

Spring 4-24-2017

(Un-)American Movement: Unaccompanied Immigrant Children and the Rhetoric of Space and Identity

Emily K. Royer

Macalester College, emilykathleenroyer@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/poli_honors



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Royer, Emily K., "(Un-)American Movement: Unaccompanied Immigrant Children and the Rhetoric of Space and Identity" (2017). *Political Science Honors Projects*. 68.

http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/poli_honors/68

This Honors Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Political Science Department at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Political Science Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact scholarpub@macalester.edu.

**(Un-)American Movement: Unaccompanied Immigrant
Children and the Rhetoric of Space and Identity**

Emily Kathleen Royer
Department of Political Science, Macalester College

Advisor: Professor Zornitsa Keremidchieva
Department of Political Science

April 26, 2017

Immigration, in all its various forms, has become one of the most pressing issues of the modern era. In the contemporary United States, the arrival of migrants—be they refugees, asylum seekers, documented or undocumented immigrants—is often figured as a problem of existential proportions. In this project, I turn my attention to a significant recent development in the new American immigration “crisis.” During the summer months of 2014, the United States witnessed a period of heightened migration by unaccompanied children from the Central American nations of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Through a rhetorical analysis of congressional hearings held in response to these children’s plight, I find that the figure of the child migrant that emerges within these hearings appears to simultaneously contest and entrench dominant modern conceptions of the agency of immigrants. Moreover, my project reveals how the children’s journey of migration reconstitutes both the physical and symbolic space defining the contours of U.S. citizenship and American identity.

Acknowledgements

Completing this project would have been impossible without the help and support of many people, and I am deeply thankful to all of you.

I would like to thank my advisor for this project, Zornitsa Keremidchieva, for your invaluable feedback, kindness, constant encouragement and humor, and being willing to read the amount of material I subjected you to. It has been a true honor to work with you over the past years.

I would also like to thank my defense panelists, Charmaine Chua and Dianna Shandy, for your thought-provoking comments and for the time you graciously spent engaging with my project.

Thank you to Patrick Schmidt and my fellow honors colloquium members for your spirit, encouragement, feedback, and breakfast. You are a great group of people.

Thank you to the Macalester professors who have inspired me academically and personally, including Paul Dosh, David Blaney, Geoffrey Gorham, Diane Michelfelder, Joy Laine, and Bill Wilcox.

Thank you to my parents, Mark and Martha Royer, my sister Meggie, and my brother Nick, for dealing with me when I was very stressed about this project, unconditionally supporting my academic pursuits, and for being the best family a girl could ask for.

To John, for your constant interest in my project and for helping me not spend too much time working! I couldn't have done it without you.

Thank you to Marta, Ashley, Rachel, Caroline, Chelsea, Tara, Abigail, and Ellen. I am so grateful to call you my friends. We did this together.

Y para Miguel Luna, por ser tú mismo y nada más, por tu amistad, y por siempre recordarme, “lo importante es que intentas.” Gracias.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Literature Review	6
The Rhetoric of Immigration: Hope, Fear, and Assimilation.....	7
The Rhetorical Citizenship of Children	17
Contribution to the Literature.....	25
Methodology	27
Rhetorical Analysis	29
Objects of Study and Rhetorical Analysis.....	31
Chapter One: Migrant Children in Perspective	35
Historical Trends	35
The Current Case	38
Factors Driving Children’s Migration.....	42
Policy Timeline	48
Chapter Two: Republican Discourse	55
Introduction	55
“The Lowest Level of Violence”	57
“How Many Children Didn’t Make It”	59
“Those People That Are Coming In”	65
“ This Humanitarian Crisis That We Are Experiencing ”	67
“ Are They Being Used as A Distraction? ”	70
“ Lawbreakers Already ”	77
“We Can Save Children” (And Ourselves)	85
“ They Can Return Back to a Normal Way of Life ”	85
“ My Country’s Sovereignty Violated Over and Over ”	89
Outcomes of Republican Discourse	92
Chapter Three: Democratic Discourse	96
Introduction	96
“The Real Humanitarian Crisis”	98
“ A Constant Barrage of Violence ”	99
“ Chased Off by the Violence ”	105
“Still Clutching their Dolls and Teddy Bears”	108
“This is a Test That We Must Not Fail”	112
“ This is Who We Are, and This is What We Do ”	113
“ Our Residents ”	121
Outcomes of Democratic Discourse	130
Conclusion	136
The Spatial Mapping of Identity	137
Returning Children to Invisibility	142
The Future of American Identity	145
Suggestions for Further Research	147
Works Cited	150

Introduction

Immigration, in all its various forms, has become one of the most pressing political issues of the modern era. Since the foundation of the United States, immigration has typically been cast by political elites as a crisis requiring immediate action, suspicion of newcomers, and the close regulation and investigation of immigrants for signs of moral, economic, or racial inadequacy. The image of the “foreigner,” as encompassing a disquieting unknowability due to their linguistic and cultural difference, has historically been drawn as a threat to the established, settled population that must not be forced to fall victim to the vagaries of the immoral or culturally unassimilable foreigner. Such discursive frameworks of suspicion and deep mistrust have been driven by and reflected in federal immigration policy as the state has evolved since the late 1700s. This policy has continually imposed boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable foreignness, thereby simultaneously constructing a dominant vision of the racial, cultural, and political composition of a genuine American identity.

While such exclusionary ideas continue to abound in the present era, recent policy debates over immigration have incorporated several new themes. For example, American immigration debates have become closely intertwined with the narratives and problematics of globalization, bringing the enforcement technologies of the border to the fore as methods of regulating global mobilities and reinscribing the supposed boundedness of American identity. Additionally, old romanticized narratives of the immigrant searching for a better life in the promises afforded by the United States have been disrupted by increasing flows of refugees from across the globe primarily fleeing

home rather than choosing a new one purely for its mythologized resplendent promise.

The anxiety such changes have caused for many policymakers has been reinforced by the rise of *en masse* immigration, a trend which subverts traditional American narratives of the atomized individual immigrant traveling to the United States alone or with familial dependents. Such trends have magnified the complexity of questions of citizenship, territory, and national identity within governmental debates over immigration, as the various identities and histories of the “new” immigrant destabilize long-held assumptions about immigrant experiences, desires, and capacities to assist in sustaining the vitality of American democracy and its founding myths.

In the following project, I turn my attention to a particular case study of the new American immigration “crisis” that at once involves several of these developing themes of immigration and immigration debate, implicating questions of the definition of a true refugee, the material effects of *en masse* immigration, and the southern border as both a physical and a symbolic space defining the contours of U.S. citizenship. This case study centers around the summer months of 2014, when the United States witnessed a period of heightened migration by unaccompanied children from the Central American nations of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. By the end of the year, over 68,000 unaccompanied minors from these nations had crossed the Mexican-American border into the U.S. (Kandel 2). The figure of the undocumented, unaccompanied immigrant child, as evidenced by the discordant naming terms employed by political actors to encapsulate their identity, presents a rhetorical challenge to those charged with formulating policy proposals concerning their presence on American soil. As such, policy-makers must navigate the child migrant’s embodiment of diverse, seemingly

antagonistic characteristics, such as childhood, criminality, suffering, mobility, and politicization. As I will explore in this paper, the political and rhetorical conundrum posed by migrant children was met by a rhetorical response that variably highlighted and diverted attention away from unaccompanied minors' status as children.

The deep ambivalence evidenced in congressional responses to unaccompanied child migrants, I contend, results in part from how speakers navigate both the new trends in immigration I discuss above and the extraordinary quality of the case involving substantial numbers of *children*. Scholars of communication have largely come to a consensus that adult undocumented immigrants, primarily those from Latin America, are cast on largely negative terms within dominant forums of political rhetoric, encompassing responses oriented toward dehumanization and criminalization, and demonstrating an “undifferentiated fear of terrorism, crime and non-white immigrants” (Welch and Schuster 404). However, the discursive power of policymakers to formulate immigrant identities and motives when the particular immigrants in question are children has been largely unexplored within the communication literature on immigration and citizenship. To date, no scholarly research has confronted Congressional discourse on this subject, although this legislative body is charged with crafting policy determining to a great extent the material, legal, and personal outcomes of unaccompanied minors' presence within and relation to the American nation. Only one major work has confronted public discourse on unaccompanied minors (Antony and Thomas 2017). I contend that this paucity in research is symptomatic of how dominant American immigration discourse largely over-determines the adult character of immigration populations, who are assumed to enjoy certain powers associated with full personal agency. The instance of mass

immigration I confront in this project, however, is highly disruptive to this long-standing over-determination in two major ways, as the migrants in question are not only significant numbers of children, but also do not migrate as part of identifiable family units.

In the following project, I present a preliminary attempt to explore this unique case through a rhetorical analysis of five U.S. Congressional hearings concerning unaccompanied minors held by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, the House Committee on Homeland Security, the House Committee on the Judiciary, and the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations between June 24, 2014, and December 10, 2014. My analysis of these hearings explores the ways in which the divergent rhetorical characterizations of unaccompanied minors advanced by both Republican and Democratic representatives variously challenge and conform to the ideographic determination of the adult undocumented immigrant that has emerged within American political discourse as immigration trends have shifted to bring questions of globalization and border control to the fore.¹ The reiteration and subversion of these themes within the hearings I analyze, as well as the policy responses these tropes are invoked by Members of Congress to justify, provide prime material through which we may probe larger questions of children's political identity and the identity of the American nation within an era of profound and challenging change in migration and notions of state belonging. As

¹ For a discussion of the ideograph in rhetorical criticism, see McGee (1980). McGee argues that political discourse implicating ideology, formulated by rhetorical artifacts, "seems characterized by slogans, a vocabulary of 'ideographs' easily mistaken for the technical terminology of political philosophy" (87). McGee thus refers to terms such as "property" and "rule of law" as the structural "building blocks" of ideology that foment social control as they "signify and 'contain' a unique ideological commitment" encompassing unstated propositions (89).

such, I explore the questions: How do Members of Congress approach the case of child immigrants? How is that approach refracted through the prism of party affiliation? Finally, what do these responses tell us about the substance and fault lines of current conceptions of American citizenship and identity? By addressing these questions, my project furthers investigations of the rhetorical nexus between immigration and childhood by analyzing how Congressional speakers implicate the status of the child as an always-becoming embodiment of flux, dynamism, and uncertainty and what we can learn about children's political identity and citizenship from these frameworks. As a result, my project contributes to the political theory literature on children, which I believe often implicitly assumes the child's status as a non-racialized citizen, by putting this literature in conversation with racialized discourses on *immigrant* children.

In investigating how Congressional rhetoric on Central American unaccompanied minors both implicates and controverts discursive characteristics associated with the stereotypical "illegal" immigrant, I explore the mobility of the identity of the child migrant as constructed by both Republicans and Democrats, linked with the rhetorical production of discursively bordered spaces. That is to say, I investigate how the discursive characterization and prescriptive historicization of spaces, including Central America, the space of the journey, and the United States, enable multiple particularized understandings of the child migrant, their motives for migrating, and the legitimacy of their presence on American soil. Drawing from these constructions of space, I explore how the mobile political identity of children is mapped by Congressional speakers along narrative spatial trajectories granted moral and symbolic value, mimicking the growth of the quintessential child and thereby exceeding the bounds of contemporary political

discourse on the adult “illegal” or undocumented immigrant. Such discourses, I argue, put to rhetorical work an understanding of the child as a mobile site of potentiality and becoming to ultimately debate the fundamental cultural and political identity of the American nation, rather than the identity, experiences, and needs of Central American child migrants as such.

