

# El Paso Texas, 2007



El Paso

—Rio Grande  
US/Mexico Border

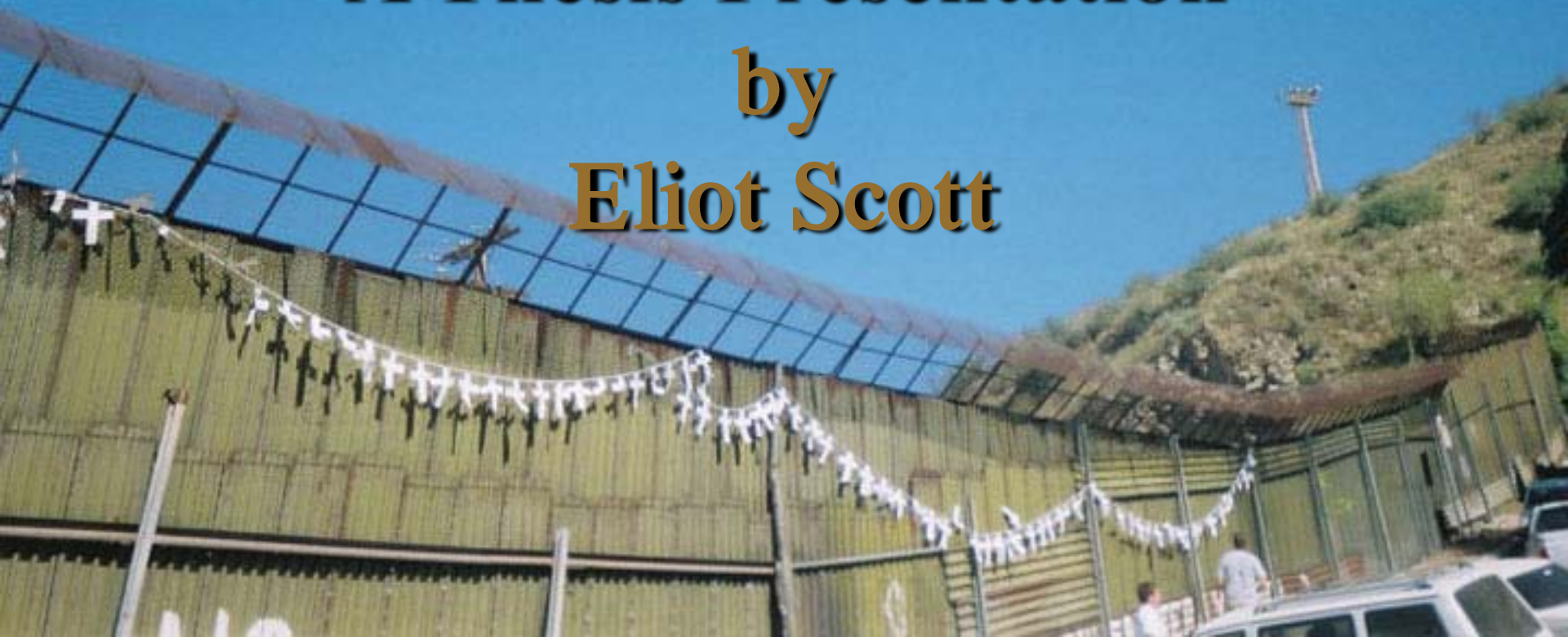
Ciudad Juárez

—I-10



# Militarization & Functional Changes At the Mexican-US Border

A Thesis Presentation  
by  
Eliot Scott



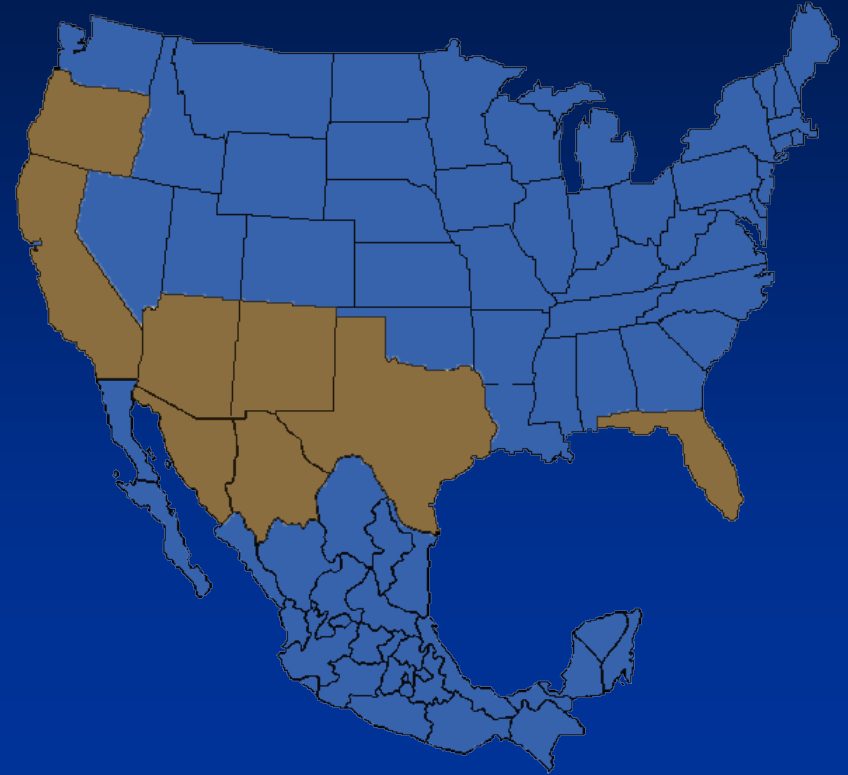
# Introduction to Research



- Border has benefited US employers for decades
- Recent military and legal activities causing scarcity of migrant labor
- *If the border no longer serves as a semi-permeable barrier to Mexican labor for economic exploitation by US employers, what is its function and what entities are benefiting from this increase in militarization?*

# Research Design & Methodology

- Designed a multi perspective study to assess the impact of post 9-11-01 federal changes.
- I conducted ethnographic research on
  - migrants
  - US employers
  - immigrant rights groups
  - border guards and military personnel
  - residents on the border
- Research was conducted over a period of ten months in 2007 and 2008 in six US states and two Mexican states.
- To protect the identities of my subjects, I did not take notes during our conversations nor did I record their actual names.

