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Notes from editor (not for publication):

Reads smoothly. Made me want to see the film.

I cut back on some of the PR, condensing the intro to get to the interview faster. I couldn't find any way of abbreviating Paco de Onis that didn't look really weird or incomplete, so I went with one style guide that said to ditch the "d." At least it doesn't look weird, and it's obvious who is who, and that's all those labels have to do.

I cut a lot of the filler words. That's always a tough call. A few here or there are good to create the conversation vibe.

I'm trying to be minimalist about the brackets and pretty much omitting them for any of our questions as interviewers in these columns. I want the disclaimer to give us enough license not to twist ourselves into a precision-quotation pretzel. In stray quotes in the rest of the paper, I'd ordinarily be bracketing everything pedantically.

I debated about condensing the back and forth about all of us being immigrants, but I'm trying to get a smaller paper together this week and working the editorial machete a little more comprehensively than usual. —J



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

- 1 'It's a system: Look at it. Both Democrats and
- 2 Republicans support it, and we have to change it.'

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

3 Filmmakers discuss 'Borderland: The Line Within,' a film
4 that looks at the data behind the politics and the economics of
5 U.S. immigration policy

####END SUBHED####

6 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

7 WINDHAM WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL (WWAC) will screen
8 the documentary *Borderland: The Line Within* at Brattleboro's
9 Latchis Theatre on Sunday, Oct 26. The film will be followed by a
10 discussion with filmmakers Pamela Yates and Paco de Onís.

11 As explained in a WWAC press release, the 110-minute
12 film is [described by](#) *The New York Times* as taking "a surprisingly
13 multidisciplinary approach [to the border crisis] fueled by both
14 personal history and government data."

15 In their promotional materials, the filmmakers posit that
16 "the United States border is everywhere: It is not just a
17 geographical line, but rather a vast border-industrial complex
18 entrenched in every corner of the country. It is a massive
19 surveillance, militarized and carceral apparatus, built to capture,
20 imprison and deport millions. It lies within every undocumented
21 immigrant family with the threat that at any moment they can be
22 captured, incarcerated, deported, and their lives destroyed."

23 The film "not only exposes the profitable business of
24 immigration and its human cost, but weaves together the stories
25 of immigrant heroines and heroes resisting and showing a way
26 forward" as they build a movement to resist these trends.

27 As described by the filmmakers, "the narrative thread
28 that weaves *Borderland* together is a group of Ph.D. digital
29 humanists, immigrants all."

30 In their work at Columbia University's Group for
31 Experimental Methods in Humanistic Research in New York City,
32 the scholars are "researching, scraping the web, and creatively
33 visualizing the inner workings of the border-industrial complex."

34 With that information, “the film examines who’s
35 involved, the flow of funds, locations of the many ICE detention
36 centers that dot the country, far from the border itself.” Moreover,
37 it looks at how fear of immigrants, characterized as the “other,” is
38 used as a gateway to autocratic governance while revealing “the
39 exponential growth of the Customs and Border Protection’s
40 budget: \$25 billion in taxpayers’ dollars in 2024.”

41 *The Commons* recently spoke with Yates (director) and de
42 Onís (producer), whose connection to WWAC is through its chair,
43 Merrill Sovner, a freelance researcher and consultant focused on
44 democratization, international aid, and nonprofit program
45 development and evaluation.

46 * * *

47 **Annie Landenberger:** The border-industrial complex:
48 how deeply rooted is this?

49 **Pamela Yates:** [This] has been happening across the
50 political spectrum, starting when Clinton was president. That’s
51 when we’re really beginning to see this new idea about the
52 border policy and the amounts of money growing exponentially
53 each year to fund the border-industrial complex — to capture,
54 incarcerate, deport, and separate families. You know, really huge
55 amounts of money — billions of dollars — being spent and
56 gained on the backs of the suffering of immigrants.

57 That’s one of the things that distinguishes the film: We
58 say, “It’s a system: Look at it. Both Democrats and Republicans
59 support it, and we have to change [it].”

60 **A.L.:** So tell me about this line in your press materials:
61 “The film’s protagonists, all immigrants themselves, are quietly
62 building strength.” What does that look like?

63 **P.Y.:** Well, that means that people are developing
64 leadership, that they’re knowing their rights, that they’re
65 networking within their communities, that they’re creating mutual
66 support networks.

67 The thing about this film is that it's predictive. We didn't
68 realize it while we were making it. What we said was going to
69 happen is happening right now, tenfold.

70 **Paco de Onís:** We'd hoped it would have been a
71 preventive film, but now, you know, this border-industrial
72 complex has just tripled its budget with Trump.

73 **A.L.:** So you'd hoped it'd have been an eye-opener, a
74 wake-up call to spark some preemptive striking against it?

