deaths."

Corinne not only acknowledges her privilege, she has taken the stance that by redistributing
her privilege she is “unpacking power structures.” She uses her privilege as a resource—not for her own personal gain but for the organization. The focus here is not the disparity of privilege between migrants and Corinne, but between Corinne and the organization. Privilege in this situation can be beneficial to more than just the individual.

Although privilege can enable volunteers to make certain decisions or enact specific choices, privilege can also be viewed as a burden. This theory was popularized by William Easterly who hypothesized that much of the civic engagement and humanitarian aid work occur due to a phenomenon known as “White Man's Burden” (Easterly 2006). White Man's Burden argued that privileged individuals (mostly white) witnessed discrepancies between their lives and the lives of other disadvantaged often minority or indigenous groups. Relying on international history and imperialism, many Whites felt guilty over their undue privilege and sought to rectify this imbalance by volunteering in disadvantaged communities. It was the responsibility of Whites to essentially take historical responsibility and “clean up the mess” they made in other countries.

In my particular study, I do not believe the motive to be an aid worker is entirely racially or historically based. Rather I choose to expand on Easterly's theory by arguing that the White Man's Burden also has negative consequences on aid workers and that these consequences are equally as important to recognize as the intent. Privilege places a somewhat unfair harshness on the aid worker. United States citizens may be held accountable for their support of NAFTA but aid workers are not directly responsible for the deaths of migrants (although they may feel that way). When volunteers feel personally responsible for the misfortunes that migrants incur, they have misinterpreted their role as humanitarians.
Humanitarians prevent death. They do not willingly cause it.

Sometimes aid workers come to uphold this misinterpretation because of the three basic assumptions of the paradigm. They want to help, they don't know how best to help, and they are not migrants. From these assumptions, aid workers often lose sight of what is fair or just. They sacrifice their own happiness or freedoms and disregard their own problems in order to equalize their relationship with migrants. No More Deaths workers witness terrible acts committed to migrants and they reason to themselves that because less terrible things happen to them, their experiences do not need to be resolved. Picking up the letters or holding the stretcher are two examples of how the homo sacer has manifested in the borderlands. These items can be understood as symbols of the homo sacer—used but forgotten. Severity becomes the most important aspect of a situation. Below are two quotations that highlight how aid workers often lose perspective and default to sacrificing their own needs.

“See I get more concerned or as concerned when a migrant who has been out there for five days and dehydrated and is suffering terribly from systems and then is run through the craziness of our Border Patrol. If they're not given water, food, or correct medical attention. That's trauma—those people are traumatized. Or when I see kids coming across, [pause] I don't even want to think about the experiences that they are having. And if we put ourselves in their shoes—I mean what kind of help are they getting?” - Jim Marx

“Victor Ceballos: You talk about trauma and you think about what the migrants are going through, you look at what the women who are crossing are going through and all the horrible stuff that goes on to them. And then you kinda of say, well, yeah it's trauma but you can't compare it to what you know, some of these people, not just here but other parts in the world are suffering. Some of us just say yea [pause] it's not [pause] that bad for us. It's worst off for other people so umm we shouldn't feel that bad [chuckles] because there is worst stuff that is going on out there and there are people can't sit down and talk about their own trauma when they are crossing the border, and they're trying to get to their destination and they're trying to get to their work, and they're trying to send money back to their families in Mexico, or
Jim and Victor's statements on trauma follow a similar theme. Both men's statements support that at times they are greatly upset by their privilege and feel that it would not be “fair” to consider their own needs when the immediate needs of migrants are not being met. Because they are more privileged than migrants, they cannot truly be traumatized or rather, their trauma is of less weight and therefore less importance. Essentially, because of privilege the problems that aid workers face can be downplayed by the other positive circumstances that they possess. As Victor suggests, he can go to a movie and relax, while a migrant could not take a break from the realities of his life. These breaks from the austereness of humanitarian aid work and the situation on the border are also seen as privilege. Aid workers seem to believe that because their problems are less severe, they can easily cope with them on their own but as I will come to argue, this may not always be the case. It is fair to say that the problems aid workers encounter are not as severe as the ones migrants may face but the effects of valuing one problem over another can cause serious consequences to occur.

Problems surrounding migrants are widely discussed during a meeting or event yet personal or collective group trauma is never dealt with during non-organizational time. It would appear that one situation clearly exists and is acknowledged while the other is largely unaccepted or even unknown. This perspective would clearly devalue the worth of aid workers. Only the most serious problems are worth addressing, and aid workers may be seen...
as weak or self-obsessed if they were to publicly address their own problems in the same space.

Violence

The second piece of the paradigm involves the concept of violence. Through privilege aid workers are ironically able to choose to work in areas of violence such as the borderlands. When a person thinks about violence, they often recall a scene in which two people engage in a fight. Violence however, is not simply a physical altercation. It does not have to end in bodily pain nor does there have to be a winner and a loser. Violence is more than aggression, force, or anger. Violence can be a systemic and reoccurring event that over time inflicts injury.

I use the work of Veena Das in *Violence, Knowledge, and Subjectivity* as a backdrop to my own theories on violence and trauma. Das’s work emphasizes the effects of witnessing violence and how that act of witnessing may reproduce itself both socially and physically in everyday interactions. Her analysis on violence is indispensable to my own work, as she vocalizes the essential dilemmas one faces when coping with issues of pain. Das writes “Through complex transactions, they were able both to voice and to show the hurt done to them and also to provide witness to the harm done to the whole social fabric—the injury was to the very idea of different groups being able to inhabit the world together” (Das 2000, 206). These “complex interactions” speak directly to the experiences of aid workers who are in the process of reconciling with the harm experienced on the border.
I veer from the conventional definition of violence as an innately physical occurrence and employ Das's definition of violence. The violence on the borderlands is both obvious and hidden. As Das wrote, “The oscillation between the extraordinary violence and the everyday violence is clearly not the oscillation of the tick-tock of a clock” (Das 2007, 91). The presence of helicopters, border patrolmen, search towers, and check points on the road all point to a thoroughly militarized area of the United States. The daily task of placing water on the trails without knowing how and if the water helps a migrant along the way adds to the precarious nature of the borderlands. Doing the work of No More Deaths, without ever having a concrete knowledge of the effects, is also an experience of violent. The fear of running into a migrant whom volunteers can do no more than to generally direct the position of “north” is another experience of violence. Volunteers may also interact with unsympathetic or even aggressive border patrol. The interactions between aid workers and border patrol inflict a particular type of injury on the aid worker.

Although volunteers themselves may not encounter the direct physical violence that migrants face through robbery, rape, or physical abuse, volunteers are still affected. No More Deaths volunteers work daily in this environment of violence. The violence becomes ingrained and almost expected. Volunteer Corinne Bancroft told me in an interview that one of the main reasons she joined No More Deaths was that her classmates in Hamilton College (located in upstate New York) did not know that it was a reality that migrants died on the border. For Corinne, this was just a fact of life that she accepted. Corinne assumed the rest of the United States felt the same. Only when she was confronted by her classmates on the peculiarity and shock of this situation did she realize she needed to get involved. Volunteers
must consciously reconcile with the violence present in their everyday lives. They cannot avoid it. For aid workers to be effective as humanitarians, they must fully accept this phenomenon present in the desert.

Yet only through small and intricate negotiations can volunteers reveal the violence they have witnessed. To out rightly share these experiences with peers would have elicited greater concerns than volunteers may have been prepared to discuss. In my own research, these “complex interactions” have often referred to a careful process of self-reflection in which aid workers seek to find a compromise between reconciling themselves to the violence and living through the trauma.

This compromise between reconciliation and recovery requires understanding how the violence began. For many volunteers, the violence began when they realized the imbalance of wealth and therefore privilege between the United States and Mexico. Jonathan Inda and Renato Rosaldo explore this imbalance in *Tracking Global Flows*. Inda and Rosaldo introduce a consequence of globalization know as the “awkward connection.” The “awkward connection” refers to the irregular speed in which certain areas of the world become significantly more developed. This increase in development and economic prosperity generates a culture of privileged individuals who are often ignorant of this imbalance. Ignorance of the imbalance essentially perpetuates a stereotype that reasons and normalizes the inequality. Inda and Rosaldo write, “the world has long been—and still is—a space where economic and political relations are very uneven; it is filled with lumps, places where power coalesces surrounded by those where it does not, places where social relations become dense amid others that are diffused” (Frederick Cooper in Inda and Rosaldo 2008, 33). Inda
and Rosaldo’s use of the word “power” plays directly into my discussion on wealth and
privilege. Through wealth one acquires both privilege and power. Knowledge of this power
requires responsibility and consequently the burden of action. Those with power may decide
to change policy or provide aid; those without power may only wait. However, power in
itself is problematic, as unequal amounts of power restrict access to actions ultimately
caus[ing] internal struggle and trauma. Aid workers may feel that they can form some plan of
action only to realize they are also subjugated in a power structure associated with the border.

Complicating this problem is the added realization that the work of No More Deaths
never stops. At the camp, volunteers may work all 24 hours of the day since many migrants
wander into the camp late at night. Volunteers are awoken from their slumber to address the
needs of the migrants, many who were separated in their group and stumbled onto the camp.
This may include medical aid, providing a warm dinner, preparing a place for the migrant to
sleep, and documenting abuses. Volunteers are constantly reminded of the violence on the
borderlands. Once while I was interviewing John Hyde our conversation was disrupted by a
Border Patrol helicopter that flew directly over the camp. We both looked up to the
immediate helicopter that made a small circle around the camp before zipping past the Twin
Peak Mountains. John responded to this incident:

“Here we have an airplane or some sort of helicopter, oh! That’s a border patrol
helicopter coming right nearly our heads as we speak. Now we’re not threatened
directly by that we know that our friends out in the desert are and so [pause] that has
some [pause] that’s a reality [pause] that we [pause] part of being out that’s a reality
that we deal with.”

The practice of helicopters flying closely over camp is not unusual. In fact, it is a regular
occurrence. Border Patrol looks for any signs that a migrant may be under the care of No
More Deaths volunteers. In August of 2008 volunteers faced direct violence when the Arivaca camp was raided for three migrants. All volunteers were escorted out of their private quarters and subjected to interrogations as the Border Patrol attempted to find the three migrants in the camp. John's statement about the helicopter having a different meaning to volunteers than to migrants supports my claim that the violence in the desert borderlands affects all parties. John notes that the helicopter is nonthreatening to him yet when he begins to think about its meaning to migrants, his speech begins to slow down until he is occasionally at a loss for words. John feels an immense amount of empathy for the migrants, and the violence that they encounter is real to John. From John's statement, it is clear that the violence on the desert also inflicts injury on aid workers. As John says, working in an area of violence is a reality that aid workers must come to terms with.

Because No More Deaths volunteers live and work in an area of constant violence, they are unable to step away from the realities of the border. Aid workers are therefore bombarded with the violence that surrounds them. The violence has in turn become normalized and is acceptable to mention even in casual conversations, as when two No More Deaths volunteers run into each other at a restaurant before a meeting. On another hot afternoon in Tucson, I conducted my first interview with Victor Ceballos at a local Persian restaurant called Ali Baba's. Our conversation was interrupted when a retired pastor, another No More Deaths volunteer, spots Victor and I at the restaurant. Jerry came to table and the two men engaged in a brief conversation.

Victor Ceballos: Hi how are you doing?
Retired Pastor: Hi victor.
Victor Ceballos: How's everything?
Retired Pastor: Ok pretty good. It's very hot.
Although the two men begin their conversation causally by mentioning the weather outside, the weather immediately becomes politicized when the pastor notes his concerns for the migrants. A subject as seemingly mundane as the weather, what many people would refer as “small talk,” can quickly become a political conversation. Both men started the conversation in a light spirit yet by the end of this quick interchange both men became clearly distressed. The realization that they are comfortably seated in an air conditioned restaurant while migrants seek shelter from the heat below a mesquite tree is stark and difficult to ignore. This is yet another example of how the violence of the borderlands permeates volunteers' daily lives.

I do not assert that volunteers do not recognize the violence of the situation in which they live and work, but often volunteers like Victor are unknowingly pulled back into reality of a violent environment. A consequence of this occurs when volunteers fully recognize that their ability to decrease violence in their community is limited. Volunteers are often confronted with the reality that what they do may have no overall change in policy. Danielle Alvarado speaks to me on the thoughts she often has when thinking about the ability to decrease any substantial amount of violence on the border:

“There are so many things that are really hard. Coming head to head, we say it's not conflict but running up against the government everyday is really depressing and really hard, it's like fighting this huge dragon. I feel like we come up short every day because they always have more resources. They always have more money, they have more cars.”

In this case the experience of violence can be something as mundane as realizing that you do
not have as much or even the same type of resources available to you. The task set before you can never be achieved because you simply do not have the tools, or you do not have enough tools. Realizing that even before one begins they are disadvantaged inflicts real injury to a person's state of being. In this way, the realization is not insignificant because it can have a real impact on a volunteer's perception of himself and his abilities.

**Trauma**

The repeated witnessing or experiencing of violence becomes trauma. Trauma occurs when there is some level or presence of violence in which a person is unable to adequately process or reconcile. I define trauma as the state in which a person is overwhelmed because he or she was unprepared for the situation presented. Trauma can happen instantly when such an event is so severe that it completely overwhelms a person's ability to manage the situation. Trauma can also occur over time when repeated violence is never fully addressed.

A more detailed explanation and analysis of trauma will be presented in Chapter Four. For now, I draw on Danielle's statement pertaining to the nature of No More Deaths work, a statement which reveals the violence and trauma volunteer often experience, while also touching on some of the themes in the next chapter:

“Sometimes this work really inflicts pain on us. It's interesting because some people think that if we were to say that, it somehow takes away from the pain that is inflicted on other people like migrants. They say they don't want to trivialize migrant pain by saying 'I experience pain too' and I don't think it's like a zero sum. I don't think that if I get 5% more trauma that migrants are less traumatized. But it is really difficult for us to do the work that we do and one of the reasons I feel like it's possible for me to do is that I have community support, even if we don't say 'I'm going to support you because we all experience secondary trauma.' Even if I don't say that, they know what I'm feeling even if we don't have explicit discussions about it.”
Danielle challenges the expectations of what her community should provide her. She strongly believes that the trauma that aid workers face is not only real but also deserving of recognition. Aid workers need to accept that trauma happens even to the privileged. From this acceptance, organizations such as No More Deaths must deal with the trauma they witness and experience as a united organization. Danielle's community is clearly split between people who acknowledge trauma as an issue. These are the people that Danielle identifies as her support group, who acknowledge her pain and attempt to console her. More importantly, this support group enables Danielle to continue her work with No More Deaths. There is, however, another group of volunteers who do not believe that trauma concerns them. To them, trauma only affects migrants. For Danielle, this belief is dangerous in that it devalues the identity of aid workers and their emotional needs. It also assumes that, as Danielle describes, there is a limited and fixed amount of trauma experienced. To me, Danielle's candid statements that the work inflicts pain and that she also experiences that pain, point to the humanity and common experiences of all people—migrant or not.

**Piecing the Paradigm Together**

Privilege enables volunteers to work with No More Deaths. Their privilege gives them the ability to receive the education that informs them on border issues. Money, time, and freedom to travel to the border are all resources associated with privilege. Indeed, the decision to volunteer with No More Deaths as a humanitarian is a privileged one.

The inclusion of violence within the paradigm occurs at the point when volunteers
arrive in the borderlands. Non-local volunteers are struck by the military presence on the border, which is typically very different than their hometowns. As volunteers with No More Deaths, aid workers begin to live and work without sanctuary from the violence of the borderlands. The nature of humanitarian aid work is violent: volunteers witness tangible physical violence and less noticeable normalized systemic violence. Witnessing the trauma of others, the aid worker experiences his or her own trauma. The trauma worsens as aid workers return to their notion of privilege and reject their own problems. They argue that the violence they experience is incomparable to the violence that migrants endure. Therefore, the paradigm continues in the form of a triangle of privilege—violence—trauma and will not stop until volunteers actively identify and claim ownership of the trauma they suffer in order to heal from them and experience in the borderlands.

I end this chapter with another statement from Danielle Alvarado which gives evidence to the formulation of the paradigm. As she notes, volunteers reject the notion of vicarious trauma because they see it as “touchy feely” and disrespectful of the realities of migrants. Yet because they acknowledge their privilege so extensively, they are willing to sacrifice their own needs in order to further support the goals of No More Deaths. They recognize that they live and work in a violent atmosphere yet they make no group effort to address this issue. As a result, many members of the community such as Danielle become concerned with the level of trauma that is inflicted and unaddressed. After all, “This is not a normal situation:”

“When we were going to have Sarah come do that presentation on vicarious trauma. When we proposed that we wanted an hour next week to talk about this, some people were like, ‘well, will we have enough time to have our meeting if we do that?’ That's the logic, that this isn't really our work, it's some extra touchy feely thing that's nice if
we have time for it. But I feel like that's the foundation because if we're not healthy as a community [pause] then our work is built on what we're capable of doing. I think it diminishes our capacity when we compromise our health in that way. That's why I think it would be so amazing if we were able to start thinking of taking care of ourselves as a good use of our time and recognizing that this is traumatic work that we do. People like to say, 'oh we're just the people in Arizona that do that things that have to be done', but we also say we're in a crisis situation, a humanitarian crisis where we have to put ourselves on par with Rwanda and other refugee situations, and those are not normal situations. This is not a normal situation so I don't think we should be able to just deal with it.”
CHAPTER FOUR: 
Trauma: Re-invoking the Everyday

“It affects a person... if you look at them [migrants] as a human being, you're going to experience vicarious trauma.” - Maureen Marx

“The everyday is eventful” (Das 2007, 218).

Defining Trauma

In the previous chapter, I laid the framework of a theoretical paradigm in which privilege, violence, and trauma are intertwined. I suggested that volunteers often become trapped within this paradigm because they are unable to recognize their own suffering. I also provided an example of how aid workers understand their own trauma, as being separate, but equally as important as the trauma experienced by migrants. As a result, it becomes difficult for aid workers to heal from their experiences in the desert. This chapter further explores the concept of trauma and its implications in the field.

