

Representing National Identity, Borders, and Migration: Making News in Southern California*

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ABSTRACT: *The US-Mexico border has become both socially and physically symbolic of conflicts about nationalism, identity, mobility and immigration policy. In this paper I explore how these conflicts have been played out in a selection of media representations focusing on the border in Southern California. The goal of this paper is to illustrate that news media representations of immigration and the US-Mexico border rely on certain notions of space, identity and nationalism which are thoroughly embedded in specific constructions of migration and race. To undertake this study I examined a selection of programs from television news media exploring the western section of the US-Mexico border and interviews with San Diego and Los Angeles-based print press journalists. In addition to creating a visual and textual cartography of the nation, news media are also key forums in which alternative stories of nationhood go untold. Given that for many people mainstream media are a key source of information, such forums of representation are significant for framing discussions about national identity and immigration policy. An analysis of media images of immigration in Southern California television news illustrates the need to explore, and problematize, binary representations of borders and nationhood that rely on essentialized concepts of 'native' or 'foreign' in order to have a more complex and nuanced understanding of identity and space.*

Introduction

Media interest in the US-Mexico border and immigration has intensified and waned at different periods, becoming more intense in 1994 in relation to Proposition 187¹; during 1996 in relation to the Presidential elections, bi-lingual

1 Proposition 187 was a California statewide initiative that included the removal of public services to undocumented immigrants and their families (California State Government 1994,

education initiatives, and debates over affirmative action; and in 1998 around Operation Gatekeeper² and growing death rates of undocumented immigrants crossing (and continuing to cross) at increasingly remote areas of the border. As a response to the events of September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington, DC, and as part of the 'War on Terrorism', there has again been a push to increase the presence of US Border Patrol agents and the National Guard at the southern US border. In particular, the Southern California section of the border includes one of the most frequently crossed international boundaries in the world, and as such, has regularly figured in news coverage relating to immigration, policing of the US-Mexico border, and concerns around national security.

The US-Mexico border is, therefore, a contested space, particularly in relation to immigration, in which context it has become both socially and physically symbolic of conflicts about nationalism, sovereignty, mobility and immigration policy (Brimelow, 1995; Chavez, 1984; Coatsworth & Ferrat, 1989; Contee, 1989; Knobel, 1996). An example of this conflicting and contradictory border space can be seen in the images of the border stretching partially into the Pacific Ocean (Figure 1), as trucks – just a few miles east – carry additional materials to help reinforce existing border fences (Figure 2). In this paper I explore how some of these conflicts have been played out in a selection of media representations focusing on the border (particularly in southern San Diego County). The goal of this paper is to illustrate that news media representations of immigration and the US-Mexico border in the context of Southern California rely on certain notions of space, identity and nationalism which are thoroughly embedded in specific constructions of migrant bodies, and which elude the notion of one single narrative of border life or of a 'typical' migrant.

Media stories are an important subject for analysis in that they provide us with the fuel and framework for creating spatial imaginaries of borders, and also

1997, 2000). Widely hailed as anti-immigrant, the proposition passed in an election in 1994, but was held up in lengthy court proceedings due to conflicts with Federal legislation (Davis, 1995; Martinez, 1995).

2 At approximately the same time as Proposition 187, Operation Gatekeeper was put into effect in the Southern San Diego County section of the US-Mexico border (US INS 1998-2000). This border enforcement strategy (which continues to be in effect) was implemented in order to intensify surveillance and arrests of undocumented border crossers. The measure, while visibly reducing the number of people crossing without papers at the westernmost section of the border, has received substantial criticism from immigration advocacy groups stating that it has facilitated an atmosphere of intimidation and discrimination towards Mexicans specifically and Latinos more generally.

pose challenges for creating alternative stories and questioning who assumes the position of narrator (and cartographer). In order to undertake this examination of media representations I begin by exploring concepts of borders and identities, while outlining my theoretical framework and methodology. The second section then examines a selection of programs from television news media exploring the Southern California section of the US-Mexico border. This is then followed by an analysis of interviews with San Diego and Los Angeles-based print press journalists who have been reporting on the border and immigration for several years. I conclude by re-visiting linkages between media images, nationalism and borders, and suggesting ways that this can be used to inform our concepts of space and identity.

Borders in Theory and Practice

The Constitutive Outside: Binary Borders

The US-Mexico border is not only expedient in terms of providing a political rallying point for the proponents and opponents of immigration control, it is also tied into the utilization of binary identities in political debates, i.e., the process by which particular identities have been depicted as either belonging in, or outside of, discourse. To interrogate these binary concepts, this paper is situated within a poststructuralist framework where language and identity are dialectical and constantly changing. Discourses provide a means by which identities and ideologies, such as nationalism, are given meaning, and are constantly reproduced, challenged and negotiated. Poststructuralist theory provides a framework for teasing out the power relations that are embedded in discourses and decentering hegemonic identities and places. To undertake this decentering, poststructuralists such as Derrida (1976, 1988) interrogate the centralizing processes of earlier epistemologies, particularly binary systems that stabilize constructs as comprised of a 'presence' that in the process also assigns a peripheral category, an 'other' or 'absence'. Poststructuralists point out that binary thought permits divisions such as essence and contingency, cause and effect, origin and destination. To unearth these 'foundations', poststructuralists explore the ways in which centers, margins, and boundaries are created to demarcate different discourses and identities, who creates these categories, and for what purpose. In undertaking this exploration, therefore, poststructuralism offers the opportunity to unearth power relations that enable certain groups to discursively (and materially) create categories, i.e., it reveals groups who have the ability and means through which to "name" people and places (Jones & Moss, 1995; Jones & Natter, 1999).

Laclau and Mouffe provide a useful entryway into theorizing identity and space. Building on the work of Foucault, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985: 105) they outline the relationship between articulation and discourse:

We will call *articulation* any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call *discourse*. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call *moments*. By contrast, we will call *element* any difference that is not discursively articulated.

