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Constructing and Deconstructing Border Wars

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CONSTRUCTING AND DECONSTRUCTING *BORDER WARS*

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Communication Studies

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

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May 2012

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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

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May 2012

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ABSTRACT

CONSTRUCTING AND DECONSTRUCTING *BORDER WARS*

by damien chadsworth wendel

Discussing a border's location, how it functions, and who is allowed to cross it can quickly give rise to heated arguments that at times escalate to violent disputes. In order to better understand the tension surrounding borders, a mediated-rhetorical critique of National Geographic's television show *Border Wars* was conducted. Performing this critique enables an understanding of the rhetorical strategies the show employs to construct and reify the Mexico/U.S. border, keep outlaw discourse from influencing the civic imaginary, and answer the question, "Is there an end in sight?" This thesis will specifically address these questions: What rhetorical strategies does *Border Wars* use to construct the civic imaginary? What strategies does *Border Wars* use to construct and reify borders? What rhetorical strategies does *Border Wars* use to keep outlaw discourse from becoming a part of the dominant discourse? The results of my study yielded a much more complex border than expected. The civic imaginary, if constantly critiqued and reshaped, can help alleviate the tensions along the border. *Border Wars* was not created by the civic imaginary, but the show does help maintain it. Without ordering apparatuses, such as *Border Wars*, the civic imaginary would collapse and outlaw logic would be allowed in forever changing the border and the people it contains.

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Chapter One: Enforcing the Border—The Inspiration For This Criticism

If the gates do not close, an alarm will sound. The courthouse where I work monitors and controls who can be where, and how they can get there. To get inside the building every morning, I swipe a badge that unlocks the security fence and the employees' entrance door. Once inside, I pass the sheriffs who are getting ready to inspect and process the public. To cross the line from unrestricted free space to restricted "legal" space, the public must submit its possessions and bodies for inspection for anything the court has deemed objectionable and unsafe. All bags, purses, and containers must go through an x-ray scanner, and members of the public must empty the contents of their pockets into buckets for the sheriffs to examine before being allowed to pass through the metal detector. If the metal detector's alarm sounds, the person passing through is deemed suspect, and is required to raise her or his arms and spread her or his legs so the sheriff can caress her or his body with a metal-detecting wand. The court requires all persons entering to conform to the scripted rules of court before crossing the line into the legal space the court created.

After I pass the sheriffs who patrol the legal border, I enter my code that lets me into the employee section of the courthouse. I sit down at my desk and stare at the window that divides me from the public—a window that the court erected to keep me safe from anything that might challenge the scripted rules of the court. If anybody on the other side of my window steps outside of the scripted rules of the court, grabs anything from my desk, or passes me something that has been deemed

objectionable or dangerous by the court, I can immediately call the sheriffs to have the person put under surveillance or removed from the courthouse. The courthouse is a safe place for those who are in dominant positions, which includes me; it requires a plethora of security measures to keep people separated and contained. I am allowed, by the court's design, to mingle with the public if I choose, but the public is not allowed to mix with me or threaten the sanctity of the constructed legal space. Members of the public are only allowed to offer me what they hope will be processed into the legal record. If I approve of a document's legality and conformity, I stamp the document "filed." With this act, I help patrol the legal border; I am silently complicit in the larger system that keeps me in and others out.

I am at my desk, preparing for the day ahead. The doors open to the public; I help the first person¹ in line wanting to file her or his documents. As I look over my customer's documents, I note some mistakes that can be easily fixed with just a little help; I cannot tell the customer directly how to fix the errors, but I can hint and hope she or he catches my subtle guidance. The rules, while strict, do allow for a narrow margin of flexibility if the court clerk is willing to slightly bend them. My coworker, who sits a few cubes down, views the rules as unbendable and gruffly rejects her customers' documents. She snaps that they need to fill in the X, Y, and Z line. I hear my coworker curtly tell a customer to read the directions, fill the form out correctly and then get to the back of the line.

¹ The court tells its employees to call the people we help customers. It is the one time the court acknowledges people have the choice of whether or not they want to buy into the court system

Her customers speak primarily Spanish, but enough English that my coworker does not feel the need to use one of the court's translators, which are always available and easily accessible. It is possible that her customers may not know how to read English, but she assumes that they can read it well enough to fill out the documents. Her customers plead for help. They tell my unrelenting coworker that they need the documents filed or they will be evicted and lose all of their things. In exasperation, my now extremely agitated and rigid coworker raises her voice, refuses to accommodate, and instructs them to hurry, get help and be back before the court closes, or face the consequences. Every clerk inspects the documents differently; some push the borders of legality allowing more people to participate in the system, while others hold steadfast to the scripted rules of the court allowing access only to those with the cultural knowledge required to understand the system and its forms.

I sit at my cubicle filing and stamping a document, then another, and another. Elsewhere, the cubicles are singing the same stamp song as more and more documents are filed or rejected. A cacophony of approval or rejection, of filed or not, of in or out, of legal or illegal resounds throughout the building. The cacophony—turning into a discordant drone of legal judgments—spews procedures, codes and rules to regulate human bodies. The legal judgments—rendering all situations black and white by governmental logic—fail to consider how their power has tightly wrapped itself around both legal and illegal bodies, and fail to bear witness to the fragility of flesh and emotions of the heart. I sit, judging the legality of

documents, until I get my break. To clear my headspace, I sit in the back corner of the office and read for class.

I take a moment to close my eyes and turn my mind off from my work world. I hear and see silence until I open my eyes to look upon the Ingushetia volume in Kirshner's (2008) graphic novel, *I Live Here*, in my lap. This story is about Zura. She is in the later years of her life and lives in a dusty camp that has been crudely erected for people with no real home. The camp is in Ingushetia, a federal subject of Russia. In Ingushetia, the government is corrupt, the lawmakers can be bribed, murder and rape occur everyday, and Zura is trying to survive on handouts and good luck. Her story begins when she returns to the camp after having tried to go back to her homeland. Upon her return, she discovers her tent with all of her things has been removed; in its stead are the imprints of her temporary home and meager belongings. I turn the page. The next story about life in Ingushetia tells of too many people living too closely together with too little food and supplies. I turn the page. The next story is about a man who has been tortured and comes home to beat his wife. His wife, hurt and abused, keeps him around because he is her husband and she needs him for protection; life without a husband would be far more abusive. The graphic novel closes on a picture of a little girl playing next to an unexploded bomb that has fallen through the roof of her home. In the middle of processing these uncomfortable images and stories, I hear my alarm to return to work.

For a brief moment, I become disoriented; my mind is in Ingushetia and my body is sitting comfortably at work. As I get up to return to my desk, I can hear the

cries of desperation and need against the multitude of stamps claiming justice and exclusion. I see a ghost of Zura in line hoping to get her documents filed by 4 p.m. so she can reclaim her tent and possessions. I sit again, now in a liminal state being pulled apart by two realities, to help the next person file her or his documents. Zura and the other stories of suffering in her country have ruptured and distorted my work-reality; as my work-reality distorts, its constructedness is revealed, making it hard to make sense of why I continue to do my job—my privilege becomes uncomfortably obvious. And then the two worlds separate, each taking a piece of me with them; a paradox is born within me.

The tension that comes when I try to hold a paradox together is not hell-bent on tearing me apart. Instead, it is a power that wants to pull my heart open to something larger than itself. The tension always feels difficult, sometimes destructive. But if I can collaborate with the work it is trying to do rather than resist it, the tension will not break my heart—it will make my heart larger. (Palmer, 2007, pg. 87)

As I try to adjust to the paradox, my inner tension pulls me apart and reassembles me differently, anew. My newness is open and hyper-conscious of other people's positionalities and struggles; I am more keenly aware of how their identities may have been constructed and shaped by experiences that are outside my frame of knowledge and experience. My heart, torn and growing, is more sensitive to the different ways of being that have been constituted by a diverse range of experiences, the power given to different ways of being, and by how lives are restricted by a system of exclusionary practices.

Zura does not leave my mind for months; I cannot help but see her in every customer I help. During these months I hear my coworkers complain about sitting through a meeting listening to a non-native English speaker with an “ugly accent.” Some muse why a woman who cannot speak English well does not just go back to her home country. I want to join the conversation with the retort: “Because she doesn’t fit into your idea of a United States citizen, she should go back to her home country?” Of course my lips will not form the words because I need my job and want to keep my work environment an agreeable and pleasant place. I uncomfortably listen to the racist remarks and remain uncertain of how to address them without significantly damaging my work relationships. My struggle over what is appropriate to say is paltry in comparison to the everyday struggles of voiceless immigrants in the bureaucratic system.

I do not know if the person my coworkers derided comes from a place like Zura’s, but that is not the point. My coworkers’ statements make the claim that all people that do not fit in to the current formation of society are stupid-ugly-idiots and need to go back to their home country. Their claim—which remains unchallenged by me—continues the anti-immigrant rhetoric that perpetrates a certain ideal of the civic imaginary he subscribes to. D. Robert DeChaine describes the civic imaginary as serving

an ethical horizon for the articulation of the citizen as an embodiment of personhood...civic personhood reduces the border-crossing migrant to a racialized juridical subject. Crucially lacking in such a formulation is consideration of the border-crossing migrant as a human being worthy of recognition, respect, and dignity. For this

alone, the present construction of the American civic imaginary warrants concerted critical attention. (DeChaine, 2009, p. 60-61)

The civic imaginary is the space where the rules for defining who is and is not a citizen are debated and settled. It is an abstraction that has material consequences; it denotes who can(not) have power and what people can(not) be. Those who are not apart of the civic imaginary are considered suspect and must be controlled by the juridical laws of the United States.

The civic imaginary is formed by the impressions made on impressionable people who impress upon all others the impressions they have been impressed with. These impressions are formed because of the rhetoric used by the products of the civic imaginary. As a product of the civic imaginary, the rhetoric of *Border Wars* creates a border whose structure has been constructed by dominant discourse. *Border Wars* demonstrates how authority and power derive from the structure and discourse of the civic imaginary. It is these structures and discourses of the civic imaginary that my study is concerned with; the same structures and discourses that have been impressed onto me. This thesis is a product of my questioning and critiquing of my daily performances in life—as a clerk of the court, a citizen, and a human being. It is a means for me to understand the world I live in and where I can fit in, by coming to an understanding of how borders define the people they include and exclude. I am writing this thesis not only to complete my master’s program, but also to clarify the ideas and passions that drive my life, and to engage in praxis so that my actions and practices will be equally informed by each other.

To accomplish these goals, I investigate the rhetoric of *Border Wars*, a show heavily immersed in the United States' civic imaginary, which will allow me to perform a mediated-rhetorical critique of the show's discourse that makes real a particular structure of the civic imaginary in the United States. This particular structure of the civic imaginary is divisive, separating citizens from non-citizens, those of worth from those of no worth. Border-crossing migrants are of no worth when they enter the United States' civic imaginary; they are considered unlawful trespassers who, despite their humanity, are not worthy of recognition, respect, or dignity. The civic imaginary is continually coming into being and is created by the cyclical interaction between its citizens and the media: the people shape the media and the media shapes the people in a feedback loop ad infinitum.

Stephen Colbert Takes Your Job—He Does Not Want It Either

During September of 2010, Stephen Colbert tried to use his star power and media outlet as a means to shape the people. On his program, *The Colbert Report*, he had a segment called, "The Fallback Position." This segment was designed to highlight the difficulty of migrant jobs, illustrate how posh and safe Colbert's job—and by extension, the average United States citizen's job—is. In the segment, he took up the campaign started by the United Farm Workers called, "Take Our Jobs!" This campaign asked U.S. citizens to do the job of a migrant worker for a day in order to debunk the theory that undocumented immigrants are taking jobs away from U.S. citizens, and highlight the fact that the nation's food supply is dependent

on migrant workers. Only sixteen other United States citizens participated in the campaign.

As a result of his experience, Colbert testified in front of a committee hearing of the House Subcommittee on Immigration Policy and Enforcement. Invited by Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren (representative for San Jose, CA), chair of the committee, Colbert testified that he worked ten hours packing corn and doing other jobs typical of migrant laborers. When asked by committee member Judy Chu if he had a chance to talk to the workers about their workplace conditions, Colbert said he tried to engage them in conversation, but he did not speak Spanish and the workers “seemed busy with the corn and beans.” As a result of their busyness and language barrier, Colbert was not able to talk to migrant workers about their workplace conditions and any medical needs or lack of benefits and rights, but he did say that he did experience the extreme heat. Colbert said, “It was hot, hotter than I want to be.” Colbert used his well-nourished and privileged body to more fully understand the plight of the mostly undocumented work force that provides the essential foods for a documented and privileged populace’s healthy diet.

Colbert hoped to raise awareness about migrant workers and their lack of rights by highlighting the perspective of the migrant farmer. This is evident in his testimony at the hearing titled “Protecting America’s Harvest” on September 24, 2010:

I like talking about people who don't have any power, and it seems like one of the least powerful people in the United States are migrant workers who come and do our work but don't have any rights as a

result. And yet we still invite them to come here and at the same time ask them to leave. And that's an interesting contradiction to me.