In her book, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, Veena Das discusses some of the repercussions of violence on the individual. Das states pain and trauma to be two clear products. Violence has transcended our daily connotation of physical pain or injury. It has evolved into a systemic or structural aggressor that inflicts pain. Like the environment of the borderlands, Danielle's need to also be valued highlights Das's claim that “to be vulnerable is not the same as to be a victim” (Das 2007, 63). One must come to
understand the clear distinction between the two before fully comprehending how violence affects the person. Danielle clearly states that her emotions matter as well and valuing her personal needs does not in term undervalue the experiences of migrants. Das is making a similar claim that to assess violence, we need to understand it appears in different layers—nuanced and overt.

Das's book also refers to how one experiences trauma and how he or she knows it in others. These are again two claims that Danielle and other volunteers emphasis. Pain and trauma are real, aids workers need to recognize all forms and manifestations of this reality. Das writes:

“If I cannot claim to know the pain of the other...what is it to relate to such pain? The absence of any standing languages of pain is perhaps symptomatic of the fact that I cannot separate my pain from my expression for it—another way of saying this is that my expression of pain compels you in unique ways—you are not free to believe or disbelieve me—our future is at stake. I want to reenter this scene of devastation to ask how one might inhabit such a world, one which has been made strange through the desolating experience of violence and loss” (Das 2007, 39)

Aid workers need others to understand the trauma they experience, but in order to accomplish this goal, aid workers need to first understand their own trauma. This means that there must be some value placed on the self before any work can be done with the other. Das asks the reader to redefine their understanding of pain and to see it as dispossession of ability.

“Pain in this rendering is not that inexpressible something that destroys communication or marks an exit from one's existence in language. Instead, it makes a claim on the other—asking for acknowledgment that may be given or denied” (Das 2007, 40).

Another theme of this chapter is concisely addressed by Danielle Alvarado, “We’re
the same people. If we're not addressing our trauma then we can't explain it to other people.” I seek to place value on the trauma experienced and witnessed by aid workers. Only when these experiences and emotions are recognized, can the complexities of aid work be relayed to others. As Danielle describes, No More Deaths workers are also part of mainstream United States culture. Volunteers collect these experiences in the desert but if they do not take the time to value their own experiences, then these experiences essentially disappear. It is impossible to address a problem or meet a need if those problems are never voiced. The phenomenon of trauma within humanitarian aid work in relation to volunteers needs to be valued in order to have a tangible meaning outside of the individual experience—to affect the organization as a whole.

Trauma within the humanitarian field is both experienced and witnessed. Both of these layers need to be equally recognized. One form of trauma should not be more important than another. What needs to be distinguished is the response to the form of trauma. Clearly, a person who witnesses a traumatic situation or hears of a traumatic story does not need the same type of support as a person who experienced that traumatic event. One cannot, however, deem one experience more significant, critical, or pressing. Organizations need to address all forms of trauma in order to maintain awareness and effectively carry out their work. The trauma of aid workers needs to be addressed. It may cause pain and conflict within volunteers in such a way that they may be unable to address their own needs. This feeling of uneasiness is then repeated numerous times until it forms into a cumulative trauma.

The accumulation of trauma is not a new discovery within Anthropology. In reading about the experiences of Sverker Finnstrom in his book, *Living with Bad Surroundings: War,*
History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda, I am able to draw corollary inferences to my own research. Although our sites are thousands of miles from each other, the story of the Acholi can also be applied to the experiences of Arizona aid workers:

“According to Acholi beliefs, the shadow being of a killed person might return to disturb its killer. If you have 'killed too many people,' as Tonny puts it, this will have a profound and malevolent influence on your behavior. He used the metaphor of butchery, 'if you slaughter cows all day, you will end up dreaming about it.' In addition, the spirit of the one who died violently will also disturb the person who found the body. People who merely witness or otherwise experience the violence of war can be disturbed, with repeated nightmares and other daily flashbacks that assail their memories. Thus there is a continuous and destructive challenge to ordinary, quotidian life. There is a quantitative dimension to this—the more cen (ghostly vengeance) you experience, the greater its effect. A violent shadow unfolds before you. The result is that the exposed person will start behaving asocially, amorally, and eventually in violent and destructive ways” (Finnstrom 2008, 160).

Although No More Deaths aid workers have never purposefully killed people, too much exposure to violence can cause serious emotional and psychological consequences. Moreover, non-aggressors, victims, and people who have simply witnessed or indirectly experienced these violent situations can also be affected. In this way, the concept of vicarious trauma is real, alive, and recognized in other cultures and scenarios. In a violent environment, all players are affected and they must all take active roles in trying to preserve some form of an “ordinary life.” Otherwise, they may experience a destructive lifestyle.

In this chapter, I will first define trauma. Then I will discuss the origins and push factors that are involved with trauma. From the origins, I also investigate why trauma happens, and why aid workers find it difficult to claim their own experiences as traumatic. Lastly, I discuss the effects of trauma.
Discovering the Origins and Push Factors Involved in Experiencing Trauma

Recall from the previous chapter that within the humanitarian sector, trauma has evolved into an idea or connotation of unexpected pain that leads to suffering. I use the word “unexpected” to reveal this experience of being physically and mentally overwhelmed—without knowing what to expect, a person can easily become overloaded. Revisiting the paradigm of humanitarian aid, trauma arises from violent environments. This is because these environments facilitate a collision of power, ability, and anger. Power comes from the roles that migrants, government agents, and humanitarians play. Each group has different levels of agency. Agency is seen as the ability to choose or make decisions. These levels of agency lead to feelings of anger and frustration or even despair. Pain is the product of these emotional reactions. Trauma comes from suffering or witnessing the pain of others.

The phenomenon of experiencing trauma without having been directly traumatized in the situation is not a new concept. Anthropologists refer to it as simply the process of witnessing (Das 2007). One sees and experiences the traumas of others. Psychologists often refer to this experience as “secondary trauma.” Primary trauma is defined as the trauma felt by those directly involved. Within humanitarian communities such as No More Deaths, this process is often called “vicarious trauma” (Headington Institute 2009). These terms each do a different type of work for those involved and those who do the analyzing. The notion of witnessing trauma is an acknowledgement that trauma can be transferable. When a person witnesses something, they ultimately become part of that experience.

I do not favor the use of the term secondary trauma as I feel that it sterilizes the experiences of the victim and the onlooker. Trauma cannot simply be split in definite levels. Often trauma is permeable, for example, can a mother who witnesses the death of her child be called a victim of secondary trauma? This term does not address the positioning or relationship of the mother to the child nor does it really value the experiences of the mother. I use the term vicarious trauma interchangeably with the anthropological term of witnessing because it is part of the language used by aid workers. Vicarious implies a relationship between the direct victim and those also affected. Both “vicarious” and “witnessing” give value and respect to the experiences of both players.

It is important to also realize that the use of each word: witnessing, secondary, and vicarious affect the way in which trauma is perceived and understood. An attempt to categorize and identify the various forms of trauma may lead to devaluing some experiences while prizing others. In navigating my argument, which seeks to provide evidence for the traumatic experiences of aid workers, I must often recall the type of work that each word does for the concept of trauma.

To highlight this concept of vicarious trauma, I use John's story of a volunteer (who I also witnessed) who experienced the pain of witnessing another suffering. The pain she felt became real and affected her in such a way—both emotional and physical—that it became a sort of trauma that had to be addressed:

“Folks have gone away very [pause] very upset by what they have experienced. Sometimes with even the best tools we are unprepared for what is going to happened. For example, in camp a couple of weeks ago [pause] one of our guests said, 'I'm ready to go back to Mexico, would you please call border patrol' and one of the folks here asked a second and a third time to clarified and then asked me to ask him again. I said you know we have asked this individual a number of ways as gently as possible
and they've been very consistent and clear that they can't go on and they want to go back with the border patrol. It was one person’s need to want this person to, as they see it, not give up. So part of it was, 'why can't we just transport this person?' Why can't we do something to fix this situation? Then when border patrol came, the border patrol agent was one of the most amiable, gregarious guys that I've come across in border patrol. He was new and had called half a dozen times to find directions because as often is the case with border patrol on the ground unfamiliar with the territories and getting lost—he seemed so relieved to be here. And when I asked if we could please give food and water to our guest who was going to be put in his custody while he's in the vehicle—that's often denied to us. He said of course sure you can! And when the two of them pulled away I commented to one of the other volunteers, 'well that's as good as it gets,' and I saw one of them, the very new volunteers just on the verge of breaking down. Just...just...leaving the scene immediately clearly distressed. I was able to talk to this person a little bit later and she said, 'you said it was as good as it gets but it was horrible for me. That's the first time I've ever seen anything like that. I'm struggling with I've just seen.' It was a wakeup call for me how I can be desensitized in the moment and how raw and how fresh and how real this is to someone that is new and has not seen it that way before. So it was important for me to sit and talk and listen to each other...When I think of trauma I think of severe injuries and I don't always automatically think of blood and broken bones, I also think of [pause] emotional trauma. There was a degree of trauma that was evident of the volunteer that I mentioned earlier. When border patrol pulled away, I’d seen this person for a number of days and there was something about her nonverbal—and most of our communication is nonverbal, when I looked at her face, her eyes, her posture, it just spoke [pause] trauma. 'I have just been traumatized; I am just really not ok right now.' So I would say [pause] a dramatic assault on body or psyche.

John mentions that trauma is an assault, and it may occur even when an aid worker is presented with the best tools. Therefore trauma can still occur even if we are in the presence of a supporting and open community and even if we take time for ourselves and decompress.

“Trauma is much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in an attempt to tell us of a reality of truth that is not otherwise available” (“Cathy Caruth in Stanely Cavell, Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman” in Das 2007, 102). Moreover, many times the trauma affects a person in such a way that that person in unable to clearly describe their pain. Working on the border inherently lends itself to experiencing trauma.
This volunteer who I will call Jane\textsuperscript{12} experienced a new and overwhelming situation. Having never seen this type of interaction among aid worker, border patrol, and migrant, Jane did not know how to respond. What she witnessed and experienced was completely different than the experiences of the migrant and even that of the other aid workers. I was one of the other aid workers who also agreed with John that this was the best it was going to get. It was rare for us to work with such an amiable border patrol agent, but for Jane, she saw a migrant—a human being treated like an animal as he was patted down by the officer and then loaded into the back of a truck where the door was covered in a heavy grade iron mesh—meant for stray dogs.

Jane's psyche, her personhood, was assaulted that day. The trauma she witnessed was real. It affected her in such a way that her personality and demeanor drastically changed. No, she was not the person placed in the border patrol truck, but her experiences are nevertheless as real. Both the migrant and Jane became players in a traumatic situation. A person's literal freedom was taken away as he was handcuffed and escorted to the back of the truck. This happened at the time when another person's belief in freedom was also being chained.

\textbf{Beyond Privilege: Why does Trauma Happen?}

In this section, I look beyond the paradigm and ask, although trauma is closely linked to privilege, why else might it occur? To answer this question, one needs to take a step back and ask, where do volunteers feel pain in their work? The answer is not simple because the pain was felt through an intricate process. There is some level of trauma evoked even before

\textsuperscript{12} Not actual name.
aid workers arrive on the borderlands. The feeling of empathy\textsuperscript{13} for migrants and the subsequent “call to action” instill a type of vulnerability prevalent in all humanitarians. Essentially, as I will discuss in another chapter, metaphorically, volunteers feel a piece of their own hearts begin to break.

Michael Barnett wrote in \textit{Humanitarian Aid in Question}, “humanitarianism concerns the attempt to alleviate the suffering of distant strangers (Barnett and Weis 2008, 237). This is where I believe, the trauma begins. Aid workers hold themselves responsible to distant stranger—people they have no relation to nor have they ever met and yet a particularly strong feeling of empathy and servitude arises. It is the inability (in the perspective of the aid worker) to adequately fill that role of the helper that causes the conflict and pain within the volunteer. Teresa Simone identifies this internal struggle by naming the concerns that she believes cause trauma, “I think that there is guilt and [pause] and ideas of ‘what if, what should have, what would have?’” Volunteers arrive to work with No More Deaths under the assumption that they are doing some type of “good,” something that will benefit the overall work of aiding migrants yet they often find themselves completely overwhelmed by their experiences. They come to help and yet they feel helpless.

Victor Ceballos shares another experience in which the problems he is presented with

\textsuperscript{13} In reference to Corinne Bancroft's statement which help me conceptualize trauma as being directly related to empathy. “I think it [trauma] is empathy—isn't empathy feeling something that someone else is experiencing? At the meeting about vicarious trauma they were saying that when you witness traumatic situations like when you hear the stories of migrants who have had really had horrible experience that it's emotionally trying. I thought to myself, “we know that! Of course that's true! Anyone who does this work knows that!” But one of the things that I think is also emotionally trying is to, [pause] your doing your own No More Deaths thing and I notice this more during the spring break groups because everyone is new...It's really hard for other people, so [pause] when I interact with other people and it's vicarious trauma or I feel like I don't know [pause] I can sort of deal with it or do my own thing but then when volunteers do it for the first time, they want to come tell me about how their feelings and then I feel empathy for the migrant and for the volunteers too. I think, I can't do this!”
cannot simply be fixed with food, water, and shelter. The trauma experienced by aid workers becomes the realization and direct confrontation of the humanitarian critique. How much good can truly be done, and whose responsibility is it to ensure it is done?

“I just think the work we're doing is so [pause] we see so many people suffering. We see kids walking in the desert with their families [pause] people walking and drinking their gallons filled with cattle water. Sometimes it's the evidence left behind—gallons being slashed or our bottles being used as target practice. So it does affect you, it affects you very deeply. So you know, some of those folks who are out in the desert for more than a week, I'm like whoa—that's, just one day out there you see things that are like 'wow this is horrible to see people suffering like that' and you just think 'did they make it, did they get hurt?' I think just what they are seeing out there, it's just so intense. It's going to affect people. Some people say they can deal with it, I'm ok ,I'm ok, but I don't know.’”

What could Victor truly do about the children crossing in the desert? At a loss for words, Victor momentarily pauses in the middle of the first sentence. He is unable to identify exactly what the work is, within an emotional context. It is difficult for him to describe exactly what it is that he feels or experiences as a No More Deaths worker. Das describes a similar experience when she recounts her experience with Manjit, a Punjabi housewife:

“Her violation was of an order that the whole principle of life stood violated and that to put it back into words could not be done except with extreme hesitation. Hence the boundaries she had created between saying and showing could not be crossed by carless invitations to conversation such as: Tell me what happened” (Das 2007, 91).

Volunteers cannot simply tell someone “what happened.” As Victor says, the work is emotional and it does affect those involved very deeply. It affects workers because there seems to be a loss of civility—what they understood as a basic standard of living or set of rights became completely devastated as they watched needs go unmet. Children should not be forced to walk the desert because they and their parents became victims within an international community. Jim Marx echoes Victor's call for civility questioning the existence
of true equality:

“...I've done a lot of driving around the country but I'm not accustomed to finding people lying in the ditch dying and so that traumatized me. It's like gah! It overwhelmed my brain and caused an emotion that for a little bit I didn't know what to do with. I just wanted to be mad. I just wanted to say that's not fair, that's not right...In the beginning I was kind of angry about it. For some people, it's a spiritual trauma. They ask how God can allow this if they believe in a God. Some people will think it's just evil—how does this fit within my view of the world? ..."

How can volunteers make sense of this new toppled version of the world? How will volunteers make sense of this same space again? Jim is familiar with many United States roads yet it is difficult (for obvious reasons) for him to connect his understanding of a road as not only a place of transportation but also a place of migrant trauma and death. Spaces that once seem safe or familiar become drastically changed from that previous schema, as volunteers are bombarded with the reality of the border. Das connects this notion of space to trauma—the land in which the people live begets the trauma they endure. “This image of turning back evokes not so much the idea of a return as a turning back to inhabit the same space now marked as a space of destruction in which you must live again” (Das 2000, 208). As Das wrote, the space was the same but Jim's perception of it had changed. He now had to negotiate between two communities and upon his return to Tucson, he was forced to reconcile with the reality of living in a “space of destruction.” Volunteers often hold experiences similar to Jim's and come to believe the camp's reality as normal and Tucson as abnormal. Tucson, therefore, becomes a place of violence in which no one acts to restrain the harm while the camp becomes a place of familiarity and action. People act within these norms at the camp. They witness violence and respond. In Tucson, there was no response to the same violence.
At the camp, even water becomes tainted both literally and symbolically. Victor mentioned “cattle water” in his earlier statement. A core belief of No More Deaths volunteers is that people should never be forced to drink unclean water, meaning still water that is infested with algae and animal feces. Even the debris left behind becomes a painful reminder of the violence of the borderlands, as gallons meant for migrants are brutally slashed by opponents draining the precious liquid onto an encrusted sand-scape. Aid workers look to each other asking, “Why would someone do this? Why do they want them to die? Why would a human being deny another human something as necessary as water?” These questions can never be answered.

These actions seem small in comparison to the extraordinary violence that sometimes occurs on the border yet they can become just as painful. I recall one evening when members of a patrol began to cry during the nightly debriefings because of a discovery of over 40 slashed gallons. Their tears were just as real and as compelling as those of other volunteers I had witnessed who grieved over medical evacuations or violent encounters with border patrolmen. Although the person who slashed these gallons probably did not intend to primarily offend aid workers, (he or she was most likely trying to deny migrants the water) a complex situation arose. It was as if this person had intimately attacked the No More Deaths volunteers, and serious pain and trauma resulted.