Through this understanding, Laclau and Mouffe continue by explaining that, “in an articulated discursive totality, where every element occupies a differential position – in our terminology, where every *element* has been reduced to a *moment* of that totality – all identity is relational and all relations have a necessary character” (1985: 106). This implies that as identities shift, so too do their relations with each other, and the possibility of closing off and immobilizing identities is never fully realized: “if contingency and articulation are possible, this is because no discursive formation is a sutured totality and the transformation of the elements into moments is never complete” (1985: 106-107). Social identity is “overdetermined” due to multiple signifieds. In addition, as Laclau and Mouffe explain, “society never manages to be identical to itself” because every effort to fix and articulate that identity is intertextual and embedded with meanings that overflow its discursive field (1985: 113). In relation to this study, such a theoretical framework suggests that the categories and representations of ‘immigrant’ and the ‘US-Mexico border’ are imbued with multiple and often conflicting meanings, while at the same time being ‘fixed’ (even if temporarily) through specific processes, such as enforcement of specific legal practices (e.g., through visa requirements and physical border fences).

Shapiro (1997: 6) also notes that nationalist discourses may not consistently represent binary nationalist identities: governments or popular media may create the image of the ‘stranger within’, or a dangerous ‘other’, in order to justify hostility towards documented as well as undocumented residents, yet at the same time institutions encourage immigration in order to service economic needs: “while their representational practices have kept ‘foreign populations’ at a distance conceptually, other practices of industrially and economically advanced states have produced flows of such peoples across state boundaries.” In order to understand the processes and relations that construct and adapt identities, it is important to understand the way these identities, representations and spaces are reformulated in different contexts, such as television news. Media organizations’ attempts to represent and define the categories of migrant

or native is “articulatory” in the sense that is true of “every social practice,” wherein “new differences” are partially fixed through a developing discursive field (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 113-114). The changing representations and meanings assigned to immigrants, for example, illustrate the various ways in which this social group is situated as different (and yet situated *in relation to* other groups).

Methodological Framework

As several geographers have already noted, landscapes and media representations can be read as ‘texts’ (Aitken & Zonn, 1995; Barnes & Duncan, 1991; Duncan & Ley, 1993). Representations provide a cultural map to places and people, and often represent dominant notions of who ‘belongs’ and who is excluded from decision-making processes (Cosgrove & Domosh, 1993; Cresswell, 1996; Pile, 1997; Sibley, 1997). Media images can outline what is considered safe, and areas (both socially and physically) that are considered to be ambiguous terrain (Aitken & Zonn, 1995). At the same time, as Laclau and Mouffe (1985) have noted more generally, mainstream representations are never completely hegemonic. There are always moments, fissures and contradictions in mainstream media, where images and stories that challenge dominant narratives provide an entryway into understanding why and how particular identities and political viewpoints have been privileged. Morley (1992) notes that media texts can be read by different audiences in a variety of ways depending on a range of social factors or “social location,” such as age, class, race, or media literacy, and that “the meaning of the text will be constructed differently according to the discourses (knowledge, prejudices, resistances, etc.) brought to bear by the reader” (Morley 1983: 106). In my analysis of media representations I provide a reading of media texts that attempts to draw out what Morley (1983) refers to as the dominant or “hegemonic” coding of selected news stories, in an effort to illustrate the nationalistic, and sometimes nativist sentiments that frame media subtexts.

In relation to nationalist sentiments and the production of problematic visual texts, the process of privileging through selective news reporting is a particularly significant process. For, as Coutin and Chock (1995) note, a substantial proportion of information about current events comes from television news and daily newspapers. As Cornelius (1982: 9) comments in an analysis of US media coverage of various regions of the world, certain places, particularly Mexico, become demarcated as either allies or enemies, and this is often in relation to specific notions of safety, proximity and “lawlessness”. Bourdon also notes that although journalists may be assessed relative to their ability to present a range of information, the possibility of falling into – or

choosing – familiar narratives that define national identity in relation to immigrants, is common: “Like newspapers, television news has no hesitation in taking up the worrying theme of an ‘invasion’ of the country by refugees” (1995: 26). Although focusing on the context of Europe, Bourdon’s statement illustrates the importance of understanding how the framing of news stories and the identities/places they depict limits the discourses available to the viewer.

Data Selection

Television is one the main sources of widely available information for a broad spectrum of the California public, and became one of the key forums in which conflicts around undocumented immigration were aired during the 1990s in Southern California. Having examined Southern California and national television news coverage of immigration spanning 1994 to 1999, I selected case studies that succinctly illustrate how concepts of gender, race, and nation were utilized during a period of heightened concerns around immigration to California and following the implementation of Operation Gatekeeper.³ Cinematic images of the US-Mexico border, combined with mainstream television reports and local news coverage, were used to examine Proposition 187 and Operation Gatekeeper throughout the larger study of which this study is part. This paper focuses on key news clips because they enable a close reading of the ways in which immigrants and borders were discursively constructed and contested in popular political debates.

I viewed a range of daily recordings of news-related programs (including national and local news) stored in the UCLA Film and Television Archive. Using a purposive sample, I examined a selection of television news programs from local stations that were broadcast on specific dates, beginning with the period prior to and following the vote on Proposition 187 in 1994, and during the implementation of new surveillance technologies and policing strategies in Southern California in 1996 – a Presidential election year in which immigration was a key campaign issue. I also examined television news images during 1998, after Operation Gatekeeper had been in effect for over five years and during a period when advocacy groups were drawing growing attention towards the

3 This paper is also part of a larger project examining changes within US immigration policy in relation to Operation Gatekeeper, nationalist sentiments in California, the role of community organizations and the media in reproducing and challenging representations of borders (see for example, Mains [2000; 2002]). For this study I conducted a range of interviews with community organizations both for and against immigration control in Los Angeles, San Diego and Tijuana.

increased death rates of immigrants crossing in more remote areas of the Southern California section of the border.

The television segments to be examined come from San Diego evening news coverage on Channel 7 (KNSD) and Channel 10 (KGTV) on July 5, 1996, followed by two segments from Channel 8 (KFMB) and Channel 9 (KUSI) local news on July 7, 1996, and then CNN Perspectives, July 1998. These specific clips were selected because they represent a range of prominent social and physical conflicts focusing on immigration in Southern California while also providing the opportunity for a more in-depth analysis of the ways in which immigrant policing and policy practices took place in specific locales. Clips were chosen from this period because the mid to late 1990s were a particularly important time for debates focusing on immigration and the deployment of Operation Gatekeeper, and these examples are representative of some of the key recurring issues in television news coverage of the border. During this time, increased immigration controls, more visible policing, and economic trade were key concerns raised by immigration advocacy and control groups, and addressed regularly in the media (Davis, 2001). These media representations 'map out' the US-Mexico border and the people who inhabit it. This process of mapping occurs at a variety of scales – the national (the 2,000 mile border expanse), state (Northern Mexico/California), local (San Diego/Tijuana), and individual (immigrant/US citizen) levels.

