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## **Frameworks of American Identity Building: Necropolitics and the Construction of an Enemy, Immigrant Other**

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## **Introduction**

United States identity functions under American exceptionalism and... “[legal] recognition [of asylum claims are] contingent on institutionalized socio-discursive dynamics of victimhood (Signorini 2015) (Maryns 2013: 661; Shrestha 2019: 47). The myth of the American narrative and identity is shaped through what we are told it is not. A combination of nation and identity constructing policies through the way they are presented today and played with on a linguistic level serve to shape how the U.S. has and currently justifies the dehumanization of a constructed other, especially when the “other” are asylum seekers. My central claim is that wording and discursive measures in asylum and immigration policy builds a more explicit picture of a racialized American identity. Although past administrations have supported policies and used rhetoric to criminalize and dehumanize immigration before, the Trump administration affirms and validates the racialization of immigration in how he codes indexicals of “us” and “them” identities.

In the context section, I first explain how the Bush administration emphasized the idea that immigration is a security issue rather than a civil one, when the precursor to zero-tolerance policy, Operation Streamline was passed in 2005 with the intent to criminalize any migration between the U.S/Mexico border 100%. Then, the Obama administration laid the foundation for over-criminalization of immigration with the focus on quick deportations and passage of the Priority Juvenile Docket in 2014. Next, I discuss how the Trump administration validated the racialization of immigration and how the concept of migration is discursively associated with the Latinx identity in the United States. Finally, I specifically focus on how framing these concepts

and identities with both spoken and written policy make asylum seeking precarious as well as how that affects asylum seekers.

In the literature review section, I utilize various anthropological works that explore identity building through the construction of enmity based on scholarly discussions of Ngai, Butler, Nordstrom, Taussig, Appadurai, Hinton, Gregory, Bestemen, Hauptman, and Reijerse. There are three subsections that have the overarching theme of the construction of identities and categorizing which ones are valued and unvalued in American politics to justify anti-immigration policies. In the context of Greivable life, “[if] certain lives do not qualify as lives or are from the start, not conceivable as lives within certain epistemological frames, then these lives are never lived or lost in the full sense,” which justifies denial of asylum claims (Butler 1). In the second grouping, Manufacturing Difference and the Construction of Enmity, according to Alexander Hinton, The construction of enmity tears people away from “their personal histories, identifying them primarily on the basis of [their] imagined membership in an abstract, socially constructed grouping... that is essentialized, stigmatized, and targeted for [exclusion]” (Hinton 284). Hinton describes that this social conditioning makes apathetic behavior towards exclusion and violence justifiable the moment it’s happening.

In the third grouping of literature, discursive dehumanization, Hauptman among other scholars frame the other as deviance from the norm. She acknowledges that conformity and passive forms of social control continue to construct and enforce the idea that people who have deviated from the norm are bad and should be excluded from the normal group (Hauptman 8-10). The definition of deviance is created by society or the people more so than the sovereign, but it’s

echoed and enforced by the sovereign to maintain power through appeasing constituents (Hauptman).

In the data section, I utilize various anthropological works that explore identity building through the construction of enmity to analyze patterns of speech by President Trump and Jeff Sessions as well as tweets, policy documents, and official statements on the whitehouse website. I also track the shifts in policy through the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations to argue that Trump's immigration policy as well as the way he talks about immigrants exacerbates an already existing problem. And I want to tie a bow around all of these things that don't seem related by emphasizing that this is a part of the racialization and criminalization of asylum seeking and groups that seek asylum. In order to make this claim relevant to those with Salvadoran background, I'm going to need to set up the context for MS13, and how that group is used to dehumanize those who aren't even associated with it. Constructing and associating certain racial and ethnic identities with the concept of criminality and violence is used to further legitimize the concept that problematic racist immigration policy is a valid homeland security protocol.

### **Context/ Background**

Contemporary immigration policy is unique in that it plays into racialization. The discursive mechanisms used in these policies act to criminalize immigration as well as frame asylum seekers as an "other," undeserving of protection. Obama's and Trump's policies are not all that different, but the indexicality of criminality is explicit and more overtly enforced in conceptual speech and practice under the Trump administration, which has more effect on those

seeking asylum. This thesis will focus on the legal and sensationalized loop that led to increased denials in asylum seeking in the U.S. This ultimately fits into a narrative that has existed since the beginning of the United States. The construction of who is and is not American is often viewed through a racialized lens. In the U.S., this is pushed in a very extreme way to deny people human rights for the sake of saving money in the short term. Who is the other, and what are the more explicit ways the Trump administration is keeping them out? How is this different from the past? This paper will focus on how racialized rhetoric is present in contemporary immigration policies in order to solidify an idea of American identity.

In this section, I organize the contextual framework for my claim by discussing groupings of policies categorized by how they shape immigration policy and rhetoric under the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations. The policies discussed in the sections with designated administrations are not all of the policies of the presidents at the time, but they explain topical themes associated with how the administrations framed immigration. I first explain how the Bush administration emphasized the idea that immigration is a security issue rather than a civil one. Then, I explain how the Obama administration laid the foundation for over-criminalization of immigration. Next, I discuss how the Trump administration validated the racialization of immigration and how the concept of migration is discursively associated with the Latinx identity in the United States. Finally, I specifically focus on how framing these concepts and identities with both spoken and written policy make asylum seeking precarious as well as how that affects asylum seekers. When immigration shows up in the news, there is a myth of monolith in that atrocities under Trump happen in a vacuum. In reality, current human rights violations in the context of U.S. immigration policy were foreshadowed before the Bush administration.

Although the U.S. government has been exclusionary with immigration policies and in the way that “American identity” has been constructed, the contemporary lens that lays the foundation out for how discourse and policy are disseminated and enforced really started in the 1990’s with an increased investment in border security, specifically at the southern border, to discourage unauthorized immigration. The view that immigration is a security issue started to take shape with the immigration cap being increased to 700,000 people annually in the 1990’s (Ngai 2014). Supposing the Trump administration puts emphasis on immigration being a security issue, past policies, which pre-date the Bush administration, allow the rhetoric used today to hold validity in policy discussion and enforcement.

Looking at a timeline of policies and how they are worded, the overt exclusion of migration because of race ended in 1965 with the emergence of implicit language (Ngai 2014). The key piece of legislation that standardized the use of implicit systemic racism in immigration policy was the Hart-Celler Act, passed by Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 (Ngai 2014). This policy eradicated the national origins quota system, which had been in place since the 1920’s. In 1960’s America, with a cultural shift towards social equality, the Hart-Celler Act appeared progressive for its time because it lifted the ban on immigrants from Asia as well as South and Central American countries. In reality, the reason for lifting the National Origins quota system was less humanitarian and more opportunistic because one of the political factors that led to its passage was “... the rise of Euro-American ethnics as important voting constituents in the urban industrial north,” (Ngai 2014: 25). This law also posed an issue because albeit restrictions are no longer being explicitly racially based, there were still numerical restrictions being imposed (Ngai 2014:

25). This is when immigration legislation started shifting into racialization concepts more recognizable today (Ngai 2014).