Colbert is acutely aware that the United States is merely using migrant workers for their bodies; the United States wants nothing to do with them as actual humans, some of whom have been here so long that they ironically fit the United States' civic imaginary more than Mexican civic imaginary. With his performance, Colbert was able to not only reach his usual fans, but he was also able to reach out to different communities by way of mass-media coverage that has not been present "since impeachment" (Madison, 2010, para. 6). Colbert used his star power to bring mass coverage to a perspective that rarely gets significant airtime.

After Colbert's testimony, the media (left, right, and in-between) disseminated the news of the hearing into their niche markets. The next day at my work, my politically-minded coworkers (left, right, and in-between) knowing my penchant for all things border-related, discussed Colbert's performance. My right-winged coworkers focused primarily on trying to discredit Colbert because of his comedian status. They did not validate his experience as a farm worker for a day, echoing the right-wing media outlets' complaint that Colbert's program did not show footage of Colbert performing any of the ten hours of farm work he said he did; thusly, they claimed he did not do the work and does not have credibility. My right-winged coworkers believed that because Colbert performed his testimony in character—a character that epitomized caring about the needs of the migrant workers—his testimony was a mockery to the political process. It is hard not to

infer from my coworkers' reactions the latent racism—and if not racism, at least out-right disrespect for human needs—that informs their conclusions about migrant workers.

My left-winged coworkers, echoing their preferred political outlet, were more interested in the ideas, along with the exacting wit, of Colbert. The left-wingers, like their media outlets of choice, thought Colbert's testimony was provocative and that his humor helped to make the issues raised in the hearing accessible. My coworkers echoed the arguments of their respective parties. How their respective media outlet framed its coverage of Colbert's testimony directly affected how my coworkers talked about the event.

At the end of the workday, our dialogue ended the way it started: both sides were unable to cross the divide between them. Politically charged media outlets did not help by failing to provide a bridge that could allow audiences to understand the complexity of the issue; and my coworkers, lacking help, could not build the bridge themselves. My right-winged coworkers still wanted all undocumented workers to go to their home country and to stop stealing U.S. jobs from its citizens. These feelings persisted despite the fact that only sixteen people out of the entirety of the United States' population took advantage of the campaign, which speaks volumes about the desirability of the jobs migrant laborers perform. Nowhere in my right-winged coworkers' evaluation was there a discussion of how migrant workers are poorly treated, how they work hard jobs so U.S. citizens can have healthy meals, or why migrant workers left their home country. Most of my coworkers assume

undocumented workers come here because they like the work and want to take advantage of the United States' generous system. Unfortunately, the majority of my coworkers do not realize that most immigrants come here because they have to, and they are unaware of the danger immigrants put themselves in in order to get into the United States.

Leaving Home and The Road Though Hell—Dying To Survive

Many of the people that make the news as illegal immigrants come to the United States fleeing gangs, violence, death threats, political persecution, enslavement, and economic woes. In their desperation for a better life, they do whatever it takes to get inside the United States. Sometimes people will risk the lives of their relatives that remain behind, pay thousands of dollars, travel for months on end in trunks or cramped rooms, and risk the chance of rape or death to cross the Mexico/United States political border. Undocumented individuals often come to the U.S. to help their family members back home by sending the money they make in the U.S. doing work in almost slave-labor conditions.

In Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, the threats of violence against women and any people that threaten the livelihood of the drug cartels are real and ever-present; it is a dangerous place to live, especially if you are female. Kirshner (2008), in her graphic novel volume *Ciudad Juarez*, offers a plethora of evidence of the harsh realities that people endure and why people try to emigrate. Ciudad Juarez has been dubbed, "The City of Lost Girls," because so many women have gone missing and

turned up dead in and around the city. Between 1990-2000, approximately 500 female bodies were found (Kirshner, 2008). Young women are constantly going missing, and many turn up dead. Their murders are linked to drug dealers trying to protect rampant drug trafficking in the area. The drug dealers have so much money that they can control the police, who enable the drug dealers to cover up their involvement in the murders. The average police officer makes \$275.00 a month; the drug cartel payrolls police officers approximately \$375.00 (Kirshner, 2008). Drug cartels have absolute power to commit and get away with crime. They often kidnap the women they want and do with them as they please; the cartels will rape, prostitute, enslave, abuse, murder, and discard a kidnapped woman at their leisure only to kidnap another to use up and throw away. Sometimes the women are not even recognizable when they are found, but more often than not, they are never found. Ciudad Juarez is a violent city where crime and abuse is caused by an ever-increasing demand for Mexican cartels' services in the United States.

As desperate as people may be to leave a homeland overrun with corruption and violence, leaving is not an easy choice. Not only do potential emigrants have to think about their ties to their homeland, they have to think about putting their life, and their family's lives, on the line. According to the United States Border Patrol, 1,954 people died crossing the Mexico/U.S. political border between the years 1998-2004 (The New York Times, 2004). Crossing the border can cost a person her or his life. It can involve months confined in small places and little to no sunlight to get to the Mexico/U.S. political border. Women are often raped if they are alone. Children

are sometimes taken and sold into the slave trade. The sacrifices people make to cross the Mexico/U.S. political border are endless; some are willing to risk everything for the chance to live a slightly better life.

The Devil's Highway (2004) by Luis Alberto Urrea chronicles the story of a group of people who were willing to risk everything in order to travel from Mexico across the political border into the United States. The Coyote, the person who is supposed to lead the group to safety through the scorching hot desert, makes a few mistakes that turn the trip into a disaster. Of the twenty-six men who started the trip, twelve survived the inhospitable Sonoran Desert terrain. The group traveled unprepared, across scalding hot sand. Some brought bottles of cola, while even fewer brought water. Some wore shoes that covered their feet, while others wore only sandals exposing their skin. It can reach 113 degrees Fahrenheit in the Sonoran Desert; the sand is about 20 degrees hotter than the air temperature. As they traveled, those in sandals had sand burning their skin at 133 degrees. As the people traveled on, they started to die of exhaustion or dehydration. In their dehydrated delirium, some would start digging in the sand looking for water or shade; later they were found half buried, their bodies sticking out of the ground like prunes. Others took off all their clothes and folded them nice and neat in preparation for death. Some separated from the group and were lost in the desert never to be found.

The Devil's Highway and Colbert's "The Fallback Position" are mediated examples that describe the pain and sacrifice of the undocumented individual.

These two texts demonstrate the legitimate reasons people have for leaving home and what they are willing to do to get into the U.S. They also point to hypocrisy in our national identity. The United States often claims it is a nation of immigrants, exemplified in the sonnet at the Statue of Liberty's base:

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame, with conquering limbs astride from land to land; Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand a mighty woman with a torch, whose flame is the imprisoned lightning, and her name Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command the air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame. "Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she with silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

The Statue of Liberty, the iconic symbol the United States uses to represent its beliefs in liberty and justice for all, is made a mockery by the true manner in which the United States treats its migrants now, and throughout the histories of Ellis and Angel Island. Despite the invitation to all people of the world to come to the United States, the U.S.'s border maintenance tactics speak volumes about who is actually welcome inside of its borders. The lamp, if ever there was one, has been extinguished, and the golden door removed from its hinges. This is perhaps best seen in the border wall: the material manifestation of the political border that divides Mexico and the U.S., constructed where undocumented individuals cross most. Instead of curbing the flow of people, the wall has rerouted them—sending immigrants through hell to get into the United States. As a result of the wall being built in high traffic areas, people wanting to cross the border now have been forced

to cross more dangerous and inhospitable land (Egan, 2004). And any persons lucky enough to get through all of the trials and tribulations still must contend with the United States Border Patrol, who is fighting a war on the Mexico/U.S. border.

Border Wars—Staging A War To Keep The Civic Imaginary In Tact

The war along the border is documented in a National Geographic Channel television show called *Border Wars*. This show depicts how Border Patrol agents go about “defending” the border against undocumented individuals. *Border Wars* is a reality show about the agents who are on the front line of the war. The show depicts the tactics used by border agents to enforce the political border by investigating drug cartels, seizing smuggled drugs, chasing down undocumented individuals, and screening suspect individuals. The National Geographic channel takes the viewer into the heart of the war zone where the villains of the war are attempting, for one reason or another, to cross the border. The people crossing the border are whispers on the wind, trying their best to cross the border undetected. Most of the people crossing are on the last leg of their journey and if they are caught, they will be sent back to their home country and possibly arrested, depending on how many times they have previously been caught by the Border Patrol.

The scenes from the show usually take place at night when the cover of darkness helps undocumented people cross undetected into the United States. A typical episode begins when one of the Border Patrol’s sensors goes off. The agents will rush off to the activated sensor in hopes of swooping in on the unsuspecting

undocumented individuals. The agents will generally discover some tracks and soon start their hunt. When they spot the group, they call it in, hoping for back up or a helicopter to help track down those trying to cross the border. If the helicopter joins the hunt, the undocumented people, knowing they have been found, play the odds and scatter; the agents, less in number, scramble trying to catch them all.

The agents gather those they were able to capture and make sure they are not hurt, or if they were hurt, attend to their wounds. They ask their captives their name, where they are from, and to identify the coyote. The show will sometimes feature a brief interview of the attempted-border-crosser, asking how much it cost for them to make the attempt and if they will try again—they always say they will try again. The show does not fully address the complicated reasons why people try to cross the border, but justifies their capture based on U.S. laws. U.S. laws are constructed to maintain the identity of U.S. citizenry, which is constituted by the civic imaginary.

Border Wars is framed by the civic imaginary of the United States. A promotional advertisement starts with the opening notes of the “National Anthem” while the American flag ripples in the wind. This is a stock image that is often used to capture the essence of being a citizen of the United States—proud, free, and brave—as it has been written in few couplets of “The National Anthem:”

Gave proof thro' the night that our flag was still there.
O say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

The promotional advertisement pulls viewers in by both reaffirming and appealing to the already deeply instilled identity-politics of the ideal United States citizen; the commercial confirms and reaffirms the civic imaginary. After a few moments of banner waving patriotism, the song quickly stops as an image of the Mexico/U.S. border flashes on the screen and then the advertisement cuts back to the song and flag waving patriotism again. It happens so fast, that it is as if nothing could effect the civic imaginary, but both song and image cut away again to another image: people running from the Border Patrol.

As the commercial progresses, the patriotic images are interrupted more and more rapidly until the words and images are blurred and the song can no longer continue because it is stopped by the words that symbolize what comes across the border: people, money, mysterious bags, guns, drugs, contraband, biohazard, bombs, grenades, stolen goods, prescription medicines, human-trafficking, stowaways, disease, fugitives, and lastly terror. It is no surprise that the last word that interrupts the patriotic flag waving is “terror.” In post-9/11 U.S., “terror” has become a loaded word that has powerful associations of a threatened way of life—a threatened civic imaginary—and is used as a rallying cry to shut down any avenue that might possibly let any external voices cross the border. “Terror” is the last word displayed on the screen, and then it fades to a black and white image of the fence that demarcates the Mexico/U.S. political border with a helicopter patrolling the fence. The black and white image imbues a sense of doom for those that try to cross the border by suggesting that the issues of the border are black and white. As

the word “terror” fades, the “National Anthem,” never having been fully realized, fades out and dies as the sound of a whirling helicopter blade cuts the air.

The change from a dying “National Anthem” to a cutting helicopter blade asserts that any who try to kill or pollute the national identity—the civic imaginary—will be hunted down, captured, and sent back. This commercial sets up the border as a contested place where only one side is right, only one side has power, and only one side has the authority to control who and what comes in and goes out. The border is staged as a war, and is at all times watched and guarded, which reaffirms the idea that it needs to be maintained in order to protect our national identity that is constituted by the civic imaginary we subscribe to.

Border Wars is a rich and complex text to investigate in order to better understand the construction of borders and the civic imaginary.

I analyze *Border Wars* because I am interested in unpacking the constructedness of the United States’ national identity. *Border Wars* is specifically about who is and is not allowed to participate in the United States’ civic imaginary, and it provides a fertile text with which to understand the reality humans have constructed, and continue to reify into a state of normalcy by perpetuating the myth that borders are justly made a priori. To understand the implications of how borders are constructed, I will explore the ongoing conversation about border rhetoric in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three, I explain how I will do a mediated-rhetorical critique of *Border Wars*. In Chapter Four, I will conduct my analysis. In Chapter Five, I will draw conclusions about borders based on my critique.

Chapter Two: Imagined, Constructed, and Bordered

The border is a symbol of meaning, which defines objects, places, and people. Where (geographically and socially) and how (rhetorically) borders are created is important to study. Humans rely on the symbols, which are shaped by borders that are constructed through everyday rhetoric. In order to make sense of the ways borders construct meaning in daily discourse, I want to briefly review relevant literature in several areas. In this chapter, I first discuss how borders are rhetorically constructed, followed by how dominant and outlaw rhetorics are used to shape borders. I then discuss the civic imaginary that is created through the rhetoric of borders, and move to the alienization that exists outside of the border. Finally, I discuss border crossing, and conclude the chapter with a discussion of borderlands.

