At Home in the Nation: Coloniality, Contested Citizenship and the Structural Embeddedness of Vigilantism and Border Violence along the U-S//Mexico Border

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In this paper, which forms part of my larger dissertation project, I focus on the rise of recent civilian patrols operating on the U-S///Mexico border\(^1\) to interrogate shifting discourses of citizenship and belonging, the persistence of structural racism in/through othering, and some of the mechanisms which I argue uphold these logico-structurally embedded violences. I situate this work in my dissertation—a *longue durée* analysis of the racialized/gendered logics of nations and violence vis-à-vis what Aníbal Quijano has termed “coloniality of power”\(^2\)—where I examine manifestations of violence that we associate with three distinct historical moments and conceptual frames: the frontier, the border and globalization. In the dissertation, I argue that the three distinct manifestations of violence follow an interwoven trajectory rooted in the dominant episteme of colonial the encounter at the end of the 15\(^{th}\) Century.

Briefly “coloniality of power” speaks first to a heterogeneous pattern of power constitutive of modernity, rooted not in 18\(^{th}\) or 19\(^{th}\) century Europe with the advent of industrialization, but in 1492 (Quijano 2000, 535-536) with what liberation philosopher Enrique Dussel has called the “invention of the Americas,” as the condition of possibility or “primitive accumulation” that allowed for a co-temporally “invented” entity of Europe to enter the “industrial age” over two hundred years later (1995, 19-26).\(^3\) Through this shifting of lenses, Dussel thus establishes “that

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\(^{1}\) The usage of this inscription for what is commonly referred as the U.S.-Mexico border is a twofold attempt to politically intervene in the discursive hegemony of both U.S.-Mexico Border Studies discourse and its critiques. First, the dash between the letters ‘U’ and ‘S’ is meant to disrupt the ‘hidden transcript’ that monologically silences dissent and implies a timeless permanence and unity vis-à-vis the term ‘United States’ and its abbreviation. Secondly, it is an attempt to visually voice (protest of) the “triple fence strategy” now in effect in numerous parts of the border via Operation Gatekeeper, while simultaneously acknowledging what Mike Davis and Alessandra Moctezuma term the “third border.” For Davis and Moctezuma, the fist border is the one created through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. The second border is the inland border checkpoints, initiated by the Border Patrol as a “second line of defense.” Lastly, the emergence of private gated communities (and I would add vigilante groups patrolling the border) acts as a “new nativism to create a third border distant from, but complimentary to, the first and second borders.” See Mike Davis and Alessandra Moctezuma, “Policing the Third Border,” *ColorLines* Vol. 2, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 7-12; and Jose Palafox, “Opening Up Borderland Studies: A Review of the U.S.-Mexico Border Militarization Discourse,” *Social Justice* Vol. 27, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 56-72.


\(^{3}\) Enrique Dussel, *Invention of the Americas* (New York: Continuum books, 1995). While not as widely recognized in the United States until recently, several authors throughout Latin America have long engaged with Dussel’s work.
while modernity is undoubtedly a European occurrence, it also originates in a dialectical relation with non-Europe” (15) and has thus always had its underside.\(^4\) Second, it is in/through this initial encounter that the socially and discursively created categories of race as we know them today became the central organizing axis for ordering social relations (Quijano 1993, 170).\(^5\) Third, coloniality maintains that following the “independence movements” in Latin America through the mid-19\(^{th}\) century and of other colonial possessions on through the 1950’s and 1960’s, nations achieved not independence but “colonial independences” as the same colonial patterns of power (along class, race, gendered, sexual lines) remained largely in place in the newly created nations (Quijano 1991, 11).\(^6\) In effect, coloniality today then speaks to the continuation of colonial situations without the presence of formal colonial administrations, but instead to the state/structural and self-administration of a colonial order, operating simultaneously interrelated, yet with respective dynamics, at global, national, and epistemological levels (Quijano 2000, 576). It is situated within this larger frame of coloniality, that this paper makes three distinct but interrelated arguments as they relate to the civilian patrols.

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First, I consider the shifting and gendered discourses of home and nation, by which the national imaginary’s boundaries of belonging are expanded, both legislatively as well as discursively, to create changing narratives about who constitutes the nation/home, but always already in relation to an ‘other’ or as Chantal Mouffe has articulated, a self-affirming \textit{constitutive}

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\(^4\) Walter Mignolo draws from both the work of Aníbal Quijano and Enrique Dussel to explicitly link the two arguments, articulating coloniality as precisely the underside of modernity, and hence the need to speak of a simultaneously “modern/colonial” world. See Walter D. Mignolo, \textit{Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking}. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), ix-x, 17-18.  
outside.⁷ These constitutive outsides have historically included the savage, the slave, the immigrant, to distinguish the “them” from the “we” or what Caribbean philosopher Sylvia Wynter refers to as making sense of the propter nos, the “for our sake”—that is, the for the sake of the nation/race/civilization (47).⁸ While today the “them” of the nation is most commonly defined as “terrorist”, the “them” or constitutive outside against which the border watch groups make sense of their “we-ness” (as American-ness) is increasingly the immigrant (again). In other words, the propter nos, or the “for the sake of the nation” is currently defined in relation to a nebulous terrorist, which along the border has become somewhat synonymous with immigrants or worse yet, in the portrayal of some civilian patrol groups, a metaphorical if not literal collapsing of the latter two into a new form of super-mutant immigrant/terrorist.

