

**Cite this article:** Sarah Bassnett, “Undocumented Migration and Political Community in Susan Meiselas’s Crossings Photographs,” *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2020), <https://doi.org/10.24926/24716839.10850>.

## ***Undocumented Migration and Political Community in Susan Meiselas’s Crossings Photographs***

**Sarah Bassnett, Associate Professor, Department of Visual Arts, Western University**

In 1989, Magnum photographer Susan Meiselas (b. 1948) photographed irregular border crossings in southern California. At the time, it was relatively easy for undocumented migrants from Central America and Mexico to cross between ports of entry, even as there was growing pressure on American officials to address border security.<sup>1</sup> One photograph in Meiselas’s Crossings series depicts a border patrol officer apprehending a migrant off the interstate near Oceanside (fig. 1). Two torsos fill the center of the image. The officer grasps the man’s clothing, propelling him toward the nearby vehicle. With heads cut off by the frame and backs turned, the uniform and the force of the interaction conveys the unequal power dynamic. This series of black-and-white photographs tells a story of the struggle between people attempting to cross into the United States and the border agents trying to stop them. It follows Meiselas’s work in Central America during the 1970s and 1980s and connects events in that region to pressure at the border.



Fig. 1. Susan Meiselas, *US-Mexico Border, 3:00 pm, Arrest Alongside Interstate 5, Oceanside, California*, from the series *Crossings*, 1989. Fiber print, 17 1/2 x 29 5/8 in. Photograph © Susan Meiselas, Magnum Photos

Because Meiselas is best known for her photographs of political unrest in Nicaragua and El Salvador, her work does not fit neatly into traditional histories of US photography. These histories have tended to concentrate on defining moments in nation building and identity formation in relation to internal matters such as the Civil War and western expansion. This has meant that Meiselas’s practice has not been adequately considered in the context of American photo history. However, by “re-reading American photographs” through a hemispheric approach and in relation to histories of contact and migration, it is evident that her work in fact does relate to nation building and identity and therefore challenges a history of US photography that stops at the nation’s borders. Meiselas deserves renewed

consideration in this context because her work helps us recognize how encounters between people and cultures, and attendant legacies of systemic racism, are at the heart of histories of the Americas.

These histories are the condition for Meiselas’s investigation of the border region in 1989, a project that brought her interest in Latin America home. Photographs she made in Nicaragua during the late 1970s had already had an impact on public perceptions of the insurrection there, both within the United States and internationally. In particular, the photographs in her book *Nicaragua, June 1978–July 1979* refuted US government propaganda that characterized the Sandinistas as terrorists.<sup>2</sup> In the early 1980s, Meiselas photographed the civil war in El Salvador, raising awareness about US-trained death squads serving a brutal military regime. In the 1980s, she also spent time in Guatemala, Colombia, Chile, and Argentina examining political conflict, drug wars, and the impact of US foreign policy on the region. In the Crossings series, her focus shifted to another aspect of the historical moment, and she began to consider the relationship between what she had witnessed in Latin America and what was happening at the US-Mexico border. The imperialist approach of American foreign policy had contributed to what Meiselas described as “a whole culture of terror” in Central America during the mid 1980s, and the Crossings series was an opportunity to reflect on the consequences of that crisis within the United States.<sup>3</sup>