Rhetorical Construction of Borders

Borders divide the whole into manageable parts. They provide a common ground, a foundation that can be used to build relations amongst in-group members. Through the process of discourse and/or rhetoric, we articulate and shape symbols by creating borders around the identified important pieces of the whole. The rhetoric we use to describe our realities is powerful and is the genesis for our understanding of the world in which we live. The everyday rhetoric humans use to orient themselves and make meaning of the world influences and shapes the borders that describe our realities. “Rhetoric *shifts* borders, changing what they

mean... rhetoric shapes understandings of how the border functions; taken further, because of its increasingly powerful role, rhetoric at times even determines where, and what, the border is” (Ono & Sloop, 2002, p. 5). Rhetoric is the site of creation for borders. A border cannot exist until it has been articulated through rhetoric. And it is through rhetoric that borders take shape and take on a façade of permanence. The consistent performance of like-minded rhetoric continually reifies the border through a particular people’s subscription to a particular way of knowing. Over time, through the continual reification of border rhetoric, the border becomes increasingly steadfast. Its origins are blurred into obscurity without the continual critical eye that keeps the border contested, and evolving to be effective and useful for the ever-changing people—both in and outside of the border.

Rhetoric is the precipice on which borders are hinged; the shape of a border is contingent upon the rhetoric used to construct it—especially as borders take on a physical manifestation, i.e., the geo-political border that separates the United States and Mexico. Rhetoric “itself emerges as if to demarcate more precisely what and where the border is. Without...[rhetoric], legislators, government officials, citizens, and those who patrol the border would not know where the border begins and where it ends” (Ono & Sloop, 2002, p. 50). A people’s particular way of knowing is justified by the particular construction of their border. In knowing where the border begins and ends, it is easy to identify who is in and who is out. In knowing who is in or out, the border can be defended and protected. Once a border is erected and conceived as immobile, it becomes a site of contention; “because it is

conceived of as being immobile, it is perpetually threatened by those who cross it” (Ono & Sloop, 2002, p. 50). Governments and the people inside national political borders have a vested interest in the current iteration of the border because their respective power and identities exist as a result of the current border’s iteration; the powerful maintain steadfast borders in order to keep their power intact.

The idea that the border exists as a fixed and concrete truth of reality is an outdated construct. “According to the traditional geography-based logic, a border exists as a given entity whose contours can be cleanly and clearly recognized, measured, and mapped. A border’s givenness and mappability implies its stability as a resource for delineating spatial territory” (DeChaine, 2009, p. 44). Based on this logic, it is not a question of where or how the border exists, but only how to maintain its structure. Yet, if we consider borders to be “socially motivated constructs,” they are more than stable lines, but are “bounding, ordering apparatuses, whose primary function is to designate, produce, and/or regulate the space of difference” (DeChaine, 2009, p. 44). In this way, borders differentiate ourselves “from others, one culture from another, desirable elements from undesirable ones, and, often enough, ‘us’ from ‘them’” (DeChaine, 2009, p. 44).

To keep out what is undesirable, borders manifest themselves in innumerable ways. They can be physical, as in political borders, but, most often, they are invisible, making them harder to pinpoint and articulate. “Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow string along a steep edge” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 25).

Borders are divisive. They separate one side from another; they are the basis for determining who is in and who is out, and they control what is allowed to transpire within their confines.

Dominant vs. Outlaw Discourse

Borders are constructed, shaped and controlled through the daily rhetoric of “dominant” and “outlaw” discourse; at the confluence of these two discourses, a border will form, which is constructed according to the shape of both the dominant or outlaw discourses.

Dominant discourses are those understandings, meanings, logics, and judgments that work within the most commonly accepted (and institutionally supported) understandings of what is just or unjust, good or bad. Outlaw discourses are those that are incommensurate with the logic of dominant discourses. (Ono & Sloop, 2002, p. 14)

These two discourses unequally push and pull to negotiate a border that contains who is us and who is them—ultimately making the naturally existing holistic state of entirety appear to be naturally fragmented and disparate. Outlaw discourse can become a part of dominant discourse only if, “it becomes popularized...[enough to lead] to social change...[or] if it is disciplined to become a part of the dominant discourse and thus loses what is resistant and challenging about it: thus rendering it unable to alter the status quo power relations” (Ono & Sloop, 2002, p. 18). If outlaw discourse fails to make change or be changed, it “remains Outlaw (sic), which means it never becomes part of the larger civic discourse and is...remarginalized” (Ono & Sloop, 2002, p. 18). It is important, for any critic hoping to change the status quo, to

shift the oppressive border by highlighting outlaw discourse in hopes of bringing it into dominant forums—without losing its potency of resistance, that way it can still challenge the dominant structures that have been created (Ono & Sloop, 2002).

Governmentality, the logics of governing bodies, actively prevents outlaw discourse from becoming one with dominant discourse; logics of governmentality are threatened by outlaw discourse because outlaw discourse will upturn the dominant discourse it belongs to. Outlaw discourses' foundation is other than dominant discourses making the two seem incommensurable.

Dominant discourse has its foundation in governmentality, while outlaw discourse has its foundation in what is on the other side of the border. “Outlaw discourses are not simple inversions of dominant discourses; they do not refute or counter dominant position; rather, they are discourses outside the logic of dominant ones” (Ono & Sloop, 2002, p. 15). Because dominant discourses operate within governmentality, any attempt of the critic who aspires to change the border using dominant discourse is futile because, while change may happen, it is change that ultimately upholds the very logic system the critic is trying to change.

Governmentality obscures the possibilities and questions that would upend its foundations of power by maintaining the focus of questioning on the products of its foundation and not the foundation itself.

For example, governmentality will keep the focus on the legality of crossing a border and not the construction of the border itself or keep the focus on the laws based on the U.S. constitution, but not the constitution itself. Border debates are

about the constitutionality of a law, but not about questioning, “whether or not the U.S. constitution should be the basis for deciding such a question” (Ono & Sloop, 2002, p. 142). Governmentality keeps the borders reified and strong by keeping the borders’ foundations intact, hidden, and unquestioned. “This dynamic points to the intersection of state and rhetorical forces that...must work together to create the ideological climate in which governments can achieve...their desired ends” (Flores, 2003, p. 364). The government’s desired end is to maintain its dominance and power over the border that contains and controls the United States’ population. The United States’ population is deeply invested in governmentality because its the logic system that sustains their life as they know it, a life that is forever stagnant; governmentality blinds the United States’ population from choice, forcing them to think there is only one correct logic system—this in turn continually pulls the United States’ population deeper and deeper into its logic system. Borders are maintained and reified by rhetoric. The contours of the border’s foundation communicate to the populace only one way of being—by where they are, how they keep the populace in, and where and how they keep the undocumented immigrant out.

In its invisibility and unquestionability, the border is ascribed a truth function that hides its constructedness. As such, “the border functions as a prevalent organizing doxa in a group’s collective vocabulary” (DeChaine, 2009, p. 45). In this view, the border constructs the citizens as much as the citizens construct the border in a continual feedback loop. The citizens of the United States

do what it takes to maintain the structures that keep them validated and powerful. United States citizens perpetuate a particular singular way of thinking and being. “Enticed by their desire to live in a given rendition of the world...[the citizens] seek to make real the social vision contained” in the everyday narratives they subscribe to (Flores, 2003, p. 366-367). The everyday narrative gives meaning to the members of a particular group’s lives, providing comfort and security. In maintaining these culturally established narratives, the populace forms a public vocabulary or communal social ideology that defines their world and their citizenship within it (Flores, 2003). Citizens, wanting to maintain the life they desire to live, are deeply invested in who is among them. Defining who can and cannot be among the citizens provides structure for a particular way of being and knowing, because it delimits the possibility of change. The possibility of change diminished, borders are positioned to permanently define who can and cannot be a citizen.

Civic Imaginary

As society accepts and promotes the definition of citizenship, the borders demarcating citizenship become rigid, hard to move, and subject to the law. The dominant discourse shaping citizenry prescribes acceptable identities and denounces discourses of difference. Bordering is “a social ordering practice” which “produces and enforces spaces of identity and difference, defining terms of identification and exclusion. As such, it influences a community’s ways of seeing and experiencing itself, its members, and those deemed to be outside or unworthy of

membership” (DeChaine, 2009, p 46). Bordering establishes the civic imaginary:

A contested space for adjudicating conditions of citizen identity and inclusion.... Both real and imagined, performative and affective, it is a consummately rhetorical space where culture and politics converge, identity is shaped, and power is wielded. An adjunct of the public sphere, it proscribes conditions for citizenship enactment and the voices that are to be included in and excluded from deliberation. More than anything, the space of the civic imaginary serves as an ethical horizon for the articulation of the citizen as an embodiment of personhood. (DeChaine, 2009, p. 60)

The civic imaginary is the ordering apparatus that has been constructed through the dominant discourse of governmentality that maintains the bounds of the citizen’s identity by way of the daily rhetoric of the dominant in-group that is used to express and promote a consensual imagining of a particular way of life.

While bordering keeps order, it also keeps other possible ordering practices from having a chance to influence, and change, the core structure of the dominant discourse. “Institutions...exist to maintain control, to protect wealth from dissipating” (Nainby & Pea, 2003, p. 12). The civic imaginary preserves itself by maintaining the power structures that define its dominance. The borders that define the civic imaginary shape acceptable options of citizenship—simultaneously including and rejecting possible ideas of knowing and being; as the civic imaginary promotes itself as the “right” way to orient oneself, it also demotes other possible options by claiming they are the “wrong” way. The borders that define the civic imaginary and citizenship are entwined and influence one another. The civic imaginary and the parameters of citizenship constitute each other, and therefore cannot exist without each other. DeChaine states that, “as alienization is enacted,

citizenship is enacted” (2009, p. 60). In the following section, I suggest that the converse is also true: as citizenship is enacted, alienization is enacted.

Alienization

The rhetoric that shapes the borders of who is and is not a citizen is both inclusive and exclusive. Through exclusion, alienization occurs. The rhetoric of alienization relies on the constructed borders of the civic imaginary to bolster and justify the structure and claims of the dominant discourse. The rhetoric of alienization, with the consent of the citizens, actively maintains borders. Alienization draws upon “a variety of common linguistic and nonlinguistic resources” to prevent assimilation of certain groups or individuals. Alienization often “materializes as a reactionary rhetoric,” which “promises an antidote to disunity and incompleteness in the form of a shoring-up of cultural boundaries that border-crossing migrant subjects reveal to be troublesome... [and] shapes a population’s collective attitudes toward and practices of citizenship” (DeChaine, 2009, p. 45). Citizens shore up holes in the borders that they use to justify and give themselves power. In the citizens’ constant vigilance in policing the border and maintaining it as a steadfast foundation masquerading as impervious to change, the citizens maintain their power and privilege. In defining and alienating who the citizen is not, they define who they are: legitimate citizens and, “only ‘legitimate’ ...[citizens] are those in power,” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 25). The non-citizen’s power is usurped when the rhetoric of alienization is invoked.

The dominant in-group, to maintain power, invokes the rhetoric of alienization that has been shaped to conform to popular ideas of citizenship, which perpetually marginalizes the non-citizen. While the foundations of borders masquerade as permanent, they are only as permanent as the values and relations of power that circumscribe the civic imaginary. The foundations do change, but slowly, generation by generation. “With generations, the connection to language, culture, and values fade and people believe in the [current] assimilated performance as natural” (Chavez, 2009, p. 175). Thus, the means by which the rhetoric of alienization achieves its power adheres and slowly changes to fit the current needs of the citizens, who constitute the civic imaginary, to maintain the current iteration of the border that defines and alleviates the citizens’ anxiety of incompleteness; “In its most elemental sense, alienization is a form of othering—a way of seeing and not seeing, of experiencing and not experiencing—that conditions modes of human subjectivity and action” (DeChaine, 2009, p. 47-8). By shoring up cultural boundaries, dominant discourses maintain the valuative structure of the civic imaginary.

Grounding their power in the current form of dominant ideology, citizens perpetuate the unstable hegemonic process of alienization by using whatever metaphorical or linguistic means necessary to continually reify the public’s value system that supports the formed national community in its current popular valuative structure.

Border Crossing

While I have demonstrated that borders are deeply reified in citizen consciousness, there are situations that allow for provisional crossings of the border by peoples who have been labeled “other,” and barred access. An example is Mexican labor within the United States borders. Mexicans who have been othered by their historical positioning “as an ideal temporary labor force...were [and are] rhetorically characterized as docile, obedient, and loyal to their Mexican nationality” (Flores, 2003, p. 371). Given their status as an ideal labor force, they have been brought in and forced out numerous times since the late 1800’s for the capital gain of the United States. Mexicans were, and arguably still are, constituted as peon labor. This rhetorical labeling served two functions. “First, peon labor was defined as poor, uneducated, and without ambition. Peon came to signify an interest in day-to-day life over a desire to get ahead” (Flores, 2003, p. 371). The framing of Mexican laborers as peons fostered tolerant attitudes by the U.S. citizens towards Mexican laborers. The success of the rhetorical strategies employed to bring in Mexican labor suggests the importance of borders in control of the civic imaginary. Framing Mexican laborers as such paved the path to bring them in provisionally. They could remain here as long as they worked, spent their money here, and eventually left to go back home. Their home could never be in the United States. Mexican immigrants did not pose a threat to the civic imaginary. In their configuration as a docile people, Mexicans were unlikely to bring with them forms of outlaw discourse that threatened institutionalized ideas and identities.