Second, through the published and public statements of recent civilian patrols along the border I trace what I argue is an ironic simultaneous triangulated constitutive outside. But in this second case, it is the Minutemen and other civilian patrols, which function as a distinct but related constitutive outside that serves to normalize and naturalize the imagined normative inside of the nation, through their respective discourses of exclusion directed at the primary constitutive outside. By the imagined normative inside I mean what many political scientists, irrespective of partisan leanings, refer to as “middle America”, “mainstream America”, or perhaps most importantly as it relates to the racialized and gendered constructions of the nation, “your average everyday Joe”. Here the argument follows that by painting an image of the civilian patrols as vigilante-like formations, as extremists, as bigots, as racists, there is a double-play by which their “extremism” discursively constitutes them as an “outside” to the “mainstream”. In doing so, the result is an

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⁷ The use of “constitutive outside” is employed here in the way it is used by Chantal Mouffe, where the real or perceived violations of norms serve to reify the very same norms that are being violated. See Chantal Mouffe, The Return of the Political (New York: Verso, 1993).

effective legitimating of a kindler, gentler racism on the “inside,” and by this I am referring to issues of mainstream politics/legislation, such as the recent Sensenbrenner bill now up for consideration and the series of anti-immigrant legislation throughout most of the 1990s.

Lastly, these first two interrelated arguments lead us to a third argument regarding the structural embeddedness of vigilantism and border violence. Through the work of Karl Polanyi, Mark Gravonetter, and particularly with Wayne Cornelius on the “structural embeddedness of demand for labor” and what he separately terms “ethnocultural objection”, but I reframe as a colonial/racial objection, I argue that gendered discourses of home and nation function to reproduce masculinist narratives of nation, property, citizenship and belonging. In other words, discourses of vigilantes patrolling/securing the frontiers from hostiles, the borders from “illegals” or the outer stretches of homeland security (read here Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, etc.) from terrorist attacks “at home” as suggested by George W. Bush, serve the purpose of constructing and legitimating a masculinist rendition of the nation. In each of these instances, the head of the household, imagined as a brave young man (usually white, though no longer exclusively and hence the point of expanding boundaries of inclusion), simultaneously protects his “nation”/territory as he would his home/”property” (read here real estate, wife, children). This scale jumping between discourses of home and nation, which feminist scholars such as Norma Alarcón, Nira Yubal-Davis and Floya Anthias, among others have shown intricately tie notions of nation-building and domesticity, produce myths of the sovereign nations (imagined as internally cohesive and closed systems) as female/home/private realms and their leaders or protectors (from the both real and imagined threats from the outsides of said boundaries) as men/politics/publics. The result thus structurally embeds

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9 For path-breaking elaborations of these positions see Nira Yubal-Davis and Floya Anthias, eds, *Woman-Nation-State*; Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcón and Minoo Moallem, eds, *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*; and, Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tétreault, eds., *Women, State, and Nationalism: At home in the nation?*. 
the political ordering of the world-system along the lines of nation-states, with boundaries to be protected by border (or civilian) patrols, so as to ensure that all the necessary outsides (immigrants, terrorists, other nation/“rapists” (of nations/women), and even “extremists”) stay in “their place” and in doing so ensure that so the insides (nations/women) remain in tact, orderly, secure, sovereign, etc. Mythically constructed as static representations to symbolize “the nation”, Zillah Eisenstein reminds us that “live women, rather than mythic ones, can always subvert this representation and the national boundaries constructed by it” (2000, 42).

I conclude my analysis by positing a challenge to those who wish to confront the constructions and impositions of such representations and asymmetrical binaries in all their relations (gendered, racial, national, etc.). I argue that a shift in approach to such discursive formations is sorely needed. And by this one need look precisely at the concrete study of violence on the border and the minutemen, as a way to bridge what is often posited as another asymmetrical and false binary, the “intellectual/activist” divide. Here I mean the idea that the two are separate realms and that one always necessarily trumps the other. Instead discursive (re)formulations such as those undertaken by the Minutemen illuminate the need for an intellectual/activist engagement, that is, without reifying the two as mutually exclusive.

**Landscapes of War, Then and Now**

Since September 11, 2001 and despite increasing global political and economic integration, violence at nations’ edges, at the United States’ southern border in particular, continues to escalate, necessitating nuanced attention to the continuities that facilitate such seemingly unique violence. With respect to the United States’ “global” War on Terror, the battleground of such war has taken on many fronts. While Afghanistan and Iraq have come to symbolize the landscape of this global violence, Zillah Eisenstein, “Writing bodies on the nation for the globe” in Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tétreault, eds., *Women, State, and Nationalism: At home in the nation?* (London: Routlege, 2000), 35-53.
war, the U-S///Mexico border has also increasingly become a focal point of various politicians and anti-immigrant groups who argue Homeland Security—as part of the same war—requires militarization of the southern border. However, border enforcement and immigration policy generally have been stalled, in part due to George W. Bush’s conflicting sets of supporters—restrictionist, anti-immigrant Republicans such as Pat Buchanan on the one hand, and neoliberal, free trade, business interests that rely on immigrant labor on the other. Official policy has thus been ambivalent in taking a position in either direction, giving rise to populist formations of anti-immigrant civilian patrols lamenting what they call a porous U-S///Mexico border.

