Bordering Populism in Immigration Activism: Outlaw–Civic Discourse in a (Counter)Public

Don Waisanen

This study involved a rhetorical ethnography and textual analyses of an anti-immigration group over a six month period. I argue the collective engaged in a deleterious form of bordering populism, in which communicators continually attack and praise the same targets. This populism was generated by outlaw–civic shifts between marginalized, outsider stances, and more official, general cultural logics. The group demonstrated a fragile, fracturing approach to a public issue, and local, vernacular practices that are employed to bridge pressures for agitative and integrative movement communication in a pluralistic, globalizing environment. Overall, each of the group’s stark rhetorical shifts for and against the government, businesses, and immigrants concurrently crafted and dismantled rhetorical borders, creating an unstable (counter)public forgoing the possibility of democratic communication and community.

Keywords: Bordering Populism; Outlaw–Civic Discourse; (Counter)Public; Immigration Activism; Multi-Methodological Rhetorical Criticism

Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.—Benedict Anderson (1991, p. 6).

From the United States’ inception, the way in which citizens have communicated about immigration has led to mass mobilizations, contributed to the development of particular policies, and shaped the opportunities and constraints that immigrants continue to face. In the late twentieth century, a conservative story of increased immigration reform dominated public discourse (Demo, 2004). The Immigration Act of 1990 and Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of

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1996 restricted immigration into the US far beyond previous periods, and many conservative movements advanced bills like California’s Proposition 187 in 1994, seeking to do away with education, health, and welfare for undocumented migrants (Ono & Sloop, 2002). Strict anti-immigration measures have been heightened in the post-9/11 period, and contentious policies continue to develop, such as Arizona’s strict immigration law requiring aliens to possess registration documents at all times (Christie, 2010).

Yet there are curious tensions within conservatism that challenge simple understandings of how these rhetorical and material borders have been formed. In the last few decades, conservatives have shown support, indifference, and opposition to immigration (see Hurt, 2006). Contrary to what might be expected, many conservative think-tanks and elites opposed policies like Proposition 187, and organizations like the Christian Coalition were “agnostic on the anti-immigration cause” to form inclusive appeals (Diamond, 1996, pp. 155–156). President George W. Bush both developed and thwarted anti-immigration policies during his administration, advocating that a “pro-market party could not argue for strong restrictions on immigration on social and cultural grounds” (Seggar, 2003, pp. 191–192).

Despite the number of right-wing institutions that have not made immigration salient on their agendas, many grassroots movements have formed populist fronts to combat “illegal” immigrants in neighborhoods across America (Diamond, 1996; Jacobson, 2008). With the “emergence of a borderless world,” there are still “a number of critical territorial divides” being drawn (Andreas, 1998–1999, p. 614; see also Castells, 2004), given local nativist eruptions nationwide (Keogan, 2010). From the anti-Catholic Know-Nothing Party of the nineteenth century to the forced repatriation of nearly four-million Mexican immigrants during campaigns like Operation Wetback after World War II, US history is replete with nativist moments (Fry, 2006). Just what kind of movements these are and how they argue about immigration remains a matter for rhetorical inquiry. Rhetorical scholars are currently asking, “what kinds of operations are at play in the construction of borders” in anti-immigration rhetoric (DeChaine, 2009, p. 45; see also Cisneros, 2011)? I ask, furthermore, what communicative theories of populism and publics are enacted by such groups, and what do they portend for democracy?

This study charted the rhetorical workings of an anti-immigration group in California over a six month period. I argue that the group engaged in a deleterious form of bordering populism, in which communicators continually attack and praise the same targets. This populist rhetoric was generated by sequential and simultaneous outlaw–civic shifts between marginalized, outsider stances, and more official, general cultural logics. Bordering populism is conceptualized as an agitative and integrative form of (counter)public rhetoric that simultaneously opens and closes spaces for democratic communication and community. This type of group is caught between a public and a counterpublic, with its “counter” status either advancing or receding depending upon the discursive and nondiscursive choices being made at a particular moment.
Historically speaking, this collective had much in common with prior American nativist movements, but also evidenced a communication style in which the group occupied an interstitial, internally undertheorized space about its relations with external others. The collective’s bordering populism was partly generated by local, enclave rhetoric that could not remain completely enclave relative to a larger, globalizing environment. As much as the group’s discourses established a border against immigrants, that frontier was withdrawn to accommodate needs for new external members, awareness of civic values relating to tolerance, and so on. Overall, each of the group’s stark rhetorical shifts for and against the government, businesses, and immigrants concurrently crafted and dismantled rhetorical borders. This study extends the theoretical scope of Laclau’s (2005, 2006, 2007) ideas about how populism is constructed between logics of equivalence and difference, and Ono and Sloop’s (1995, 2002) work on outlaw and civic discourses in immigration politics. In so doing, this analysis adds a rhetorically grounded understanding of undemocratic populism to Laclau’s theory, and situates outlaw–civic discourse as a (counter)public possibility constituting an unreasoned and unaccountable movement identity.

In the following sections, I first situate anti-immigration discourses as social movement rhetoric, and outline this study’s multimethodological approach. The construct of bordering populism is then defined in relation to Laclau’s (2007) theory of populist formation and Ono and Sloop’s (2002) outlaw–civic discourses. I demonstrate next how bordering populism works (and fails to work) in the anti-immigration group’s outlaw–civic shifts among three targets. Finally, implications are drawn for communication scholarship and public affairs.

Movements, Method, and Conceptual Framework

Anti-immigration groups pose challenges for the literature on social movement rhetoric. The strategies of conservative administrators, elites, and various groups have been explored (Bjork, 1987; Conrad, 1983; King, 1976; Medhurst, 1985; Murphy, 1992; Solomon, 1978, 1979; Warnick, 1977), but further communication research is warranted regarding rhetorics of agitation and control in modern right-wing movements (see Bowers, Ochs, Jensen, & Shultz, 2009). Demo (2004) argues that “the need for scholarly reflection on the logics of immigration policy debate and reporting has never been more pressing” (p. 216), and numerous studies have explored mainstream representations of immigration and immigrants in media and policymaking (Demo, 2005; Flores, 2003; Ono & Sloop, 2002). Yet these controversies are often sanitized through official filters, leaving local, everyday political discourses untouched. The direction of movement scholarship has been to tease out the complex layerings, affective elements, and embodied, performative logics in collectives (Cox & Foust, 2009; Pezullo, 2003). Communication research is thus being called to examine vernacular immigration discourses at the level of local, civil societies (see Hauser, 1998, 1999; Ono & Sloop, 1995, 2002; Sloop & Ono, 1997), with methodologies employing “symbolic proximity” (Matsunaga & Torigoe, 2008, p. 369; see also Chavez, 2007).
As such, I collected and analyzed data produced by an anti-immigration group in California between January and June of 2007. California is a critical place to study immigration, as its "history is rife with examples of antiforeign attitudes" (Moon, 2006, p. 695), and anti-immigration activities in the state have often led to "copycat initiatives" in other states (Jacobson, 2006, p. 651). The group investigated has been highly active in state and national politics over the past two decades, claiming a wide membership that receives frequent emails, newsletters, and invitations to attend its monthly meetings. Though the group described itself as "nonprofit" and "nonpartisan" in its Credo, its political commitments were largely conservative. For example, during the town hall meeting I attended, much time was spent deliberating over which Republican President should be voted into office in 2008.