As the numbers of Mexican laborers being brought into the United States increased, their status changed from invisible to a minority population, thus elevating their potential threat (Flores, 2003). As a result, the rhetoric changed to emphasize that the “threats of Mexicans invading the nation, particularly in ways that would potentially shift its fundamental (racial) identity, were contained by rhetorical constructions that limited any active agentic dynamic” (Flores, 2003, p. 372). As the Mexican labor force’s visual presence grew, the back door stopped swinging in and only swung out. “Depicting increased numbers of Mexicans and the dangers ostensibly wrought by them, the narrative of the Mexican problem directed public attention to borders and the potential influence of Mexicans on the national body” (Flores, 2003, p. 372). The narrative of the need for labor dissipated during the Great Depression, leaving the narrative of the Mexican problem mostly alone and uncontested.

As the Mexican problem narrative took hold, Mexicans became framed as the enemy and dangerous. The media of the time framed them as dangerous and criminal, instilling a public fear of the Mexican other (Flores, 2003). “Virtually gone were references to Mexicans as peons, as docile, as necessary farm labor. Replacing this discourse was a narrative in which Mexicans occupied the space of criminal” (Flores, 2003, p. 376). The rhetorical switch from docility to dangerous rendered Mexicans a threat to the civic imaginary and the borders that constituted citizenship. The criminal narrative reinforced their otherness: citizens are not criminals. The only thing to do with non-citizens, as the civic imaginary thinks, is to

return them “home” so they will no longer be a threat to a possible civic re-imagining. “In short, migrant workers are needed to keep the economy strong, but must be returned when they become a drain on the economy” (Ono & Sloop, 2002, p. 56). And so, immigrants—and specifically Mexicans in this context—in times of economic prosperity, can more readily gain access and cross the temporally relaxed borders that have otherwise kept them out. But when the economy starts to fail, the borders that mark and divide those who are in and out become more readily policed, maintained, and rigid in order to ease the tension and anxieties of a national ethnos identity.

Borderlands

Once a border has been crossed, regardless of the legality of the crossing, the border can never completely resume its original shape. With every border crossing, a piece of the other side is brought in: as people crisscross, a borderland emerges. When a person leaves their side of the border for another, they bring part of their home with them. “Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 19). Borderlands, unmappable in any linear or easily organizable fashion, are the spaces in-between—spaces that are neither totally this nor that. Borderlands are spaces where a multitude of positionalities and discourses operate and mix. Borderlands are

“where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs” (Anzaldua, 1999, p. 101). The borderland is a messy place that provides for the possibility of growth and change. It is a space that allows for the ebb and flow of differing ideas; the ebb and flow loosens the cultural hold freeing those in the borderlands to try new things that were not allowed in their home culture. “Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger” (Anzaldua, 1999, p. 26). It is also a place of great discomfort and possibly death. But those that choose to reside there do so knowing the danger; they stay because they want knowledge, they want a new consciousness that is always moving, not stagnant.

Through border crossing, borderlands offer the potential for change, for a new vision or deconstruction of borders. There is hope and possibility in the borderlands where people can play with boundaries in useful and heuristic ways that will stretch the imagination to be more inclusive and less divisive. As borders are crossed, a way of engaging the world that is not either/or, but both/and will emerge which will, as the borderlands grow, shift and alter the seemingly unmovable borders that will open discourse instead of narrowing it down as governmentality does.

There is one critique of the borderlands that is worth mentioning. Helene Shugart cautions, “that—conceptually as well as in terms of its manifestations—it is at least potentially if not inherently hegemonic” (Shugart, 2007, p. 119). The very aspect of the borderland’s nature that makes it rife with possibility—its flexibility

and openness—makes it also co-optable. Since the border is not fixed, it can be repositioned to suit the needs of the dominant discourse. Shugart cautions that this possibility needs to be closely monitored, but also contends that, of the available options, the borderlands is the best possible solution (Shugart, 2007, p. 119).

Without the borderlands, without the *mestiza*, life will not change, it will become rigid and petrified: dead. The best possible solution to opening and changing the border to be inclusive is what is happening in the borderlands, where

the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs. This is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element, which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness—a *mestiza* consciousness—and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm. (Anzaldua, 1999, p.101-2)

The borderlands create a space where all the parts can be put back into the whole and taken apart again. The borderlands require constant movement and change; they require a new way of thinking, a new consciousness that, if realized to its fullest capacity, will continually tear down and rebuild the borders that are used to give our bodies and minds definition. The future depends on the *mestiza*, on the mixing up of parts with respect to a holistic perspective. I now turn to discussion of a method for understanding the rhetoric of border crossing, and the possibility of such a consciousness in mediated border discourse.

Chapter Three: A Method of Rhetorical Critique

In this chapter, I explain my methodological approach. First, I explain the foundations of a rhetorical critique, and then I explain the more specific approach of a media-centered rhetorical critique. Next, I outline the aspects of a television-centered rhetorical critique. Finally, I provide a description of my artifact and outline the specific steps I will use to conduct my analysis.

A Rhetorical Critique

A rhetorical critique is an examination of a rhetorical discourse. “Rhetorical discourses are those discourses...which aim to influence” (Black, 1978, p. 15). Rhetorical discourses take the form of any rhetoric that aims to influence the auditor of the discourse. Rhetoric is concerned “with how the meanings that we would find in or assign to [a] text [is] being managed so as to influence people” (Brummett, 1994, p. 30). To critique rhetorical discourse requires an understanding of the meanings that have been assigned to a text and how that rhetorical discourse communicates that meaning to its auditor. The meaning the auditor attaches to a text is influenced by the way its rhetorical discourse communicates the signs that constitute it. A rhetorical critic is responsible for understanding both the short and long-range effects on his audiences. “A critic can...interest himself not alone in the short range effect of a discourse on its immediate audience, but also in its effect on later audiences” (Black, 1978, p. 74).

The implications of rhetoric's effects run deep both into the past and the future where they will take hold as long as the rhetorical discourse continues to exist.

A critic of rhetoric is concerned with the effects of anthropologic discourse. "The subject of criticism consists exclusively in human activities and their results" (Black, 1978, p.5). A critic of rhetorical discourse aims only to understand the results of human activities. "If the critic has a motive beyond understanding...that motive is to enhance the quality of human life" (Black, 1978, p. 9). The critic is therefore an educator hoping to encourage new ways of being and understanding. "The critic is an educator, and insofar as he fails to educate, he fails his essential office" (Black, 1978, p. 6). The critic of rhetorical discourse seeks to educate and change the world in which they live, by assessing all the differences the critical object "has made in the world and will make, and how the differences are made and why" (Black, 1978, p. 74). The rhetorical critic examines the text in its current context and will make claims regarding future implications of the rhetorical discourse; the critic also will examine any kind of difference the text has had on its auditors to understand why and how the rhetorical discourse made this effect. To understand the effects of the rhetorical discourse of *Border Wars*, I employ a media-centered-critique—a subset of rhetorical critique—to enable me to delve deeper and provide a more meaningful critique by using concepts that center media as the medium of the message.

A Media-Centered Rhetorical Critique

In order to fully understand the meanings and implications of *Border Wars*, a critique that addresses the medium in which it displayed is needed. “Media-centered criticism argues that texts of popular culture should be analyzed using concepts that take into consideration that *media* in which the component signs of the text appear” [Italics in original] (Brummett, 1994, p. 138). Using a media-centered rhetorical critique of border wars will enable me to get at the United States’ civic imaginary and its constituent parts. “Media-centered critics trace the effects of the medium that may be found in an audience’s ways of thinking and processing information” (Brummett, 1978, p. 145). The goal of media-centered criticism is to understand the effects of the medium and how the medium is constituted by its audience; media criticism enables the critic to see the medium as always in flux between shaping and being shaped by its audience—whose loyalties are embedded in the civic imaginary. “Media-centered critics study the texts of popular culture with an eye toward the media that present those texts to the public” (Brummett, 1978, p. 145). Media-centered critics, to successfully investigate a mediated text, must keep one eye towards the ways in which the medium operates and the other eye on how, through the medium, the message is both shaping and being shaped by its audience. “Media centered criticism...[shows] how the medium influences the texts that it carries and the audiences that it addresses” (Brummett, 1994, p. 139). Media-centered criticism—in using the tools of rhetorical discourses critiques—is able to more clearly understand the medium’s influence on the text

and audience by having intimate knowledge of the medium itself. On the ever-increasing focus on media-centered criticism, Brummett, “caution[s] critics to consider the characteristics of television as a medium, and to show how those characteristics affect many other dimensions of how texts are created and received” (Brummett, 1994, p. 138). The meaning that is made among humans and television is complicated and interwoven. In an effort to unravel and make clear the meaning made between humans and the television medium, I am going to investigate, using Brummett’s and Black’s expertise on mediated-rhetorical criticism, the constellation of signs that are employed by *Border Wars* in its first two seasons (twenty-three episodes) that create a civic imaginary imbued consciousness. I will examine these signs for the border rhetoric—analyzing its patterns, themes, and the strategies by which *Border Wars* constructs borders oriented by the rhetorical themes of a television-centered critique: commodification, realism, and intimacy.

Television-Centered Critique

A television-centered critique must take into the account the characteristics of television, or the ways in which the medium works to make humans consume either a physical product or an ideology. It is these characteristics of the television medium that enable *Border Wars* to influences its viewers. Television is a medium of communication that has, “a means of reproducing signs, and...the ways in which a given society or culture typically makes use of that means of production” (Brummett, 1994, p. 139). Television is a prominent fixture in the U.S. household

and in U.S. culture. The media-centered critique takes into account the ways in which television is used—whether for entertainment or instructional use—while knowing that whatever its intended purpose, it is always producing a particular ideology that, in the media’s ideal conclusion, will be impressed upon the auditor. A media-centered criticism uses three characteristics to understand the underpinnings of television’s intent: commodification, realism, and intimacy.

First, television commodifies the viewer by making them, especially those close to the border, feel like they need to buy varying forms of protection to ensure their safety from a contaminated other—an undocumented individual. “The impact of commodification is that it creates a intense concern for commodities in the minds of those who use television a great deal” (Brummett, 1994, p. 141). *Border Wars* often depicts the war on the border taking place near a United States’ citizen’s home. A viewer near the political border between Mexico and the United States, fueled by the rhetorical discourse that living near the border is unsafe, will feel the need to make sure that even if the political border is crossed, the border into their home will not be.

Second, television engages in realism through seemingly real-life images. *Border Wars*, considering it is a reality show that uses actual footage of the imaged war on the borders, is made to seem even more real by the actual real-life images that are used to construct the show. The narrative assembled by spliced excerpts of real footage of the agents policing the border attempts to pass itself off as a seamless event, as the whole-story, as reality.

Television...seems to be a window on reality for...two reasons. First, it is a *visual* technology, and in our culture, seeing is believing.... A second reason...is that it is so much a part of our lives...we take television to be a realistic window on the outside world. (Brummett, 1994, p. 141)

Television regulates reality; this is especially true now that what is real is further obscured by reality-based programming. To lift the mediated veil obscuring reality, a “Media-centered critic...[will] identify ways in which they cultivate unrealistic or distorted views of reality,” in order to, “judge the effects...on the larger society” (Brummett, 1994, p. 142). Brummett helps me understand the deeper and more complicated ways meaning is constructed in an increasingly hyper-based reality. What is and is not real is becoming increasingly difficult to discern, and television takes advantage of those questions regarding realism to influence its auditor before they have the chance to process and unpack the real reality of reality-television.

Third, the television experience is intimate. Television—constrained both in physical size and the airtime given to a show—prefers, “that which is small, personal, and person-oriented” (Brummett, 1994, p. 142). Television shows do not have time to expound about the complications of human experience, but they can focus on one person’s experience in attempt to draw general conclusions about human experiences and their respective meanings. “Television’s intimacy tends to turn public attention toward the personal dimensions of any event of great public importance” (Brummett, 1994, p. 143). Television—seeking intimacy with its auditor—will be constructed to show what is personal and what is most simple and easy to tell, rather than taking the time to flesh out the complicated, and sometimes

contradictory, explanations of serious issues; television simply cannot explicate deeply about any topic because it is limited by both air-time and a screen not large enough to allow for more than a face to clearly be displayed.