The emergence of such civilian patrol groups has also meant an increase in anti-immigrant hostilities, and in some cases, outright physical violence. However, when viewed historically, one sees a continuum emerge: one that geophysically, discursively, as much as bodily, follows a trajectory from early notions of ‘the frontier’ to current images of lawlessness associated with the border in the American imaginary, on through the uneven spoils of globalization that occur in spite of borders said to contain the nation-state (and presumably its violence).

By examining the history of violence in the frontier, as well as the recent patrolling of the U-S///Mexico border by groups such as the Minutemen and the post-9/11 ‘War on Terror” with its “preemptive strike” paradigm in the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, my dissertation asks the following questions: What, if any, are the connections between the violence of the frontier, the ongoing violence on the border and the violence accompanying globalization, particularly in its post-9/11 manifestations? Is there an organizing principle maintaining such violence as genealogically similar? What are the foundations, premises and operative mechanisms of such violences (frontier-border-globalization) and to what end are they mobilized?
Herein, I proceed at length to more contemporary questions regarding the “civilian border patrols”. Namely, what connects contemporary "civilian patrols" to historical incarnations of vigilante formations? How have the civilian patrols facilitated a shift in the rhetoric around the issue of immigration, as it relates to questions of legality, the inability of the state to “control” its borders, property and citizenship? Specifically, how do the patrols “jump scale” (Smith 1992; Mains 2002), shifting between discourses of home and nation to (re)spatialize and obscure constructions of an immigration “problem” (Roy 2003, 475), and therefore its root causes and the possibility of seeking fundamental remedies?

I ask the above questions in relation to the resurgence of anti-immigrant vigilante groups patrolling at the U-S///Mexico border by employing Ananya Roy’s conceptualization of “propertied citizenship” (2003, my emphasis). Similarly, I draw from Mark Granovetter’s elaboration of the concept of “embeddedness” (1985) vis-à-vis Karl Polanyi’s “socially instituted processes” (1957), as well as Wayne Cornelius’ usage of the two in his articulation of the “structural embeddedness” of Mexican labor (1998) to ask, are anti-immigrant vigilante groups and the concomitant violence on the border a structurally embedded feature of geopolitical boundaries, themselves in relation to the world-system? And, if so, how does their presence legitimate a gendered/racial state?

While a right-wing nativist “intelligentsia,” such as Samuel Huntington, Pat Buchanan, and Victor Davis Hanson, has helped fuel the flames of anti-immigrant sentiment, I am mostly interested in interrogating how the “ground troops,” or “Civilian Homeland Defense” as one group calls itself, function to bring about a rearticulation of legality and belonging that extends earlier equations of whiteness and citizenship to reluctantly include those within the nation (“assimilated” Latinos, African Americans) at the expense of those deemed perpetually external to it
It is my contention that “fringe” groups said to exist outside the state—extralegal, extrajudicial elements, such as the Minutemen, vigilante-types—necessarily function as an integral mediating mechanism that allows for the state to posture as neutral in the face of such blatant racism. In other words, vigilantes as fringe elements, in their extremism, are, I argue, themselves a structurally embedded mechanism, a constitutive outside\(^{11}\) that allows for the legitimizing of a presumably moderate inside, the state (White 1993), making it seem tolerable, but nonetheless systemically racist. Lastly, I interrogate how notions of citizenship, traditionally equated with formal membership in nation-states are rearticulated by civilian patrols as propertied citizenship whereby membership is transformed into embodiment of “the (white) American dream” of (home) ownership and “transient,” predominantly dark-bodied immigrants, themselves their own separate sovereigns, become a distinct nation-less/“homeless” constitutive outside, criminalized and equated to thieves and burglars in someone else’s (American) home/nation and therefore seeking undeserved shelter and privileges.

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Drawing from Karl Polanyi’s (1957) work on “socially instituted processes,” Mark Granovetter (1985, 483-487) offers a critique of what he sees as oversocialized and undersocialized considerations of social structures, particularly though not exclusively, economic structures (i.e. the market). Instead Granovetter articulates how structures are constructed from various social networks that function as structurally embedded intermediary mechanisms (between the micro and the macro), and which themselves constitute the necessary sociality of social

\(^{11}\) The use of “constitutive outside” is used here in the way it is used by Chantal Mouffe, where the real or perceived violations of norms serve to reify the very same norms that are being violated (See also Roy 2003, 464). I choose this term to emphasize the racial and othering nature of anti-immigrant hysteria that in my opinion supersedes what Wayne Cornelius has called and “ethnocultural objection” (2002, 180), a term that I feel does not capture the complexity and historicity of anti-immigrant sentiment.
structures even when articulated as purely asocial, as in the case of economists referring to “the market” as an autonomous sphere or political scientists referring to the secular bureaucratic state. Wayne Cornelius (1998) draws on Granovetter to interrogate immigrant labor in California and argues that such labor is “structurally embedded” in the economy by focusing on two issues. Cornelius points to how employee social networks function to recruit new workers with little or no effort on the part of employers and to the role of immigrant entrepreneurs’ practices of hiring from a predominantly immigrant labor pool. In both cases, the demand/supply of immigrant labor, Cornelius argues, remains steady and largely unaffected during fluctuations in the economy (1998, 125-128). While conceding that historically major changes in the economy have affected migrant labor pools, Cornelius suggests recent social networks of immigrant workers and their relationships with (largely) immigrant employers dependent on such labor are “structurally embedded” and as such not dependent on the economy.