This essay considers Meiselas’s Crossings series in relation to her previous work in Central America and in terms of concepts of political community. According to Jacques Derrida, a political community constitutes itself in relation to a “structuring enemy” perceived as threatening its way of life. The enemy must be confronted to preserve the community’s coherence and apparent purity. The structuring enemy is a cornerstone of discourses of nationalism and formulations of national identity because it demonstrates how political communities constitute themselves partly through exclusion.<sup>4</sup> For the United States, hemispheric connections and enmeshed histories of the Americas have shaped the political categories of friend and enemy. For example, starting in the 1940s, the United States and Canada began to treat each other as friends. Although the two countries had experienced border disputes and periods of conflict throughout the nineteenth century, relations became more amicable during the twentieth century, especially during the Second World War, when their alliance established a significant foundation for ongoing cooperation and friendly relations.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, the relationship between the United States, Mexico, and Central America has historically been marked by conflict and coercion. Land expropriation, in particular, is a legacy of the campaign to subjugate the Mexican American population in the border region from the 1840s to the end of the Mexican Revolution. Even after open conflict in the region ceased, border enforcement remained important as a way to control the entry of migrant workers.<sup>6</sup> Latin American studies scholar María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo describes the contingency of the relationships between friends and enemies as connecting US citizenship and security to the displacement and insecurity of others. She argues that the friend-enemy distinction has shaped human rights and security issues and was central to US foreign policy toward Central America throughout the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> Saldaña-Portillo emphasizes that Central Americans and Mexicans have been cast as enemies, and their rights have regularly been violated by US military and intelligence personnel in the name of protecting the perceived security of the United States and its citizens.<sup>8</sup>

In this essay, I draw on Derrida’s and Saldaña-Portillo’s ideas about political community and an interview with Meiselas that I conducted earlier this year to offer insight into the

ways Meiselas portrays immigration along the US-Mexico border in her Crossings series. I consider how Meiselas represents the relationship between border agents and migrants throughout the process of crossing. Then, by tracing different iterations of the Crossings series across several exhibitions, I explore the ways Meiselas re-examined it in relation to her earlier work in Nicaragua and El Salvador, creating opportunities to reflect on how the United States constitutes a national political community partly through the exclusion of others. I argue that these later exhibitions expose connections between the United States’ interventions in Central America and the policing of migrants along its southern border. Finally, I suggest that the series has continued relevance in the face of ongoing disputes about migration.

### Border Crossings

The Crossings series was created in 1989 for the exhibition *Los vecinos/The Neighbors* at the Museum of Photographic Arts (MoPA) at San Diego. Arthur Ollman, curator of the museum, invited six photographers—three, including Meiselas, from the United States and three from Mexico—to produce work conveying their perspectives on the border region.<sup>9</sup> As Meiselas explains, it was a rare opportunity because there were few parameters beyond the request that they explore the border. Essentially, she said, the photographers “had a free hand to do the work.”<sup>10</sup> Migration was becoming a contentious issue in San Diego, and Ollman believed the museum could offer a space for reflection and dialogue.<sup>11</sup> He sought to establish an inclusive environment where visitors from a broad range of backgrounds could engage with photography.<sup>12</sup>

Ollman’s attempt to create a space for public discussion about the border was an important initiative because tensions were rising in the region at this time. Sociologist Timothy Dunn has described the US-Mexico border during the late 1980s as both strategically important for regional economic development and vulnerable to social unrest.<sup>13</sup> Throughout most of the 1980s, Mexico experienced an economic crisis, and migration to the United States increased significantly. Then, electoral fraud during the 1988 presidential elections in Mexico caused social and political uncertainty. On the US side of the border, in San Diego County, a contingent of residents responded with open hostility toward undocumented workers and migrants. At the same time, changes to border enforcement in the 1980s under US President Ronald Reagan meant that the military began to supply equipment and provide training and surveillance for border enforcement. Dunn notes that in order to justify the militarization of the border, government agencies had to identify a threat or an “enemy.”<sup>14</sup> The official justification for increased military support along the border was to confront drug trafficking from Mexico and Central America; however, the new equipment and tactical strategies also affected interactions between migrants and border agents.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the rhetoric of the period associated drug trafficking with undocumented migration and characterized both as threats to national security. Dunn argues that the militarization of the border extended the punitive character of US foreign policy toward Central America by subjecting people from the region to additional hardship as they tried to flee their devastated homelands.<sup>16</sup>

