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**Universiteit
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**The Latina Threat:
*A gendered analysis of right-wing immigration
discourse in the United States***

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Thesis
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Introduction

The United States is undergoing a demographic transformation towards a majority-minority nation in the next few decades where the American Hispanic population will become the largest ethnic-racial group by 2055 (Torres-Gil & Demko, 2019: 60). The Donald Trump presidency marked a new wave of white nationalist backlash against Latin American immigration, that has rippled through media discourse since (Massey, 2020). Within right-wing discourse there is a focus on the perceived threat of undocumented immigrants to the American nation, and a persistent focus on the non-white, foreign-born population in the US. This thesis argues that right-wing media portray Latin American women as a threat to American white identity, through their role as reproducers and mothers of non-white American citizens. As such, this research develops a novel gendered analysis to conceptualise the way Latina women are portrayed as the driving force behind the demographic transformation. This gendered analysis is called the Latina threat.

This thesis offers a much-needed gendered analysis of how nativism seeps into right-wing immigration discourse engaging in discussions of citizenship, reproduction, motherhood and illegal immigration. Using Critical Discourse Analysis this research will investigate the relationship between the Trump administration and right-wing media outlets, Fox News and Breitbart, to argue that the media-policymaker relationship was a breeding ground for nativism and white supremacy that constructed Latina women as a threat to American demography. Critical Discourse Analysis is crucial in examining the implicit and explicit use of xenophobic, racist, and misogynistic language that portrays Latina women as the source of nativist anxiety that the American white-population is diminishing. If we accept that xenophobia and racism brought us Donald Trump, then we must assert that white supremacy, in the form of whiteness preservation, is an existential danger to the country and the world (Coates, 2019).

This thesis will unravel the Latina threat narrative using two central arguments. First, I argue that Latina women's capacity to reproduce non-white American citizens is at the centre of nativist fears of a changing demography. Second, I argue that the discourse surrounding the Central American refugee crisis during the Trump administration, created relentless insecurity for Latina women and mothers at the southern border. Using the concept of intersectionality and ontological security we see that right-wing discourse is able to construct the Latina threat narrative and transform it to push inhumane anti-immigrant policies. Intersectionality denotes the ways race and gender shape the experiences of Black women and women of colour (Crenshaw, 1991). This thesis reveals that the experiences of Latina motherhood and reproduction are marginalised as right-wing discourse erase all forms of gendered language that may humanise Latina women. Therefore, intersectionality conceptualises what gendered experiences are being obliterated and how this further subordinates Latina women to portray

only their reproductive capacity as an affront to the sanctity of the American constitution and citizenship. This research frames the demographic transformation as a source of ontological insecurity for nativists and anti-immigrant proponents who fear that America's self-identity as a predominantly white nation is diminishing. Ontological security refers to the study of practices that groups or nations use to secure their sense of self-identity over time (Delehanty & Steele, 2009). As such, ontological security conceptualises how the media-policymaker relationship, between the Trump administration and the right-wing media, weaponise such language against illegal immigration to ramp up border security and call for an end to birthright citizenship.

The research question of this thesis is: **How does US right-wing immigration discourse attempt to portray Latina women as an ontological threat to American demography?** This thesis will begin with a literature review to emphasise the need for a gendered analysis to build on existing literature that discuss themes such as citizenship, reproduction and illegality. Then, I will introduce the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis outlined by Teun van Dijk (1993), using discourse strands to present the findings. Chapter 1 demonstrates that the perceived threat of Latina reproduction is hyper visible, but the oppressive force of illegal immigration status means Latina women's gender is erased from the discourse. Chapter 2 demonstrates that instances of Latina women as victims of sexual violence is disregarded because nativist fears of unrestricted immigration dominates the discourse and propels Latina refugees into perpetual insecurity and violence.

Literature Review

Introduction

This research centres a gendered analysis using intersectionality to highlight the way the fear of Latina women's reproduction is *the* source of anti-immigrant sentiment. Using intersectionality and ontological security, this thesis will contribute an original gendered analysis, called the Latina threat narrative, to existing bodies of literature on immigration and nativism. Nativism is the support of strict immigration control and eugenics due to a suspicion of migrants and refugees that they are unable to assimilate racially and socially into American society (Young, 2017). There is a body of literature called the Latino threat narrative which stands in direct opposition to nativism (Chavez, 2004; 2013a; 2013b; Martinez, 2011). The Latino threat narrative explores how immigrants from Latin America are portrayed as threats to the American nation, identity, culture and the southern border. Within this body of literature, Latina women's issues surrounding reproduction and citizenship are demoted to a small subsection, which treats their gendered experiences as a secondary consideration, and thus less important.

This thesis prioritises a gendered analysis using intersectionality and contributes important findings to anti-racist and feminist literature on right-wing depictions of Latina women. The first section of this literature review will conceptualise the Latina threat narrative using both intersectionality and ontological security to construct the argument that Latina women are the root of nativist fears that the American demography is becoming drastically less white. The second section will explain three ways this research contributes to existing literature on immigration and nativism. Overall, this research adds a pertinent discussion surrounding the ongoing Central American refugee crisis as existing literature (Chavez, 2013a; Young, 2017) is currently limited to Mexican immigration.

Conceptualising the Latina Threat

Ontological Security

In order to understand how nativism shapes fear-driven narratives that Latina women are motivating the changes in American demography, it is important to conceptualise this insecurity. Ontological security provides a stimulating conceptualisation of the insecurity that arises among nativists when confronted with the fact the US is shifting towards a majority-minority nation where the white population faces a dramatic decline by 2055 (Torres-Gil & Demko, 2019). Anthony Giddens (1991) writes that ontological security, from a sociological perspective, concerns an individual's sense of safety and trust in the world and the avoidance of existential anxiety. It is not security as survival but rather security as being (Steele, 2005). Kinnvall and Mitzen (2020: 244) echo this conceptualisation by placing the constitution of "the self" as a core tenet of ontological security, as well as the idea that continuity creates stability over time. This idea of stability is arguably the antithesis of the demographic

transformation taking place today in the US, despite scholars predicting such changes in the 1980s (Martinez, 2011). When a state feels internally or externally threatened it calls upon state-action to mitigate the threat, according to Huymans (1998). Notably, Delehanty and Steele (2009) incorporate gender into their conception of ontological security and claim a state's sense of self is constructed by their masculine autobiographical narrative of both history and experience which provides continuity and stability. Perhaps nativists spin narratives that harken back to historical hegemonic control of women's reproduction to find comfort in times of ontological insecurity (Delehanty & Steele, 2009: 524; Subotic, 2016). Therefore, nativist fears of immigration can effectively be conceptualised by ontological security as it helps understand how the fear of a slowly diminishing white population permeates narratives in conservative media discourse.

Intersectional Experiences

The Latina threat narrative this research conceptualises, addresses the shortcomings of existing literature by placing Latina women's intersectional experiences at the forefront of the argument. Using intersectionality, this research analyses how the portrayal of Latina women in right-wing discourse shapes their experiences under the US immigration system. Conservative media discourse often adopt a single-axis lens of immigrants and does not view race as intrinsically linked to gendered experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). This intersectional approach goes beyond race and gender by also incorporating undocumented status into its analysis. Depictions of illegality, or "alienage" are often used a proxy for race to target and devalue undocumented immigrants. Therefore, undocumented status must be incorporated into this research's gendered analysis as it dictates the lives of over 11 million people in the US (Kim et al., 2018: 318). Latina women are an extremely diverse heterogeneous group of women therefore this Latina threat conceptualisation focuses on intersectional experiences rather than identities, as it allows for a more applicable analysis of how experiences of undocumented status, race and gender, shape women's lives beyond identity. Indeed, an intersectional approach helps us understand the complexities of Latina women's experiences through a lens that considers the individual impacts of gender roles and the collective impacts (Jamarillo, 2010). Ayón (2018: 881) applies a framework developed by Young (1990) to the oppression of Latina motherhood, by outlining five intersecting forms of experiences which include: *exploitation, violence, marginalisation, cultural imperialism* and *powerlessness*. The oppressive force of *powerlessness* can intersect Latina women's experiences of immigration and seeking asylum in the United States. The fear of deportation impedes the lives of undocumented immigrants, particularly Latina mother's navigating motherhood (Ayón, 2018). The threat of violence can also oppress Latina women in many ways. Through systematic violence from gangs, police, the state, or through micro-violence which includes gender violence from peers, husbands or family members (Huerta, 2020).