A corollary to Cornelius’ argument made only four years later, although not explicitly articulated as such by him, follows that there is an “ethnocultural objection” to immigrants that exists and is itself not subject to shifts in “the market,” but dependent on “noneconomic factors (especially ethnicity, language and culture)” (2002, 165, 180 original emphasis). In other words, anti-immigrant sentiment is around not just in times of economic hardships, but due to a rejection of migrants more generally. Thus, it is from this engagement with structural embeddedness and ethnocultural objection, that I extend Cornelius’ argument to say there is something else at play, a dynamic or logic that is itself colonial/racial (as opposed to “ethnocultural”) and is also structurally

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and historically embedded in the United States in/through the colonial/racial social structures that preceded the formal founding of the nation.

Further still, this racial objection doubly incorporates immigrants as a constitutive outside that reinforces the sense of a socially constructed inside, an imagined “we” of the nation (Anderson 1983; Huntington 2004a, 2004b), while simultaneously being dependent on vigilante groups or “racial extremists” on the other end as a distinct form of a constitutive outside whose (potential for) violence functions to legitimate the systemic inside or center (i.e., the State). I trace this argument, by briefly elaborating on the history of a racial exclusion vis-à-vis violence and the role of the frontier as the “out there” that normalized the “here and now” of a colonial enterprise (Little and Sheffield 1983, 796-797) and subsequent nation-building and “progress,” and then turn to the contemporary militarization and violence on the border and the role of civilian patrols such as the Minutemen in maintaining a propertied sense of belonging and citizenship through discourses of nation and home that constitute migrants as outside the home/nation.

**Race, Nation and Citizenship: Frontier History and the Question of Belonging**

The United States prides itself as having been built on the principles of equality, democracy and justice, yet its trajectory has been a living experiment in ethnocentrism, slavery, land theft, violence, and racism (Feagin 2001). Separating themselves from a regime that did not administer their rights, the “founding fathers”—beyond any simple replication of power and privilege—committed atrocities to Native Americans “in the frontier” and Blacks in the colonies worse than any British act on white American colonists (Takaki 1979). Central to that moment of “independence” was a select group from the state militias, referred to as the Minutemen, who were said were to be prepared to fight for the freedom of the early colonists in a minute’s notice were the British troops to arrive. The militias were themselves composed of ‘free able-bodied white
male citizens’ who would provide for an “inherently racial” ‘common defence’ “in the context of slaveholding on the one hand and frontier settlement on the other” (Jacobson 1998, 25). Thus the militias and the Minutemen in particular, alongside the ‘Founding Fathers’, played an important part in the founding of the nation and the accompanying national imaginary thereafter.

Upon independence from Britain however, the colonists continued existing practices of slavery, displacement, exploitation and imperialistic expansionism. As such, Mexicanas/os in the newly established nation to the (then) west-southwest would also come within the clenching grasp of a merciless westward movement; peace, life, and human dignity, all godly attributes said to guide protestant values, yet unheard of in the wake of what was billed as “God’s will”: Manifest Destiny (Horsman 1986). The push west would eventually result in the deaths and removals (to reservations) of many Native peoples, a war with Mexico, and the Census’ declaration of the “end of the frontier” in 1891 following the massacre of hundreds of Lakota women and children at Wounded Knee (Takaki 1979, 263-264). Frederick Jackson Turner’s proclamation of the significance of the frontier is telling, for the frontier, Turner argued, offered “free land” that was once outside the reach or control of the westward moving progress embodied in Euro-american men. He further defined the frontier as “the meeting point between savagery and civilization” (ibid.). The end or taming of the frontier thus signified a savage wilderness or territory “under control”. However, Spanish/Mexican control of lands was itself seen as no control at all.

Attitudes of Anglo superiority over Natives (and dark-bodied Mestizos by extension) that led to the “civilizing” of the frontier, eventually led to usurpation of nearly half of Mexico’s territory at the time, turning many Mexicans that remained into “foreigners” over night. The violence of the frontier, upon which the American character came to define itself (Slotkin 1973; White 1993) was soon complimented and replaced by violence on/across the newly demarcated
border, the geopolitical boundary designating the “limit” of the “tamed” frontier. Many have
documented the history and legacy of antagonism and violence since 1848 on the part of
“marauding Indians” and “Mexican bandits” on the one hand, and Texas Rangers, Border Patrol
and other vigilante-like formations on the other (Mirandé 1987, 112; See also Paredes 1958; De
León, 1983). The war between the U.S. and Mexico and the resulting legacy of antagonism has
since left generations of Mexicans, in both nations, resentful of the U.S., yet economically
dependent on it (Gutierrez 1995). Ironically, the dependence is itself a byproduct of the same US
military, political, economic, and cultural invasions that created and still perpetuate the same
resentment today, and is most evident in the ongoing history of migration between the two nations.

