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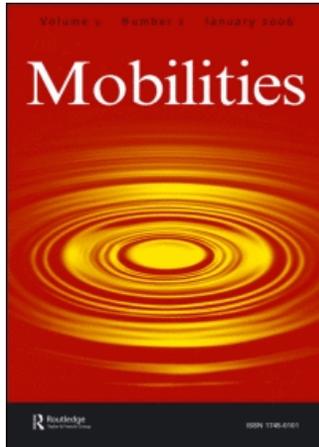
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Centre and Edge: Pilgrimage and the Moral Geography of the US/Mexico Border

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ABSTRACT *This essay posits two forms of pilgrimage – to the centre and to the edge – as forms of meaningful movement that contribute to the moral geography of peoples and nations. This model is applied to a variety of disparate, current movements through the desert borderlands of the United States and Mexico, all of which can be read as employing pilgrimage in the task of inscribing versions of America on a highly contested landscape.*

KEY WORDS: Pilgrimage, borders, US/Mexico Border, America, moral geography

Currently there is a great deal of mobility through what, on natural grounds, is among the least likely regions of the world: the vast Sonoran Desert. The catalyst for that movement is the border between the United States (US) and Mexico; several hundred of its nearly 2,000 miles traverse that parched and wild terrain. Increased enforcement elsewhere has made this deadly landscape the scene of what must now be the greatest annual migration of people from south to north, probably a million souls, sometimes in vehicles but most often walking through those sands. At the same time, agents of both states (Border Patrol, Customs, now National Guard, *Grupo Beta* and a variety of Mexican services) stand or move laterally along that same border, joined recently by groups of volunteer US citizens who call themselves Minutemen. Those organisations have their own counterpart in Humane Borders, Samaritans, No More Deaths and other groups that also move through the desert on the Arizona side, leaving tanks of water or offering medical services or even clandestine transport to undocumented migrants.

Of course all these movements have as their main aim the achievement of clear and rather simple political and and/or personal goals: migrants reaching the US; agents from the US, volunteers, and to a far lesser degree Mexican officials, stopping those migrants; and humanitarian groups saving or abetting them on their journey. But these movements also have a powerful symbolic dimension, amounting to rival

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inscriptions of the nation whose essential character is somehow understood to be defined by them. It is as if the footprints and tread marks in the sands are lines that either reinforce a state-imagined border or else blur that same border with trails that cross it, leading into the interior. Both lines, and the respective movements that created them, define America, the former by marking the edge, the latter by indicating a centre within: two kinds of movement; two kinds of nation.

In fact, before these movements began to gather momentum, other Americans had been walking through these deserts with even more overtly symbolic intent. Native Americans, The Tohono and Hia C-ed O'odham, moved transhumantly or nomadically among seasonal camps and villages through a territory that encompassed thousands of square miles on both sides of what became the border between the US and Mexico. But they also moved on pilgrimage, first to acquire salt and rain from the sea, and, beginning in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, on their own version of a Catholic pilgrimage to the shrine of San Francisco Xavier in Magdalena de Kino, Sonora.¹ That pilgrimage, to which we will return below, is also popular among Mexicans and Mexican Americans, who arrive on foot or by vehicle from all directions for the fiesta on the fourth of October.² Also on a 'spiritual mission' are many devotees of 'Wilderness' who come alone or in groups to walk through such official and 'authentic wilderness' as can be found in the national lands along the border, including Organ Pipe National Monument and the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge. While ostensibly concerned with other goals, these movements, like those of the anti- and pro-immigrant groups, can also be understood as pilgrimages that narrate, perform and geographically inscribe versions of America.