The last source from which trauma originates is the unknown. Aid workers like Victor, often never know the end of the migrant’s journey. In a way, for No More Deaths volunteers, the meeting of distant strangers becomes intensely intimate but is subsequently catapulted from within reach. The work of No More Deaths and the nature of the borderlands
are so transient and temporary. Here one moment and gone the next without detection. The only evidence that remain is the memories—many of which are never shared or retold. Just like the slashed jugs that are collected, a chance meeting with a migrant may last for only a few moments—a temporary relationship that unlike work at a refugee camp escapes as soon as the migrant walks away. Volunteers bandage the ankle of migrant only to send him off to the steepest mountains. There is healing in knowing the end of the story, but for No More Deaths workers this type of healing rarely occurs.

Victor has set out the basic origins of trauma, but Danielle reinforces those origins by stating that even if no apparent violence occurred the experience is still traumatic due to the nature of the work:

“Even if nothing goes wrong, and you feel like you had a totally average No More Deaths day, there is something really painful about encountering people in the situations that we see them in. I think it's just traumatic to begin with. There is no good day. Even if, 'oh yea 40 gallons are gone' that means there are 40 people wandering around in the Sonoran desert.”

We return once again to an idea of civility—“they should not have to because it is unfair. It is unjust.” This logic seems reasonable, but it is also problematic because it is impossible to ensure justice. Ordinary people like aid workers cannot be and are not keepers of equality, yet the responsibility to fill that role persists due to the nature of privilege and the paradigm it fosters within humanitarian aid. Should an ordinary person who has experienced extraordinary situations be responsible for any or all of the consequences that arise? Or does the experience transcend both the migrant and the aid worker—does it become bigger than just the individual players?

“Everyone needs more and we can't give them more. I know it's true that we save lives but I know they need more than what I can give them. It's very painful and there
is a trauma when things don't go right. I feel like I created more problems for somebody and then it's like "oh I get to come here and feel like I'm helping somebody." It was so awful that summer when that kid got pulled off the ambulance and deported to Nogales. This guy came to the camp and he hadn't drank anything for three days. He had obvious signs of kidney damages already. He was 20 years old—he said he was 20, but he was really like 17. It was just awful because finally he asked us to call the ambulance for him and there was sorta, I felt like some people were trying to convince him to do it, even though he didn't want to. Finally after a few days he said ok and then the ambulance came and then the border patrol took him off the ambulance and deported him. He got some IV fluid and then they deported him. That was so awful. From my perspective it was awful to feel like we had created more problems for this person. We had promised him that that wouldn't happen. The thing he feared the most happened to him. I felt like we were complicit in that happening. I feel like it's really traumatic to realize how little we can do for people and its worst when the little we can do seems to create more problems."

It is never truly within the right or the ability for aid workers to promise a particular outcome to a migrant, and yet, these transactions occur daily. How does this happen when it is also true that aid workers are thoughtful and logical? Danielle even admits at the beginning of her statement that she hurts knowing she cannot give or do as much as she wants. This situation occurs because although aid workers understand and recognize their limits, the emotions they feel are not restricted to the same bounds. Aid workers empathize with migrants and attempt to mold the outcome of events controlled by external factors and players such as the border patrol. They do this in order to make sense of world that they feel is unjust.

Aid workers are not responsible for what happened to this migrant. Yet, they feel that because they attempted to do “good” but instead incurred negative consequences that they did “bad,” even though humanitarian work cannot be analyzed so simply. Should aid workers concentrate on motive or result? Danielle says she felt complicit but was she really? What could she have truly said to the border patrol to prevent their actions? I return once again to
Teresa's earlier conjecture. The trauma arises out of the blame game—a play on “should have, would have, could have.” Yet ironically these options never really exist within the limits of aid work on the border. Because they do not truly exist and are not viable choices, aid workers become implicated in the trauma of migrants and therefore experience responsibility, pain, and suffering. Danielle continues to explain how she relates to migrants and why she feels pain in this work:

“On top of that, every time we hear from people what their experiences are like and all the horrible things that have happened to them before they've even got to us, like people who have been raped or robbed or separated from their families. I feel like I carry all of those stories with me too. I feel like it's not the same as if happened to me but I totally feel like I carry some of that with me—all the things I've heard that happened to other people.”

Danielle explicitly acknowledges that the experiences of migrants are obviously not her own but they still hold meaning to her. She “carries” these stories with her, and they become part of her story as an aid worker. At the same time, these stories add stress and therefore conflict and pain to Danielle's experience. The repeated witnessing or collecting of these stories results in systemic and everyday trauma for volunteers:

“It's awful to feel like you're part of ending that person's dream. It's awful to not be able to help them. I can't do . Then you watch them walk away and you have no idea what will happen to them. It's so traumatic to never [pause] there's no resolution [pause] ever. You see the same crisis over and over again and you never know what happens to somebody. There's been two people that I’ve know where I knew what happened to them after I met them and I can probably say I've met 1000's of people in the aid stations and the desert and I only know two.”

Can Danielle truly be seen as ending a person's dreams? I do not think so, but I also would not deny Danielle's belief that she feels responsible for the happiness of migrants. No More Deaths workers often slide between “grays” so to speak. They feel that are never doing enough, yet what they wish to for migrants would be considered breaking the law. Agamben's
concept of the homo sacer is again relevant to No More Deaths. The structure of the United States government is currently that the lives of citizens must be preserved, but the lives of non-citizens—“illegals”—can be sacrificed. Volunteers work against this treatment of life, and they are often confronted with an ethical dilemma—is breaking the law immoral? Can one “do more” if it is illegal? No More Deaths workers cannot; yet, they still feel as if they should. There is an odd guilt that arises because one is unable to sacrifices himself.

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, it does not arise out of a “white man's notion” but rather an intense belief in equality and civility. As Danielle mentions, witnessing the same crisis numerous times takes a serious toll on the psyche, so that aid workers are unsure whether to react with indignation, sorrow, or helplessness. Danielle and Victor both identify these crises and the psychological and emotional consequence of not knowing the next steps within another person's journey.

**How is Trauma Shared and Experienced?**

The power of storytelling is incredibly powerful to the experience of trauma. It is able to carry an effective message that is shared and valued by the listener and the teller. Sue Lefebvre demonstrates this ability by recalling the stories told to her by other aid workers.

“People talk about their experiences and I hear the emotion in their voices. I wasn't there, but I can still relate. For example, Dan's experiences affected me, you can hurt for someone that you care for. We hear a lot of stories, some heartwarming and some will break your heart.”

Stories can affect listeners by eliciting particular emotional responses. Sue describes the stories told to her as both inspiring and heartbreaking. Although these stories motivate her
work in No More Deaths, they also cause pain. Sue is unable to change what has already occurred. Moreover, if these stories directly implicate a close friend then Sue is not only unable to help the migrant but also the aid worker who hurts from this experience. When a person sees someone else in pain, it causes discomfort within oneself.

Teresa Simone explains this pain through a physical characterization,

“When I see people who are not doing well, like people who have really bad blisters. It just makes my whole stomach hurt, my whole core just aches. I think about them walking and how much pain that must be. A lot of times when I encounter them, I feel like I want to give them more than what I am able to in that moment. I always feel limited. If only I had this, if only we had that, we could help this person more, and there are limits on how we can help people and a lot of times it becomes difficult for me to accept in my brain...When I meet people [pause] I don't understand how, when you do encounter these people, how you could deny them.”

Jim Marx explains this pain through an emotional characterization,

“We found this fellow hiding in the ditch—a migrant in the ditch. He was an older gentleman and clearly in trouble. He had been separated from his group. He'd been out there in five days...We had to call the squad. We told him he was in real danger of [pause] well of dying if he didn't get medical attention. It is probably the one example I use when I went from intellectually knowing something about the border to [pause] a real investment from the gut—from the heart. I was so upset I cried. I mean here was a fellow at work in Sacramento, had a family actually three kids and married a woman who was a citizen in the US. He went back to see his parents. He went back a number of times, but as the border got increasingly tighter, he now had to play this game to get across. To see what he was put through and the gauntlet he had to run through just made me mad. [Pause] People should not be treated that way.”

In these ways, pain becomes real, not simply an emotional or mental response but also physical—one that can be felt, measured, and spatially articulated. Witnessing the pain of others affects the aid worker. Imagining the pain of others may actually transfer it to oneself. Elaine Scarry wrote in *The Body in Pain*, that those who suffer from traumas must literally learn to remake their own worlds, both personal and external. All pain must be acknowledged in order to rectify or progress from a particular trauma:
“Regardless of the setting in which he suffers (home, hospital, or torture room), and regardless of the cause of his suffering (disease, burns, torture, or malfunctioning of the pain network itself), the person in great pain experiences his own body as the agent of his agony. The ceaseless, self-announcing signal of the body of pain, at once so empty and undifferentiated and so full of blaring adversity, contains not only the feeling 'my body hurts' but the feeling 'my body hurts me' (Scarry 1985, 47).

This physical pain of exhaustion and body ache is coupled with internal pain, to form trauma. The body becomes the canvas onto how the person experiences pain. Here the body is able to store those traumas and possibly incur more physical or emotional pain. The body may also release those emotions onto the surrounding environment. Thus, the body is able to feel simultaneously “full” and “empty.” Those in pain may recognize a loss of emotion or energy—a feeling of helplessness, and yet, they may also experience anger, regret, and indignation—a feeling of emotional pressure. In either case, the body becomes essentially the litmus test for the environment in which we experience pain and trauma.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the effects and consequences that may result from an unaddressed accumulation of trauma through the phenomenon known as burnout.
CHAPTER FIVE:
Manifestations and Effects of Trauma: Burnout

“I think it's true [laughs] when I joined I didn't know it would be true and then it was true and I was sorta shocked by how quickly I got tired. I think the reason why I get tired is because it takes a lot of energy to emotionally invest yourself in the people. Also, it takes a certain amount of energy to physically do the work of No More Deaths. I think if it wasn't No More Deaths, if it was just 'go out and be in the desert and hike around the same distance' and everything and there wasn't any emotional stuff. I could it for a lot longer. So I was just surprised that after three or four days I would just feel dead, and I wouldn't know why because usually I like to be out. I like to think that I'm a lot stronger than I am.” - Corinne Bancroft

The word “burnout” is not a new one. In fact it has become a popular colloquial phrase used in everyday interactions. Students often claim they are burned out after studying for multiple exams or clocking excessive work study hours. Burnout is commonly used to describe a person's state of being when he or she is stretched beyond their normal or daily limits. The state of burnout has physical as well as emotional and psychological characteristics and experiences.

Burnout is also used medically to describe a psychological condition in which a person experiences extreme exhaustion and a diminished interest in activities previously enjoyed (Maslach 1981). The phenomenon of burnout is recognized in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems 10th Revision. Additionally, extensive research has been conducted on the nature of burnout. In the 1970's
Christina Maslach studied the effects of job burnout and released the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) which became the “most widely used research measure within the burnout field”\textsuperscript{14}.

I will examine how the term burnout is used within the No More Deaths community and to see what work the word burnout does for volunteers within the language of humanitarian aid organization. The word “burnout” is not something that I have ascribed to my informants, rather it is a term they use themselves. It is a word used commonly within the community and it holds specific value and meaning. I am interested in how the use of this term influences the individual and his or her understanding of trauma and healing.

The crux of burning out however, is that many aid workers never recognize the symptoms. They, like Corinne, have the belief that they are “stronger” than the situations that they experience. They do not understand why their body reacts so differently and are surprised to find that they, like all people, have limits, which must be respected. Corinne's statement concisely describes how burnout is an essential part of the No More Deaths experience and why volunteers struggle to act on its presence. In her book Condemned to Repeat, humanitarian Fiona Terry writes that the first stage that many aid workers experience while trying to respond to the stress of their violent environments is by overworking. “Overworking commonly produces 'burnout,' which impairs a worker's effectiveness and lucidity, reducing analytical potential and capacity for change” (Terry 2008, 225)

New volunteers will often ignore common symptoms such as fatigue and irritability in order to continue their work. They see these emotions as simply a result of their

\textsuperscript{14} Christina Maslach. Professional Profile. University of California: Berkeley. 
http://maslach.socialpsychology.org/
commitment to the No More Deaths mission. This however, leads many volunteers to burnout even more quickly as they become displeased or annoyed by the actions of other aid workers. It is only with time and experience that volunteers recognize their own humanity and adjust to meet these personal needs.

This chapter explores the theme of burnout within a humanitarian aid community. It discusses various definitions of burnout and why burnout occurs. I then consider how volunteers have learned to prevent burnout and why, ironically, burnout persists within No More Deaths. The last section of the chapter answers the essential question, why should we care about burnout?

What is “Burnout?”

When I first began my research, I had no idea that “burnout” would quickly become an overriding theme. But in fact, in the first three interviews that I conducted, each volunteer freely discussed burnout as immediately connected to trauma. They described burnout as being the consequence of too much stimulation. These stimuli could be the desert environment or impatience at the camp community, but more often than not, volunteers described burnout as being a result of witnessing some sort of trauma.

Volunteers meet many migrants in need of help, and as a result, many volunteers feel internally responsible for migrants. Burnout happens when volunteers hold themselves to unattainable goals. Volunteers feel that if they were to release themselves from this responsibility, death and suffering in the desert would surely increase. The act of burning out
is inherently emotional, and the feeling of being directly responsible for another person's actions is rooted in the paradigm of privilege, violence, and trauma. Aid workers respond to this paradigm by fulfilling the needs that they see as volunteers; burnout occurs when they realize that those needs are endless yet they continue to try to match them. Returning to Sverker Finnstrom's work in Uganda, Finnstrom notes that these refugees “live with a harsh reality,” No More Deaths volunteers apply this same logic to migrants. If volunteers are unable to help migrants, then who else will?

“This is the preliminary and only conclusion that can be drawn from my structurally informed analysis of displacements in Acholiland. People live with a harsh reality. They exercise little or no control over their surroundings or even their own lives. Agency is experienced as being in the hands of others” (Finnstrom 2008, 133).

Much can be said about the reality of the Acholi refugees in Uganda and the Latin American migrants crossing through the Sonoran desert. Both groups are inherently dispossessed, as they are unable to make unconstrained independent choices. It seems their decisions, especially the decisions of migrants are reliant on the abilities of aid workers. Migrants can only receive as much as volunteers are able to give. I have witnessed this situation a multitude of times when aid workers encounter more migrants than they are able to provide for.

As one volunteer Gene Lefebvre told me, “You feel you are losing control of your view and normal behavior.” Aid workers who experience burnout can no longer logically put reason and perspective together. Reason, logic, and decision-making are rooted in an individual's perspective. John Hyde, another volunteer that I interviewed, said that burning out is when the perspective has been so dramatically altered that every situation, no matter how trivial, becomes a crisis in itself:
“When I begin to look at everything as a complication, as a crisis, as a problem to be solved immediately...when burnout begins to occur, there is I see, I observe a mentality that approaches the [pause] equates a situation of a person who is near death with several other tasks that need to be done right now. There becomes a 'everything is a crisis' and when we're in crisis mode 24/7 we are out of touch with reality and we need to realign and find out what centers us—to recognize 'I need to step back from this.' I need to take a break and see what is going on with me.”

Burnout implies a particular type of urgency. Tasks must be done now! If these task are not completed by this specific deadline than all our work was for naught. As John Hyde described, these tasks may be menial and many do not fall within the “death as a consequence” category yet to many volunteers everything becomes a crisis. Every second of every minute is of the utmost importance. This occurs because volunteers donate a limited amount of time—maybe only one or two weeks to the organization. This shortage of time propels them to “make the most of their experience.” Second, there is also a notion of “debt” that volunteers encounter. Volunteers feel that they “owe” something to migrants. This feeling is once again explained by the paradigm. Volunteers face little to no direct or immediate danger. This is not true for migrants. As a result, volunteers feel that given then these privileges, it is their duty to do the most that they possibly can for migrants who they envision as an invisible population in the United States. Third, the danger of migrant death and suffering is ever present in an aid worker's mind therefore it is easy to become transfixed on efficiency and timeliness.

**Burnout: Two Personalities**

I am drawn to two situations which paint an authentic depiction of burnout in the No
More Deaths community. The first story involves a woman named Mary\textsuperscript{15} and the second a man named Jeff\textsuperscript{16}. Mary was slightly older than the majority of the summer volunteers. She stood at medium height and average weight but on one particular day, she seemed to double in size and ferociousness. During my first week at the camp, I encountered my first confrontation with another member. It occurred during the afternoon break between patrols. Another volunteer and I were writing in our journals under the main picnic table tent area. Suddenly, Mary approached our table and began to yell at us. She became visibly frustrated and shouted about at us—why had we not separated the migrant clothing yet? At that moment, we were very confused. Although Mary had previously worked with No More Deaths, we had only met her the night before as she came into the camp halfway through the week. We were not sure what authority she had over us, but at that moment, the volume of her voice was enough. Like small children running after their mother's threats to discipline them, we rushed to the back tent behind the camp to see Mary frantically organizing the boxes of migrant clothes. She began to berate us about the importance of organization and what would we do if a migrant were to walk in right now? Although we had worked hard earlier that day, Mary's actions caused extreme discomfort and slight fear in the other volunteers. It completely changed the dynamic of the camp. We had been under the belief that the organization was based on consensus; yet, at that moment, we felt there was a clear hierarchy.

In those moments Mary, who was an otherwise friendly and attentive volunteer, was entrenched in her state of burnout. Burnout does not necessarily take a specifically long

\textsuperscript{15} Name changed.
\textsuperscript{16} Name changed
period of time to form; it is solely dependent on the individual. In Mary's case, experiences from her past work with the organization could have invoked memories that caused characteristics of burnout to manifest. Nevertheless, the presence of burnout in any form is detrimental to the unity and effectiveness of the camp environment.

