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Francisco Villegas
Kalamazoo College, francisco.villegas@kzoo.edu

Elizabeth Munoz
Kalamazoo College, Elizabeth.Munoz16@kzoo.edu

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Allied Arguments or Subtle Exclusion?: Illegalizing Frames in Arguments Supporting a County ID

Francisco Villegas and E. Munoz

While undocumented migrants lack formal citizenship, they have navigated and mobilized lower levels of U.S. government to develop spaces of belonging and relative safety. Examples include, sanctuary policies, local governments banning cooperation between their police forces and immigration enforcement, and the availability of municipal or county-issued ID cards. These programs, while not fully addressing the deportability and illegalization undocumented migrants experience, can serve as a loose patchwork of policies that address legal exclusions presented by state and federal legislation.

Demands for ID are a salient feature of today's society, given the prominence of security discourses, specifically in relation to the movement of people across borders. Furthermore, while narratives normalizing the need for ID often operate at broader levels of society, they seep into localized spaces (Ono, 2012). That is, despite there being no legal statute requiring individuals to carry state-issued identification, it is a necessity of everyday life and often required to pick up children from school, cash checks or open banks accounts, turn on utilities, pick up medication, and show when coming in contact with law enforcement. As a result, many individuals and institutions take for granted the ability for people to identify themselves¹.

Normalized demands for ID intersect with the fact that post-9/11 policies severely curtailed the availability of state-issued identification for undocumented migrants. Ranging from the outright banning of undocumented migrants from eligibility for licenses and ID cards in various states to the development of the REAL ID Act, the ability to receive state-issued identification shifted into the realm of securitization rhetoric (Bloemraad and De Graauw, 2013; Valdez, 2016) and resulted in increased insecurities for

¹ One timely example is the initial demand for ID cards to receive water during the ongoing Flint water crisis (LeBron et al, 2017).

undocumented migrants. Specifically, the inability to receive a state-issued identification card illegalizes migrants not just by marking them outside the eligibility criteria but also through the denial of goods and services that demand ID. In this way, IDs reinforce internal borders that place the undocumented population outside the parameters of belonging.

There have been many attempts to promote the availability of an ID for undocumented populations (Wilson, 2009; Lagunes, Levin, and Diltman, 2012; De Graauw, 2014; Manuel and Garcia, 2014). These efforts, including demands toward driving privileges, have met considerable resistance particularly from individuals who proclaim an ID is a feature of formal citizenship. As such, exclusion and reduced availability to common goods and services, operate alongside demands to create inhospitable environments² and increase punitive measures against undocumented migrants as a method of removing said communities.

This paper examines the initiative to develop a county ID in Kalamazoo County, Michigan. The proposal culminated with a launch in April 2018 after a year of organizing and maneuvering local government bureaucracies.³ The process to pass the policy consisted of community deputations across multiple County Commission meetings, the development of a task force and a report describing the barriers experienced by people without government-issued IDs, and organizing residents and local politicians to support the motion. During Commission meetings, a debate ensued between opponents to the proposal who mobilized xenophobic arguments and proponents who described the ID as a method of fostering community. While this debate was expected, many of the arguments in favor of the County ID also deployed illegalizing logic. We examine this process, focusing on illegalizing discourses that arose in an attempt to counter nativist arguments: defining the limits of community between “us and them” and deservingness ideals aimed to “save” the undocumented or reduce them to an economic benefit provided to the nation and county. We argue that the ideological boundaries of belonging were shaped through speech-acts, particularly as some proponents for the ID re/formed separation between undocumented migrants into Manichean binaries: good/bad and, or deserving/undeserving migrants (Anderson, 2013; Chauvin and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2014). In short, we propose that these arguments depicted the undocumented Kalamazoo

² Including attempts to create spaces that lead to “self-deportation”

³ April 2018 was the date of a soft launch with an official launch in May 2018.

population in reductive ways, as either “good” potential members of society or as abject others.