### **The Bush Administration: Framing Immigration as a National Security Issue**

An important aspect of immigration rhetoric emphasized by the Bush administration was the idea that immigration is a national security issue. The discursive assertion of this concept took place when the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) was moved from the Department of Commerce and Labor to the Department of Justice, which predated the Bush administration (Ngai 2014). This set the stage for a Bush era policy that pushed immigration into a criminal framework in 2005 called Operation Streamline (David 2015). This not only paved the way to criminalization, but was pivotal in focus on the southern border in Texas (David 2015). This was the origin of zero-tolerance policy, and the goal was to criminalize migration between the U.S./ Mexico border 100% (David 2015). This made it so that anyone who tried to cross over was automatically prosecuted, even if they crossed over in a federally legal context to seek asylum.

While immigration matters are civil, migrants caught in certain border states are put through the individual state's criminal system instead of civil immigration courts. This was key to making migration synonymous with criminality. Whether or not migrants are put through civil or criminal court is contingent on individual state laws. This presents a blatant shift from federal to local legal discretion and transforms the nature of the issue. The Bush administration was operating on the premise that we "need to protect our country," guaranteeing the idea that this is a security issue (David 2015). The concept of "catch and release" was also something that

originated in the Bush administration, where groups of people were subjected to mass trials with a determination that they were being deported anyway. Before the mass trials, migrants subjected to deportation were detained until their deportation hearings, which led to an increase in uptake for privatized detention centers. One key factor under Bush though was that adults were that families were able to stay together.

### **The Obama Administration: The Shift into Overcriminalization**

The conversation started to change during the Obama administration because of how immigration was discursively framed. In 2014, Obama declared a “crisis at the southwest border,” (David 2015). He called the wave of child migrants a humanitarian crisis that should garner immigration reform and non-bipartisanship. But contrary to his careful wording about it being a humanitarian matter, the Obama administration also focused on quick deportations and allowed for migrants to go through criminal proceedings. Families were allowed together in administrative, but not criminal detention. There were also “make-shift overflow facilities,” but families were only together depending on which state they entered (David 2015). When the Obama administration declared the humanitarian crisis in 2014, they also passed the Priority Juvenile Docket that accelerated child deportation hearings by 94% (Luiselli 2017: 40). This changed the amount of time child migrants have to find a lawyer from 12 months to 21 days because “... unaccompanied minors from Central America were grouped together and moved to the top of the list of pending cases in immigration court (Luiselli 2017: 39).

The lack of regard for children’s safety was a contradiction to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program Obama’s administration had passed two years prior in

2012. This program implies that people with unlawful presence brought to the United States as children are eligible for a work permit and deferred action from deportation that would need to be renewed every two years. Another notable policy from the Obama administration is the 2016 allowance of expansion of refugees from Central America in order to allow for families of asylum seekers to qualify. This was initially put in place in 2014 and would eventually be repealed by the Trump administration. The collective shift from civil to criminal court proceedings and shift from federal to local discretionary power further facilitated the racialization and race-making of what an immigrant is portrayed to look like in rhetoric. This is especially apparent in the focus on the southern border in particular.

### **The Trump Administration: Validating Racial Coding of Immigration Rhetoric**

A notable feature about the Trump administration was that his campaign's voter base was primarily motivated by racist and anti-immigrant sentiments, rather than overall disgust with the political system (Hooghe et al. 2018: 528). In discourse, Trump conflates undocumented status with being a "dangerous criminal that deserves to be incarcerated" (Abrego 2015: 694-95). He has used fear mongering tactics to spread hateful ideology about a number of different national, racial, and ethnic groups. One conspicuous example being in 2017 when he banned the entry of people from seven majority Muslim countries for "security" purposes, then removed Haitians from the TPS visa eligibility after saying that all Haitians have AIDs, Afganistan is full of terrorism, and Haiti and Nigiria among other African countries were "shithole" countries. With these examples alone, it's made very clear that Trump's conceptualisation of American identity is white. When talking about the number of undocumented people here who are convicted

“criminals,” his claims are an inaccurate over-estimation, as he claimed that this number was 2 million (Abrego 2015: 694-95; Martin 2017: 15). This not only further conflates the concept of criminality with any immigration at all, but also conveys the negative normative value that criminals are less worthy of human dignity than “non-criminals”. Although the concept of criminalization and racialization of human movement in U.S. policy has always existed, Trump explicitly builds on it, and makes those concepts a framework for his policies (Abrego 2015: 695).

Even though the construction of “us” and “them” identities have always informed how individuals are framed in the context of the U.S. as a geopolitical body, it remains important to note the differences in attitudes towards immigration between the Obama and Trump administrations. One main policy President Trump ran his campaign on was the promise that the U.S. was going to have a 2,000-mile wall built in the U.S./Mexico border, and that Mexico “should pay for it,” (Martin 2017: 15). Another main policy he emphasized was the deportation of 11 million undocumented people. He also stated that he wanted to reverse DACA in order to “put American workers first,” (Martin 2017: 15). One of the main issues in contemporary treatment of migrants arriving through the southern border is the Trump administration’s enforcement of family separation regardless of migrants being put through civil or criminal court (Kibria 2019: p.809). Although the concept of overflow facilities was used during the Obama administration, the Trump administration started instituting make-shift tent cities to detain minors (Martin 2017: 15).

### **Earlier Policies that Lead to Targeting Latinx Populations**

The initial racialization of immigration started as a domestic citizenship question for people who were already living here through implications of the 14th amendment when it came to the citizenship of Black, Asian, and Native Americans (Jacobsen 2006; Ngai 2014). This set up a narrative of American identity that was white and European that informs fear and anti-immigration rhetoric used today. When it comes to racialization in immigration policy today, "... [individual] state institutions may do different work as race makers, but race-making efforts by federal, state, and local actors interact to produce both racialized subjects and racial hierarchies" (Mohamed et al 2019). Because state governments have a say in immigration and deportation protocol, they also have a role in race and identity building. Local laws in Arizona and Alabama for example function to conflate the concepts of being undocumented and being Latinx. Then, this is compounded with the concept of criminality, which is used to discursively associate Latinx community members themselves with criminality and "otherness," which in turn perpetuate racist attitudes and assumptions about status (Mohamed et al. 2019).

While current immigration laws are written to sound "race-neutral," the omission of explicit wording serves to measure and document discriminatory practices and rhetoric (Bosworth 2018). One specific example of racialization of immigration politics under the Trump administration was his use of the term 'bad hombres' as a blanket term to criticize all immigrants in general (Mohamed et al. 2019). He very intentionally used the Spanish word for "men", which also genders the issue. Excluding women and children from that demographic affirms the inferred risk of danger. When immigrants are mentioned in the media, the way immigration is

spoken about is gendered and racialized, with an “[overrepresentation] of Latinx men and [underrepresentation] of all other immigrant groups,” (Mohamed et al 2019).

Immigration is exemplified to be transformed into a Latinx issue in the explicit wording of 40 a part questionnaire that posit’s the assumption that there is gang affiliation specifically with MS-13 and Calle 18 (Luiselli 2017: 45). The origin of both gangs on the asylum seeking intake assessment both originate in Los Angeles. Calle 18 were second generation Mexican-Americans who grew up in L.A. and MS-13 were a group of immigrants seeking refuge from the Salvadoran Civil War between 1979 and 1992. One fifth of the Salvadoran population fled as refugees because of the atrocities orchestrated by the military government that was backed by the Carter and Reagan administrations against the progressive party Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (Luiselli 2017: 45). This resulted in 300,000 Salvadoran refugees residing in Los Angeles (Luiselli 2017: 46). These gangs are important to informing rhetoric used by the Trump administration later. In the 1990s, there were mass deportations of Central Americans, this would lead to the transnational function of MS-13 as a group to act as a dangerous push factor in Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala that refugees would have to flee from (Luiselli 2017: 46). What hit the nail in the coffin for the criminalization and racialization seen today in immigration policy was Bush’s 2008 amendment to the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act which deemed a migrant from Mexico and Canada a “removable alien” that can be, and almost always is deported without formal immigration hearings (Luiselli 2017: 53). These are filed as “voluntary returns”.