Contribution to the Literature

This section will outline three important contributions to existing literature. First, this research adds an intersectional perspective to experiences of citizenship and undocumented status and pushes fears of demographic transformation at the forefront of the anti-immigrant agenda, a phenomenon which has thus far been overlooked. Second, this research builds on the feminist body of literature that deconstructs racialised control of women's reproduction and merges its analysis with literature on nativism. Third, this research adds a unique gendered perspective to the way nativist fears are portrayed in media discourse. Intersectionality is crucial in establishing this research's relevance in highlighting how oppressive experiences of undocumented status, subordinate a mass of Latina women under tightening US immigration control and border enforcement.

Citizenship and Illegality

Using the concept of intersectionality, this research places the experiences of Latina women at the forefront of the threat narrative by arguing that Latina women are at the crux of anti-immigrant rhetoric, rather than a secondary consideration – which is a common occurrence within existing literature (Chavez, 2013a; 2013b). Illegality and citizenship are key themes that arise within the literature on the impacts of the Latino threat, however no research thus far has used intersectionality to analyse the way Latina women, as reproducers and mothers, are constructed as a threat to American demography. Given that the number of families apprehended at the border has steadily increased since 2014, therefore there is an imperative to focus on the intersecting experiences of Latina mothers immigrating to the US (Bialik, 2019). Experiences of illegality, which refers to illegal immigration status or an absence of documentation, cuts across gendered lines to subjugate Latina women and mothers (Abrego, 2013). Gendered illegality means that undocumented women are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, sexual harassment in the workplace and threats of deportation (Abrego, 2013; Ayón et al., 2018: 891). In the case of Latin American immigrants, the term “illegal” which dominates the discourse, refers to unauthorised residents who entered the US without permission or perhaps entered with permission and subsequently overstayed their visa (Chavez, 2013b: 93). Notably, Ngai (2014) researches how terms such as “illegal alien” marginalise unauthorised or undocumented immigrants to create a caste of people situated outside of formal membership in society. There is a dichotomy of citizenship between which groups are allowed American identity and which groups must earn it (Chuang & Roemer 2015). Illustrative of this dichotomy, the children of undocumented immigrants are labelled ‘anchor babies’ by right-wing discourse to reinforce racially gendered ideas of illegal immigrants and their children (Kim et al., 2018). Kim et al. (2018) investigate the perpetuation of racist rhetoric surrounding birthright citizenship to conclude that a gendered and racialised construction is placed onto Latina women. Birthright citizenship is a right detailed in the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, that grants citizenship to any child born on US soil. While existing research is limited to birthright citizenship, the conclusions prove

useful in advancing this research's argument that nativist fears of an increasingly brown population are rooted in the Latina threat (Kim et al., 2018).

Racialised Reproduction

Within existing literature there is little overlap between discussions of nativism and feminist literature on reproduction. This research contributes to these two bodies of literature by merging the analysis and arguing that the desire to control women of colour's reproduction is still prevalent in the US today and is driven by nativist fears that the Anglo-American population is on the decline. The Latino threat body of literature discusses Latina reproduction and fertility, sexuality, and racialised images of motherhood (Chavez, 2004; 2013a; 2013b). However, Chavez's research, albeit limited to Mexican immigration, subsumes Latina women's experiences within the Latino threat narrative, which indicates that the impact of anti-immigrant sentiment is less important than the impact on Latino men. This concludes that even in anti-racist literature on immigration, Latina women's issues are given secondary importance. Therefore, the objective of this research is to centre the intersectional gendered experiences of Latina women, who are often placed in increasingly marginalised positions than men (Crenshaw, 1991). The concept of '*stratified reproduction*' has been applied to Latina women and reproduction which denotes how certain groups of women's reproductive capacities are characterised positively while others are actively discouraged (Chavez, 2004; Ginsburg & Rapp, 1991:331; Greil et al., 2011). Racialised control of reproduction as a form of population control has a deep colonial and imperialist history of forced sterilisations of Black and American Indian women in the United States (Volscho, 2010; Kuumba, 2001). Historically, the racial order of eugenics and the hierarchy of race enforced at the US-Mexico borderlands was upheld by nativists (Lytle Hernandez, 2010: 30) and pushed into immigration control policies (Young, 2017).

Nativism in Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

This objective of this research builds off existing literature that examines the link between nativism and immigration control, but importantly adds a unique gendered analysis by examining how these fears are portrayed. A major deficiency within existing literature is the focus on Mexican immigration which fails to address the changing nature of immigration flows to the US, namely the increase in immigrants and refugees from Central America (Bialik, 2019). That said, this research addresses this deficiency by focusing on the ongoing Central American refugee crisis. A defining feature of American nativist ideology is the fear that immigrant groups do not assimilate because of their sub-national, ethnic or racial identities and therefore dilute, divide or contaminate American identity and culture (Schrag, 2010). The main argument highlighted here is the perceived threat to American society when Mexican immigration is unrestricted and loosely enforced. This is seen in the way Latin American immigration is framed as a challenge or a threat. Samuel P. Huntington's book '*Who Are We: America's Great Debate*' (2004) points to a number of key oppositions, all of which frame the

growing Latino population as “The Hispanic Challenge” (Huntington, 2004; 2009). Huntington (2009) believes that the drastic increase in Latino immigration fragments “Anglo-Protestant” culture which is supposedly essential to American identity. Another narrative that is spun against the surge in Latin American population, is the claim that Mexican Americans in Texas feel a sense of “territorial reclamation” which is often communicated by right-wing media through messaging that Mexican immigrants are ‘reconquering’ previously lost land (Huntington, 2009; Schrag, 2010: 177). Massey’s research (2015; 2020; Massey & Pren, 2012) identifies the widespread human costs of restrictive immigration policy over the years. These impacts include: the militarisation of the US-Mexico border resulting in increased apprehensions; deportations and an overall resurgence of nativist ideology and xenophobia against Central American immigration marked by the Donald Trump presidency (Massey & Pren, 2012; Massey, 2020: 787).

Conclusion

This thesis contributes a novel conceptualisation, called the Latina threat, which uses intersectionality to add a gendered analysis to existing literature on immigration and nativist discourse. By recognising that media coverage of immigration is the driving force behind white backlash against Latino immigration (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015) this research aims to examine the way Latina women are portrayed in conservative discourse, which establishes the relevance of this research’s gendered analysis. Using the overarching concepts of intersectionality and ontological security, I will argue that the insecurity that arises from the demographic transformation is entrenched in nativist attempts to place a threat narrative onto Latina reproduction and overall immigration to the US. Intersectionality will highlight the many ways Latina women are oppressed by this narrative that erases experiences of violence and powerlessness in the face of tightening immigration policies and widespread xenophobia.

Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis

This research is particularly interested in the way nativist ideology persists within discourse surrounding immigration to label Latina women as a threat. The focus of this research will be on the media-policymaker relationship to examine how this unique feedback loop perpetuates racist and misogynistic discourse. The media plays a crucial role in the formation, production and maintenance of discourse through their power to influence mass audiences into creating the Latino threat narrative (Wodak, 2001). This power to create and control the portrayal of immigrants is inherently political. That said, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) allows us to examine this discourse using an equally political tool, through the concepts of intersectionality and ontological security. These concepts will assist in the application of CDA to analyse how the Latina threat narrative is constructed in the relationship between language, power and ideology (Wodak, 2001).

The source material I have selected for this research are twofold. First, I will examine two major conservative media outlets, Breitbart and Fox News, for news articles, opinion pieces, interviews, and reports that discuss demographic changes and Latino immigration from 2015 to 2020. Second, I will use speeches, press releases, policy papers, tweets, campaign speeches, and presidential communication from Donald Trump. Additionally, to link the conservative media element to the executive power, I will also research Stephen Miller as a key aide in the production of the pernicious Latino threat discourse at the government level. Stephen Miller acted as a Senior Adviser to Trump and is the well-known “architect” of his hard-line stance on immigration (Holpuch, 2020). During his time on the Trump campaign, Miller also influenced the editorial direction of Breitbart, by sending more than 900 emails to editors sharing anti-immigrant and white supremacist propaganda (Hayden, 2019).

Justification of Critical Discourse Analysis and Sources

Feedback Loop of Policy

Trump’s relationship with the media is described as “transactional” and deeply entangled during his presidency which is why it is important to analyse how these sources collectively portray Latina women as a threat (Stelter, 2020: 67). CDA is crucial in understanding how the media-policymaker relationship Trump fostered during his campaign and presidential election is able to defend, define and disperse anti-immigrant discourse that leads to support for the inhumane treatment of immigrants at the border (Massey & Pren, 2012; Massey, 2020). This is a feedback loop of policy that circulates viscerally negative language and rhetoric about immigration and citizenship from the government to media outlets, which leads to increasingly restrictive immigration control and enforcement. This feedback loop was strengthened after 2016 due to the unique media-policymaker relationship fostered during Donald Trump’s presidential campaign that extended into his presidency (Wolff, 2018: 142; Woodward, 2018: 198). This establishes a strong foundation for conducting a critical

discourse analysis into how the media-policymaker relationship is able to define terms, language and rhetoric within immigration discourse that lead to the erasure of Latina women's intersectional experiences as a result. This research is interested in the close media-policymaker relationship and feedback loop of policy that Trump fostered during his campaign and presidential election. The Fox News Network frequently shaped and informed Trump's opinion on a number of issues including immigration, as he reportedly watched the cable news shows religiously – which seals this feedback loop (Davis & Hirschfeld, 2019: 47).