Analyzing *Border Wars*

Border Wars, a show created by National Geographic, tries to clearly display the tensions along the Mexico/U.S. border. National Geographic has a long and prestigious reputation of documenting and bringing information about other cultures outside of our borders in. National Geographic, building on a popular and cemented reputation in the United States, has created a television show that viewers use as a window into reality of the border—a reality constructed through careful assemblage of photography direction, editing choices, and production values. U.S. citizens put their trust in National Geographic’s window into reality because they consider it a reliable and educated source. Not only do citizens consider it to be a dependable source of information, but National Geographic identifies itself “as a scientific and educational institution” (Lutz & Collins, 1993, p. 1). In this sense, people’s perception of the presentation of *Border Wars* as accurate is bolstered by National Geographic’s stated intent to educate the viewer about the Mexico/U.S. political border. This positions National Geographic in an educational role, and U.S. citizens pay attention by attending its lectures in the form of the shows it airs. The first episode of *Border Wars*, “No End In Sight,” drew 2.9 million viewers, the highest rated debut in the channel’s history (Equal Justice Society, 2010, para. 6). Using

National Geographic's credentials, *Border Wars* is able to inform a vast portion of the U.S. population, making its message potent and far-reaching.

Border Wars is an hour-long television broadcast on the National Geographic Channel that is currently in its third season as of this writing. *Border Wars* is about the Border Patrol agents who police the United States political border with Mexico. The show depicts some of the many tactics Border Patrol agents use to patrol the border, and some of the agents' cases that investigate drug lords. Each episode delves into the drama that results at the confluence of five characters: the narrator, voiced by two male actors over the series; the Border Patrol, defenders of the Border; the undocumented peoples attempting to cross the border; drug cartels, shadowy figures that exist in the shadows; and U.S. Citizens who are cast as extras.

Typically, an episode follows the Border Patrol agents as they are hunting down undocumented immigrants. Each episode of *Border Wars*, deviating only once in format, follows the same repeating cycle of events: the set-up, including a description of the location and the agents patrolling that area; a description of how the agents police the borders in that location; the moment when the agents suspect some illegal activity and must investigate; the chase; what the agents catch in chase—be it drugs, people, or both; and the wrap-up, explaining what will happen to the people and/or drugs that the border agents seized.

Border Wars offers viewers special access to the border war. The promotional copy describes the thrilling adventure the series offers:

Ride along on chases, rescues and busts with the brand-new series *Border Wars*. NGC cameras were given special access to go on duty with CBP agents and officers as they use every means at their disposal—from high-tech stealth planes to basic wilderness skills—to track, catch and deport illegal immigrants. We are there as officers and agents race to save illegal immigrants from possible death in desert heat, uncover a shocking smuggling strategy involving children and find a cache of narcotics that sets a new record for a single seizure. (National Geographic, 2011, para. 2)

Each episode of *Border Wars* shows a battle in the ongoing war against illegal immigration. Episode titles like “3000-Pound Coke Bust,” “Checkpoint Texas,” “Narco State,” and “Storm Surge” offer a hint of the story lines featured in each episode, and more broadly, the way the show constructs a national civic imaginary.

Border Wars, because it is created within the United States culture, is a text that can be read to understand the meanings that constitute the ideology or consciousness of the United States’ civic imaginary. “A text is the mouthpiece for a culture; it is a representative sampling of the overall system of meanings that constitute an ideology or consciousness that is linked to a group. Texts urge a consciousness on us” (Brummett, 1994, p. 29). *Border Wars* urges the consciousness of United States civic imaginary on its viewers. As such, it is an ideal text to investigate in order to understand the current temporal, cultural, and geographical context it informs. As Barry Brummett (1994) explains, “it is important to understand that [texts]...mean what they mean according to their placement in a system of artifacts, culture, that is the manifestation of a group” (p. 26). *Border Wars* only exists in relation to the group, culture, or the civic imaginary, it is a part of. Understanding the context of *Border Wars* is essential to

understanding the ideology it puts forth. “*An ideology or consciousness is an interrelated system of meanings that are generated by the system of artifacts that comprise a culture*” [Italics in original] (Brummett, 1994, p. 25). As a part of my critique, I investigate the rhetoric of *Border Wars* by critically analyzing the interrelated meanings that comprise the artifact in order to better understand the culture of the United States.

The United States’ culture, composed by its civic imaginary, is enacted by texts that have a prominent voice of power. The National Geographic has established its reputation as a news outlet that has stood the test of time as a respectable and trustworthy news source. National Geographic is “America’s lens on the world” and “has come to be one of the primary means by which people in the United States receive information and images of the world outside their own borders” (Lutz & Collins, 1993, pp. 1, 15). National Geographic’s reputation for being the primary regulator of who is and is not seen crossing the border, and how they can or cannot cross, bolsters *Border Wars*’ authenticity as a valid window into the reality of the border. National Geographic’s television show *Border Wars* is a significant artifact to study considering the influence National Geographic has in creating a particular civic imaginary; it shapes and unifies the United States’ popular culture through a particular lens that continuously depicts foreign cultures—what the United States is not. *Border Wars* is intimately linked with construction of the civic imaginary, or culture as Brummett (1994) describes it:

Culture is the integrated set or system of [texts] that is linked to a group. The linkage between [texts] and a group occurs because the [texts] are how the group is manifested to its members. The [texts] are systematically linked to each other as they are linked to culture. Culture is the system of material manifestations of our group identifications. (p. 20)

The texts, which are linked to each other, make real the civic imaginary. *Border Wars*, imbued with the civic imaginary, is able to seamlessly link itself to other texts that inform the United States' civic imaginary. The texts link to each other through the similar signs they all share and have been constructed by. "A text is...a set group of signs...that all contribute to the same effect" (Brummett, 1994, p. 27). *Border Wars* is a set group of signs that are made in the civic imaginary's image. Brummett defines a sign as being everything. "That's because a sign is something that induces you to think about *something other than itself*—and everything has that potential" [Italics in original] (Brummett, 1994, p. 6). Innumerable signs constitute *Border Wars* as a readable and analyzable text. Using Brummett's understanding of the construction of mediated texts and how they operate, I am going to investigate *Border Wars* using a media-centered rhetorical critique.

A mediated-rhetorical critique reveals how *Border Wars* constructs and controls the United States' civic imaginary. Brummett remarked that, "To control words is to control the world" (1994, p.34). Similarly, to control texts, which are constituted by a specific organization of words, is to control the world. Texts are constructed carefully to influence the meaning that is being created in the surrounding rhetorical discourse. Texts, according to Brummett (1994), influence

meaning. “Meanings, and therefore the texts that generate meanings, are sites of struggle...struggles over power occur in the creation and reception of texts” (p. 70). In the careful examination of texts, a mediated-rhetorical critique will reveal deep power struggles along with the ways in which meanings of texts are constructed, reified, and perpetuated through the understanding of how a text is constructed and received.

I examine elements of border rhetoric, discussed in Chapter Two, that work to rhetorically construct borders by watching multiple episodes consecutively to get a sense of the narrative arc, themes, or patterns emerging in the *Border Wars*. We understand borders through discourse: “public vocabularies, which include social narratives and myths[, and] circulate foundational ideas about a culture, its values, [and] structures. Often captured in narratives, public vocabularies ... serve to outline ideological positions and to garner assent for those public stances” (Flores, 2003, p. 366-7). Border narratives emerge in dominant and outlaw discourses, and rely on rhetorical strategies such as alienization and the civic imaginary. Such border rhetoric is a “rhetorical mode of action...[providing] a national community with a repertoire of symbolic resources for naming and thus bringing into being its valuative structure... an array of metaphors ascribed to alienized persons, as well as linguistic and visual figures that serve both to condense and to amplify public values” (DeChaine, 2009, p. 48). By examining the rhetorical strategies in *Border Wars*, I answer the following research questions:

1. What rhetorical strategies does *Border Wars* use to construct the civic imaginary?
2. What strategies does *Border Wars* use to construct and reify borders?
3. What rhetorical strategies does *Border Wars* use to keep outlaw discourse from becoming a part of the dominant discourse?

Chapter Four: Catch and Release—People Just Trying to Make It

Border Wars is a reality-based television show created by the National Geographic Channel about the border between the United States and Mexico. This show, by its title, suggests that there is a war on the border—a dramatic framing of the tensions on the border that makes explicit the experiences and situations National Geographic intends to find and depict during the show. A Border Patrol agent in the episode “Hidden Narcotics,” who had just completed an eight-month tour as a U.S. soldier in Afghanistan, makes this clear in his statement that frames the tensions on the border as a war:

I realized there was a war going on over here that people kind of look past.... And I loved it when I was over there protecting my country, but I kind of had a family here that I needed to protect, so I came back home and I am protecting them...you know, the war on the border is right here. (Laird, 2010-11)

The soldier’s experience in the well-known war in Afghanistan reinforces the show’s depiction of the border as a war zone. Both the soldier’s war experience and comment conflate the tensions on the Mexico/U.S. political-border with the war in Afghanistan—legitimizing both the tensions on the Mexico/U.S. border as a war and United States’ justifications for the border war. This conflation also groups innocent immigrants trying to find a job with Afghani terrorists; any person crossing the border without documentation is depicted with a terrorist framing.

Every episode starts with a narrated preview of the captures, chases, investigations, and footage it will feature to illustrate the border wars. At the end of every preview, the narrator frames the footage with the tagline, “These are the

border wars.” This statement shapes how the viewer is supposed to engage with the subsequent hour-long presentation. Sometimes the narrator in his preview will say, “We will take you along with us...,” or “You will join us in the chase...,” inviting viewers to be honorary agents participating in the daily capturing, chasing, and investigating all from the comfort of the viewer’s living space.

After the preview of its hour-long program, each episode tells several stories through the eyes of the Border Patrol. Every episode frames the stories as part of a typical day in the life of a Border Patrol agent, and according to the show’s depiction of a Border Patrol’s typical day, there is rarely a lull in the action. The *Border Wars* narrator often cautions that agents will have to wait for hours without moving or making a sound, but as soon as the viewer sits down with the agents ready for an all night stake-out, the agents hear something and the chase immediately begins, creating a story that exaggerates the real event by editing it to appear quicker and to take more dramatic turns. *Border Wars*, using television as its medium, produces and reproduces specific signs in a specific order to make clear a specific argument (Brummett, 1994, p. 139). The television format allows the editors to move footage around and glue together disparate scenes into a purposeful narrative—a specific discourse that obscures the whole story. Editing condenses the tensions along the border into a seemingly realistic, but abridged version of reality, which “cultivates a sense of its own reality in viewers” (Brummett, 1994, p.141). *Border Wars* uses edited footage of scenes that include Border Patrol agents stopping undocumented individuals from going to their home in the U.S., capturing drug and human

smugglers, and dismantling vehicles looking for hidden drugs or people—both in the rugged terrain of the desert and border crossing checkpoints. These stories are heavily edited and told in fragmented form.

As each story builds, the show shifts to another developing story somewhere else along the border. This fragmentation depicts the alleged threat of border invasion as always omnipresent and constantly spiraling out of control everywhere along the border, until the border agents swoop in from all sides succeeding in their planned operation. If the agents are not successful in their planned capture of people, seizure of drugs, or human smuggling sting operation, a viewer's fears are assuaged by knowing the agents learned from their mistakes, and by being shown innumerable other successful missions obscuring any moments of failure.

Border Wars repeatedly tells the same story over and over again in the same format. *Border Wars* first sets the scene by giving a location and profiling the agents. Secondly, it describes the problems those agents face. Thirdly, it shows the agents zeroing in on a possible border breach. Next, it shows the agents swooping in and saving the day from possible perceived contamination to U.S. soil. And lastly, the show provides a wrap up of the mission—consisting of the agents congratulating each other on the successful heroic mission, at times a brief interview with the undocumented individual, and finally the show concludes by revealing the fate of the undocumented individual. All of the episodes in the first two seasons follow the same format; they are so similar that when reviewing earlier episodes, I could not distinguish one from another.

Border Wars simplifies the tensions along the border by telling the same recycled story lines exclusively through the eyes of the Border Patrol. The streamlined stories have a similar plot line: undocumented people trying to cross through the desert or border checkpoint, trying to transport drugs, or waiting in houses to go on the last leg of their journey. The camera never leaves the border to get a clearer picture of what happens after the border is crossed and the show always places the cameras in the same places along the border, which continually attract the same immigrant stories that prompt the same kind of Border Patrol response. The episodes are edited the same, with the intense dramatic moments falling predictably before a commercial break; this consistent and predictable structure provides a sense of order to the Borderland, which reinforces the Border Patrol's power by showing that they are always in control of the border and how the drama unfolds. The editing also shows the border as always under threat of potential invaders. The only break in the action is when an agent or immigrant is being interviewed or the immigrant is being processed by the Border Patrol. This singular depiction of the tensions along the border continue an uncomplicated border narrative that upholds the civic imaginary so U.S. citizens do not have to think about the complications of having a border that promotes one way of being. All of the episodes in Season One and Two follow this strategic formula, except for the first episode of Season One, which uses a different format and communicates a different message.