The most up to date version of this transition from dehumanization to blatant devaluation and disregard for human safety was on June 11th, 2018 when the Attorney General of the United States at the time, Jeff Sessions decided that domestic and gang violence were no longer valid grounds for asylum (Kibria 2019: 809). Although asylum is technically and legally defined as being granted "... to people who are fleeing persecution (or who have a fear of future persecution) based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, and/or association with a particular social group," this criteria is arbitrary and determined by the subjective judgement of each individual officer that influences the outcome of a case (Luiselli 2017: 60). Restricting the criteria for asylum had an explicit effect on asylum seekers from the southern border. Session's zero-tolerance policy implied automatic criminal persecution for those seeking safety, and by extension also ensured family separation (Kibria 2019: 809). The concept of family separation existed under the Bush and Obama administrations, but the increase in criminal persecution because of the no-tolerance policy also meant the increase in family separation. Session's restriction of asylum criteria was layered on top of Trump's end to the Obama era program for Central American Youth fleeing violence under the Department of Homeland Security in 2017.

### **Specific Targeting of Salvadoran Asylum Seekers**

Although this didn't start with the Trump administration, Trump's speeches spread misinformation and fear about gangs like MS-13 to justify anti-immigrant rhetoric against Latinx people in general. The Central American group that are affected by these current policies the most are Salvadoran (Luiselli 2017: 45). According to the Human Rights Watch, as of February 5th, 2020, over 138 people have been killed who were deported to El Salvador from the U.S.

during the time of the Trump administration after the program to protect youth asylum seekers from Central America was repealed (*Human*). The policy initially passed under the Obama administration in 2014, had been subsequently torn away by the Trump administration. The report delineated that over 70 cases of violence shortly “following their arrival in the country,” (Fox). One of the main issues leading to these individual’s getting deported is that this can happen if they are convicted of any crimes at all. This can include non-violent misdemeanors, and most recently, just existing in this geopolitical space regardless of the legality of it. The ambiguously worded definition of what makes someone a criminal makes it easy to justify the deportation of individuals in fear of danger from El Salvador. Rhetoric in the U.S. constructs ideas of whether or not it is okay to grieve over someone getting harmed by whether or not we define them as a criminal (*Human*).

“Between 2014 and 2018, the U.S. deported about 111,000 Salvadorans back to their homeland, which has long been in the grip of fierce gang violence,” and this is an enormous issue because Attorney General Jeff Sessions set the precedent that gang violence and domestic violence were no longer a valid reason to obtain asylum by claimants in 2017 (Fox). The Human Rights watch has also stated that asylum seeking from El Salvador to the U.S. grew almost “1,000% between 2012 and 2017, many citing threats from gangs. Only about 18% are granted asylum (Fox). According to the Department of Homeland Security, These measures were meant to filter out “fraudulent” asylum claims and make the system more efficient. The deaths and mass deportations have also occurred under the Obama administration, but the main difference with the Trump administration is that he has forced “asylum-seekers from Central America to wait in Mexico while their claims are evaluated and be sent back to their homelands if their

claim is rejected” (Fox). Dangers those subject to deportation face include domestic gender based violence, and the threat of being brutalized or killed by corrupt officials and/or Mara Salvatrucha-13 (*Human*). In the United States only 18.2% of asylum claims have been recognized between 2014 and 2018 (*Human*).

It’s also stated in H.T. Ward’s 2013 ethnography about MS13, that Salvadoran parents pay thousands of dollars to make sure their children safely arrive in the U.S. in order to escape gang recruitment that they are often subjected to anyway when they arrive in Los Angeles (Ward 2013: 38-47). The lack of concern by institutions like the DHS for the safety of the people they deport is informed by how American exceptionalism shapes whose life is grievable (Butler).

### **The Precariousness of Asylum Seeking**

As stated above, the definition of what counts as valid criteria to seek asylum is constantly changing (Shrestha 2019: 48). This means that seeking legal documentation or “making papers” for asylum purposes is a stressful precarious process in and of itself. When migrants want to seek legal status, they must stop working and making money in order to survive, in order to approach gaining documentation in a way that won’t hurt their cases or status. When the choice has to be made between subjecting oneself to the risk of deportation for the opportunity for equal rights and human dignity in the U.S. and being able to eat and having a safe place to live, it effectively criminalizes people who were trying to follow the law in a system that was never constructed to protect them in the first place.

Becoming legal is more difficult than rhetoric makes it out to be, and refugees and asylum seekers are real human beings with lives and faces, and we can’t just chalk it up to, well

why don't you just become a citizen? This also shows the direct effects and evolution of asylum policy, and how it informs the later shift in management from the department of labor to the department of defense. I also want to connect what this work is saying about the construction of victimhood, and how we turn people away to be kidnapped by gangs (Shrestha 2019).

When those who are unfamiliar with and feel threatened by immigration make blanket assumptions about the legality of how or why an asylee is in the U.S., they fail to understand that making papers is precarious work that invasively intersects with the everyday lives of those seeking asylum (Shrestha 2019: 47). When asylum seeking is essentially criminalized, it clouds the reality that making papers in the process of asylum seeking is about status regularization. Although the concept behind working for papers in order to secure legal employment, there lies a dilemma and paradox of safety. Despite the fact there are benefits to seeking a documented status among avoiding being deported to dangerous situations, if people seeking asylum wait for acceptance or denial “without knowing what will happen,” there's the issue of not being able to work and support one's self, because that would require compromising your case (Shrestha 2019).

The Refugee Act of 1980 also made it so granting asylum was determined through “the affirmative frame” which means that determinations for asylee status are based on those in the United Nations Refugee Protocol and managed by the INS (Shrestha 2019: 47). Even before the events of 9/11, “Since 1991, U.S. political asylum has been reconfigured through the use of ‘the defensive frame,’ which enables a regulatory framework and bureaucratic infrastructure that makes sharp distinctions between the rights of ‘citizens’ and ‘non-citizens’ (Coutin 2011;

Shrestha 2019: 47). The entire criminalization of immigration in general has permeated into the specific topic of the criminalization of seeking-asylum.

The institutional protocols that define what criteria makes someone deserving or undeserving of asylum is so exclusionary, stringent, and specific that if an asylum claimant erroneously worded their need for entry and protection, those in charge of their case can take advantage of the ability to transform their need for asylum to a labor and income matter, and deny their claim. Because U.S. identity functions under American exceptionalism... “[legal] recognition [of asylum claims are] contingent on institutionalized socio-discursive dynamics of victimhood (Signorini 2015) and the ‘co-construction of client identities’” (Maryns 2013: 661; Shrestha 2019: 47).