Literature Review and Discursive Framework:

Much of the research examining the depiction of migrants in media has been divided across “positive” and “negative” frames (Estrada, Ebert, and Lore, 2016). However, less focus has been placed on the ways “positive” frames may reconstitute the very thing they aim to disrupt.⁴ Specifically, “positive” frames can define and reinscribe the parameters of belonging and the resultant exclusion of undocumented migrants. Furthermore, “positive” frames do not necessarily centre the undocumented population and may instead focus on the “nonimmigrant community, including U.S. born individuals, the business community, and government institutions” (Estrada, Ebert, and Lore, 2016, 564).

To examine this, we employ a discursive framework that brings together theorizations of migrant “illegality,” deservingness, and value. Rather than describing a simple binary of good and bad migrants, the framework facilitates a critical analysis of arguments delineating “good migrants.” It also provides an entry point to understand the ways national ideals are mobilized to restrict the inclusion of the undocumented.

The social production of illegality is manifested at discursive and material levels; it defines the boundaries of membership and generates apparatuses that execute multiple forms of exclusion. The social production of illegality is a way of continuing to concretize and strengthen the borders that exist throughout the community of value to exclude “outsiders” (De Genova, 2005; Calavita, 2005; Anderson, 2013). In this way, the divide between the “good citizen” and the “non-citizen” can be bridged by the non-citizen with the potential of becoming a good citizen (Anderson, 2013). However, potentiality is contextual and precarious as it must maintain a script of deservingness constantly re/defined by demands to prove humanitarian worth or economic profitability.

There are many consequences of being illegalized. Historically, they have included race-based exclusions and quotas (Ngai, 2005) as well as the

⁴ Take for instance the arguments in favor of Dreamers and the Documented that argue children must not be punished for the sins of their parents. Such arguments, while appearing in favor of these youth, hinge on the illegalization of parents and vilification of undocumented migration (defining it as sin).

development of a deportation complex (Ngai, 2005). Contemporarily, they involve large raids in racialized communities (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013; Golash-Boza, 2015; Crowder and Elmer, 2018), the building of structures hindering the movement of people or redirecting them towards dangerous environments (Nevins, 2001), and the lack of access to social goods (Menjívar and Kil, 2002; Carney, 2015). These processes are racialized, particularly as the label of undocumented serves as proxy primarily to Latinx bodies in the U.S. (Chavez, 2008). In this way, the definition of the citizen and non-citizen is subject to illegalizing and racializing discourses that determine the parameters of belonging and deservingness to the nation.

The study of deservingness encompasses the ways migrants define their presence in the nation, the depiction of migration in media, the broad discourse utilized by politicians and citizens to re/define the boundaries of belonging, and the discretion within law enforcement to determine targets for detention and deportation proceedings. According to Villegas and Blower, (2019) examining deservingness is useful to analyse “the ways different actors evaluate ‘worth’ and mobilize strategies to support their position...examining deservingness frames furthers understandings of how social exclusion operates in relation to different categories of non-citizens.” 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”; it needs protection, specifically from members outside the community who allegedly do not share the same values (Anderson, 2013, 3).

Deservingness frames facilitate the analysis of potentiality to become the “good citizen.” Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas (2014, 426) describe frames that range from demands of deservingness based on vulnerability or civic performance, economic or academic performance, cultural integration, and fulfilling a particular “niche” such as “being a student, a worker, or a parent.” These frames, while aligned with national ideals of productivity and morality are themselves fluid but provide a useful mechanism to understand the social production of value in a community. One aspect of disingenuous “positive” discourse regarding migrants is benevolent rhetoric. To Menjívar and Kil (2002, 160), this consists of sympathetic discourse by public officials that “can mask divisive tactics that effectively deny immigrants vital resources.” Benevolent rhetoric thus can have material consequences as it criminalizes practices developed as a result of limited access to social goods (housing and health). Thus, politicians can appear to mobilize humanitarian concern while simultaneously illegalizing survival practices.