These varied and sometimes contending constituencies of the desert borderland have been the subject of several years of ethnographic inquiry, during which I have spoken and travelled with all of them. Each of their journeys and its complex sets of motivations and consequences has been or will be treated at length in separate essays (see Taylor, 2007a, 2007b). Here, however, my purpose is to sketch with very broad strokes a portrait of two types of pilgrimage that in a very general, but still important, way encompass all of them. This overview of a dramatic case of symbolic politics may throw some light on both the meaning-creating capacity of such movements in general, and the particular moral geography of the US.³

By moral geography, I mean the cultural practice of ascribing symbolic significance and moral valence to particular landscapes. In the case of nationalism there are of course countless examples, including 'ancient homelands', or 'where our dead are buried'. Such places are never simply given or remembered; rather they are created and sustained through the cultural work of specific actions and narratives. In the category of actions comes movement through the landscape, a particularly potent form of which we often call pilgrimage. My use of that term, and of the larger category 'religion' is admittedly broad, following the same strategy of my earlier work in Ireland (1995, pp.242ff.) and Coleman's (2002, p.363) approach to pilgrimage. I would argue, in fact, that 'religion' often performs most powerfully precisely in contexts that are not clearly religious. Perhaps religion, like culture, works best when we do not think it is religion.

In his seminal text on imagined communities, Benedict Anderson (1991, p. 53) suggested an important role for pilgrimages to central places in the definition of dynastic realms and budding nations. But for Anderson these 'pilgrimages' were the

purely secular journeys of bureaucrats from peripheries to governmental centres, that sort of movement having in fact replaced the religious pilgrimage to cultic centres necessary to the conjuring of international, religious 'imagined communities' of Catholics or Muslims (for example). Yet pilgrimage of an overtly religious kind can certainly continue to play a definitive role in the imagined community of even contemporary nation states. In Europe one thinks of Czestochowa in Poland, Tinos in Greece (Dubisch, 1995), and Croagh Patrick in Ireland (see Taylor, 1995). While such pilgrimages are not obligatory expressions of belonging for the individual, nor the only collective spectacles of nation, they can and sometimes are used as either or both.

But pilgrimages may move towards the 'edge' as well as towards the centre, the case in fact for several of the examples cited above. This form of sacred journey has its own history in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is an Old Testament motif of course, the movement away from Egypt into the desert, a defining journey that creates nation and landscape in terms of one another. It may be a collective pilgrimage through a 'wilderness': a dangerous landscape — but one in which G-d manifests Himself in awesomely direct forms. The myth establishes the sacred, chosen character of the Hebrew people, but also serves to inscribe them in a landscape in such a way as to make them, in a powerful if special sense of the term, indigenous.

The pilgrimage to the edge has also its individual, rather than collective, form. Lone pilgrims leave the centre to seek G-d in holy, wild places. Indeed, there is a historical and dialectical process at work, a variant of Weber's notion of charisma and its routinisation.⁴ That is, as central places become points of control as well as of pilgrimage they inevitably become too routinised, and the search for authentic charisma moves toward another edge. Once again, the Old Testament supplies the Western model: prophets in the desert, followed in the New Testament by John the Baptist (who remains a semi-wild image in all the iconography) and of course Christ himself. In the ensuing Christian era, this motif is continued in the eremitic tradition of lone monks or small communities finding a place, typically in the desert, but always *in extremis*. In the damp northwest of Christendom a comparable journey was made to the wild west where Irish holy men sought wind and water wilderness on islands, peninsulas and mountain tops (see Taylor, 1995, Chap. 2). And in Ireland that movement to holy places on the wild edge survives (and in fact continues to grow) in two pilgrimages: to Lough Derg (Station Island) in Donegal and up the mountain called Croagh Patrick in Mayo. In the case of Lough Derg, we have the persistence of what for much of medieval Western Europe had been a frighteningly powerful place on the edge of the world in every sense: a liminal spot and space between the here and the hereafter, a cave in which the pilgrim personally confronted purgatory outside and, no doubt, within him or herself (see Le Goff, 1984 and Taylor, 1995). The other clearly liminal natural space is the top of Croagh Patrick. The origin story is a mimetic version of the Mosaic myth that substitutes Saint Patrick for Moses and the damp heights of Mayo for Sinai, and indeed displaces the original 'central' text with a story that takes its place in a whole corpus of wandering Irish saint legends. The modern pilgrimage takes place around the pre-Christian festival of Lughnasa when thousands of pilgrims make the difficult hike up the mountain. The journey seems particularly open to notions of individual trial and transformation, no doubt aided by the all too vivid embodiment of the experience.