Although historically U.S. national discourse has defined this country as “a nation of
immigrants,” in practice a distinction between legal and illegal immigration is used to keep many
out. This official distinction, as well as the lack thereof (in practice) has become a vital source of
discrimination, particularly for those who enter, or are believed to have entered, the country from
Mexico, “legal” or “illegal”. Despite the questionable effectiveness of current immigration policy,
vis-à-vis Cornelius’ thesis of structural embeddedness, such policies nonetheless ignore the vital
role foreign and trade policy play in creating the conditions abroad that inevitably force people to
migrate. Rather than addressing such economic complexities that protect and serve to benefit U-S
interests, immigrants have been historically designated as friends or foes in the United States’
imaginary according to economic necessities. In times of economic turbulence, immigrants are
targeted as the perpetrators of most societal ills. But as the economies flourish, so does the relative
acceptance of immigrants that provide a source of cheap and exploitable labor. While some point
to the historical discrimination against, for example, the Irish or the “Okies”, as evidence of the
overcoming of differences and eventual inclusion into the dominant society, these cases instead
illuminate the reasons for my rearticulation of “ethnocultural objection” as “colonial/racial objection”. Although Cornelius (2002) has argued that there is an “ethnocultural objection” overriding economic trends, such objection has co-existed with the need and continued use of immigrant labor and political (racial) efficacy in maintaining such order. So even though some groups of people have been historically excluded, only to be later included, the point here is “later-included” groups were excluded on the basis of ‘ethnicity’ or culture (even if articulated as ‘race’), but their inclusion has been precisely through ‘race’ or their racialization as part of (or into) the dominant ‘racial’ group. Meanwhile, for others (non-whites) their rejection has been and continues to be on the basis of ‘race’ as marked on their bodies, thereby limiting their possibilities of ever attaining any “racial inclusion”.

Conversely, while some ‘ethnic’ Latinas/os may be included into dominant society, this usually occurs only to the extent that they are visually/scopically, that is, ‘racially’ white. Such schizophrenia in popular sentiment and policy can have devastating consequences and complicate corresponding immigrant advocate responses.

Nonetheless, in the last five decades following World War II the U-S developed another enemy; a new outside in both fascist Germany, but more substantially and prolonged in communist USSR. However, the subsequent fall of the Soviet Union, which marked the official end of the Cold War, also prompted a search for a newer enemy/outside to rationalize a multi-billion dollar

13 Frantz Fanon’s articulation on the “fact of blackness” as an over-determination “from without” speaks to the ways in which conceptions of race are visually marked on dark-bodies. See Frantz Fanon, Black Skins/White Mask: (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), 116. Similarly, Mary Waters argues “racially” white individuals can choose to accentuate their difference (ethnicity), for example on St. Patrick’s Day or during Oktoberfest, while those racially categorized as non-white do not share the luxury of such “option,” as their bodies are markers of (racial) difference on an everyday basis. See Mary Waters, Ethnic Options: Choosing Ethnic Identity in America (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990).

14 See Daphne Taylor-García, “On Border Subjectivities and Subaltern Temporalities.” Paper Presented at the “Workshop on Philosophy, Theory and Critique in Ethnic Studies,” in association with the “Mapping the Decolonial Turn: Post/Trans-Continental Interventions in Philosophy, Theory and Critique” Conference. University of California, Berkeley April 21-23, 2005 (manuscript in author’s possession). In contrast, see Eva Marie Garroutte, Real Indians: Identity and Survival of Native America (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003) as a nuanced account of the intricacies of Native American identity that while brilliantly interrogating issues of belonging, fails to complicate how one can be ‘ethnically’ Cherokee (or Diné, Lakota, Kurok, etc.) at the same time that one is scopically/racially ‘white’ and therefore benefiting of the historically attendant privileges.
budget for the Defense industry. As the U.S. applauded the toppling of the Berlin Wall in 1989, plans for a similar wall, the 15-foot tall steel-fence that now divides the United States and Mexico, were well underway. Given the importance (to the industry) of maintaining a militarized front, at home—keeping an entire nation fear-striken of an imagined outside evil—and abroad to protect US investments, the “enemy” (of focus) constructed to promote the United States’ “national security” spending became foreign “terrorists” years before the September 11, 2001 attacks (Hernández 1999, 3). Although current national discourse is one of defending against terrorism, the stereotypical image of passionately anti-American, dark-haired, turban wearing, bearded Middle Eastern men accelerated the doors to the targeting of communities of Color and immigrants at large. Despite the Timothy McVeighs, Ted Kazinskys and Nazi insignia-wearing high school kids spraying bullets on campuses across the country it is still the Rodney Kings, Amadou Diallos, those who drive while black (or brown), and increasingly Muslims or Arabs, who “fit the description.” Accordingly, in response to the bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma—a terrorist attack by a US-born, right-wing “extremist”—Congress passed and the President signed into law the Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act in 1996, which among its provisions, targets both legal and illegal immigrants, requiring Immigration officials to detain and deport legal immigrants convicted of felonies, even if they have already served time in prison for the crime (Williams 1996). This law marked the beginning of the current shift and blurring of the anti-immigrant and parallel anti-terrorist discourse.