Literature Review

In order to investigate how Congressional discourse approaches unaccompanied child migrants, I must first understand how dominant discourses approach both adult undocumented immigrants and the concept of childhood in order to explore how these constructions are reflected and controverted in the hearings I analyze. Therefore, in the following literature review, I discuss major analytical trends in contemporary communication and political theory scholarship on immigration, citizenship, and childhood that I will draw from throughout my project. I begin by exploring scholarship that investigates the American rhetoric of immigration writ large. In this section, I turn to the book *Democracy and the Foreigner* by the political theorist Bonnie Honig as a framing text. Honig argues that the seemingly bifurcated rhetorical moves toward the inclusion and exclusion of immigrants in American society should not be seen as wholly discrete discourses. Rather, xenophobic and xenophilic rhetoric often constitute overlapping discourses drawing from the same set of imagined characteristics of the “foreigner” constructed and reconstructed over time within immigration debates. Confronting rhetorical scholarship on immigration debates from this angle provides a useful strategy for understanding within my own project the seeming

incommensurability, at first glance, of the narratives that emerge within Congressional debates disputing the status, rights, and identity of the unaccompanied immigrant child. I next identify patterns that can be drawn from the work of scholars who have analyzed dominant, ideographic discourses on the “problem” of adult undocumented immigrants in the United States. I do so in order to have a basis of comparison between the rhetorics of the immigrant child and the adult immigrant. I next turn to the political theory literature on children, analyzing how the figure of the “universal” child has been thought outside of the family. I then cover the work of the few communication scholars who have undertaken rhetorical analyses of discourse concerning immigrant children, in order to discover contrasts and overlap between constructions of immigrant children and the “universal” child found in the political theory literature.

The Rhetoric of Immigration: Hope, Fear, and Assimilation

While several scholars have recently called for increasing focus within the communication field to be turned toward “alternatives to the state’s conservative ideographs,” the prevailing focus of rhetorical analyses of immigration rhetoric remains trained on discourses encompassing the diverse varieties of responses to immigration flows by non-immigrants (Demo 51). As my project about unaccompanied minors expands upon this trend, in part due to the dearth of widely disseminated texts privileging the voices of child migrants themselves, in the following section I will examine the work of scholars covering dominant responses to immigrants, both documented and undocumented, who explore the malleability and mobility of citizenship and belonging within political discourse. It is this complicated landscape of discourse encompassing

simultaneous acceptance and rejection, and tolerance and fear, of immigrants that the Congressional hearings I analyze emerge into, draw from, and impact in turn.

As Bonnie Honig notes, seemingly disparate or incommensurable strands of thought circulating among American responses to immigration assume common ground in their treatment of foreignness as a “problem” that can be solved with new policies and new knowledge (1). As Vanessa Beasley argues, this “problem” is fundamentally rhetorical, as policy proposals impacting immigration and citizenship always advance particular constructions of immigrants and their history and identity (3). Confronting such constructions, Beasley asks, “How can the immigrant of yesterday be lionized as the very foundation of the nation’s character, while the immigrant of today is often demonized as a threat to the nation’s safety and stability?” (3). While Beasley characterizes these inclusive and exclusive responses as separate but attendant rhetorics, Honig argues that they are necessarily intertwined, as xenophobia and xenophilia act as twin threads in immigration debates that do not run merely parallel but rather accompany and reinforce each other (Honig 77). Honig explores the Immigrant America myth to illustrate this point. In its dominant formulation, the myth asserts a vision of the foreigner as the lifeblood of the American nation, capable of reinvigorating the nation’s founding principles and commitments through a deep allegiance to their adoptive home. By working hard, embodying “traditional” family values, and literally performing the mythical act of consent through the acts of relocation and naturalization, the immigrant acts as a restorative “agent of national reenchantment” (74). Along these lines, Beasley similarly identifies a trend in American political discourse of identifying the immigrant as

an enactor of foundational American principles through one's hopeful work toward achieving one's unlimited natural potential (7).

The dissemination of this image of the giving, reinvigorating immigrant, however, necessarily provokes a corresponding negative, suspicious response by the very virtue of its strength. Honig argues, "the dream of a national home, helped along by the symbolic foreigner, in turn animates a suspicion of immigrant foreignness at the same time" (76). The more essential to true American virtue and practice the immigrant becomes, the more they threaten to displace and challenge the political, cultural, linguistic, and economic dominance of "real" Americans. The hard-working immigrant thus presents a simultaneous exemplar of behavior and an ever-heightening threat to citizens by expanding their economic and political power through their performance of the American Dream. This rhetoric of giving and taking, in which "the presumed test of both a good and a bad foreigner is the measure of her contribution to the restoration of the nation" provides the discursive backbone to the mutuality of xenophobia and xenophilia, where both orientations "feed and (re)produce" each other (76). Such discourse imparted by "us" as citizens is profoundly imperialist in that it prevents us from seeing the immigrant on their own terms. Rather, we confront the immigrant framed by the effects, both invigorating and threatening, their potential or actual presence on American soil, and their agential capacity to both give to and take from the American nation, have for the American people and our shared values (46). This theme will be acutely evident within the debates I analyze.

The co-presence of xenophilia and xenophobia in American immigration rhetoric often terminates in pitting the documented immigrant and the undocumented immigrant

against each other within dominant discourses. In this way, Honig argues, “The iconic good immigrant—the supercitizen—who upholds American liberal democracy is not accidentally or coincidentally partnered with the iconic bad immigrant who threatens to tear it down” (97). Undocumented immigrants, who neither submit themselves to the power of American law and constitutionalism through the naturalization act, nor allow the American citizen and virtuous immigrant to consent to their presence within national boundaries, pose a counter to the documented immigrant’s ability to shore up the myth of contractual liberal consent. While Honig largely treats documented immigrants and undocumented immigrants as subject to disparate discourses, Demo notes that since the 1990s, some discursive platforms, including the U.S. Congress, have begun to shift toward rhetorically conflating documented immigrants with the extremely negative popular image of “illegal” immigrants (Demo 50). Together, then, Honig, Beasley, and Demo bring into critical focus the mutual reinforcement of inclusion and exclusion that demonstrates the dynamism of the concepts of citizenship and non-citizenship.

The book *Rhetorics of Immigration*, edited by Johanna Hartelius, provides a collection of scholarly evidence drawn from specific case studies that reinforce and provide nuance for Honig’s thesis. Many of the articles in this collection explore “positive” rhetorical framings of immigrants and their journeys toward residence and assimilation in the United States that attempt to ameliorate the hold and power of xenophobic discourses but nevertheless serve to deny immigrants agency or to reformulate and suppress their histories into Americanized narratives. For example, in their article, “Facing Ghosts, God, and Nature: Affect, Naturalization, and the ‘No Más Cruces’ Border Campaign,” Check and Jasken (2015) explore videos produced by the

United States Border Patrol in an attempt to highlight for potential undocumented immigrants the pervasive dangers of the journey north through Mexico. These supposedly positive, sympathetic rhetorical portrayals aimed at the welfare and safety of potential immigrants, Check and Jasken argue, ultimately assign blame and moral responsibility to migrants “by rendering border deaths an inevitable and irrevocable consequence of the behavior of undocumented immigrants and their families,” shifting attention away from federal policies that deeply imperil migrants crossing the Mexican-U.S. border (27). Check and Jasken, then, complicate Honig’s claim that the “weak and wretched” immigrant figure is employed to activate the humanitarian impulses of the American populace by showing how this figure may be blamed for their plight (Honig 77). The work of Karma R. Chávez (2015) additionally shows that the suffering of the “wretched” immigrants who do succeed in crossing the border may be harnessed by immigrant rights advocates in a way that normalizes and perpetuates their plight. By arguing for the better treatment of queer immigrants within detention facilities, for example, advocates’ passive acceptance of the reality of detention risks reifying the dehumanization and humiliation of imprisonment, thereby contradicting their humanitarian orientation (Chávez 2015 72).

Adding to the “preventative” case of supposed respect for the dignity of immigrants analyzed by Check and Jasken, the following scholars focus on how the life histories and journeys of immigrants are often idealized and Americanized. These rhetorical strategies force immigrants to embody the characteristics of American citizenship at the expense of suppressing the strength of U.S. anti-immigrant sentiment and the extreme hardships and loss often involved in immigration. Along these lines, Hector Amaya (2007) provides a cogent analysis of how the Latino immigrant soldiers in

the U.S. armed forces killed during the Iraq War were rhetorically framed by mainstream news sources as embodying deeply patriotic commitments and an idealized, wide-eyed love for their adoptive nation reminiscent of Honig's claim that immigrants are often employed in popular discourse as exemplars of the most American of virtues (Honig 98). These stories, Amaya argues, exemplify a "mythic recasting of the soldiers' lives into heroic military biographies" (238). The fact that these men were awarded posthumous citizenship demonstrates how the concept of U.S. citizenship resists fixity, as acts coded as supremely patriotic and valuable to the imperialist projects of the nation may be enough to overcome supposedly rigid juridical categorizations. Embodying the idealized path of the virtuous immigrant may grant one citizenship, but sometimes only at the cost of one's life.

Assimilationist rhetorics, while often asserting migrants' inherent humanity and dignity and advocating for inclusive and welcoming attitudes toward both documented and undocumented immigrants, as the following scholars note, often similarly rely for justification on a construction of immigrants as aligned with the practice of "American" virtues. In her article "Faithful Sovereignty: Denationalizing Immigration Policy in the 2003 Pastoral Letter on Migration," Anne Teresa Demo (2015) performs a rhetorical analysis of pastoral letters issued by the U.S. Catholic Church that attempt to humanize undocumented immigrants from Central America and Mexico. While representatives of the Church create an image of undocumented immigrants as inherently dignified, they qualify this claim by "[situating] the migrant as a focal point of evangelization" (Demo 58). Their potential for coming to know Christ as American Catholics have, then, is

instrumental in the Church's justification for treating undocumented immigrants with compassion.

Advocating for immigrants' ability to assimilate and take on American characteristics may be extended to the point that, as Honig argues and Amaya's case demonstrates, immigrants become within dominant discourses idealized contributors to the nation who "[shore] up and [reinvigorate] the regime" (Honig 76). The measure of "good" immigrants then, refers not to them, but to what they may give to their adopted nation. Such discourses repackage the symbolic and actual lives of individual immigrants in a way that, according to Amaya, suppresses the extreme deprivation and hardship many immigrants experience (243). While resisting xenophobic language, these discourses do so in a way that forces the immigrant to embody an American character as a condition of acceptance. These discourses, then, presuppose an inherent otherness and difference of character, culture, or ideology the immigrant must ever overcome in order to serve as a truly beneficial, giving "supplement to the nation" rather than an unassimilable, dangerous threat (Honig 74).

Many scholars of immigration rhetoric have addressed discursive practices that project largely negative constructions of immigrants that deny them the possibility of any role as "agent[s] of national reenchantment" (74). Much of this work focuses on how those in positions of political or journalistic power have formulated an ideographic image of "illegal immigrants" imbued with specific, usually highly negative, characteristics. Other scholars have moved away from investigating the employment of the term "illegal immigrant" as an essentializing monolith, and have analyzed the differing rhetorical characterizations of undocumented immigrants that emerge when the diverse social

identities of undocumented immigrants are taken into account, such as gender and racial identities. These discourses, while largely confronting undocumented immigrants, often deeply impact documented immigrants and U.S. citizens, inscribing many such individuals with the characteristics of the threatening imagined “illegal immigrant” intent on appropriating the resources and jobs of deserving American citizens. As Karma R. Chávez (2009) and Mary Romero (2011) demonstrate, such rhetoric exposes the often-racialized character of immigration discourse, a character left largely unaddressed by Honig.