In later, Protestant guise (with a renewed search for authentic experience in the context of a routinised and corrupted Catholic Church) another kind of singular searching pilgrimage was set in motion which, in breaking down the line between secular and sacred journey (and much else, see Taylor, 1983, pp. 141–163; Coleman, 2004, pp. 50–51) could see a life's journey as pilgrimage through the wilderness of this world: 'the Pilgrim's progress'. The underlying notion that God and/or God's will was revealed in the course of the journey, of its trials and travails, was of course Old Testament again. Despite the typical view of Protestantism as part and parcel of the rise of individualism in the West, this sense of life journey/pilgrimage had decidedly collective potential as well, wherein a persecuted and hence chosen people (the model for communities of affliction) embarked together on a long and treacherous pilgrimage to the charismatic, authentic and dangerous edge. Such 'errands into the wilderness' (Miller, 1956) were mimetic reruns of the Hebrew journey: across the sea and into the dark forests of New England, west to the wilds of Utah, over the veldt and bush of southern Africa, back to the Holy Land in the East. Historically such movements are often associated with variants of settler colonialism. In such colonies there certainly could be those who might well remain loyal politically and in terms of personal identity to the distant central place, returning there (as Anderson [1991, Chap 4] describes) in the circuits of bureaucracy, but others – the dissenting Puritans, Calvinist Boers or Mormons – saw the movement to the edge (their own or that of their forebears) as itself the definitive pilgrimage, a journey once again to a place where a new destiny and identity, always with great difficulty and many trials, could be inscribed in the landscape. As with the ancient Hebrews, there was an ideology of self-transformation possible within these pilgrimages but also a collective rebirth in the form of a construction of indigenouness accomplished in the course of these movements through the landscape: a fundamental encounter with the land that was mutually transforming. The people and land become one another.

America

As indicated by the foregoing very schematic discussion, one seam of American mythology – a story (as Geertz would say) Americans tell themselves about themselves – begins with the Puritan 'pilgrims'. They were of course not the only settlers, but in the later, nineteenth-century construction of a national memory and identity, their origin/arrival myth was offered as foundational and open to everyone (except the truly indigenous). This was possible of course because the story of 'arrival' and of the construction of a nation by social contract (the Mayflower Compact) could be understood to apply to all later arrivals as well, each wave of immigrants arriving and, in the act of becoming a citizen, taking part in the contract. The US, in this story, is never static, it is rather a project, of territorial expansion of course, but even more so of a growing society whose coherence and cohesion comes less from the soil than from the rule of law. In embracing that origin tale as 'our own' (no matter what the particular origin of a very diverse population might be), 'we' identify ourselves with the America so defined – a holy land sought by a pilgrimage away from the corrupt centre out to the holy, authentic edge – and of course with those Americans, participating in their second-order indigenouness, mythically

accomplished in the Thanksgiving meal, where indigenosity is imbibed in the form of native foods.

Yet, following the perhaps inevitable dialectic, that same migration narrative ends up turning America from edge to centre: and a series of relics and monuments enshrine past events and persons, especially in Washington DC, mark the centres of the centre in this sense. Among these are sacred objects, like the Constitution. Although the parchment itself is an object of some veneration, in true Calvinist fashion it is more the ubiquitous text rather than the specific book that partakes of the biblical sense of divinely inspired sacred contract: a particular version of the rule of law whose articles bear more than a passing similarity to the Ten Commandments. More conventional holy places are of course offered in the form of monuments in 'our nation's capital' (as the oft-repeated phrase rather insistently reminds us), among which are the statues of sainted presidents, a cult that began soon after the death of George Washington. Even more powerfully cohesive, however, are points of sacred time, which, like the Constitution, are ubiquitous. Perhaps the most effective and affective of these is the secular (only in the narrow sense of the term) ritual of Thanksgiving. Ever since the successful campaign led by magazine editor Sarah Hale in the Civil War years, that national holiday has offered the opportunity for (and often demanded) the performance of the nation as a collectivity of families sharing the American meal and project, in a particularly apt illustration of Anderson's contention that although an American will never meet very many of his fellow countryman, 'he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity' (Anderson, 1991, p. 26).