I examined the group's monthly newsletters, letters to the public, leaflets, flyers, website information, DVDs, and other products. I also spoke with the president of the organization over the phone, and took notes as a participant-observer at two of its monthly meetings. The first was a self-defense meeting (many in the group had been attacked in recent protests, so members created these training sessions). The second was a monthly town hall meeting where members and partners from other organizations came to hear a speaker and discuss immigration. The method of linguistic, extralinguistic, and ethnographic analysis was used to examine how the group constructed itself from multiple perspectives. Once all the data were collected, I conducted a close reading of the texts, searching for patterns of meaning, distinctive moments, and implicit communication theories operating in the discourses.

My main contention is that the collective's communication demonstrated a bordering populist form of outlaw–civic rhetoric. Bordering populism describes discourses continually oscillating between equivalence and difference with others. This concept works with DeChaine's (2009) notion that, in US immigration rhetoric, borders are dynamic, "performative, sociocultural productions" requiring us to examine the "process, practice, and affect of bordering" (p. 45). In this case, bordering populism situated the anti-immigration group in a continuously liminal, unstable space between public and counterpublic. A major project in rhetorical studies has been to ascertain the viability of certain communication forms in contemporary societies (Goodnight, 2007). But as Benson (2009) notes, while the communication discipline often celebrates "discursive, democratic, decisive, deliberative, and diverse" rhetoric, it needs better understandings of the "various practices that act as substitutes, deferrals, approximations or corruptions of such practices" (p. 542; see also Cloud, 2009). Concurrently, populist theories evidence a similar concern.

**Populist Form**

In *On Populist Reason*, Laclau (2007) constructs a theory of populism and collective identity formation as rhetorically constituted through "naming," putting populist reason at the center of political inquiry, and demonstrating how "rhetorical mechanisms ... constitute the anatomy of the social world" (p. 110). He argues
that scholarship has failed to explore populism sufficiently, partly due to conceptual imprecision and the term’s pathological connotations rooted in crowd psychology literatures. Differing from prior approaches, Laclau makes populism a malleable, social logic of performative acts, rather than a type of ideological movement, group with established interests, collective that only finds its footing in negative critique, or core teleology that precedes discourse. Logics are “mode[s] of constructing the social” (p. 78), particularly through “systems of statements . . . drawing a horizon within which some objects are representable while others are excluded” (p. 117).

Laclau argues that populism and social change are linked to the “variable articulation of [logics of] equivalence and difference” between actors and groups (p. 117), with “articulation” referring to partial, “contingent social construction[s]” (p. 224)—or “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 105).³

Critically, populism is a form of articulation and not about specific contents, so that it can be performed on the political left or right (Laclau, 2005, 2007). It is “an area of variations within which a plurality of phenomena could be inscribed,” rather than a determined ideological designation—such that “a broad oscillation [emphasis added] between ideological constellations” is even possible (Laclau, 2007, pp. 175, 196). To create political identity, populism requires enemy constructions (Laclau, 2005). Initially, demands must be articulated by communicators in relation to an established order. Through these demands, an internal frontier is created between the communicators and external target(s), or “something that the totality expels from itself in order to constitute itself” (p. 70). These requests will often find unfulfilled demands from others in relation to the external system(s). In turn, simplifying “equivalential chain(s)” of relations can be established between neighbors, who for instance, may perceive that demands for better healthcare invoke similar demands for better schooling (pp. 73–74). Tensions between logics of difference and equivalence with others are thus necessary to populist identity formation: neither symbolic fullness nor complete revolt characterize collective spaces. Total equivalence would make collective action impossible, as there could be no differences between actors, while total differentiation would fragment a group completely.

What starts as a series of differentiated demands in relation to antagonistic targets will subsequently be made equivalent, as particular demands rise to become synecdochically uniting signifiers. Laclau (2007) calls these “empty signifier[s],” as they create continuity for a series of specific contents, but also represent “an unachievable fullness” (pp. 162, 71). For example, a signifier such as “workers” can represent the particular demands of some communicators, but then go on to represent a collective or people as a whole. Similarly, populist revolutions have been formed around condensed demands for “bread, peace and land” (p. 97), and leaders like Nelson Mandela have embodied many pluralistic demands from a variety of actors. The more extended an equivalential chain, the less it becomes enjoined to the “original particularistic demands” in which it was formed (p. 96), and the emptier the unifying signifier(s) holding the chain together becomes. These particularistic demands are not eliminated, however, so there will be an ongoing tension between
the collective's universalistic symbols and local demands. When some consistency is found in the equivalential bonds emanating from these tensions, populist identity can be structured.

Laclau (2007) further explains that empty signifiers can become unmoored, "floating signifiers" when external institutions or actors take up the various demands established in a populist chain. If empty signifiers become too abstract or vague, they can easily be poached and reappropriated by others. This explains how conservative discourses can come to have populist connotations, such as President Nixon's appeals to middle-Americans who felt marginalized. In other words, forces from beyond a collective's internal frontier can rearticulate and displace an equivalential chain. My approach moves beyond Laclau's point by demonstrating that collectives can also undermine themselves through bordering populism. While poaching from external others can lead to populist problems, a movement's very form of communication can also impair its democratic potentials from within.

Building from Laclau's (2007) scheme and his call for more examples, I contend that the anti-immigration group established an unstable, inconsistent frontier between itself and three antagonistic others, in response to local and global demands for both differentiation and equivalence with these entities. Different than Laclau's analysis of single unifying symbols creating collective identities, the populist frontier in this study was continually constructed and displaced by a slew of linguistic and extralinguistic signifiers both protesting and affirming government, business, and immigrant targets. These signifiers never quite rose to a unifying status, foregoing continuity by failing to address tensions within the group, and between the group and others. Additionally, there is little explanation of the potentially undemocratic, dangerous side of populism in Laclau's analysis, as critics have noted (Erfani, 2007; Panizza, 2006). This essay thus adds to Laclau's framework a theory of unreasoned, unaccountable populism in a group's outlaw-civic discourses.