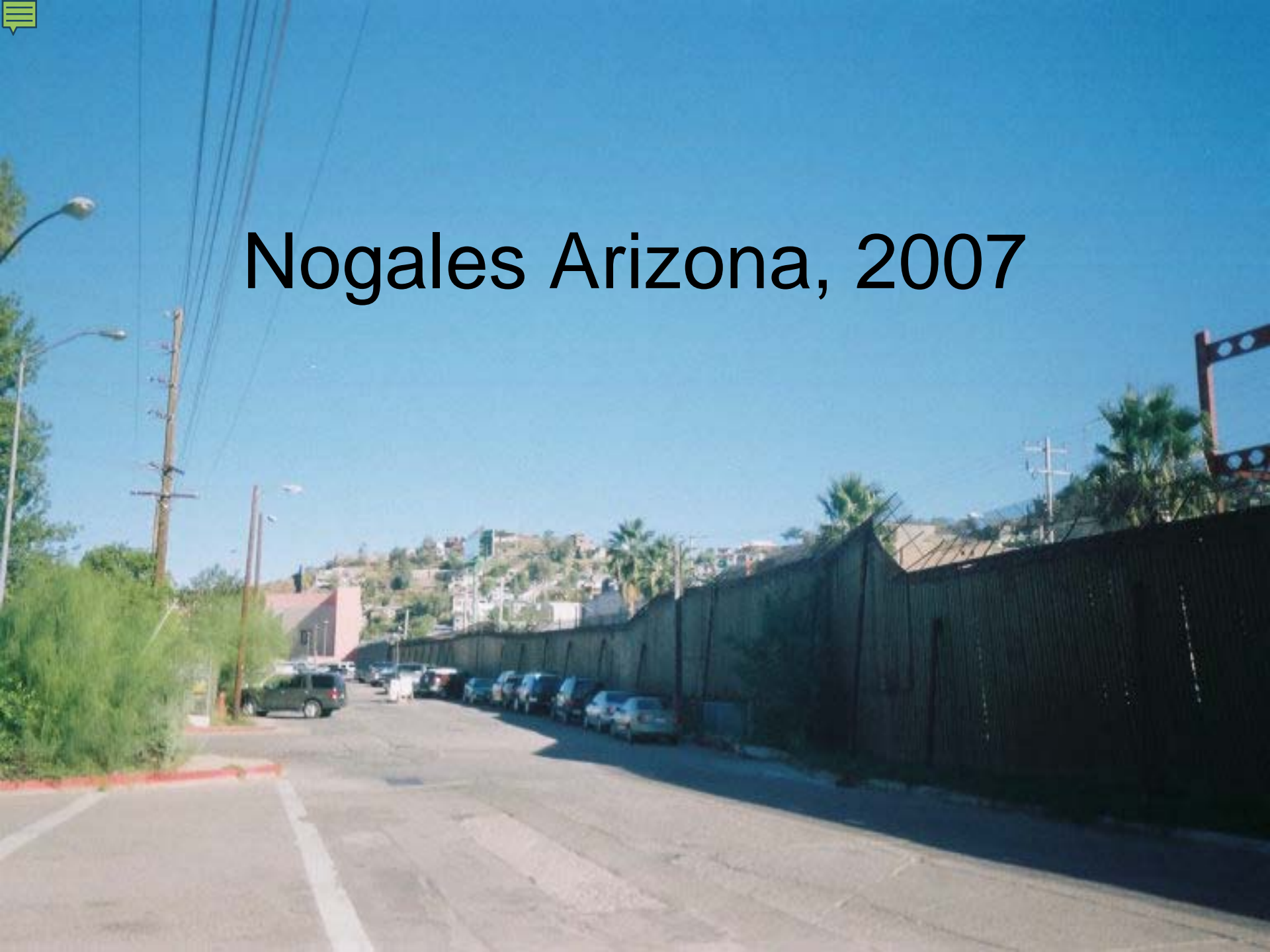




An aerial photograph of a border crossing. A wide river flows from the foreground towards the background. A concrete bridge with multiple spans crosses the river. To the left of the river, there is a large parking lot filled with cars. In the background, a city is visible, followed by a range of mountains under a clear blue sky. A large, dark, blurry object is in the foreground, partially obscuring the view.

# **Border Militarization & Panoptic Spectacle**

# Nogales Arizona, 2007





# Panopticism

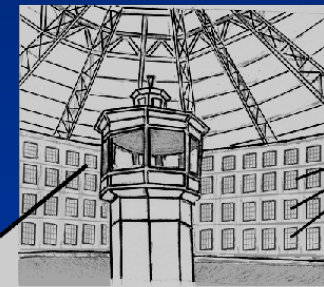
- The militarization of the border creates an atmosphere that mimics Foucault's description of the Panopticon (1979).
- The US-Mexican border functions as a site of surveillance and disciplinary power.



## DESIGN OF THE PANOPTICON



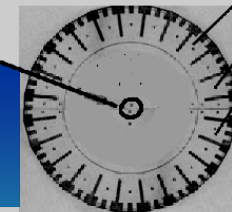
exterior of the panopticon



interior of the panopticon

prisoner cells

guard tower



floorplan of the panopticon

# El Paso, Texas





# Border Patrol

- Encounters with Border Patrol demonstrate the Panoptic effect
- The primary effect of the Panopticon is “to induce in the inmate a sense of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault 1979:201).
- This arrangement assures that “the surveillance is permanent in its effects” (Foucault 1979:201).



# Military Spectacle



- Military displays of spectacle to intimidate the inmates on whom the panoptic gaze is focused.
- Spectacles consist of border checkpoints and surveillance activities carried out by the US Military, US Border Patrol and local Police Departments
- “spectacle...and panopticon, coexist as technologies of power” (Kaplan 1995:93).

