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## Who is Valued in a “Community of Value”? Conceptualizing the Boundaries of Belonging at the County Level

Elizabeth Munoz

In July of 2017, Kalamazoo County passed a resolution to develop a County Identification Card Program to provide an accessible form of government recognized ID for people residing in the county. Proposed post-election in 2016, the program took almost eight months to get through the local government. After significant community pressure, the County Commission voted 10-1 in favor of creating a task force, which would be led by two “rookie” commissioners, neither of whom had any prior experience in leading or organizing a task force, clearly placing the ID Program as a low priority project. The task force split into five subcommittees: Needs and Barriers, Compliance, Implementation, Finance, and Outreach, which collectively developed an argument recognizing the need for the ID and the value it would have for residents. However, regardless of the depth of research and information from community members needing an ID, commissioners still voted along party lines with the final vote at 6-5 (Democrats-Republicans) in favor of the ID.

I position myself in relation to this project as a member of the research group for the Needs and Barriers subcommittee of the task force, which focused on understanding the different needs for an ID and the barriers that many populations face in obtaining one. I also aided in the compilation and writing of the report presented to County Commissioners two weeks before their final vote. While I have access to a state ID, the work with the task force facilitates an important entry point to discuss the methods utilized by individuals to argue for and against the ID. In this paper, I focus on problematic rhetoric deployed by “allies.”

Data for this paper comes from various County Commission meetings between December 2016 and July 2017. I transcribed videos of each of the County Commission meetings, where community members spoke at “citizens’ time,” a time set aside in the agenda for citizen comments in which speakers are given four minutes each to talk on any topic they may want to address. I then coded these transcriptions for discursive themes regarding the strategies used by proponents of the ID to counteract prevalent illegalizing discourses, or ways undocumented migrants are framed as criminals by opponents of the program.

The Kalamazoo County Identification Card Program provides a more accessible route to obtaining an identification card than the state of Michigan ID. Given the normalization of identification in today's society, the inability to furnish a form of ID prevents marginalized populations from accessing essential services. The ID program not only provides a way to reduce the exclusion of marginalized groups from the community, it can serve as a way to build community and transgress boundaries of belonging among excluded people within the county by highlighting one shared source of exclusion to the overall society: the ineligibility to obtain state issued ID. Populations who will benefit most from this ID include but are not limited to the following individuals: the homeless, the transgender community, formerly incarcerated individuals, persons with a disability, the elderly, children in foster care, domestic abuse survivors, and, for the purposes of this presentation, I focus solely on undocumented migrants.

To Bridget Anderson (2013), the modern-state's "community of value" is a place that has a collection of shared values made up of 'Good Citizens'. She describes the construct of the 'Good Citizen' as a member of the community who is law abiding, honorable, and contributes to the community. She explains that "the community of value *is* valued" (Anderson 3). Therefore, it needs protection specifically from members outside the community who allegedly do not share the same values. Consequently, the category of the 'non-Citizen' is created to describe those who fall outside the community. Anderson explains, "part of being an outsider is not sharing the same values—which easily becomes about having the 'right' values...immigration and citizenship are not simply about legal status, but fundamentally about status in the sense of worth and honour—that is, membership of the community of value" (4). The social production of illegality is a way of continuing to concretize and strengthen the borders that exist throughout the community to exclude "outsiders" (De Genova, 2005; Calavita, 2005).

Throughout County Commission meetings, undocumented migrants were consistently illegalized and placed outside the boundaries of the community by speakers and commissioners. The arguments against the ID were mainly nativist arguments, such as, "there are a lot of people in this country, and a lot of countries, getting tired of the immigrants coming in, taking jobs, getting other things, getting the benefits and cutting down the money available for other benefits" In another meeting, the same community member said, "I think, using the word 'immigrants,' but then towards the end they don't have any documents. If you're a legal immigrant, you got some documents... What you're doing is mainly letting illegals in" Kevin Johnson (1996) tells us that the modern appeal to nativism and more stringent borders provide a scapegoat for societal frustrations and a solution to the fear of the "other" (see also, Santa Ana, 2002 and Chavez, 2008). Due to such illegalizing arguments, proponents of the ID strategically attempted to counter the illegalization and argue the undocumented population as one of

value. However, in this attempt, illegalizing tropes were redeployed, that, while utilizing meritocratic, financial, and religious ideals to place the undocumented as a valuable population, also reinscribed the presence of “bad migrants.” These discourses further placed this population outside the community and perpetuated the same boundaries of belonging that the ID project attempts to transgress.