One strategy that *Border Wars* uses to demarcate the difference between the first episode, “No End In Sight²,” of Season One from the rest of the series is a change in the narration style. *Border Wars* not only changes actors, but alters the tone and content of the narration as well. For “No End In Sight,” the narrator, Rodd Houston, makes his voice sound soft and open, which serves to emphasize the human struggle and plight of the immigrants. His narration communicates compassion and concern about the material realities that have resulted because of the physical manifestation of an imaginary line. The narrator for all subsequent episodes, Bill Graves, narrates more dramatically, pacing his sentences quickly to emphasize the military-like action on the screen, which never softens to sympathize with the immigrants. The high paced-action and the overdubbed narrative both keep the viewer in a perpetual state of anxiety that the border is under siege, which is not felt with Houston’s narration.

The Border Patrol operates as if the border is always under attack; the stories are dramatic when they unfold and Graves’ narration keeps the viewers’ blood pumping, bringing the viewer into the war, instead of into a position of questioning it. Graves’ narration does not offer a counterpoint to the Border Patrol’s rhetoric and logic on which its power relies; Houston’s narration gently questions the governmental border logic, suggesting the border is imaginary and constructed, and as a narrator, he provides empathy for the undocumented

² As of this writing, IMDB incorrectly lists “No End In Sight” as Episode Five.

individual's plight. Graves' narration continues through the rest of the episodes to frame the border as always under threat and needing to be policed, compelling the viewer to invest more deeply in the governmental border logic.

The "No End In Sight" episode decenters a border under siege and re-centers the border in tension. With the title, National Geographic pessimistically frames the question the episode posits, "Is there an end in sight to the border war?" The episode also asks, "What is the border?"—by weaving together a discourse that is complicated and by viewing the border from both sides—and "Is the border permeable?"—by depicting the border through both the eyes of the Border Patrol trying to stop the immigrants and immigrants trying to evade them in order to cross the border. As the show investigates the border and its permeability, it lastly asks, "What is the possibility of a borderland and what does it look like?"

For the rest of the chapter, I will first discuss Episode One at length focusing on how it sets up these questions. Then I will analyze how the rest of Season One and all of Season Two answer these questions by uncovering the ways *Border Wars* highlights dominant discourse and negatively frames outlaw discourse. The way the show frames these two types of discourse creates a border rhetoric that is shaped by means of alienization, which bolsters the civic imaginary and squelches the borderlands, ultimately keeping the forces that create the border indefinitely creating the war.

Episode One—The Beginning Has No Hope For an End

The first episode of the series, “No End In Sight,” is the only episode that acknowledges the complexity of the border war by recognizing that there is no end in sight; the tensions are so taugth, the war sorting them out will continue long into the future. The first episode of *Border Wars* examines the border war by telling both immigrant and Border Patrol stories through their own respective lenses. Portions of the episode are filmed in Mexico; National Geographic crossed the border into Mexico to film the border-crossing industry. While in Mexico, *Border Wars* takes the viewer on a tour of a former human smuggler’s store where he sells items needed to get across the border: caffeine pills, shoes, backpacks, snacks, etc. After the tour, the show tries to cross the border with a few hopeful immigrants trying to get home to their families and work any job they can, but as the journey is about to start, the *Border Wars* crew is not permitted to cross with the immigrants. The episode later catches up with the successfully crossed immigrants in Kentucky where they were able to continue their accustomed way of living, which the show suggests is working hard and being with family. This episode is the only one that suggests the possibility of a permeable border by showing a successful border crossing, which opens up the possibility of a fluid borderland to exist.

This breaks away from the format of the remaining episodes in the first two seasons, which examine the border exclusively through the eyes of the Border Patrol. After the first episode, the National Geographic Channel’s cameras never

again cross the border into Mexico³. The first episode continually switches between viewing the border from a U.S. and non-U.S. perspective, complicating viewers' understanding of the border as being both steadfast and porous. This episode describes the border as both unmovable and permeable.

The narrated introduction of the first episode of the series complicates the border by describing it as imaginary, and therefore changeable, opening up the possibility of a permeable border with a rich borderland. But it also describes the border as an unquestionable monolithic manifestation of the civic imaginary by grounding the border's means of adjudication in the legality of governmental logic that seeks to keep foreign peoples policed and pushed back. The narrator describes the border in the episode "No End In Sight":

It runs for two thousand miles, through cities, mountains, and some of the most inhospitable terrain in America. The U.S./Mexico Border, an imaginary line that separates two peoples, two languages, two economies. And in recent years, it's become a kind of battleground; a place where ever day a high stakes game of cat and mouse is played out between those who want to cross the border illegally and those whose job it is to stop them. (Laird, 2010-11)

The narrator acknowledges the constructedness of the border by saying the words, "imaginary line," but his words are juxtaposed with a panning aerial view of the border wall that is anything but imaginary. What is and is not imaginary becomes obscured through the conflicting narratives and visualization of *Border Wars*. What the narrator calls an "imaginary line" extends far into the distance; as an abstract

³ Once in the episode "Fog of War," a camera crosses the border to film the boundary line from the Mexico side, but the camera is heavily regulated both in terms of who owns the camera (the Border Patrol) and who handles the camera (the Mexican police).

idea, the border is imaginary, but its material manifestation is neither abstract nor imaginary. The disjoint that makes the imaginary real also highlights that *Border Wars* is a construction itself, a construction made from a strategic assembly of clips taken from longer cuts of film with carefully chosen interwoven narration. The narration not only sets up undocumented individuals as long-standing natural enemies of the Border Patrol in a game of cat and mouse, but also gives power to and justifies the existence of the Border Patrol's power because of its roots in governmentality. The Border Patrol, supported by the power of the U.S. government, roars to rally the troops to pounce on all foreign rodent elements and send them where they came from, or punish them for crossing the materialized imaginary border. This episode frames the border project as divisive and costly—both in a monetary sense and for the toll it takes on the humans involved.

The episode's last story—told from the immigrant's perspective by filming a family that was once united but is now forced to celebrate birthdays through the holes in the border—expands on the toll the border takes on humanity by exploring the difficulties of living along bordered land that prevents the possibility of a fluid borderland. The camera footage of the birthday ritual is intimate; the camera frames the celebration close up and the footage is similar to what one would see in a home video of a birthday party. The camera focuses on both the highly ritualistic moments of blowing out the candles and sharing the birthday cake, as well as the everyday moments of hand-holding and communal laughter that a viewer would only see if they were really immersed in the reality of that moment. The viewer,

now a participant in the family's celebration, sits with the U.S. side of the family, who long to embrace the family members on the other side. All of the festive rituals of cake, blowing out the candles, and birthday hugs are interrupted by the border dividing the family, and conducted through a hole, barely big enough to fit the cake or hand through. The imagined hugs and birthday festivities that typically unite a family are made impossible by the border, which the family attempts to figuratively cross by engaging in a cultural practice that cannot be contained by a border. Despite the border, the physically divided family reunites by transgressing and decentering the physical border, and by privileging and re-centering love and family ties; while their physical bodies do not cross fully into either side, their love for each other pour through and around the border, unifying the physically-divided family. This resistive act of border crossing deconstructs and reconstructs a border that starts to take on the shape of a borderland.

The challenges to an open border are woven deep into the U.S. cultural fabric, making it hard to change the fabric's pattern without removing all of the threads.

Border Wars opens with this narration in episode "No End In Sight":

Like every war, this one evokes passions, splits families apart, and causes casualties. New weapons have been brought in to fight it. New tactics have been introduced. Measures and counter measures deployed. Over the past few decades, the conflict has intensified.
(Laird, 2010-11)

Under the narration, *Border Wars* portrays a border in tension with images of violence between protesters on both sides of the immigration debate, separated families on both sides of the border crying and holding hands through the border

fence, skulls of immigrants that died crossing the border, and immigrants both running free and being caught by the Border Patrol. The episode concludes with the *Border Wars* narrator lamenting that there is no end in sight for the border dispute:

Until the problem of illegal immigration is resolved...The revolving door between the U.S. and Mexico will continue to spin: illegal entry, followed by detention, followed by arrest, followed by re-entry, and arrest, and so on and so on as far into the future as the eye can see.
(Laird, 2010-11)

The concluding narration frames images of the family crying, divided by the border and footage of immigrants jumping fences to freedom and getting caught. The last scene closes with a shot that continually opens to show more and more of a land that gets farther and farther away. This last shot emphasizes the point that the tensions on the border are constant and uncontrollable, with the space between the two sides continually widening. The concluding narration reveals a war that will intensify as the border remains a highly contested construct. The cycle of undocumented immigration will continue regardless of law and increased police presence. As the war intensifies, the continuing arms and tactical race against those trying to cross the border without documentation will continue to ensure the border is locked down tighter and tighter. There is no end in sight to the border dispute as long as the border remains in its current formation. This setup propels the episode's questions—"What is the border?," "Is there an end in sight to the border war?," "Is the border permeable?," and "What is the possibility of a borderland and what does it look like?"—further into future episodes. The first episode, in being unable to answer these questions, leaves the viewer wrestling with tough questions;

the viewer must continually come back and watch more episodes if they want to have the questions answered.

This first episode complicates the border's current formation. In this episode, viewers see a border in tension that ultimately calls into question their civic identity and the civic imaginary that informs it. The presentation of different perspectives along the border enables viewers to question the border outside of the governmental framing they are pre-conditioned to by the civic imaginary. Even those who promote some variation of an anti-border discourse find a place for themselves in the show. The first episode functions as the wide-mouth of a funnel to allow a multiplicity of people to enter the debate. As I describe in the next section, as viewers watch more episodes, they will pass through the funnel's narrow stem, unifying the viewers with a singular pro-border position. Rather than asking questions, the rest of the series funnels all the confusions the viewer may have after the first episode into a singular civic imaginary that constructs a particular border that is not permeable, and nullifies the possibility of a borderland by only privileging governmental rhetoric as it manifests through the Border Patrol.

The Rest of the Episodes—The Never Ending Border War

Every episode after "No End In Sight" seeks to answer the questions posited through a singular governmental perspective: the Border Patrol agents. The remaining episodes in Season One and Two follow a different format in their exploration of the border, first and foremost because the immigrant's voice is never

again heard without a Border Patrol agent's contextualization or framing. In watching the series, three broad themes discussed in Chapter Two emerge: the civic imaginary/alienization, dominant and outlaw discourse, and borderlands. The following sections focus on how *Border Wars* constructs borders, and the means it uses to answer the questions the episode "No End In Sight" poses.

Civic Imaginary/Alienization. These two themes emerge in tandem because as the border contains the civic imaginary, it alienizes the people outside of the border. In this way, "alienization depersonalizes (and dehumanizes) the alien subject while providing the rhetoric...with an alibi" (DeChaine, 2009, p. 56). The border becomes a condition that provides people on the inside with justifiable means to alienate those that are outside the border. In Episode Nine of Season Two, an agent comments on an immigrant who has been here since he was eight years old and has no cultural or family ties to his home country Grenada, noting that if he went back, the Grenada-born immigrant would be essentially in a foreign country: "He has no ties with his country besides the fact he was born there...but then the...thing he needs to take into consideration is the law." The fate of the immigrant, who is culturally a U.S. citizen, is up to an immigration judge. *Border Wars* justifies the border with governmental logic, which allows all persons contained within the border to disregard any guilt for treating immigrating humans inhumanely because they do not matter, the law does.

Border Wars encourages the dehumanization and alienization of immigrants by viewing them as people who need to be kept out because they are a threat to the civic imaginary.

The show's depiction of the Mexico/U.S. border constructs the civic imaginary. As *Border Wars* visually and verbally describes both Mexico and the United States, a distinct and separate picture of both takes shape. The U.S. is described as the land of plenty. Throughout the entirety of the first two seasons, the narrator repeats the statistic that immigrants can earn up to ten times more money in the U.S. than they can in Mexico. The United States is framed as a land where money grows on trees, but the show is quick to clarify that this wealth must be protected. A Border Patrol agent in Episode Eight of Season Two titled "Manhunt," comments on people crossing the border: "While we'd like to keep them all back, the reality is, this is the land of opportunity, so they're going to come." The agents are eager to protect the U.S.'s opportunities for those with birthright. The show presents the land of opportunity in two different ways. First, scenes in the United States (distinct from scenes filmed at the border) are filmed during the day in clear, sunny weather. Clean landscapes are filmed without any moving camera effects, leaving the United States unfiltered and pristine. Second, all the U.S. landscapes depicted on the show are full of green foliage and bustling with people and goods. The United States is alive: supported by natural abundance and a hardworking citizenry.

The Mexico side of the border is shown in stark contrast. While the camera never crosses into Mexico, the camera films scenes from the United States, looking across the border onto Mexican landscapes that are brown, dusty, and dilapidated: both the depicted partly demolished buildings and lots of land are empty of goods and people. While patrolling the border, the camera, in Episode Four of Season One “City Under Siege” pans from the U.S. side to the Mexico side. Specifically in that episode, the camera pans to the Mexico side of the border filming a woman in a chair holding a baby outside of a trailer that is amongst a few other trailer homes that appear to be randomly strewn about a brown and desolate landscape. The use of a brown landscape ties immigrant’s skin color to the lack of prosperity possible in an unfertile land. The title and camera work go hand-in-hand to reinforce a U.S. city under siege by a Mexican way of life that is desolate, barren, brown, and poor.