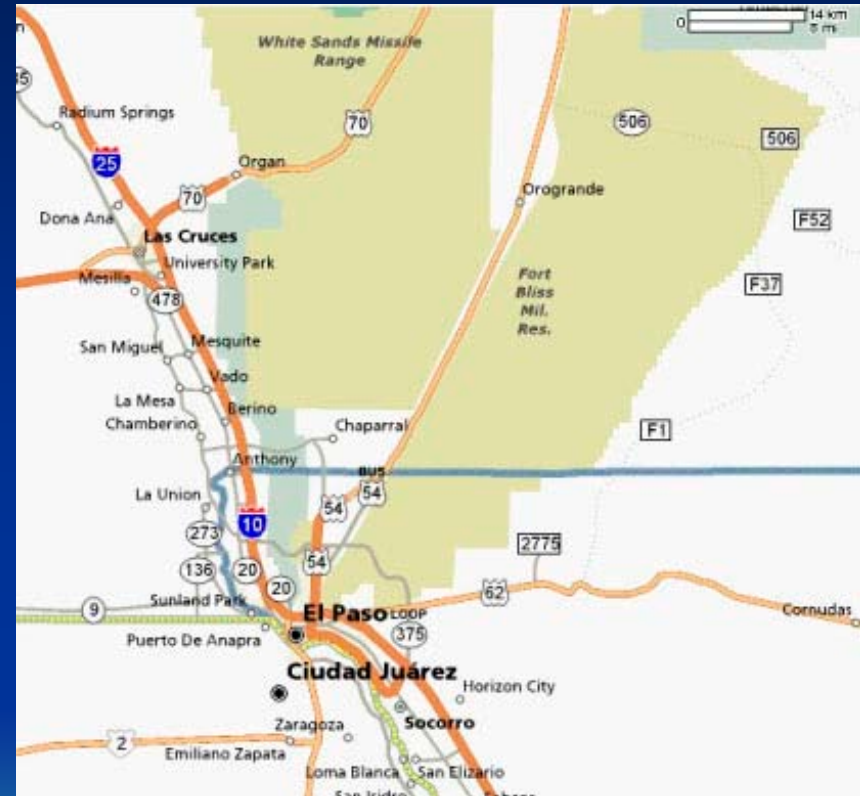



# El Paso, Texas



# The US Military

- Fort Bliss is a spatial and economic representation of US control of the El Paso region.
- The base accounts for a large amount of local economic activity
- The base and its munitions testing range sit on a ridge that splits El Paso between East and West
- Fort Bliss also serves as a primary training ground for air defense.





# **Border Patrol Checkpoint Agua Linda Road On I-19 between Nogales & Tucson Tubac, Arizona**



# Borders Within Borders

- Border checkpoints inside the territorial US
- Checkpoints on I-19 and elsewhere serve as a 'third layer' of enforcement (GAO 2007)
- This "third layer" of enforcement, extends the atmosphere of the border inside US territory.
- The borders within borders, along with stringent requirements for identification documents extend the panoptic gaze to encompass those on the US side of the border as well.







# **Legal Functions & Structural Violence**

# Structural Violence



- Caused by large scale economic, political and social conditions
- Focus on US legal system's production of structural violence against migrants

# Legal Fees

- Fees to immigrate legally much higher than smuggling fees
- Fees discouraged several migrants I spoke with from obtaining legal documents because they could not afford them
- Discourse advocates for legal immigration
- Legal fees have recently risen dramatically





# Legal Complexity



- 100's of immigration documents at the USCIS web site.
- Forms filled with legal jargon.
- Calling for clarification requires navigating a complex phone menu system
- Migrants therefore need to hire an expensive lawyer.

# Legal Production of Militarism

- The law and militarization work in conjunction.
- Process inflicts structural violence against migrants
- US law functions as another border to legal migration
- Law encourages illegal migration



A photograph of a large concrete archway over a highway. The archway is a massive, light-colored concrete structure that frames the scene. Below the arch, a multi-lane highway is filled with cars, including a prominent red pickup truck in the foreground. To the right, a white sign with a red border and a red 'E' with a diagonal slash is visible. In the background, a multi-story building with many windows and an American flag on a tall pole are visible under a clear blue sky.

# Shifting Economic Benefits



# Prior Benefits to US Employers



- Migrants who lack documentation within the US legal framework have little recourse but to accept employment at below market cost.
- Because many migrants lack “valuable” skills, many US employers have exploited them to a greater degree.

# Changes in Policy to Employers

- US Immigration and Customs Enforcement increased its investigations including raids on Wal-Mart, Del Monte and Tyson foods in 2007 and 2008.
- Charges can carry a potential 10-20 year prison sentence, plus forfeiture of all company assets
- Employer contended that US policies on migration “hurt farmers and farm workers alike. Only the federal government can fix this problem, but they refuse to do so.”



# Corporate Contractors

- US Customs and Border Protection utilizes Wackenhut's Transportation Services to transport detainees.
- In March 2002, The Wackenhut Corporation merged with a Danish owned security conglomerate
- Boeing acquired a huge government contract to create a “virtual fence” of surveillance cameras at the Arizona border.
- ICE awarded a contingency contract to former Halliburton subsidiary Kellogg, Brown and Root.
- Border Patrol Utilizing UNICOR – Federal Prison Industries



# Conclusion



- The border has become increasingly militarized in the years following 9-11-01.
- US interests that benefit from this militarized border have shifted with changes in policies.
- The patrols and surveillance activities at the border work to create a panoptic gaze.
- This thesis has described the increased militarization of the border since the attacks on the US on September 11, 2001. It has further demonstrated some of the negative effects this increased militarization has had on a variety of populations.
- This discussion contributes to the ongoing debates regarding globalization and transnationalism in modern neoliberal states, especially in a socio-political and economic anthropological context.



# Questions



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