The myth of the American narrative and identity is shaped through the discursive mechanisms through which we are told what American identities are not. A combination of nation and identity constructing policies throughout history and the way they are presented today and played with on a linguistic level serve to shape how the U.S. has and currently justifies the dehumanization of a constructed other, especially when the “other” are migrants seeking safety. These concepts are shaped in the American consciousness through positing the idea that “foreigners” are a security risk, criminalizing the act of existing the U.S. as a geopolitical area, and racializing who is and is not American by conflating the idea of immigration with Latinx identities.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

As the Trump administration has vehemently chipped away at the ability for claimants to seek asylum in the U.S., it's increasingly clear the reasoning for stricter claimant criteria is based in the racialization of immigration. In this section, I investigate different theoretical frameworks that discuss the construction of national identity narratives of enmity, and how we position ourselves as deserving or undeserving of safety. This is important to think about because of the recent immigration rhetoric under the Trump administration and how the U.S. is essentially trying to stop anyone from entering for any reason. This is especially hard for populations fleeing violence. This section is organized into three theoretical categories based on scholarly discussions of Ngai, Butler, Nordstrom, Taussig, Appadurai, Hinton, Gregory, Bestemen, Hauptman, and Reijerse; Constructing identity through framing what life is grievable, manufacturing difference through the construction of enmity, and dehumanization through discursive measures. All three subsections have the overarching theme of the construction of identities and categorizing which ones are valued and unvalued in American politics to justify anti-immigration policies.

### **Necropolitics: Identity through Which Lives are Deemed Grievable**

In "Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?," Judith Butler asks when we frame life as precarious and how we frame life as grievable. Immigration policy is not war in the way Butler uses it, but her work is relevant to the question of grievable life in migration policy because of the U.S. government's posturing of apathy when limiting the criteria for grounds for asylum. When Butler says a group of people is framed as precarious, she means that they are seen as fragile or likely to collapse as an identity if measures aren't taken to protect them. With this context, if something atrocious were to happen to a group of people not framed as precarious,

either explicitly, or in the crossfire, then there's an air of apathy that follows to allow for the violence to continue. According to Butler, "[if] certain lives do not qualify as lives or are, from the start, not conceivable as lives within certain epistemological frames, then these lives are never lived or lost in the full sense" (Butler 1). Frames we use to apprehend or "fail to comprehend the lives of others as lost or injured... are politically saturated" (Butler 1). In her work, Butler describes someone thrown into layers of context that make up whether or not they are grievable which include, "socially and politically articulated forces... language, work, and desire" (Butler 3). How we construct the worth of a human is used to "maximize precariousness for some and minimize precariousness for others. Someone being recognized as a grievable human depends on what governing powers want those they consider humans to be normal. Because "[normative] schemes are interrupted by one another, they emerge or fade depending on broader operations of power, and they often come up against spectral versions of what it is they claim to know" (Butler 4). This connects back to Appadurai's observation that if the needs of a "them" group are considered too much of an inconvenience, it may further pigeonhole vulnerable groups into a construction of enmity (Butler 4) (Appadurai).

Arjun Appadurai's work, "The Fear of Small Numbers," states the concept of affirming the construction of a host country's identity functions by framing the "other" as having an identity that has compromised the existence of the in group (Bestemen; Appadurai). In the context of asylum seeking policies, the Trump administration frames the arrival of those that want to seek asylum as a threat to the American identity. Appadurai talks about uncertainty as a framework to catalyze defining an in group by defining an out group:

“...they seek uncertainty by dismembering the suspect body, the body under suspicion. This species of uncertainty is intimately connected to the reality that today’s ethnic groups number in the hundreds of thousands and that their movements, mixtures, cultural styles, and media representations create profound doubts about who exactly are among the ‘we’ and who are among the ‘they’” (Appadurai p.5).

Defining identity with majority and minority numbers, Appadurai denotes that a type of uncertainty used to construct identities is that of census numbers and asks, “... how many persons of this or that sort really exist in a given territory?” and “... in the context of rapid migration or refugee movement, how many of ‘them’ are there among us?” (Appadurai p. 5). He states that people lose their sense of well-being when the myth of national economic sovereignty is challenged, and that this is “... exacerbated by globalization and produces a need for cultural purification” (Appadurai 6).

Appadurai postulates how majority populations take on this predatory narcissism and that the elimination of differences is impossible because we’re in a world of “blurred boundaries, mixed marriages, shared languages, and other deep connectives, it is bound to produce an order of frestration that can begin to account for the systematic excess that we see in today’s headlines” (Appadurai 11). Because of the changing and diversifying population, “ideologies of inclusion and equity, can plausibly change places [which] suggest... minor differences can become the least acceptable ones, since they further lubricate the slippery two-way traffic between the two categories' ' (Appadurai 11). This constructed identifiable threat can garner asymmetric defensive responses. Because the media shows us visual representations of gang violence in rhetoric about immigration, without background context or knowledge to build a

concept of who was an enemy and who was a victim, Appadurai argues that "... ideologies produced by various forms of desperation about asymmetry produce victims and martyrs as instruments of freedom. These singular bodies are a desperate effort to bring back a religious element of spaces of death and destruction that have become unimaginably abstract" (Appadurai 13)(Taussig).

In groups that position themselves as the majority can "... become predatory... with regard to [minority identities] precisely when some minorities of a small gap which lies between their condition as majorities and the horizon of an unsullied national whole, a pure untainted national ethnos" (Appadurai 8). The fear of loss of sovereignty or perceived national identity often takes "the form of new panics about foreign languages, foreign migrants, or foreign investments" (Appadurai 22). To protect the structural integrity of the in group identity, "fantasies of purity, authenticity, borders, and security can be enacted" because they protect the fiction of a national economy. A part of the myth we construct is that our economy is ours alone, and it has nothing to do with the exploitative international power structures that allow it to prosper, so when communities that exist within national boundaries we don't identify as our own want to assert their rights to human dignity in violent or non-violent ways, we almost always frame it as terrorism because we conflate our economy with our values and identity (Appadurai p.22-23).

Narratives that construct the danger of another in the eyes of the U.S. are made up of pushbacks from danger the U.S. has caused to others. There is a global resentment of the US because we are a force of global capitalism. There is a creation of a dichotomy of winners and losers in the context of who benefits from the wealth of global capitalism, and because of the

moral outrage caused by economic exclusion, in an asymmetrical power structure that wouldn't otherwise hear the voices of the exploited, violence to achieve some level of equity seems like a logical conclusion (Appadurai 23). Because of the stark power imbalance between global powerhouses like the U.S. and the majority of the world, any kind of violent response we impose will almost always be asymmetrical displays of power that kill more people, which in turn, creates more resentment. This continuation of resentment further fuels the narrative that the American ethnos is always under attack, and should be protected at all cost, even if it means antagonizing asylum seekers. Appadurai suggests that the construction of an outgroup is for the convenience of "the [economic] winners of globalization [because it minimizes] the inconvenient noise of its losers" (Appadurai 41). Life is not grievable when it is deemed inconvenient.

In response to this fear of small numbers, there's an emergence of narcissistic predatory identities, usually ones numerically represented as the majority, that claim to require the elimination of another to survive (Appadurai 51). They claim that if proxy groups in the minority gain the same privileges they aren't aware that they take advantage of on a daily basis, then somehow it's a threat, and it's something being taken away from the image of their identity. They then use the fiction of their pure and perfect nation to mobilize their anxiety of incompleteness. Appadurai exemplifies this entire concept with the systematic and explicit violent marginalization of Jewish people by the hands of the predatory nazis and the ethno-racialization of what it meant to be a German citizen. Any minority that wasn't considered a German citizen were considered "social, political, and economic threats" (Appadurai 55). Despite the fact that the majoritarianism exemplified by nazis was more totalitarian, and there are more liberal forms of majoritarianism that claim to be more inclusive, and allow the

existence of minorities within the state, there still exists the predatory, insatiable desire to cast out the minority because minorities are still touted by the state as a stain on the image of completeness (Appadurai 57).