Border Wars obfuscates Mexico by filming through or over a fence. We can only see Mexico through the border. The few times it is shown without a fence, camera effects prevent viewers from seeing Mexico with any clarity. Mexico is hidden behind a veil of mediated effects and/or framed by the holes in the border, which reinforce its incompleteness and help explain why people would want to cross the border to a place that is depicted in its excess as anything but incomplete. *Border Wars*, throughout the first two seasons, does not observe any form of law policing the Mexico side; the Mexican police are framed as being untrustworthy and corrupt. *Border Wars* depicts Mexican land as inhospitable, desolate, dirty, and lawless: inferior. The people coming from Mexico are depicted as poor, desperate,

and crime ridden: inferior. Both the land and people in their lawless state are inferior and a threat to the U.S.

The U.S.'s civic imaginary is demonstrated as intact, green, organized, and bustling, while Mexico is alienized—shown as inhospitable, desolate, dirty, poor, and crime-ridden. The depiction of the two countries polarizes them to opposing sides of a binary—a binary that has no middleground, and little chance of coming together. In polarizing the two countries, they mutually define each other: what one country is the other cannot be, and vice versa. The U.S. is the place people are literally dying to get into as opposed to Mexico where nobody wants to be or go to. *Border Wars* never depicts people trying to circumvent the legal institution to get into Mexico; it only shows people who have to go back to Mexico because they were caught trying to cross the border or have business there. *Border Wars* frames the United States' civic imaginary as a functioning apparatus that is successfully controlling and providing for its people, while Mexico is alienized and depicted as a failing country with unusable land, filled with desperate people who are criminals willing to take whatever they can get their hands on. Every immigrant the Border Patrol talks to is a suspect. *Border Wars* documents with singular vision what happens when a land of plenty closes its borders and pushes back all that try to cross without a proper piece of paper, on the grounds of governmental logic—perpetuated through the interplay between dominant discourse's alienization of outlaw discourse.

Dominant and Outlaw Discourse. Governmental logic pervades and regulates all thoughts and actions of any Border Patrol agent featured in *Border Wars*. Dominant discourse is produced by governmental logic in the Border Patrol character. Border Patrol agents, informed by a singular logic, operate on the assumption that every agent will act and think the same as any other Border Patrol agent when faced with a border issue. The Border Patrol's reactions to any given situation are pre-scripted by the governmental logic that justifies their job, despite the emotional openness agents feel toward the immigrants. Agents express empathy and sympathy toward the immigrants, but through their actions, their emotional response is displayed as indifference. In Episode Five of Season Two, *Border Wars* tells the story of a brother and sister who tried to cross the border. The immigrants have just been captured and while being interviewed by the agents, tell their story about how they could not find any work in their home country of Honduras, and pooled all the family money to travel two thousand miles to the U.S. to work. They hope to send money to support their aging and ill parents back home. After the Border Patrol agent hears the story, he responds to the camera (the viewer) by admitting he feels sorry for this family, but concludes that he has a job to do and "you just gotta keep going." The agent buries his instinctual emotional response with governmental logic.

He uses dominant discourse to justify sending these people back to a reality that is killing them and their family. The viewer is similarly able to bury their emotional response to free themselves of any guilt they may feel in knowing that if the two Hondurans do not get work, their family members will die of starvation or sickness; coming to the United States was their only hope to survive.

Even though the agents express an emotional openness toward the immigrants looking for work to support their family, empathy and sympathy stop where the legal dominant discourse starts; emotive arguments have no traction in a civic imaginary rooted in rational logic. The Border Patrol character is unified but divergent allowing viewers to align themselves with the agents because, while the viewer is allowed to have divergent positions regarding the immigrants and the border, both agent and citizen are unified by their investment in the legal logic that justifies the construction of the border.

Dominant discourse provides an emotional scapegoat for any agent feeling remorse about the job they do. The agents justify their indifference by claiming that it is not their fault, they are simply acting in accordance with the law. In the episode "Fog of War," an agent says:

The criticism you receive in this job is when people talk to you about undocumented aliens, they are trying to better their life and whatever they have to do, and how can we do that to them, they are another human being...I have to say we look at it like this is America, we do what we have to do to protect her. (Laird, 2010-11)

Any emotional residue an agent has is written off by the belief that they are saving U.S. citizens' lives. Agents also see themselves working to save the lives of fatigued immigrants who have traveled through unimaginably harsh terrain; if the immigrants have not died yet, they will if they are allowed to cross into the U.S. because of the extreme traveling conditions such as being trapped in a trunk on an extremely hot summer day. The harsh terrain immigrants have to negotiate is not only physical, but also embodied by the Border Patrol agents who want nothing to do with them. The sacrifices of the immigrants are more pronounced by the land they have to cross, and further magnified by the indifference of the border agents who continue the cycle of indifference by sending them home to try to cross again.

The dominant discourse in *Border Wars* determines what is broadcasted on the show, preventing any form of outlaw discourse from taking root. On occasion, outlaw discourse in the form of immigrant interviews will emerge briefly. When these brief moments happen, an agent immediately frames them. By immediately framing the outlaw discourse, *Border Wars* makes it containable; once the discourse has been contained into a box, it is easily disposable. When a captured immigrant is asked why he came, he responds in the episode "Dirty Money":

I have my wife pregnant. I come back. I need to come back. I have two sons. One daughter and my sons. You have family, you understand, you know? You have wives, daughters, sons. It's natural.
(Laird, 2010-11)

The immigrant's discourse is considered outlaw because it is predicated on human need and assumes a natural life is one where law does not obstruct people from

being with their families. The immigrant removes the civic imaginary as the governing apparatus of people and replaces it with the love people have for one another. But before this outlaw rhetoric can allow us to cross the border, it is processed and framed by *Border Wars*. The camera cuts to an agent who is explaining how he does his job when faced with people who just want to work and be with their family: “You hear the stories of the good people, but you have to be numb to it because if you let that get to you, you’re not going to be able to do your job.” The agent’s response privileges the laws that justify border protection over securing the lives of the immigrants.

Viewers who are briefly moved by the plight of desperate people in need of hope, quickly learn how to process their emotion: bury it. The agent reframes the immigrants’ plight by shifting the attention from an emotive appeal to a legal appeal—centered in the roots of the civic imaginary to keep the bounded and ordered people of the U.S. safe from any outside influence of difference. When the viewer, pre-conditioned to Western forms of argumentation that privilege rational logic over emotional appeals, accepts the agent’s rationale, they also accept that the immigrants should be policed and the Border Patrol should do the policing. Humanity in need is decentered and pushed away when the border itself, its construction, and its enforcing tactics are justified. Western rational logic contains and boxes the possibility of difference by framing it as a threat to not only the U.S., but also to the individual viewer. An open border would throw the identity of a U.S. citizen in turmoil. A more open border would mean that U.S. citizens would have to

have a more open identity, which would mean that they would have to constantly keep re-evaluating their own identity in relation to the constantly changing membership comprising the U.S. civic imaginary. An open border would compromise the entirety of the civic imaginary project.

Borderlands. An open border, or borderland, would undermine the civic imaginary. The civic imaginary, in order to exist, requires borders that are closely regulated. A tightly regulated border prevents humans from becoming both/and, and forces them to remain either/or. Even though each immigrant carries with them parts of their homeland as they cross the border, the tightly-regulated border prevents immigrants from displaying their parts of their homeland; as the immigrant crosses the border, they pull part of Mexico into the United States, but since they need to remain undetected, they keep to themselves and keep the Mexico they brought with them muted in hopes of passing as a U.S. citizen. The borderland that is created differs from the one Anzaldua proposes. Anzaldua conceptualizes borderlands as a productive space where “creating a new... way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave...creates a new consciousness” (Anzaldua, 1999, p.101-2). The borderland, and the possibility of its existence, that produces the new consciousness Anzaldua describes does not exist in *Border Wars*.

Borderlands, as they appear in *Border Wars*, are not spaces where cultures rub up against each other in a productive manner, nor do they explicitly offer the possibility of the new way Anzaldua describes. The separate sides of the border are

kept separate and buffered by a place the border agents have coined as No Man's Land. No Man's Land is a space between the primary and secondary fences that separate Mexico from the United States. The U.S. closely monitors this borderland, making sure people stay out of it. The borderland's possibility to unite is usurped by the U.S. Before a borderland has a chance to flourish, it is divided and co-opted by the U.S. government.

The primary way the U.S. has stigmatized the borderland is in naming it: No Man's Land. No Man's Land is the stretch of land that buffers the U.S. from Mexico by placing another fence one hundred fifty feet from the actual border fence. The land in between the two fences is devoid of human activity; No Man's Land is wide enough to prevent U.S. and Mexican citizens from having the chance to engage one another or discuss and celebrate their differences. By stigmatizing the borderland, they have hindered any positive associations with mixing and uniting that may have grown had the border not been built; the U.S. squelched the possibility of an organic borderland taking any form along the border. Instead, the U.S. has relocated the borderland further into the U.S.'s interior, making it diffused and disparate in the cities and towns near the border, which prevents the borderland from taking shape and forming a movement to open the border wider. The borderland, when pushed deep into the city, never crystalizes, therefore the borderland ceases to exist, making it imperceptible to, and thus made imperceptible by, *Border Wars'* cameras.

The borderland is not always a free place of play that is continuously shape shifting in relation to its influences as Anzaldua described. Instead, the borderland

between the U.S. and Mexico is very controlled and carefully guarded. The U.S. does not allow any space for the immigrant, making the borderland too narrow to occupy; the Border Patrol has regulated the borderland, preventing it from changing dimension and color in order to keep it a static black and white No Man's Land—making it either/or, but never both/and.

Conclusion—The Civic Imaginary Divides

The division created by the border is essential to the construction of the civic imaginary. If the border is ruptured, the feedback-loop that shapes civic identity will in turn either collapse or severely weaken. Thus, the civic imaginary strengthens to ensure the security of the border. U.S. citizens have grown accustomed to the life that is shaped by the construction of the border. If the border were to collapse, the foundations people build their civic identities around will also collapse. The kind of life the U.S. citizen has come to consider natural relies on a tightly bordered civic imaginary to keep its stability and predictability intact; the U.S. citizen has created a farce in a world that is naturally anything but stable and predictable. The border is a human project of control in an uncontrollable world.

Through viewers' participatory viewing of the show, *Border Wars* invites the viewers to think like the Border Patrol, to be the Border Patrol, and to carry with them in their off-duty time the Border Patrol's governmental logic. *Border Wars* reinforces the same governmental logic that dominates border debates: the law is

the proper means of adjudicating the construction and policing of the Mexico/U.S. political border. If a critical lens is not maintained, the viewer may unknowingly slip into an inflexible pro-border position. The show narrows the field of vision of the viewer by not including different perspectives or by reframing them so that any outlaw discourse is boxed into a manageable container by the dominant discourse.

Border Wars does not suggest a different way, or seriously question the border it represents. Rather, it conditions the viewer for a long border war that has no immediate hope of being resolved—a war that reifies the logics informed by the civic imaginary deeper into the viewer's consciousness with each viewing. As the war rhetoric continues, the contained people grow their roots deeper into the civic imaginary, fusing the citizen identity with a governmental ideology into one way of being—a way of being that allows U.S. citizens to hold up the border as long as the U.S. and its civic imaginary perceive difference and change as a threat. *Border Wars* sets the stage for a seemingly never ending war that will continue to spin faster and harder fueled by new weapons, new tactics, measures, and counter measures continually being crafted by the U.S. to shore up the border: keeping the possibility of hopeful change hopelessly unchanged.

Chapter Five: Through and Around

Border Wars is a cultural artifact that demands critical study because of the potency and reach of its influence in the immigration conversation. The research questions I had initially asked in order to understand the show and how it is situated in the immigration conversation revealed that *Border Wars* does not construct the civic imaginary, but is constructed by and through it. *Border Wars* uses governmental logic to justify and reify its borders; and *Border Wars* keeps outlaw logic from becoming a part of dominant discourse by either calling it into question, undercutting outlaw discourse's power, or displaying outlaw discourse as a dangerous possibility that will destroy the civic imaginary project. *Border Wars* relies heavily on the civic imaginary to inform how it rhetorically frames the border. These questions, while initially compelling before performing a rhetorical critique of *Border Wars*, were outshined by a more interesting and provocative question that the first episode "No End In Sight" asks: Is there an end in sight? *Border Wars* answers this question by showcasing the need for the civic imaginary to remain the primary ordering apparatus by framing a suspicious other as always and already suspect. The civic imaginary of the United States needs Mexico to function; it relies on a Mexico that remains framed as poor and both empty of people and goods to justify the tenacity it uses to keep its borders policed.