Several scholars focus on the ideographic term <illegal immigrant> as their primary object of analysis, unpacking the associations carried within this term.² In her article “Brown-Skinned Outlaws: An Ideographic Analysis of ‘Illegal(s),’” Jennifer Potter (2014) investigates the rhetorical consequences of the recent transition from the use of the term <illegal immigrants> to the abbreviated term <illegals> in articles culled from the *Washington Post*. She argues that, while the term <illegal immigrant> conflates “illegal” status with a criminal motive in the popular imaginary, <illegal> shifts the perpetrator from acting with criminal agency to commit the specific infraction of crossing the border without proper documentation to inhabiting criminality as a very state of being (Potter 237). The grammatical shift, then, “provides an opportunity for politicians to collapse <illegal> immigrants into a singular and unified positionality of Latino/as” (241). The work of Justin G. Whitney (2013) demonstrates the material and social effects the production of this criminalized identity has for undocumented immigrants. Through his analysis of a voter education guide published by a non-partisan commission of the

² An ideograph is denoted within angle brackets.

Arizona state legislature, Whitney concludes that the text “construct[s] a dehumanizing notion of and violent response to ... undocumented individuals” through the repeated employment of violent metaphors referencing the need to “combat” or “fight” undocumented immigration (446). In this case, the ideograph of criminality is employed to figure a violent, combative response as the natural social response to undocumented immigration, with potentially disastrous consequences for the immigrants caught up in it.

While the above analyses explore the associations inherent in the ideograph, neither investigates how this construction rhetorically positions undocumented immigrants in relation to American citizens, a project undertaken by Robert DeChaine (2009) in his article “Bordering the Civic Imaginary: Alienization, Fence Logic, and the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps.” Analyzing texts produced by a civilian militia in favor of reinforcing and militarizing the southern border, DeChaine argues that these texts not only construct a dehumanized, degraded notion of undocumented immigrants as Potter and Whitney find, but also “alienize” them apart from American citizens in a discursively bordered space as “irredeemable others whose putative exclusion from the national body is virtually absolute” (45). This exclusionary response is characteristic of a liberal regime in which particularly threatening “foreignness is generally taken to signify a threat of corruption that must be kept out or contained” (Honig 1-2). While DeChaine highlights the work performed by the concept of human difference in rhetorically producing the <illegal immigrant>, the above scholars treat undocumented immigrants as a coherent group defined by their juridical status rather than as a diverse group of individuals whose differing social identities may in reality reinforce or disrupt the ideographic framework.

As a result, these scholars risk reifying the monolithic construction of undocumented immigrants common in the dominant discourse.

Several other scholars add nuance to the above analyses by recognizing the relevance of gender and racial differences for the discursive construction of undocumented immigrants, as well as for the types of persons caught up in reactions to perceived hostile or valuable foreignness. In her article “Embodied Translation: Dominant Discourse and Communication with Migrant Bodies-as-Text,” Karma R. Chávez (2009) considers how the racialized bodies of Latino/as are read and translated as texts by law enforcement officers as a heuristic component of the alienization discussed by DeChaine. Using a case study of the 1997 “Chandler Round-Up” raids, Chávez found that a person’s darker skin tone and appearance indicating lower socioeconomic class were likely to be read by law enforcement as indicative of potential illegality, resulting in the detention of undocumented and documented immigrants, as well as U.S. citizens (28). Drawing from this evidence, Chávez argues that “those deemed ‘illegal alien,’ whether they are documented or not, are marked and translated without any acknowledgement of other possibilities of subjectivity” due to the simplistic heuristics of the dominant discourse that bring the material consequences of the <illegal> ideograph to bear more heavily on persons visibly embodying racial or class disadvantage (22). In this case, then, U.S. citizenship is reformulated to accept and reject individuals based not on their legal status, but on how their racial and class identities mesh with the dominant image of a true American citizen. This rhetorical practice implicitly bars all dark-skinned Latino/as from ever embodying the beneficial, revitalizing foreignness explored by Honig, and from having any valid claim to exist as members of the American polity at all.

In her article, “‘Alien’ Sexuality: Race, Maternity, and Citizenship,” Natalie Cisneros (2013) finds that the racialization of undocumented immigration intersects with sexuality and motherhood in a way that disrupts traditional understandings of women as the producers of virtuous future citizens. She argues that contemporary political debates concerning the phenomenon of “anchor babies” serve to “constitute the always-already racialized ‘alien’ subject as dangerous and perverse” through the production of a racialized conception of motherhood as threatening to white American citizens and their continued dominance in terms of race and population (Cisneros 292). Cisneros’ analysis is essential in that it demonstrates that undocumented women are never fully confronted by the dominant discourse as women in their own right, but as alien women retaining a deviant potentiality to enact national disaster. Thus, in the dominant imaginary, the undocumented woman presents a double threat to the identity of the nation in terms of both her racial identity and her supposedly inevitable fertility.

The Rhetorical Citizenship of Children

While the analyses of the above scholars are essential in that they elucidate the variegated rhetorical tropes associated with undocumented immigrants, the discourses confronted in these works all implicitly assume the immigrant subject as a fully agential, atomized adult, a subject I argue is complicit with the trope of the immigrant as an active subject. In reality, children make up a significant proportion of the American immigrant population. In 2013, the last year for which data are available, the United States Census Bureau found that 16.2% of immigrants entering the U.S. between 2000 and 2013 were between the ages of 0 and 19, although these statistics are subject to complications

considering the difficulty of counting undocumented immigrants (“Current Population Survey”). Additionally, between October 1, 2016, and February 28, 2017, unaccompanied minors constituted 27,591 of the 186,986 total immigrants apprehended by the United States Border Patrol at the southern border, or 14.8% of the total (“Southwest Border Migration”).³ It is possible that part of the deep controversy surrounding the immigrant comes from the counterfactual over-determination within American political culture of the immigrant population as largely adult. As described above, a consensus has emerged within the communication literature that confronts how the “problematic representation of immigrants in official discourses and mass media” inscribes adult immigrants with profoundly negative signifiers revolving around their supposed destructive *agency* (Hartelius 3).

The question of how these constructions are challenged by children has been minimally attended to. Discourse on child immigrants presents a compelling and largely unexplored manifestation of immigration rhetoric, as they embody a nexus of identities that invoke widely disparate ideographic constructions, such as the identities of undocumented immigrants, the global Child, and children experiencing humanitarian crisis. To provide a theoretical background for my exploration of how and under what rhetorical circumstances Congressional discourse variably privileges and subverts these ideographic determinations, in the following section, I first outline several analyses of the way the image of the Child circulates in political and humanitarian discourse. Secondly, I turn to the work of several scholars who have explored discourse on immigrant children

³ However, the 186,986 total includes children apprehended as members of family units. Therefore, the proportion of children is likely even greater than 14.8%.

and the U.S. citizen children of immigrant parents in order to understand how scholars so far have approached the distinctive rhetorical opportunities and constraints presented by children.

The universalized figure of the child analyzed by political theorists seems at first glance to suggest that undocumented children, especially those who experience humanitarian crisis, may be able to override the associations embedded in the <illegal immigrant> ideograph. Liisa Malkki, analyzing constructions of the child in transnational humanitarian practice, argues that children emerge in this discourse as suffering “embodiments of a basic human goodness” who always invoke the proximity of the future (60). Malkki argues that children who experience humanitarian crisis are attributed with “an affective authority that adult refugees and other victims can generally never hope to possess” (65). This affective authority draws on the common trope in humanitarian discourse ascribing children with an all-encompassing innocence, the deployment of which results in suffering children discursively being placed beyond and above the concerns of history, law, and racial and cultural identities that often temper humanitarian reactions toward adult refugees and immigrants (65).

In his book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman (2004) deepens Malkki’s analysis by revealing how pervasively the image of the child and its imagined future permeates Western political discourse. Edelman argues that, even beyond humanitarian discourse, the imagined “child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention” (3). The child’s ever-present discursive position in policy debates, even if not explicitly stated, results from the child’s “embodiment of futurity” (10). This identity serves to

inscribe the future impact of all proposed policies squarely on the child, potential effects that must be grappled with by all policymakers. This leads Edelman to claim that the “fantasy subtending the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought” (2). Thus, Edelman suggests, to refer to politics is to metonymically refer to the child, as the forward-looking, outcome-oriented nature of politics is unthinkable without the always growing, always potential child.

Roche (1999) provides a middle ground to the analyses of Malkki and Edelman, implicitly rejecting Edelman’s thesis that the child and its future are primal, ever-present components of *all* political discourse, and confronting a case of children less under imminent violent threat as those discussed by Malkki. In this way, Roche argues that the child, as relegated to the privacy of home and school, is in a natural state of *invisibility* to adult society, rather than embodying the object to which adult politics always necessarily pertain. Roche contends that, when this invisibility is ruptured, “the child’ appears for public consumption only as a victim and a source of trouble” (478). This dichotomy of visibility influences public discourse about children, who become the focus of policies promoting either their greater protection or greater constraint, and often a mix of the two (477). Such policing of children’s lives results in part from the dominant Western imagery that characterizes the child as lacking rational agency and incapable of discerning their own interests, faults adult benefactors must ameliorate. In noting the tendency of adult discourse to construct the child as either a purely needy innocent or an unpredictable, irrational source of concern, Roche highlights the potential for certain groups of children to receive ambivalent responses from adult political figures who cast the child as a visible problem that must be solved.

The figure of the child examined by Malkki, Edelman, and Roche invites adult intervention and assistance by its very nature. What remains for them and theorists who draw similar conclusions is to explicate what forms of assistance are advanced in political discourse. Roche, for example, explains how the image of the child as so irrational as to not understand their own basic needs or interests leads political actors to employ needs-based rather than rights-based rhetoric when formulating paternalist policies. As such, advocating for the protection of children is grounded not in a comprehensive political or ideological doctrine but an appeal to basic humanity (477). Edelman in turn agrees that moral claims advocating protecting children are typically treated as “extrapolitical” in that they transcend the specificities of particular political doctrines (1). This transcendence stems from the way Western thought treats the child as the “telos of the social order and ... the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust” (11). These theorists, then, demonstrate how children are figured in dominant Western discourse as deserving of claims to assistance against those adults who assume guidance for them.

The Child addressed by the above scholars, however, either lacks explicit nationality or is ascribed to a plane of existence beyond nationality—termed the “ethereal pedestal” by Malkki (78). Recent communication scholarship engaging with the rhetorical construction of immigrant children complicates the above theories by treating the Child as embedded, as they *are* in reality, in convoluted relationships of national and familial context, race, gender, and citizenship. By foregrounding questions of nationality and citizenship, the work of the following scholars demonstrates how immigrant children may subvert the Child of Roche, Malkki, and Edelman such that rhetors advance justifications for protecting the nation *from* the child, rather than protecting the child as

the representative of a social telos. These scholars show how discourse about the immigrant child that haunts Edelman's text as an unspoken counterpoint confronts a child that can act not as the embodiment of a universal Future, but as the embodiment of a variety of future threatening to the racially-coded social order itself. The force of this embodiment is heightened by how the immigrant child, as the opposite of the political default of citizen, is necessarily visible in political discourse as opposed to Roche's child (implicitly a citizen) who can slide in and out of social visibility.

In their article "'Stop Sending Your Kids Across Our Border:' Discursively Constructing the Unaccompanied Youth Migrant," Mary Grace Antony and Ryan Thomas (2017) argue that unaccompanied minors are "uniquely poised to benefit from compassionate discourse, and anti-immigrant agendas must accordingly harness creative strategies to thwart compassion" (7). Mary Romero (2011) calls on past immigration rhetoric as evidence that immigrant children have indeed "been used as emotional and influential symbols to sway public opinion" in favor of welcoming immigration policies (50). However, a consensus has coalesced among Romero, Antony and Thomas, and other communication scholars that contemporary immigration debates abound in largely negative, stereotypical constructions of immigrant children as menacing to U.S. citizens and ready to appropriate their resources, often extended to the U.S. citizen children of undocumented immigrants.