**Outlaw-Civic Discourses**

The bordering populist form was expressed by the anti-immigration group through outlaw-civic discourses. Ono and Sloop (2002) discuss vernacular, civic, outlaw, and dominant discourses in immigration politics. According to the authors, "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," while "outlaw discourses are those that are incommensurate with the logic of dominant discourses" (p. 14). Separate from official logics, outlaw discourses are equated with everyday, vernacular practices (Sloop & Ono, 1997). Ono and Sloop (2002) draw a further distinction between civic discourses, which represent commitments to "areas of the general culture," and vernacular discourses, which include the language of everyday individuals and communities in "localized contexts" (p. 18).

These four areas can overlap, so that outlaw-vernacular, dominant-vernacular, outlaw-civic, and dominant-civic positions are available as rhetorical positions. Ono
and Sloop (2002) state that an outlaw–civic discourse is always short-lived, as a movement from the local into the broader culture provide three possibilities:

(1) it becomes popularized and hence productively leads to social change, (2) it is disciplined to become 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, or (3) it remains Outlaw, which means it never becomes part of the larger civic discourse, and is, in a sense, remarginalized. (p. 18)

While Ono and Sloop (2002) generally critique dominant–civic discourses, highlight how dominant–vernacular discourses often remain complicit with oppressive dominant logics in society, and attempt to advance progressive outlaw–vernacular discourses, they underestimate the potential functions of outlaw–civic discourse, which they state “is in effect an empty cell” (p. 73).

I find, instead, that bordering populist, outlaw–civic discourse can be a tightrope that communicators walk to find a way between needs for exclusivity and inclusivity (or logics of difference and equivalence), in a pluralistic, globalizing environment. Outlaw–civic discourse can certainly threaten to dissolve a movement into dominant logics or remain on the fringes of public discourse. But at least for the anti-immigration collective in this study, outlaw–civic discourse was the very fragile nexus that both fueled and impaired its movement communication. What might have been a strong public or counterpublic in turn becomes an entity constantly both at odds and in accordance with itself and its environment.

While the idea that a largely conservative collective could engage in outlaw discourse may seem contradictory, Sloop and Ono (1997) make clear that in outlaw discourse the scholar’s focus should be on the discourse, and not the outlaw individual or group. For instance, some individuals I spoke with at the group’s public meetings stressed that their language about immigration would never make it into more official, mainstream publications. Members positioned themselves as both outside and within certain institutional frameworks, and often paradoxically as outlaws for the law. Ono and Sloop (2002) argue that both pro and anti-immigration advocates can be bound up in the same hegemonic, dominant logics, particularly in framing immigrants as economic units rather than human beings. To further deconstruct such processes, the next section demonstrates the (counter)public’s bordering populist, outlaw–civic discourses both against and for the government, businesses, and immigrants.

**Bordering Populism in Anti-Immigration, Outlaw–Civic Discourse**

*Anti-Government, Pro-Government*

Laclau (2007) defines “discourse” as not “something that is essentially restricted to the areas of speech and writing, but any complex of elements in which relations play the constitutive role” (p. 68), so that expressions like “the people” do not reflect ideological expressions, but relations between “social agents” (p. 73). Similarly, bordering populism is a style in which the attentional shifts necessary to deal with
sequential or coexisting rhetorics of such contrasting character (or an articulated "complex of elements") reflect an undertheorized space in regards to pressing relations between members and external others. The anti-immigration (counter)public continually produced rhetorics both protesting and affirming the government. In moving between outlaw and civic stances, in particular, the collective's attention oscillated between vernacular and dominant languages. When I spoke with the president of the organization, the group's desire to work outside of "official discourses" became apparent. I told the president that I was a researcher studying immigration and was quickly corrected, "this issue is not immigration, it's an illegal ... alien ... invasion." I was asked repeatedly not to use the civic-dominant term "immigration."

Yet the word "immigration" was used by members during their meetings, on their website, and across their literature, creating slippage between outlaw and civic commitments. The group drew the term "invasion" from the United States Constitution, as cited in a fax flyer urging President Bush to know, "we are the victims of this invasion and have made every effort to combat it through our Legislative and Judicial channels." The "invasion" signifier oscillated between the "official" constitutional definition and the group's outlaw stretching of the term to fit its attacks against immigrants. During the self-defense meeting, members practiced carrying signs that said "stop illegal immigration [emphasis added]," but they also remained dedicated to a vernacular vocabulary. One man I talked with at the town hall meeting commented, "illegal immigration ... that's like saying Jesus Hitler," querying, "how can you do both?" Official civic discourses were in continuous tension with these outlaw rhetorics.

As such, bordering populism provided the group with a liminal but unaccountable space. Outlaw-civic discourse could be used to avoid confrontation with what it might mean to be outlaw or civic citizens, as members never had to seriously consider what fully committing to one judgment or another portended for themselves and others. The collective's denunciations and endorsements of the government were also constructed by using vernacular, outlaw key phrases in its internal communication, while adhering to more official, civic legalese in external messaging. The group's internal March newsletter chastised "corrupt elected official 'power-mongers'" who had "the blood of innocent[s] ... on THEIR hands." The group engaged in much outlaw rhetoric against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as the goal of (former and then Presidents) "Daddy' Bush, 'Slick Willy' and 'Baby' Bush ... [to advance] a globalist regime governed by elitist tyrants" (March newsletter). At the town hall meeting, the guest speaker also highlighted that in order to create immigration reform, "D.C. ain't going to do it ... we have to take back this country!"

These types of symbols characterized much of the group's communication. In demanding a return to former ideals, members created an internal frontier between the collective and the government. Drawing a forceful divide through an absolutist, capitalized writing style, the Credo of the organization signified that "there is notably little decisive action from Washington," since "WE had no voice" in the "IRRESPONSIBLE IMMIGRATION, ASYLUM AND AMNESTY MANDATES" of
2006–2007. Members construed external structures as abandoning them in the face of a collapsing immigration system. Reappropriating a Kouri (2006) article, one of the collective’s flyers articulated that a Federal Reserve money transfer scheme favoring illegal immigrants, “is being created under the radar and few, if any, political figures are discussing the subject.” As such, the group positioned itself outside dominant governmental logics of immigration reform (like President Bush’s), framing itself as a separate, purist, outlaw grassroots voice (June newsletter).