Positive representations may also come with caveats that distinguish between “good” and “bad” migrants. This is fairly common in the current rhetoric about the deservingness of migrants to formal citizenship. Claims to desirability are often deployed when politicians and community members portray some undocumented migrants as exceptional due to their upholding of national ideals such as enrolment in higher education, having a history of paying taxes, and maintaining a clean police record. However, as Dingeman-Cerda, Munoz Burciaga, and Martinez (2015, 62), remind us, “the construction of any ‘desirable’ category rests upon the production and demonization of undesirable ‘others.’” The presence of the latter constructs a false dichotomy that illegalizes individuals who are not perceived as satisfying the grounds necessary to be considered a “desirable” or “good” migrant.

In addition to media and politicians, community members also have an impact in the deployment and maintenance of illegalizing discourse. These frames come to the fore when such individuals speak at community gatherings, political meetings, and in everyday engagement since the everyday citizen is also now involved in the processes of immigration enforcement (Aberman, 2018). Aberman, drawing on Orr, theorizes these actors as “civilian soldiers” (Orr 2004; Aberman 2018). The citizen, as Walsh (2014) stipulates, has become both deputized and given the responsibility of engaging in immigration control. This includes the use of tip lines to call immigration enforcement, being required by law to curtail access to local institutions, and encouragement to develop vigilante groups. While this is a useful typology of creating the “watchful citizen,” we must also consider the use of citizens’ voices in shaping local policy that defines the parameters of belonging. Thus, while not necessarily tasked outright by the state to protect the nation from the undocumented, the citizen, based on ideas of American identity, fairness of law, deservingness, and relative value frame the contours of an imagined community (Anderson, 1991).

Contextualizing the Kalamazoo County ID:

While ID cards issued by county and municipal governments are primarily imagined as a tool to limit the exclusion of undocumented migrants from local spaces, they are valuable to many other communities that experience barriers accessing a state ID including the elderly, the homeless, transgender individuals, and the formerly incarcerated (Wilson, 2009). These cards, often designed with criteria for broader eligibility and accessibility, define residence in the local space as the primary factor determining membership. At the same

time, while municipal and county IDs facilitate the ability for individuals to utilize some local goods and services, they do not provide access to goods or services to which an individual was not already legally entitled (de Grauw, 2014). However, the provision of these cards remains a hot button issue with both opponents and proponents often utilizing illegalizing discourse to argue their position.

In Michigan, Public Act 31 of 2008 institutionalized the illegalization of undocumented migrants by making them ineligible to receive a driver's license or identification card. It stipulates:

If the applicant is not a citizen of the United States, the applicant shall provide documents demonstrating his or her legal presence in the United States. A person legally present in the United States includes, but is not limited to, a person authorized by the United States government for employment in the United States, a person with nonimmigrant status authorized under federal law, and a person who is the beneficiary of an approved immigrant visa petition or an approved labor certification (Michigan P.A. 31, 2008).

Since its passage, undocumented communities residing within Michigan have been unable to receive state issued identification. And, while various levels of governments and service organizations have worked to address this challenge, the result has been a loose patchwork of documents that can vary greatly in their degree of acceptance⁵.

As a result of the federal government's inability to come to a consensus regarding immigration policy, and of states, like Michigan, reducing the possibilities of undocumented migrants having access to drivers' licenses and identification cards, municipalities have taken stronger stances on how they conceptualize residents within their localities, particularly the parameters of belonging vis-à-vis immigration status. Cities like Hazelton, Pennsylvania passed resolutions making it illegal to rent to undocumented migrants, though such resolutions were later found unconstitutional (Longazel, 2016). On the other hand, in 2007, New Haven, Connecticut was the first locality to offer a municipal identification card with the goal of developing a more welcoming environment to all residents regardless of status (Lagunes, Levin, and Dittmann, 2012).

⁵ This can include municipal and county IDs as well as consular IDs issued by foreign government consulates and cards developed by social service agencies such as homeless shelters or food banks.