Jeff, my second example, is not like Mary. The way burnout manifested in him was more gradual than abrupt. Because it was not as conspicuous, I would have never identified Jeff's actions as characteristic of burnout without first listening to the experiences of veteran volunteers. Jeff would load all three vehicles (each vehicle carrying 80-120 gallons of water) by himself. At 5:20AM, other volunteers were having their coffee and enjoying some personal time before the day had begun while Jeff would hurriedly pack the cars. By the time volunteers began to eat breakfast, Jeff had loaded the cars as well as packed necessary equipment for each patrol. This made other volunteers including myself, uncomfortable since many volunteers would discontinue their socializing or relaxation to aid a very flustered Jeff. I watched and remembered that seasoned volunteers (those who had spent three or more summers with No More Deaths) continue fulfilling their personal needs while inexperienced volunteers would rush to help Jeff. Jeff had created a imaginary timeline for himself to follow that was not truly effective since it made other volunteers uncomfortable and in the end did not allow for a quicker departure time. Volunteers were taken away from their own personal needs or timelines in order to fulfill Jeff's needs. As a result, these other volunteers required more time to readjust and prepare for the patrols.

Jeff's actions are significant indicators of burnout because they show his lack of perspective. His values were solely on getting the work done even if it was at the cost of
other volunteers and their time. Often Jeff would become frustrated with other volunteers and feel the need to do all of the work himself. He would only ask for help from a small group of volunteers and he formed a clique that, during one week of his time at No More Deaths, became openly discussed as verbally uncomfortable and unwelcoming. As he was generally a passive person, Jeff would often seclude himself from the majority of the camp volunteers, and he seemed to fear confrontation with the people who frustrated him. Once I told Jeff that the experiences with migrants were what really burned me out to which Jeff responded by saying that it was the meeting new people that was emotionally tiring for him. Although Jeff had a reserved personality, it was peculiar that he would equate sharing simple small talk as being as difficult as participating in medical evacuations.

An extension of the “burnout as crisis” theme is the idea that one person’s actions are more important than another's. Maureen Marx, a retired nurse and No More Deaths volunteer aptly calls this phenomenon the “martyr complex.”

“That's the martyr complex—no one can do it like me and if I'm not there everything will fall apart. Well I'm over that! That's what burnout is, having the savior complex if you think that you're so indispensable in that desert that nobody can do it except you then you're burnout and you don’t know it. Most people who are burnout will deny that they need a break. That's one of the first symptoms!” [Laughs]

Volunteers come to value their own actions over the actions of others as a control mechanism. It is impossible for volunteers to truly know whether or not their individual work is changing the life of another individual. It is, however, much simpler to value what we know is true—our own actions—than to suppose what may happen. Maureen touches on two specific concepts within the theme of burnout. First, a person who is burned out values their independent contribution over a group contribution. They don't trust that the work can and
will continue without them. Much of this mistrust occurs because the work of No More Deaths requires a specific skill set that cannot be achieved overnight.

Burnout occurs with many multi-week volunteers who have mastered skills such as memorizing water drops, driving patrols, filling camp water, and collecting information from migrants. These responsibilities may seem mundane, but they cannot simply be handed to a new volunteer. What these “martyr” volunteers fail to realize are the equally competent and experienced volunteers who came before them and the co-volunteers who trained with them. Personal pride and the fear of failure nurture the instinct to continue even when one is feeling overwhelmed. Second, Maureen mentions that a person who is burned out does not recognize their own state of being, nor are they willing to listen to others about their personal state of being. Volunteers see themselves as strong, capable beings. No More Deaths's work is highly self-selective so volunteers tend not to question their own capabilities and as a result often inappropriately compare themselves. Many volunteers espouse the notion that because migrants are suffering, the least they can do is continue with the work.

Below is an excerpt of an interview, in which one volunteer traces her understanding of burnout to her own personal experiences. Of particular notice is the use of the word “guilt” and how the emotion of guilt can transform into irrational thoughts and unattainable goals.

“Burnout is [pause] when you are at that place already where you can't take it anymore. Unfortunately I feel like burnout is so many steps down the road and there are lots of things that happen before they get to that point, but usually we wait till that point to tell that person, 'maybe you should take a break' when really that would have been helpful several steps prior. It's already at crisis at that point, I think. I know I'm burned out when I'm being impatient or being really crabby and thinking, 'no one knows as much as I do, or I do things better than other people, and if only I were there things would be happening.' This notion that if I were there, we would find
the people that really need help. This thought that it depends on you that you're more competent, and no one cares as much as you do, and if only I was there people would understand and everything that was happening would be exactly as it should. On the other hand is this feeling of guilt—I'm not there right now, I'm wasting my time, or it's not what I should be doing, or I'm not committed enough, or other people care more than me. If someone dies then it's my fault. I feel like when someone can't take it anymore, I think what accompanies burnout is the complete lack of perspective. You are so in it, you can't even conceive that the decisions you are making may not be the best one. There is no discussion, it's like, this is just how it is.”

Although Danielle's statements may seem extreme, these views aligned with the majority of my informants. Danielle was an extremely candid interviewee whose descriptions of burnout were particularly telling. For example, Danielle not only described basic emotional characteristics of burnout such as impatience, irritability, and inflated self-importance. She goes further by identifying an understanding of responsibility. When Danielle is burned out, she feels that the best work is not being done, and more strongly, she feels that the help she could provide would lead to real and notable differences such as finding a migrant in a dire situation. Through this perspective, it is easy to understand why many volunteers push themselves beyond the limits.

Danielle also introduces the concept of “guilt” as a cause of burnout. This is a fundamental element of my argument, as guilt is an immediate consequence of privilege within the humanitarian community. A volunteer feels guilty because he is given with the tools to help others. He is not the one that must be helped. When he does not feel that he is doing everything in his power or when he sees others doing more, the volunteer experiences guilt. He does not believe that he has lived up to the expectations that he has placed before himself. Tasks or events that are not dedicated to the humanitarian cause are seen as unimportant and a waste of resources. Danielle's sentence, “If someone dies then it's my
fault” speaks to the severity of this issue. Values can be so misaligned that volunteers whose initial goal was simply to “help” become severely affected by their responsibility to the distant people they seek to help.

How can volunteers feel such closeness to people they have never met? This again would be another characteristic of burnout. The perspective of an individual has been so altered that they feel personally responsible for helping every migrant in the desert. Volunteers may see inflated or even nonexistent relations between migrants and themselves. Yes, there is some level of connection among all human beings, yet what burnout does to volunteers is to heighten that sense of urgency so that whatever pain volunteers witness in migrants becomes their own personal loss as well.

“The very temptation to invoke analogies to remote cosmologies (and there is a long tradition of such analogies) is itself a sign of pain's triumph, for it achieves its evasiveness in part by bring about, even within the radius of several feet, this absolute split between one's sense of one's own reality and the reality of other persons” (Scarry 1985, 4).

Scarry writes that even the want to draw connections to unrelated events—the need to intimately empathize with all migrants—is a sign that a person's body is experiencing an overwhelming amount of pain—burnt out. Volunteers cannot longer distinguish between their own experiences and the realities of other people.

Interestingly, although Danielle can fully identify burnout, it does not mean that she is not unable to become affected by it. It appears that burnout will inevitably occur; it is each volunteer's responsibility to identify the change in themselves and then to act in response to this change. Yet, the problem still remains, how does a person recognize that their perspective has been altered when their decisions constantly reinforce these perspectives?
Causes of Burnout

Why do people lose their original perspectives or values when volunteering with No More Deaths for an extent of time? We have only begun to answer this question through Danielle's descriptions of burnout. Thus far, we have identified the concept of guilt and responsibility. Yet how does burnout begin? Interviewee Teresa Simone told me, “I think you go through a point where you care more, you care too much, then your compassion receptors fused. You need to pull them out and start over.” For Teresa, burning out is not something that volunteers are internally aware of. A key theme that Teresa emphasizes is that volunteers “care,” they are compassionate to the cause. It is this initial compassion that propels them to travel varying distances to volunteer on the border. Volunteering is an investment. Aid workers become interested in border issues and subsequently view volunteering with No More Deaths as a concrete way to help. They invest time, money, and energy in the organization, and the more they invest their energy and emotions, the more ownership and accountability they feel. They see some of their actions as visibly having a positive impact, and so they become even more invested in the work. Ultimately, they over estimate their ownership and accountability to the organization. As Teresa says, their compassion receptors fuse. Corinne Bancroft describes this process as an addiction, stating:

“I think [pause] I guess it's because if you do something right, you think 'oh! I need to be here in order to make it happen like that again so I need to stay' and if you did something wrong, you need to stay to fix it. I think it's also the group mentality. It's a group mentality thing because everyone is saying that this is the most important thing that we can be doing...you want to keep doing that. You have a group that supports you so you just want to continue.”
Danielle echoes Corinne's statement when she described to me:

“It's really easy to set a really high bar for yourself, for ourselves. Everyone is so committed, it's really easy to encourage each other to go beyond our limits because we think, 'Oh yea! We should be doing more, we should do this.' I think people forget that when No More Deaths started, the name was the demand from our community. It's not our mission statement. We are here to end death and suffering in the desert but some people are like, 'We're going to stay in the desert till there are no more deaths.' Then we've set this impossible standard. I think that the situation can end but on an everyday basis, I know that I prevented every death that I could have occurred in the desert. I mean...we can never meet it. That's how burnout happens, we keep pushing ourselves to meet this goal that is not possible. It's like we set ourselves up to fail. We do the work and then we see that people still die so everyone thinks we have to do more. We have to keep going.”

In this case burning out is not simply a self-inflicted injury. It can be brought on by a community mentality. The work of No More Deaths is a group effort, everyone must work together in order to provide real aid in the desert. Volunteers may not only suffer from a “martyr” complex but may also feel that they are letting down the organization or other volunteers by taking time off. Danielle also mentions that the name of No More Deaths may be misinterpreted. Volunteers wrongly interpret the organization's name to be the mission statement (it is suppose to be the demand from the organization to the United States government). This is a key difference, as a demand requires the action of non-No More Deaths parties such as United States citizens and government officials, whereas a mission statement would denote a type of attainable goal set before each volunteer.

Another aspect to consider is the ability of volunteers to respond to crisis situations. As mentioned earlier volunteers are given brief training sessions in comparison to the situations that may encounter. While these training sessions are appropriate for day-to-day situations, it is impossible for any training session to cover all the situations that may occur in the desert. Burnout in this case may occur simply because a person repeatedly does not
know what to do, feels uncertain about his or her actions, or is continually asked to do something that he or she is not prepared for. Jim Marx highlights this contradiction between feeling the need to continue the work but also recognizing that a volunteer may simply be unable to meet this challenge.

“People can burnout when they are asked to do something that they're not trained to do. For example my wife is a nurse and I'm not, but if I'm thrown in a situation where I've got to do some medical stuff constantly, and it stays constant not only do I not know what I'm doing. What I'm doing could be done badly, and I could be self-critical. I could be down on myself for being in a situation where I don't have the skills. So I've often seen burnout occur when we ask people to do something that they simply are not trained or qualified to do...I think the simplest answer to that is we cross over boundaries into territories of extremes.”

**Burnout Prevention**

Assuming that volunteers recognize burnout in themselves, what measures can they take to prevent burnout?

“Well I think you have to be aware of the signs in yourself and you have to take action like I don't think I can go on patrol this afternoon. I feel very stressed and I am physically not feeling good and that fellow we met this morning is really bothering me and it's on my mind a lot. I think I want to take the afternoon to rest and get myself together. That would be an instance where a person could do something for themselves about it before it got bad. Also talking to your friends: are you feeling the way I'm feeling about so and so and so and so helping out enough or are they letting the women do all the cooking and the dishes while all of them are sitting around playing guitar. That kind of thing can be very annoying. That happens because we're all people but those are the kinds of things that I think need to be talked about in a group or with the individual that you have a problem with.”

- Maureen Marx

For Gene Lefebvre, the community that often encourages pushing oneself past the limit is also the “preventative medicine” needed to say grounded and obtain perspective:
“And you have to have a strong community that is an ongoing community that is tough enough to work through squabbles and arguments, and you have to have a sense of humor that’s around the camp sometimes and a sense of enjoyment [pause] of life especially together in the community so that there are fun times. You also need time to process things, to reflect on things. I really strongly believe that an important part of the camp experience is processing. It’s better done every day if it can be done every day so that that stuff doesn't build up too much. We get in trouble when we have volunteers here who stay here too long. They love the work, and it’s intense and they think, although they don't articulate this usually, that the work can't go on without them, and so they stay too long. So we try to tell them, 'You've got to take breaks' but they fight us on it.'They think, 'Oh no I can handle it' and sometimes they get into trouble because of that. Coming out of this scene can be depressing for people, you come out of camp. You come to Tucson or you go home and life seems pretty trivial going around you and if you don't have anyone to talk about it with or even if you do, like a couple people from camp, you're in a different atmosphere, it’s just kind of naturally depressing. So there are scenes we get into with people getting very depressed who are feeling like they've been traumatized. It's like an emergency room work in a hospital and some personalities deal with that better than others. The average person wouldn't deal with that very well for very long. You got to have this [pause] if you're gonna stay in this week in week out, you've got to have a very unusual personality that can deal with these emergencies over and over again and walk away from things where people are gonna die. And that's [pause] most of us can't handle that week after week. We have to take breaks, sometimes long breaks.”

Persistence of Burnout in the No More Deaths Community

Volunteers recognize burnout in others; they understand what preventative measures they should take. They may even notice it in themselves. Given these assumptions, why does the act of burnout persist? An obvious answer to this question is that not all volunteers are experienced or as self-expressive as others. Although some scholars and clinicians have questioned this, I argue that it is important for all volunteers to learn how to give voice to their emotional experiences. “Agency’ is seen as having the ability to voice one's pain and explain or present it to others. People have different types of language agency. This difference can help or harm the people who talk about their pain or the pain of others”
Having the ability to talk about burnout ensures a particular type of agency to form. Speaking about a state of being gives life and credibility to its existence therefore if volunteers do not vocally acknowledge the phenomenon of burning out then its importance and value may not be known.

Additionally, many new volunteers have never experienced anything as intense or emotionally demanding as No More Deaths. For these volunteers, it may be as I mentioned in an earlier section—completely unknown to them that they are struggling with a loss of perspective. They may feel tired or irritable and blame a lack of sleep or the intense heat as the sources of their emotions. Clearly, burnout can persist in the No More Deaths community due to the transient nature of the organization. New volunteers are constantly being asked to adjust to the organization. They want to give as much as they can during their time at the camp. They may even feel their new perspective is an improvement of their past nature. For example, a volunteer may value his ability to fulfill needs. He may not consider that he has set lofty goals or bears too much responsibility. He may see himself as simply accepting a greater challenge or responsibility.

The less obvious answer concerns long-term volunteers who repeatedly go through cycles of burnout. Why if burnout is so recognizable and relatively preventable, does it continue? Teresa Simone was my first informant to truly address this cyclic burnout issue when she fully disclosed, "They know that they are, they say that they are, but nothing is going to change you know [chuckles]. They're going to...they seem to be people who just have to keep doing it. I think it's because there are so many shots in the dark. You do this and you don't know what's going to happen. Maybe you meet this person and something goes really bad or you see this and it's really awful but then you have that one time when everything falls into place. You say, 'ok this is concrete.' You helped somebody. I think
Teresa notes two interesting concepts pertaining to humanitarian aid and burnout. First, she expands upon my initial hypothesis of a “debt” point of view. Volunteers appear to run an ongoing disproportionate balance sheet where the balance sheet can incur multiple negative or null experiences yet the presence of one positive of experience can out weight the negative and return the balance sheet to a positive score. The argument is often that if one person can be helped then the work is justified. Aid workers do not keep a strict tally system. For No More Deaths workers, the number of migrants helped is not important. Simply knowing that their work helped one person is enough. This leads me to the second concept of validation, which Teresa indentifies as a “deep interior need.” The positive outcome felt by one migrant validates the work of the organization. No More Deaths volunteers do not expect to help every single migrant who crosses the Sonoran desert, but their mission is to help as many as possible. When it is possible to directly aid a migrant, volunteers feel extremely faithful to the organization and validated in their actions. As Teresa says, this one act motivates them to forge ahead. This one positive situation essentially invalidates the negative ones. Moreover, volunteers want to feel justified in their work. Their belief that individuals can make a difference even against a major national government policy reveals the vulnerability they hold and the risk they may incur.

According to many of my informants, this two-step process of debt and validation is most commonly seen in younger volunteers. Younger volunteers are less apt to attend to their personal needs. They believe that they are physically able to do more therefore, more should be expected from them. Their value system may also be more flexible as they are still
developing an idea of who they want to be and what their beliefs may be. Maureen notes,

“I can see it in other people, mostly in the young people. They're strong. They are tough, they can get up and go. They have the energy and the stamina. They keep pushing themselves. They're like, we've got to get this done. In this organization everything seems to be an emergency. It has to be done today! It has to be done tomorrow! We are constantly being drawn into these ‘emergency’ situations like the Salazar thing. We got to gear up for that and the BANWR thing. We got to do this, we got to do that. It's got to be done today! It's just never ending and I just say STOP, you got to stop. I don't care if it gets done or not! But then that dumps it onto someone else and of course you're worried about that. If I don't do it who will? It's that savior thing again. If I don't do it who will? [Chuckles] And we all need to know that that cause is still there for me but I have to be very conscious of that and myself. I need to say wait a minute, is it that important that I have to do it today. Like this letter that I'm working on today, do I have to—yes I do because it has to be done today. [Chuckles]

Maureen's statements are particularly interesting because she begins stating how young people fall easily into being burned out because of their age and inexperience. Yet within a few sentences, the “they” becomes a “we” where Maureen is no longer identifying this phenomenon of “crisis everywhere” as being a solely age based problem. Everyone feels the urgency to finish tasks. Perhaps it is the younger volunteers who push for this speed but the older volunteers appear to keep up with their younger counterparts' demands. Regardless of age, all the volunteers believe their work is urgent and impending. The present is what is most important. It also appears that older volunteers are better at recognizing burnout. Yet they may also ignore the warning signs.