At the same time, the group’s rhetoric focused on the enforcement of existing laws, siding with governmental forces. The group’s introduction letter to people interested in joining the organization stated that “the US is a nation of law,” and that “immigration is not a racial issue but a legal one.” Members communicated that they would work through civic, existing channels of government, as law-respecting citizens. A newsletter insert reminded the group to work within the system: “Remember: every contact represent[s] 1,000 voters! WE have ’People Power’—USE IT!” (April newsletter). During my time with the collective, members joined with Arizona Congressman Tom Tancredo, who was running for President. The group held a fundraiser for Tancredo in June, arguing he was the “only presidential candidate who has courageously championed enforcement of our existing [emphasis added] immigration laws” (May newsletter). These types of candidates were ideally able to work within the system and the group’s patriotic allegiance to civic structures.

Counterpublics are characterized by an “internal discursive exchange” (Maddux, 2004, p. 302) and “a variety of discourses,” so that “emergent collectives [now] fit less comfortably in a conception based on essential group identity” (Asen, 2000, pp. 433, 438). In its oscillations between public and counterpublic, the anti-immigration collective’s various discourses—constituting sets of relations within and between the group and external others—also demonstrated that some reflective capacity about these emergent identity processes is necessary to a democratic imaginary. Each step of the way, rhetorical borders were crafted and dismantled as the group’s texts both opened and closed spaces for external actors and institutions.

While dissociating themselves from civic institutions, members characterized themselves as a public working with government discourses, inscribing a range of ideological contents within their rhetorics. They put together a legal resolution opposing the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) (a government initiative to consolidate a North American regulatory scheme) with both civic-dominant and outlaw–vernacular language (February newsletter). Outlaw–civic slippage was sometimes even evident between the form and content of the same document. At the town hall meeting, the group distributed an official-looking government petition for the US Secretary of State. Yet the group’s language emphasized “that the SPP is a globalist boondoggle,” which would open the country’s borders to “foreign products” and “force us to live by many of the laws dictated by Canada and Mexico (such as environmental regulations and homosexual marriage) and even lead to a single common currency.” In this way, other populist demands over issues like same-sex marriage surfaced in the group’s equivalential chain, but with little corresponding reflection over these fleeting turns.
Laclau (2007) finds that populist groups are able to move from lower to higher levels of solidarity and political mobilization once “stable system[s] of signification” are constructed (p. 74). Yet the collective’s rhetoric was characterized by an inattentive instability. Populist formations become greater than the sum of their individual parts, but rising to this summative level was made difficult by the constant fissures evidenced in members’ messages. Overall, these shifts between outlaw dissociation and civic association evidenced a struggle to construct a frontier amidst pluralizing conditions. Similarly, the collective advanced outlaw–civic discourse with businesses, which also acted as simultaneous targets and partners.

**Anti-Business, Pro-Business**

Bordering populism toggles between polar extremes in constructing and dismantling a rhetorical border between a movement and its targets. Complicating differences will always exist within equivalential chains (Laclau, 2007, p. 121), but in this group’s efforts to establish a populist frontier, haphazard oscillations between logics of equivalence and difference prevented a consistent “crystallization of a chain of equivalences” (p. 93). In bordering populism, my point is not to mark a specific, linear threshold at which outlaw and civic rhetorics negating and affirming various targets suddenly becomes manifest, but rather to establish how the group’s discursive and nondiscursive environment continually sustained (and fractured) both sequential and coexisting polarities. In this manner, more than simply reasoned, deliberative changes of mind or sudden, warranted realizations related to information acquisition, the continued presence of such opposite messaging between equivalence and difference with external others showed little attention to the very style of unfettered imagining and reasoning for these contrasting judgments.

The (counter)public demonstrated outlaw and civic judgments about businesses, virulently opposing “cheap labor advocates” (Credo), while simultaneously respecting dominant capitalist logics. Businesses were seen as “EVIL GLOBALISTS PLAN[NING] TO ENSLAVE OUR CHILDREN TO ‘NEW WORLD ORDER’ TYRANTS” (January newsletter). In fact, the sheer extent and magnitude of the group’s rhetoric against businesses initially led me to question its generally right-wing alignments. Members feared that collusions between businesses and the government would create a North American Union abolishing US sovereignty, putting the country under foreign government control—an “anti-American scheme” (January newsletter). Continuing these conspiratorial significations, the group believed these machinations involved a “bureaucratic elite” or “Shadow Government.” The collective constructed itself as an outlaw watchdog working for justice against wicked financial forces. A cartoon pasted at the top of the group’s March newsletter summarized its objections, showing a shady looking, caricatured businessman saying, “Keep the Borders Open . . . I Need Cheap Labor,” to a cloaked Dracula figure (representing “Congress”) replying, “Yeah—I Will, ’Cause I Need Cheap Votes!” As the two figures conspire, a city burns in the background. In these all-or-nothing
terms, the group’s characterizations are of businesses as not just mistaken, but evil (see Burke, 1984).

The collective also engaged in many campaigns against corporations like Sears, Chevron, and Microsoft (January newsletter; February newsletter), constructing webs of negative associations and assertions. The collective’s March newsletter devoted a special section to Bank of America giving credit cards “to illegal aliens (aka criminals) with NO social security number,” only tax identification numbers. The newsletter linked these numbers to the “9/11 terrorists,” who allegedly used them to stay in America without detection. Businesses permitting these forms of identification allowed illegal immigrants to “launder their drug money, ‘transfer’ it to either drug cartels OR terrorist cells AND incur credit card debt . . . that US taxpayers will be forced to pay” (March newsletter). The collective’s outlaw rhetoric against businesses was not limited to national and global corporations; a flyer advocating, “Turn in employers who hire illegal aliens,” clarified that “small and large businesses are equally notorious in the hiring of ILLEGAL aliens to avoid paying fair wages to its workers and to criminally evade . . . taxes.” These stark characterizations and attacks left little room for important facts and qualifications about immigration. For instance, immigrants are more likely than native-born Americans to start businesses, and are the source of much skilled wage labor, not just low-skill labor (Masci, 2000). Legal and illegal immigrants also give federal and local governments a net increase in taxes (Briggs & Moore, 1994; Magana & Short, 2002). In using extreme bordering shifts, the movement prevented space for such reasoning.