Because of the myth of the need for a monolithic national ethnos in order to have a complete identity, migration shakes and unsettles what the Trump administration defines as who an American is. The myth of monolithic identities is sullied with the reality of hybridity, and the belief in that myth is exploited to demonize the inevitability of human movement. Appadurai discusses how migration poses a threat to the ideology of a large-scale identity when they state that, “ migrations across and within national boundaries constantly unsettle the glue that attaches people to ideologies of soil and territory. The global flow of mass-mediated, sometimes commoditized, images of self and others create a growing archive of hybridity that unsettle the hard lines and the edges of the large-scale identities” (Appadurai 83).

The instilled fear of perceived infiltration from a minority group foments an “ intolerable anxiety about the relationship of many individuals to state-provided goods-ranging from housing and health to safety and sanitation-since these entitlements are frequently directly tied to who ‘you’ are and thus to who ‘they’ are,” meaning that the in-group feels entitled to human dignity in the form of state-provided goods (Appadurai 6). The uncertainty of whether or not the in-group receives those goods is magnified “... whenever there are large-scale movement of persons, when new rewards or risks attach to large-scale ethnic identities, or when existing networks of social knowledge are eroded by rumor, terror, or social movement. Where one or more of these forms of social uncertainty come into play, [turning asylum seekers away] can create a macabre form of certainty...”(Appadurai 6).

Through the construction of who an in-group is and the posturing of this identity as the majority, the in-group is also simultaneously co-constructing an outside identity, as well as identifying how the out-group are not the majority in order to hold power out of fear of obsolescence. Appadurai states the point that “...minorities emerge explicitly in the process of developing ideas of number” and what those numbers represent, and “they are produced in the specific circumstances of every nation” in the crossfires of the violence utilized for state-craft and nation building (Appadurai 42).

Those in the in-group persecute the margins in order to silence the moral questioning that would bring an end to the system only the in-group benefits from. Because the out-group represent a violent, un-pure past, and raise questions from onlookers about the lack of human rights in a system that only benefits the winners, one of the most egregious ways to stop the influx of moral questioning is to just get rid of the population that lacks rights, the one that’s making everyone ask questions about the effectiveness and validity of the system the people in power benefit from. Appadurai says that our conceptualization of a group of people as a minority is only recent, and that “they” raise questions about citizenship, belonging, rights, as well as “examining the obligations of states ... [and the] boundaries of political humanity (Appadurai 42). If someone’s not considered a proper citizen within the geographical boundaries of the state for whatever reason, where do their rights to human dignity stop? As exemplified with the horrific actions of the Holocaust, when humans are “viewed as insufficient by others... [they] are often the first targets of marginalization or cleansing (Appadurai 42).

### **Manufacturing Difference and the Construction of Enmity**

In “The Colonial Present,” Derek Gregory identifies how enmity is constructed. One of the ways this idea is embedded is if violence happens in another country, even if our government was one of the key stakeholders, there are geographical boundaries that make it alien to us because a country that one hasn’t called home sees other countries as “far away... different” (Gregory 18). Gregory invokes the clash of civilization theory when he discusses how people are constructed as cultural monoliths with their designated geopolitical area through Orientalism (Gregory 18). This is reminiscent of Taussig’s observation about the commodification of human beings because concepts like orientalism “[produce] the effects that it names. It’s categories, codes, and conventions” deepen the ethnocentrism, exoticism, and dehumanization meant to construct enmity (Gregory 18).

The construction of enmity doesn’t happen in a vacuum nor is it one sided. Judith Butler adds to the point raised by Gregory in her work by utilizing the example of the U.S. response to 9/11 to extrapolate this concept by stating that the events of 9/11 and videotaped beheadings were conducted with the intent to “... punish America for its moral travesties around the world, in particular in the Islamic world” (Buter 17). Because of American exceptionalism and self-victimisation, instead of asking crucial questions about how our foreign conduct may have sparked the events of 9/11, many looked to the model of the clash of civilizations in search for an answer as to why this happened (Buter 17). This is also a dangerous form of thinking that further pushes for the constructions of enmity because it pigeonholes those who don’t live in the geographical markers of “our civilization” into monolithic, oversimplified versions of their own societies that they themselves weren’t given the authority to define. This contributed to the conflation of certain definitions of terrorism to certain “civilizations” and by extention, certain

extention religions. Because the American people were so obsessed with the “why” and at the same time staunchly avoided looking at accountability for the past actions of the United States as an option, Americans were so susceptible to and willing to accept when George W. Bush and Condoleezza Rice declared that the enemy was definitely Al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, and for some, a bastardization of this declaration also meant responsibility lied with the entire Muslim religion (Butler 19).

Hinton argues that with the anxiety of incompleteness, “[devaluation taps] into this anxiety, discontent, and meaninglessness by promoting a blueprint that will lead to a more satisfactory way of life- including the elimination of elements of the population portrayed as the cause of social woes or as a threat to this new social order” (Hinton 283) (Taussig) (Nordstrom) (Appadurai). In “Why Did They Kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide”, Alexander Hinton discusses the emergence of enmity. Similar to Butler, the argument about categorization of people successfully facilitates in dehumanizing people to a point that their death is no longer seen as grievable, if it ever was.

Even if individuals in the majority population or in the population assuming power didn’t directly partake in violence, they would feel helpless or apathetic to the action, and wouldn’t do anything to stop it. The construction of enmity tears people away from “their personal histories, identifying them primarily on the basis of [their] imagined membership in an abstract, socially constructed grouping... that is essentialized, stigmatized, and targeted for elimination” (Hinton 284). Hinton describes the shadow as the social conditioning that makes apathetic behavior justifiable the moment it’s happening. For example, “whether or not someone was targeted [with dehumanizing propaganda]” was dependent on “[g]ender, class, wealth, ethnicity, residential

area, education, religion, and occupation”(Hinton 27). The U.S. government exploits the resentment of the lower class white constituents that felt as though people who don’t fit neatly into what they categorize as an ingroup, would be taking what is theirs (Hinton 27).

According to Hinton, difference is manufactured when entities that hold power “construct, essentialize, and propagate socio-political categories, crystalizing what are normally more complex, fluid, and contextually variable forms of identity” (Hinton 211). Hinton also raises the argument that “crystalized group identities are so rigid... [that any measures must be taken to] find ways to impose and maintain these social divisions" (Hinton 211). This means the demonization of “foreigners”. The justification of dehumanizing those categorized as the “other” involves “socioeconomic upheaval, deep structural divisions and an identifiable target group, structural change, effective ideological manipulation, a breakdown in moral restraints, discriminatory political changes, and an apathetic response from the international community” (Hinton 281). Because racism is the base for the functionality of U.S. economic and political systems, it’s easy to tap into that hardwired understanding of group decisions, and exploit that to scapegoat another group when the system’s structural integrity falters. At the same time, Hinton argues that these harmful, divisive ideologies can be reversed with “international pressure, local moral restraints, political and religious mechanisms, or lack of ideological ‘take’” (Hinton 281). Accountability for actions of perpetrator regimes is essential, not just in hindsight to get miniscule reparations for damage already done, but while it’s taking place to stop the damage in its tracks. Once enmity and difference is established, the process of dehumanization in its entirety follows.