Maureen emphatically described her thought progress in regards to burnout. The demands become too high or occur to quickly so that it becomes impossible for her to finish all the tasks asked of her. At this point, she knows that she must stop. There is a moment of self-realization where Maureen realizes what is best for her, is to take a break from the work. She needs to distance herself from the environment even if it is at the cost of a project being
delayed or worst unfinished. At the same time, Maureen feels great internal conflict. If she does not finish the task, who will? Because she is an invested member of the No More Deaths community, she upholds certain beliefs and opinions about the people around her. She does not feel it is appropriate to ask someone else to take on more tasks, because she recognizes the majority of them probably need a break too. Then Maureen vacillates back to recognizing that the work will still be there when she returns. Although she clearly holds this understanding, she ironically disregards its importance when she refers to the letter she is working on.

Maureen has taken a great length to demonstrate the depth of reasoning she implores in order to prevent burnout yet no matter the precaution, she is driven to by what Teresa calls the “deep interior need” to fulfill each task. Because Maureen laughed at her actions, it can be interpreted that she has fully accepted this characteristic of the No More Deaths work and has decided to “make do.”

Although there is a great level of reflection within Maureen and the other volunteers, demands and realities (real or perceived) of what is important and needed at that time override how volunteers would ideally like to live and work as humanitarians. And while volunteers may have strong opinions about what is right and balanced for them, they cannot control or truly change the opinions of other volunteers in their community. A Volunteer may witness burnout in himself and address it accordingly yet he may also see it in others and have no real ability to change them. Often times, it seems, regardless of the warnings from other volunteers, many volunteers do in fact burnout and are never seen by the No More Deaths community again.
Why is Recognizing and Addressing the Issue of Burnout Important?

Elaine Scarry wrote, “Something has to be visible for people to recognized the problem and then solve it. It has to be 'verbally represented' before it is 'politically represented' (Scarry 1985, 12). All aid workers need to recognize that burnout is a real state of being, one with significant repercussion before any real action to resolve burnout can occur. Although my informants recognize importance of burnout, not all No More Deaths volunteers hold the same opinions. Volunteers and the organization must put value on how to identified burnout and subsequently how to heal from that state of being.

The last section of this chapter deals with the consequences of burning out. Why is burning out an issue that must be recognized and addressed within humanitarian aid communities? I argue that there are four main considerations or consequences that arise when burnout is not addressed. First, burnout hurts the overall mission of the organization. Volunteers can become detrimental to an organization's goals when they misinterpret or are overly committed to the work. They may go against protocol or undergo risky behavior that would hurt the organization's public image and support. Moreover, volunteers who have burned out are less useful to the organization because their perspectives and values are so skewed. Burned out volunteers are unable to make good decisions for the rest of the organization. In an organization like No MoreDeaths that is based solely on consensus—this may be incredibly problematic. In the summer of 2009, a few summer volunteers were asked to leave the camp because they failed to recognize how burned out they were. They refused to listen to the advice of their community members and often felt their role and opinions
were more important than other volunteers'. They made poor decisions on behalf of the No More Deaths community, and the organization no longer felt they were good representatives of No More Deaths and its mission statement.

One of the most difficult lessons a No More Deaths aid worker must learn is that their individual role within the immigration movement is small and that it is possible for other community members to fill the void that may be left behind. At the same time, volunteers need to understand that the work will still be open to them if and when they return.

“This community comes and goes, let's be honest, but we got to have the courage to look after each other with some honest feedback and that can be difficult sometimes because we don't want to hurt anyone’s feelings.” - Jim Marx

As Jim says, it may be hard for aid workers to tell each other that they need to take a break, but the most realistic perspective is that the work will go on. Volunteers must have respect for each other and for the limits of each person. At the same however, it is important for workers to take ownership in their community, to not only encourage each other to work but to also support the pace and intensity that each individual is able to provide.

Second, burnout hurts the volunteers who choose to work with No More Deaths. I heavily support the new protocol for summer volunteers that requires every volunteer to return from the field every two weeks. Many times inexperienced volunteers need to be told that it is acceptable and encouraged to take breaks, decompress, and reflect on what they have witness or experienced. The protocol enforces the notion that No More Deaths wants its volunteers to take care of themselves and value their own health as much as they value protecting the health and lives of migrants. When a volunteer begins to burnout, he or she becomes difficult to work or communicate with. This makes the mission of No More Deaths
much harder to achieve since more time is spent on conflict management between volunteers than on providing immediate aid in the desert. Maureen Marx describes herself as during burnout.  

“I get cranky, I start getting [paused] snappish with people. I start complaining about this one's not doing that and that one's should have done that and why didn't they get that done! Well that's when I can tell. I start getting really cranky and demanding, 'you should have done that!'”

These actions and mannerisms would increase the already high stress level of No More Deaths. Not only would Maureen endure that extra level of stress but so would the volunteers working with her. Impatience toward other volunteers can result in unnecessary squabbles and arguments, which are ineffective and ultimately waste time.

On a more serious level, burnout can result in a type of psychological crash where volunteers are unable to return to the desert or the No More Deaths community. They simply cannot confront that environment again. The situation associated with that community or environment is so overwhelming to the volunteer that their only recourse is total avoidance.

Corinne Bancroft describes this intense phenomenon.

“I think burning out is when you can't go back. You just can't go back. You can't go back to the camp or you can't go back to Tucson. You can't continue the work that you were doing or you can't go back to your home community. You can't go home.”

A volunteer who has essentially crashed from their burnout is clearly not beneficial to the No More Deaths mission. They have completely disappeared. They are unlikely to return to the border to engage in humanitarian aid work or any form of service. They are also unlikely to spread awareness about the situations on the border. They have become isolated in their own reality. They cannot seek help or advice from other volunteers. They are completely disconnected. In this situation, burnout had drastically changed a person's life. A large
disservice has been done to both the volunteer and the organization. Luckily, as Gene Lefebvre points out, this type of crashing rarely happens due to the self-selecting nature of the No More Deaths work:

“I've seen displacement like that [pause] often for us, people that come and volunteer with us, and then they'll just check out and we don't see them again. Sometimes, we're in a scene with them, and you'll see them later and find out that it just overwhelmed them just absolutely overwhelmed them. They couldn't talk to us about it so they just had to leave. And it took them quite a while at home to work it through. People, just have a sense of being absolutely overwhelmed and not knowing what specific thing it is that is getting to them at the time. This group is a self selecting group in a way. There aren't a lot of people who are going to come here to be in this hot desert to do primitive camping and to help people and to take some risk doing it. So we do have a self selecting group in away and very rarely do we wind up with someone that is totally out of place.”

Third, burnout can hurt the people who support aid workers. Family members, friends, and partners may become emotionally implicated. Those closest to a volunteer may become the very people that the volunteer hurts or pushes away.

“I see the problems of uncertainty, doubt, and skepticism as embedded in the concreteness of relations—if I come to doubt such things as my relations to my parents, the fidelity of our love, or the loyalty of my children, these are doubts that put my world in jeopardy” (Das 2007, 4).

Das aptly describes the dangers of losing the ability to relate to one's love ones. A volunteer's world can change suddenly over night when he realizes the way he relates to the world—the way he feels about his friends and family has drastically changed. Burnout can inflict this type of additional pain on not only the individual but that individual's love ones as they come to see him as a changed (for the worse) person. This type of change should signal a red flag to the volunteer and call for immediate action.

The experience of a No More Deaths worker is bound by the unique community and the geographical location of the work. It is difficult for people to sympathize with
experiences that they themselves find foreign. Volunteers may return extremely vulnerable and therefore expect more emotional support and understanding from those they are close to. When they feel friends and loved ones do not understand the situations that have experienced and the emotions that they continue to experience, it can be difficult for volunteers to relate and maintain relationships with non-volunteers in the same way. Volunteers may expect their relationships with friends and family to remain the same yet recognize that their desert experience is hard to communicate to people who do not possess that experience. The demands of volunteers on their loved ones have dramatically risen, and often non-volunteers do not have the skills to mediate these experiences. Gene describes how his process of burnout may have negative effects on close family and friends.

“One of them is umm [pause] if I start to get angry when I talk to other people about the work that we're doing, that's not a good sign. Sometimes I find myself doing it with family and friends, not with casual acquaintances or people I work with but if they ask me what's going on, they ask me questions. The more I talk the angrier I get—and I better watch it and the other thing is with Sue, my wife, I'm starting to get argumentative [pause] acting in a way that is demeaning to her, you know it's like [pause] argumentative [pause] and I'm often not even realizing that I'm doing that. I'm defensive and argumentative with her so she can sit me down and say 'you're doing it again.'”

Many volunteers are not as lucky as Gene to have active supporters. However, Gene is also fortunate that his wife is also involved in No More Deaths. She is able to meet his needs accordingly and when he displays signs of burnout, she is able to correct and redirect the behavior. Yet even for couples who are both humanitarians, it can nevertheless be difficult to remember that burning out affects multiple people, not just the person who experiences burnout. Interestingly, Gene also describes his negative behavior as being directed mainly at those who are close to him. One might assume that acquaintances would fall more to the
irritability of burnout victims since these people are less attached to the aid worker. This is not the case however due to the belief of accountability and responsibility that many volunteers who have burned out strongly uphold. They have displayed the utmost amount of accountability to the organization and its demands, they expect the same from their love ones who are responsible for their emotional support and mediation. When this expectation is not met, burnout volunteers react negatively to their support network. Not only is this damaging for the community of supporters but also for the volunteer. As these needs are perceived as being unable to be met by the current support network, volunteers may resort to seclusion—believing that there is no one who understands them.

Lastly, burnout is only one symptom of a larger problem. When volunteers do not address the symptoms of burnout, they may “crash” as mentioned earlier. Volunteers may also let their burnout manifest into different situations. These actions can be misinterpreted by other volunteers and cause serious concern within the volunteer's community. The manifestations may also become more serious issues such as drug or alcohol addiction. This is clearly dangerous for the person experiencing burnout as they feel they have no other options to deal with their change of state. It is also dangerous for the organization to have active volunteers who maintain their work at such a costly price. Volunteers who have let their burnout manifest beyond the standard feelings of fatigue, irritability, and the need to continue the work will face serious consequences in their life. The organization must as Victor urges, actively respond to burnout:

“'I'm a strong believer, if you don't deal with the situation...it's going to come back. In one way or another it's going to manifest itself—you might drink more, you can't sleep at night, headaches, not communicate with your significant other. I strongly believe it will manifest itself until you deal with it. I believe...if something traumatic
happens to them, they don't find a way to deal with it or they are in denial. They might eat more, drink more, and do drugs, whatever. I think as human beings we may unconsciously try to think of a way to deal with this stuff and sometimes the way it's done—it's not the best way.”

An organization whose volunteers do not know how to respond to symptoms of burnout is troubled. Although experienced volunteers know when and how to take care of themselves, it is important for them to impress upon younger volunteers these same values. These values must then in turn also be impressed upon new and temporary summer volunteers. In order for the mission statement of No More Deaths to be effectively and efficiently carried out, volunteers need to be self aware of their state of mind and be trained as to how to know when to step away. This is not currently happening as only a few in-town volunteers work at the camp where summer volunteers work. At the same time, experienced volunteers must be aware of volunteers who seek to hide their emotional state. Victor describes a range of symptoms that volunteers can identify and then resolve with another volunteer.

“I guess it’s based on [pause] how I see a person behave. If I see them behave out of the norm, I won't mention names...if I see 'John' participating in the meetings and he's doing this or that but then all of a sudden, not necessarily not participating but maybe using more F words. He might be swearing a little bit more. His or her body language may be different. Then I think, there is something affecting that person. For me it's based on relationships, if I know how they are and I notice they are acting a little bit different at whatever the situation is. They get more aggravated at little things, like road rage. There is a need in them that is not being met. Some people are really good at hiding how they feel and you don't see it until they start drinking a six pack and you're like whoa they are drinking a 6 pack—[laughs] because you know a six pack—that's a lot!”

I end this chapter by concluding that the work of No More Deaths is based solely on volunteerism. This is a basic and obvious principle, yet what remains is the responsibility that aid workers having toward each other to not only encourage enduring work but to inspire
“good” work. Good work is based on an idea of teamwork in which each volunteer can rely on the other for nonjudgmental support. Good work happens when balanced people work together. The motivation for good work is grounded on the belief that a volunteer wants to help because it fulfills a need in them, not that they feel they owe some indeterminate thing to the organization or to migrants. Although the majority of volunteers view their community as open and supportive, I believe it is important for No More Deaths to actively espouse this idea. The notion of working hard and keeping up with demanding deadlines should also coincide with the belief that taking personal time is also important to the overall mission of No More Deaths.

These values are important to me because burnout can curb the amount of participation or even drastically change the type of participation involved. Local volunteers are able to come to many of their profound statements about the work of humanitarian aid because they belong to a special cohort of people whereas temporary non-local volunteers are left with a different impression. These summer volunteers may inappropriately apply this practice of denying one's limits in other situations of their lives. This, I believe is damaging to a volunteer's process of reflection and personal political growth. Unable to cope with their experiences, volunteer may entirely drop their values in activism. This would clearly hurt the mission of No More Deaths and other humanitarian aid groups.
“To have pain is to have certainty; to hear about pain is to have doubt.”
(Scarry 1985, 13)

“We see a woman as witness not just in the sense that she is within the frame of
events, but that she is marked by these events. The zone of the everyday within which
Asha spoke had to be recovered by reoccupying the very signs of injury that had been
marked to forge continuity in that space of devastation.” (Das 2007, 74)

It was another sunny day on the border. Volunteers gather their belongings and
congregated around the two plastic picnic style tables beneath a seemingly transparent
awning that laid baking under the Arizona sky. Lunch was ready and the aid workers
anxiously awaited a hearty pile of beans and tortillas. Sitting down at the cracked plastic
table, volunteers waved to the second patrol car coming in from the trails. The returning
volunteers were not in their typical exhausted yet happy demeanor. They hanged their heads
low in sorrow. Why were they so distressed?

Earlier that day, these volunteers had encountered over fifty gallons of water at three
different sites—all slashed. Seeing this sight of destruction was described to me as literally
“breaking their hearts.” I have personally witnessed other volunteers and myself experience a
loss of physicality. Seeing these empty bottles somehow translated into a personal attack that
involved physical pain. How was a situation like this possible? How could seeing a pile of
debris cause such heartache? What type of healing could be expected from pain that was
what I defined in this chapter as “empathetic pain.”
The majority of the pain or trauma that aid workers experience is indirect. In my observations and research aid workers most likely have not been personally harmed by border patrol, government agents, or migrants. However, I do not use the words “empathetic pain” to devalue the experiences of aid workers in fact I only use this term within the context of healing. I ask, how do aid workers heal from experiences that are not necessarily their own?

Seeing a collection of broken plastic bottles under any other circumstance would never be considered painful or capable of invoking trauma. Aid workers, however, cannot imagine how such a situation could arise. The main goal of bottle slashers is not to emotionally harm aid workers (though that may be an added benefit) but to prevent migrants from drinking the water and to let aid workers know that some individuals do disagree with their work. But how does a person heal from seeing broken bottles or hearing a tragic story? Do they need to heal from these peripheral experiences? The concept of empathetic pain takes into the account that aid workers do experience a nuanced version of pain which requires an equally sensitive approach to healing.

In this chapter I explore the concept of healing and how No More Deaths workers heal from their work and its experiences. Rather than simply defining what it means to heal, I begin by deconstructing the concept of healing and what it means to heal specifically within the humanitarian context, while using No More Deaths as a case study. Can aid workers heal? What work does the term healing do for aid workers and their organizations?
Healing

It is clear to the majority of people that healing is an important value. Our society has always prized happy individuals. “Healing,” therefore, is a required and necessary component. But healing from emotional trauma is not one dimensional like healing from physical trauma. Unlike breaking a bone, that can be proven to heal over time, academics and clinicians still do not know how the trajectory of healing from emotional trauma looks like?

Here, I take a step back to deconstruct the notion of healing. Traditionally, the understanding of healing has been that individuals suffer from a particular pain or trauma and then “get better.” To get better means to become emotionally more stable or “happier.” Sometimes healing is viewed as accepting a particular trauma and then moving past that trauma. This definition is incredibly problematic as it assumes that there is some inherent level of stability that could be applied to all individuals. It does not take into account the different experiences or preferences of people who go through this process of healing. Healing is an individual process, so to adhere to some standard is at best, a paltry attempt. Next, the assumption that humans only exist in two states “sad” and “happy” is also problematic. What about individuals who are already experiencing pain and must heal through multiple experiences?

Academics need a new or different comprehension of healing, one that would assess and include the variety of ways in which people may feel “stable” or be able to continue their work in a positive fashion. This definition also needs to accept that some people may not heal or may not value healing as part of the humanitarian approach. Some aid workers may
not think they need, or having anything to heal from. Other aid workers may simply push their experience to the extremities of their memories, thereby “forgetting” these experiences. This process is clearly not the same as healing.

Through my research, I have found that there is no general definition of healing that can be applied to all of my informants. If I were to use this earlier definition of healing, it would be obvious that none of my informants had “healed.” They would seem to be avoiding this approach to healing.

**How do Aid Workers Conceptualize Healing?**

Before asking if aid workers can heal, one needs to understand how aid workers view themselves in relation to the process of healing. Do they value it and if so, how much? Moreover, if healing is not a one directional process, then how do volunteers understand when and if they are healing?

I have discerned from my informants that the majority of No More Deaths volunteers value some form of healing because they see it as an essential part of their work. They view healing as a logical response and necessary component to their “debriefing” process. Until the summer of 2009, No More Deaths did not have a formal debriefing process where volunteers were asked to spend a Saturday morning and afternoon discussing their experiences with the organization. Long-term in-town volunteers started to see a gap in their process. The realization that hundreds of volunteers left No More Deaths without any direction or guidance on the transition back home was obvious to No More Deaths, but the
answer as to how to fix this flaw was not apparent until recently.