Taken together, these sacred words, places and times are the crucial elements in what sociologist Robert Bellah (1967) long ago described as the civil religion of the US. In that context, the pilgrimages linked to these times and places help imagine and enact not just the nation, but the sacred nation. That such central points can remain very evocative points of pilgrimage outside and beyond simple triumphalist nationalism is perhaps shown by the great popularity and emotional power of the 'Wall' (Dubisch & Michalowski, 2001) – the Vietnam War memorial – and may happen again with whatever memorial rises from the ashes of the World Trade Center.

Indeed, the attacks on that building and on the Pentagon remind us that America may see itself, and be seen, as a project that is more than national, but rather global. The US, from this perspective, is another kind of dynastic realm in Anderson's (1991, p. 19) sense of the term wherein everyone is potentially American and every place potentially America. In this mythology there is another sacred monument that faces not inward towards the nation, but outward towards the world, the Statue of Liberty in New York harbour: the end of the immigrant/pilgrim's journey; America facing the world. This gift from the French embodies what many Americans believe, that their country is the central place and guarantor of freedom and democracy everywhere and hence is entitled to act everywhere. That it was the Trade towers and not the Statue of Liberty that was attacked suggests an agreement about the global, dynastic character of the nation, but a rather different definition of the true character of the empire.

In this mythology of America's centre and America as global centre, what has happened to the edge? The edge-ward pilgrimage may be understood to have once defined America, but has settled into narrative. The active national pilgrimage is to central points, secular shrines that gleam with the official charisma of institutional

nation, or beckon toward the other, less blessed nations beyond the sea. There is, however, another American myth that resists the centre, and instead seeks a renewal in the charisma of the edge. And from that perspective, s/he who is already American may perceive the centre (indeed all centres, by definition) as potentially or actually corrupt or at least effete. The recurring immigration of newcomers, from that point of view, looks less like the arrival of holy pilgrims than of waves of people who cannot in fact successfully transform themselves into Americans, but will instead dilute and pollute: a corrupting influence, or worse, a profanation of the sacred earth. For those who see the centre and those who come towards it from abroad in this way, the answer is moral regeneration in another journey, further west, another real rather than remembered movement towards the edge, another identification with a wild landscape that can produce another indigeness.

This tension between America as a goal of pilgrims from abroad (centre) and the constant movement of pilgrims within America westward (edge) is precisely what animates perhaps the most famous piece of writing by an American historian: F.J. Turner's 'The Frontier in American History' (Turner, 1996). For him, the frontier afforded the growing nation a series of crucial points of contact with the 'wild'. While Europe was rooted in place, America was on the move westward – generation after generation, from the first European settlers till the last pioneers of his own day in the closing years of the nineteenth century. More than national definition was at stake, he argued, for that recurring engagement with the wild on the frontier was morally regenerative. Europe stagnated in a state of civilisation that inevitably grew more corrupt and effete, while America was reborn on the frontier. For each time these pioneers arrived at this edge they were morally renewed by the ensuing engagement, the struggle to overcome the dangerous but in some sense divine savagery of the truly wild. This confrontation did not take the form of the transcendental musings of any Thoreau on Walden Pond, but rather the shape of a determined frontiersman hefting an axe, clearing the ground and building a rude but crucially cultural cabin. Yet it was not, according to Turner, a case of simple subduing and conquest, but rather of a kind of lively engagement that brought a sense of identification along with opposition. The frontiersman was at the same time both the enemy of wild nature and its embodiment. In oppositional comparison with those back east, he was wild and indigenous to the landscape. This was a movement to the edge, but also a comparable movement or transformation within the person that stripped off 'the veneer' of civilisation and left 'essential man'. For Turner this story was not that of a few individuals, however, but rather that of a nation, a people who each time they moved west and re-experienced a form of this transformation, were morally re-invigorated, and went on to found particular kinds of institutions rooted in and to an extent preserving this experience. In one sense, therefore, the moral rebirth was kept alive in the various 'Western' (beginning in New England) states, each of which possessed the cultural legacy of its own specific frontier experience. Yet the nation as a whole seemed to need the recurring experience, the new frontier. And so by 1893, the year of his public presentation of his thesis, Turner was worried. He feared that the loss of the frontier, the filling in of all the continental spaces, spelled the end of that process, the loss of the Wild and of the regenerative encounter. Nor was he reassured by the arrival of the new hordes of immigrants in his time, who seemed not to share the northern European proclivity for exactly the

kind of pilgrimage necessary, and who were sinking into the static urban moral morass back east.