The “crazy cable news cabinet”

The sources selected for Critical Discourse Analysis are directly implicated in the media-policymaker relationship and play a role in the production of conservative discourse. Within the Fox Network, I have selected Tucker Carlson who hosts a news cable show '*Tucker Carlson Tonight*' where he regularly promotes white nationalism, nativism and anti-immigrant sentiment to a massive audience and plays a crucial role in communicating the discourse to the public (Gertz, 2021). Breitbart is an important news source when investigating negative and discriminatory discourse on immigration and demography as it had explicit ties to key advisers within the Trump administration. For that reason, I have selected Stephen Miller as a source who greatly influenced Trump's messaging and action on immigration and had a direct link to the right-wing site Breitbart. Steve Bannon, the former head of Breitbart and the former Chief Executive Officer of the 2016 Trump presidential campaign, was closely linked to Miller during Trump's campaign. Bannon also paved a path for Miller to become a significant figure in Trump's action on immigration namely the “Zero Tolerance” policy (Davis & Hirschfeld, 2019: 47). The “Zero Tolerance” policy criminalised the undocumented or illegal crossing of refugee children and families at the southern border (Monico et al., 2019). Journalist Brian Stelter labels this close media-policymaker relationship the “crazy cable news cabinet” as Fox News commentators avidly supported the Trump campaign and administration and shaped the parameters of the anti-immigrant discourse (Stelter 2020, pp 29-97).

Discourse Strands

A number of themes arise when examining how the Latina threat narrative is portrayed as an ontological threat in right-wing discourse during the Trump administration. To conduct Critical Discourse Analysis, I will use Siegfried Jager's (2001: 15) method of discourse strands to structure the data along thematic lines and subsequently analyse the roles Latina women are assigned throughout the discourse. Discourse strands are a useful tool to analyse texts that refer to a larger theme but also refer to smaller, yet equally important, themes within the text. Intersectionality tells us that, the intersecting experiences of Latina women, cannot be extracted from a woman's experience under a patriarchal and racist immigration system at the same time (Crenshaw, 1991). In other words, gender, race and citizenship create a multi-layered force of oppressions that Latina women face as a result of the threat narrative. These strands are entangled with one another and cannot be analysed in isolation (Jager,

2001). For this reason, the use of discourse strands will effectively consider the complex nature and history of racism and sexism in the US.

The findings of CDA will be organised into two main chapters. The first chapter will present three discourse strands that collectively argue that Latina women's reproductive capacities are portrayed as an internal threat to the nation. Strand one examines how the term "anchor baby" is weaponised to frame Latina women as exploiting the generosity of the Fourteenth Amendment. Strand two exposes how the discourse erases gender from media coverage to push Latina women to the margins of illegality, race, and gender. Strand three explores how debates surrounding birthright citizenship are used to bolster anti-abortion rhetoric. The overarching concepts of intersectionality and ontological security tie each of these strands together by conveying the way Latina reproduction is presented as a threat to the racial makeup of the American demography.

Chapter two argues that Latina immigration to the US is portrayed as an external threat using two discourse strands. Discourse strand one takes the shape of the discursive event of the refugee 'caravan' in 2018 was used as a tool to garner support to introduce unhumanitarian policies and propel mothers and children into perpetual powerlessness at the border. The 'caravan' denotes the annual mass exodus from violent Central American countries where thousands of fleeing refugee families travel together through Mexico to the US southern border (Huerta, 2020). Strand two demonstrates that the media-policymaker feedback loop was drenched in messaging surrounding the white supremacist conspiracy theory called the Great Replacement. Ontological security links these strands together by conceptualising the nativist fear of unchecked immigration which feeds into their anti-immigrant narratives of Latina women.

Tools of Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA will be used to identify discourse strands, in the media coverage and government communications surrounding demographic change and immigration that sheds light on how Latina threat narrative is portrayed in the US. The tools used to conduct CDA will follow the approach laid out by Teun van Dijk in *'Elite Discourse and Racism'* (1993). This approach uses media outlet's texts to analyse the strategic meanings, functions, relations of language and words used in their discourse. Van Dijk's (1993) approach to Critical Discourse Analysis lays out numerous tools to analyse how minority and majority groups are portrayed, conveyed and described in the media, which then shape shared social representations of out-groups. The over-representation of white elites in news-making in issues of immigration and race can silence the voices of minority groups (van Dijk, 1993: 255). White, male elites in the media play a crucial role in disseminating the discourse on the Latina threat narrative to the wider public and therefore are an important factor in selecting the tools of CDA for this research.

Style and Rhetoric

The style of writing and rhetoric deployed by Fox News and Breitbart will be analysed as part of CDA to examine *how* they write about the discourse surrounding the demographic changes in American population and what themes are attached to usage of terms such as “anchor baby” or “chain migration”. Media, particularly right-wing media, deploy a number of stylistic manoeuvres such as hyperbole, repetition, metaphors, comparison and alliteration to express their opinions and ideological positions (van Dijk, 1993: 264). The use of rhetoric allows news-makers, such as Tucker Carlson, to emphasise the negative properties of an out-group while underlining and outlining the positive qualities of the in-group they perceive as threatened. This thesis will use style and rhetoric as a tool to identify when conservative media and elites emphasise and repeat demographic statistics surrounding Latino populations in the US.

Semantic Moves

When analysing the strategic function of language in discourse, the moves of media outlets play a part in the implicitness and preservation of racist discourse (van Dijk, 1993: 259). Semantic moves can vary from denying, to trivialising, or playing-down accusations of racism. Van Dijk (1993: 260) labels this functional move as “mitigation” when elite news-makers attempt to protect their image of tolerance of immigrants by denying or doubting accusations of racist intent. This tool will be used to examine if conservative media convey statements about Latina women that are both racist and sexist and if either is denied or trivialised by analysing the implicit meanings of their text. Semantic moves of denial or trivialisation are common when media figures are accused of inferring to white nationalism, and ideological conspiracy theories such as the Great Replacement.

Ideological Implications

Conservative media are inherently ideologically aligned to preservation of ideas and traditions of racial superiority, and in this respect news texts are often “ideological icebergs” where greater significance beyond the text is implied in its understanding (van Dijk, 1993: 256). Therefore, analysing the implicit and explicit implications of the text and beyond is a crucial tool I will deploy in this analysis. In the case of an increasing Latino population, ideological implication can be inferred from specific words or phrases in a text such as ‘overrun’, ‘invaded’, ‘replaced’, ‘threatened’. I have selected these words to narrow the search process of media texts from Fox News and Breitbart. Additionally, presupposition of ideology is a subtler tool of ideological implication summarised by van Dijk (1993) and is used by right-wing news-creators to assert a proposition as true to consequently insert their ideology. This tool will be useful in identifying when news texts use this tactic to implicitly presuppose that a rising Latino population, or the number of American children to non-citizen parents, is a pitfall or something to fear.

Editorial Power

Finally, CDA will allow for a broader analysis of how media elites, such as Tucker Carlson, use their power to disperse the discourse surrounding the demographic change and ultimately, set the parameters of the conversation to their mass audience. Editorial power goes beyond the local semantics of formulated news texts and instead examines the broader social and systemic reproduction of elite racism by using their dominance in mainstream media to produce public opinion (van Dijk, 1993: 277). This tool bolsters the feedback loop between the discourse produced by Fox News, Breitbart and the people Trump surrounded himself with during his campaign and administration. Stephen Miller exerted his editorial power and, therefore, played a crucial role in controlling and dispersing the discourse.

Application of CDA

The empirical analysis of the immigration threat discourse will employ the CDA tools outlined by van Dijk (1993) to apply gendered perspective this thesis develops. That said, I will first gather source material that report on immigration from Mexico and Central America and the demographic changes from Fox News, primarily Tucker Carlson's cable show, and Breitbart. Then I will analyse data on Trump and Stephen Miller to assess how they informed the larger discourse and policy. Following that step, I will categorise this data into the two main chapter headings (1) Latina reproduction to exploit American privileges (2) External Latina migration as the threat. I will then deploy the tools of style and rhetoric, semantic moves, ideological implications and editorial power to the texts to critically analyse the roles assigned to Latina women in this discourse. This CDA will highlight the way Latina women are portrayed in relation to power, ideology, and language exhibited in popular right-wing media that continues to shape public opinion today.