Interviews with journalists were selected for analysis because they provide a range of perspectives from those working within the media industry and represent a diversity of newspapers within Southern California (Coutin & Chock 1995). The newspapers represented are the *San Diego Union Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *La Opinion*, and *La Prensa*. The journalists interviewed were among the key correspondents addressing topics focusing on the US-Mexico border for each publication. In addition, these interviews provided an opportunity to question individuals who were actively involved in producing news stories and, to a certain degree, in setting a news agenda. Along with many other representations of the border, these media mappings are significant in that they guide how certain locations or people are discursively situated, and they are themselves open to varying interpretations.

My goal is not to provide a comprehensive overview of all media coverage of the border, but rather to highlight the different ways in which borders can be discursively produced and the physical implications of these discursive practices. Southern California provides a useful case study for examining media coverage because immigration has been a hotly contested issue in this region and because it includes an area that is one of the busiest border crossing zones between two countries with starkly contrasting economies. California has also – intermittently – struggled with its own identity, both in terms of its position

relative to US Federal immigration policy, and in relation to its physical (and social) neighbor Mexico (Almaguer, 1994; Dwyer, 1994; Martinez, 1988, 1996).

Analysis Interpreting images is just that, interpretation, not the discovery of their 'truth'

(Rose 2001: 2)

I am particularly interested in drawing out the means by which media images are inherently spatial, and construct and mediate geographies. As Jones and Natter (1999: 239) note, "geography is all about texts and images, and these in turn are all about geography. That this assertion is not self-evident reflects the disciplinary processes that heretofore have worked to separate as distinct objects of inquiry, 'space' on the one hand, and 'texts' and 'images,' on the other." My analyses, therefore, seek to illustrate the spatiality of representations and identities, and the ways in which they are part of broader discourses that construct specific concepts of power and place (see also Natter & Jones, 1993).

An analysis of media images of national identities and spaces should draw attention to the ways in which stereotypes of immigrants are utilized within discussions of the border. As Hall (1997: 258) explains, "stereotyping deploys a strategy of 'splitting'. It divides the normal and the acceptable from the abnormal and the unacceptable. It then excludes or expels everything which does not fit, which is different." In order to reinforce a system of representation in which such "splitting" takes place, it is necessary to create distinct boundaries between identities and stereotypes as a means through which identities (and spaces) are narrowly delineated: "So, another feature of stereotyping is its practice of 'closure' and exclusion. It symbolically fixes boundaries, and excludes everything which does not belong" (Hall 1997: 258). As I examine media discourses of immigration, I illustrate the ways in which stereotypes – efforts to construct boundaries around identities and spaces – are strategically deployed and reflect power inequalities. Foucault (1977) notes that discourse is embedded with distinct notions of power and knowledge that are reproduced through an "institutional apparatus" and its technologies. Political representatives and media organizations can be examined as examples of such institutions, and so too can the technologies or techniques used to reinforce sanctioned concepts of identity and space.

Visualizing the Border

In this section I provide examples of a selection of television news coverage of the border. These various texts of the border provide case studies that

contextualize contemporary media representations of immigration and national identity. A key issue in some San Diego evening television news coverage of the US-Mexico border is the threat of impending conflict and tragedy in the region and the nation. This potential conflict is symbolized through the presence of immigrant bodies or through the potential for larger numbers of immigrants in the future. In these newscasts immigrants' bodies are situated as separate and different from the local population, and are depicted as drawing much-needed resources away from US residents. In order to understand these representations in more detail, I provide an overview of each clip I will be examining.⁴

Clip 1 (July 5, 1996):

This is a short Channel 7 (KNSD) News report that focuses on a physical conflict between pro- and anti-immigrant organizations that met on a street in Westwood, Los Angeles during a demonstration. This report shows two groups of largely white populations hitting each other with flags, with one person being taken away on a stretcher as the newscaster announces that six people had been hurt and one hospitalized, while 150 police were sent to the scene. The reporter then asks, "could this happen during the Republican National Convention?"

Clip 2 (July 5, 1996):

The second clip, shown on *Channel 10 News* the same evening as Clip 1, is a special report focusing on Eastern San Diego County, particularly the firefighters based near Otay Mountain. The story begins showing a migrant being helped to safety and then large fires on the mountainside, with the voiceover stating, "Rescues on Otay Mountain, Fires on Otay Mountain." The report then focuses on firefighters rescuing sick migrants who have been attempting to cross the border in the intense summer heat of this rugged terrain. In addition, this piece examines the ways in which such rescues are "taxing [the firefighter] system" due to overtime costs, fires started at immigrant camps, and a 60% increase in emergency calls. An immigrant is then shown being led out of the hills while another drops his head to the ground, as he lies dazed, surrounded by firefighters. The voiceover continues stating, "and it's not only rescues, but the increasing number of fires from immigrant camps that are overloading the system." The piece ends with the reporter stating that a major fire resulting in substantial loss of life is a distinct possibility in the future.

4 The first four clips are less than five minutes long, and clip 5 is an approximately 20-minute segment (of a 50-minutes program titled "Border Patrol", focusing on the California, Arizona and Texas sections of the border).

Clips 3 and 4 (July 7, 1996):

These news clips – both similar in content and focusing on false documentation of border arrests – aired on San Diego’s *Channel 8* and *Channel 9 News* two days after the two segments outlined above. They focus on accusations filed by a Border Patrol agent claiming that officials within the agency had been falsely documenting arrests in order to illustrate how successful Operation Gatekeeper had been as a deterrent to undocumented migrants crossing the border.⁵ These reports depicted reporters interviewing Border Patrol agents who said they knew of no foundation for the complaints, followed by images of helicopters flying over the border and new surveillance equipment, such as night-vision camera scopes. In one story the reporter is shown standing in a suburban San Diego neighborhood pointing to Tijuana on the horizon, and explaining that hundreds of migrants used to pass through residents’ gardens. The reporter then interviews a local (Latino) resident who states that he is unfamiliar with these new allegations against the Border Patrol, but that fewer migrants are running through his neighborhood. The other report focuses on the same topic and depicts Latino men standing as they are viewed through a hole in the border fence, then a Border Patrol agent is shown observing the landscape through binoculars, and finally migrants are shown being arrested.