Back to the Border

What, however, has any of this historical mythology to do with all the contemporary movement along and across the border? My contention is that the moral geography implied and indeed created in the movements of state officials, volunteers, migrants and others now operating in the desert borderlands owes much to these competing mythic models of pilgrimage: movement to the centre and to the edge. In both models America remains a project – even a global project – rather than a place or simple nation. Both partake of a sense of America as a sacred idea as well as place, one that needs constant performance in the form of actions that include pilgrimage. And for both, the movement through the landscape re-establishes, re-defines and re-invigorates nation. The pilgrimage to the centre model continues to be invoked wherein the actual passage through the landscape defines both person and place as sacred. On the other hand, the settler colonial, Hebrew-Calvinist sense of individual and collective pilgrimage to the edge may take a particular turn when the possibility of movement in that direction has ended. At such a point, pilgrimage gives way to another model and mode of religious action: purity and danger. The edge, having been reached, is marked and protected in the form of borders and boundaries: sacred ground within, dangerous pollution without.

It is clear that the federal government of the US is engaged in ‘performing’ the nation on the border with the deployment of personnel, national symbols and military hardware. But many citizens are equally engaged in nation-defining drama, their imagination (with varying degrees of self-consciousness) animated by these religious models. Leaders of border action groups, on the political left and right, are moral entrepreneurs (Becker, 1963) who draw on these mythologies, but do so by action on the ground that deploys objects, words and the actual movement through the desert, inscribing the landscape, conjuring the moral geography of the nation. And they attract followers, for as De Tocqueville observed, Americans exercise their individuality by joining groups – voluntary associations we call them now. The joining of such groups, particularly when they perceive themselves as political projects (as do all groups on the border), is again a re-enactment of the mythic sense of the nation itself as just such a voluntary association. That notion is rooted in particular Protestant and Enlightenment traditions wherein the legitimacy of the community and the larger society rests on the belief (no matter how fallacious) that it is the natural result of free individuals coming together. There is in this view the danger, if not the inevitability, that all routinised government, (perhaps all leadership) is seen as corrupt. In its extreme form (far from uncommon), this belief turns to a deep distrust of federal government and a faith in the possibility that individuals can join together in associations that not only do the job the state is failing to do, but in a more profound sense re-constitute the Nation, through a performance.

In the pilgrimage to the centre model the migrants can of course be figured, especially by the ‘faith-based’ immigrant aid groups, as pilgrims. That they are

crossing the desert is of course helpful in this regard, and at least one liberal Protestant church has this to say on its website:

Every day, thousands of men, women and children from Mexico and Central America attempt to cross the border into Arizona...Many are Christians, carrying with them religious symbols, Bibles, or pictures of the Blessed Virgin of Guadalupe, patron saint of the Americas. Like the ancient Israelites, they believe God is with them on this journey. There is no Red Sea to cross, only the vast Sonoran desert.⁵