While cities and counties do not have the power to confer driving privileges, they can legally produce government issued identification cards that can be recognized by municipally funded entities and local organizations and businesses. Since the enactment of New Haven's ID card, 17 other municipal or county governments have adopted similar policies. Washtenaw County became the first location in Michigan to begin issuing their own County IDs in June of 2015. A year later, in December 2016, Detroit followed suit. In May 2018, Kalamazoo County became the third locality in the state and 18th in the country to provide local-government-issued identification cards. However, the process to bring this to fruition demanded a carefully curated taskforce made up of key public figures, a clear discourse about its availability to communities lacking identification, beyond the undocumented population, and strong displays of support from the community. After significant community pressure, the County Commission voted 10-1 in favour of creating a task force, which would be led by two "rookie" commissioners and immediately-placed the ID initiative as a low priority item. The task force split into five subcommittees, which collectively developed an argument recognizing the need for the ID and its value for residents. However, regardless of the depth of research and information from community members needing an ID, commissioners voted along party lines with the final vote at 6-5 (Democrats-Republicans) in favour of the ID (Barrett, 2018). The program took almost eight months to get through the local government.

While the populations imagined to benefit most from this ID expand beyond the undocumented, they became a population highlighted by Republican Commissioners as the primary sticking point in passing the policy. For this reason, the following subsections focus exclusively on the ways they were described by different stakeholders to re/formulate the boundaries of belonging.

Methods:

The primary goal of this project was to understand the discursive boundaries of belonging employed by individuals who positioned themselves as allies during Kalamazoo's County Commission meetings. Discourse is important to an understanding of power relations; it consists of more than speech-acts, also informing action, including policy (Ahmed, 2006). To this end, we utilize Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyse the "written and spoken texts to reveal discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias and how these sources are initiated, maintained reproduced, and transformed within

specific socioeconomic, political, and historical contexts” (Pimentel and Velazquez, 2009, 8). Specifically, this method of data analysis centres the ways power is asserted as a means of contesting it (Pimentel and Velazquez, 2008). Thus, this paper follows the challenge set forth by Wodak (2008, 55, emphasis in original), who states that “we need to approach the processes of ‘inclusion/exclusion’ by carefully considering issues of power, in defining access *to* discourses and power *in* discourses.”

Data for this paper comes from public video records of nine Kalamazoo County Commission meetings, as well as one Kalamazoo City Council, one Portage City Council, and one Kalamazoo Township Council meetings held between December 2016-July 2017. Meetings aired live on a local public-access TV channel and were stored on that station’s online database. At all but one of these meetings, commissioners followed a pre-set agenda that included a slot for citizens’ comments⁶. Community members showed their support or argued against the County ID during “citizens’ time” to urge their Commissioners to vote according with their respective standpoints on the proposal. Using video capturing software, we recorded each meeting where the County ID Program was mentioned and then transcribed the recordings. Upon completion of transcriptions, we coded for discourse regarding membership and undocumented migrants using Atlas T.I. First, we collected all instances where individuals discussed the ID, and then developed a codebook to categorize such speech acts into discrete discursive strategies.

Table 1 Meetings Coded and number of speakers during Citizen’s time⁷

Meeting	Community Speakers in Favor	Community Speakers Against	Total Number of Speakers
12-6-16 Kalamazoo County	17	0	17
12-20-16 Kalamazoo County	20	1	21

⁶ This is a broad label signifying residents of the area rather than a reflection of speakers’ immigration status. Status was not provided or questioned at any point. The only meeting that did not include citizens’ time was a Kalamazoo County “Committee of the Whole” meeting that takes place prior to a County Commission meeting and does not make space available for citizen input.

⁷ This table does not include the number of instances Commissioners spoke about the ID as their time is less structured than citizens who are given one opportunity to speak and a four-minute time limit.

1-3-17 Kalamazoo County	0	0	0
1-7-17 Kalamazoo County	0	0	0
2-20-17 Kalamazoo City Council	5	0	5
2-28-17 Portage City Council	8	0	8
3-7-17 Kalamazoo County	0	1	1
3-13-17 Kalamazoo Township Board	6	0	6
3-21-17 Kalamazoo County	26	1	27
6-20-17 Kalamazoo Committee of Whole	0	0	0
6-20-17 Kalamazoo County	15	1	16
7-5-17 Kalamazoo County	34	2	36
TOTAL	131	6	137

While the statements are public record, all individuals quoted in this paper appear under a pseudonym. We understand this is a limited protection but recognize the value of a layer of confidentiality. Prior to speaking, all community speakers provided their full name and local address to identify themselves as residents of the county. No other identifying information was requested to contextualize their comments, though some described their stake in the proposal while speaking, often describing the length of time spent living in Kalamazoo County or their family’s migratory trajectory.