Clip 5 (July 1998):

The most recent report included in this analysis was aired as part of a *CNN Perspectives* special program focusing on the US Border Patrol, including Operation Gatekeeper and its impacts on Southern San Diego County. This piece begins with the narrator stating that it will focus on the US-Mexico border and “the struggles and successes of the men and women who defend that line” and how this process is “costing the American taxpayers billions of dollars.” The first segment of this story shows some US residents living in Eastern San Diego County who state that their property has become a “freeway” for undocumented immigrants, and describes how they video-record people crossing through their yard. An (Anglo) resident stating that the land is overrun with immigrants asks, “How are we meant to defend ourselves?”, especially when the Border Patrol takes “45 minutes to three days to appear”. The narrator states, however, that this situation is changing since the budget for Border Patrol has been increased.

The report then shifts to the San Ysidro Port of Entry, which is described as “the Ground Zero for Operation Gatekeeper”, particularly in relation to “illegal”

5 After an external investigation undertaken by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), these allegations were declared to be unsubstantiated, although the need to improve communication within different sections of the agency was noted.

immigration and drug trafficking. Cars and people are then shown being searched by customs officials as the voiceover states that the number of people crossing without proper documentation has dropped due to the visibility of agents (see Figure 3). The effectiveness of the Border Patrol is then depicted with videos showing how the border landscape used to appear, with images of large numbers of people running across the border.

In the next segment the report shifts focus, stating that some residents in East San Diego County disagree that the landscape is under control; rather, it is being taken over by the Border Patrol. In this segment a US resident states that the “Border Patrol doesn’t want people caught”, and that the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (US INS) is failing to address the situation appropriately. The narrator then continues stating, “The tide of illegal crossings seems down, but the reasons are not,” and he then explains that there are major draws (e.g., higher paying jobs) that attract people to the US. The story continues by focusing on the technology utilized by the Border Patrol, how the border expands across a vast area, and the controversy surrounding the presence of the US military at the border and the shooting of a Latino youth who was allegedly “mistaken” as an undocumented migrant on the Texas side of the border.

The report then turns to Jacumba in Eastern San Diego County, where the journalists are shown filming and interviewing a number of residents who have been critical of the increased Border Patrol presence. One (Anglo) resident describes the Border Patrol as “being more invasive than the Mexicans themselves”, partially due to the frequent turnover in agents, implying that they rarely know the local population. Residents explain that stores are closing because of this atmosphere of surveillance. Kirk Ellam, who lives and runs a business in the town, takes the camera crew to a border fence to illustrate how easy it is to simply walk back and forth. The crew then hikes over to Jacume on the Mexican side of the border with Ellam, and once in the town, they speak in Spanish with a local store owner who ponders, “We’re putting a wall up and in Berlin they’re tearing it down.”

The final segment shifts to Tijuana, where the border fence divides Friendship Park (which used to be an open bi-national recreation area), a place where one Latino resident comments, “Immigrants of color are not welcome.” The journalists give their cameras to Mexican children so that they can film the reporters looking through the fence. The television crew follows Border Patrol agents at night and discusses their tracking procedures as surveillance intensifies during the evening. Undocumented migrants are then shown being processed through the new Ident system, followed by a reporter explaining that the border area is much harder to control in the wide-open spaces further east. This is followed by journalists interviewing patrol agents working at a road

checkpoint. The segment then closes with a brief flash of each of the various activities that the agents undertake (Figure 7).

To illustrate the narratives and images used in greater detail in these latter scenes of the *CNN Perspectives* broadcast, I include a transcription below (dialogue/narrative in bold):

Voiceover: *Miles away checkpoints are set up to catch people who have escaped earlier detection.*

Image: A large truck pulls up at the checkpoint on a highway in Southern California at night, stops for two Border Patrol (female) agents, and then continues on. Another car pulls up to the checkpoint and an agent looks in the window.

Agent: [To driver] *How you doin' tonight sir? Anything in the (male) back here?*

Image: Agent continues looking in back windows of car. The camera is situated behind the agent.

Driver: *No.*
(male)

Agent: *Great, thank you.*

Image: Car drives out of checkpoint. Image switches to a female video journalist standing conversing with a Border Patrol agent.

Journalist: [To agent] *Generally speaking what are you looking for?*

Agent: [Looking down the road towards camera] *Uh, make eye contact with the drivers. Look at their face, how they're reacting to the checkpoint.*

Image: The camera focuses on an agent attending to an arriving car, and then another agent approaches him, carrying some drivers' licenses.

Agent 2: [To agent at car] *I want you to check this one out.* [Holding (male) out a driver's license] *It's got a notch in the card.*

Agent 2: [Talking to journalist behind camera] *Every once in a while they'll try to run a load through.*

Image: Camera focuses on driver now unlocking car trunk (lighting is dim).

Agent 2: [Talking to journalist behind camera] *And if there's a case that won't hold up in court they'll end up getting turned loose.*

Image: The car trunk is opened and the other agent looks inside. The trunk contains what looks like a blanket in its shop wrapping, some shopping bags.

Agent 2: *But, they'll notch the card to let somebody else know that*

there's been a prior [charge].

Image: The driver closes the trunk and the agent returns the drivers' license.

Agent 2: [To driver] *Gracias.*

Image: The scene then changes: there is a rapid succession of images, combined with up tempo news style music, and a male voiceover (all agents shown in the following images are male).

Voiceover: *Tracking.*

Image: Border patrol agent in car driving parallel to the US-Mexico border fence during the day.

Voiceover: *Patrols.*

Image: Border Patrol agent running with a dog (view from behind).-

Voiceover: *Ground sensors.*

Image: Close up of an agent's foot near a motion sensor. Agent Looking up at (possibly) migrants climbing down from a train at night.