Members of that Church, and many other churches, volunteer with one or another of the organisations that aid these migrants, among the most prominent of which is Humane Borders, a 'faith-based' NGO whose home is the Church of Christ in Tucson and whose founder/leader is the Reverend Robin Hoover. Their mission is deceptively simple: putting out tanks of water in the desert marked by blue banners held aloft on very high poles. These are placed wherever allowed on public and private land known to be passage points for migrants. In order for these tanks to be effective they need to be kept full, so dozens of volunteers set out into the desert every day in the warmer seasons to check and refill tanks. Any of the volunteers involved in this procedure might think of him or herself as something like a pilgrim, having come to this borderland and taking direct action in the aid of migrants. But this kind of aid does more than help the undocumented migrants; it defines them as pilgrims, for the volunteers are repeating the ancient act of offering sustenance to pilgrims and thereby sharing in their holiness. This sort of activity, in fact, remains prevalent in the Catholic pilgrimage to the northern Mexican town of Magdalena de Kino. Thousands seeking the aid of San Francisco Xavier (a life-size statue of whom reclines in a chapel in that mission town) walk every year, some from 60 or more miles away, across the border in southern Arizona. And thousands more who are faithful to the cult but unable to walk station themselves at the roadside or come out to greet passing pilgrims, offering them food and water. That gift, as Mauss would have appreciated, is an exchange that guarantees a share in the holiness accrued by the accomplishment of the pilgrim, but it also defines the giver as 'Samaritan' just as it defines and acknowledges the receiver as 'Pilgrim'. If there were any doubt that such a model operates in the case of the migrants, another aid organisation that sends groups out in the desert actively seeking migrants in trouble calls itself, 'Samaritans'. Of the dozens of migrants I have had the opportunity to speak with, many certainly see their journeys as 'in the hands of God' (I have found this among both Catholics – the large majority – and a groups of 'testigos' – Jehovah's Witnesses – from Chiapas) and interpret the actions of aid groups within that framework.

Ironically, that stream of overtly religious pilgrims on their way to the shrine of San Francisco is heading south just as the much larger river of migrants heads north. Among the pilgrims are many Native Americans of the Tohono O'odham nation, whose very large reservation includes some 75 miles of international border. While one might not expect the O'odham to be concerned with enacting the US in their own movements through this borderland desert, their sense of themselves as Americans in America is also at play. In one of the most popular walking pilgrimages, led by a local religious and moral entrepreneur named Felix Antone,

pilgrims carried American flags and portraits of the many O'odham serving in the US military along with the usual religious objects and the American national anthem was sung in O'odham every morning during a blessing ceremony. It may be that the O'odham homeland, though in some measure politically autonomous, is understood to be not outside of America but rather quintessentially American. Just as the larger America needs to be protected by the military, their own homeland needs similar protection. But it also needs (like the larger America) moral regeneration that can be partially achieved in a pilgrimage through a landscape that requires, like its people, re-enchantment. The world and people thus re-enchanted can only be profaned from the outside: the religious model is now purity and danger. Therefore, though one might expect these pilgrims to recognise the Mexican migrants as their fellows, especially since the majority of the latter are 'indigenous' people from the southern states of Mexico, this is mainly not the case. While some O'odham aid migrants or even help smuggle them across their territory, most (as reflected in tribal council actions which have repeatedly refused permission to put out water sought by Humane Borders) see them as unwanted intruders whose passage through their sacred ground only serves to profane it.

In that sentiment they are not unlike another category of people operating in the area: the wilderness groups. Tucson is home to several nationally active voluntary associations dedicated to the preservation of wilderness such as the 'Center for Biodiversity' noted for taking very confrontational stands against real and perceived enemies. The latest embodiment of what Nash called 'the wilderness cult' these groups are represented on the 'sacred' ground most typically by lone individuals but also by such groups of 'pilgrims' as those known by the intriguing sobriquet, 'Leave no Trace'. The religious dimension of such wilderness groups is not difficult to find: they are worried about the profanation of sacred ground and seek to preserve, protect and experience (in a religious/spiritual transformative way) the wild authentic landscapes crucial to both individual and national redemption. Indeed some of these western wilderness landscapes (so designated by acts of Congress) were cleared of Native Americans in the 'setting aside' process. For wilderness groups it is no longer a question of pushing the frontier westward, but rather of encircling and protecting internal 'edges' that continue to be represented in binary opposition to the crowded, corrupted, civilised East. As with the O'odham, the religious motif appropriate to this more static opposition is purity and danger. That is, each preserved wilderness or wild landscape is sacred ground that is always threatened by profanation in the form of the movement through it of all human beings aside from those physically and spiritually prepared for the journey.⁶ While thousands of Americans participate in such pilgrimages to protected edges, many millions do lesser versions of the same movement, seeking personal regeneration in relative if not absolute and authentic wilderness in the national parks which since the later decades of the nineteenth century have offered a series of alternative, natural, 'edge' monuments for individual and family pilgrimages that have, for Americans at least, a discernable nationalist element. They are billed as a discovery of nation and I think, often enough, experienced that way.