Meiselas’s photographs portray the challenges undocumented migrants faced as they crossed into the US, and they convey the tension between migrants and the border patrol. In one image, a group of young men sprint across a field, presumably with border agents in pursuit. Other photographs show drop sites in the United States where migrants are left by

smugglers once they have crossed the border. In one of these, Meiselas captured the surprise of a group of undocumented workers as they are discovered by a border patrol officer. Another shows discarded belongings littering a clearing in the underbrush. Meiselas explained: "I was interested in where people were sleeping, the remnants of where they had been, this question of whether or not they had successfully moved on, and others had come."<sup>17</sup> Several images in the series depict migrants under arrest or in detention. In one of these, an agent handcuffs two men near a derelict building in downtown San Diego. With slouching bodies and faces pressed to the wall, the photograph conveys a feeling of the arrestees' resignation. The photographs are captioned with descriptions of events and time of day, emphasizing the ongoing cycle of migration and the round-the-clock nature of the chase. Night scenes were dependent on the searchlights of patrol vehicles, and in one evocative panorama, several people are seen on the dark horizon, illuminated only by distant beams (fig. 2). Meiselas explained that here she was interested in the idea of distance, because it related to her own process of gradually understanding what happens at the border and what is involved in migration.<sup>18</sup>

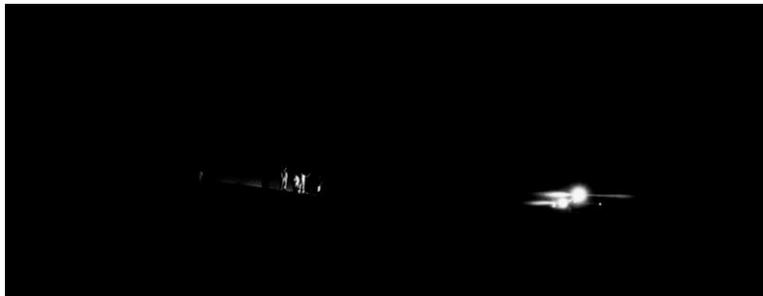


Fig. 2. Susan Meiselas, *US-Mexico Border, 2:00 am, Arrest of Undocumented Workers by US Border Patrol, El Bordo, California*, from the series *Crossings*, 1989. Fiber print, 17 1/2 x 29 5/8 in. Photograph © Susan Meiselas, Magnum Photos

Meiselas experimented with different formats for the series. She wanted to find the best way to capture the feeling of the landscape and the sensibility of border patrol operations. After trying out 35 mm color film, she decided instead to shoot in black and white with a Widelux 35 mm panoramic camera. Meiselas chose the Widelux format because, she explained, "it captured something of the theatricality of the whole dynamic."<sup>19</sup> The narrow lens on the panoramic camera moves as it exposes only one small section of the film at a time, so making the images involved connecting with her subjects by following their movement. In some photographs, the 180-degree view emphasizes the motion of running figures, conveying the intensity of the chase. In others, the expansive perspective situates exchanges between migrants and border patrol officers within the regional terrain. Panoramic photographs have traditionally been used by military strategists to depict contested land or points of tactical interest. In the *Crossings* series, the panoramic format heightens the tension of pursuit and evasion in the border region. The photographs allude to the contingent nature of the relationship between border agents and the undocumented migrants they seek to capture. By focusing on connections between the two groups, the series suggests an analogy. Like a nation defined by those it excludes, border enforcement is constituted by those it seeks to regulate.

As part of the process of creating the series, Meiselas engaged with migrants and agents alike. Starting on the Mexican side, she followed migrants as they crossed and were

confronted by the border patrol. At other times, she accompanied agents as a ride-along, traveling with them on the US side of the border for ten to twelve hours as they pursued leads and checked known hiding places off the highway. Meiselas interviewed officers as well as some of both the crossing and captured migrants. One agent she talked to at the time described the dynamic of the border as "a giant game of cat and mouse." Unlike today, she explained, there was "a lightness to the mission" for border patrol officers, and she was free to photograph what she wanted, including detention halls and nighttime apprehensions. When the work was exhibited at MoPA, Meiselas incorporated different voices and perspectives by including quotes recorded from her interactions with migrants and border patrol officers.<sup>20</sup>