The civic imaginary, as an ordering apparatus, needs to maintain tight control of its borders to ensure its continued existence. A fluid border does not allow the civic imaginary to function as an ordering apparatus. As such, the civic

imaginary, to keep tight control, is manifested through the physical border that divides Mexico from the United States in an attempt to ensure its preservation as the dominant form of discourse. The civic imaginary, shaped by dominant discourse, adjudicates citizenry. The citizenry script, written and bordered by dominant discourse, reinscribes the civic imaginary through its everyday performance infinitely bolstering and cementing it into the public consciousness. As time passes, the cement becomes re-cemented and refortified, obscuring the civic imaginary's roots that laid the foundation. As the civic imaginary strengthens, the border continually tightens down on any porousness, preventing any outlaw logic from influencing a new way of conceptualizing citizenry.

Border Wars is a part of the dominant discourse that keeps the United States free from the contaminating outlaw discourse, helps keep the border stable, and assuages citizens from contesting its shape and value. To help stabilize the border, *Border Wars* edits immigrant stories to conform to a pattern that is shaped by dominant discourse, which is expressed through the Border Agent's perspective. This singular perspective is woven throughout *Border Wars*, which creates episodes that are indistinguishable from one another—one episode after the other reinforcing only one possible version of the Mexico/U.S. border, and drilling the need for the border, and the agents who police it, into viewers' minds.

The need for the border and agents is further bolstered by *Border Wars'* invitation to viewers to participate in the chases, busts, and rescues seen in the show, which positions the viewer to be an active participant in constructing and

policing the border. The show, providing only particular pieces and tools, limit the possibility of other ways to constitute the border; *Border Wars* controls the kind of border the viewer can create by offering only one possible construction of the border, and by only telling stories that have been reframed and recontextualized by the Border Patrol. Through participatory viewing, the viewer brings the war into their home and continually recreates the border in the shape of the Border Patrol's making.

Border Wars, in bringing the war to the viewer's living room, make the tensions on the border every citizen's problem—not just those actually living along the border. *Border Wars*, using television—a ubiquitous medium—is able to boost the importance and scale of the war by taking it from one location and spreading it all across the United States; the show brings the war along the border to a national level. Through the continual telling of a singular story about one way of constructing and policing the border, the border is constructed again and again ad infinitum—in television rebroadcasts, internet viewing, DVD viewing, and viewers retelling the stories in *Border Wars* to other citizens, who tell other citizens, so that the stories reach deep into the citizenry.

The ever-strengthening civic imaginary answers the question “Is there an end in sight?” with an emphatic no. There cannot be an end when there is no beginning. Governmental logics remain centered in alienating and exclusionary dominant discourse, because they are prevented from changing and beginning a discourse of inclusion by the uninterrupted reciprocal exchange between citizenry

and the civic imaginary. *Border Wars* centers the civic imaginary as the ordering apparatus that adjudicates who can and cannot be on the United States' side of the border and frames the border as impermeable so the U.S. citizen can maintain the kind of life they have come to consider natural, a life whose stability and predictability relies on a tightly bordered civic imaginary. The U.S. has created a farce of predictable stability in a world that is naturally anything but stable and predictable. The civic imaginary thrives on stability and control of a bordered-land, which ultimately lead to acceptable forms of racism through the alienization of a specific set of people, instead bringing people together and encouraging them to coexist in the kind of borderland Anzaldua describes. As the civic imaginary currently exists, any chance of the productive borderland she described is eradicated by the power imbalance between the U.S. and Mexico. *Border Wars* frames the borderland as No Man's Land—a bordered-land that is divisive instead of unifying.

The Implications of The Civic Imaginary

The civic imaginary has co-opted and stigmatized the borderland—a place where life blossoms and is able to exist in fluidity, and to breathe deeply, without the constriction of a border choking out the possibility of deep change that could foster a new way of life. Through the Border Patrol's strategic renaming of the borderland as No Man's Land, the borderland ceases to exist as a possibility. The strategic renaming does not allow the borderland to reach the public consciousness,

because it too has been alienated out of the dominant discourse. The borderland, since it cannot take root along the border, is pushed into the cities where it becomes diffused and disparate—unable to take any hold as a movement or alternative ordering apparatus. The civic imaginary, as the dominant ordering apparatus, is threatened by any alternative ordering apparatuses, thus it seeks to control and manipulate the borderland. The civic imaginary, keeping the borderland under its control, is able to maintain its status as the only way of conceptualizing citizenry. The civic imaginary uses tactics of domination and control to rule the set of people it has contained within its tightly shored up border; the civic imaginary, inextricably imbued in *Border Wars*, uses media representations to fix our ideas of immigration and, in doing so, fixes the borders.

The border has become increasingly more fixed as the civic imaginary tightens down with new tactics, weapons, measures, and counter-measures that are continually being refined to stay ahead of the changing tactics immigrants are using to cross the border. The possibility of crossing the border is getting harder and harsher. The physical border has been built to extend into inhospitable desert regions forcing some immigrants to go farther into the unrelenting desert, significantly compounding the difficulty of their journey across the border. The immigrants are faced with danger either way they go—they can stay in their homeland and face possible starvation, persecution, violence, and death, or struggle to live in a place that does not want them; either way, the immigrant is damned. Immigrants are not trying to cross the border because they want to, they are doing it

because they have to: their life compels them to move. This need to live in the United States falls on impermeable and closed hearts, similarly bounded by the same governmental logic that shores up the border. The agents adhere to the law, indifferent to the immigrant plight.

Indifference can be revealed in all jobs, justified by dominant discourse—including mine. I see the same indifference in my coworkers who laugh and poke fun at the people who come in to file their documents. It is especially apparent when a person who is being evicted comes in crying and confused. When they get to the window, they are desperate for any help they can get since they have most likely lost their job and cannot afford any sort of assistance or legal representation. The court rules prevent me, as a clerk, to provide any kind of assistance other than handing the customer a pen, maybe a form, but little-to-no explanation of what is happening to them. My coworkers and I are not allowed to help, even if we know the answer; we are only able to process the documents and make sure they are filled out correctly. After a crying person leaves a clerk's window, sometimes the clerk will laugh with another clerk, mocking the customer for crying over a problem the clerk says "could have been easily fixed if they had paid their rent." Our supervisors advocate displacing any empathy or sympathy we may have toward people crying at our window because it is the person's fault and, as my coworkers often say, "they are idiots for not paying their rent." My coworkers, deeply imbued with governmental logic, strictly adhere to the rules that regulate the information they are allowed to give. The law requires its followers to adhere to it, even when it does

not make sense, which provides people's emotions of guilt in the form of sympathy or empathy a place to be sacrificed: on the alter of the civic imaginary. The governmentally imbued are exempt for taking responsibility for their guilt because the law is infused with dominant discourse, a scapegoat for the civic imaginary.

Going To The Border

Stuck between a discourse of indifference and being conceptually confused and bewildered by the possible malleability of the border that I had long thought to exist a priori, I journeyed to the border to explore where theory meets action. In writing this thesis, the cornerstones anchoring my world and keeping it steady have been called into question; what I knew as left and right began to swim through and around. As a U.S. citizen, even with a critical lens, I felt pulled into the logic of *Border Wars* in subtle and undistinguishable ways. I cannot help but strongly identify with my status as a citizen and the civic imaginary that makes my citizenship meaningful. I know I am pre-conditioned to the show's pro-border rhetoric despite my daily attempts to subvert its control over me. My pre-conditioning to pro-border rhetoric makes it easy for me to slip into an honorary Border Patrol role, leaving behind questions of who has the authority to adjudicate the border. My pre-conditioning to pro-border rhetoric is so complete that as I watched *Border Wars*, I was initially blinded by it; it took numerous visits before I could pull out the rhetorical strategies *Border Wars* used to construct the civic imaginary that was hidden beneath dense layers of dominant discourse.

In all of the episodes, the civic imaginary is not questioned, nor does anybody try to leave it; the civic imaginary was the underlying motivation for what the agents did. In Episode Six of Season Two, I saw some agents patrolling a beach in San Diego, California next to the border. The ocean, moving through and around the border, overtime moved the physical border left and right along an imaginary line. The physical border, pompously marching into the water, becomes porous and open. Shortly after seeing this episode, I went on a trip to San Diego. I started to fantasize about slipping through and around the porous border, making it my first trip in Mexico. Even though crossing the border without regard to the law seems natural to me (after all, California residents do this without thought when we drive into Nevada or Oregon), I wondered what it would mean to cross the civic imaginary through transgressive means: Would I forgo my citizenship?

When my friends and I were in San Diego with nothing to do, I proposed that we go to the border's edge. On our way, I delved deep into my fantasy, running free through and around the fence into Mexico and back again and back again and back again, dizzying myself in the mixing of two lands. As we neared the border, we passed through National City. As I contemplated the naming strategy evident in the signs proclaiming our location, I was reminded of what I would be leaving behind if I did cross, and what I might never see again if I was caught in a legal mess. In all the episodes of *Border Wars* I watched, not one told a story about leaving the civic imaginary. One of the civic imaginary's greatest tricks is to keep hidden the outdoor. I wanted out; I did not want to hear the daily chorus of stamps singing, nor

did I want to see Zura in my line anymore, trying to get her stuff back. I wanted to know what would happen if I left the civic imaginary: Would I be a different person?

As we drove closer to the border, my angst and plans of possible rebellion slowly were replaced with a series of “what-if’s” as we started to see the increased Border Patrol presence. My fantasy of running through and around again and again faded into hopes of sticking at least part of me, a foot or finger, across the border. As we drove into Border Field State Park, I could hear the Border Patrol echoing the stamp song I hear at work, and realized it was them who helped write the cacophony of oppression: a slow number that kept the body still. The Border Patrol, painting the border white with their numerous vehicles along the border, turned the cacophony into that drone of legal judgments that I knew so well. As the familiarity of the discord resonated within, I started to feel anxious about going to the border. I could feel the long arms of the civic imaginary trying to keep my body in while simultaneously planting doubt in my mind. I just wanted some part of my body to leave the U.S. if only for a short time just to see if anything would happen to me: Would I feel different?

Leaving our cars behind, we started our walk to the beach. As we walked, the land spoke to us through a web of fences and paths keeping us in from going out into un-bordered wild lands: the directions to the beach were strict, keeping us well-contained on easily observed roads in the Border Patrol’s panopticon. The trail dropped us on the beach about a half-mile north of the border. As we made our way along the beach, we saw a few animal carcasses and wondered if they had been shot

and left for dead because they lacked documentation: Why are humans the only animal regulated by the border?

The nearer we got to the border, the less I paid attention to everything around me. My fantasy shielded my ears from hearing the drone of judgment; they were scanning for a different frequency that played a song that I could dance to. When we were within sixty yards of the border, my feet quickened as my fantasy ushered me ever nearer. I was preparing my body, mind, and soul for the unknown. Within one hundred fifty feet of the border, I heard the civic imaginary. My friend had heard the Border Patrol honk and, as the civic imaginary moved through him, it cued his own sense of alarm. The Border Patrol's gentle reminder could not penetrate my fantasy of freedom. The agent honked again, provoking the civic imaginary in my friend to again tell me to stop, but I simply replied, "Relax, I'm just going to the border, it's no big deal." He shook his head, and I continued on until the Border Patrol truck swooped down an embankment—siren blaring—and stopped in front of me. I could not deny its powerful call and obediently stopped walking. When I turned to walk back, my friend, seeing that I had tuned back into the civic imaginary said, "I told you we were getting too close." I replied, "Too close to what, more sand?"

Deflated, I walked back to my friends who had long ago stopped, waited, and were watching my encounter with the border. I walked away from the border and slipped back into the civic imaginary: I was afraid of what I did not know. The civic imaginary casts the outlaw discourse of difference in the shadows of the unknown,

giving dominant discourse the run of the land. Feeling frustrated on the edges of shadow, I yearn to resist the invisible power that keeps the possibility of difference in the dark. In questioning an outlet of power, I hope to unnaturalize and destabilize the seemingly a priori power that maintains the border. I asked the agent why he stopped me in hopes of understanding the power that controls me, and he said he is not allowed to let people cross into No Man's Land—a buffer zone that he described as is “neither us nor them.” This is what Anzaldua would suggest is a borderland, but this borderland was devoid of life. This borderland, and the possibility for change, has been co-opted by the Border Patrol, who turned it into a barren space, only fertile for death; the Border Patrol regulates the nothing that grows between them and us.

As I stood on the San Diego beach staring at the physical border in front of me, I looked to the right where the once-proud solid border wall has partially disintegrated—permeated by the ocean, now moving through and around it. I was transfixed by the water's power to move, regardless of what stood before it. It adheres only to the rule of mixing endlessly whatever it touches. If a border-crossing civic imaginary can exist, it occurs to me that water should be its mascot. Water can morph into any state of matter, any state of being: solid, liquid, or gas and despite its ability to shape-shift, it always maintains its sense of self—its variations are always in a state of play. It plays with the boundaries because it knows no boundaries. Water engages borders—sometimes as a part of them—and changes with them as it swims through and around. Water works in synthesis with borders;

as the two blend, they respond to each other morphing into a mutually agreeable new shape. Water damage is not damage at all, but a sign of transformation, a sign of change. I used to yearn for radical change that would upend and destroy the civic imaginary, now I just yearn for a civic imaginary that allows the fluidity of identity and place in the possibility of borderlands.

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