In 2009, No More Deaths instated a three part debriefing process in which volunteers were broken into groups: three to five temporary volunteers paired with one long-term in town volunteer. In the first section, volunteers were asked to recall positive and negative experiences with No More Deaths. Essentially, they were verbally suppose to reconstruct their emotional and physical experiences to in-town volunteers so that in-town volunteers could gain a wider perspective of the experiences and concerns of summer volunteers. In the second section, volunteers were led into an education based understanding of “vicarious trauma,” the term popularly used within the humanitarian community. During my debriefing session, I was passed a packet of information quoted from the Headington Institute, a predominant academic player within the non-government and non-profit sector. Here, temporary summer volunteers were asked to confront and eventually reconcile with the trauma or pain they had experienced. Volunteers were told that their feelings were common and not outside the realm of how other more experienced volunteers felt.

As I had mentioned in a previous chapter, the work of No More Deaths can inflict pain on its participants. That section gave examples of people who might be experiencing vicarious trauma. These experiences were essentially early warning flags for volunteers to recognize in themselves. Examples such as impatience, lost of memory, and inability to interact with others were highlighted in this section. Next volunteers were given another list of activities that might help them process their experiences and emotional consequences of the summer. Here examples of how to decompress from their traumas were activities like reading, talking to love ones about your experience, getting involved in local organizations
related to No More Deaths goals. Finally, in the third section of the debriefing, volunteers were asked to give three goals either personal or public that they would strive for after their No More Deaths experience. These could be organizing an event that would educate others about the issues of the border or simply telling a friend about an experience with No More Deaths.

To me, the way that No More Deaths as an organization, conceptualized healing is a three part process. Healing is an individual and unique experience but it is also a process that requires guidance, awareness, and support. One cannot heal on his own because he would mostly likely have no similar prior experience on how to “get better.” He needs information from others who have endured the same pains in order to heal. The debriefing process is essential to No More Deaths's work and the work of other aid organizations because it creates a definite connection between in-town and summer volunteers by handing down the necessary tools for healing. John Hyde elaborates on this situation when he speaks from the viewpoint of a summer volunteer:

“What can we do? It's almost to say, ‘You No More Deaths, have a responsibility here because you have exposed me to experiences that I never imagined, and now I'm dealing with these feelings. What am I going to do about it? You can't just say, figure it out. No! No! No! You have a responsibility here.’”

Aid organizations do have a responsibility to the volunteers they recruit. Clearly some process of healing is valued and required for aid workers, otherwise humanitarian aid would cease to exist. Without valuing healing, aid work would simply be seen as a source that inflicted pain and resulted in a more traumatized situation. Not only would aid work do little to improve the plights of a particular community, but it would also actively increase the number of traumatized individuals. This would result in a heavily diminished interest in
humanitarian aid.

Secondly, aid workers must form some type of awareness of their own actions and emotional experiences. Many people leave No More Deaths with no real understanding of why they feel or act a particular way. I have experienced this in my own life. After leaving No More Deaths in the summer of 2008, I became insatiably driven at school work and extracurricular activities. I experienced many physical and emotional setbacks including the deaths of my both of grandparents on my mother's side, yet I never stopped my actions to grieve. I felt that I was being very efficient and rational in all of my actions, and I often became upset at friends and family who did not behave the same way. At that time, I had a very distorted perspective on life and death—my grandparents were only one more stone on a pile of boulders. I never thought of myself as any type of victim, let alone someone who needed to heal. This belief, I found later on in my interviews, is prolific amongst No More Deaths volunteers. According to Danielle Alvarado, this viewpoint is something that must be actively rectified:

“Healing for us means coming to terms that we are also victims. I think it's really easy to think of other people as victims and 'we're here to help victims' and I think it's a whole other thing to think about how we are also disempowered and victimized by these dynamics.”

Like Danielle stated, there must be some attempt to recognize the positioning of aid workers and what they experience. Aid workers need to understand who they are, before they can begin to examine their experiences with migrants and other volunteers. Conversely, if aid workers do not reconcile with their, as Danielle says “disempowerment”, it would be impossible for them to progress or heal. By obvious deduction, one can easily reason that aid workers who do not recognize they need to heal can never heal.
I restate that it was only through the beginning of my interviews with No More Deaths volunteers in the summer of 2009 that I realized I shared many of the same “burnout” qualities that they described in myself. When one intimately interacts with the mentality of many No More Deaths volunteers, (which is essentially the “work more not less” mentality described in Chapter Five) he or she can lose perception of their personal limits or the limits of the average person. Although I experienced a change in myself, I saw it as an improvement to who I had been before my No More Deaths experience, yet my closest family and friends felt that I had dramatically changed, and they did not like who I became. There is clear danger in crisis situations with organizations like No More Deaths. Volunteers may change dramatically with no awareness of how or why that change happened. It is important for aid organizations such as No More Deaths to actively address this issue to summer volunteers. Knowledge of a “martyr complex” or the recognition that fatigue can mean more than simple “sun stroke” are critical in the orientation program of humanitarian aid organizations. This is because, these simple behavior can lead to other problems such as impatience and ultimately confrontation amongst volunteers. Aid workers need to recognize and be aware of their emotional changes and needs. Change is not a bad thing, but it must be tempered with awareness and control. Danielle Alvarado identifies another major theme of No More Deaths aid work, that volunteers must contend with—the never ending component.

“Healing means coming to terms with the situation as it is. We have to come to terms that there is pain involved in the work we do for us and the people we work with. Healing means that we come to terms to the extent that we can keep going. Until we eliminate the entire situation, we can't eliminate the trauma that comes along with it because I think it's an inherently traumatic situation to be present in whether we choose to place ourselves in it or we are forced to like the people we encounter in the desert.”
The last step to how No More Deaths understands the process of healing is by emphasizing the importance of support. Even before No More Deaths formally introduced their debriefing component, they encouraged all volunteers to find a support group in their hometowns or to stay in connection with one or more No More Deaths volunteers from their time at camp. Healing requires that people talk or share some form of support for one another. Individuals need to know that others express the same concerns in order to eliminate the feeling of solitude or disorientation. Aid workers also need someone to empathize with their situations or problems. Support from the organization or other volunteers helps aid workers identify problems and come up with solutions while comforting aid workers in the process.

Collectively, healing is important to the No More Deaths organization. It keeps volunteers viable and able to continue the work. It ensures that summer volunteers can transition back home and possibly even return to Arizona for another summer. Most importantly, it places value and some focus on the needs of aid workers.

“Debriefing is a necessary component. People can talk about their experiences. Probably the most healing thing we can do with this kind of this is to talk about it and to get support from others and to share those experiences and be compassionate with others and to empathized. That doesn't presuppose that people are having bad experiences or being traumatized with what they are seeing. Most everybody handles it pretty well. But there have been plenty of people who came back and didn't have enough chances to express it. We are not realizing that lots of volunteers leave rather quickly, and they didn't really get the chance to process or maybe the issue might be they are really enthused about the work. They go back to their communities, and no one else is enthused. They go oh here she is, running her mouth about... so we're just trying to get people who go back to develop a network to feel support.” - Jim Marx
Healing and its Complexities

Although, No More Deaths volunteers do on the whole value healing as a process relevant to them. The path to healing however, is not always as obvious. Das calls for a re-imagining of healing where, “Instead of the simplified images of healing, which assumes reliving a trauma or decathacting desire from the lost object and reinventing it elsewhere, we need to think of healing as a kind of relationship with the dead” (Das 2007, 48). Volunteers are not always able to pursue a simplified or linear model of healing. Perhaps then, organizations must also re-imagine healing not as a separation but as a relationship. As Jim Marx said in the previous section, talking about one's experiences is the most effective way to healing, but what happens when a person wants to talk and is silenced? In this section I explore some of the complexities of healing within the context of No More Deaths work.

Some of these complexities arise simply out of the nature of No More Deaths and its goals. First, unlike many humanitarian aid organizations, No More Deaths does tend to take a political stance even though they argue that their role is strictly humanitarian. This does not have so much to do with the work that No More Deaths does, (providing food, water, and medical aid) but rather the positioning of aid on the border. This positioning is clearly politicized. In an international frame, one cannot say that international aid workers are going against the government or allege that they break the law. These groups were allowed by a particular country's government to set up an operation in order to dispense aid. This is not the case for No More Deaths. Because No More Deaths is a domestically based organization working with a population that is undocumented and therefore politically unwanted, the role
of humanitarians is complicated. United States citizens have strong opinions on the actions of other citizens and their work with undocumented immigrants, how those actions may affect the overall country. Some common questions or concerns include, “Are No More Deaths workers 'encouraging' undocumented immigration? Are they acting against the interests of the United States government? Are aid workers compromising the safety of the United States southern border?”

No matter how much a volunteer tries to explain his or her work in a nonpolitical manner, the viewpoint is not always comprehended by the listener. Volunteers work in a politically active environment. It is something they must come to accept. A No More Deaths volunteer is never seen as just a neutral player. This adds an extra layer within the humanitarian context that directly affects the healing process of aid workers. How can aid workers come to heal when due to political opinions, they are unable to find a support group in which they could share their experiences and concerns? A mentality of consequence—you deserve what you got—or disregard from friends and family may await volunteers. Although there are many critiques on humanitarian aid, few critics would simply cast refugees or recipients of aid—no matter how problematic—as undeserving or pest. Generally aid organizations are critiqued not the victims, but in the case of No More Deaths, often it is the immigrant victims themselves that are abhorred. How can No More Deaths volunteers heal when they are criticized for the type of people they seek to help? Humanitarians value life without discretion, so how do volunteers heal and transition home when the opposition of their work is center around a the concept of human value—the homo sacer?

Second, the work of No More Deaths never ends, in that the problem of the border
cannot simply be amended overnight. This is a common problem that all humanitarians face, yet for No More Deaths volunteers, it can become exponentially complex. Aid workers live in the very environment that they seek to help. That is to say that even when aid workers leave the desert, the camp, the borderlands, or even the entire state of Arizona, the problem of undocumented immigration does not simply taper off. The United States is undergoing a period of rapid immigration so that in almost any town, there is an immigrant community present (Nevins 2008). At the same time, this means that immigrant law enforcement is also increasing. There is no longer a simple designation as to when a No MoreDeaths volunteer is acting as a humanitarian and when he or she is just another United States citizen. The desert never seems to end in some aspects. The reality of how intertwine the two may become is surprising even to long-term volunteers. Although aid workers are chiefly concerned with the interactions they will have with migrants, they are confronted with the reality of immigrant violence even when they seek to escape. Victor Ceballos shares

_Victor Ceballos_: Hanging out with friends and just sharing with them or going with my wife to a baseball game stuff like that really helps me. Spending time with other No More Deaths folks, I think that's been the best medicine for me because we get to share, we get to [pause] bounce ideas back and forth, stories. At the end of the day we get to support each other say, hey things are going to be ok so that we can continue with the work.

_Lucy Zhang_: Why do these things work?

_Victor Ceballos_: I guess it takes me away from all the bad stuff that is going on. It gives me an opportunity to do something I enjoy. Though sometimes it's difficult because sometimes I'm at the ball park and immigration officers are there recruiting for their vacancies and I just think, great I'll probably see these guys at the desert. It's just a break for me it's just [pause] you kinda have to find time for yourself—give your mind and yourself time to heal and just something positive, so you can get back to the work and be like, 'ok we got to do this.' So for me those things work, going to the movies or spend an hour on the phone with friends from Chicago. Even if I talk about No More Deaths business stuff it's better for me to talk about it.

I share Victor's story within this section because it highlights how healing is often
plagued with complications. Even when a volunteer intentionally sets time and energy
toward healing or rejuvenating oneself, their plans may often come to a halt. This happens
quite frequently as the environment of the border inherently lends itself to unsolicited and
unexpected acts of violence. Victor actively tells me what he needs in order to recover from
his work with No More Deaths, yet his environment does not always lend for that to happen.
Although the border patrol is not actively engaging with Victor, like they might in the desert,
Victor is still aware of their presence and that causes discomfort and a re-realization for him.

Although Victor is able to go to a ball game in order to relax, he recognizes the world
that concerns his baseball game simultaneously coexists with the world of migrants crossing
the desert. This reawakens Victor's realization of his own abilities and privilege thereby
reinforcing the paradigm. Healing is difficult for No More Deaths aid workers because of the
nature of undocumented immigration is ever present and yet invisible. It becomes all too
easy to be trapped within the constructed paradigm. When aid workers concentrate on
healing, they also feel conflicted that they are ignoring a problem in order to decompress.
This conflict is heightened by constant reminders and indicators that undocumented
immigration is a pressing issue, which aid workers due to their experience with No More
Deaths feel responsible for.

Valuing Healing in a Complex and Violent World

“If we’re conscious of the trauma, if we’re working through it, if we come to terms
with it. Then we live very conscious lives. We can make very deliberate decisions
about how we manage our life. If it stays unconscious and it stays submerge and we
push it way. There is a real likelihood that we will spray our environment with
negativity that we’re not even aware about. I think that’s why it’s so important to
provide people with opportunities to acknowledge what is alive in them.” - Jim Marx

A clear value of healing is identified by Jim when he notes that healing helps both the individual who is hurt and that individual's community. “Leading a conscious life” is seen as a positive in which volunteers can learn to live with more awareness and meaning. On the other hand it is clear that to “spray our environment with negativity” is an unwanted action, even the word “spray” seems to indicate some level of unpleasantness or undesirability.

Valuing healing as a necessity for aid workers reexamines how much humanitarian aid can truly accomplish. It widens the net of affected players and considers the aftermath of aid. It also reveals where there is room for improvement and how aid organizations might begin to close that gap. In the below passage Danielle Alvarado identifies some key issues that volunteers face and why there is real value in aid workers addressing their needs to heal:

“I think we have to come to terms with it to a degree that makes it possible for us to be fully present and empathetic with the people that we work with. I think ultimately, that is one of the main goals of No More Deaths to be in real solidarity with people. I think the way we do things right now, the way our culture understands trauma, it sort of shunts us off—like we have to close a part of ourselves to deal with it. But I think really dealing with it mean engaging with the painful parts of what we do [pause] and leaving room for that means we can leave more room to actually really empathize with other people and I think that's really where we're trying to get to, sort of cultivating a community that attempts to stand with people in their respective struggles. If we were able to do that, I think some people would say that we'd get in the way of doing the task because we're focusing on ourselves instead of other people and the focus should be on the 'real' victims of the situation. But I think the work of No More Deaths is in this bigger continuum of healing our communities that are disrupted by the borders that are physical and rhetorical in placed in our communities. We are the real victims too in the sense of how these polices directly affect people in the way that we see very obviously on migrants on the border but also how it has an impact on how we live and interactive with other people that I feel like we're victimized. I don't think we're in a healthy community in comparison with a lot of other people.”

Here healing is also seen as “coming to terms” with the situation on the border. Aid workers
must on some level accept the current situation of the border and their potential or ability to ignite real change. In a sense, healing is never complete because aid workers have to settle for the next best thing—acceptance. Danielle does not imply that aid workers completely heal or even make an attempt to fully heal, rather the emphasis is on healing to a certain level. That level is essentially viewed as the minimum. Aid workers should heal enough so that they can return to their work. This is however not to say that No More Deaths volunteers do not fully value healing, but that the very process of healing is ironic, in that it conflicts with the direct work of the organization. Aid workers cannot be fully engaged in volunteering when they are taking personal time to heal. One cannot be at the ball game, and also at the desert camp. There must be set times for when volunteers are expected to act, and when they are able to decompress and relax. The nature of relaxing however does not readily lend itself to working, and so given the choice to work or to relax, aid workers feel personally driven to work and to answer pressing demands set by the border environment.

For Danielle, volunteers need to find the balance between working and healing. She claims that the ultimate goal of healing is finding solidarity with the people that one seeks to help. The balance is achieved when aid workers, “engage in the painful parts of what we do.” These painful parts are the emotionally draining aspects of working with No More Deaths. Danielle is asking that volunteers not only accept the pain that migrants endure, but also the pain that volunteers face in their process of witnessing another's trauma. This is important for the overall organization because it creates even room for volunteers to empathize with migrants, and share in what they experience. To understand another person’s situation, it is sometimes necessary to also feel their pain. Aid work should not be seen as another “us” and
“them” scenario. For Danielle, it has to be “we” otherwise no real work can be accomplished. Although Danielle recognizes that not everyone in the organization would agree with her stance, she nevertheless asserts it, because she believes volunteers are essential toward the ultimate goal of rebuilding border communities.

Although No More Deaths, as an organization, seems to understand healing as a collaborative three step process, in reality its individuals do not view healing as neatly. Had I been able to interview a volunteer who did not value healing as strongly as Danielle, I think he or she would have depicted a fuller picture of the concerns of No More Deaths aid workers. An important exception to note in this section is that although long-term in-town volunteers lead these debriefing sessions there is no formal process for these same volunteers to heal or debrief. The focus and value on healing is mainly aimed at temporary (i.e. less experienced) summer volunteers, which itself points to disagreement amongst No More Deaths volunteers. When I asked Victor Ceballos if No More Deaths spent sufficient time discussing the nature of vicarious trauma on their community, he responded by saying:

“No, no we don’t. Unfortunately and I keep on saying this, it’s a volunteer organization and there’s so much work that’s being done—meetings and all these fires that the coordinators have to put out, whether it’s with volunteers or senior volunteers. There’s so much going on that I think [pause] we don’t put enough time on the side for ourselves to kinda of heal, to talk about this stuff or to just spend time doing—you know just sharing or even playing board games. Something separate from talking about the horrible things that are going on in the desert and what we need to do. So no, I don’t think we spend enough time either talking about stuff or doing something separate of work that is more for community building. No, we definitely don’t.”

Healing is important for the direct benefit of aid workers and the indirect benefit for migrants. However, it does also take resources such as time and energy away from direct aid, something that Victor clearly identifies. Aid workers are constantly bombarded with
emergencies or crises, making it difficult for volunteers to value their own personal needs—especially the emotional or psychological. For Victor, the organization needs to not only value healing (i.e. talking to each other for moral support), but they should also value the time outside of the organization with each other. Healing should mean more than meeting the minimal requirements needed to continue working. These are issues that aid organizations must reconcile with in order to decide how best to allocate their time.