The post-Cold War “enemy” has thus taken various shapes across the United States, varying geographically, depending on and feeding off of the fears of particular populations. While the “war” has manifested itself in various forms, its primary domestic battleground has become the U-S///Mexico border, where immigrants have become the most visible and viable “enemies” and
defense against terrorism has translated to defending the border. This fear and *nativist* impulse (Perea 1997) has led to a resurgence of vigilante, as well as legislative efforts against immigrants. Despite the build-up of policing that emerged as a centerpiece of Clinton’s administration with policies such as *Operation Hold the Line* in El Paso, Texas (1993) and *Operation Gatekeeper* in San Diego, California (1994), anti-immigrant nativists commonly argue the government has failed to do its job of controlling the border, a “nostalgic narrative,” according to Peter Andreas, that at once imagines a border once “in control” and provides a rallying call to “regain control” (2000, 142). Although the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the parent agency of the Border Patrol, was reorganized as the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) under the Department of Homeland Security and has since become one of the fastest growing federal agencies, some are still not satisfied. The INS budget had nearly tripled between FY 1993 and FY 1999 (from $1.5 billion to $4.2 billion), much of this growth has been targeted toward beefing up the Border Patrol (*Migration News* 1997), which continues to grow. According to Timothy Dunn the Cold War shifted to a low-intensity war at the nation’s edge (1996), yet under the rubric of the War on Terror what some nativists want is a full-scale militarization of the border.

The Border Patrol’s growth over the years has been accompanied by the “help” of several groups of “concerned citizens” some paramilitary in orientation, who have unofficially joined their ranks to assist in “controlling” the border. Whether the *Citizen’s Patrol*, illegally impersonating federal officers as they combed through the San Diego International Airport asking Latinos for their green cards or the reported attacks by the *Border Militia* on unsuspecting, would-be border-crossers east of San Diego, vigilante efforts are on the rise.15 Chris Simcox, co-founder, along with

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Jim Gilchrist, of the Minuteman Project interestingly makes this point: “We are three years post September 11, 2001, and still our government is more concerned with securing the borders of foreign lands than securing the borders of the United States” (Minuteman Civil Defense Corps 2005a). Although the “enemy” has been defined as “terrorists,” presumably Islamic fundamentalists in the United States’ current imaginary, nativist groups have advocated sealing the border to stop illegal immigration as a way of keeping “terrorists” from coming into the country, implicitly blurring the distinctions between the two. The civilian watch group, California Border Watch’s webpage, “Starting Your Own Border Watch Group” exemplifies this trend most clearly:

Starting a Border Watch unit is what every red blooded citizen and legal alien should be doing these days. The number one threat to everything you know and love is not so much overseas anymore. It is a porous border! The enemies of our well being (sic). The destroyers of our children's futures are among us, including Al Qaeda, says the rank and file Border Patrol Agents, says union leader TJ Bonner (sic). . . . Al Qaeda is across the street planning the next slaughter of millions and you sit on your hands and watch "I love Lucy" reruns. You need to be on the border with or without Border Watch. Form your own small or large unit and go for it. (California Border Watch 2005)

The Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, a reorganization of the initial Minuteman Project of 2004 also makes allusions to the threat of terrorism in the rationale for policing the border, while attempting to connect themselves to the Minutemen of 1775:

Minutemen fought valiantly for liberty across New England and, together with the regular Continental Army, brought an end to British tyranny in the Colonies . . . In recent times, the legacy of the Minutemen has been honored by Americans who share a concern for homeland defense. . . . since the infamous terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the term has also been applied to groups of volunteers that seek to protect America’s borders from unwelcome intruders. (Minuteman Civil Defense Corps 2005b)

Note here that while the attempt on the part of Simcox to establish a link to the “original” Minutemen is a move to establish legitimacy, it is also a very particular romanticized notion of such history that is invoked. In a different article on their website, “Minuteman Tim Donnelly” continues: “Terrorists who wish to convert by tyranny all who oppose their warped and radical
version of Islam are free today to walk across the border unchecked with chemical, biological and even nuclear materials. This is an unacceptable level of national security risk in a post-9/11 world” (Minuteman Civil Defense Corps 2005c). Furthermore, anti-immigrant violence since 9/11 has been directed not only at Muslim or Arab immigrants, but Sikhs, Indians, and Latinos, in all cases regardless of nationality or citizenship status who increasingly “fit the description,” and are confused for or assumed to be “terrorists,” giving rise to a new wave of immigrant bashing through perpetuation of the logic of the frontier: fear of the “outside” the “other”, the immigrant, the “terrorist,” and any other “enemy”. While this latest surge of vigilantism has sought to tie itself to the post-9/11 discourse of security and homeland defense, it is not at all new.