Exploring several varieties of these negative constructions, Antony and Thomas provide essential preliminary insight into the discursive construction of unaccompanied child migrants in the public discourse of private citizens. Antony and Thomas analyze reader comments on online articles published by five major U.S. news outlets detailing

reports of Border Patrol agents' abuse of unaccompanied minors in their custody, textual artifacts selected to reveal how audiences negotiate widely-circulating negative constructions of Latin American undocumented immigrants and impulses toward compassion and sympathy for suffering children (6). Through their analysis, Antony and Thomas find that, within these texts, "the unaccompanied youth migrant emerged ... as undesirable and inassimilable [*sic*]" just like their adult counterparts (9). Although a significant number of compassionate claims were advanced within these texts, many were accompanied by calls for harsh, reactionary enforcement measures. These findings are significant in that they demonstrate the sheer pervasiveness of nativist impulses in the United States that may mesh with racist, classist discourses to alienize young migrants, many of whom have fled even the most severe persecution and crisis only to encounter danger and uncertainty again within American borders.

Romero and Cisneros explore cases of immigration rhetoric that map the characteristics of this vociferously negative construction of unaccompanied immigrant children onto the bodies and lives of the U.S. citizen children of adult undocumented immigrants. Romero analyzes the speech and publications of the nativist group Mothers Against Illegal Aliens (MAIA), arguing that these texts advance character constructions through which "immigrant mothers and their children are stripped of their humanity" (50). The U.S. citizen child of Mexican immigrants is rhetorically positioned in direct opposition to the (white) U.S. citizen child of native-born parents and is pictured as a likely diseased, criminal usurper who capitalizes on the resources that are rightfully due to the "real" American children who act as the "silent victims" in the MAIA narrative (49). These negative, implicitly and explicitly eugenic claims suggest that U.S. citizen

children born to undocumented mothers have no moral claim on the constitutional right to and substantive benefits of national citizenship as a matter of national security and cultural sanctity (62). Cisneros argues that this construction results from how the discursive racialization of the “alien” mother contributes to the corresponding racialization and alienization of the child.

Together, Romero and Cisneros illuminate the rhetorical flexibility of the concept of citizenship by highlighting discourse in which a U.S. citizen child’s race and parental origin categorically excludes them from the ability to perform as a “good” American citizen despite the legal command of the Fourteenth Amendment. The rhetoric analyzed by Romero and Cisneros presents a striking case where nativist discourse ignores the fixed, legal dichotomy of citizen versus non-citizen nativists tend to draw on in arguments against “illegal” immigration in favor of promoting a conceptualization of citizenship based in the racialized logics of *jus sanguinis*. The *jus sanguinis* idea of citizenship constitutes an example of Edelman’s description of “our political institutions [that] compel the collective reproduction of the Child,” yet the anti-immigrant claims that implicate this idea advance a supposed need to compel the reproduction of the culturally and racially ideal child who is deeply threatened by the reproduction of the racialized, alienated child threatening in its potential to enact national disaster (11).

A fruitful literature in communication studies has recently emerged that covers rhetoric addressing potential beneficiaries of the proposed DREAM Act. These studies elucidate the ways in which undocumented children may “overcome” their foreignness by being cast as proto-American in their lives, hopes, and futures, echoing Amaya’s analysis of similar trends confronting adult immigrants. For example, Chuang and Chin

Roemer (2015) find that a distinct, stereotypical “exemplar” model of a typical DREAM Act beneficiary is constructed in mainstream media accounts, encompassing both “signifiers that linked to cultural codes typically associated with desirable, assimilated American attributes” and hints at the beneficiary’s dependence on the goodwill of American citizens in allowing them access to the American Dream (1057). The authors note that mainstream media coverage tends to favor those who came to the United States “at a very young age, thus connoting a lack of blame for illegal immigration” (1057). Ironside and Corrigan (2015) similarly investigate the way Members of Congress advance this culturally imperialist iteration of xenophilia when discussing the beneficiaries of the DREAM Act. They conclude that representatives in favor of the act frame beneficiaries as “naïve and childlike ‘ultimate Americans,’” nationalist rhetoric that mirrors Honig’s idealized, hard-working foreigner charged with reinvigorating the nation (Ironside and Corrigan 174). These two discourses differ significantly from those discussed by Romero and Cisneros, as the Americanized DREAM Act beneficiary is capable of appearing enough “like us” to warrant inclusion or at least acceptance within the future “we” want, just like the adult immigrants subject to assimilationist narratives.

Contribution to the Literature

The lack of scholarly analyses of discourse about unaccompanied child migrants leaves us without a firm, nuanced understanding of how children and childhood are implicated in political responses to globalization and the trends of the contemporary American immigration “crisis.” Additionally, we lack developed insight into the specific ways through which immigration rhetorics inscribe fault lines among different groups of

children, privileging adult-like characteristics for some and child-like characteristics for others, and we thus additionally lack insight into just who gets to “count” as a child at all within immigration rhetorics, and under what circumstances. In the following project, I will explore these themes through a preliminary unification of the two literatures I discuss above by analyzing the rhetorical constructions of unaccompanied immigrant children that emerge within Congressional discourse. I will discuss how these constructions implicate and align with both the negative xenophobic, and assimilationist xenophilic characterizations of adult undocumented immigrants circulating within contemporary immigration debates. However, the primary force of my contribution to the literature stems from my focus on how the *child* immigrant’s essence as a child simultaneously alters these entrenched images by introducing a component of fundamental variability in ascribed identity and agency absent in the rhetorical characterizations of adult immigrants discussed above.

My focus on the *unaccompanied* child migrant is largely unique within the literature, with the extremely insightful and comprehensive exception of the work of Antony and Thomas. I suggest that the figure of the unaccompanied minor may allow us to explore how the actions and motives of children standing alone are constructed within political discourse, and how such discourse may bring questions of the visibility and invisibility of children, as discussed by Roche, to the fore. More so, though, I seek to understand how the immigrant child, as a fundamentally dynamic site of becoming by their very nature, embodies not merely the future as an objective time span but also the potentiality and uncertainty of the future, and how Members of Congress negotiate the deep cultural existential anxiety stemming from this uncertainty. By focusing on the

dynamism and flux of dominant discursive constructions of immigrant children, I ultimately seek to build upon and complicate Honig's fundamental thesis that the most prevalent and lasting responses by American citizens to immigrants "judge the immigrant in terms of what she will do for—or to—us as a nation" (46).

Methodology

What the public often observes about Congressional reactions to immigration, both documented and undocumented, is the almost total gridlock between Republicans and Democrats when it comes to passing policy, with the executive branch filling the gap by continuing enforcement and mobilizing what institutional capacity it has to affect change, for better or worse. Although this gridlock could simplistically be explained as merely another manifestation of the intensely polarized nature of recent Congresses, behind the gridlock lies not complete inaction, but rich and deeply contradictory debates over the rights and livelihoods of the immigrants within and those entering American territory every day. These current debates are a facet of the longstanding, complicated tradition of Congressional immigration debate that has resulted in extensive material, personal, and emotional consequences for immigrants since the nation's founding. This deep connection between rhetoric, the construction of identities, and the lives of immigrants indicates that, as for any policy, the language used to craft and debate immigration policy is an essential component to understanding the issues and persons it addresses, why and how policy proposals have shifted over time, and why particular policies come to the fore on the Congressional agenda at the time they do.

In closely analyzing Congressional speech for the rhetorical and narrative constructions of unaccompanied child migrants that emerge within this speech, I confront a unique form of rhetoric that cannot be merely explained as a discursive echo representative of the same concerns and rhetorical themes that inhere in public discourse on immigration. Due to the insularity of Congressional discourse and the impossibility for Congress to represent a range of viewpoints as variegated as that exhibited by the public, investigating Congressional rhetoric has come to be seen as a crucial component of public policy analysis, a perspective argued for in a series of books by Fischer and Forester (1993), Fischer (2003), and Hajer (2006). Finlayson, advocating for the necessity of a rhetorical perspective in political science, argues that the value of such an approach “rests on a strong sense of the dynamic, contested, and creative nature of political activity” (528). Robert Asen, espousing a similar perspective, contends that policies and policy debates treated as rhetorical texts “express a nation’s values, principles and priorities, hopes and ideals, and beliefs about citizens’ responsibilities and obligations to each other,” as well as, I would add, the nation’s hopes and beliefs about its non-citizen residents (127). While public policy cannot be understood outside the grounding of the symbolic resources of the society within which it is produced, the dynamism and distinctiveness of Congressional discourse on immigration, for example, in turn contributes to these symbolic resources, expanding the public’s terminological and value vocabulary concerning immigrants and immigration (Martin Harlow 68-70). This conceptual, linguistic vocabulary on matters of immigration is a component of the political power Congress maintains in determining the life prospects of immigrants within our borders. This power is flexible depending on the particular configuration of

voices within Congress and within the committees charged with discussing matters related to immigration and citizenship and the issues these speakers choose to prioritize. As Robert DeChaine argues, these “dominant voices and logics have the ability to direct the civic imaginary” in the shaping of identity and culture, a weighty power that is hidden in treatments of Congress as a non-personalized institutional body, or as a body characterized not by multifarious rhetorics but merely by the ideological divides between left and right (DeChaine 2009, 60). To summarize, language is a crucial component of political power, as demonstrated by how Congressional immigration action throughout U.S. history has been characterized by acute, shifting divides where the body and life of the immigrant become testing grounds for American struggles with racial, class, sexual, and ideological identity. Analyzing rhetoric implicating these struggles is imperative for political scientists who wish to understand the American politics of immigration, and it is my hope that this thesis advances this understanding through its analysis of Congressional discourse on unaccompanied immigrant children.

Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical analysis or criticism is a qualitative method for the analysis of texts of diverse forms. Sonja Foss describes rhetorical criticism as a process “designed for the systematic investigation and explanation of symbolic acts and artifacts for the purpose of understanding rhetorical processes” (Foss 2009 6). The textual artifacts of rhetorical analysis may include symbol-laden speeches, movies, commercials, music lyrics, and even bodies, as Karma Chávez exemplifies above. These texts are not static entities that condition observers to draw the same analytical conclusions. Rather, as Asen argues,

rhetorical artifacts are often polysemic in their significations, “[expressing] multiple, sometimes contradictory meanings that manifest as qualities of dynamism and movement” (131). Viewing texts as processes rather than discrete objects allows us to understand why a rhetor may advance contradictory meanings within a single text. The analysis of a text or group of texts usefully produces insight not only into the elements, shifting significations, contradictions, and patterns of that text or texts, but allows the rhetorical critic to contribute to our understanding of general symbolic processes (Foss 1996 8). In the case of my project, despite my limited textual evidence drawing from only five Congressional hearings, my conclusions inform broader threads of analysis about the rhetorical construction of American citizenship and immigrant identity.

The fundamental recognitions that form the conceptual foundation of rhetorical analysis include the conviction that the human world view is profoundly constructed by language (Rountree and Rountree 350). When a rhetor confronts a given topic, it is impossible to “give the full story” in its entirety. The rhetor necessarily undertakes a certain packaging and organization of information and messages as a framing strategy of making sense of the world around them and communicating these ideas to others. According to Foss, as “rhetoric is a rhetor’s solution to perceived problems, it constitutes ‘equipment for living,’” communicative strategies that in a mutually constitutive turn impact the way we view the world and our role in it (Foss 2009 64). Neatly summarizing this dialectical process, Foss argues that “our particular vocabularies constitute a reflection, selection, and deflection of reality” (64). As I confront the varied images Members of Congress draw of migrant children, Central America, and the U.S., as well as the details emphasized in each image to define the whole, the extent to which my

project focuses on the “construction” of subjects is a reflection of this fundamental tenet of rhetorical analysis.