Voiceover: *All these become much harder to deploy when you get to the wide open spaces of the east.*

Image: Aerial view of mountainous desert area to the east (during the day)..(Total length of segment 1 minute 4 seconds)

Analyzing Border Views

From the five clips outlined above three key themes emerge: 1) control of identities/landscapes; 2) immigrants as symbols of conflict and difference; and 3) the 'costs' of immigration. In each of the television representations outlined above, efforts to control both immigrant behavior and the physical landscape in San Diego County are important themes. Immigrant bodies symbolize conflict, despite the fact that many fights over immigration policy and the role of the US Border Patrol have been fought between different US resident organizations (see, for example, Clip 1). At the end of several broadcasts, it is suggested that the conflicts and problems that have been portrayed will eventually move beyond the local and individual level to the border-wide or national scale. In addition, although the media clips depict a focus on observing and removing undocumented immigrants from the border landscape, there also appears to be specific systems of representation that *locate* immigrants, particularly Mexicans, by situating them as *out of place* in the US. Immigrants are marked as *different* from 'regular' US citizens, and because they are viewed as separate from US residents (e.g., through the image of the person in Mexico being viewed through the fence in Clip 4), they are rarely given the opportunity to speak in television broadcasts. The *CNN Perspectives* segment (Clip 5) is one of the limited exceptions to this rule, but even in this instance, as is shown by the transcription above, practices such as notching identity cards are illustrated as a

means by which 'suspicious' border crossers continue to be identified and policed.

During the course of these television broadcasts, no mention is made of what circumstances have pushed people to migrate to the US or how these movements link into broader socio-economic conditions. Although in Clip 5 the reporter mentions that higher paying jobs draw people to the US, what is not discussed are the ways many agricultural, domestic, and service industries rely on migrant labor to sustain their industries (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2002; Martinez, 1996; Mitchell, 1995). Nor do these broadcasts mention that US companies pay workers in Mexico much lower salaries for similar work done in the US. The 'cost' of immigrants, both socially and economically, can also be seen in Clip 2, where the report focuses on the physical and financial burdens to local firefighters and US taxpayers in relation to migrants rescued in the Otay Mountain area. In addition, during this segment the rescuers are distanced from the migrants, with a representative of the former asking, "Ok, how many of *them* have we got here?" [emphasis added].

Images of new developments in surveillance technologies and an increased Border Patrol presence have continued to be prevalent in many television broadcasts addressing the US-Mexico border. Despite challenges to the agency's effectiveness and fairness (e.g., as seen in Clips 3 and 4), these representations of observation and control appear to be an important strategy in reassuring the presumptively Anglo Southern California population that despite continuing problems, the border is still firmly intact: science and technology are heralded as compensatory, able to overcome the Border Patrol agents' inability to control the border. At the same time, images of immigrants frequently seem to dehumanize them: they are often shown as distant figures, in large groups, or having just been arrested. Policing and surveillance are thereby justified relative to the lives of the humans represented.

The assumed 'illegal' status of Latinos shown traveling from Mexico is rarely questioned during the television broadcasts. The narratives and images of immigrants depicted in these reports assume that the people shown do not have appropriate documentation and that this is a common means by which many Mexicans, in particular, cross the border to the US. The CNN clip does also, however, depict Anglo US residents walking across the border, and it shows the proximity and links between residents in both countries. Interestingly, as a San Diego Dialogue (1994) study outlines, the majority of people who travel to the US from Mexico do so to shop and visit tourist sites, with the vast majority of visits being temporary in nature, and contributing substantially to the San Diego economy. These latter images, although far more common in border residents' daily interactions, are rarely depicted in popular news media. As Bailey (1995: 68) comments in a study examining newspaper and television coverage of US-

Mexico relations, “television stresses stories that contain action and vivid imagery – such as gun battles, natural disasters, and violent demonstrations – or dramatic human interest stories, such as hostage situations and rescue operations.” In addition, he points to the limitations in television news coverage, wherein major television channels tend to reproduce similar news stories, therefore limiting alternative forms of reporting (see also Kellner, 1990). This reliance on familiar news narratives can result in the process of splitting and stereotyping that Hall (1997) refers to (mentioned earlier), where individuals who do not fit within mainstream notions of *typical* migrant identities or behavior are excluded from media coverage, and binary oppositional notions of American/Mexican are utilized instead. This process of over generalizing is further fuelled by the restrictive demands of the need to produce ‘profitable’ television, where recognizable characters and storylines are viewed as the easiest to sell – to both advertisers *and* viewers – resulting in a preoccupation with migrant ‘types’:

...in those few instances when Latinos are recreated as members of US society in general market media, they are most often portrayed as criminal, or otherwise socially deviant. A pervasive example of the consequences of this representation (and lack of representation) is general market journalism’s continuing focus on illegal Latin American immigration to the United States – to the virtual exclusion of other aspects of Latino life (Rodriguez, 1998: 1).

These stories become part of a Foucauldian “regime of truth”, where news representations facilitate the construction of essentialist and binary nationalistic representations of migrants and borders (Foucault, 1977). The site, or *moment* – as Laclau and Mouffe (1985) would call it – of the newsroom, is significant, in that it symbolizes a nodal point in the production of national narratives that are represented as neutral.

Lourdes Sandoval, news director for the Univision/Channel 19 Spanish language station in San Diego, explained during an interview that some of these shortcomings in television news coverage of the border have been central concerns during her reporting:

Operation Gatekeeper is a central policing tool used to secure borders, on the other hand there are 24-hour inter-relations [between the US and Mexico]. Ninety nine point five percent of people who cross are legal, so we try to show the positive [aspects]. [In relation to Operation Gatekeeper] we try to be a watchdog, watching human rights... violations... the relatives of people are here, so we have a strange relationship [with these different groups]: we helped to produce a public service announcement about the dangers of the

border. [There's a] right to control the border and a human aspect – both have rights (personal interview/fieldnotes, August 28, 1998).

In covering stories related to the border there is an important dilemma represented in the comment above – that reporters at the station are situated awkwardly in relation to how they situate themselves *vis à vis* their audience and members of various Latino communities. This dilemma is tied into creating the image of 'objective' reporting while also attempting to specifically address concerns of settled and recent immigrants. This concern for creating neutral news reporting is also borne out of criticisms that Latino news organizations reflect 'special interest' groups and as such are more likely to give favorable coverage to Latinos, which in turn reflects the notion that mainstream English language channels reflect a non-partisan default system of representation, thus once more marginalizing 'other' groups and their efforts to (re)present immigration narratives. In addition, as Rodriguez notes, the focus and reproduction of a 'Latino market' necessarily relies on often contested categories of difference:

This is the logic of 'narrow casting', the production of specialized media for specialized audiences, whether the audience be US Latinos, vegetarians or sports fans. In the case of the Hispanic audience, a defining tension is produced between the construction of Hispanic as 'different', and so efficiently 'targetable', and the construction of Hispanic as just another 'American' consumer group (1998: 4).