At the same time, the collective’s discourses praised businesses and dominant capitalist logics. The group exalted virtuous private sector organizations like US Evolutions (February newsletter). It supported American truckers, who enforced the border by bringing citizens’ goods through the proper channels (March, April, and May newsletters). Pitting the honorable truckers in a scene with the starkest contrasts, the group amplified its praise, using the “truckers” signifier to construct a frontier between US citizens and immigrant enemies—along with fear appeals asserting that many immigrants who find their ways into the US could be “diseased” (February newsletter)—a noxious metaphor with a sordid history in the formation of anti-immigration policies. The bordering populist form alternated between the most repugnant and praiseworthy aspects of business, advancing a rigid, black-and-white picture of the US immigration scene.

Rather than constructing what Laclau (2007) calls “empty signifier[s]” (p. 162), which provide a collective with some consistency to unite differing demands against an external order, the group unleashed a slew of unstable outlaw and civic signifiers erecting and collapsing rhetorical borders between itself and its targets. These are the difficulties of populist formations, when “popular identity becomes increasingly full from an extensional point of view, for it represents an ever-larger chain of demands,” it can also become “intentionally poorer, for it has to dispossess itself of particularistic contents in order to embrace social demands which are quite heterogeneous” (p. 96). Yet the collective’s communication not only struggled to condense demands within its frontier, but between itself and external targets. Member comments during meetings
illustrated the tension, ruptures, and uncertainty over the movement’s identity in relation to other organizations, vacillating with a bordering populism communicating “others are out” and “others are in.” Just when the group’s rhetoric reached an outlaw peak at the town hall meeting, a woman stood up and asserted “we’ve got to coalesce with some people.” She explained that the Sierra Club had been good on some immigration issues, implying that members could perhaps join with some of these types of institutions. The group did not appear to treat this as some kind of heresy (for the Sierra Club’s traditional alignment with liberals rather than conservatives), demonstrating needs for both agitation and integration with external others.

Outlaw rhetoric opposing capitalist interests frequently slipped into praise for and attacks against various racial and ethnic groups. A flyer purported that African Americans were “Getting Hosed” by businesses and politicians. Building the collective’s equivalent chain with racial and ethnic demands, the flyer explained that “illegal and illegal immigration has undercut blacks from the jobs they once held in meat plants, service industries and on construction crews” and “in many cases those were union jobs that paid good wages with full benefits. Now those jobs go to illegal aliens who work for pennies above the minimum wage.” During the town hall meeting, a Black man asserted that the federal government was not doing anything about immigration and asked the others “what can we do at the local level?” The speaker at the meeting answered that members should go into all of the “Black churches” and tell them that it’s not just a “White problem.” Focusing on jobs, the movement struggled to find a space between taking outlaw actions against businesses and affirming dominant economic logics providing for citizens’ needs.

But many tensions erupted in the group’s racial, ethnic, and even gendered rhetorics relative to economics, creating an unstable movement identity. In a prominently displayed newspaper at the meetings, an editorial titled “How Multiculturalism Works” explained: “If you’re a white guy in Canada looking for a job, don’t waste your time applying at the federal Department of Public Works. The multiculturalists who run the place have decided to hire only women and minorities” (World watch, 2006, p. 2). Another article explained that “although Americans were never asked if they approved, US political elites have embarked on an ambitious project to alter the ethnic composition of the country” (Immigration’s quiet, 2006, p. 3). Laclau (2007) argues that “the language of a populist discourse ... is always going to be imprecise and fluctuating ... because it tries to operate performatively within a social reality which is to a large extent heterogeneous and fluctuating,” (p. 118) and concludes that these operations should not necessarily carry pejorative connotations. Nonetheless, bordering populism is more than a matter of simple contestation within and between internal and external actors. In its local, vernacular practices, mixed messages abounded, as the group simultaneously communicated a desire to maintain an outlaw status, while asserting civil–civic messages to meet the demands of an increasingly multicultural planet.
Anti-Immigrants, Pro-Immigrants

The collective’s bordering populism became most apparent in its construction of immigrants. Members’ messages demonstrated an incoherent outlaw–civic rhetoric both attacking and praising immigrants, advancing and undermining the group’s populist identity formation. On one side, the group often employed outlaw anti-immigrant discourse through arguments for Anglo monoculture. One of the collective’s flyers related, “we have room for but one flag . . . one language and . . . one sole loyalty . . . to the American people.” Its Credo further construed pluralistic immigration as threatening: “CITIZENS MUST BE MADE AWARE OF THE CLEAR DANGER THAT THE US MAY BECOME A ‘THIRD WORLD’ NATION!” The March newsletter decreed foreigners as prone to “easily accept tyranny.” This language presented a fateful world, where immigrants had little choice but to follow blind and evil impulses. Advanced by an untethered, unreasoning, and ultimately unaccountable bordering populist style of imagining, these dramatic attacks against immigrants emerged with little evidence. Lewellan (2002) writes that “most international First World migration is from one developed country to another, and by far most Third World migrants travel within the Third World” (p. 124). International migration patterns from Latin America have also broadened far beyond unidirectional flows into North America, branching out into many other nations (Durand & Massey, 2010). Ignoring these facts, the group created absolutist scenarios in its characterizations of immigrants, who could advance the “DEATH OF YOUR NATION & POSSIBLE DEATH OF YOUR LOVED ONES!” (April newsletter).

On the other hand, the movement welcomed multicultural difference. Just as Laclau (2007) describes the “whole game of variations” inscribed in populist moments (p. 121), members oscillated between extremes of patriotic bigotry and democratic inclusion. An introduction letter to those interested in the movement underscored civic, pluralistic, and multicultural goals: “we represent citizen groups in many states as well as loyal, law-abiding individual members of every race, ethnicity, political or religious preference throughout our nation.” As often as the group dehumanized and scapegoated immigrants, it supported an official civic discourse embracing them as human beings. Marking the shift between civic and outlaw discourses directly, an outreach flyer established that, “each member is aware that racism, radicalism or bigotry will not be tolerated.” Yet this official, civic line was quickly bypassed in the group’s everyday discourses. A woman at the self-defense training told me she protested against “vicious” immigrants nearly every weekend, stating there were always a minority of “us” at the protests. Disturbingly, she continued, “when you’re out protesting they all come crawling out of the woodwork, it’s like cockroaches multiplying.”