In Caroline Nordstrom's "Shadows of war, Nordstrom posits the concept that crafted belief systems inform who is viewed as deserving or undeserving of life, or who is deserving of being grieved when that life is threatened or lost. If gang and domestic violence aren't valid criteria to obtain asylum in the U.S., then the people fleeing that violence must not have grievable lives in the eyes of those that allow for them to be forced back to face it. U.S. immigration policy throughout the history of its existence has relied on the crafted belief system that national identities have always existed the way they do now, that the narrative of the outsider is always to take what belongs to the insider, and different state actors are completely separate nor influence one another, and therefore, we are not responsible for the safety of those that originate outside of our geopolitical location nor identities.

Nordstrom states that these crafted belief systems can be challenged by adding narratives to these beliefs (Nordstrom 47). People who have first hand experience with the fallout of political actors and stakeholders like gangs and foreign governments, who are willing to tell these stories, actively evolve and add to our understandings beyond the crafted belief systems (Nordstrom 47). There lies a cognitive dissonance between what we are told to believe in order to uphold the status quo by those in power and what happens in the lives of those affected by those decisions being made. In this regard, implicit political marginalizations and devaluation of groups perpetuates violence enacted on them both actively and passively (Nordstrom 52). To illustrate how in and out groupings are subdivided in policies as well as how in-groups frame themselves as exceptional, Nordstrom states that "the world is not so neatly subdivided into peaceful and violent zones," and that "[mass] immigrations, pauperizations and prejudice also ensure that rootlessness, ethnic tensions, and violent lawlessness are features of nearly every city

of the developed democratic world” (Nordstrom 52). She is saying that “they” are so fundamentally different from “us” and “we” are so far removed from the danger and uncertainty being experienced that “we” separate ourselves from responsibility to provide safety and human dignity.

Nordstrom raises the argument that we construct what violence is grievable, and what makes a life seen as worthy of safety. American exceptionalism is part of the reason why people escaping violence aren’t framed as worthy of protection from that violence. She argues that looking at global violence and push factors empirically rather than from lived human experiences, “...would exculpate other people in other places whose participation in collective violence is of the same sort; even more dangerously, it could tranquilize those of us who live self-congratulatory lives in times and countries apparently free of any kind of violence [that has plagued those seeking refuge and] could lull us into believing that we or our country or our people were above such brutalities” (Nordstrom 53). Of course, there are people who care, but the lack of efficacy in one’s own power and diffusion of responsibility instilled by the sovereign makes seeking refuge nearly impossible because “the people with the nice cars and big homes are not asking [them] home” (Nordstrom 185).

Reijerse argues in his work “Beyond the Ethnic-Civic Dichotomy: Cultural Citizenship as a New Way of Excluding Immigrants,” ingroups hold an accepted form of citizenship, while outgroups do not. He argues that the measures of citizenship representation are ethnic, cultural, and civic (Reijerse 2013). Reijerse found in his data that an overwhelming majority of people that consider themselves in an in-group believe that citizenship or belonging is earned through cultural factors. This belief includes the argument that embracing a multicultural society would

emphasize cultural and ethnic differences and "undermine national unity" (Reijerse 2013). When Reijerse refers to these three categories, he defines ethnic citizenship as where someone is born or what current political geographical location they interact with the most. He defines cultural citizenship as a subjective category groupings with specific sets of social norms used, and defines civic citizenship as legally documented citizenship on paper. This garners an obsession with protecting conceptions of national culture.

Reijerse utilizes the Social Psychological Framework to further explore how in-groups define themselves. These representations come in the form of "social identity and self-categorization rather than as characteristics of nation-states." (Reijerse 2013; p.612-13). According to self-categorization theory, people partake in "self-stereotyping" with "norms, values, and customs" to create in and out groups, and ingroup criteria are subjective in nature (Reijerse et al, 2013 p.613; Brubaker, 2004; Hjerm, 1998; Kuzio, 2002). Due to the subjectivity of cultural citizenship criteria made by majority group members, "...they do not necessarily reflect the official citizenship criteria applied at the state level (Rothi, Lyons, & Chrysochoou, 2005). Therefore, having been granted citizenship by the state does not guarantee acceptance as a fellow citizen by national majority group members" (Reijerse 2013 613).

Due to a mixture of emphasis by those with the power to define and enforce these groups by cultural and civic factors, in policy, this is where the "...shift from blatant to symbolic forms of racism" starts (Reijerse et al, 2013; Dovidio, 2000; Kleinpenning & Hagendoorn, 1993; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). Whether or not someone meets the subjective criteria is used to justify anti-immigrant rhetoric in order to prevent the civic framework of belonging is because the civic frame is more inclusive by nature (Reijerse et al, 2013; Brubaker, 2004; Kohn, 1944).

### **Other Vignettes: Discursive Dehumanization**

In the context of how contemporary immigration policy constructs who is and isn't deserving of being in the United States, Samantha Hauptman argues in her work "Criminalization of Immigration: The post 9/11 Moral Panic," that laws like the Patriot Act function as a form of social control for who we see as worthy of grieving. Hauptman argues that the construction of social rules and norms has creators (e.i. legislators) and enforcers (e.i. police officers) (Hauptman). She acknowledges that conformity and passive forms of social control continue to construct and enforce the idea that people who have deviated from the norm are bad and should be excluded from the normal group (Hauptman 8-10). The definition of deviance is created by society or the people more so than the sovereign, but it's echoed and enforced by the sovereign to maintain power through appeasing constituents (Hauptman). Hauptman frames the construction of identity through the societal reaction theory when she states that "...[t]here is a progressive reciprocal relationship between the deviation of the individual and the societal reaction, with a compounding of the societal reaction out of the minute accretions in the deviant behavior, until a point is reached where in grouping and out grouping between society and the deviant is manifest" (Hauptman 38). Stigmatizing of the deviant occurs in the form of name calling, labeling, or stereotyping (Hauptman 38). The American identity is positioned as victimhood, so in rhetoric, an outside identity is positioned as something to be feared.

In "The Nervous System," Michael Taussig discusses that fear is what drives people's actions in conflict. He argues that in language, "to make anything terrible, ... obscurity seems in general to be necessary" (Taussig 3). He followed with the disarming observation that in "reality a great clearness helps but little towards affecting the passions, as it is in some sort an enemy to

all enthusiasms whatsoever” (Taussig 3). This means that knowing the truth or objective facts about a situation does not affect people’s core beliefs or feelings. Taussig discusses the fear of incompleteness and the constant need to fix it based on the constructed narratives we are told about what completeness looks or feels like (Taussig 3)(Appadurai)(Butler)(Nordstrom). Fear does not function alone to dehumanize a group of people. Taussig also argues that to affirm fear, one must also objectify the out-group.

Commodifying human labor functions in effectively dehumanizing migrant workers in the argument that they don’t deserve basic rights just on the premise that they could arbitrarily be designated as a public charge. The worth of a person to the American culture is what kind of productive means they can provide for the sovereign. This is based on Taussig using Karl Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism as a framework to discuss the dehumanization and objectification of people (Taussig 4-5). According to Taussig, the discursive process of modifying a group of people is exemplified in the mystifying of indigenous people in the United States:

“Construction of the narrative of incompleteness requires “the power of the mental image to alter the course of misfortune... to historicize this imagery with its play of angels and sacred gold, its wildness and montage, it's possible locations in a giant and, strange to say, curing, narrative of colonial conquest, Christian redemption, and Statecraft- the point of this narrative being the way the Indian, the (phantom) object of scrutiny, is recruited as a healing object” (Taussig 7).