In 1989, shortly after Meiselas finished shooting the work, the situation at the border became openly hostile. Because border crossers were apprehended after they entered the US, the struggle to control entry was highly visible. Dramatic scenes in which border agents chased down people after they rushed checkpoints or ran across the border heightened awareness among US border residents.<sup>21</sup> In the United States, a nativist group called "Light up the Border" protested for increased security. At their demonstrations, they beamed their vehicle headlights toward the southern border to draw attention to the damaged partition between the United States and Mexico near the San Ysidro port of entry and expose migrants trying to cross the border, making them easier for border agents to capture. Denouncing the existing wire fencing as inadequate and demanding additional barriers, they even proposed constructing a ditch to stop vehicles from transporting people across the border.<sup>22</sup> Tensions rose as protests set one contingent against another. On one side, the pro-enforcement group portrayed migrants as criminals and waved banners with slogans such as "Wake Up America."<sup>23</sup> This group argued that migrants were threatening the "American" way of life. On the other side, activists from groups such as the Coalition Without Borders supported immigrants and described the hostility toward undocumented migrants as racist.<sup>24</sup> The dispute became increasingly polarized.

Meiselas continued to reflect on the series after returning home to New York, as she interacted with migrants living in the city. Talking to a Salvadoran man in a hardware store, she wondered about his history and what he had gone through to get to the United States. When she exhibited the Crossings series, she included an introductory text to encourage viewers to think about the experiences and perspectives of undocumented migrants. It reads, in part: "The migrants say that when rich Americans want gardeners and maids, they allow the 'undocumented workers' to proceed. When they have enough, the rest are scooped up like garbage and disposed of."<sup>25</sup> Both the photographs and the accompanying text and quotations invite viewers to think about how migrants are excluded from the US political community.

### **Civil Conflict and Migration**

With subsequent exhibitions of the Crossings series, Meiselas developed new ways to consider how conditions for undocumented migrants in the United States were connected to the conflicts she had witnessed in Central America. In 1990, Meiselas exhibited her border series at the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC) (fig. 3). Sylvia Wolf, curator of contemporary art and photography, was interested in the work from Nicaragua and El Salvador, and Meiselas herself was thinking further about her experience at the border. The idea of showing a

selection of her work from Central America alongside the border photographs emerged in preparation for the exhibition.<sup>26</sup> Meiselas explained:

I'd spent the decade working first in Nicaragua and then in El Salvador and some in Guatemala and back and forth over twelve years. But I always saw them as their own unique histories. Even if they bordered each other and overlapped, and were for many Americans just Central America, not distinguishable. I really always wanted to keep them very distinct. [The exhibition at the AIC] was the first time I broke through that thinking. . . . Because then I began to see it was not just the particular crisis of the Contra war in Nicaragua, let's say, or the economic stress elsewhere. It was all of these factors, over time, influencing and creating another set of consequences. And that's what I wanted to capture, by weaving through to the border images.<sup>27</sup>

The resulting exhibition, *Crossings: Photographs by Susan Meiselas*, brought together a selection of photographs from Nicaragua and El Salvador with images from the US-Mexico border. Meiselas's idea was to connect the conflicts in Nicaragua and El Salvador with the influx of people attempting to cross into the United States. She wanted to convey the challenges migrants faced as they left their homelands and draw attention to the consequences of those conflicts at the border. There was a large Hispanic population near the AIC, and she hoped the exhibition would both speak to that community about the border and “create an environment of reflection for Americans” visiting the show.<sup>28</sup>



Fig. 3. Installation view of *Crossings: Photographs by Susan Meiselas* at the Art Institute of Chicago, 1990. Photograph courtesy of Susan Meiselas