In these vast shifts between civic and outlaw discourses, the (counter)public constructed passive and aggressive signifiers toward immigrants. Struggling to define communicative norms for being exclusive outlaws and inclusive citizens, a trainer at the self-defense meeting vacillated between needs for outlaw force and civil–civic persuasion, stating that while violence might be necessary at times, members should
"resist through reasonable force," cultivating "a softer, gentler response" to possible assailants during protests. Linguistic and extralinguistic significations of both war and peace advanced this incoherent discourse environment. During the town hall meeting, a pastor came to the podium and declared "we need foot soldiers" to oppose illegal immigrants. Similarly, during the group's self-defense meeting, the trainer likened participants to soldiers in the movie "300" against the "10,000." Yet the trainer also quoted King David (from the Bible) saying "I am for peace, but I am prepared for war," skirting a line between integration and agitation.

In fact, bordering populism became most apparent when members approached the concept of "racism" with civil-civic appeal or warlike enthusiasm. Many times in the movement's meetings and literature, members were quick to point out their frustration with being called "racist" for simply trying to enforce national order. The president stated up front at the town hall meeting: "we are not racist . . . we are simply for the rule of law." That there were clearly individuals associated with the group from a variety of races, ethnicities, and backgrounds further created a situational need for these largely pro-immigrant, civic rhetorics. One of the critical tensions in populist formations involves assertions that they are "a part which claims to be the whole" (Laclau, 2007, p. 83). Along this line, movement claims to being a representative microcosm of the world—yet also not inviting of that larger world—reflected an undertheorized space about local and global relations with others. Civic, universalizing arguments coexisted with outlaw logics emphasizing that the collective was also defiantly not the whole. The guest speaker at the town hall meeting stated, "I'm Catholic, and my wife is from Venezuela, but we are losing this country" on the immigration issue—just as a flyer used a testimony from an immigrant who had come to the US legally to underscore the need for a strong border with Mexico.

Despite appeals to multiculturalism, the movement constructed pro-immigrant, civic rhetoric in tandem with visceral, racist logics. This was partly due to the selective way in which Central Americans were equated with being illegal, and hence violent and criminal people (January newsletter). Referring to a CNN transcript, the group negatively associated immigration with race: "illegal aliens . . . have a crime rate that's two and a half times that of white [emphasis added] non-illegal aliens" (March newsletter). The "white" nonillegals in this sentence created a binary comparison with other races, situating "illegal aliens" as a racial/ethnic concept, rather than a purely legal one. The group's February newsletter further related that, "the Internet has been bombarded with a gruesome cavalcade of images depicting Mexico's love of violence . . . victims decapitated and their heads thrown in the streets." The phrase "Mexico's love of violence" demonstrates a populist signifier at once invoking civic concerns about crime and outlaw references to supposed racial and ethnic predispositions. Empirical research has shown how, in conditions that should show no difference between perceptions of individuals of varying ethnic backgrounds, crime serves as a psychological heuristic and "convenient, nonrace based rationale to voice one's prejudice against Mexican immigrants" (Short & Magana, 2002, p. 708). In the group's outlaw-civic discourses, associations such as these ran rampant, but
with little corresponding awareness of these bordering logics both against and for immigrants.

In this outlaw–civic environment, visual and nonvisual symbols sustained and fragmented synecdochic tensions between the group’s pro and anti-immigrant stances. The March newsletter appealed to the need for “every race and ethnicity” to come together in these anti-immigration efforts. But a short film played at the town hall meeting showed a photo of a citizen who had been “shot between the eyes by four illegal immigrants.” The video documented vivid “crimes” committed by aliens on “a daily basis,” with images of angry Latinos marching. Linguistic and extralinguistic signifiers created a web of associations linking immigrants with “evil,” as the short film stated, “one child was beheaded by illegal aliens,” and “one girl with cerebral palsy was raped by illegal aliens!” During the meetings, members reacted strongly to these claims and images. There was a stark juxtaposition between the crowd’s nodding, civil body language and deliberative, multicultural openness when appeals to law and order were made—and the suddenly vivid looks and closed bodily orientations to the violent racial and ethnic appeals. Many in the crowd crossed their arms and shook their heads in response to the film. Many men sitting around me kept repeating the word “shit” to the meeting’s revelations, highlighting the affective, embodied dimensions of the group’s bordering practices.

In interviews with anti-immigration advocates over California’s Proposition 187, Jacobson (2008) found that conservatives were often able to work their way through competing schemas of racial realism (where race is seen as a real phenomenon) and idealistic, color-blind conservatism (where race is seen as a social construction) through bridging strategies reinforced by member activities. In this way, there was a “simultaneous fixation on, and erasure of, the border in respondents’ minds” (p. 48)—a parallel phenomenon to bordering populism. Additionally, I find that a variety of linguistic and extralinguistic practices fuel but also impair the mobilization of such groups through unstable significations oscillating between such extreme (counter)public stances, effectively bypassing public reason and accountability. It is critical to note, for instance, how statistics changed across the collective’s discourses; unshackled from the need for consistent or valid evidence, the group made many sweeping claims.5

Ultimately, failing to create consistent public or counterpublic spaces, as much as the movement’s rhetoric embraced civic pluralism, it created explicit monocular attacks against immigrants. The group’s Credo asserted that illegal immigrants bring “their [pernicious] values and culture to our midst,” and in its April newsletter, a Teddy Roosevelt quote underscored how “there is no room in this country for hyphenated Americans.” Jacobson (2006) established that anti-immigration advocates often make appeals to singular patriotic “allegiance rather than [the deliberative, manifold claims necessary to] community approval” (p. 652). I would add that such groups can also perform bordering populism by threading a language of community approval, multiculturalism, and civic order through anti-immigrant, racist appeals to singular allegiance.
Conclusion

The last several decades of immigration events and policies underscore the serious stakes involved in the creation of social and political borders. Walking a line between a bordered and borderless world, the anti-immigration collective in this study engaged in a deleterious form of bordering populism through outlaw–civic discourses. Between logics of equivalence and difference, outlaw–civic discourse simultaneously crafts and dismantles rhetorical borders, neutering democratic potential when performed in movement communication. There are a number of implications emerging from this investigation.

First, bordering populism forges democratic possibilities by advancing extreme forms of political unity and difference. The anti-immigration movement never removed itself long enough from its liminal, contradictory spaces to be reflective about its practices. Through various embodied, visual, and written choices, the rhetoric vacillated between support and derision of particular targets. There are ongoing debates across disciplines about how to reconcile “the universalizing claims of politics and political theory, and the emphasis on identity/difference in multiculturalism” (Siapera, 2005, p. 499). The collective in this project itself struggled to find a way through this very tension, but by using a form that undermined both unity and difference.