Discussion:

A total of eight County Commission meetings open to the public included the County ID in their agenda. Community members were very invested in this agenda item and the meeting space was filled to capacity with individuals overflowing outside the doors, a rare occurrence for this branch of government. Deputants mobilized frames to identify un/deservingness and by extension “good” citizens, residents and migrants. Such frames sometimes

promoted nativist arguments, which found all undocumented as undeserving of membership, reserved the boundaries of belonging to those able to produce permanent residence documents, and identified undocumented presence as a danger to the nation. While in the context of the Kalamazoo County ID this was a numerical minority, it resonates with what Kevin Johnson (1996) argues is the modern appeal to nativism and more stringent borders: that it provides a scapegoat for societal frustrations and a solution to the fear of the “other” (see also Chavez, 2008). However, illegalizing tropes were not reserved to opponents of the ID.

Individuals in support of the County ID were far more numerous at government meetings; however, in their attempts to serve as “allies”, many drew boundaries based on immigration status. In this way, the border⁸ was reintroduced while arguing for a project aiming to erode such boundaries. These bordering discourses constructed undocumented migrants as 1) outside the boundaries of membership (us and them arguments), 2) in need of protection, or solely as economic units. While these categories encapsulate understandings of exceptionality and value, there are clear differences in how value is construed in each classification. Furthermore, a third dynamic was also present where some undocumented migrants deployed deservingness frames as a method of referring to themselves as potential “good citizens” while reifying categories of the “bad migrant.”

While these classifications are not meant to serve as discrete categories, they can serve as analytical tools to discuss and interpret the ways discourse aiming to support undocumented migrants can, through the deployment of national ideals, further illegalization. As such, there can be overlap or the utilization of various frames simultaneously. In this way, we can think of deservingness frames as encompassing more than a single discursive pattern and instead stemming from a multitude of illegalizing rhetoric.

Us and Them Arguments:

The majority of community members speaking at County Commission meetings were in favour of the ID. However, many deputants distinguished undocumented migrants (them) from citizens (us). Irene Bloemraad et al

⁸ Kalamazoo is significantly closer to the Canadian border (~140 miles) than the Mexico border (~1,400 miles), but mirroring dominant discourse, the latter was the only referenced as a danger.

(2008, 156) explain that “some must fall outside the community in order for a ‘we’ to exist” that is, in order to secure an understanding of an imagined community (Anderson, 1991), there must be a distinction about what binds members and separates them from non-members. In the context of County ID meetings, the defining category was immigration status. While the use of this tool was previously discussed in relation to opponents of the ID, “allies” also utilized it in the ways they described or justified a discursive divide.

The division between the undocumented and the rest of society is a fallacy, particularly the idea that communities do not come in contact with the “other.” This strategy betrays the ways communities, workplaces, and public spaces are composed of individuals with varying immigration statuses. For example, Margaret, a legal aid worker in regular contact with undocumented migrants, while arguing in favour of the ID stated, “this will benefit the community while also benefitting undocumented immigrants at the same time.” In this instance, the speaker removed undocumented migrants from “the community,” creating a clear distinction between the two. For Margaret, “the community” referred to individuals who are not undocumented. Thus, the undocumented were positioned as peripheral individuals within the city. Comments such as this reimpose borders in a project aimed to erode them by demarcating the undocumented as existing outside the parameters of community.

There were also more subtle comments within “ally” arguments in favour of the ID. Jim, a white community member at a County Commission meeting mentioned, “I just want to express my support for the county ID program because I think it’s one way we can ensure everyone has, even the most needy, have more access to Kalamazoo’s resources.” One of the problems throughout many statements was the consistent clarification of community members’ meanings of “everyone.” Many speakers clarified and adjusted their own meanings; that is, rather than saying *everyone* should have access, the statement “*everyone, even the most needy,*” should have access, thereby implying that “the most needy” were not automatically included in this speaker’s initial conception of “everyone.” In this way, there is a distinction made between “everyone” as citizens and the “most needy” as those with precarious belonging.