In exhibitions of the *Crossings* series at other venues over the years, Meiselas continued to revisit and re-contextualize the work. At the Tremaine Art Gallery of the Hotchkiss School, a preparatory school in Connecticut, she added documentation, including an image of the terrain, to help students understand what people endure as they cross the border.<sup>29</sup> She also included a recruiting brochure for border patrol, a postcard illustrating a stream of American cars returning to the United States after a visit to Tijuana, Mexico, and a sketch she drew on the back of a restaurant menu, showing the migratory cycle of border crossing and return after capture and detention. There is a page from a 1988 report detailing

apprehensions in the San Diego area, listed by nationality (but excluding Mexico), which indicates that approximately seventy per cent of the more than eleven thousand people apprehended were from Guatemala and El Salvador, two countries that were mired in vicious civil conflicts at the time. The ephemera situates the photographs within the visual culture of the period, while the diagram and report establish a broader framework for interpreting the photographs. When she showed the work at Galerie Catherine et André Hug in Paris, she added a vitrine to provide context for an audience who might not know much about the US-Mexico border.<sup>30</sup> Each time the series was installed, Meiselas considered the new circumstances in which the work would be seen.<sup>31</sup> The supplemental material offered insight into her process and context for audiences for whom US-Mexico border concerns may have seemed remote.

In reframing the Crossings series, Meiselas introduced elements that were not evident in the photographs. Eduardo Cadava, a scholar of literary and cultural studies, suggests that, for Meiselas, photographs are “the record of an encounter—between, among other things, a photographer and a subject, a subject and a context, a camera and an object, a viewer and an image, the image and history, the past and the present, and stillness and movement.”<sup>32</sup> He acknowledges that not all aspects of the encounter are visible, and what remains hidden in a photograph “is perhaps what also made it possible.” In our quest to understand photographs, he suggests we pay attention to what is not visible in the image but may have nonetheless “left its traces in it.”<sup>33</sup> With each exhibition of the Crossings series, Meiselas has made more of those traces visible. The supplemental material and changes in exhibition design reveal some of the factors that impact migration. They establish new connections between different historical moments and create new paths for reflecting on the nature of political community. Meiselas explains that she wanted Americans to understand how they were implicated in the conflicts in Central America and “to reflect on and have some responsibility for it.”<sup>34</sup> By exhibiting the border series with additional materials and photographs, Meiselas references the important but under-recognized historical and political conditions for undocumented migration.

These conditions, and specifically the connections between civil conflict in Central America and migration to the United States, were not widely acknowledged in the 1990s. Many Americans were not aware that US involvement in Central America began in earnest during the Cold War, when the United States used the region as a testing ground for military development and proxy wars.<sup>35</sup> In fact, there are direct links between Cold War conflicts and border security, because the counterinsurgency tactics implemented by US border agents in the 1980s and 1990s were developed decades earlier by the military through its suppression of revolutionary movements in Central America. As Dunn explains, these counterinsurgency strategies, which Pentagon documents describe as “low-intensity conflict,” focused on controlling civilians and regularly resulted in human rights violations.<sup>36</sup> Although by the mid-1990s there was growing awareness of how US military and intelligence operations in Latin America contributed to undocumented migration, a decade earlier, the Reagan administration had actually argued that the flow of migrants from the region would dramatically increase if the US were to withdraw its military support of anti-communist factions.<sup>37</sup> Saldaña-Portillo notes that the friend-enemy construction was central during both the Reagan and Bush administrations because it gave them license to suppress communism and exclude Central American migrants from the United States on the basis that both supposedly jeopardized US democracy.<sup>38</sup>

In an installation of the Crossings series for the 2016 exhibition *Susan Meiselas: Carrying the Past, Forward*, at the Fotografie Forum Frankfurt, Meiselas layered the photographs in new ways to suggest connections between civil conflict and migration. This exhibition addressed migration through the lens of two bodies of her work: Crossings and Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History.<sup>39</sup> The Crossings series was displayed in a manner similar to the 1990 AIC exhibition, in which the border images were shown alongside selected photographs from Nicaragua and El Salvador. However, Meiselas reconceived the earlier exhibition by reconfiguring the relationships between the images. At the AIC, the border panoramas were shown with photographs from Nicaragua and El Salvador, which hung singly and in pairs, with one above the other (see fig. 3). In Frankfurt, Meiselas used the panoramic border photographs as a kind of landscape onto which the Nicaragua and El Salvador photographs were overlaid (fig. 4).<sup>40</sup> The Crossings series and El Salvador photographs, both in black and white, are punctuated by the color of the Nicaragua images. By overlapping them, the connections became more fluid, creating associations Meiselas describes as “both narrative and aesthetic.”<sup>41</sup>