Press(ing) Issues: Border Reporting

In addition to television coverage, newspaper reporters have been a key source of public information about the US-Mexico border and immigration. During interviews conducted with journalists from the *San Diego Union Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *La Opinion*, and *La Prensa*, I asked how reporters approach stories about immigration.⁶ Despite the limitations placed on journalists in terms of time, space and content (and perhaps despite the internal politics of these newspapers), during interviews conducted during the summer of 1998, several

6 While also interviewing members of immigrant advocacy groups, the *San Diego Union Tribune* was criticized for taking a relatively conservative stance on Prop. 187 and Operation Gatekeeper, as well as on the "disruptive" movement of undocumented immigrants into eastern San Diego County neighborhoods. On the other hand, the *Los Angeles Times* – an outspoken critic of Prop. 187 and generally more critical of the treatment of immigrants and Latinos – had been challenged as "too liberal" by immigration control groups (VCT 1996).

of these newspapers' journalists raised similar issues in relation to concerns about how immigration and the US-Mexico border were represented in local media.

Gregory Gross, a reporter for the *San Diego Union Tribune* who has been reporting on the US-Mexico border since 1983, stated that:

Prop. 187 was very significant, not for itself: 187 was significant for what it represents to ... [pause] It was a referendum on the presence of Hispanics or Mexicans. A lot of Anglos are very conscious that Latino populations are increasing very rapidly and this frightens them to death... [there's a] fear of a brown state. [This] manifests itself in 187.

When people talk about immigration in California you pretty much know who they're talking about – it's a coded lexicon of immigration and race. [They're] very closely linked. Part of [my] job is separating myths from reality...

We try very hard to be complete and even-handed. We try to introduce Latino and Anglo culture. [Our] success is decidedly mixed... Little by little we're getting more resources...

In [upcoming] US elections immigration is not a big issue. If it was going to be it would have to be the Republicans that raise it, but Latinos are a fertile recruiting ground, [and] they don't want to look like Mexican bashers (personal interview/fieldnotes August 27, 1998).

Similar sentiments were expressed in an interview with Frank Del Olmo, Assistant Editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, who had been working as a journalist with the newspaper since 1971:

Twenty-seven years ago I was the first reporter to cover immigration as a topic. I began with different stories... From around 1968 someone was keeping tabs on the Mexican-American community, [in relation to] civil rights. About 1973 I started looking at the border: [focusing on] business, smuggling, customs, etc. Look at the statistics: the INS was ill-prepared for the job it was doing. This was a problem agency... And for twenty years... this is still an issue...

Now there are four reporters with beats in this area. Covering Mexico City for Los Angeles is very different. There's more cultural coverage relating to the border: theatre critics, movie critics... Mexico and [the] border are covered with a whole series of beats...

[Issues that are covered include] drugs, smuggling, drug abuse, it's a quiet period with immigration. [Now we're looking at] environmental issues, economic development, decent jobs, crime (beyond drugs), car thefts, robberies...

[We haven't been covering Operation Gatekeeper] as much recently, [because] it is not as new to us. We have covered it, but not as a new thing... We have had more coverage [than a lot of other newspapers]. Operation Gatekeeper is an interesting experiment, but not the final solution. You can't completely control [the border] unless you see militarization and we don't see that as viable...

What we're going through now is a prelude to a more realistic notion of this border as a crossing zone. It's not all smugglers or illegal immigrants. [And in terms of] 'legal' or 'illegal', I'm careful using this. Immigrants are not always coming to work for a while... We're ahead of most media, we try to be aware of nuances. Ninety nine percent [of people crossing the border] are coming to shop. The more we can move away from the criminalization of the border, I think that is a good thing. Militarized advocates have criminalized the border. Millions of border crossings [happen]... The issue got distorted with focusing on drug smugglers, people could focus on that. [For] San Diego City Council, Congress, Wilson...Mexicans and Mexico [were seen as] whipping boys. But, the pendulum has begun to swing back. [It's time to] lower the rhetoric a little, [although] this will never completely go, [it can be] less demonizing. [We] challenge images: Pat MacDonald [another *Los Angeles Times* reporter] shows that it's not just Mexicans crossing over from Tijuana to Los Angeles. [The] INS, when you talk to them, they admit there are bigger issues, but Mexicans are easier to arrest. It's hard to go into Boston and find [the] Irish. The complexity hasn't often gotten through. [The] image [is of] a young male from Mexico, but in reality it's much more complex...

The readers are divided the same way as the electorate: some see illegal immigration as the worst factor, some say open borders, which is perhaps a bit optimistic. Most are in the middle, they don't want to build a fortress America. People in the middle seem to be younger, more educated. When we print in Spanish we get some negative responses (usually from older readers). Human immigration is natural...

The editors do see [the border] as a region... bilingualism plays a part. It is a bi-cultural, bi-national zone (personal interview/fieldnotes, August 13, 1998).

As shown above, both journalists are aware of the ways in which immigration is codified with images of race. Gross views part of his job as "separating myths from reality", which in itself is another mode of creating stories about immigration. Newspapers produce and mediate border narratives by attempting to articulate 'real' stories, but every article addressing immigration is in some way part fiction. News stories are fictional in the sense that they rely on an interpretation and a generalization of events, which may

differ greatly from other individuals' understandings of what is taking place. In Del Olmo's comments there is also recognition that Mexican immigrants in particular, have been written about largely in relation to crime and that the border itself has also been 'criminalized'. Del Olmo explains that people have told stories about the border selectively. By and large, mainstream newspapers have ignored stories about the "ninety nine percent" who are crossing to the US to shop, but instead are reproducing stories about drug smugglers. His comments also suggest that the ability to mark and monitor specific identities and spaces has been a crucial component in both the discursive *and* physical policing of immigrants, "...but Mexicans are easier to arrest. It's hard to go into Boston and find [the] Irish."