Finally, discourses of “us” and “them” also included racialization, particularly an association between being Mexican or Latinx and undocumented. Theresa, a local social worker, when speaking about who could potentially benefit from the ID, explained the project was useful,

Not only for Latinos who do not have it, but for people who have mental illness, sometimes they do not have IDs, people who are homeless and have substance abuse issues, maybe they lose their IDs, people who are, they are the persons who are coming out of prison, have difficulty finding IDs.

In this quote, Theresa not only utilizes “Latinos” as proxy for the undocumented, she also delineates the various communities differentiated from the “us,” a category only encompassing those able to secure a Michigan ID. Alberta, a college student who self-described as Mexican, also linked race to undocumented status. She stated,

They want to do good, be part of the community and I don't want things to go bad for them for us because after all I am one of them even though I'm a US citizen. And I do want to thank a lot of you guys that came out here because I know a lot of you guys are not probably Mexicans or anything like that and it's nice to see support from other people too.

While Alberta described herself as connected to the community affected, she reinforces the idea that all undocumented migrants are Mexican. However, she is also clear in distinguishing herself from the undocumented community, as she is a member of the nation, a “U.S. citizen.” The continuous categorizations of “us” and “them” in statements at the meetings display a limit of the “ally” framework, particularly when they enhance differentiation rather than a breakdown of the social structures that facilitate their employment.

Deservingness Arguments across Humanitarianism and Capitalism

Deservingness was often defined in two distinct ways. First, in relation to a moral imperative that demands inclusion as a means of saving individuals imagined as lacking agency (Willen, 2012; 2015; Villegas and Blower, 2019). Unlike distinctions of membership based on immigration such as the “us and them” discourse, the humanitarian argument determines that the ‘non-citizen’ needs to be looked after by the ‘good citizen,’ since the latter is defined as law abiding, honourable, and a contributing member of the community. Anderson (2013, 3) classifies ‘the good citizen,’ as someone 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.” Second, the capitalist or economic benefit frame reduced undocumented migrants to financial contributions to the local community or the larger society

via taxes. 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” (Thobani, 2000, 38). In this way, the economic deservingness frame not only objectifies undocumented migrants solely as financial units providing rewards to the nation, it also removes recognition of the oppressive and exploitation present in the labour markets available.

The liberal humanitarian discourse was used prominently. Sarah, a community member at a Portage City Council meeting stated,

there’s a whole host of things that we take for granted that they can’t do and their children shouldn’t be, at least in my humble opinion, be stigmatized for that, and I also think as a compassionate, caring community, don’t we want to look after everybody as fellow human beings?

While we do not mean to say that compassion is problematic, Sarah’s statement fits very neatly within liberal discourse arguing for the innocence of children and the need to provide them with protection. It also provides speakers like Sarah the ability to portray themselves as “good citizens” who can recognize the humanity in the undocumented child, while other “citizens” cannot.

Keith, a white middle-aged local County Commissioner utilized a similar humanitarian argument to Sarah’s. He said, “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 honour and a privilege for us to be able to offer that opportunity.” While like Sarah’s deputation, at face value Keith’s statement displays an important and perhaps commendable stance, we must also consider the limits of the action being redefined as an “honour and privilege.” Taking credit for the inclusion of others through this initiative removes responsibility from the exclusion that has been taking place. That is, it demands a temporal adjustment that prohibits the recognition of borders built across time and instead shifts 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” some degree of power to others via the availability of the ID. Furthermore, humanitarian discourses remove agency from marginalized populations, assuming that these actions are solely based on goodwill rather than political pressure and activism. Both Sarah’s and Keith’s statements showcase the utilization of the humanitarian moral

argument as the reason for inclusion while simultaneously eliding the history of exclusion and the political capital utilized by community members to demand the passing of the ID policy.