In this paper I delineate four problematic illegalizing discourses: us and them discourse, humanitarian arguments, arguments of undocumented migrants as valuable because of their economic benefits, and illegalizing arguments by individuals who defined themselves as undocumented. Arguments in favor of the ID deployed discourses that divided the undocumented population into two categories: good potential members of society and abject others. I argue that the ideological boundaries of belonging as a ‘non-Citizen’ in a community mainly composed of ‘Good Citizens’ became more concrete, particularly as the discourses created by proponents for the ID increased separation between populations, specifically undocumented migrants.

The majority of community members speaking at County Commission meetings *were* in favor of the ID. However, many arguments perpetuated the distinguishing of “them” from “us.” Irene Bloemraad et al. (2008) explain that “some must fall outside the community in order for a ‘we’ to exist” (156). This argument was supported at Commission meetings. One community member argued, “this will benefit the community while also benefitting undocumented immigrants at the same time.” Immediately, while attempting to argue for the ID’s benefits for undocumented migrants, the speaker removed undocumented migrants from “the community,” creating a clear distinction between the two. Rather than overcoming the separation between two communities, comments such as this reinforce the boundaries of belonging within the community and place the undocumented in the space of non-belonging. Reece Jones (2008) explains that the reason for the struggle to move beyond categories stems from our tendency to focus more on analyzing the categories themselves rather than the way they came about. These categories, he says, “allow power to be exercised as the world is ordered and organized in particular ways that are favorable to a select group of people” (185). The remark of the citizen quoted above reimposes borders in a project aimed to erode them through the demarcation of the undocumented existing outside the parameters of community. Although the proponents of the ID may not have purposefully perpetuated “us and them” discourses, categories of belonging remain normalized, and the power differential between the ‘Good Citizen’ and the ‘non-Citizen’ remains.

The power differential continues within the humanitarian argument that the ‘non-Citizen’ needs to be looked after by the ‘Good Citizen,’ since the ‘Good Citizen’ is defined as a law abiding, honorable, contributing member of the community. Anderson (2013) continues that ‘the Good Citizen,’ is one who has a “moral compass that enables

him to consider the interests of others...firmly anchored in liberal ideals about the individual, autonomy, freedom, belonging, and property” (3). Those who use the liberal humanitarian discourse, then, fall into this category. One speaker, explained, “I also think as a compassionate, caring community, don’t we want to look after everybody as fellow human beings?” Another speaker continued, “the opportunity to help human beings in our community get identification so they can establish their identity for any good number of reasons I think that’s an honor and a privilege for us to be able to offer that opportunity” Taking responsibility for the inclusion of others through this initiative removes the responsibility from the exclusion that has already been taking place and instead shifting the focus to what is being done now. Specifically, rather than addressing the inequities built into the processes of illegalization, it simply places liberals on a pedestal of “good people” who are willing to “share” this opportunity with “others.” Furthermore, humanitarian discourse removes agency from marginalized populations, assuming that they are lesser and need the ‘Good Citizen’ to look after them/ save them.

Another argument used in an attempt to avoid the exclusion of undocumented migrants is that of migrants as an economic benefit. Thobani (2000) writes that speaking of migrants as benefitting ‘our’ economy means “‘our’ economy is treated as if it belongs to all of ‘us’ equally, and, although migrants make a contribution by working and living in this same economy, it is not ‘their’ economy” (38). Speaking of undocumented migrants as benefitting the economy assumes that the economy is benefitting everyone equally, which is not the case as long as undocumented migrants continue to be imagined as outside the boundaries of ‘our’ community. One community member argued, “as far as employment goes, I think we are all well aware countywide that there are undocumented citizens working very dutifully for us countywide,” while another explained that the presence of undocumented migrants equals the availability of fruits and vegetables. That is, the deployment of neoliberal logic served to imagine the undocumented migrant solely as an economic unit whose sole value is financial. This presents a number of problematics as it places all undocumented migrants in a homogenized category, excludes other types of work, and dehumanizes undocumented migrants by placing them as only valuable to the community for economic purposes.