Far from being a short-term discursive possibility (Ono & Sloop, 2002), the anti-immigration group constructed itself between outlaw and civic loyalties. This movement between such differing norms and forms was problematic for the group—creating an elusive community by supporting and castigating others, indicating the group did not entirely know what to do, or how to communicate among themselves and with larger publics. As the communication discipline searches for viable structures of public communication (Hauser & Hegbloom, 2009, p. 480), this case demonstrates a continuously contradictory and fracturing rhetorical pattern held together by only the slightest demands and dependencies. As such, this study adds to Laclau’s (2007) theory one way in which populist formations can be undemocratic.

The need for trust within and across spreading local and global, interdependent networks presents one of the largest challenges facing public deliberation (Hauser & Hegbloom, 2009). The movement in this study wanted to engage in seemingly secure, local–vernacular discourses. The decontextualizing conditions of high modernity (Giddens, 1991), however, also drive cooperation with generalized civic logics. The anti-immigration group’s bordering populist, outlaw–civic discourses displayed oscillations between lifeworlds (see Lewellen, 2002), but to such a degree and between such extremes that its incoherent practice left members with little space for deliberative moderation.

At the center of the group’s efforts there was always a nagging, fleeting sense that other ways of operating exist—that civic tolerance might demand more from the group than strict exclusivist policies, and that not all external persons or institutions might be evil. There was a steady feeling that different choices might even be
pragmatic. These are the difficulties that movements engaging such rhetorics face in a globalizing, increasingly pluralistic age that refuses to let movements close themselves off completely from the world. This study thus spotlights “enclave deliberation” (Sunstein, 2000, p. 113) that had difficulty being completely enclave relative to its external environment.

Ultimately, outlaw—civic discourse was a quick escape valve, a button that could be pressed whenever the group's discourses became too official (e.g., when the group used multicultural, tolerant language that they were also supposed to oppose) or too unofficial (e.g., the desire to not come off as racist, but rather for the rule of law). The vast shifts between these two poles demonstrated that the group never had to seriously consider what leaning in one direction or the other might portend for itself and others—creating an anti-deliberative environment where unmoored, unaccountable claims could easily be made, and avoiding confrontations with the potential meanings of politics, citizenship, and democracy.

Second, the existence of a collective employing bordering populism adds to the literature on public spheres and counterpublics the concept of a (counter)public, a group caught between a public and a counterpublic. Mansbridge (1996) finds counterpublics “oscillate between protected enclaves” and the “broader surroundings in which they can test those ideas against the reigning reality” (p. 57; as cited in Asen & Brouwer, 2001). The direction of counterpublic theory and criticism has thus been toward the development of such concepts, just as Asen (2000) highlights how, “the movement toward multiplicity in public sphere theory belies such binaries” as “consent versus dissent, public versus counter” (p. 444). More so, this (counter)public demonstrates that the types of performances in these internal and external exchanges are critical to the evaluation of such groups.

Bordering populism illustrates more than simply the (re)appropriation of liberal and conservative rhetorics (see Asen, 2009), or emphases upon the “stealing back and forth of symbols” in the movement literature (Burke, 1984, p. 328; Bjork, 1987). This communication form evidences less conscious symbolic appropriations that craft and dismantle inward and outward appeals. Ono and Sloop (1999) write that “processes of assimilation are oppressive and violate democratic principles” (p. 534), particularly with “hierarchicalized, forced socialization to a given hegemony” (p. 534). The diffuse environment of the anti-immigration (counter)public was far more complicated, however, exemplifying both assimilation and rejection.

The group did not appear to be at all conscious of how its public and counterpublic rhetorics both united and fragmented its anti-immigration advocacy. Its contrasting rhetorical practices reproduced dominant-civic logics while remaining, as Ono and Sloop (1995) state, “an embodied practice that is everchanging, active, and constantly motivated by a concern for local conditions and social problems” (p. 23). Additionally, (counter)public oscillations appear similar to what Brummett has described as “bipolar dramatization” in apocalyptic rhetoric (Brummett, 1984, p. 91) and what Huxman has conceived of as a “Tragi-Comic Rhetorical ‘Dance’” (Huxman, 1997, p. 305) between broader cultures and remarginalization in church-state discourses.
Last, the methods used to investigate such discourses are critical to explaining how movement motivations are formed. Individuals join and leave movements for many different reasons, including opportunities for or lacking in expressive ego-fulfillment, sociality, and action warranted by idyllic myths (Asen, 2004; Conrad, 1983; Gregg, 1971). In this study, movement members became further motivated by the inundation of linguistic and extralinguistic signifiers in their immediate environment generated by, and in response to, contingent logics of equivalence and difference. Critically, Laclau (2007) conceives of these populist processes in terms of broad symbol use, such that a populist people can be constructed through words, images, institutions, associations, affects, and other nonverbal practices. This project thus advances the notion that rhetorical critics can gain more broadly informed understandings of collectives by further expanding their notion of what constitutes a "text" (see also Chavez, 2011; Cisneros, 2011)—particularly by adding short ethnographic investigations into their discursive and nondiscursive analyses.

By using a multimethodological approach, I was able to observe how the group drew from a hodgepodge of sources and sayings, never quite following a linear line of thought. From pop culture references and ancient religious texts to bigoted metaphors and assertions about terrorism, many speculations became plausible in a discourse environment where rhetors continually grasped for some certainties amidst the group's contingent but unmindful bordering populism. Furthermore, by conducting a rhetorical criticism on the group's written, visual, and embodied rhetorics, I find that vernacular language is not necessarily a mediator for democratic interchange (contra Hauser, 1999), similar to Howard's (2005, 2008a, 2008b) findings that vernacular discourses should not necessarily be equated with oppressed communities, as they can hybridize and incorporate both institutional and noninstitutional elements.

While this study can only make limited claims regarding the actions of one anti-immigration group, interdisciplinary immigration research provides some evidence that bordering populism or similar communication forms may exist more broadly. Cornelius (2005) finds there are "notable contradictions in the public's belief system about the consequences of immigration"—for instance, that the economy is both hurt and helped by immigration (pp. 777–778). Martin (2003) finds that Americans tend to want immigration levels reduced, but support the admission of refugees, skilled workers, and family (who make up most of US immigration) (p. 132). Immigration has become an increasingly divisive issue among groups such as Latinos as well, who are often split on this issue (Lopez, Morin, & Taylor, 2010). Spotlighting the construction of "illegality" in national discourse, Chavez (2007) concludes that "simultaneous processes of inclusion and exclusion underscore the schizophrenic context within which illegality exists" (p. 193). Jacobson (2008) too notes "the historically schizophrenic way in which the Mexican worker has been characterized, both as lazy and as a pliable, hard worker" (p. 68), just as DeChaine (2009) finds that Minutemen discourses evidence a "too easy slide from communal appeals based on majoritarian values to violent ethnacionalist exhortations" (p. 59). These trends demonstrate that incongruous rationales about immigration permeate the American
consciousness. Future studies of these rhetorical processes should thus remain attentive to the consistent or contradictory claims surrounding immigration and other issues.