Spanish language newspapers have been a significant source of information for Latino audiences. *La Opinion*, the widely distributed Spanish language Orange County-based newspaper, is one of the main forums for coverage of the border for many Latinos. Lilian de la Torre, a journalist for the newspaper, stresses that maintaining a focus on Operation Gatekeeper and immigration is important for many Southern Californians:

I focused on this [Operation Gatekeeper] before this [period (1998)]. I get a lot of feedback from groups on the border, [in relation to] human rights violations... [I heard that] people were shackled, people were not given money. They had gone through Mexicali. So, I called the INS, the stories catapulted. South of the border it was on television. The ACLU stepped in, [they tried to talk with the INS], [but] no response.

[I've also reported on] the Detention Center conditions, the INS in El Centro, the [immigrant] hunger strike... We have to verify information and get the other side. On April 1, 1996 we covered the beating of immigrants. It was a half front page. I covered this, then me with a team. [We did a] constant follow up... on the case, the attorneys, there were rallies, letters... there was an incredible response. I also went on a ride-along with Calexico [agents] at midnight, [to] survey the Mexican side. We went to the children's immigrant center. We did a profile of Border Patrol [agent], to get his perspective. This was unusual, the media doesn't usually cover this. We did coverage of chases. We talked with children crossing, did a ride-along. It was really hot, six hours with Border Patrol. Then we did a comparison with El Paso and interviews with people crossing. [We examined] the changes with new immigration laws, with people being deported...

The border is a unique area... The country between two countries – bi-national communities, there's so much interaction. [It's a] stable permanent ongoing relationship, a flow of people...

Generally, our [coverage] is more in-depth and ongoing, others [e.g., other newspaper and television journalists] can be superficial. We do a lot of

interviews, to look at the impacts at a personal level. This has to do with the readership: people are directly impacted...

With anti-immigration movements you have to be objective. I talked with Glenn Spencer [Head of Voices of Citizens Together], Barbara Coe [a leader of the California Coalition for Immigration Reform]... *La Opinion* covered other groups. You have to be ethical. When a woman got beaten up I could hardly talk, but you have to be professional, [for the] Latino community to have this. Your job is not to get mad (personal interview/fieldnotes, August 5, 1998).

De la Torre raises several important issues in relation to the newspaper's responsibility to the 'Latino community'. Articles examining the border and immigrant experiences involve ongoing research and rely heavily on input from local residents on both sides of the border. This process of producing news, therefore, is one that necessarily relies on journalists being situated within a series of social networks that enable access to voices that usually have limited public exposure (e.g., children crossing the border). By including a range of border stories, de la Torre provides an outlet where authoritative voices can be re-defined; it is not only the local politician or economic expert who can 'legitimately' comment on this landscape, but children, undocumented immigrants, and a range of community activists. De la Torre suggests the importance of incorporating a range of stories within articles that are published in *La Opinion*. Like Del Olmo, de la Torre also notes that the border is approached and represented as a "unique area" with intensive interactions, which leads to an approach that views both places in relation to each other, rather than as separate and distinct.

Concerns about providing a space for Latino voices in newspapers and responsibilities to the local community were also expressed by Daniel Munos, editor of *La Prensa*, another Spanish language independent newspaper, established in 1976 and based in San Diego. Reflecting on the origins and contemporary foci of the paper, he noted:

It was impossible to get voices out. There was no media, no television. Radio and television were too expensive. Newspaper was the most affordable. I was working in the [electoral] campaign community – trying to get issues across. I started with a newsletter, it kept growing. It went from a couple of hundred to a couple of thousand. I gave them out free... it was easier. There weren't journalists on the job... The newspaper was a financial sacrifice, and personal.

[The goals were] to provide political empowerment to our community in four ways: 1) politically; 2) economically; 3) media; and 4) educationally. Economically, we don't have much money. Politically, the newspaper tries to provide information, a perspective to represent ideas, [so that people] are

educating themselves, we try to influence newspapers. Educationally, [we try to raise] opportunities/issues. People who live here read the paper, not new immigrants. With Spanish not there [among sections of the population], it limits our audience. It's important for the Anglo community, we need to put in English so people know [what's happening]... Anglos wouldn't understand.

We've been attacked by some of the biggest people in the city. A lot of people don't like what we've done... We're one of the few liberal voices in San Diego. We get a lot of Anglo and libertarian writers... Mexico is not our area of concern. It's dangerous. [In relation to] drug lords, you'll get killed if you write about them. We cover Mexico in the sense we're neighbors (personal interview/fieldnotes, July 28, 1998).

Both *La Opinion* and *La Prensa* seek to link contacts in Latino communities with the representation given to coverage of immigration. *La Opinion* is more widely distributed, and although different in style, both newspapers aim to readdress the ways in which Latinos have been depicted in popular news media.⁷ In *La Opinion* there is an effort to be 'neutral', negotiating between left- and right-wing perspectives, while also addressing issues of inequality. This can be seen in de la Torre's discussion of violence against female immigrants: "When a woman got beaten up I could hardly talk, but you have to be professional, [for the] Latino community to have this." In order to communicate the difficulties immigrants face, therefore, it is important for the newspaper to create a narrative that is not regarded as inflammatory (to avoid the charge of siding with a 'special interest group', e.g., Latinos), but fair (in order to achieve legitimacy in public discourse). De la Torre also stresses the importance of taking both a regional and personal perspective when examining the border, reflecting a shift toward the stories of individual immigrants rather than presenting abstract discussions of immigration (which has historically been more common in the *San Diego Union Tribune*, although, as Gross mentions, there is now an effort to change reporting strategies).

The majority of stories in *La Prensa* focus directly on issues related to the US-Mexico border and Latino communities, and are openly critical of anti-immigration policies. The newspaper gives a considerable amount of coverage

7 The circulation for the newspapers listed in the year 2000 was:

<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	1,033,440
<i>La Opinion</i>	102,847
<i>La Prensa</i>	30,000
<i>San Diego Union Tribune</i>	369,632

(Sources: Hispanic Radio Network, 2000; *Los Angeles Times* October 23, 2000; *San Diego Union Tribune*, 2000).

to community events, such as art exhibits, language classes, and public meetings, and similarly to the other newspapers mentioned, is produced in online form (at <http://www.laprensa-sandiego.org>). A significant amount of US-related news examines job discrimination faced by Latinos, such as a recent hunger strike undertaken in protest of unequal pay at the Univision/Channel 21 (KFTV) station in Fresno, CA (April 7, 2000). In addition, international stories focusing on Latin American politics in particular, make links into broader Latino concerns.