By objectifying indigenous populations and taking away the image of their humanity, if they have human needs, they can be easily categorized as a threat to completeness.

Taussig frames terror itself as the “other”. By renarrating the stories and existences of others and attributing features we should fear to those stories, like “terror”, Taussig raises the idea that the U.S. implies that this negative event is always happening somewhere that isn’t your own country (Taussig 11). The U.S. government perpetuates the myth that we have “a deeply rooted sense of order here,” and that we should protect it because the “dark wildness [of an elsewhere] exists so as to silhouette our light” (Taussig 11). Taussig postures that the U.S. claims that while places classified as “elsewhere” have terror, fear, and disorder, while places classified as “here” have “...order, law... justice, sense, economy, and history” which the other lacks (Taussig 11). We construct the concept of order, and label anything against that order as a threat. He understands a state of emergency as “... an opportunistic positionless position which recognizes that the terror in such disruption is no less than that of the order it is bent on eliminating.” Taussig also brings up that there is this perception that there is an order of the state that needs to fight the arbitrary threat of incompleteness. He talks about how in verbal and written representations, those who hold power work to conceal and reveal violence in our normal life that may be indicative of underlying systemic issues.

This is done and undone repeatedly to their own convenience, and it is used to trick the populous into thinking these revealed and concealed versions of our national narrative have always been a part of our whole narrative (Taussig 13). Taussig argues that we construct a historical narrative and push for the argument that operating in a certain way has always been a part of our ideal image of completeness. We have to maintain and bring about “states of

emergency” to justify actions we take to protect ourselves from the invented “states of emergency”. We invent the idea that concepts like Fascism only existed in the past and are amazed at the idea that something of that nature is still possible today (Taussig 12). The point of this framework is that how we view history is important to how we shape our narratives and what we choose to acknowledge as realities that affect people.

In “Militarized Global Apartheid,” Catherine Besteman argues that access to mobility and where people are placed in the labor market have been highly racialized, that dehumanization also lies in the fact that normative values are constructed to label the other as not living ordinary lives, and that militarized border regimes stop people from being able to move (Besteman 26). The need for security built by those that see themselves as precarious, “dehumanizes racialized others through blocking their routes of mobility, channeling them into the most dangerous regions of the sea and the desert, incarcerating them in refugee camps... for indeterminate periods, and subjecting them to removals from white space” (Besteman 36). Even if not explicitly, the state “uses law, territorial boundaries, and militarized security structures to promote and ensure a particular hegemonic racial identity” (Besteman 36). Besteman raises the argument that the U.S. is guilty of this because of the “removal of minorities into prisons and immigrants into detention centers” (Besteman 36). But it isn’t just removal for morally justifiable reasons because those “[removals] are acts of racism... racist projects of cultural consolidation, and they are often hidden within self-serving discourses of security” (Besteman 36).

Besteman also acknowledges in her work “Refuge and security Panics,” the identity of an in-group can be defined through identifying who an out-group is as well as the positionality of

victimhood and refuge in the eyes of the recipient state (Bestemen 41). Bestemen also calls the identifiers or the frameworks which make up the “other” vignettes. Although Bestemen is discussing her theory of the dehumanization of refugees through their own lived experiences, the point she is raising applies to refugees explicitly being targeted by the Trump administration. The constant political messaging that any form of migrant presents a financial burden to residents who live in an area they are moving to, leads to vulnerability and marginalization. Refugees are framed as “criminals, security threats, diseased, and enemies who should be shot” (Bestementam 59). Because the violence is slow and highly politicized, there is almost a guise of plausible deniability where people don’t have to take accountability for trivializing and objectifying someone else’s existence because it’s their “political belief”. This violence against refugees is defined by “internal threats against whom the security state’s exceptional citizens must be vigilant” (Bestement p.60; Appadurai p.5).

### **Data/Methodology**

I am arguing that U.S. immigration policy is racialized and the Trump administration has weaponized preexisting implicit racism to construct and normalize a white image of an American national identity. Other scholars have argued that construction of the other starts with framing which lives are precarious, self-victimization of the in-group, and reiteration of norms to define deviations (Hauptman 38)(Gregory 18)(Butler 1). My work aligns with the work of the scholars enumerated in the literature review because the dehumanization of others starts with categorization, false narratives, and the assumption that the out-group don’t live ordinary lives (Bestemen: 26)(Staton)(Luiselli 44). The data I analyzed to affirm my central claim included rhetoric invoking the Zero tolerance policy by Former Secretary of Defense Jeff Sessions as well

as his and Former Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen, Sessions' discursive measures that justify why domestic and gang violence aren't valid grounds for asylum, how president trump frames immigration in the 2020 state of the union address, official statements on the whitehouse website, and various tweets.

This involved Coding discursive methods of racialization in rhetoric and how the Trump administration uses it to construct a specific image of American identity that excludes people of color which appeared to be discursively easier to do or morally justify with the topic of immigration. I looked at the baseline denotational content of what was being said and contrasted it with positionality through dialogical relationships and evaluative indexicals. Regardless of how the context differs in each set of data, they all show patterns of desire to militarize to reinforce claims of danger, invoke seemingly relevant past legislation to sound legitimate in making asylum seeking difficult, and use implicit and explicit evaluative indexicals to racialize a constructed enmity and national identity.

### **Militarization to Emphasize the Perspective of a Security Issue**

In order to co-construct a dangerous other that needs to be expelled, the Trump administration postured the in-group as victims by posturing the need for protection. In the 2020 State of the Union address, the emphasis in the immigration discussion was national security. In doing so, president Trump codifies any migration as dangerous. The discourse also focuses on the southern border and MS-13, which function to racialize immigration and conceptualizations of the other. He calls upon congress in the first two sentences to "protect our homeland and secure our very dangerous southern border", illustrating that Trump's Indexical meaning of "congress" is implied to be categorized as the other or another source of the issue as opposed to

the denotative use in because congress is majority democrat with majority support for more inclusive immigration reform as well as sanctuary cities (2020 State of the Union)(Duranti 15; Silverstein). President Trump uses the deictic phrase “our homeland” to emphasize that he thinks the group being excluded should have nothing to do with the U.S. as a geopolitical territory.

In the same set of data, president Trump uses discursive measures to categorize individuals he views as Americans as victims and anyone who doesn't fit that categorization as a perpetrator of violence that must be stopped. Not only is immigration framed as a security issue, but the proposed need for security is conflated with the racial codification that creates the image that it is just a Latinx issue by placing a singular focus on immigration policy that has to do with the “very dangerous southern border” (2020 State of the Union). He asserts the implication that those who enter through the southern border are dangerous and should not be present in the U.S. by using the deictic “our” when referring to “fellow citizens” and the United States (2020 State of the Union). The sense of danger is dramatized when he states that he had ordered “3,750 troops to our southern border to prepare for this tremendous onslaught”(2020 State of the Union). Racial codification is facilitated by social groupings based on socioeconomic status as well as implicit and explicit word associations. By stating that the goal of “ending illegal immigration” is to stop “coyotes, cartels, drug dealers, and human traffickers”, Trump is omitting the concept that immigration does not just happen at the southern border and it's centered around one constructed monolithic group (2020 State of the Union). This is also exemplified in the continual use of and false narrative he presents about MS-13 with the omission of acknowledgment that this gang originated in the U.S. and was created by a combination of U.S. facilitated war crimes and police brutality (2020 State of the Union).