Objects of Study and Rhetorical Analysis

In the following paper, my objects of study comprise five Congressional hearings occurring between June 24, 2014, and December 10, 2014 that confront Central American unaccompanied minors as their primary subject matter. These hearings were directed by several committees—the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere; the House Committee on Homeland Security; the House Committee on the Judiciary; and the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. The five hearings I study are representative of broader Congressional policy debates over immigration law. Asen argues that policy debates present compelling challenges for scholars of rhetoric, as “rhetorical analyses of public policy raise issues of authorship, temporality, and polysemy differently than singular speech texts and other relatively discreet texts” (124). Policy debates build on existing themes and ideas over time, and are influenced by a range of diverse voices and shifting contexts. In order to address these challenges, I have chosen hearings that fall within one Congress in order to examine in greater detail the discursive themes manifest in the most intense period of Congressional debate on the issue of unaccompanied minors. In this way, I avoid sacrificing a level of nuance by focusing more broadly on Congressional discourse on immigrant children over time. Although Central American minors have been traveling to the United States unaccompanied for many years, 2014 saw both a peak in the numbers of UACs entering the U.S. and the height of Congressional discourse examining their situation. This greater

volume of discourse may be explained by Asen's claim that the "speed" of political debate over an issue may intensify in line with the occurrence of a perceived crisis implicating this issue, as many saw the 2014 "influx" to be (136).

In analyzing these five hearings in an attempt to locate within them constructions of unaccompanied child migrants, I detect and discuss themes advanced by Members of Congress, organized almost completely by party, with an eye to the subtle and obvious differences representatives contribute around each theme. I proceed in such a way to avoid the risk of defining the debates by the statements of an outspoken few or casting an ideological outlier as representative of the whole body. Foss states that rhetorical critics often focus their arguments around "units of analysis" such as word choice, evidence usage, metaphors, rhetorical strategies, or textual argumentative structure (Foss 1996 15). I focus on a mixture of these different components to discover the characteristics attributed within these hearings to unaccompanied minors, thereby pursuing a macro-level analysis in which "the statements of individuals may be mixed and matched to reconstruct larger themes" (Asen 134).

I also draw from the methodology of pentadic analysis devised by the literary theorist, rhetorical theorist, and philosopher of language Kenneth Burke, who emphasized the central importance of motives and interpretation of motives to human speech. When one speaks about motives, according to Burke, one of necessity invokes the five terms of the "pentad," which may condition and constrain each other: "act (what), scene (when and where), agent (who), agency (how), and purpose (why)" (Rountree and Rountree 353). This framework accentuates, for example, the rhetorical nexus between identity and action, and between ascriptions of identity and ascriptions of identity and action. These

“pentadic relationships” work to “shape our ultimate interpretation of action in a given case so that, for example, we are not surprised to find a teacher talking, a police officer arresting, a thief stealing ... a king in a palace” (353-354). The pentadic terms are often “tied to a particular community’s assumptions about who does what, when and where things are done, how, and why; who should be in certain places at certain times; [and] what kinds of agents use certain agencies” (354).

Immigration discourse is often riddled with assumptions about how individual immigrants and groups of immigrants variously disrupt and conform to dominant discursive and cultural standards of immigrant agency and spatial location, and thus my use of pentadic analysis is a fruitful way to investigate the rhetorical construction of child migrants’ identity and agency. In this way, I discuss the rhetorical strategies Members of Congress wield to deal with the “problem” of unaccompanied minors, a case which, along with other large-scale instances of immigration, disturb and destabilize “commonplace assumptions about spaces being a stable and coherent source for some coherent identity that can be distinguished from some ‘other’” (Shome 44). My analysis is thus largely framed around exploring how Members of Congress use rhetorical strategies to (re)produce and (re)stabilize the “normalcy” of dominant pentadic relationships and to create policy proposals aimed at ameliorating the “problem” of unaccompanied minors’ transgression upon space coded as American.

My methodological choice to perform a rhetorical analysis of dominant discourse by powerful political figures concerning unaccompanied minors has several limitations. First, I acknowledge that I confront unaccompanied minors terminologically in a way that perpetuates simplistic, alienating categorizations of human beings that do not recognize

the fullness of child migrants' identity. I use these terms due to the necessity of using the same terms as the Members of Congress I discuss in order to accurately depict and analyze their discourse. Additionally, my project almost completely lacks the voices of unaccompanied minors themselves, a symptom of a long-standing social phenomenon of adult voices controlling discourse such that "narratives of children abound but real children are disturbingly absent" (Roche 479). Thus, my project risks continuing the marginalization of children and their ideas and perspectives. However, I believe it is essential to vigorously confront adult discourse on immigrant children in order to fully understand the particular ways through which this discourse contributes to their marginalization so as to challenge the impulse to resign child migrants to "simply become exhibits in a show of concern or fear" (487). A further limitation of my approach is that, while my project contributes to a deeper understanding of political reactions to the immigration of unaccompanied children, I cannot offer any policy proposals, nor can I propose and justify within such limited space less problematic ways of treating immigrant children in policy discourse without acting as simply another adult justifying what "we" should do about "them."

Chapter One: Migrant Children in Perspective

Historical Trends

The history of migration by unaccompanied children to the United States is extensive. As journalist Tasneem Raja notes, when the famous immigration station opened at Ellis Island, “an unaccompanied child migrant was the first person in line” (Raja). This child’s name was Annie Moore, who traveled at the age of 17 from Cork County, Ireland to the United States in 1892, accompanied by her two younger brothers.⁴ Just as anti-immigrant voices today disparage the character and motives of migrants, Annie and her fellow travelers faced discriminatory rhetoric construing immigrants as “disease-ridden job stealers bent on destroying the American way of life” (Raja). Despite this rhetoric, thousands of unaccompanied child migrants traveled to the U.S. in the late 1800s and early 1900s, often following the deaths of their parents or due to the ravages of war and famine. About 15 years after Annie’s arrival, the Immigration Act of 1907 differentiated the treatment of unaccompanied children from adult immigrants. The act initiated a system of holding centers charged with the care of unaccompanied minors until their immigration hearings (Raja). During these hearings, “local faith-based organizations, immigrant aid societies, and private citizens” could assume guardianship for the children (Goździak 6). With this act, the foundational legal principles governing child migrants’ presence, movement, and status in this country were established.

⁴ There is some controversy about Annie Moore’s actual age, with some sources indicating her age as 15, and others as 17 (Smolenyak). For a critique of the “contemporary archivization” of Annie Moore, see Kelly and Morton (2004).

Following the Immigration Act of 1907, multiple periods of heightened migration by unaccompanied minors have occurred. For example, Operation Peter Pan brought around 14,000 children from Cuba to the U.S. between 1960 and 1962. A similar airlift was performed by the federal government in 1975, when Operation Babylift was responsible for evacuating around 3,000 Vietnamese orphans from the nation's south. Beginning in the mid-1980s, substantial numbers of unaccompanied Nicaraguan, Guatemalan, and Salvadoran children began to arrive in southern Texas, most fleeing calamitous civil wars. Of the tens of thousands of Central American children who eventually arrived, many were granted temporary protected status or asylum (6). The immigration of this particular group of children prompted a procedural change in immigration detention policy for unaccompanied minors. Previously, the federal government had customarily released detained minors to relatives in the U.S. while they awaited their hearing. In 1984, however, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), "citing the need to protect vulnerable children caught up in a humanitarian emergency, and using their broad powers to detain non-citizens," initiated a policy of prioritizing detention over release (Terrio, "Life Ended"). This being said, from the mid-1980s until today, Central American unaccompanied minors have borne the brunt of child detention policies and have not received temporary protected status or humanitarian parole to the extent that children of other nationalities have. For example, over 1,000 Haitian children began adoption procedures in the U.S. after being orphaned by the January 2010 earthquake. Many of these children were granted humanitarian parole (Goździak 6).

The substantial numbers of unaccompanied child migrants from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras arriving in the present decade are part of a decades-long trend of heightened immigration, both undocumented and documented, from Central America. Until the 1950s, few Central Americans migrated to the United States or Canada. In the 1960s, however, “the number of Central American immigrants more than doubled from the previous decade, topping 100,000” (Hernandez). From 1960 until today, the number of Central American immigrants in the U.S., dominated by Hondurans, Guatemalans, and Salvadorans, has grown by over 600% to reach over 3,000,000. (Stinchcomb and Hershberg 9). This increasing trend has resulted in part from flows of refugees forced out by the terribly violent civil wars that wracked Central America in the 1980s. Some historians estimate that almost one in five Salvadorans fled during the war, with around 500,000 settling in the U.S. and Canada, the majority undocumented (Hernandez). The number of undocumented migrants from the Northern Triangle nations has continued to rise until the present day, tripling since 1990 to now constitute 14% of the number of undocumented individuals living in the U.S. (Stinchcomb and Hershberg 10).

Central American migrants fleeing extreme regional violence have encountered barriers to being perceived as true political refugees rather than economic migrants, a trend that varies with nationality (Peralta). While the government frequently granted asylum to Nicaraguans, it often deemed Guatemalans and Salvadorans merely economic migrants, a pattern of discrimination that was addressed in 1991 by rehearing “all of the asylum cases decided during the first decade of the 1980 Refugee Act” (Peralta). Many scholars argue that this pattern emerged due to U.S. support for the Guatemalan and Salvadoran regimes of the late 1980s and U.S. opposition to the Nicaraguan rebels who

eventually took control over the government (Hernandez). Despite these challenges, many Central American migrants have been able to attain Temporary Protected Status (TPS), especially following a destructive trend of natural disasters that afflicted the region from 1998 to 2001.⁵ Today, approximately 280,000 Salvadorans, Hondurans, and Nicaraguans in the U.S. have this status, which has been extended over time (Stinchcomb and Hershberg 10).

The Current Case

The population of children implicated in the contentious Congressional debate I analyze in this project is constituted by the “surge” of unaccompanied migrant children fleeing alone or with fellow children northward across Central America and Mexico during the summer of 2014, primarily from the three Central American nations of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. While immigrant children are juridically categorized in diverse ways that take into account their legal status, need for humanitarian relief, and whether they made the journey in the company of family members, for example, these debates specifically confront the class of child migrants labeled in legal parlance as “unaccompanied alien children” (UACs), defined by Section 462 of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 as “aliens under age 18, who lack lawful immigration status in the United States, and who are without a parent or legal guardian in the United States or lack a parent or legal guardian in the United States who is available

⁵ According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “the Secretary of Homeland Security may designate a foreign country for TPS due to conditions in the country that temporarily prevent the country’s nationals from returning safely, or in certain circumstances, where the country is unable to handle the return of its nationals adequately” (“Temporary Protected Status”).

to provide care and physical custody” (Kandel et al.). As discussed above, unaccompanied Central American children have been journeying north in steady numbers since the 1980s, as civil wars and natural disasters ravaged the region and children emigrated to seek a better chance at life. Drawing on these historical trends, many child advocates and historians agree that the “problem” of unaccompanied Central American minors is not a new phenomenon, yet it has only recently become a matter of intense public debate following the 2014 surge (Terrio, “Life Ended”).

Similarly, the NGO Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) notes that the extreme numbers of child migrants flowing across the border in 2014 are part of a general trend in heightened child migration from the Northern Triangle of Central America throughout the past decade, especially concentrated in the years following 2011 (*The Time is Now* 8). Child advocates from the Women’s Refugee Commission state that the surge began around October 2011, when the Office of Refugee Resettlement within the Department of Health and Human Services “began receiving into its custody an unprecedented number of UACs,” a claim which is corroborated by KIND and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Jones and Podkul 4). Not only has the number of unaccompanied child migrants from Central America increased dramatically since late 2011, but the proportion of Central American migrants overall, including adults, actively seeking asylum and humanitarian protection in neighboring countries, Canada, and the United States increased as well after an initial rise in 2009 (*Children on the Run* 4). The trend comprises one facet of shifting migration patterns in recent years demonstrating a marked decrease in the numbers of Mexican laborers migrating north and a substantial

uptick in the number of Central American migrants crossing the border, including many single women with children and family units in addition to unaccompanied children.