In a world of increasingly hybrid citizenships, migrants continue to construct porous transnational identities and communities (Fitzgerald, 2000), which defy the border logics of traditionalist groups. Far from fragmenting America, those fearing the loss of American culture should note that “most of the counties directly north of the Rio Grande have been predominantly Hispanic for decades” (Ellis & Wright, 1998, p. 693). Transnational hybridity is a present condition, not a possible future to guard against. Critics can recognize these social dynamics and “upend essentialisms, undermine stereotypes, and eliminate narrow representations of culture” (Ono & Sloop, 1995, p. 25). As Sloop and Ono (1997) remind us, “by investigating judgments as they occur materially, the critic pulls forth existing logics as a space for the imagination of different ways of operating and talking generally” (pp. 65–66). Toward this end, connecting immigration politics with group practices can shed light on present conditions, demonstrating the everyday rhetorical choices we all make to impair or inspire more democratic futures.

Notes

[1] The Border Patrol increased from 3389 to 6213 agents from 1993 to 1997 alone. This enforcement contrasts with the economic integration implemented between the US and Mexico during the same period (through the North American Free Trade Agreement) (Andreas, 1998–1999). Since 2001, when it was discovered that a number of the 9/11 plane hijackers were illegal immigrants, anti-immigration activism has increased in America (Anti-immigration groups, 2007). This study shares the assumptions of Andreas (2006) and Cornelius (2005)—that illegality is a generated construct, and that America has experienced a decade of failed border policies, which have shuttled spending toward the border and away from labor market regulation, with many negative, unintended effects.

[2] Traditionally, “complaints about unassimilability, dirtiness, backwardness, hostility to American values and institutions, sexual immorality, and criminality have been leveled [by nativist movements] against Irish, German, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, and Latinos, as well as Jews and Catholics” (Jacobson, 2008, p. xxii). Yet the “specific forms” of nativism in each of these moments have differed so that, for instance, exclusionary campaigns have been led against Chinese immigrants, while the threat of German culture led to efforts at Americanization (p. xxii). Fry (2006) distinguishes particular periods and characteristics of nativist movements in the US: from 1600 to 1869 nativists primarily advanced charges of conspiracy and insurrection against Catholics, often prohibiting them from participating in civic culture. Other groups such as Jews, French Huguenots, Irish Protestants, and Germans were also targeted, and similar nativist ruptures correlated with laws like the Alien and Sedition Act of 1798. In the 1850s, movements like the million-plus member Know-Nothing Party rose, but subsequently dissolved among divisions over slavery. From 1860 through 1914, Chinese and Japanese immigrants became the victims of racial nativism, especially on the West Coast in relation to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. Along with several government actions placing more stringent requirements on immigration, the eugenics movement of the 1900s attacked European groups from racialized perspectives. Nativists from World War I through the Great Depression charged Germans with national disloyalty and as dangers to security, a charge that continued with “Red Scare” and anti-Bolshevik discourse in the
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postwar period. Many nativists began to make education and language the focus of initiatives by advocating for literacy standards in national laws. The xenophobic Immigration Act of 1924 placed incredibly restrictive quotas and ancestry-based criteria upon immigrants, especially from Southeastern Europe and other, non-Western and Northern European nations. In the 1970s, nativist groups such as Zero Population Growth and the Federation for American Immigration Reform connected the degradation of the environment and economy with immigration. In the 1980s, the American Immigration Control Foundation focused on “a medley of cultural arguments against immigration,” of which bilingualism was the most prominent—eventually leading 22 states to adopt English-only measures by 1997 (p. 61). Many nativists targeted Arab-Americans in the 1990s and post-September 11th period, and groups like the Minutemen and Carrying Capacity Network continue to promote the creation of cultural and material borders against foreign others (pp. 36–69; Huang, 2008).

Immigrant threat narratives have become part of a “grand tradition of alarmist discourse” in American rhetoric (Chavez, 2008), and in its latest instantiation, a “Latino Threat Narrative” falsely positions Latinos as actively resisting assimilation into the American national community, unlike previous immigrant groups (pp. 2–3). Most importantly, almost every round of nativism in American history has been characterized by varying types of attacks against new immigrants as unfit to live in society though, ironically, from those whose own forebears had been targets of this very same belief (Schrag, 2010).

This definition of articulation resembles the concept's usage in rhetorical and cultural theory—in terms of situated, multiple communicative linkages (Peeples, 2011), and as an emergent discursive, material, networked, and “performativity concept about the ordering of matter and meaning. To articulate is to produce bodies, language, and the space of their relative disposition through shared acts” (Sturme, 2004, p. 257).

Historically, immigrants have been framed as in need of spatial containment, and through subhuman disease, organism, object, natural catastrophe, war, animal, and criminal metaphors (Charteris-Black, 2006; O'Brien, 2003; Ozu & Sloop, 2002). Immigration politics is often subtly constructed through concerns for security, and through national needs for desirable or undesirable fertility and reproduction (Vukov, 2003). Ellis and Wright (1998) found that liberal and conservative uses of “balkanization” metaphors to describe American society, “help sustain an anti-immigrant, pro-Anglo-conformist agenda” (p. 694). Flores (2003) too notes that Mexican immigrants have been portrayed through different framings in American history, from agreeable peon laborers to criminal illegal aliens.

The group's literature and messages at the public meetings seldom provided sources for statistical information. For example, the collective's literature described how “it's confirmed that every day an average of 13 Americans are killed by drunken illegal alien drivers. . . . If you spot a Mexican truck, get away from it ASAP” (March newsletter) (note how the “illegal” reference is also equated with a nation and people group). “An average of 25 Americans are killed every day by illegal aliens” (April newsletter). Yet, in a video shown at the group's town hall meeting, a political figure argued that “12 Americans are killed a day by illegal aliens.” Another point of disagreement concerned how many illegal aliens live in the US. The group also asserted, “many Mexicans lauded Osama bin Laden [sic] for his 9/11 terrorist attack” (February newsletter). Tying together Islamic terrorism with all forms of immigration, the guest speaker and individuals that I spoke with at the town hall meeting also repeated a resonant, key signifier guiding their cause, “since 9/11—27,000 Americans have been killed by illegal aliens.”

References