Fig. 4. Installation view of *Susan Meiselas: Carrying the Past, Forward* at Fotografie Forum Frankfurt, 2016. Photograph courtesy of Susan Meiselas

Themes of concealment and exposure, conveyed through framing and masking, are woven throughout photographs of Nicaragua, El Salvador, and the San Diego border region. In particular, members of the resistance and migrants depicted in photographs made in Nicaragua and along the US-Mexico border are wary of being seen. The first photograph in the exhibit is an image of a rebel fighter in the town of Monimbo, a Sandinista stronghold, wearing a traditional dance mask repurposed to conceal his identity during the Nicaraguan insurrection. Other photographs depict fighters with bandanas covering their faces. These images show masks as a form of protection and as part of the visual language of the revolution. In the Crossings series, migrants turn their faces away from the camera, suggesting their inclination to hide. Only those caught by surprise gaze into the lens. Sometimes heads or other parts of figures are cropped out of the frame. In other instances, they are obscured by shadow. Migrants take cover in the underbrush, using the landscape itself as a means of camouflage and concealment. The searchlights of border patrol vehicles

reveal migrants traveling under cover of darkness. The associations between the photographs offer multiple connections, including visual narratives that emphasize concealment as a strategy of resistance in conflict zones, whether in the midst of revolution or along the US-Mexico border. Central American migration to the United States is read through the revolution in Nicaragua.

In the El Salvador photographs shown adjoining the Crossings photographs in Frankfurt, the formal and thematic approaches to concealment are similar, although it is the military rather than migrants and insurgents who hide. One image depicts three members of the elite Atlacatl Battalion during survival training. With branches strapped to their bodies, they practice the art of concealment. Trained in counterinsurgency by US Special Forces, this unit of the military was responsible for some of the worst atrocities of the civil conflict, including massacres and disappearances.<sup>42</sup> An image of a firing range used by this same US-trained battalion is another reminder of the United States’ covert role in the brutal proxy war. These photographs add another layer to the narrative by calling to mind the atrocities committed by the Salvadoran military against civilians. They complicate the narrative by suggesting that concealment is a tactic of both perpetrators and targets of oppression.

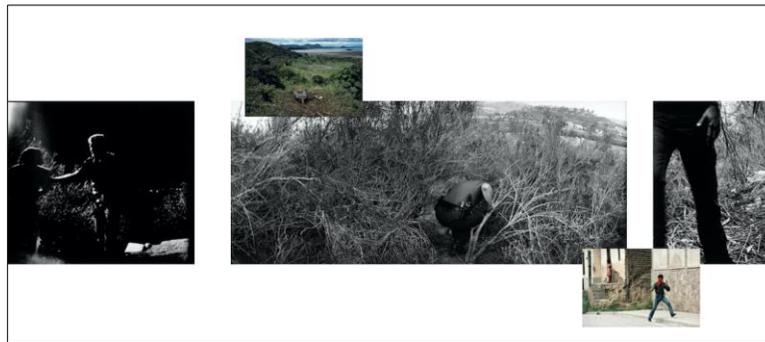


Fig. 5. Installation view of *Susan Meiselas: Carrying the Past, Forward* at Fotografie Forum Frankfurt, 2016. Photograph courtesy of Susan Meiselas

Such associations also encouraged visitors to the Frankfurt exhibition to reflect on the connection between present-day human rights violations and migration. Shown in 2016, a year when Germany received hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees, this reconfiguration of the work highlights the human costs typical of civil conflict. Bodies, both dead and alive, along with their shadows and traces, thread through the exhibition. Among the photographs of El Salvador, there is an image of the shadows of bus passengers with their hands raised while being searched by soldiers at the side of the highway. Meiselas describes photographing the shadows because, fearing for her safety, she did not dare point her camera directly at the scene.<sup>43</sup> Another photograph shows a pool of blood from a student who was killed for handing out political leaflets. Yet another evokes the brutality of the Salvadoran regime by showing a man collecting donations for families of the disappeared. Meiselas’s images suggest the difficulty of representing state-sanctioned human rights abuses. Among the photographs she made in Nicaragua is a distressing image of the remains of a body Meiselas found by accident on a verdant hillside outside Managua, which confirmed rumors she had heard about forced disappearances in that country (fig. 5).<sup>44</sup> This body was left at the execution site by the assassins—members of the Somoza regime’s National Guard—in order to “terrorize everyone passing.”<sup>45</sup> In another photograph, a Monimbo woman carries the body of her dead husband home for burial. In the context of