Chapter 1 – The Internal Threat of Latina Reproduction

Introduction

In September 2020, allegations of involuntary hysterectomies at an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Detention Centre in Georgia were raised to the Department of Homeland Security, (Government Accountability Project, 2020), which is a stark reminder of the state of fragility Latina immigrants are forced to live in. The same pervasiveness of patriarchal rule leads to fundamentalist attacks on abortion rights and allows hegemonic control to chip away at women's reproductive rights (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1995: 331). Such allegations act as a reminder that racialised sterilisation and reproductive control practices have continued well into the 21st century, stressing the importance of an intersectional perspective that considers race, gender, *and* legal status in discussions of reproduction (Nelson, 2003).

This chapter reveals that the threat of reproduction is given a hyper visible role within the discourse as undocumented immigrant mothers are portrayed as fulfilling a deceptive and cunning ploy to gain citizenship. However, the key finding reveals that while reproduction is hyper visible, gender is erased. Undocumented women are undeserving of patriarchal subordinating terms because illegal status defines their role in the discourse. Intersectionality reveals what gendered experiences of womanhood and motherhood are erased from the discourse. Indeed, the language of “anchor babies” is defined and defended by the Trump administration and right-wing to galvanise anti-immigrant support in a nativist effort to repeal the Fourteenth Amendment. These findings are crucial in understanding how the Latina threat narrative is constructed to justify unhumanitarian border enforcement and immigration control, particularly during the Central American refugee crisis.

This thesis addresses Chavez's (2013) shortcomings by adding an essential intersectional perspective that goes beyond a shallow argument towards deconstructing how harmful narratives are used to push efforts to terminate birthright citizenship and the detrimental consequences of this. Chavez (2013a:193) briefly recognises the pernicious narrative within media discourse that undocumented women are plotting to have “anchor babies” to obtain legal residency. However, he fails to address the gendered implications on Latina women's lives by granting it a secondary consideration within the broader Latino threat body of literature.

Three discourse strands present this chapter's findings. The first discourse strand demonstrates how the perceived threat of Latina reproduction is used to bolster a nativist campaign to repeal the Fourteenth Amendment. The second discourse delves into how the language of undocumented status is prioritised over gender identity to perpetuate Latina women into relentless illegality. The third discourse strand shows how right-wing hegemonic control of women's bodies link these strands together in the production of the Latina threat narrative.

Discourse Strand 1: Reproduction to Exploit American Privileges

This strand argues that Latina women's reproductive capacities are framed as a threat to American demography. The media's racialised discourse uses language and ideological implication to frame birthright citizenship as an unjust phenomenon that allows women to fulfil a deceptive, cunning plan to give birth on American soil solely to gain citizenship for their child. Using tools of CDA, three themes arise within this strand. First, government rhetoric promotes and defends the term "anchor babies" to perpetuate a disdain for birthright citizenship. Second, this rhetoric is then weaponised by right-wing media to push a nativist campaign to repeal the Fourteenth Amendment. Third, there is a strong tendency within media reporting to conflate birthright citizenship with birth tourism to further degrade non-white births as undeserving of citizenship. Ontological security tells us that nativist fears of Latina women's reproduction is embedded in the fact America's identity as a majority-white nation is in jeopardy due to demographic shifts.

Defending the term "anchor babies"

Both Donald Trump and right-wing media define and defend the term "anchor baby" which places the threat narrative directly onto Latina women as reproducers of "anchor babies" who are changing the American demographic makeup. At a press conference in New Hampshire on August 19, 2015 Donald Trump was questioned by a journalist if he was aware that the term "anchor baby" is a highly "offensive term" that "people find hurtful". Trump bombastically quizzed the reporter if there was a different term to use, then swiftly rejected the response and said, "I'll use the word 'anchor baby'. Excuse me, I'll use the word 'anchor baby'." (Fox News, 2015). Trump's defiance characterises the beginning of a four-year-long series of racist rhetoric and policies towards immigrants. In analysing dozens of Breitbart articles during Trump's presidency, this definition of "anchor babies" is presented to their mass audience:

The children of illegal aliens are commonly known as "anchor babies," as they anchor their illegal alien and noncitizen parents in the U.S. and eventually are allowed to bring an unlimited number of foreign relatives to the country through the process known as "chain migration." (Breitbart News, 2018)

The majority of Breitbart articles related to birthright citizenship or children of undocumented immigrants explicitly use the definition above. The power of media in setting the boundaries is underlined in the fact that this discriminatory definition is repeated verbatim across multiple articles. This definition actively blurs the line between opinion and fact (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018), which has a number of problematic implications for the way anti-immigration proponents address and view undocumented mothers and their children. This definition employs loaded rhetoric that instantaneously devalues American-born citizens, authorises the use of "anchor baby" in public discourse and points the reader towards reproduction as

the source of the phenomenon and blames birthright citizenship. When these are the parameters of the discourse drawn out by right-wing media, it is no wonder that such politically incorrect language was continuously used by Donald Trump and his closest aides. Furthermore, it sensationalises the process of a US citizen sponsoring their family members which as stated is a multifaceted and lengthy process (Chavez, 2013a: 198). Using the CDA tool of editorial power, we see that Breitbart occupies a high degree of editorial authority in legitimising the language of illegality, which preserves its use and shields it from being scrutinised within the discourse.

Both Trump and Breitbart actively defend the use of “anchor babies” by emphasising that the mothers of these children are not American citizens, prompting the reader to place the threat onto Latina women. Breitbart pairs their definition with nativist-infused reminders of the current number of US-born children of undocumented immigrants. Nativist sentiment is highly evident in the rhetoric deployed, which compares the birth rates of children of undocumented immigrants to the number of “children born to native-born Americans” in various states (Binder, 2018a). This rhetoric promotes an ideological view of reproduction where native-born Americans (coded as white) are normative ‘deserving’ births and “anchor babies” (coded as non-white) are ‘undeserving’ births that are growing at a concerning rate to the normative level. Note that Breitbart communicates this without using any gendered language – a layer of analysis covered in discourse strand two. In other words, this encapsulates the disregard of gender assigned to Latina women - a deliberate tactic used to dehumanise and define women’s experiences by illegality and espouse the argument that the Fourteenth Amendment must be repealed.

Ending Birthright Citizenship

This research posits that rhetoric surrounding “anchor babies” is weaponised by nativists to push a campaign to repeal the Fourteenth Amendment. I argue that this campaign was re-energised by Trump and bolstered by right-wing media to perpetuate the threat narrative that Latina women are driving ontological insecurity by having children in the US. The unrelenting ability of nativists to spin harmful narratives in the name of ending birthright citizenship to mass audiences, should not be taken lightly. After years of pushing his anti-immigration agenda, on the 30th of October 2018 in the run-up to the midterm elections, Trump formally announced his plans to sign an executive order to end birthright citizenship (Swan, 2018). Trump’s attempt to repeal the Fourteenth Amendment adds to the string of anti-immigrant proponents who have attempted it throughout the 20th and 21st century. Attempts to repeal the Fourteenth Amendment failed to withstand constitutional review as they violate federal jurisdiction over immigration (Oliviero, 2013: 8). Of course, Trump’s failed attempt to end birthright citizenship reinvigorated nativist arguments that birthright citizenship “*remains the biggest magnet for illegal immigration*” an argument that is wholly supported by conservative media (Moran, 2018). This reveals a reoccurring narrative that undeserving immigrant women actively use birthright citizenship to exploit the American

welfare system which must be stopped, according to nativist fears. Breitbart reported extensively in support of Trump's hard-line argument that repealing the Fourteenth Amendment would "*deter the practice of having 'anchor babies'*" (Boyle, 2018). Both Fox News and Breitbart use terms such as "deter" which implies that the act of women giving birth in itself is a wrongdoing that must be actively discouraged, as their illegal status makes them an undeserving criminal (Ngai, 2014). However, the reality remains that ending birthright citizenship has many practical implications. Despite claims it will reduce illegal immigration, it will in fact increase the number of people oppressed by illegal status. The unauthorised population would dramatically increase from 11 million in 2021, to nearly 24 million by the year 2050, if citizenship was denied to children with one unauthorised parent. Ending birthright citizenship would create a "self-perpetuating class that would be excluded from social membership" for many generations (Fix, 2015). Manifestations of nativists' ontological insecurity would castigate millions of non-native citizens into perpetual illegality.