Access to mobility and where people are placed in the market has been highly racialized, that dehumanization also lies in the fact that normative values are constructed to label the other as not living ordinary lives, and that militarized border regimes of the United States stop people from being able to move (Besteman 26). Under the guise of appearing open to immigration, he states that the group that should be protected "... includes our obligation to the millions of immigrants living here today, who followed the rules and respected our laws" (2020 State of the Union). By addressing people with legal residence here as immigrants in the context of his discourse, Trump maintains that distance between the image of us and them. He continues to say that "legal immigrants enrich our nation and strengthen our society in countless ways," which demonstrates the commodification of the part of the out-group that's allowed to live here (2020 State of the Union). While "illegal immigrants" are framed as dangerous, "legal immigrants" are framed as a commodity who only have value because they provide to the American economy. He states that any entry through the southern border is a threat to "financial well being of all Americans" and that he wanted to create a system that protects "jobs of our citizens" (2020 State of the Union). Through discourse, president Trump frames all immigrants as separate from the American populace regardless of documentation status in order to justify dehumanization.

The data has shown a sympathetic affective stance with the implied in-group that displays them as important or exceptional through preformative verbs like "protect" (Ochs 1996: 421) (Durati 17). In the same respect self-victimization is criteria for the in-group, this can be applied to asylum seeking in the United States. Asylum seekers need to victimize themselves enough to be seen as precarious and grievable enough to seek asylum. American identity is differentiated

from the other with self-victimization and exceptionalism. This is challenging when life threatening situations like gang violence are not seen as valid forms of victimization.

### **Ignoring Past Precedence and Pretending to Follow it**

Adding to the myth of monolith and permanence, omissions of empirical data, and generating false narratives to justify actions, a pattern of ignoring passed precedence in order to construct a false narrative that seems indisputable can be seen in Former Secretary of Defense Jeff Sessions rhetoric surrounding in the invalidation of gang and domestic violence as grounds for asylum. Attorney General Jeff Sessions spoke about his plan to limit the reasons for people to claim asylum in the U.S., at a Justice Department immigration review training program on Monday in Tysons, VA (Rose 2018).

He has stated that “[asylum] was never meant to alleviate all problems, even all serious problems, that people face everyday all over the world. So, today, I’m issuing a decision that restores sound principles of asylum and long standing principles of immigration law.” This was rooted in a 2014 case where a woman from El Salvador was fleeing to the US because of domestic abuse. Even under the Obama administration's Justice Department in 2016, it wasn’t enough to be fleeing domestic violence, the woman had to prove that she was a part of a group that was being persecuted. The decision of Former Attorney General Jeff sessions has set the precedence for future asylum cases where women’s groups aren’t counted. (Justice Department immigration review training program, Tysons, VA June 11 2018). The change in criteria for credible fear violates “the Refugee Act of 1980 [and] the Immigration and Nationality Act” (Wofsy 2018)

The enforcement of the Trump administration's Zero tolerance policy passed in June, 2018 also presents a pattern of ignoring past precedence. This policy has resulted in the separation of families and detention of over 2,300 migrant children because it "called for the prosecution of all people who attempt to enter the country illegally" (Sanchez). Former secretary of defense Jeff Sessions stated in a briefing that "If you are smuggling a child, then we will prosecute you, and that child may be separated from you as required by law"(Sessions). Although it is true that under past administrations, family separation had taken place, this was only under criminal circumstances instead of civil and depended on which state the individual entered through. What Sessions did not state was that the Zero tolerance policy would turn into a federal and criminal matter, significantly increasing child separation from previous administrations.

The myth of immutability in the Zero tolerance policy presents itself when Former Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen by claiming that the only two options for handling entry at the southern border is to "either release both the parents and the children... or the adult and the minor will be separated as a result of prosecuting the adult"(Nielsen). Nielsen and President Trump both claim the same argument about Former President Obama separating children that Sessions made in order to justify the action. Ignoring past precedence illustrates who is valued and is not valued as a person in the United States. This is facilitated with implicit and explicit wording that suggests positionality.

### **Positionality of Us and Them**

Explicit and implicit discursive measures that illustrate the construction of national identity and enmity are present in statements from the Official White House website and displays

on Twitter. In statements, executive orders, and “fact sheets” on the official Whitehouse website on the immigration issues page, released between Jan 25th 2017 to May 23rd, 2019, all contain the terms “southern border”, “security” “protection”, “safety”, and “public safety and national security”. All twenty four pages of immigration rhetoric on the official white house website display similar if not identical content. In section one of the executive order “Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States”, President Trump conflates visa overstay with illegal entry, then continues to claim that they all collectively “present a significant threat to national security and public safety” (“Executive).

Words and names used to describe those in the out-group function to dehumanize them. The Trump administration wants to clarify that asylum seekers are a part of the out-group because in “the media and much of the political discourse, the word ‘illegal’ prevails over ‘undocumented’ and the term ‘immigrant’ prevails over ‘refugee’” (Luiselli 44). He also uses the word “alien” to describe undocumented people to identify them as outside the image of an American identity. President Trump also positions the in-group as a victim when claiming that sanctuary jurisdictions meant to protect undocumented people, cause “immeasurable harm to the American people”(“Executive). Trump emphasizes that he wants to prevent individuals crossing the border from “being released into communities” as if they are pests (“Executive).

In the context of Tweets that illustrate ideas of national identity and enmity, one from President Trump portrays the same message present in his legislation and platform in regards to immigration. He affirms the underlying belief that those who are not citizens want to take resources and jobs from citizens when he states that the reason for the 2020 immigration ban is to “protect the jobs of our GREAT American Citizens”(Trump). Regardless of what power this

statement and executive order hold in the future, the language used is important for perceptions of national identity. In the Tweet, he acknowledges that “the Invisible Enemy [Covid-19]” comes from somewhere else, describing it as an “attack”, painting the image that the U.S. is in need of protection from outside of the geopolitical territory. Denial of human dignity of those originally not from the U.S. is also shown in a Tweet from the White House that “Americans will be first in line for jobs... and our healthcare resources [will be preserved] for American patients” (The White House).

Dehumanization starts with categorization (Stanton)(Hinton)(Gregory). In the context of the data, the subjective determination that someone seeking asylum or registering for a visa would need welfare would serve as symbolization to mark people the government wants to subject to expulsion. When describing the ways in which dehumanization is expressed, Trump refers to migrants as “vermin” or “diseases”, and this is important because of how U.S. leaders are apathetic to the deaths and disappearances of people trying to seek asylum, and in the context of the specific interview, apathetic to whether or not refugees are fed through social programs should they seek permanent residency status (Stanton).

## **Conclusion**

Scapegoating the quote unquote stranger is not a new concept used in authoritarian regimes to maintain control over the people. American identity isn't a binary concept, and moving forward, the era of american exceptionalism and ethnocentrism has effectively run its course to a bitter conclusion. 2020 is a political stand still and pause in reality with denial of facts. Even the most reasonable political suggestions like voting in local elections sound like an idealistic fantasy. The

Trump administration just served to explicitly denote the racism that had been implicitly present in previous discourse.

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