the Syrian civil war, the exhibition of photographs from Nicaragua, El Salvador, and the US-Mexico border region reminded viewers in Germany that in modern conflict, the bodies of civilians, insurgents, migrants, and refugees are habitually at risk.

In the Crossings series, bodies and their traces refer to the human toll of conflict and forced migration. In these photographs, agents look for signs as they pursue undocumented migrants. From footprints to discarded clothing, the remnants left at drop sites reference the cycle of movement and the struggle to evade capture. Some people are apprehended and returned to their homelands, while others move on in search of opportunity. In scenes along the border, migrant bodies are routinely tracked, chased, arrested, detained, and deported. Their bodies move back and forth across borders in a cycle that connects the conflicts and human rights abuses in their homelands to the security apparatus of the United States. Meiselas also looked for signs, but for another purpose. Instead of detecting signs in order to regulate the political enemy, she was interested in photographing signs that might reveal tensions between security for Americans and the insecurity of those who are excluded in the name of safeguarding a fantasy of internal coherence and purity.

The Crossings photographs have not figured prominently in discussions of Meiselas’s work, despite how this important series enriches our understanding of histories of contact and migration and the nature of political community. The photographs themselves reckon with the way US subjectivity is constituted in relation to the suffering of those considered enemies. The narrative and aesthetic connections Meiselas has created in exhibitions of the Crossings series invite viewers to reflect on difficult histories and to consider how they are implicated in the displacement and insecurity of others. With successive US administrations continuing to rely on the construct of the political enemy, Meiselas’s work remains more significant than ever. This series sheds light on a system of exclusion that has only become increasingly cruel and inhumane.

## Acknowledgments

This research is funded by a grant from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Special thanks to Susan Meiselas for discussing her work with me. Also thank you to Madeline Bassnett and guest editors Monica Bravo and Emily Voelker.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> The region of Central America is composed of seven countries: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Belize, Costa Rica, and Panama. However, the home countries for the majority of Central American migrants attempting to enter the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s were El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

<sup>2</sup> David Levi Strauss, “An Amplitude That Information Lacks,” *Susan Meiselas: In History*, ed. Kristen Lubben (New York: International Center of Photography and Steidl, 2008), 110; Susan Meiselas, *Nicaragua, June 1978–July 1979* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> Susan Meiselas, *Susan Meiselas: On the Frontline*, ed. Mark Holborn (New York: Aperture, 2017), 105.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (New York: Verso, 2005), 84. In the book, Derrida deconstructs political philosopher Carl Schmitt’s concept of “structuring enemy.”