The humanitarian deservingness frame was not limited to the ideal of the “good citizen”; it also include the utilization of the ideal of the “good Christian.” Some community members in attendance at commission meetings reiterated their Christian values as reasons for “helping” others. Joshua, a member of the clergy stated at a County Commission meeting,

I really didn't want to come here tonight. I wanted to stay home and bake Christmas cookies and I'm tired and I'm old and I'm tired of arguing about these things and then I realized last night that I needed to be here just because it is the Christian's Christmas season and Jesus always always always stood at the side of those who were weary, those who were ill, those who were marginalized.

While noting that they did not have to be present at the meeting, but took time out of their day, such citizens again perpetuate a boundary between people who need the ID and people who are present as an act of kindness. Similar to those who utilized the “good citizen” ideal, Joshua described a desire to stand “at the side” of the marginalized given his relative power. Villegas and Blower (2019), in their discussion of the Canadian deservingness frame stipulate that for it “to be effective, it needed to be applied onto ‘deserving’ subjects: those identified as having a ‘legitimate’ need for protection.” In this sense, deservingness for Joshua was based on his understanding of weariness, illness, and marginalization. Thus, migrants become deserving as long as they uphold an abject and helpless position.

As stated above, deservingness frames also utilized financial arguments, particularly the fiscal reward the community receives from their waged labour and spending practices. Robert, a Kalamazoo County resident who described difficulty in accessing an ID as a child of adoption, also 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.” Similarly, Fred, at a different County Commission meeting explained that the presence of undocumented migrants equals the availability of fruits and vegetables. Both individuals speak to the presence of undocumented workers supporting the agricultural industry present in the area, particularly given the rural/urban divide in Kalamazoo County. In both instances, the deployment of fiscal logic served to imagine the undocumented migrant solely as an economic unit whose primary value is benefiting the local economy. This

presents a number of problems as it places all undocumented migrants in a homogenized category, excludes other types of work, and dehumanizes undocumented migrants by placing them as only important to the community so long as they serve economic purposes. Furthermore, these arguments limit the recognition that the economy does not benefit everyone equally, and many of the gains described are the result of the ways illegalization facilitates exploitation.

While not explicitly an economic argument, some deputants also formulated deservingness based on a transactional process. Tina, a self-identified person of colour, further described this when stating, “we want to make it easier for them, to get housing and to make it easier for them, you know... those who are giving and valuable in our community.” This statement not only separates outsiders from the “we,” it further clarifies that “we” only want to make daily services easier for certain people “who are giving and valuable,” again creating standards of eligibility to belong in the community. The politics of being valued in this instance relates to aspects read as beneficial to citizens.

Conclusion:

The social production of illegality demands that institutions and individuals partake in defining the parameters of belonging and non-belonging. This process is multifaceted and can encompass various degrees of adoption, from nativist ideas of actively removing the undocumented to “liberal” ideas of benevolence in accordance to deservingness. In this paper, we examined strategies formed to counter xenophobia that instead maintained boundaries and barriers to belonging. The deployment of humanitarian, religious, and economic bases for deservingness further concretizes illegalization and fails to highlight or address multiple exclusions.

The arguments we present in this paper highlight how illegalization of undocumented migrants is hegemonic as state actors as well as community members take for granted immigration status as an organization feature of society. That is, state discourse can permeate understandings of belonging and membership to an imagined community. Furthermore, such discourse, as deployed by state actors as well as the populace has material repercussions. As Anderson, Sharma, and Wright (2009, 8) tell us “*the state* is deeply implicated in constructing vulnerability through immigration controls and practices.” 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 discussed in this paper. One important point to consider is our inability to classify to what degree these statements served to gain support from the Commissioners who ultimately voted in favour of the proposal.

Recognition of membership in a community can serve an important role in creating spaces of relative safety while endeavouring to reach a comprehensive and equitable solution. 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.” The Kalamazoo County ID was described by a different community member as “an emblem of membership in a community.” Having a form of identification which identifies all people as members of the same community was considered a way of transgressing some boundaries.

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