Using tools of CDA, language and rhetoric it is explicit that the discourse puts a biologically essentialist threat onto immigrant women and erases their autonomous or personal motivations to have children. The gendered implication here is that the focus on deterring "anchor babies" feeds into a reductionist view that women strategically give birth on US soil to gain access to and benefits of American citizenship. In the eyes of conservative media, the Fourteenth Amendment is "flawed" (Hahn, 2015). A sensationalist account of the Fourteenth Amendment portrays pregnant mothers as devious women who immigrate to the US solely to exploit this constitutional loophole that is not offered elsewhere in the developed world besides Canada (Binder, 2018b;2018c). The discourse depicts birthright citizenship as a game in which it "*allows a pregnant foreigner to win citizenship*" despite entering the country illegally (Hahn, 2015; Moran, 2018). Using tools of CDA, the use of the word "*win*" implies that immigrant women who give birth in the US are playing this game where securing citizenship is the aim. This characterisation also infers there are winners and losers in the Fourteenth Amendment, which prompts the reader to believe the American system is losing out because of supposedly undeserving women who should not be rewarded because of their illegality, which makes them criminals under the law (Newton, 2008). Tucker Carlson expresses support for Trump's attempt to end birthright citizenship as he believes it is currently used to abuse "American generosity" (Carlson, 2018a). Using the CDA tool of editorial power, we see this well-established media-policymaker feedback loop in action where the Latina threat narrative is used to justify the abolishment of birthright citizenship, which as established, has wide-reaching repercussions (Fix, 2015).

However, the ideological implications of the Latina threat narrative can be better understood through ontological security. I argue that Latina reproduction is framed as a threat by nativists because of its role in changing the American demography towards a majority-minority nation (Torres-Gil & Demko, 2019). Nativists tether their sense of self, or ontological security, to whiteness so deeply that they believe that illegal immigrant women are weaponising their

birthing capacities in a hostile effort to gain American privileges of welfare (Delehanty & Steele, 2009). The existential anxiety of becoming a diminishing white population means nativists are able to construct these beliefs despite them being wholly disputable. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 accounts that a US citizen must be 21 years of age before they can sponsor their illegal parent, which involves steep financial costs and stipulates that the sponsor must not use publicly funded medical and social programs in this process. By peddling this argument that immigrant women strategically reproduce, the discourse removes any logic that reproduction is often a secondary effect of immigration (Chavez, 2013a: 198). The media discourse's shallow reporting relies on their audience's ignorance and uptake of stories that blur the line between opinion and fact (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018).

Birth Tourism conflation

The reproductive habits of Latina women are constructed as a threat to American demography. Here I argue that right-wing media discourse deliberately conflates birthright citizenship with birth tourism as further evidence the rhetoric is used to justify the end of birthright citizenship. An ontological security perspective tells us that nativists find comfort in a continuous battle against the Fourteenth Amendment as it calls upon the state to act to mitigate the threat of Latina women's reproduction (Huymans, 1998). Using tools of CDA, it is clear that Fox News attacks birthright citizenship, and in doing so, brandishes all women as participants in a ploy to win citizenship:

Women come to give birth in the U.S. and then return home, having earned their offspring a safety-net passport worth a fortune in free food, health care, education and retirement benefits. (*The Tucker Carlson Tonight Show*, Fox News, October 30, 2018)

Ultimately, the Latina threat narrative is perpetuated in the discourse through a nativist belief that women are plotting to have children in the US for the sole purpose of gaining citizenship. Analysing this using CDA, it is apparent that Fox News are able to evade acknowledging the existence of Latin American women who often immigrate long-term to the US or flee countries with dire social and economic fragility. The concept of "tourism" implies a fleeting, short-term trip whereby non-American women gain access to so-called American privileges, which juxtaposes the concept of immigration or seeking asylum. This is a deliberate ploy to marginalise the experiences of immigrating to the US. Intersectionality helps conceptualise the way right-wing media deliberately erase the overlapping layers of *marginalisation* Latina mothers face (Ayón et al., 2018). This *marginalisation* encapsulates the number of barriers undocumented Latina mothers face. On the basis of illegality, undocumented mothers are ineligible for most public benefits, and are forced to live in constant fear of apprehension and deportation (Villalon, 2010; Ayón et al., 2018). Latina mothers also face obstacles in access to healthcare and social support services (Abrego, 2013: 150). Furthermore, undocumented women often fear apprehension if they deliver their babies in hospital or attempt to access

pre-natal care (Chavez, 2013a). Each of these layers compound the *marginalisation* (Ayón et al., 2018) many Latina mothers face, which conservative media erase from their discourse. It is precisely this erasure that allows conservative media to marginalise and vilify the act of undocumented women having children and claim their pursuit of citizenship is the sole purpose.

Discourse Strand 2: At the Margins of Illegality, Race and Gender

Erasure of Gender

This strand argues that the use of dehumanising language to describe and assert illegality of immigrants in reporting is further evidence of the erasure of Latina women's intersecting experiences. The key theme highlighted here is how language makes the plight of Latina women invisible to the reader on reporting that pertains to reproduction, mothering and womanhood. This strand illustrates the extent to which elite media institutions reproduce racial discrimination that erases gender from the discourse and replaces it with language of illegality. Using the tools of CDA, it is clear in all Breitbart articles that focus on "anchor babies," there is an overwhelming refusal to use gendered terms such as "mother" or "woman". Instead, Breitbart favours language such as "*illegal alien parent*," "*illegal alien births*," "*pregnant foreigner*," "*children of illegal aliens*," "*births of illegal aliens*," "*alien family unit*" and "*illegal alien households*" in its reporting (Binder, 2018d; Hahn, 2018; Moran, 2018). Tools of CDA, such as language and rhetoric, indicate that the incessant repetition of "*illegal*" and "*alien*" throughout articles serves as a pervasive tactic to 'other' women and mothers based on illegality.

Illegality over Gender

By promoting illegality over gender, the discourse makes the reader ignorant to the reality of intersecting oppressions that arise when Latina women and mothers navigate life under undocumented status. Tools of CDA indicate that using terms such as "mother" or "women," albeit gendered, would assume the immigrant is more human than Breitbart would prefer to convey and, therefore, deserving of gendered roles. Given the discourse analysed here sits firmly within conservatism, it is expected that the discourse would not distinguish gender as intrinsically linked race (Crenshaw, 1991). However, the alarming discovery is that a complete removal of gender implies the right-wing uses erasure as an oppressive tactic to dehumanise Latina women and castigate an "*alien*" status to replace where gender identity traditionally would be. The implicit messaging here is that undocumented women are unworthy of being depicted through patriarchal roles of mothering and womanhood. This erasure of gender puts undocumented women at the intersection of illegality, race and gender. Illegality is at the forefront along with race, while gender is cast aside erasing all remnants of their role in mothering, birthing, and rearing to mitigate any sense of sympathy that may be conjured within the audience. Illegality contains and defines their role within the discourse. The perpetuation of illegality can be understood clearly from an intersectional

conceptualisation. The oppressive forces of illegality make Latina women more susceptible to circumstances of *powerlessness* (Ayón, 2018) whereby their experience as a mother is defined by their illegal status. An undocumented status prevents immigrant mothers from fulfilling gendered expectations of themselves and instils legal barriers to caring for children as they wish (Abrego, 2013: 150).

Discourse Strand 3: “Anchor Babies” as a platform to Stratified Reproduction

This strand analyses how media coverage on the political correctness of the term “anchor baby” is used as a catalyst to promote anti-abortion rhetoric and attack progressive immigration arguments. Two distinct trends have emerged from the gendered analysis that typify this anti-feminist and racialised discourse. First, amidst public debates on the use of the term “anchor baby” extends outwards from the Trump administration towards defending anti-abortion sentiment. Second, there is a clear preference between which women’s birthing capacities are valued, and which women are denied all autonomy.

“Anchor babies” to Unborn Babies

The term “anchor baby,” which is part of the Latina threat narrative is used and defended by right-wing media as a platform to convey other forms of reproductive oppression that harken back to a violent history for women of colour in the US. Ontological insecurity provides a novel perspective to the violent act of controlling or coercing women’s reproductive capacities. The threat that women could exercise reproductive agency by choosing to have or not have children triggers a patriarchal nativist fear that women are the key drivers of the instability they experience (Kinnval & Mitzen, 2020). Especially considering that in a hypothetical situation where all immigration flows were to stop, America would still become a majority-minority nation by 2055 (Torres-Gil & Demko, 2019: 60). This supports the argument that women of colour and their birthing capacities are a source of ontological insecurity for nativists.

