

Abstract:

The PhD project investigates migrant solidarity initiatives in desert borderlands, which encompass some of the most frequented yet most perilous migration routes in the world. It explores how solidarity initiatives organize direct aid and support infrastructures in environments shaped both by harsh natural conditions and by state policies that turn these conditions into tools of migration control. Against this background, the primary aim of this project is to investigate how different forms of migrant solidarity emerge, are sustained, and acquire political meaning within desert borderlands.

Both the Saharan and Sonoran deserts are marked not only by state interventions to control movements in these borderlands, but also by an absence of the state and the active neglect of migrants trying to pass remote corridors into which migration is pushed. The PhD project examines the activities of two migrant solidarity initiatives in this distinct landscape, which operate in the Sahel region and the desert areas surrounding the US-Mexico border. They offer support to migrants who are in transit, involuntarily stuck, or have been deported, encompassing direct aid, search and rescue missions, monitoring and documentation, providing information about the crossing, and building local networks.

Based on a qualitative multi-method research design, the study embarks on an in-depth investigation of these two migrant solidarity initiatives in the desert. It thereby explores their political meaning with the aim of refining existing understandings of migrant solidarity and its relationship to contemporary border regimes. Furthermore, it examines how solidarity practices are shaped by the desert environment amidst the ambiguous reality of state control and neglect. Finally, it investigates the nature and basis of the networks and communities that sustain them.