Finally, we come to the citizen volunteers who call themselves Minutemen.⁷ As with the other groups mentioned, these are founded and led by moral entrepreneurs – Chris Simcox and Jim Gilchrist⁸ – who have marshalled iconic imagery and

rhetoric that draw on a number of the mythological themes discussed here. Even more than do politically liberal groups, these associations tend to see the state as having failed politically and morally, perhaps inevitably so – as it is in the nature of government from the top to do so. Convinced that America is faltering and that the government lacks the will to do anything about it, volunteers answer the call, not just to watch and patrol the border, but to re-enact the birth of a Nation. The volunteers who have rushed to defend the border are in my experience mainly comprised of retirees and people on fixed incomes. They are not by and large white supremacists, though their dissatisfaction and alienation can certainly focus on ethnic enemies when they become the visible impediment and when their leaders fan those flames. In coming to the border, often armed and excited at the possibility of rediscovered military camaraderie, meaningful agency and the titillation of danger, volunteers may be re-invigorated (as the ones I have met seem to be) by contact with the frontier. Though they may have come there from far away – individual pilgrimages to the edge of America – they, like the O’odham and the wilderness groups, are more centrally concerned with drawing lines in the sand: defining the purity of America’s sacred ground over against pollution (physically embodied in the stream of refuse left in the desert by the migrants) from without.

That does not mean, of course, that each of these groups would understand itself in this way, even less so would they identify with one another. Though all three may share the notion of a corrupt centre in Washington, their respective members typically differ on general political positions: most Minutemen would be conservative Republicans, and very many wilderness advocates liberal Democrats (for example), Withall; however, both have a sense of a definitive American landscape that must be defended from polluting forces. As for the O’odham, those who are engaged in re-enchanting their ‘own’ landscape see it as purely their own and yet also quintessentially American. In a perhaps unanticipated way, the O’odham pilgrims, the wilderness groups and the Minutemen can all be seen as embodiments of the late stage of American settler colonialist mythology, where the edge has been reached, indigenism and identity defined, and moral purity defended.

Notes

1. The O’odham, also known as the Papago, have been the subject of scholarly attention for a century. See Dobyns, 1978, for a useful beginning.
2. This pilgrimage is the subject of a detailed analysis in process. Suffice to say here that it attracts tens of thousands from various constituencies including indigenous groups from both sides of the border, working- and middle-class Mexicans and Mexican Americans. To a certain extent the devotional agendas of these groups overlap and vary in a way that suggests much about the labile potential of pilgrimage sites.
3. The border is the subject of a very extensive literature in all the social sciences and humanities. In anthropology there is a persistent tension between structural, political-economy views and ‘post-modern’ attention to ‘hybridity’ and cultural creativity along the border (see Donnan & Wilson, 1999; Alvarez, 1995; Bhabha, 1997; Anzaldúa, 1987). In fact, both approaches capture important elements of the borderland phenomenon, where creative response to market and state forces are striking (see Taylor & Hickey, 2001, 2002).
4. Gellner’s (1983) pendulum theory of Islam has a similar basis in Weberian notions.
5. Rebecca Bowman Woods. Available at: <http://www.ucc.org/ucnews/aprmay2006/as-immigration-debate-heats.html>.

6. There is a great deal of scholarship on the question of 'wilderness' as a sacred category in America. Nash (1967) is the seminal and still very useful text. A recent critical view that takes a more constructivist approach is Cronon, 1995 (See also Benton & Short, 1999). A good example of a group whose contradictory sense of the problem of pilgrimage to such sacred ground is captured in its name, is the national organisation called 'Leave no Trace'. This group and the wilderness movement and idea in general are treated by the author in more detail in Taylor, 2007a.
7. The subject of the Minutemen is dealt with at length in Taylor, 2007b.
8. Gilchrist is a former journalist and CPA who co-founded the Minuteman Project with ex-Kindergarten teacher and latterday journalist Chris Simcox. They split soon after the founding of the project, with Simcox re-naming his wing the 'Minuteman Civil Defence Corps'. Gilchrist has been involved in a major conflict within his organisation that included accusations of mishandling funds and an attempt to unseat him as leader.

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