Using the CDA tool of semantic moves, we see that the media derail conversations around the term “anchor babies” to promote an anti-feminist, anti-abortion stance to preserve their image of conservatism. In August 2015, while Trump was accelerating his presidential campaign to be the Republican nominee for president, Fox News reported on a public debate where Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton publicly suggested phrases to replace the term “anchor baby” with “babies,” “children,” or “American citizens” (Fox News, 2015). On a Fox News cable show, Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee¹ was asked to respond to these alternative phrases, to which he replied: “I think it's interesting Hillary Clinton would say they're called babies. And I'm thinking, Hillary, have you seen the Planned Parenthood videos? They're called babies.” (Fox News, 2015). During Mike Huckabee’s short-lived presidential campaign, he waged war on reproductive rights, actively speaking about his

¹ Mike Huckabee served as Governor of Arkansas and was a candidate US Republican Presidential Nomination in 2016. He also hosted a Fox News Channel show and radio from the years 2008 – 2015 (Britannica Academic, 2021).

goal to end abortion in the US (Holpuch, 2015). During the formation of the Trump administration, Mike Huckabee's daughter Sarah Huckabee Sanders was appointed his Press Secretary from 2017-2019. Sanders, who shared a faithful disdain for abortion as her father, had extensive experience working on political campaigns with hard-line anti-immigrant focuses, and was subsequently responsible for much of Trump's official media-relations (Williams, 2018).

Remnants of a Dark History of Reproductive Control

I argue that the perpetual need to control and dictate Latina women's bodies derives from the ontological threat that they trigger which places women's capacities to reproduce at the centre of the discourse once again. This brings into question who exactly anti-immigrant and anti-abortion advocates believe are deserving of autonomy to choose to have children, or not. On reflection, ending birthright citizenship and abortion rights both share the common thread of hegemonic control of the reproductive choices of women. This form of hegemonic control over women's bodies is called 'stratified reproduction' which conceptualises how some women's reproduction is characterised positively while other women's reproductive capacities are regarded as undesirable and are strategically devalued (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1995: 79). Reproductive manipulation of women's bodies has a vast historical precedence. It was specifically used by countries in the Global North to dominate and oppress populations of the Global South through reproductive imperialism (Kuumba, 2001: 25). The violent history of coerced and involuntary sterilisations of African American and American Indian women in the name of population control has an oppressive and racist history rooted in colonisation (Volscho, 2010). Returning to the comments made by Mike Huckabee, using the debate on "anchor babies" to pivot towards promoting an anti-abortion argument is evidence of an inherently discriminatory attitude towards women's reproduction where more value is placed on the treatment of native-US unborn fetuses over US-born children to undocumented women of colour.

Conclusion

It is highly evident that right-wing media target the threat of changing American demography at reproduction and birthing capacities of undocumented immigrant women. They are able to communicate this threat through highly racialised and 'othering' rhetoric which reveals important ideological implications. Extreme right-wing media and Donald Trump adopt a single-issue framework that portrays undocumented women only through the lens of their legal status, classifying them as undeserving of humanised language. Usage of the tools of Critical Discourse Analysis has enabled a thorough investigation into the role Latina women are assigned in nativist fears that immigration and reproduction of women of colour is creating a majority-minority population and with that American white identity is being eroded.

Chapter 2 – The External Threat of Latina immigration

Introduction

In April 2021, Fox News host Tucker Carlson tweeted, “Demographic change is the key to the Democratic Party’s political ambitions” (Carlson, 2021a). Despite denying claims that he is obsessed with pushing the theory of demographic replacement, he continues to do so under the partisan guise that any approach to immigration that is not nativist, is an attempt to “replace the current electorate” (Carlson, 2021a; Gertz, 2021). These recent links to conspiracy-based opinions can be traced back to Donald Trump where conspiracy theories found fertile ground in his administration. The midterm election in November 2018, set the perfect backdrop for a renewed onslaught of anti-immigrant hatred in media reporting against the supposed threat of the refugee ‘caravan’ from Central America. Therefore, the timing was perfect for Donald Trump to weaponise the ‘caravan’ and frame it as an “invasion” to drum up support and justify the onslaught of inhumane border policies that followed (Trump, 2018a).

This chapter demonstrates how xenophobic government rhetoric reached new heights when Trump lambasted the annual ‘caravan’ of refugees in 2018, composed mostly of mothers and children, which transformed it into a re-energised plea to ramp up their “Zero Tolerance” border agenda. Media coverage on the ‘caravan’ stripped it of its roots in feminist activism as a source of security for families by placing a national racialised microscope onto its journey north. Lastly, ontological security conceptualises how the tight media-policymaker feedback loop was a safe-haven for white supremacist messaging from the Great Replacement theory. This sealed the central argument that the demographic transformation heading towards a less white America, is a source of deep ontological insecurity for nativists who believe Latina women are the driving force behind their existential anxiety.

There are two key contributions this chapter adds to existing literature. First, this chapter actively engages in discussions of how grassroots feminist activism allowed Latina refugees to have their security concerns of travelling to the US-Mexico border heard – which is gravely overlooked in existing Latin American immigration literature (Young, 2017; Martinez, 2011). Second, this chapter continues to use a gendered analysis to investigate how conspiracy-based theories are embroiled in the media-policymaker relationship. Until now existing research on the Latino threat does not address such discussions of conspiracy theories, and certainly does not engage an intersectional gendered analysis (Chavez, 2013).

Two distinct strands of discourse emerged from conducting Critical Discourse Analysis. Strand one focuses on the media coverage of the discursive event of the ‘caravan’ in 2018 to argue that the symbolic importance of the ‘caravan’ as a form of safety for women has been claimed and weaponised by right-wing media. Strand two demonstrates that white supremacist messaging seeps into the discourse to construct the narrative that only white women are

deserving of safety from the dangerous effects of harsh immigration enforcement. Both of these discourse strands compound to build the argument that the Trump administration was committed to creating relentless insecurity for Latina women and mothers.

Discourse Strand 1: The ‘caravan’ as a concrete form of feminist activism

Four key themes surface when analysing the discursive event of the ‘caravan’ aligned with this research’s key finding that Latina women’s intersecting experiences of violence and powerlessness under the immigration system are erased by the discourse. *Violence* encapsulates experiences of sexual violence, harassment, intimidation and the fear that violence in the future may occur. *Powerlessness* summarises the fears and helplessness associated with the inability to change social structures, for example being subject to harsh immigration enforcement that separates a mother from her children at the border (Ayón et al., 2019). The first theme proclaims that intense media coverage placed a microscope over the ‘caravan’ which detached it from its authentic roots in feminist activism. The second theme demonstrates how media coverage placed a moving target onto the ‘caravan’. The third theme explores how the right-wing media grapple to claim a state of powerlessness to justify unhumanitarian policies against refugees. Finally, the discourse denies the ‘caravan’ refugee status which fuels the narrative of degradation. These themes collectively indicate that Trump has secured the fate that there is no safety or prospect of safety for Latina women and mothers when they reach the border. Ontological insecurity is key to understanding how the ‘caravan,’ which had been taking place each year, was perceived by conservative media as a disruptive event that triggered existential anxiety (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020).

Removing the symbolic importance of the ‘caravan’

This theme demonstrates that right-wing media brought the ‘caravan’ into the public eye and removed any sense of safety and security it once offered refugee women. Understanding the life-threatening risks of the journey northwards is crucial to understanding how the concept of the ‘caravan’ was founded. Trump and the right-wing media knowingly bend the truth about the symbolic importance of the ‘caravan’ to incite fear into their audiences and place a threat narrative onto it. Before it was plucked as a target of midterm election divisiveness, the ‘caravan’ once offered a concrete form of feminist activism that provided safety for displaced Latina women and mothers. Latina mothers were forced to leave behind their lives because of violent oppression and uncertainty to embark on a collective journey to “demand the right to live a livable life” (Huerta, 2020: 661). Intersectionality tells us that violence is an intersecting force of oppression that can extend further than acts of sexual violence or harassment to also include the *fear* that violence will occur in the future (Ayón et al., 2019: 890).