75 **P.O.:** And so that we could [urge viewers to contact] your
76 local congressperson, your state representatives, to just put
77 pressure on politicians. So many sectors of our society, especially
78 in the political realm and economic realm, are benefiting from
79 this really cruel border-industrial complex.

80 **P.Y.:** We'd hoped in the last election that being aware of
81 what immigration policies both Democrats and Republicans have
82 embraced would open up a third way for us to deal with
83 immigration.

84 [Such] policies would welcome immigrants into the
85 United States, and that rather than spending that money on
86 keeping people out and violent means to do so, it would be spent
87 more on services and welcoming and education — the things
88 that people who come to the United States really need when they
89 get here. They are often fleeing violent regimes or climate change
90 or very scary situations in their home country.

91 So many communities would prefer that approach to
92 immigration.

93 That's what we also mean when we say "building
94 strength." I mean, when you see ICE going into communities
95 these days and you see the social media of many people who
96 have prevented captures and deportations from their
97 communities just by people power, that makes you realize that
98 they're more of us than there are of them.

99 We always tell hero stories about our ancestors, the
100 immigrants who came here and provided a life for our great
101 grandparents and parents and us. The immigrants who are here

102 today and those coming, they're the same — exactly the same.
103 We're going to be telling hero stories about them, too. So why are
104 they being vilified and used to really dismantle our democracy?

105 **A.L.:** That's the question. How did you connect with the
106 researchers at Columbia?

107 **P.Y.:** I found them on the internet. I was looking for
108 people in the United States who were coming up with really
109 creative and innovative ways of helping immigrants and going
110 against the tide in the first Trump administration when we found
111 this project.

112 Because we live in New York and they were at Columbia,
113 we just wrote to them, and they invited us up for a lunch. The
114 one-hour lunch turned into a five-hour afternoon: We really hit it
115 off, and we decided to work together.

116 **A.L.:** What was the catalyst for the film?

117 **P.Y.:** We'd been working in Central America for many
118 years. Our [previous] film was about the Ríos Montt genocide
119 trial in Guatemala. The film was in 2017; the trial was in 2013.
120 And there were a lot of Central American refugees coming over
121 the border. The majority were Guatemalan, [most of whom] were
122 indigenous.

123 I thought, if you're going to make films internationally,
124 it's really important to critique your own country, too. And that
125 was when we started to develop the idea of telling this story in
126 our country at this time, at the beginning of the first Trump
127 administration.

128 **A.L.:** What kinds of responses have you had? Has
129 *Borderland* been seen by people in power who can influence?
130 Has it been a tool for action?

131 **P.O.:** People are startled by both the agency of the
132 protagonists in the film and the revelation of the extent of the
133 border-industrial complex and how it really penetrates into every
134 corner of this country. Virtually every congressional district is
135 somehow benefiting from it.

136 Even in Vermont, I'll bet, if there's a detention center,
137 somebody's doing the laundry for it. Somebody's providing the
138 meals, right? I mean, it creates this thing where people who are
139 not bad people — they're just working people — have jobs that
140 are connected to that complex.

141 It's a little bit like the military-industrial complex, right? It
142 just puts its tentacles out all over the place. So that's why it's so
143 hard to dismantle, too, because people's livelihood has come to
144 depend on it.

145 **P.Y.:** The film has been used in all the cities we went to
146 and cities we can't go to help build the local movements. We
147 offer the film [through Eventive, a website that connects
148 filmmakers with audiences] as a fundraiser to help strengthen and
149 raise funds for the local work.

150 But the unforeseen [outcome] was that all these groups
151 got connected through the film.

152 In March, we did a national immigration solidarity rally
153 online with the leadership in all the cities where we had shown
154 the film to plot a way forward. So things like that are happening.

155 I believe that courage is contagious. And when you see
156 courageous people in a film, you want to be that way, too. Those
157 are things we can't really measure. Those have no metrics.

158 **A.L.:** So we're talking about immigrants as a whole, yes?
159 The entire cohort?

160 **PdO:** Well, the film focuses on protagonists from Mexico
161 and Central America.

162 The people who put together the information on the
163 border-industrial complex are also immigrants, but they're from
164 Pakistan, Kashmir, and the Dominican Republic.

165 When you see the film, I mean, you just extrapolate. If
166 you are an immigrant from Asia or South Asia or [other places not
167 represented in the film], I think you would recognize yourself
168 there. So in that sense, yes, it applies to all because it's the
169 immigration policy. The border-industrial complex isn't just
170 focused on Latinos.

171 **A.L.:** What I don't understand is that by vilifying
172 immigrants and sending them home, we're just ripping apart the
173 backbone of our workforce, right? Why would that be? Why
174 would anybody — including the billionaires — benefit from that?
175 Why would Trump benefit from sending away the people who do
176 the farm work, who do the hotel work? I don't understand the
177 impulse.