**Vigilantism, San Ysidro and the Shifting Discourse of Citizenship**

The rise of recent vigilante groups is occurring at the intersections of reactionary nationalist moments (and movements) whose refusal to “accept” the realities of an increasingly globalized world have galvanized into a populist drive against immigrants. While vigilantes have a long history, both in the United States and Britain, as well as several African and other countries, most notably as civilian groups organized to protect communities from robberies (Abrahams 1987), what distinguishes vigilante groups in the United States is the extralegal activities they have engaged in and their specific historical and popular connection to the idea of the western frontier and accompanying notions of lawlessness (Brown 1975; Burrows 1976; Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1978; Dimsdale [1866] 1953), both real and imagined. While the frontier has been widely written about, the dominant trope has been that of a wilderness, a territory beyond the reach or control of formal judicial and policing boundaries. According to Abrahams, areas “where the long arm of the law . . . is significantly diluted or resisted have a frontier quality” (1998, 24). Similarly, Johnston
has argued that the frontier are territories noted for their “transitory” state, from a “untamed” to a “civilized” form of order and control, as well as between other forms of “social transition” (1996, 796-797). To such spatial definitions, Melbin has added the idea of a temporal frontier vis-à-vis the eventual “settling” of extended hours of the night, upon the end of the settling of territorial frontiers (1978, 5-6). Lastly, Slotkin has theorized the frontier, and the hunter-hero as mythical tropes constituted in and through violence for the purposes of a regenerative vindication of the racialized expansionism of the “pioneers” (1973). Nevertheless, Abrahams points to the role vigilantes had as securing the frontier from “hostiles” in the 18th and 19th Century (1998, 78).

Interestingly, vigilante groups also had a significant presence in the U.S. Southwest in the years immediately following the 1848 acquisition of more than half of Mexico (Mirandé 1987, 100-116), particularly in Gold Rush California (Senkewicz 1985; Myers Myers 1966) and Texas (De León 1983, 30-33).

Vigilantism, at times considered “self-help criminal justice” (Little and Sheffield, 1983, 797) has largely been about maintaining certain social orders; the question is which social order and in whose interests? (Abrahams, 1998, 74-79) In San Diego, one of the first vigilante formations in the last couple decades can be traced to Ku Klux Klan figureheads, Tom Metzger and David Duke’s Klan Border Watch in 1977 (Novick 1995, 168). Both Metzger (Omi and Winant 1990) and Duke would eventually run for public office. Various other “Light up the Border” groups would follow Klan Border Watch’s lead and form groups of their own through the 1980’s and 1990’s. Legislatively, passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986 granted amnesty to nearly 3 million undocumented immigrants, but in 1994 a backlash would emerge and California’s Proposition 187 focusing on immigrants as the cause of economic burden would pass. Paraded as a stop to illegal immigration, Proposition 187 would have done nothing to
curb immigration, but rather increase and justify the official labeling of Latinos as “suspects.” A related “Good Fences Make Good Neighbors” rally organized by a group American Patrol in early 1997 placed Confederate flags hovering over the 15-foot tall steel border fence in San Ysidro (personal observation) as rally goers shouted down counter-demonstrators “Go back to the stinking swamps that you came from you stinking cockroaches,” a line now memorialized in the documentary *New World Border* (Peek Media, 2001).

The latest efforts, galvanized initially by the Barnett Brothers and company of Arizona, a group of armed ranchers claiming to be protecting their properties from invading hordes’ of undocumented migrants by holding them at gunpoint and later under the banner of the Minuteman Project, under the leadership of Jim Gilchrist and Chris Simcox in California (Southern Poverty Law Center 2005a, 2005b). The Minuteman Project would be later reorganized as the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps, yet it helped spawn vigilante groupings of various sorts, which have been emerging in various parts of the border and internally in states far removed from the nations’ borders such as Tennessee and South Carolina. Most recently, Minutemen chapters have also attempted to patrol the Northern border with Canada, in the states of Vermont, Montana and Washington in particular (Fahrenthold 2005). However, neither their efforts on the southern or northern borders have proved as successful as claimed, as noted by a dismal showing at the San Ysidro//Tijuana border on September 16, 2005 (Bennett 2005). While claiming over 400 supporters would be present, the group Friends of the Border Patrol eventually cancelled their activities planned for that weekend when only about 20 volunteers showed up.

One crucial distinction that the current Minuteman craze has from previous vigilante groups is their carefully crafted discourse, as noted by a recent American Civil Liberties Union, American Friends Service Committee and Project Witness documentary, *Rights on the line:*
The Minutemen have gone to great lengths to appear mainstream, citing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and John F. Kennedy for instance on their homepage: “Today, we need a nation of Minutemen, citizens who are not only prepared to take arms, but citizens who regard the preservation of freedom as the basic purpose of their daily life. - John F Kennedy” (Minuteman Civilian Defense Corps 2005a). They have additionally embraced a language of benevolence towards immigrants in their campaigns against them:

> We Minutemen are not content with a solution that rewards those who capitalize on the misery of others. But the status quo is good enough for the so-called “human rights activists” who are not offended when people are treated no better than chattel. When Minutemen stand against the open borders coalition, we stand against systematic rape, abuse and exploitation of our fellow human beings. We bring water and food to those who are dying in the desert. We did not invite them, others did; but we will not abandon them to die as their enslavers do (Minuteman Civilian Defense Corps 2005c).