This theme highlights how right-wing media remove the security of the ‘caravan’ by denying the existence of violence and hardship refugees suffer both in their home country and on the journey. The right-wing discourse ignores the true nature of terror and misery mark the

experience of displacement for thousands of Central American women who escape the systematic, patriarchal micro-violence that permeates their lives (Huerta, 2020). *Powerlessness* is the central form of oppression evident here as it also compounds the fear of violence (Ayon et al, 2019). This suggests that the ‘caravan’ offered some form of power for many Latina women to escape systematic violence and somewhat mitigate the fear of violence on the journey. More than 400,000 Central Americans from the ‘Northern Triangle’ countries (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador) make the journey north each year and are met with horrific risks along the way (O’Connor et al, 2019). The ‘caravan’ of October 2018 was predominantly Honduran families, half of which were women and children, who fled their homes due to violence from family members and husbands, and gendered economic hardship such as exploitative labour (Huerta, 2020). Migrants and refugees who make the journey alone are extremely vulnerable to accidents, extortion, detentions, assault, kidnapping, human trafficking, and violence at the hands of Mexican police and immigration officials (Isaacs, 2019; Shetty 2014). In fact, Trump expressed admiration for Mexico’s immigration policies that are extremely harsh on refugees. In doing so, he strengthened support for stricter American policies by creating this dichotomous portrayal of the ‘catch and release’ policy as “weak” and Mexico’s approach as “strong”, and thus better for the US (Trump, 2018b). Furthermore, the security risks are particularly heightened for women and girls. Amnesty International reported in 2014 that 6 in 10 girls and women are raped when making the perilous journey north (Shetty, 2014). The organisation *Pueblo Sin Fronteras* (People Without Borders) for many years has been coordinating ‘caravans’ which aim to help refugees travel together from the southern Mexican border to the US-Mexican border where they present themselves at an official entry port and request asylum (Gladstone, 2018). Referred to in Spanish as ‘*Via Crucis Migrantes*’ (Migrants Way of the Cross), a ‘caravan’ symbolises a Latino Catholic procession or pilgrimage mirroring Jesus’ final days from prosecution to burial (Acevedo, 2018). The ‘caravan’ in 2018, organised by volunteers of *Pueblos Sin Fronteras* was also aided by young anti-border activists, church members, nuns, legal experts, journalists, priests and many Mexican communities who embraced their journey by offering food and shelter (Huerta, 2020).

The ‘caravan’ as a target of racialised surveillance

This theme highlights how the discourse placed a moving target on a safer form of travel for many Central American women. Ontological security helps us understand that the anxiety we see here is in fact rooted in fear that Latina reproduction and immigration will change the racial make-up of America’s future sense of ‘self’ - from a nativist lens. Prior to April 2018, Donald Trump had never publicly acknowledged the ‘caravan’, until he propelled it into the conservative discourse for it to be politicised as pre-midterm election fodder. As the ‘caravan’ made its journey north, anti-immigrant sentiment from the White House was sharpening, and inhumane policies were being readied. The discourse portrays the thousands of refugees as an incoming “invasion” of illegal migrants who must be stopped by closing the border and eliminating any “loopholes” that allow refugees in the ‘caravan’ to claim asylum (Spiering,

2019; Trump, 2018c). The CDA tool of style and rhetoric outlined by Van Dijk (1993) tells us that right-wing media are expressing an ideological opposition to what the 'caravan' represents to Latina women. They express this through language that de-legitimises Central American refugees and attacks the idea of the 'caravan' through "racialised surveillance" (Browne, 2015). "Racialised surveillance" conceptualises how race is used to justify zones of surveillance where the in-group forms a barrier, or national border, to exclude the out-group (Zecena, 2019: 103; Browne, 2015). The discourse's hyper focus on the 'caravan's' demographic makeup and its whereabouts, is testament to this. Fox News repeat images and brief video clips of masses of people walking along stretches of land without context during cable news shows to manipulate, as well as validate nativist fears that immigrants are invading the US border imminently (Lind, 2018).

Grappling for powerlessness as a justification

I argue that right-wing media claim they are powerless in the face of the 'caravan' to justify unjust policies that curtail a refugee's right to legally claim asylum. Conservative discourse grapple for the claim to powerlessness by claiming that border enforcement is "powerless" as a tool to present inhumane policies as the only solution for the US to reclaim its power after decades of common legal practice where border agents exempted families passing the US border with children from criminal prosecution (Carlson, 2018). Ontological security conceptualises this claim to powerlessness as a manifestation of the existential anxiety that the 'caravan' of refugees triggered in nativists (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). This reclamation of power is framed as the "Zero Tolerance" policy, conceived by Stephen Miller which was born out of fears that Central American families were exploiting a "loophole" by bringing their children over the border (Davis & Shear, 2019: 329). The enactment of the "Zero Tolerance" policy, forced family-separations at the border, which illustrates a nativist commitment to pervade Latina mothers and caregiver's lives with powerlessness and insecurity at the border. Using the tools of CDA to analyse how these claims of powerlessness appear tells us that the language used distorts the way power actually operates. Powerlessness and exploitation of refugees and immigrants at the border compound other forms of oppression such as violence at the hands of immigration patrol officers and the exploitation of labour (Ayon et al., 2019). A paradox is highlighted when we consider the genuine powerlessness of thousands of Central American women who make the dangerous journey to the southern border, knowing that they may be met with hostility and detainment, or be forced to "remain in Mexico" indefinitely (Ibe, 2020). The forced family-child separation policy is one example of how this language of powerlessness translated into a supposed deterrent strategy against incoming immigration and asylum. The forced family-child separation policy meant that thousands of children were separated from their parents and classified as Unaccompanied Alien Children (Monico et al., 2019). The intersecting oppressive force of powerlessness compounds with violence at the hands of immigration officials as thousands of mothers and carers who had their children forcibly removed from them.

Deliberate misidentification of refugee status

I argue here that the discourse deliberately denies the refugee status of those travelling in the 'caravan' in a ploy to undermine their deservingness and humanity. This implies that right-wing media brandish Latina women's safety as unimportant at *all* stages of their journey to seek refuge in the US. Deploying tools of CDA through the use of language Breitbart are able to degrade refugees by expressing contempt towards their right to claim asylum. Breitbart does this through deliberately mis-identifying the people in the 'caravan' by omitting the term "refugee" in their news coverage of the event (Breitbart News, 2018). This deliberate misidentification has dangerous practical consequences at the border. The misidentification and mislabelling of asylum seekers and refugees by immigration officials often fail to provide legal protection and conceals the rights such individuals are able to exercise (Soltis & Walters, 2018: 85). Even the Trump administration refrained from referring to the individuals in the 'caravan' as refugees, rather they were labelled "migrants" or "criminal illegal aliens" (Trump, 2018d). There is a wide-scale denial of the hardship and vulnerability Central American women are fleeing from and often endure when seeking refuge, from media to executive level.

Discourse Strand 2: The Great Replacement Conspiracy Theory Mobilised

This discourse strand argues that white supremacist messages about women of colour were able to mobilise in the media-policymaker feedback loop through reporting on immigration and crime rates. Using a gendered analysis, I maintain that the role Latina women are assigned continues along the premise of erasure and disregard for their safety and security. Using the concept of ontological security this section highlights two main themes. First, sexual violence is deemed by right-wing media as a problem that America should not take responsibility for which adds to their anti-immigrant narrative. The second theme forges a link between the Great Replacement theory and the Trump administration's anti-immigrant sentiment. Trump created an administration that consisted largely of "presidential conspiracism," lies, falsehoods and preposterous misrepresentations (Rosenblum & Muirhead, 2019: 68).

Sexual Abuse of Women as "Primitive" and "Savage"

This section demonstrates how the discourse employs a semantic move to portray sexual violence faced by refugees as primarily a threat to America rather than to the refugees themselves. By focusing on the sexual violence committed against Latina women, the discourse perpetuates a narrative that the sexual violence against Latina women is a problem that is unwelcome in the US. Through this narrative, the insecurity of the victim - Latina women - is disregarded because the ontological security of American identity is the most important concern. The CDA tool of semantic moves denotes a media strategy where right-wing figures want to convey an image of tolerance but in doing so produce negative statements or implications that are biased or racist (Van Dijk, 1993). For example, Tucker Carlson does this when he consistently denies claims of racism by promoting the replacement theory by responding: "This is a voting rights question" (Carlson, 2021b). For years elite racist

newspapers have distorted the binary of victim and criminal in their reporting. It has always been common to depict Black victims of crime as criminals and white criminals as victims (Kendi, 2016: 314). Indeed, Donald Trump's equivalent of this distortion manifests in his unrelenting depiction of Latin Americans as "rapists" who are "bringing crime" and "drugs" to the United States (Trump, 2015). Intersectionality reveals that immigration and seeking asylum in the US create massive disparities in experiences between men and women. Rather than viewing the act of immigration as extremely unsafe for Latina women who are subject to high rates of sexual violence and rape, the discourse focuses on the crime itself. Donald Trump mirrors a semantic move strategy as he only mentions the sexual violence that occurs at the border in conjunction to his "border crisis" rhetoric or in a plea to "secure the borders" (Trump, 2018e). In a speech at a conservative conference in Oxon Hill, Maryland, Trump ferociously distorted the crisis at the border through his remarks on sexual violence against women.