In terms of the American public's knowledge of and reaction to the flow of unaccompanied minors across the border, the temporal frame of this "crisis" has its epicenter in the summer of 2014, a framing of attention mirrored by the timing of congressional debates and hearings. Statistics from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection document the apprehension of 16,067 UACs in 2011, 24,481 UACs in 2012, 38,759 UACs in 2013, and 68,541 UACs in 2014 (Kandel 2). During this period, the proportion of UACs migrating from the Northern Triangle nations of Central America steadily expanded, reaching 75% in 2014, while the proportion of Mexican minors dropped dramatically, echoing the general trends I discuss above. Following the peak of the crisis in summer 2014, the number of UACs making their way across the southern border has dropped to a level compatible with pre-2011 child migration. However, Stinchcomb and Hershberg point out that current numbers continue in general to "reflect the past decade's pronounced upward trend in undocumented migration from Central America" (6).

The demographic composition of Central American children apprehended at the border has fluctuated significantly over the past decade not only in terms of national origin, but also in terms of gender, age, and family makeup. While during every year since 2011, teenagers, typically male, have comprised the majority of child migrants from the Northern Triangle, as the years have progressed, "unaccompanied child migrants are younger than ever before" (Terrio, "Dispelling" 16). A report by the Congressional Research Service indicates that between fiscal year 2012 and fiscal year 2014, the

proportion of unaccompanied minors under 12 apprehended by Border Patrol has expanded from 9% to 16% (Meyer et. al 2). In terms of gender, female children have begun to constitute a greater percentage of the population of unaccompanied migrant children as a whole. Between fiscal year 2013 and fiscal year 2014, the proportion of female arrivals increased from 19% to 28% (Meyer et. al 2). During this period, the percentage of female child migrants apprehended by Border Patrol increased by 77%, greatly outpacing the 8% increase in the number of male children apprehended (Goździak 8).

The family backgrounds of many unaccompanied minors are profoundly transnational and mixed. For example, an American Immigration Council (AIC) study found that 90% of the UACs they interviewed had one or more family members in the United States, while over 50% had at least one parent in the U.S. (Kennedy 1). Representing similarly high numbers, 54% of the children KIND interviewed had escaped a domestic situation where at least one parent, more often the father, was living and working in the United States (29). These findings are corroborated for all three Northern Triangle nations by the U.N., whose studies have concluded that significant numbers of *all* Central American children, not only those who choose to migrate, have one or both parents residing in the U.S., at a rate of 49% for both El Salvador and Honduras, and 27% for Guatemala (Kandel et. al 15). Additionally, many of the female teenagers that migrate to the U.S., the majority between the ages of 13 and 17, are young mothers with children of their own to care for during the journey northward, a demographic of unaccompanied minors whose unique struggles are noticeably absent from the debates I analyze (Goździak 8).

Factors Driving Children's Migration

The personal motives behind unaccompanied child migrants' decision to leave their home countries in search of a better life in the United States are multifarious, overlapping, difficult to quantify, and may depend on the considerations of age, gender, and family outlined above. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) argues that, no matter their personal or self-described motives for migrating, "the vast majority of migrants have all suffered some kind of constraints on their rights in their country of origin" (*The Time is Now* 8). Thus, while considerations of economic gain may play a role in some childrens' motivation to migrate, their motives should not be understood as merely opportunistic, but rather as stemming from a deprivation of the rights and resources necessary for well-being and personal development. One of the most significant sources of such deprivation is the existence of widespread and destructive societal violence perpetrated against children by gangs, private citizens, and government agents across the Northern Triangle. Observers and advocates argue that, proportionally, children face the worst of this regional crisis. For example, Carlson and Gallagher suggest that Guatemalan children are "amongst the most vulnerable to the long-lasting problems of food insecurity, targeting and recruitment by gang members, and the rise in the use of force and violence on the part of state militarized security forces" (136). Other observers, such as the Women's Refugee Commission, contend that children and teenagers are not only the most vulnerable, but are the "primary targets" of burgeoning gang warfare and general societal violence (Jones and Podkul 9). This particularized targeting is one reason why UNICEF named El Salvador and Guatemala the most dangerous nations in the world for children between zero and 19 in 2014.

While we have seen how, statistically, Central American children are facing the brunt of the regional security crisis, a discussion of the specific strategies organized criminal groups use to target children will help develop this claim. KIND advocates argue that history has shown how

“in times of armed conflict and other violence, particularly when civil society starts to fracture as a result and lawlessness prevails, children are the most vulnerable to abuse, sexual violence, exploitation, and even death. Gangs and other armed groups take advantage of the security vacuum and can use the most vulnerable to advance their own ends” (*The Time is Now* 17).

In the context of the Northern Triangle, this targeting and manipulation takes the form of criminal gangs approaching children, mostly young boys and teenagers, and coercing them to work for the gangs and “monitor territories, sell drugs, and collect extortion payments” (Stinchcomb and Hershberg 21). Kennedy notes that many of the children she interviewed, while discussing gang presence in their neighborhoods and schools, stressed that ““There is no childhood here ... It is a crime to be young in El Salvador today”” (3). The targeting of children by gangs extends beyond bodily harm to death, as many Central American children are murdered for their refusal to join gangs (Robles). Targeting children is additionally often a financial opportunity for gangs, as extorting those with family members working in the United States has proven lucrative through the collection of “*renta*,” a tax which may result in death for those children incapable of paying the gang’s chosen rate (*The Time is Now* 19-21).

The efforts of gangs to coerce children into performing work for them has forced many children from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to drastically change their activities and behaviors with a view toward their personal safety, significantly limiting their autonomy. Both the Women’s Refugee Commission and the study performed by

Carlson and Gallagher indicate that the targeting of children by gangs within school bounds is responsible for school attendance rates in the Northern Triangle reaching the lowest in Latin America (10, 134-135). In 2013, the Honduran Secretariat of Education found that 2,000 children age 14 and under had left school in San Pedro Sula, Honduras' second largest city, alone (Stinchcomb and Hershberg 17). Of the 322 unaccompanied minors Kennedy interviewed, 70 had left school completely, and more than 30 stated that, before leaving, they had "made themselves prisoners in their own homes; some do not even go to church" (2).

Child advocates and NGOs who have performed data-driven studies by interviewing significant numbers of unaccompanied minors, such as the Women's Refugee Commission and the American Immigration Council, agree that this widespread societal violence specifically targeting children is one of the primary push factors motivating children to leave home. For example, a research study by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops "found that over 50% of children from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador reported that violent crime in their country of origin had influenced their decision to leave home" (Carlson and Gallagher 130). Likewise, interviews of 151 migrant children performed by the Women's Refugee Commission indicate that 51% of the children "stated violence was the main reason more children were fleeing their homes" (Jones and Podkul 7). Similarly, Elizabeth Kennedy of the American Immigration Council argues that, "The most common cause of UAC's exodus from Central America has been and continues to be increasing gang and cartel violence that disproportionately affects them as young people" (5). Of the 322 Salvadoran minors

Kennedy interviewed, almost 100 stated that widespread violence constituted their sole motivation to leave.

Migrant children's fear of societal violence and the role this fear plays in their motives to immigrate may be oriented toward specific forms of violence depending on their gender. Kennedy found that Salvadoran male children more often feared abuse and assault as retribution for their refusal to join gangs, and the violent reprisals of corrupt government figures, while female children "most feared rape or disappearance at the hands of the same groups" (2). These studies often include numerous graphic examples of children's suffering at the hands of gangs in their own words, as children describe how such events impelled them to leave home. For example, a Salvadoran girl named Maritza told her interviewer that, "In El Salvador they take young girls, rape them and throw them into plastic bags'" (*Children on the Run* 9). Empirical studies and graphic examples in children's own words speak to the overwhelming extent to which coercive gang activities and brutal societal violence motivate decisions to migrate.

The studies performed by the Women's Refugee Commission, UNHCR, and other organizations attest to the role played by extreme poverty, the desire for better educational opportunities, and the desire for family reunification as additional motivations behind children's decisions to migrate to the United States. The American Immigration Council, for example, found that extreme poverty was the rationale behind immigration most commonly discussed by children from the poorest areas of El Salvador. This rationale was disproportionately espoused by male children who often desired to work in the U.S. and send money home to their families (Kennedy 1-3). Economic and material deprivation was a primary motivating factor for 29% of the Guatemalan children

interviewed by UNHCR, a factor which disproportionately impacts children from indigenous backgrounds (*Children on the Run* 9). One in three Salvadoran children, including a disproportionate number of females and younger children, interviewed by the AIC additionally expressed a desire to reunite with family members in the United States (Kennedy 1-3). For 11% of the Central American and Mexican unaccompanied minors interviewed by KIND, this desire was motivated in part “because there was no one left in their home country who could care and provide for them” (*The Time is Now* 34). KIND additionally found that 11% of the sample population they interviewed were primarily motivated by a desire for higher quality educational opportunities that were simply impossible to achieve at home, a lack of opportunity disproportionately affecting young indigenous children (39-41). These findings demonstrate that UACs’ personal motives to migrate cannot be subsumed under any monolithic heading, and may differ widely based on distinctions of gender, ethnicity, and age. Overall, child migrants overwhelmingly framed their migratory motivations in terms of the concrete, tangible benefits migration would have for themselves and their families, or in terms of a need to escape incredibly unsustainable and life-threatening conditions in their homelands.

A portentous motivator for many Central American child migrants to undertake the incredibly dangerous journey to the United States results from their experiences with abuse and assault at the hands of their own parents, a theme that is not once mentioned in the hearings I analyze. Activists and academics have noted that, in the Northern Triangle, “the domestic sphere, typically considered a protective space amidst rampant insecurity in these communities, has also become a stage for violence resulting from the processes of social exclusion,” a trend that is correlated with rising alcoholism (Stinchcomb and

Hershberg 21, *The Time is Now* 28). Susan Terrio documents several cases of domestic violence against children exacerbated by the nexus of alcoholism and unemployment, such as the story of Mirabel from San Pedro Sula, Honduras:

“She, her sisters and mother had been terrorized by an alcoholic father who abused them and stole the earnings from her mother’s struggling grocery store to spend on liquor and women. The tipping point came when Mirabel, then 16, confronted her father after a drunken rampage, and he nearly killed her with a machete. When an uncle offered to pay for a smuggler to take Mirabel to the United States... ‘I couldn’t stay. I had no life there’” (Terrio, “Dispelling” 15)

An investigation conducted by UNHCR concluded that a striking 21% of the 404 unaccompanied minors they interviewed had experienced abuse by family members, up to and including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect and abandonment. The gender breakdown of this phenomenon is similarly conspicuous, as 40% of the girls UNHCR interviewed had experienced domestic abuse, as compared to 16% of boys. For 21% of Salvadoran UACs, 23% of Guatemalan UACs, and 24% of Honduran UACs, the experience of domestic abuse was the main motivator behind their flight north (*Children on the Run* 6-28).

Many child migrants frame the journey and its inherent dangers as a necessary evil in that the net benefits of migration outweigh both the consequences of the dangerous journey and the consequences of staying at home (Jones and Podkul 7). A boy named Ernesto from Honduras, who was starved, beaten, and extorted by the transnational criminal organization Los Zetas during his journey, espouses this view in his statement that, “‘I mean, you just don’t care about the odds or you wouldn’t do it ... How did I decide? It was the American Dream’” (Terrio, “Life Ended”). Many children weigh the balance of potential outcomes in terms of how their age and gender may impact the

hazardous uncertainty of remaining at home. Kennedy found that “the adolescents themselves referenced a decreasing risk in migrating related to their bigger and stronger bodies and an increase in danger of staying upon reaching the age of 13” (3). In this way, many children cited the growing dangers of gang recruitment and retaliation upon reaching their teenage years, drawing on news media content detailing the frequent murders of teenagers in their home nations, in order to illustrate their personal rationales for migration (3).