178 **P.O.:** Yeah, you're absolutely right about the workforce.
179 The Texas Home Builders Association has asked Trump to make
180 an exception for them; the apple growers of Washington state
181 have asked, too.

182 So Trump being Trump and being sort of the Mafia don
183 that he is, he'll do the favors for the ones that come and ask him
184 for something, but he will ask something from them, too, I'm
185 sure. That's what's going on: The big agriculture concerns —
186 they're figuring that they can just deal directly with Trump on a
187 one-by-one basis.

188 **P.Y.:** I think we have to look past immigration, which is
189 being used as this tool to dismantle democracy. And a lot of it, I
190 think, is this performative cruelty that we see night after night on
191 the television.

192 It's really a political stance using immigration. So, no, I
193 don't think they want to deport millions and millions of workers
194 in America. And there'll be all kinds of walkbacks for different
195 industries to be able to allow workers to stay here, because you're
196 so right. We do need them, right? The dairy farms in Vermont and
197 New York need them. All the agriculture in the Central Valley in
198 California needs them.

199 **P.O.:** Actually, if you go by the numbers, they're deporting
200 [fewer] people than the Biden administration. [Fewer] people
201 than Obama. But it's a performance. I mean, this is a government
202 that's made up of right-wing social-media influencers. They're all
203 about performance. They have professional camera crews going
204 out on ICE raids with them.

205 And you know the way social media selects who gets to
206 see what? Your algorithm probably doesn't show it to you as
207 much as it does to the MAGA people who love this stuff. For
208 them, it's like a reality TV show 24 hours a day.

209 And I think for the billionaires, [it's wanting] the ability to
210 just take over the government and get rid of all regulations. Get
211 rid of everything that the billionaires don't want. I don't think
212 they give a hoot about immigration. All they give a hoot about is
213 being able to do unfettered, aggressive capitalism.

214 I think that's the ultimate goal here. That's why all the
215 tech billionaires have crowded around Trump.

216 **A.L.:** Kissing the ring.

217 **P.Y.:** We're also now working on the sequel to this film,
218 *Borderland Underground*.

219 **P.O.:** One thing we noticed on our 50-city tour with
220 [*Borderland*] was that all the Q&As became sort of spontaneous
221 testimonials — stories of their parents who are undocumented.

222 In our body of work, in our trajectory, we've done a lot of
223 films about truth commissions — you know, genocide trials, all
224 kinds of truth-seeking efforts.

225 *Borderland Underground* is going to be about taking this
226 brain trust that we put together of people we worked with in past
227 films, many of whom are from Latin America, where they've done
228 a lot of work with truth commissions. And we're forming a
229 networked People's Truth Commission here in the United States
230 to gather testimonies of everything that's going on and create an
231 archive.

232 **A.L.:** One last question. In the film, researcher and digital
233 humanist Alex Hill asked, "What if we had known about the
234 similar complex that Nazi Germany was creating, that Hitler was
235 creating?" Do you think that we're kind of catching this in time,
236 that we won't go there?

237 **P.O.:** I think we've already gone there. It's just whether
238 we can find a way to stop it — that's the big question. The
239 detention centers have been built, and they're being filled.

240 They're all privately owned, so they need to fill every bed every
241 night. So they just keep detaining more and more and more
242 people.

243 So it's happening. It's here.

244 **A.L.:** So the hope — I'm always looking for hope — is in
245 the building of strength?

246 **P.O.:** Yes. We're always looking for hope, too.

247 **P.Y.:** We're always looking for hope. And I would say that
248 in all our films — even in the darkest moment — there are always
249 people finding a way forward.

250 Those are the protagonists of our films.

251 * * *

252 *The film screening and discussion with Borderland: The*
253 *Line Within's filmmakers, Pamela Yates and Paco de Onís, takes*
254 *place Sunday, Oct. 26, 5 to 7 p.m., at the Latchis Theatre, 50*
255 *Main St., Brattleboro. Admission is by donation (\$10 suggested,*
256 *though one will be turned away for lack of funds). To reserve,*
257 *visit bit.ly/47gqtCh. Tickets will also be available at the door.*

258 * * *

259 *Editor's note: Stories presented as interviews in this*
260 *format are edited for clarity, readability, and space. Words not*
261 *spoken by interview subjects appear in brackets.*

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

262 **ANNIE LANDENBERGER** is an arts writer and columnist
263 for *The Commons*. She also is one half of the musical duo Bard
264 Owl, with partner T. Breeze Verdant.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

####BEGIN LOGLINE####

268 The Windham World Affairs Council will present a
269 screening of the documentary “Borderland: The Line Within” at
270 Brattleboro’s Latchis Theatre on Sunday, Oct. 26, from 5 to 7
271 p.m., featuring a discussion with filmmakers Pamela Yates and
272 Paco de Onís on immigration and the border-industrial complex,
273 with a suggested donation of \$10 for admission.

####END LOGLINE####