But mothers, who love their daughters, give them massive amounts of birth control pills because they know their daughters are going to be raped on the way up to our southern border. (Donald Trump, 2019)

Furthermore, Breitbart perpetuates this line of argument that Latina women "inject themselves with cheap birth control on the way" to the US-Mexican border (McHugh, 2015). They frame the issue of sexual violence and rape of Latina women as a direct result of allowing immigrant men to enter the US. The message behind this narrative, reveals that they will not allow this "rape culture" as it is against American interests to allow "primitive" immigrant "monsters" into the US (McHugh, 2015). Ultimately, the discourse is reinforcing the message that even for the most vulnerable and marginalised women who seek refuge and safety, their experiences deter them from finding such security in the United States. Evidence of these ideas are crystallised in this statement by Breitbart: "Since when is it in our interest to encourage mass rape and welcome both the perpetrators and their shattered victims with open arms?" (McHugh, 2015). By using CDA to analyse the messages behind this statement it appears that former Breitbart writer Katie McHugh - who was one of the editors Steven Miller emailed during his time in the Trump campaign - suggests that because Latin American culture is traditionally patriarchal, rape is therefore a phenomenon that is actively promoted within it. By this logic, they imply that criminals and victims of sexual violence should not be allowed to enter the US as they are bringing "rape culture" with them. Ontological security adds a crucial layer of analysis. It appears that Breitbart construct a self-identity where sexual violence is an external threat that enters only with unauthorised immigration and asylum seekers. Once again, the intersections of violence and powerlessness subordinate Latina women further into erasure of their gendered experience.

Ideological Implication of the Great Replacement

Using ontological security this theme demonstrates how messages surrounding the Great Replacement theory found a breeding ground within the media-policy maker feedback loop

under the Trump administration. I argue this is testament to the nativist commitment that only seeks to protect the white race, specifically white women, from demographic changes. The idea that unauthorised immigrants are “primitive” as they commit mass violence against women can be clearly traced to the racist, anti-immigration novel ‘Camp of the Saints’ by Jean Raspail. The novel fictionalises a myth exceptionally popular among Neo-Nazis and white nationalists known as “white genocide” or the “Great Replacement” (Hayden, 2019). Donald Trump’s closest aides, Stephen Miller and Steve Bannon, are heavily associated with mobilising ideas in the novel into their anti-immigrant sentiment. It was revealed by the Southern Poverty Law Centre in November 2019 that Miller emailed a number of Breitbart editors and writers in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election, including Julia Hahn who later became Trump’s Special Assistant (Marantz, 2017). Hatewatch reported that over 80 percent of the 900 emails Miller exchanged with Breitbart involved discussions around race, immigration and white nationalism (Hayden, 2019). Among these emails, there is evidence that Miller recommended Raspail’s novel to Julia Hahn when reporting on the negative impacts of non-white immigration (Hayden, 2019) - recommendations that Hahn subsequently heeded (Hahn, 2015). Furthermore, Raspail’s novel depicts a scene in which brown-skinned refugees rape a white woman to death (Hayden, 2019). This forges a strong link between ideas of Great Replacement theory, Trump’s administration, and the ideology touted by conservative media.

The CDA tool of ideological implication allows for an in-depth analysis into what messages are not explicitly stated but rather inferred by analysing the context behind this media-policymaker loop. Firstly, it reveals that the nativist fear of immigrants we see in reporting can be traced to mythical and dystopian ideas that refugees are mass perpetrators of sexual violence against white people. Secondly, it exposes both racist and sexist ideology that sexual violence against women only matters when the victim is a white. The ontological insecurity at work here means the Great Replacement theory acts as an imaginative benchmark for what the future could look like if immigration is not harshly enforced and demographics continues to change. By pushing ideas from Raspail’s novel, the discourse is projecting an American ‘future self’ identity where white people are ‘replaced’ and therefore in constant existential threat. CDA has demonstrated that the focus on the future demography and negative impacts of immigration within the discourse helps perpetuate the present-day erasure and disregard for Latina women’s oppression. Intersectionality helps to conceptualise that Latina women are both the victims of systematic sexual violence at the border and victims of political insecurity in Latin America that drives their displacement to the US. However, neither of these overlapping experiences are portrayed in the discourse which adds to the argument that American immigration enforcement is creating an increasingly insecure reality for many women.

Conclusion

Overall, this chapter tell us that xenophobic and racist rhetoric peaked when Trump launched the violent “Zero Tolerance” policy to crackdown on children and refugee families crossing the border. The annual ‘caravan’ was once a source of power and security for thousands of Latina women, until right-wing media coverage stripped it of its roots by propelling it into the public eye to be castigated as an ‘invasion’ of immigrants. Intersectionality has exposed the layers of *powerlessness* and *violence* (Ayón et al., 2019) as a result of restrictive border enforcement and denial of basic human rights – experiences that are essentially erased within the discourse.

Conclusion

This research contributes an important gendered analysis to the body of literature that currently subsumes Latina women's experiences within the broader Latino threat, and therefore treats the real-life implications on Latina women as less important than Latino men. By incorporating a gendered analysis, this research has exposed that nativist fear of the American demographic transformation is rooted in the Latina threat narrative, and in doing so erases and denies Latina women's gendered experiences from right-wing discourse. These novel findings stress the importance of this gendered analysis, as it has highlighted a phenomenon in right-wing discourse that would otherwise be overlooked by feminist and anti-racist literature. These findings profoundly draw attention to how illegality defines the experiences of millions of immigrant women which widens the gap between experiences and treatment of women from the Global South and North. The use of intersectionality contributes to this thesis' striking findings as it highlighted how Latina women's intersectional experiences are disregarded and erased from the discourse. This research has developed an original conceptualisation of nativist fears of the demographic transformation, using ontological security and incorporating it into the Latina threat gendered analysis, it adds an important contribution to existing bodies of literature that currently neglects a feminist perspective (Torres-Gil & Demko, 2019).

This thesis has proved that exclusionary rhetoric does not remain within the discourse, it reverberates out through the media to negatively impact the lives of refugees and immigrants. The findings in this research resonates deeply with an ongoing humanitarian crisis that is still being denied at the executive level. On June 8, 2021, the Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris, launched a fresh appeal telling refugees from Guatemala: "Do not come." The issue of Central American refugees is once again propelled into the media discourse as they are discouraged from fleeing gang violence, corruption, extortion, and extreme poverty (Narea, 2021). Although Harris' messaging is much tamer, this research reminds us of the power of language to create perpetual insecurity, particularly language that is xenophobic, racist, misogynistic and politically-incorrect.

As we draw closer to the US becoming a majority-minority nation, nativist suspicions of non-native, non-white, American citizens will not subside. Therefore, the implications of this research on broader immigration and nativist literature are twofold. First, as nativists continue to resist the idea of the American population becoming more brown, we must be cautious of how this resistance can disguise itself as a 21st century eugenics agenda. Immigrant women who fall into the margins of gender, race, and illegal status are often the targets of such racialised reproductive control, demonstrated in chapter 1. Second, the gendered analysis this research applied in chapter 2 highlighted the symbolic importance of the 'caravan' demonstrates that immigration studies must actively engage in discussions of grassroots feminist activism. Otherwise these concrete forms of feminism that give

marginalised refugee women a voice in the face of powerlessness, get buried within broader immigration literature meaning swathes of women do not have their security concerns heard.

This gendered analysis disrupts the dichotomy of secure and insecure by critiquing which bodies receive security from the state, and which bodies are denied it. Adopting a gendered approach in international politics research is important in understanding the power dynamics between the state and gendered subjects. Indeed, feminist approaches to international politics are crucial in unravelling whose security matters by questioning if marginalised groups' calls to action are being heard. Given that traditional theories of international security often overlook marginalised groups such as women, people of colour, trans women, and immigrant women there is an imperative to centre a gendered analysis to uplift the most marginalised communities (Mehta & Wibben, 2018). Therefore, future research should investigate the policy-side impacts of the Latina threat narrative and how it limits women's access to reproductive justice in terms of abortion rights, contraceptives, and prenatal services.

The patriarchal society we live in continues to subordinate women's lives with control, fear and powerlessness – particularly women who have fled countries only to be met with similar but more implicit disdain and hostility in the US. This research adds an essential layer of analysis to the ongoing Central American refugee crisis which was previously under-researched. The central argument has repercussions on the mass of Central American women who have and will in the future be tainted by the single-axis frame of illegality that mass media perpetuate. The wider implications speak to the massive disparity in precarity that brown women suffer when they cross the US-Mexico border. These intersectional precarities and vulnerabilities must be incorporated into the feminist agenda to include all women.

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