Policy Timeline

While the migration of unaccompanied minors to the United States has an extensive history, few federal laws and policies govern their care and route through the complex American immigration system, although numerous proposals have been asserted following the most recent surge in migration. Chad Haddal of the Congressional Research Service characterizes federal debate concerning unaccompanied minors as fundamentally ideologically divided by the issue of whether UACs “should be treated as humanitarian refugees or as unauthorized aliens subject to expedited removal” (13). This discursive tension traverses the entire legislative history of federal policy on unaccompanied minors, from the Immigration Act of 1907 to the most recent bills introduced in Congress following the 2014 “crisis.”

The Immigration Act of 1907 first introduced a distinction between the treatment of accompanied and unaccompanied immigrant children, although it only did so for child migrants under the age of 16. Under this act, minors under 16 were placed in detention to “[await] a special inquiry with immigration inspectors to determine their fate,” during

which local churches and synagogues, citizens, and charitable organizations often assumed responsibility for these children (Raja). Almost four decades later, these limited statutory references to unaccompanied minors were significantly expanded by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (INA). In addition to setting forth a cohesive asylum policy for all immigrants,⁶ including unaccompanied minors, the act and its subsequent amendments established a procedural distinction between immigration hearings as applied to undocumented adult immigrants and unaccompanied minors.⁷ The majority of undocumented adult immigrants found inadmissible by immigration officials “may be immediately reported removed” through a process known as expedited removal that does not necessitate official review by an immigration judge (Manuel and Garcia 10). In contrast, as of the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, all unaccompanied minors, except those Mexican and Canadian minors who have consented to voluntary removal, children previously ordered removed from the U.S., and children with criminal convictions, are subject to formal removal proceedings under the review of an immigration judge rather than an immigration officer as inscribed in Section 240 of the INA (Haddal 8, Manuel and Garcia 10). Section 292 of the INA mandated that all undocumented immigrants, including unaccompanied children, “have the privilege of being represented by counsel at no expense to the government” during both expedited and formal proceedings (Manuel and Garcia 10). In 1990, the Immigration Act of 1990 amended the INA to expand the immigration relief options available to unaccompanied minors, introducing the status of Special Immigrant Juvenile to cover

⁶ §208

⁷ §235

children who are dependent on state courts and for whom these courts find it would not be in their best interest to return home due to parental abandonment or abuse (Smith).

In 1996, the *Flores Settlement Agreement* between human rights organizations and the former INS, although not a legislative policy, changed the course of legislation concerning UACs by outlining general principles aimed at ensuring the humane treatment and safety of unaccompanied minors in federal detention. The settlement strongly advised against the norm of mandatory detention and mandated that UACs must be treated with “dignity, respect and special concern for their particular vulnerability as minors,” (*Flores Settlement Agreement*, quoted in Manuel and Garcia 5). This focus on the special vulnerability of migrant children was reflected in the passage of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, which established several categories of nonimmigrant visas for migrants who are victims of severe crimes. The T-visa was created to cover undocumented victims of severe trafficking who would likely suffer “extreme hardship” if made to return home, while the U-visa was initiated to protect victims of extreme abuse willing to assist with law enforcement operations investigating the crime (*A Guide to Children Arriving at the Border*).

In 2002, the passage of the Homeland Security Act, primarily known for establishing the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), formally codified a definition of the “unaccompanied alien child” for the first time (Haddal 4-5). The act additionally shifted the responsibility of caring for unaccompanied minors away from enforcement agents, granting DHS the authority to apprehend and transport unaccompanied minors, and charging the Office of Refugee Resettlement within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS-ORR) with the detention and foster care placement of UACs in a

manner guaranteeing their safety and protection from exploitation (Manuel and Garcia 13). HHS-ORR was also assigned the responsibility of authoring a plan to secure timely legal representation for all UACs, although the force of this provision is limited due to the INA's prohibition of providing counsel for undocumented immigrants at the government's expense (21).

The passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) in 2008 constitutes the culmination of substantive federal legislation governing the treatment and protection of unaccompanied minors. The act, passed unanimously by the Senate and without objection from any House member, incorporated provisions from almost annual versions of an unsuccessful bill termed the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act first introduced by Senator Diane Feinstein (D-CA) in 2000 (Zamora). While the bulk of the act was aimed at expanding prosecution of human traffickers, the act's application to UACs was motivated by concerns that UACs were not being "adequately screened to see if there was a reason that they should not be returned to their home country," and that UACs were being returned to their nations of origin without due regard for their safety (Seghetti et. al 4).⁸ The act initiated differing procedural protections for UACs from contiguous countries (Mexico and Canada) and UACs from non-contiguous countries, mandating that children from non-contiguous countries be transferred shortly after apprehension to the custody of HHS-ORR, while Mexican and Canadian UACs who are not trafficked nor have a credible fear of persecution should they be returned home may independently consent to "withdraw their application for admission" (Manuel and Garcia 7). All children who do not meet these criteria, however,

⁸ §235, "Enhancing Efforts to Combat the Trafficking of Children"

along with all UACs from non-contiguous countries, are guaranteed formal removal proceedings, before which they may be placed in the custody of an approved sponsor (Zamora). Similar to the Homeland Security Act, the TVPRA mandated that “HHS must try to ensure that UAC have access to pro bono legal counsel” (Zamora). While the TVPRA expired in 2011, the full text of the law was amended to the Violence Against Women Act passed in 2013.

During and following the 2014 surge of unaccompanied minors, most bills passed by Congress concerning the care and treatment of UACs have dealt merely with appropriations funding rather than substantive policy changes. However, the history of proposed bills, a selection of which I will discuss here, demonstrates a charged debate over the future of many of the legal protections currently afforded to unaccompanied minors. The question of legal counsel for UACs has received significant legislative attention, but most proposals have merely “[reiterated] (or slightly [re-stated]) the INA’s basic rule that aliens have a right to counsel at their own expense in removal proceedings” (Manuel 2).⁹ In contrast, two bills introduced by Senator Mikulski (D-MD) would provide for the use of discretionary executive funds to guarantee legal counsel for some UACs,¹⁰ while a bill introduced by Representative Jeffries (D-NY) would enjoin the Attorney General to locate counsel for all unaccompanied minors, a provision that would be greatly constrained by funding appropriations (Lapig).¹¹

⁹ Includes H.R. 5114 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.), Helping Unaccompanied Minors and Alleviating National Emergency (HUMANE Act); H.R. 5143 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.), Protection of Children Act of 2014; H.R. 5163 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.); H.R. 5230 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.); S. 2611 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.); S. 2532 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.); S. 2666 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.); S. 2743 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.); S. 2772 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.)

¹⁰ S. 2437 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.), S. 2648 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.)

¹¹ H.R. 4936 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.)

Several legislative proposals were introduced to accelerate the flow of unaccompanied minors through the immigration system. At least six bills introduced during the second session of the 113th Congress were aimed at procedural change placing unaccompanied minors in expedited hearings rather than formal hearings, in some cases reducing the time span of review to a mere seven to 30 days.¹² In addition, multiple proposals were suggested to eliminate the current procedural distinction between UACs from contiguous countries and UACs from non-contiguous countries and submit all UACs, or in some cases all UACs from the specifically delineated nations of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, to the current rules governing UACs from Mexico and Canada.¹³ Other proposals have been oriented at streamlining the process, in part by reducing the sheer number of migrant children classified as unaccompanied and the number of children who ultimately do not appear at their immigration hearing. These proposals have included, firstly, amending the definition of UAC to exclude those children for whom a “sibling over 18 years of age, aunt, uncle, grandparent, or cousin over 18 years of age is available to provide care and physical custody” (Manuel and Garcia 3).¹⁴ Secondly, several bills would require UACs to stay under DHS custody until voluntary departure, deportation, or admittance as a refugee,¹⁵ while the proposed CREST Act would “require mandatory detention or the use of alternatives to detention

¹² H.R. 5114; H.R. 5137 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.), Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act of 2014; H.R. 5143; H.R. 5163; S. 2611, S. 2619 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.), Children Returning on an Expedited and Safe Timeline Act (CREST Act); S. 2666; S. 2743

¹³ H.R. 5143; H.R. 5053 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.), Expedited Family Reunification Act of 2014; H.R. 5230 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.), Secure the Southwest Border Act; H.R. 5163; S. 2619; S. 2632 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.), S. 2611; S. 2773; S. 2772 (113th Cong., 2nd sess.); S. 2666

¹⁴ H.R. 5137

¹⁵ H.R. 5163; S. 2632

(such as ankle bracelets) to ensure individuals waiting for court dates actually appear to court” (Zamora).¹⁶

¹⁶ S. 2619

Chapter Two: Republican Discourse

Introduction

Central American unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant children, by definition, must negotiate diverse territories throughout their journey to the United States, crossing multiple national borders, navigating through deserts and rivers, and transferring from Border Patrol custody to group detention centers and eventually to the homes of sponsors all across the country. Any Member of Congress who seeks to tell the stories of unaccompanied immigrant children and to justify policy positions concerning their treatment must confront these diverse scenes within the narratives they construct of children's pasts and futures. The Republican rhetoric of the hearings I analyze is notable for how its discursive characterizations of narrative scene and of the child migrants traversing these scenes are extremely closely linked.

Within the Republican narrative, two distinct modalities of movement across scene are assigned moral value and condition distinct rhetorical constructions of UACs. Northward migration is presented as the undertaking of an immoral path highly dangerous both to the minors who perform this journey and to the American citizens whose sovereign territory is transgressed by child migrants who are threatening in their unknowability and uncertainty. In this construction, the Mexican-American border acts as the locus of transition between children's innocent helplessness during the dangerous journey and the loss thereof upon the criminalized act of border crossing. In contrast, southward movement, precipitated by an act of expedited deportation within the Republican narrative, is cast with a moral directionality enabling former child migrants to once again experience normal family life appropriate for still vulnerable youth. Both

directions of movement are paired in the Republican narrative with a diametrically distinct discursive construction of Central America. The rhetorical version of the region that functions as the endpoint of a moral journey is dominated by the primacy of loving familial relationships. In contrast, the Central America that functions as the departure point of migration is depicted as a region characterized by violence as a natural feature of the land such that claims to the justifiability of migration based on societal violence are thereby refuted. Thus, within Republican discourse confronting the “problem” of UACs, spatial locations, the narratively ascribed characteristics of these locations, and the directional movement of UACs function in tandem to determine whether these children are imagined as inhabiting a morally appropriate position within a family unit, as helpless children experiencing crisis, or as potential hostile criminals.

The Republican narrative’s insistence that the family environment in Central America is the sole moral position for children not only conditions an understanding of deportation as a compassionate policy response, but also constitutes an illuminating example of the rhetorical strategies through which Republican lawmakers assert the primacy of spatial orthodoxy. Through these strategies, the narratively ascribed characteristics of the homeland are mapped through Republican discourse onto the body of each Central American child migrant, conditioning them as inherently unassimilable outsiders within the United States far before the legally decisive moment of the immigration hearing. The Republican narrative thus ultimately acts as a justification against globalization, and as a result affirms the superiority of identity and belonging tied to territorialized homelands inhabited by populations seen as mutually exclusive or at least antagonistic.