**Beginning the Healing Process**

To heal we need to recognize the pain in ourselves, and we also need for those around us to realize that we are experiencing something painful. Like Das describes in the quotation at the beginning of the chapter, a witness is not someone who simply sees a frame of events but importantly, she is someone who is also forever changed by those events. These forced changes can only be healed by a reentry into what made those changes painful.

Although No More Deaths has established a debriefing protocol for summer volunteers, what happens after the debriefing sessions had not yet been determined. Volunteers interpret their time after or away from work differently. Many volunteers agree with Maureen Marx that there must be some form of conversation on the topic.

“*Jim and I talk about it a lot. [Pause] It doesn't solve the problem but it diffuses the intensity of the emotions and then we say, 'well this is reality.' We have to deal with what we got. We're going to have these emotions surrounding this and they're going to come up again. We're never going to probably feel “good” about this because the situation is one that won't be solved quickly. We have to have a way of dealing with it and I can see right now with everything that's going that we are having this tendency to put all of our efforts in No More Deaths and not take time for ourselves so I think that is what have to do.*”
As Maureen notes, talking does not necessarily “solve the problem” but it does do some work toward the goal of healing by breaking down what exactly it is about the work or experience that was painful and traumatic. Talking to others helps volunteers understand their emotions from the viewpoint or perspective of an outsider—someone who is not directly tied to those same emotions. In a less direct way, talking to others about painful experiences, allows people to empathized and share some of the emotional burden of the person who is affected. Talking also, as Maureen explains, allows the affected person to come to a realization about their experiences and the environment in which they work. By talking to Jim, her husband, Maureen is able to come to a conclusion she can accept, which is that what they experience through No More Deaths is a reality of the work. They need to find a way in which they can accept this reality and still continue working. Not only must the couple realize their situations, they also have to recognize that these emotions are recurring and directly related to their work.

Knowing that the problems on the border cannot be simply fixed by aid work repositions volunteers to think of themselves as player within a larger setting. Volunteers must realize that their work comes with limitations and that these same limitations will challenge them when trying to heal. As Maureen explains, these challenges are hard to accept because volunteers want to do much more or have influence over the situations. Because they do not, volunteers can never truly feel “good” about their work—making the healing all that much harder. Healing begins when volunteers can recognize their pain and their needs to address that pain. Maureen notes in the end of her statement that, although she knows what she needs to do to heal, she also recognizes why beginning to heal is so difficult. With so
much work to be done, the tendency is to defer personal needs in order to respond to the immediate needs of others.

Corinne Bancroft furthers Maureen's beliefs on healing by arguing that healing requires people to do nothing. Volunteers need to also value the absence of work in order to heal.

"Another thing that is really important to do is just stop and do nothing because at camp it can't be that you're never doing nothing. Even when you stay back, you're always doing something and I think doing nothing is good thing. I think we do too little of doing nothing in our society, and I think doing nothing is a good thing."

The notion of taking a break is clearly not new. Corinne is not trying to make a psychological discovery. Instead she is asserting that volunteers need to take a step back, that doing nothing, ironically, also requires direct attention and energy. Aid workers need to periodically pull themselves completely away from their work. Real relaxation is required for healing. I use the work real because Corinne emphasizes in her statement that, “Even when you stay back, you're always doing something.” She is referring to when aid workers volunteer to “stay back” from a patrol. This gives them a break from walking the trails, riding in the pickups, and placing or picking up water bottles. This does not however, mean that volunteers are on a break. Although aid workers are not actively participating in the patrol, staying back at camp also means tending to any migrants that are staying at the camp, cleaning and maintaining the camp space, organizing medical bags, sanitizing and filling up gallons of water, getting water for the camp from a neighbors, and a whole list of unnamed chores. So Corinne is right, even when volunteers stay back, they are still working and actively participating in No More Deaths. Working the in the environment that is causing you pain is not an efficient way to heal under any circumstance. Corinne is calling for all No
More Deaths work to be valued as “real” and therefore equally as stressful, painful, and traumatic. This means that healing is required regardless of the degree of direct contact with trauma.

My last example of how aid workers begin to heal is expressed through Thomas’s words in which he argues that healing, unlike Corinne’s perspective, can be found in doing working rather than separating oneself from that work.

“I think you find a lot of healing in the doing. A lot of time, it’s the thinking about it is where it gets to be overwhelming where you start to second guess, where your conscious takes over like it becomes too dominant or something. I don’t know. I think there’s real goodness in healing in thinking, in knowing you did what you could, and not only did you do what you could, you did more than what was asked. And I mean, that’s true and I witnessed it. It’s a thing you can really feel good about but at the same time you also need to know the point to let it go because it’s just one place, just one place in your journey. And now you can’t go back.”

Something to note here is that Thomas’s perspective in healing is rooted in that he believes the work he does has a direct and immediate effect on migrants and himself. Here healing is see as continual process that never stops, even while working, whereas both Maureen and Corinne see healing as a separate progress from working. To Thomas, humanitarians work and heal at the same time. Working allows volunteers to feel as if they are contributing to a positive mission. Essentially, doing good work makes people feel good. Although I believe Maureen and Corinne would agree that there is some healing in the doing, special consideration needs to be taken when the work becomes overwhelming, and it seems that the aid that volunteers can provide will never meet all the needs that migrants have. Aid workers do gain some form of healing in their work, but more often than not, aid workers also have to heal from their work.

17 Name Changed.
Although Thomas's views veer from Corinne and Maureen's, all three informants espouse some form of concern or realization that No More Deaths work can be addictive or habit forming. Aid workers need to know or recognize when the work begins to be too personal. Individuals may not want to routinely stop their work, but they should. Recognizing one's limitations within the humanitarian field is one of the first steps to healing.

**Can and Do Volunteers Heal?**

Healing is not an absolute. There is no perfect end point, and there certainly is no definite beginning. Aid workers come to No More Deaths with different levels of emotional strain before they even begin working with the organization. In the previous section, I discussed some of the ways volunteers interpret healing and how they begin to heal themselves. I follow these experiences in this sections, where I ask if volunteers heal. Although I do not believe that healing has an endpoint, I do think that there are conclusions people reach which help them feel stable and whole, so that they can return to their lives and if they wish, continue work with No More Deaths or other aid organizations.

Teresa Simone suggested a model for the type of healing that No More Deaths volunteers undergo. To Teresa, healing is never complete. Volunteers cannot simply be healed and “finished.” Although these ideas are not new in comparison to what other informants have also said, Teresa carefully notes how healing is built on an idealism that is not always reached.
“I would say it's like a cycle. In healing you go through certain painful emotions and ideally you learn things about yourself and about the world through that. Ideally, you find ways of coping with negative feelings. I don't think healing is when feelings go away. I think bad feelings are going to happen and healing is like finding where to put them, or how to deal with them, or how not to react to them or even how to react to them. I think it's a whole other set [pause] I don't think it's something that you finish. It's like you always might return to something that will remind you of that, but it's knowing how you can get away from it I guess.”

Teresa envisions healing as a cycle in which pain is not only the reactant but also the product. One must not only experience pain, he or she must also engage with the painful. Although the goal is to learn from these experiences, Teresa sees that this is not always the outcome. Many people remain angry or emotionally disoriented unable to make sense of their experiences. Other volunteers may simply never reconcile with their emotions. Teresa's understanding of healing is that, it is an experience in which people are forced to respond to their experiences. They cannot simply put these memories away or try to forget them.

Healing is knowing what to do after experiencing pain or trauma. It is not the aftermath of that progress. Teresa's belief is that healing is knowing how to take care of oneself, not just being taken care of.

Corinne's belief on healing is less cyclical in that she views healing as a stop-go process. Here she emphasizes how knowing that there is a separation between her work with No More Deaths and the rest of her life is comforting. Knowing that there is a definite stopping point makes it easier for volunteers to value and know when to heal.

“I think what helps me a lot is that I go back to Hamilton. I think if I were here year around it wouldn't be the same. I think it's a lot harder to have my whole self to get invested because I know that physically I'm going to be gone and when you're not here you can't go to the Monday night meetings, it's not the same. You're not as attached to it. That's what helps me. I only stay out at for three or four day and then I
come in for three or four days and that's good. This summer I worked at summer camp whereas last summer I worked at No More Deaths straight and that was really exhausting. Another thing that I do, I try to distance myself in becoming invested in any one thing. At camp, like I think some people are like, 'I'm going to be the Apache or if I'm not there we're not going to Chavez every two days or if we meet a migrant and I'm the one dealing with them.' I try not to do that. I have volunteers do that. For example if someone comes into camp for three days and I'm the one with them for the whole three days that'll kill me because I'll be so [pause] attached.”

For Corinne, the stopping point is when she has to leave Arizona for her college Hamilton located in upstate New York. As she explains, because she knows that she can only commit a few months of the year to No More Deaths and is require to return to school in Fall, it is harder for her to become as personally involved as the other local volunteers. Also, Corinne knows that she will return in the summer, so the feeling of not know when she will return or if she will ever return to the organization is also less intense. Additionally, her time commitment to No More Deaths is already selected for her, so emotionally she does not worry about whether or not she is doing enough work. Through her own past experiences, Corinne has discovered that working the entirety of her summer vacation is more exhausting than she expected, and as a result she has allowed for more time away from the organization. In this situation, it would seem that healing encompasses an idea of equally valuing multiple experiences in one's life. Corinne sees her time with the summer camp as a valuable as her work with No More Deaths.

Another value that Corinne has discovered is the necessity to distance oneself from any particular task such as a trail, water drop, or even a migrant in camp. To Corinne, collecting an intense connection, responsibility, or relationship to something in camp can be emotionally and mentally costly. Humanitarian Fiona Terry has also considered this interpretation of experience and healing. In her book, Condemned to Repeat, Terry writes
that:

“Such detachment eases the guilt and frustration of not being able to resolve all the problems with which refugees are confronted, and manifests itself both mentally and physically. Lest contact with the refugees reduces the burden of requests or complaints, and aid personnel spend more time isolated in the vehicle or office” (Terry 2008, 225-226).

As Terry writes, aid workers may choose to interact with victims less because of two distinct reasons. First, volunteers feel personally responsible to that entity. If something were to go wrong, they would feel it was their fault. Second, from this feeling of personal responsibility, volunteers easily put themselves in direct line of pain or trauma. For example, Corinne states that she could not be with a migrant for three days because “that’ll kill” her. Clearly, she is speaking figuratively but the emphasis is still the same. If Corinne were to spend significant time with a migrant, she would become so personally involved that if something negative were to happen to the migrant (which is highly likely) she would be brokenhearted and experience significant pain or trauma. In a previous chapter, I discussed through John Hyde’s story of a volunteer, who within a few hours, became so attached to a migrant, that it became apparent to the camp community she was traumatized and would not be ready to immediately engage in another patrol after the incident. With these types of crises happening almost every day, it is easy to see why Corinne values distance. Through Corinne’s experiences, healing can be seen not only as an exercise in time management but also as a preventative measure. Knowing how much a person can heal from an experience should gauge how many experiences they can be exposed to.

In my last example of how volunteers heal, I employ the perspective of John Fife, a retired minister who worked extensively during the 1980's El Salvador Sanctuary Movement.
and then helped form No More Deaths in 2004. When I asked John about his personal experiences with trauma and how he healed, he responded in part by explaining his role in the Movement, and how he was unable to speak to people unaware or uninvolved with his work. This was when he realized he was traumatized and sought help. As a pastor, he knew what he was experiencing was unusual and potentially detrimental to his work as a community leader. Other people relied on his abilities as a pastor to also lead them through difficulties, and John realized that he was unable to meet some of these needs now:

“I was dealing with people who had been tortured, who had family members killed in front of them who’d been threatened by death squads, who had [pause] life and death on the edge, journey through Mexico, been abused, some women sexually abused across Mexico, all of that stuff. And uh and it was so distant from the normal life of North American middle class folks...that I just could not bridge that gap. Uhh and in terms of simple language let alone anything else. So I had to come to terms with it in order to keep doing my work and doing my work as a pastor. And so as I worked through that, I [pause] had to find ways to do that. [long pause] Part of it was to compartmentalize my life, part of my life was a Presbyterian pastor that I had to do and part of my was to be directly responsible for the lives of refugees who were trying to get through the desert across the border, and I pretty much had to compartmentalize that...but that works [pause] and humor helps too. You have to have a sense of humor about yourself and about [pause] what, what it is you're dealing with [pause] in order to climb out of the trauma and say, [pause] 'Well you know life is also [pause] also joyful, and things need to be celebrated.' Like when you do a crossing and it works...well yea that's what [pause] that's the pony in the manure pile. In the midst of all of this, stop spending so much time in the manure pile and enjoy the pony...that's in there somewhere. So that was a part of it. The other part of it was that I became really hard hearted. I couldn't allow myself to be deeply emotionally involved with what I was doing and the people I was working with. So there was a period where probably eight to ten years when I never cried. I never cried, and I knew that was not good but I also knew that's where I needed to be if I was to continue doing the work. I couldn't get deeply emotionally involved with the people I was dealing with or I wouldn't be worth the help. Then I had to after it was over, go back to my therapist and said, 'Okay, I need get in touch with my emotional life a little more here,' in order to be a human being again and did some work just to do that. And so when the No More Deaths work came along, I kinda figure out how to [pause] when I'm out in the desert, I kinda revert back to that tough guy. I just do the work and I wall off some of that emotional trauma [laughs] from uhhh who I am and then I try to get back in touch with it when I get back to Tucson and I guess I've
Knowing how to heal requires experience and self awareness. John had to realize in himself that something was not right, and then he needed to value himself, and his needs enough to spend time addressing this personal problem. He recognized that his experiences were not only traumatic, but that they did not apply to the average United States citizen, and so it became hard for him to help two communities simultaneously. The concerns and needs of one community seem to drastically overweigh and overshadow those of his church community.

John said that he had to compartmentalize his life—his work with refugees had to be separated from the rest of his life. He had to recognize that his work was atypical and also very special, it was not going to be something that everyone could understand. This does not necessarily mean that John and other aid workers must box off this part of their lives. I think John was trying to explain, that his life and the life of the world, is much more than just the movement or just the aid work. A person cannot let one aspect of their life completely overturn the rest of it.

Most importantly, through his emphasis on humor, John learned how to continue to see the good in life. Sometimes healing means a person needs to refocus and see the bigger picture of life, that joyful things still happen, even in what appears to be a dimly lit world. Taking those moments and cherishing the joy is equally as important as doing the work itself. As John said, rather colorfully, a person has to find “the pony in the manure pile” because it is there somewhere. He cannot spend his whole energy concentrating on the manure when there is also a pony to enjoy.
The next section of John's story becomes a bit darker. Although John points to how he learned to regain perspective and see the good in all situations, he also comments that he became very hardhearted. He candidly tells me that he did not cry for over eight years, which seems like an incredible feat when I recall how comparatively, I had cried multiple times at camp before speaking to him. Here, one witnesses the complexities and difficulties that arise when an aid worker tries to heal. Although, he may immensely value healing, that does not automatically translate into a seamless progress for him. It does not mean that John was not healing at all but what it does tell me, is that healing is not as simple. It cannot truly occur without active participation and determination.

John said that he would not have been able to help the Movement if had not been hard hearted. He valued the work over his personal needs and as a result he suffered real consequences. When the work was over, John immediately sought help again, which points to his self awareness and ability to meet his internal needs, but it also reveals how John came to understand how he functioned within a humanitarian context. John, like Corinne and many of the other volunteers, needed to create a boundary between who they were and what they experienced in the desert, from the person they were outside of their work as humanitarians.

Forgetting as a Form of Healing?

I leave this chapter by posing the question: is healing the same as forgetting? If someone forgets a traumatic experience and are able to function normally and contribute positively within our communities, does that mean he or she has healed? Does healing within the humanitarian context always have to include some inflated effect of social awareness or
an energetic promise to change the world? With hundreds of new volunteers each summer, how do they all transition back into their pre-No More Deaths lives? It is impossible to know how each individual responds to their time with No More Deaths, but one surmises that many of them will forget or even actively try to forget their experiences in the desert. Academics and aid workers should now ask, is this an unwanted behavior?

It is unrealistic to assume that every No More Deaths summer volunteer will return to their hometowns with a sense of redirection and purpose in their life. Perhaps this is simply one way to deal with the experience. Do all experiences have tremendous value? Corinne Bancroft first brought this phenomenon to me, when I asked her how she felt summer volunteers should deal with their experiences after leaving camp:

“*I don't know, I think they just think they'll bury it and forget about it and get over it but that's not what I want you to do. Maybe I don't want you to heal maybe I want you hold that pain so that you always you feel like you want to do a little something but heal enough so that you are capable of doing something.*”

Until then, I had simply thought that healing was the process in which individuals processed through an event in order to return to a stable and proactive state. If some people needed to “forget” their experiences with the organization, (although it would not be ideal for No More Deaths) perhaps that would be the best. I also considered the nuances within the idea of forgetting. There is a clear difference between someone who actively pursues forgetting a memory to someone who values that memory less over time. When Corinne brought this perspective to me, I realized exactly how dangerous forgetting was, regardless of the circumstance or intent.

Corinne also uses the words “*get over it*” in an interesting fashion. In my other
interviews, getting over something was not necessarily a bad action. Getting over an experience might mean reconciling the memory and then accepting it for whatever it was. Here getting over is the opposite of engagement. It represents an active role to devalue a memory or experience, so that it becomes less vivid and more difficult to recall. I agree with Corinne that to forget experiences is the akin to simply running away from healing.

However, when I asked John Hyde the same question, he understood the idea of forgetting in an even more complex view.

“Several people have said, I'm afraid when I go home to my routine back to college, back to credits, back to debits, back to my nine to five job that I'm going to forget about what happened here.’ [Pause] I think it's important to unpack what goes on here because if there had been significantly traumatic experiences here, then that forgetting is probably just the clothing over denial, and that needs to be for a person's own wellbeing and family and friends needs to be looked at. By in large, I think people are saying, you know my routine is [pause] absorbs so much of my energy that I don't have much left over, so I don't think a person should feel guilty of that. That first of all that awareness is very significance, ok, do you want that to be different? And then beginning to look around at what support groups might be, that is to other people who think similarly. There are some people who say there are nobody in my town around even my family wasn't excited about this. Well if there is nobody, I wouldn't say you haven't looked hard enough. It's worth another look but try to keep in touch and finding those people in nearby communities. We're looking around the country now and a No More Deaths group started in Phoenix, Denver, and talk of more in other towns and because people often come in pockets, that's really helpful too. Keeping up in communication and [pause] I think its important [pause] listening to what a person feels most called to.”