The language of compassion for immigrants has been accompanied by an inclusive discourse claiming acceptance and concern for other American “minorities”: “Something has to be done about the unsecured border,” said one speaker. “Take back Los Angeles block by block. They're going to run all the Americans out of there, Blacks, and whites, everybody who is not Hispanic and there are a lot of good American Hispanics who feel the same way I do.” (Johnson 2005). The issue of belonging thus inevitably is brought back to a rearticulation of citizenship as one of ownership. Taking back Los Angeles “block by block” marks a jumping of scale from the nation to the neighborhood, in which the “sanctity” of the home and its surrounding blocks must be protected at all costs.

The discourse of home and immigration as home invasion is more evident in the following comments by Minutemen supporter John Main at a Sacramento rally in support of a California Border Police initiative: “you keep your door locked, if you have a welcome mat, that means you

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16 The documentary and related materials are available online through Project Witness at the following URL: <http://www.witness.org/option,com_rightsalert/Itemid,178/task,view/alert_id,43/>. 
have a right to choose who comes in and who doesn’t” (Sacramento Bee 2005). California Border Watch leader Britt Craig echoed the above sentiments: “It's a matter of sovereignty,” said Mr. Craig, . . . “If you don't claim your right to real estate, you lose it” (Washington Times 2005). While the border has become the spatial manifestation of the contest over immigration, it is the broader imagined home (i.e., the nation) that has become the axis of such debate and increasingly violent confrontations on the border. Recently, the Southern Poverty Law Center reported that Sheriff Robert De La Garza of Goliad County, Texas, upon visiting a local offshoot of the Minuteman Project was alarmed at their questions of him as Sheriff. De La Garza recounted how a “trigger happy" crowd’s comments were dominated by questions looking for excuses and justifications to be able to shoot immigrants:

‘They kept talking a lot about shooting illegals, and what they could and couldn't do to make it self-defense of life or property,’ De La Garza said. ‘One woman kept asking, "Well, what if they reach for a rock, can we shoot them then? What if they're on private land? Can we shoot them for trespassing?”’ (2005b)

Barbara Perry points to the victimization and “revictimization” endured by migrants at the hands of both Border Patrol agents and vigilantes alike “because of their particular fears of reporting abuses by civilians and state agents” (2000, 220). It is precisely this victimization and consequent fear of and the inability to seek due remedy that casts migrants, both “legal” and “illegal”, as always outside. Yet their presence to fill the necessary labor needs of the nation, maintains them physically present while socially external, and therefore a constitutive outside that reinforces the imagined nation.

In a similar light, the structural embeddedness of immigrant labor, despite an ethnocultural objection (Cornelius 1998, 2002) has served to normalize an anti-immigrant sentiment and complimentary civilian patrols patrolling such social boundaries, through different historical moments, While occasionally discussed as spontaneous citizen formations, many of the group
leaders and rank and file members are longtime law enforcement officers themselves, or have other related experience and background. In his book on the original Minutemen, David Hackett Fischer states, “The muster of the Minutemen in 1775 was the product of many years of institutional development...it was also the result of careful planning and collective effort. By the time of the Revolution, Massachusetts had been training, drilling, and improving their militia for well over a hundred years” (1994, 151). Similarly, the recent Minuteman Project and all its affiliate and non-affiliate offshoots must not be understood in a vacuum. Instead, like the Vigilance Committees of San Francisco, which sought to overthrow what they saw as a corrupt government, the long-term planning and engagement with mainstream politics reveals that they are not “so outside” or extreme even though constructed as such. A nuanced look at the current “vigilante groups” and the recent run for office of Gilchrist, as well as talk of Simcox also considering running for office strikes of some stunning parallels to the vigilance committees of the 1850’s and of Metzger’s and Duke’s attempts at office in the 1970’s and 1980’s. In fact, an October 11, 2005 Letter to Editor of the Washington Post pointing to the violence the civilian patrols have engaged in or triggered (Hernández 2005), received an immediate response by Simcox four days later (2005) who made an effort to establish how the Minutemen efforts have influenced policymakers to take action, thereby establishing their civic-mindedness and relative “inside” position. Still largely constructed as and considered extremists or outsiders their efforts thus serve to rationalize increasingly anti-immigrant policies in Congress. Susan Mains has argued “While immigration concerns are made more concrete by focusing on physical sites of border crossing, these sites are frequently signifiers for much broader, wide-ranging, and punitive efforts to police national identity” (2002, 211). The efforts of the Minutemen have indeed proven to construe a particular image of national identity by spatializing immigration as solely a border, and therefore, national security issue, at the expense of
a larger (inter)national discussion about the root causes of immigration, not only from Mexico to
the United States, but from the larger Global South to the Global North.

In conclusion, and as a matter of proceeding with a sincere dialogue on race, the border and
immigration, if immigrant advocates continue to discursively construct the racism of vigilante
formations as “extremism” and “outside-ness”, then they too implicitly corroborate in the
legitimating of a corresponding “inside” to which the vigilante groups function as a constitutive
outside; one that differs in form, yet not in substance or in logic. Instead, immigrant advocates
should proceed from the understanding that the so-called “fringe” groups are indeed structurally
embedded in the logic of home/nation—the annoying cousin if you will, but nonetheless a family
member—that informs the broader spectrum of mainstream politics, Democrat, Republican, or
Green, rooted in a western secular liberal episteme of modernity/coloniality.

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