- 
- <sup>5</sup> C. P. Stacey, *The Undefended Border: The Myth and the Reality* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1996).
- <sup>6</sup> Timothy Dunn, *The Militarization of the US-Mexico Border, 1978–1992: Low-Intensity Conflict Doctrine Comes Home* (Austin: University of Texas, 1996), 1–19.
- <sup>7</sup> María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, “The Violence of Citizenship in the Making of Refugees: The United States and Central America,” *Social Text* 37, no. 4 (December 2019): 2–6, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-7794343>.
- <sup>8</sup> Saldaña-Portillo, “The Violence of Citizenship,” 7–8.
- <sup>9</sup> Douglas Whyknott, “Behind Scenes at San Diego’s Museum of Photographic Arts,” *San Diego Reader*, October 16, 1997, <https://www.sandiegoreader.com/news/1997/oct/16/light-lovers>. In this article, Whyknott mentions that, in 1992, *Los vecinos/The Neighbors* was exhibited in ten cities in Mexico.
- <sup>10</sup> Susan Meiselas, interview with the author, August 14, 2020.
- <sup>11</sup> Meiselas interview, August 14, 2020.
- <sup>12</sup> Whyknott, “Behind Scenes at San Diego’s Museum of Photographic Arts.”
- <sup>13</sup> Dunn, *The Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 161–62.
- <sup>14</sup> Dunn, *The Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 162–63.
- <sup>15</sup> Timothy Dunn, “Border Militarization via Drug and Immigration Enforcement: Human Rights Implications,” *Social Justice* 28, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 7–28. See also Dunn, *The Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 103–40.
- <sup>16</sup> Dunn, *The Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 163.
- <sup>17</sup> Meiselas interview, August 14, 2020.
- <sup>18</sup> Meiselas interview.
- <sup>19</sup> Meiselas interview.
- <sup>20</sup> Meiselas interview. For the quote from the anonymous US border patrol agent, 1989, see “United States/Mexico Border,” Susan Meiselas: Photographer, accessed August 17, 2020, <http://www.susanmeiselas.com/latin-america/border-crossings/#id=images>.
- <sup>21</sup> Roberto Suro, “A Levee near Tijuana Becomes a Flashpoint,” *New York Times*, October 15, 1989. The Immigration and Naturalization Service introduced new strategies emphasizing deterrence in 1994. See Jason De León, “Prevention Through Deterrence,” *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 23–37.
- <sup>22</sup> Patrick McDonnell, “Tactic of Lighting Up Border Raises Tensions,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1990; Patrick McDonnell, “Protesters Light Up the Border Again,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 24, 1990, SDB3.
- <sup>23</sup> McDonnell, “Protesters Light Up the Border Again.”
- <sup>24</sup> McDonnell, “Tactic of Lighting Up Border Raises Tensions.”
- <sup>25</sup> “United States/Mexico Border,” Susan Meiselas: Photographer.
- <sup>26</sup> Meiselas interview, August 14, 2020.
- <sup>27</sup> Meiselas interview.
- <sup>28</sup> Meiselas interview.
- <sup>29</sup> Meiselas interview.
- <sup>30</sup> *Over the US-Mexican Border*, Galerie Catherine and André Hug, March 24–April 23, 2016. See “Susan Meiselas: Biography,” website of Galerie Catherine and André Hug, <http://www.galeriehug.com/en/artistes/susan-meiselas>.

- 
- <sup>31</sup> Meiselas interview, August 14, 2020. For selected documentation, see “United States/Mexico Border,” Susan Meiselas: Photographer.
- <sup>32</sup> Eduardo Cadava, “Learning to See,” *Mediations* (Bologna: Grafiche Damiani, 2018), 48.
- <sup>33</sup> Cadava, “Learning to See,” 48.
- <sup>34</sup> Meiselas interview, August 14, 2020.
- <sup>35</sup> Greg Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Holt, 2006), 42–51.
- <sup>36</sup> Dunn, *The Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 20–25.
- <sup>37</sup> Dunn, *The Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 2.
- <sup>38</sup> Saldaña-Portillo, “The Violence of Citizenship in the Making of Refugees,” 6.
- <sup>39</sup> Susan Meiselas’s book *Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History* is a visual history of the Kurdish people that includes Meiselas’s own photographs along with images and a range of other visual and textual material she collected. Susan Meiselas, *Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
- <sup>40</sup> Meiselas interview, August 14, 2020.
- <sup>41</sup> Meiselas interview.
- <sup>42</sup> Meiselas, *Susan Meiselas: On the Frontline*, 104.
- <sup>43</sup> Meiselas, *Susan Meiselas: On the Frontline*, 98.
- <sup>44</sup> Meiselas, *Susan Meiselas: On the Frontline*, 65.
- <sup>45</sup> Susan Meiselas, “Body on a Hillside,” *Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis*, ed. Geoffrey Batchen, Mick Gidley, Nancy K. Miller, and Jay Prosser (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 118.