By tapping into notions of mobility and accessibility, journalists such as de la Torre and Munos have been documenting the substantial hardships that undocumented migrants face as they are funneled into eastern San Diego County to cross the border. This recent focus has involved several journalists following undocumented migrants as they cross the border, thus revealing a more personal side to 'the immigration story' (Schwartz, May 7, 2000). By presenting the immigrant's journey with a 'human face', these representations depict a less abstract narrative of traveling and discuss some of the contradictions that migrants face (e.g., the need to provide for their families while they are separated from relatives at work sites, and their cultural ties to both the US and Mexico) (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Maciel & Herrera-Sobek, 1998). For example, in a recent article addressing the difficulties for migrants who move to the US from Mexico, Rowe (March 9, 2000) focuses on the concerns of Veronica Gomez, a Mexican citizen living in the US:

I consider myself a 'border child.' I get to see both sides of the various issues that often challenge each country's relationship; often paralyzing my own spirit to get involved on either side of any issue...

If I am feeling Mexican one day, I feel victimized by the US reaction to Mexico. If I feel American for the day, then I feel that Mexico is 'never doing enough. And they get what they deserve!'

When you put it that way, aren't we all border children? And if so, what can we do to help?

This example of conflicting identities illustrates the competing complexity, fixity, and fluidity of border spaces. This also offers a representation that avoids simple binaries of Mexican vs. US, and in so doing suggests the possibility of greater cross-border interactions. Rather than reproducing the notion of a generic experience of crossing the border, there have also been some attempts to explore the variability and dangers of this movement (Gross, March 12 and March 23, 2000). Significant limitations still exist in media representations of migration (Smith & Mains, 1999). There is a desire to chart out a map that delineates good 'safe' family-oriented immigrants versus anonymous criminals. These binary categorizations impede efforts to advance our understandings of

immigration beyond a uni-directional flow and toward representations of movements that are multi-directional and multi-scalar transnational communities.

Conclusion: Re-Presenting Borders and the Nation

Images have the power to humanize and dehumanize, value and devalue, include and exclude, not in one particular instance but through their accumulation in a particular social and historical context. They become meaningful because of their position in elaborate webs of social and cultural understandings about the world (Chavez, 2001).

News images do not exist in a space separate from everyday life; they influence, and are influenced by individuals, city neighborhoods, national policies and daily conversations. The process of making news is also a process that makes (and remakes) spaces and identities through dialectical relationships that are subject to ongoing negotiations. News media are particularly significant in relation to national identity and for understanding how designated issues are assigned greater importance in times of political change.

In addition to creating a visual and textual cartography of the nation, news media are also key forums in which alternative stories of nationhood go untold. Such media can often contribute to the ongoing marginalization of immigrants. In the case of representing immigrants at the US-Mexico border, social exclusion is an especially salient issue, given that for many people mainstream media are a key source of information on immigration (and about social groups and places that may rarely be experienced through firsthand daily interactions).

During the mid-1990s, the topic of undocumented immigration and the US-Mexico border became a nodal point in debates not only about movements of people, but about the boundaries and unifying characteristics of the US as a nation. These debates relied upon the creation of an 'other' that the US existed in relation to. This alter ego was most obviously mapped onto Mexican immigrants and the US-Mexico border itself, and more indirectly on 'outsiders' within the nation, such as foreign-born residents, and those who could be marked as different due to the brownness of their skin.

With the dramatic and largely unexpected events of September 11, 2001 in the US, concerns about borders and national security have acquired a new vigor and urgency in media representations. The media focus on identifying and apprehending potential terrorists has led to an increased scrutiny of 'less visible' populations and places. Ironically, individuals and neighborhoods that have frequently been excluded from consistent media attention are now receiving

valuable airtime because of their different and 'mysterious' lives. In many cases these identities may appear mysterious, not necessarily because of any latent terrorism, but because they have been regarded as marginal to concerns of local, state and national communities, and therefore, precisely because of this they are now being viewed with suspicion.

Understanding representations of national identity and the role of the media in reinforcing and/or challenging symbols of nationhood is interwoven with a need to understand what voices and borders are frequently excluded from moves to protect a 'safe' social and political terrain (materially and discursively). In his in-depth analysis of urban politics and Latino communities in Los Angeles, Mike Davis (2001) illustrates the significance of a 'third border' as part of an ongoing process of nation building that is inherently exclusionary. This is a border that functions well beyond the physical spaces dividing the US and Mexico, is given limited media attention, and yet can be seen quite clearly at checkpoints in San Clemente and Temecula in San Diego County (as also illustrated by clip 5 discussed earlier):

Intended to intercept *coyotes* smuggling immigrants into Los Angeles and to reassure white suburbanites that Washington really is 'in control', the controversial checkpoints have become for most Latinos hated symbols of an INS police state with sweeping powers far away from the border. They are blatant instances of racial profiling as federal policy (Davis 2001: 69).

I would also expand this notion of the third border to include institutional discourses and media images that fail to actively – and systematically – address the concerns of a broader cross-section of the viewing population. This is a border and boundary of silence, which facilitates the movement of exclusionary borders throughout the US, and which is particularly pertinent given the current political climate and anti-terrorist policies. A move to increase media examinations of the role, usefulness, and antagonisms associated with such checkpoints and other public policy monitoring may provide a basis for challenging exclusionary practices and constructions of national identity. Increased awareness and media sensitivity toward immigration monitoring and the diversity of experiences that this encompasses, may provide a step toward a more inclusive notion of nation that is transnational and – while at the same time addressing concerns around justice and safety – can potentially celebrate mobility of different forms. Therefore, in order to explore the means by which we can re-think the nation as an inclusive space, there is a need to interrogate the practices and representations through which identities and spaces become conflicted and (dis)placed.

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Figure 1. Looking southwest from the US across the border fence to Mexico
(Photograph by the author)



Figure 2. Looking north from Tijuana across the border fence to the US, during additional border fence construction as part of Operation Gatekeeper.
(Photograph by author)



Figure 3. Border Patrol agent checking vehicle for illegal drugs.
(*CNN Perspectives*, July 1998)



Figure 7. Shot of a border Patrol Vehicle on the US side of the border fence.
(*CNN Perspectives*, July 1998)