To John, forgetting could be the first indicators of wanting to heal. Aid workers who are concerned that they will forget their experiences can make a significant change in their lives at home. As John mentions, they can reach out to other communities or groups that will support their experience and encourage what is alive in them. Forgetting in this case is not seen as a malicious or sloth like act, it is the fear that the change, which the individual views
as positive can be destroyed by their home communities, which may now feel foreign. John advises summer volunteers to not give up on their communities or feel that they are completely alone. Part of the privilege volunteers have as citizens, is the ability to freely travel and communicate, so that even if aid workers feel alone in their own community, it may be just as easy to look to a neighboring city or town. Aid workers can also continue contact with volunteers that they have met at camp through telephone calls or email. Forgetting is not simply something that happens passively, aid workers have to let forgetting happen.

For all these nuances, healing in the humanitarian aid context seems ironic to me. One needs to separate himself from what causes trauma and inflicts pain in him in order to engage with the pain experienced. Volunteers have to negotiate between two work realities—one in which crises are never ending and the other one in which summer camps, baseball games, and trips to San Diego exist. The two worlds often intersect and overlap. Aid workers serve as ambassadors within these two realities. Effectively, the borderlands in its nature of “in-between,” casts aid workers into this limbo world, where one never feels quite at home. Aid workers belong to both worlds yet staying in either for too long would be uncomfortable or even possibly dangerous. Traversing between these worlds is a constant “Goldie Locks” maneuver. One world is too hot—pain and suffering, the witnessing of trauma is ever present. Needs are expressed but few can truly be met. If a volunteer were to remain in this world for too long they would effectively and ironically burn out. The other world is too cold—air condition rooms, clean water is ever present, and the ability to move and do what one would like, comes with the flash of a proof of citizenship. Privilege isolates the haves
from the have-nots, and United States citizens travel to and from desires and wants without the slightest recognition of an invisible population. Neither reality can exist from the other, yet they seem so incredibly distant and surreal.

In examining this method of healing, I look to Inda and Rosaldo’s discussion on living between globes, namely the experience of the “immigrant,” which they argue, “speak from the ‘in-betweens’ of different cultures, always unsettling the assumption of one culture from the perspective of another, and thus finding ways of being both the same as and at the same time different from the others amongst whom they live” (Stuart Hallin Inda and Resaldo 2008, 21). These “in-betweens” as I wrote earlier, create a state of constant community building and initiation. One must always negotiate between these two cultures and as result suffer from an incomplete and often uncomfortable identity. This metaphor is particularly useful in describing the ways in which aid workers attempt to heal from their experiences, while living and working on the borderlands.

Although aid workers are not economic Mexican refugees, I believe Inda and Resaldo’s use of term “immigrant” is still applicable. As aid workers, volunteers must navigate between globes: those within the No More Deaths community and those within the larger American society. As with many immigrants, they are constantly traveling between two cultures that have strikingly different values and norms—making healing all that more difficult. This traveling undoubtedly leads to confusion. Das speaks to this unnatural flow of ‘norms and transgressions’ (Das 2000, 219). “If one’s way of being-with-others was brutally injured, then the past enters the present not necessarily as traumatic memory but as poisonous knowledge (Das 2000, 221). Volunteer who have witnessed an extensive amount
of violence on the border may have their ability to communicate with others “brutally injured”. This was the case of volunteer John Fife, who doing his work in the Sanctuary Movement, had to relearn how to communicate with people who were not involved in the Movement.

In traversing these two worlds myself, I find that while healing is not a one directional process, I cannot completely agree that it is entirely cyclical—a process of relearning pain and trauma. From what I have witnessed and the stories that my informants have shared, healing appears to be a constant balancing act between the personal and the outside. Aid workers have to first value their own perspective, experiences, and pain. They must learn when and how they should attend to their own needs regardless of the daily crises. Only then can aid organizations expand and continue work effectively. The trick is finding the world that is “just right.”
CLOSING:

Coming Home from the Journey

“Yea it is. It’s like how are you going to maintain your sanity doing this stuff? [Laughs] Yea, well you’re gonna find people who are really important and you’re going to establish relationships with those people and you’re going to have to work to maintain relationships...it’s gonna be really important for you to do that, to invest enough energy in it, to keep those options open. You’re gonna need somebody that will understand umm what you’re going through very quickly. You know you won’t have the time to always help them understand everything you’ve been doing, everything that's built up to this umm [pause] often you’ll need to call them and they’re gonna have to have empathy right off the bat for you or [pause] you're gonna be in trouble. [Laughs]”- Gene Lefebvre

It was a hot day on July 30, 2009. I was leading two other No More Deaths volunteers through a migrant trail heading north. We were in the Coronado National Park north of a landmark known as Grey Tank. It was a typical “patrol,” we began our day at 5:00AM, we arrived on the trails and immediately began leaving gallons of water at known resting points. Our mission was to help end death and suffering on the border.

It was almost 1pm when met Ricardo18. We had been running late from our schedule and were in such a rush that we almost did not see him. Ricardo lay under a tree and across from a cattle water trough. He had been there for two days. Suffering from extreme dehydration and heat exhaustion, Ricardo could no longer move his body. He spoke softly as he told our group that his body ached, and he could not turn over.

Hearing this, I looked to the other two volunteers. Our faces were white and we were all trapped in a moment in time. Although I was the youngest volunteer, my other two volunteers had just arrived that week. I panicked for a moment searching for a patrol leader before I realized that in my frantic—I was the patrol leader. The cell phone reception was terrible, I looked for a hill to climb onto but saw only distant curves. I realized then that as we were at water hole, the tallest area was on top of an old windmill. I climbed onto the metal structure to call our Medical advisors and then the paramedics. The phones were constantly disconnecting, and it was hard to hear what the two volunteers below me were saying.

I waited on that windmill for over two hours for help to arrive. On top of that windmill I watched Ricardo and the two volunteers. I watched the volunteers attempt to shade Ricardo and provide him with liquids. I saw myself a tiny pink and tan figure grasping on an archaic invention. I began to cry thinking of our world, and of my country—how could my country be unsympathetic to Ricardo and other migrants?

18 Name Changed.
The paramedics arrived and we carried Ricardo onto the stretcher and placed him in the helicopter. We watch the massive structure churn as it lifted and disappeared past some distant mountains. Two days later, I visited Ricardo in the hospital. He was better but he could not still not sit up straight nor could he turn on either side without significant struggle. His voice was very raspy. He showed me his back and legs, both littered with mosquito bites. He laughed and thanked us, but we didn't know how to respond. The nurse told us that had Ricardo waited any longer, he would have suffered from irreparable kidney damage. He would have been bound to a dialysis or worst—dead.

Although Ricardo did recover, I will never forget this medical evacuation. I cannot say I was prepared for this situation. It certainly was not a normal experience for a 20 year old. I had witnessed a man clearly in distress. I thought about my peers in school, how they were doing internships with advertising and finance firms. I saw myself hot, dirty, and scared witless. I saw those preparing presentations and working on multimillion dollar deals. I was struck by the disconnect of these two simultaneous situations. When I arrived at Duke only two weeks later, I began to close off from my friends. I went through many months of feeling alone and depressed. As someone who has always believed in ethics, morality, and the social responsibility people have to one another, I could no longer understand the world. I didn't feel like there was anyone else with the same values or perspectives as me in North Carolina.

When I would talk to my friends about my summer, I felt they were disinterested or distracted by their own worries in life. I lost faith in one of my closest friends and doubted the support of my family. I had completely lost perspective. I was burnt out—crashed and I had no idea how to get better.

Thankfully, it has been sometime since I have felt that way. Ironically, it has been through working on my thesis that I have healed. Talking to volunteers and listening to their experiences, I have been able to identify my own conflicts. As Veena Das once wrote, “My journey is not about going forward, but rather about turning back, about collecting words and thoughts that I think of as having forged connections between me and my interlocutors in the field” (Das 2007, 1). These words have also held true for my own work. Volunteers trusted me and willingly gave me access to extremely personal information. Gene's quotation at the beginning of this chapter was especially influential to me. It gave me the tools that I needed to begin to heal. Knowing that healing is hard, ironically makes it easier to start. Elaine Scarry postulated, “How is it that one person can be in the presence of another person in pain and not know it—not know it to the point where he himself inflicts it, and goes on inflicting
it?” (Scarry 1985, 12) Sometimes remembering we need to share our experiences can seem profound when we think no one is listening.

Without sharing my experiences with the other No More Deaths volunteers, I would have never identified myself as burned out nor would I have done anything to amend the situation. I would have never addressed the trauma I witnessed. I would have never recognized my lost of perspective and work toward regaining it. I like many of my informants, did not value my experiences or emotions over the experiences of migrants. What was my pain compared to theirs? I thought it was best to immerse myself in as much work as possible. I was trapped in the paradigm and completely immersed in Maureen's “martyr complex.” Like John Fife and Gene had identified with their own experiences, I was so burnout I literally could not talk to people who did not already share my personal politics. And although my family would tell me that I was no longer the same person, I never listened.

I forgot what Inda and Rosaldo so artfully said in The Anthropology of Globalization, “The world is not a seamless whole without boundaries. Rather, it is a space of structured circulations, of mobility and immobility. It is a space of dense interconnections and black holes” (Inda and Rosaldo 2008, 35). My world had in fact become only a black hole.

“I was so burned out that I could not relate to the people for a day and a half. I couldn't relate to my friends or my family. I was just sleeping or umm depressed. I thought, I had just gone over the edge in terms of pushing myself physically and emotionally. I just thought, I'm never going to do this again and I haven't. I have never crossed that line and you learned that you're not umm you are replaceable. And when you leave the group for some period of time, you discovered that things go on without you and you learn that lesson over and over again. The moment you get caught up, you have to remember that you are replaceable. If you pace yourself and you let yourself take vacations and take a break from the organization then it all comes back again.” - Gene Lefebvre

I had to learn what Gene called the “line.” To do good work, I needed to regain perspective
in order to connect with those people who were not aware about the situation on the border. I needed patience and understanding—two things I had to relearn. Engaging in humanitarian aid with No More Deaths is not just a time or physical commitment, it is an emotional commitment.

Our stories matter, the stories of aid workers are important especially within the humanitarian critique. If aid workers are not encouraged to share their stories and have those stories valued then the critique is accurate. Aid workers are temporary. We have no effect. For aid work to truly be effective, we need those stories. We need aid workers to rejoin mainstream realities and continue to work positively. Aid workers who stay angry, traumatized, and hurt do not benefit the overall humanitarian community—they hurt it. There is no need for a community of ill-advised people in the world. Aid work needs to reform and we need change. We need experiences that can catapult change not experiences that result in a loss of perspective.

There are two halves within this conversation, those who are aided and those who do the aiding. Why then is there such an overwhelming discussion on the part of those who are victims while little research has been conducted on the part of the humanitarian? Should not there be equal research within the field? Are not both viewpoints valuable?

I believe that scholars cannot simply see the humanitarian critique as one dimensional where victims are hurt by horrific situations and then further distressed by the inabilities of humanitarian work. A critique on aid work and its challenges, pitfalls, and shortcomings is not innovative nor does it ask the reader to consider a complex or complicated aspect of humanitarian aid. There are a number reasons why the academic community must respond to
this gap. First, as I mentioned earlier, scholars need to understand the full perspective. How can we analyze a situation when half of the material is missing? Second, without academic discussion, no reform within humanitarian aid can occur. There are real issues that aid workers face which need to be recognized and resolved. Aid workers need to address the trauma they witness otherwise serious consequences to the organization may occur. Third, vicarious trauma is real. As Danielle said, “We experience pain too” and that pain is important to recognize. Without recognizing the pain associated with humanitarian aid, volunteers are unable to heal and continue their work.

In this thesis I attempted to explore the perspective of a No More Deaths volunteer. I described the borderlands as a transient space enveloped in violence. The violence is not new. Racial and land tensions have been ever present since European conquest began in the early 1500's. In the past 15 years, that violence has dramatically risen. Undocumented immigration spurred on by international trade agreements have escalated the number of undocumented Latin Americans crossing into the United States. In response the United States government enacted a policy that funneled all migration to the most dangerous parts of the Arizona desert. Activists, many from the 1980's Sanctuary Movement banded together to form humanitarian aid groups in order to address the situation on the border. I chose to research the Tucson based organization named No More Deaths.

Through continuous field work and many interviews, I put together this thesis to assert a theory which expanded the critique on humanitarian aid. Using ethnographic content and the works of other anthropologists, I put forth a set of basic assumptions on aid work where I placed a paradigm that connected privilege, violence, and trauma. I argued that this
triangle often repeats itself because volunteers refuse to address their traumas yet they continue to work and live in an area of violence. They deny their own needs because they use privilege as the ultimate equalizer. This is a critical flaw in humanitarian logical as it devalues the worth of a person. I have personally experienced this pain when in the midst of an argument my partner shouted, “You asked for this pain! You knew this would happen if you went! Whose fault is it if you're upset now?”

Much of my thesis has been set to deconstruct those three sentences. These words are not profound yet they espouse the general response of critics. Humanitarian work is not about getting recognition for empathy. People should not however, be scolded for their attempt to act in response to a problem. At the same time aid workers should not be lauded for their consideration. Aid work is not perfect. Volunteers should recognize that pain will be associated with the work and this pain may ignite significant changes.

“And for those of us who have been at it in a while, it's a fundamental understanding about what to expect. We've been out there a long time, and we know you're gonna get your heart broken every time you go out and it just goes with the territory. I keep telling people, 'Don't come out to the desert unless you want your heart broken.' Because every migrant you encounter, you can't do what you want to do—to help them. You have to walk away at some point without doing what you know you should do to another human being and the only rationale for that is because you have to keep the work going.” - John Fife

John told me, “Don't come out to the desert unless you want your heart broken” and yet John's statement is not at all about getting your heart broken and displaying it for the world to see. It is about understanding that pain is part of the work but wanting to still do the work regardless. It is seeing a need and fulfilling it the only way you can. As my informants have pointed out, the majority of volunteers wish not to discuss their own traumas as they feel their privilege balances out this hurt. Aid workers are not self obsessed nor do they see their
work changing the world. They are aware of the constraints. They cannot do what they want for the people they wish to help. They are privileged. They choose to live and work in an environment of constant violence and yet they do little as a group to actively resolve the trauma they witness. Their privilege ultimately becomes a consequence not a burden, as aid workers come to devalue their own needs and become trapped in the paradigm of privilege, violence, and trauma.

This paradigm however, is also ironically trapped within a time constraint. Had I had more time, I would have liked to deconstruct the notion of time on the borderlands. The geography of the borderlands has remained constant and yet the history and violence of the border is changing on a daily basis. This constant change pressures aid workers to see time in a “presentist” point of view. Only the “now” matters. They look to the past and the future as only evidence for why the present is so important. Thoughts like, “We can't change the past, we have to move forward with the future,” place a heavy emphasis on the present. Life in the desert is an emergency—a crisis—largely ignored by the public and delicately nursed by aid workers. The crisis is happening now. Everyday is an emergency and so we do not have time to look back or think about prevention in the future. We must work now. We do not really know the lives of the migrants we seek to help. What were their lives like in Mexico or Central America? We also do not know what their lives will be like after they leave the desert. Will they be safe? Will they be happy? So much of my research is steeped in the presentist point of view, that the concept of the before or the after is hard to grasp.

Coming home for temporary No More Deaths volunteers then becomes a challenge. With no constant No More Deaths community and a presentist point of view, how do we
come home? How do we heal from what we have seen, when as Danielle has identified, there is no one to understand our experiences?

“Because our work is so specifically located, most people aren't going to understand your experiences at all. So I think coming to terms with and understanding that there is a certain amount of alienation that just comes with having had this really powerful experience that other people cannot conceive of [pause] I think it's one thing that just helps to think about that, and know that that is just a really common experience—not that you aren't doing it right or you can't explain it right or you don't know enough about the background to convince somebody. That it's just so [pause] unlike most other experiences that people have with these issues and other related issues, I think knowing that it's going to be really hard is one way people can help other people.”

By witnessing violence on the border volunteers will need to rebuild personal relationships in such a way as they make to sense to whom they were before the violence and who they have become. If they are unsure of revealing their experiences because they believe there is no community support, they will be unable to release certain emotional tensions. As a result, their body as Scarry hypothesizes, will respond through its only emotional outlet. This uncontrolled emotional reaction emphasizes the importance of witnessing and revealing.

“The violence of the Partition lay not only in what happened to them in the riots and the brutal violation of their bodies but also in what they had to witness—viz. The possibility of betrayal coded in their everyday relations” (Das 2000, 218). Das argues that it is not only the actions that illicit trauma but also the fear of betrayal. If volunteers were to reveal what trauma they had incurred they run the risk of feeling alone or being blamed for the pain they experience—betrayed by the people who care most for them.

How do I respond to my partner's allegations? Am I responsible for the pain inflicted on me? I do not know. What I do know is that aid workers should not be barred from emotional support simply because they chose to engage in humanitarian work. There are real
consequences of being a humanitarian but denial of sympathy should not be one. The focus on that question should not be the answer but the motive behind my partner's statements. Why was his perspective to scold me rather than to comfort? What does that say about the nature of the humanitarian critique and its perspective?

The humanitarian critique has been too one sided. Victims are valued and aid workers are criticized. What my partner said may have been outright, but it was not an uncommon belief. To truly deconstruct his statements, we need to envision an academic discussion that would value all perspectives. Until then, humanitarian work cannot reform and both victims and aiders remain disadvantaged.


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