The final problematic discourse I consider is illegalizing logic by individuals who defined themselves as undocumented. Consistently illegalized by community members and officials, undocumented migrants, Anderson says, “must endlessly prove themselves, marking the borders, particularly of course by decrying each other to prove that they have the right values” (6). Some self-defined undocumented migrants made the following statements: “I pay taxes as much as everybody else,” stated one person; another argued to pass the initiative “from a faith-based perspective” because “I’m an evangelical Christian”; or, “I have always wanted to go and get a formal education,” explained

another. One of the more prominent arguments was the plea to pass this initiative for undocumented children who are “not at fault.” Such arguments are made through an attempt to prove they are “the ideal migrant,” or “the good migrant,” aiming to prove their place within the community of value. But in that same instance, they maintain the presence of a “bad migrant.”

The use of illegalizing logic by undocumented migrants may be an instance of what McLaughlin (2010) describes as “weapons of the weak,” or, “subtle forms of resistance to domination” (90), and in this case, consist of classifying themselves as ideal citizens: educated, Christian, and law-abiding to sway the “moral conservative” to vote in favor of the ID. While this did not succeed in swaying the “moral conservatives,” it potentially had an effect in determining the swing vote from the Democrats, which was not assured given the Commissioners’ proclivity to voting against their parties. However, the deservingness argument excludes undocumented individuals who fall outside these categories. By establishing that the ID should be passed to benefit undocumented migrants who deserve it because they are able to pay taxes, attend school, are Christian, and children, the migrants outside these categories continue to be placed as undeserving of acceptance in the community.

It is important to note that a discursive shift is not a comprehensive solution to the categorization of people – this requires a material shift in the availability of status for all. Even then, citizenship does not automatically include belonging in the community. While citizenship may minimize the boundaries faced by ‘non-citizens’, Johnston (2012) explains that citizenship is not merely a status, but “a lived experience, characterized by struggle over recognition, inclusion, redistribution, and space” (125). The ID was described by one speaker as “an emblem of membership in a community.” Having a form of identification which identifies all people as members of the same community should be a way of transgressing boundaries that are formed by everyday exclusion of populations placed outside of the community. However, the arguments for the ID simultaneously perpetuated such boundaries.

In addition, none of the arguments I present in this paper allow for the placing of responsibility on the state in the illegalization of undocumented migrants, as Anderson et al (2009) tell us, “*the state* is deeply implicated in constructing vulnerability through immigration controls and practices” (8). Therefore, they say, “social justice movements must not only ‘confront’ the question of the border, they must *reject* borders” (11). The boundaries of belonging to the community of value are perpetuated by the discourses I’ve discussed in this paper. Instead of using the ID to form a more cohesive community, the limits of liberal discourse remove responsibility from the state and the community, resulting in the concretizing of boundaries.

Not all community members perpetuated the theme of exclusion and border creation. One speaker expressed that as a community, “we believe that all people thrive when conditions are created in a community where barriers that limit potential are removed” (Kalamazoo County Commission, July 5, 2017). Anderson et al (2009) state that we are in a “struggle for the commons,” that is, rather than arguing for human rights, which generally imply citizenship, we should be demanding that, “the rights held by commoners are the rights of persons...the right of persons consists of the right to not be excluded...it includes the right to not be distinguished from others who also carry the right of persons” (12). Only through the achievement of common rights can society begin to be constructed of a group of equals. Unfortunately, in response to the social production of illegality, strategies were formed to counter illegalization that instead maintained the boundaries and barriers that undocumented migrants face to belonging to a community. In order for the ID to successfully begin breaking down the boundaries and categories between ‘Good Citizens,’ and ‘non-Citizens,’ the discursive arguments in favor of the ID must shift to accept all persons into the community and take responsibility for exclusionary actions.

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