“The Lowest Level of Violence”

The first narrative construction of Central America that emerges within the Republican narrative, acting as the starting point for children’s northward migration, is one of a statically violent region such that extreme violence is imagined almost as a natural characteristic of the Central American landscape. Many Republicans characterize the Northern Triangle countries as having continuously experienced pervasive violence and criminal activity for decades preceding the 2014 increase in child migration from these countries, a level of violence they contend has not measurably escalated in recent years. Representative Raúl Labrador (R-ID), during the House Judiciary Committee hearing entitled “An Administration Made Disaster: The South Texas Border Surge of Unaccompanied Alien Minors,” asserts his agreement that conditions in the Northern Triangle countries are “not great,” yet states that, “I find it outrageous that anyone would say that these things have changed dramatically in any of these three countries” (230-231). Similarly, in the House Homeland Security Committee hearing “Unaccompanied Minors,” Representative Michael McCaul (R-TX) claims that, “No one questions the fact that these circumstances in these countries are terrible, but these conditions are not new and they have not suddenly gotten worse” (81).

Although these Republican Members of Congress do not explicitly state the argumentative rationales behind their inclusion of these claims, their assertions that the terrible violence in Central America has not intensified since children began emigrating from the Northern Triangle in large numbers act as a coded rationale for rejecting UACs’ claims of acute societal violence motivating their decisions to migrate. The statements of

Labrador and McCaul act to naturalize bitter violence, corruption, and impunity as inherent features of the Central American landscape such that societal violence becomes a scenic property rather than the result of concrete human, and thus contingent, agency. Here, pervasive violence and deprivation in the Northern Triangle becomes a fact of life that residents, including children, have always lived with and thus may justifiably continue to do so, as alternatives to violence are correspondingly implicitly coded as unnatural. This scenic construction and the characterization of Central American children as accustomed to living among violence that it conditions ultimately works as an impetus for denying that unaccompanied minors have legitimate claims to humanitarian protection in the United States or legitimate claims to leave the land and journey north at all. For the Republicans, then, something other than extreme social and gang violence is likely motivating children to migrate north, such as purely economic concerns, the demands of selfish parents, and the lure of immigration policies promulgated by the Obama administration, such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, all claims advanced by various Republican Members of Congress within these hearings.

The way in which the above discursive construction of the Northern Triangle region acts as a rhetorical prop to insinuate the illegitimacy of immigration is reinforced by those Republican representatives who diverge from this trend of casting Central America as innately violent and instead doubt whether ubiquitous violence and crime are features of life in the Northern Triangle nations at all. This construction further denies any legitimacy to children's claims as to the necessity of migration by substituting broad regional statistics and anecdotal evidence for personal experiences with violence as determinative of the validity of these claims. Along these lines, Representative Randy

Forbes of Virginia implores the witness Bishop Mark Seitz, “And can you also speak, Mr. Seitz, that the data from the National Police of Guatemala, for example, shows the lowest level of violence now since 2004? Would you dispute those figures?” (“An Administration Made” 147). Such statements serve to bolster Republicans’ rejection of the truth-value of child migrants’ claims to extreme violence as push factors motivating their journeys. Representative Louie Gohmert (R-TX), through his discussion of his experiences witnessing migrant processing at the border, explains, “Let me just indicate that all of these people that I watched in a public area in the dark of night being interviewed, they were all very honest, very candid, not one of them said they were fleeing because of violence” (227). Here, Gohmert selects an anecdotal representation of undocumented migrants and their reasons for migrating, rhetorically minimizing the extent of societal violence as a controlling factor in UACs’ lives, and implicitly characterizing UACs as deceitful in claiming that their act of migration is a flight from danger in their home nation. Overall, then, the discursive characterization of Central America Republicans advance as the narrative starting point of potential child migrants’ northward journey acts as an integral component of their totalizing rejection of justifiable migration by casting the region as incompatible with producing experiences for children that could form the basis of a legitimate claim to asylum or other forms of immigration relief.

“How Many Children Didn’t Make It”

Republican Members of Congress employ their discursive construction of the non-differentiated space of the journey between the Northern Triangle and the United

States as a further rhetorical strategy to justify not merely the illegitimacy but also the acute immorality of Central American children's potential northward migration by characterizing the journey space as almost unbelievably violent and dangerous for the minors who pass through it. In this way, the Republican narrative implicates a spatially selective framing of the extreme violence and hardship that many unaccompanied immigrant children experience throughout all phases of their lives and journeys. They do so by characterizing the Northern Triangle as relatively stable in its very instability, in comparison with the deathly hazards of the journey space, thereby producing a sense of entrenched spatial difference between two locales. Ensuring that children remain within the bounds of this relative stability and do not cross the lines of spatial difference, then, becomes an issue of paramount moral concern for Members of Congress with the institutional power to promote policy to the effect of eliminating cases of migration by unaccompanied minors.

Of all the diverse spaces that these children occupy between their home nation, the journey to the United States, and U.S. territory, many Republican Members of Congress highlight the journey between El Salvador, Honduras, or Guatemala and the U.S. as the overriding locus of the violence and hardship UACs face. During the June 25, 2014 hearing "Children Migrating from Central America: Solving a Humanitarian Crisis" before the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Representative Matt Salmon (R-AZ), states, "When I toured the warehouses in Nogales, I couldn't help but ask how many children didn't make it, how many became ill, were sold into prostitution, or were murdered, and never made it to the border" (1). Here, Salmon implies that the unaccompanied children who successfully

make it to the United States are just the tip of the iceberg compared to all the Central American children who may have attempted to make the journey and either perished or failed due to acute violence, exploitation, and the imminent threat of death. By emphasizing the children who did not make it, Salmon creates an image of the territory between Central America and the U.S. as a virtual landmine for migrating children in which death or bodily harm is inevitable.

Representatives Sean Duffy (R-WI) and Chris Smith (R-NJ) echo Salmon's sentiments during their statements in this same hearing. Duffy question a witness, "Do you have a report for us about what kinds of horrors these children experience during their 100-plus-hundreds of miles journey here? Rape, abuse, murder?" (31). Duffy's combined reference to the extensive length of the journey and the great possibility that a child who undertakes this journey will endure incredible violence or even die along the way contributes to forming an image of the route between Central America and the United States as one plagued with crime and characterized by an overriding threat of immediate danger throughout its vast trajectory. Smith, a Republican Congressman from New Jersey, follows the trend his colleagues began by emphasizing the immense difficulty migration imposes on unaccompanied children at the expense of recognizing that UACs often face danger and hardship in contexts other than their journey. Questioning a witness, he states, "I would like to ask a few very specific questions because they are vulnerable to sickness. They are vulnerable to abuse and even death" (34). Thus, through this comment that precisely mirrors Duffy's, Smith narrows in on the migratory path that UACs follow as the primary locus of suffering experienced by these children.

At almost no point in their commentary, with the exception of one passing reference Representative Salmon makes to children undertaking a journey “at the mercy of human traffic smugglers and criminals,” do Salmon, Duffy, or Smith expand their explanations of the extraordinary violence unaccompanied children face during their journey northward to include reference to specific agents who are responsible for acts of murder, abuse, and rape of UACs (2). The disembodied references Salmon, Duffy, and Smith make to murder, abuse, and rape disassociate the capacity for violent actions from real human agents that can be located at discrete points within a scene, reconstituting this capacity as the property of an entire, non-particularized geographical scene in which the threat of abuse, rape, and murder is imminent for all who enter this space, especially those who, like UACs, are seen as extremely helpless to prevent or resist such acts. Thus, violence and criminality become generalized determinative properties of the entire territory between Central America and the U.S. This conceptualization of the migratory route UACs undertake is particularly evident in Salmon’s statements quoted above. When Salmon questions how many children “became ill, were sold into prostitution, or were murdered,” emphasizing the objects of the sales and the murders rather than the subjects through sequential passive constructions, the human agents responsible for their reprehensible treatment of UACs become invisible. Salmon thus figures the tragedy that befalls UACs on their journey not primarily as the product of human action, but as a result of their *position* within that scene.

Thus, the migratory journey scene that Representatives Salmon, Duffy, and Smith construct constitutes the space between Central America and the United States as a locale within which violence and hardship are the only possible experiences that migrating

children may have, which in turn puts significant constraints on how migrant children's character and agency may be figured within this space. The overwhelming violence and constantly prevalent specter of hardship with which Salmon, Duffy, and Smith imbue this particular scene cannot allow for a characterization of UACs such that they are not construed as continually vulnerable, helpless, and under threat. Along these lines, Representative Smith, discussing the length of the journey between the Northern Triangle and the U.S., states that the long journey puts "strain on [UACs'] young and very fragile beings" (34). Smith's characterization of unaccompanied children as "fragile" constitutes their being as naturally susceptible to and defenseless against harm throughout the course of the journey. This image of natural fragility is intensified by frequent reference to unaccompanied children's very young age, such as Representative McCaul's claim that "Many [UACs] are under the age of 10, traveling thousands of miles along through Mexico from Central America" ("Unaccompanied Minors" 80). This trend is also exemplified in Representative Duffy's statement that, "In my short time here in Congress—3 ½ 4 years—I don't think I have seen an issue that has made me more angry than seeing 4-year- old and 6-year- olds and 8-year- olds by themselves with smugglers or coyotes coming to the American border" ("Children Migrating" 31). Reinforced by his subsequent reference to UACs as "little kids," Duffy's comments accentuate the plight of only the youngest UACs, contributing to the overall characterization of unaccompanied children as supremely vulnerable beings within the migratory journey scene of the Republican narrative (31).

Just as the Republicans' emphasis on UACs' very young age and exceptional fragility informs the construction of an image of pure defenseless innocence, a third trend

of the Republican narrative's characterization of UACs within the migratory space disassociates these children from any connotation of intrinsic or agential criminality. When the scenic microscope of Republican speech is placed solely on the journey UACs undertake, at no point is it mentioned that these children will come to embody the image of inherent illegality that dominates American immigration discourse as soon as they traverse the border between Mexico and the United States. When the narrative scene is narrowed as I have discussed above, unaccompanied children are imagined as simply vulnerable, innocent young children. The intensity of this characterization is enhanced by their seeming lack of specific ties to nationality or citizenship that would figure them as either "legal" or "illegal" as they come to occupy disparate scenes. This suppression of questions of citizenship and documentation is reinforced by textual references to a supposed commonality of parenthood and childhood across national boundaries. Representative Duffy espouses such a reference in his emotional claim that, "I have kids those age—4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14—a lot of them. And I could tell you what, to think that they could be traveling on their own to the American border is absolutely outrageous" (31). Here, Duffy imagines an alternate reality in which his own children, rather than those from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, could be hazarding an incredibly dangerous, lengthy journey, and rejects the hardship of the journey as almost unimaginable for all children in a moment of empathy that transcends differences in citizenship and documentation.

Taken together, the two narrative tropes I discuss above—the rhetorical characterization of the migratory journey as ubiquitously and inevitably dangerous and the construction of child migrants as helpless innocents—serve to provide a complete

rejection within Republican logics of the legitimacy or morality of migration, as preventing future acts of migration is essential to protect further Central American children from experiencing acute violence and suffering. In order for this imperative to retain force and fully justify Central American children remaining within the region, however, the Republicans' discursive construction of the journey space must correspond with a reproduction of Central American space, ironically, as relatively stable in its state of predictable instability. In this way, the Republican narrative exhibits a spatially selective framing of societal violence that ignores the fact that the Central American scene and the migratory journey scene in reality overlap, and that, as I discuss in Chapter One, many unaccompanied children migrate northward to escape societal violence of the same caliber Republicans ascribe solely to the journey space. Instead, Republican discourse depicts Central America and the journey scene as mutually exclusive spaces characterized by entrenched differences in stability and the quality of life for the children inhabiting or moving among these spaces, reinforcing their claim to the deep immorality of northward migration.

“Those People That Are Coming In”

*“And I’m telling you, we are not doing our job as a Congress ... and the Federal Government is not doing their job in protecting us from those people that are coming in”
(227).*

—*Representative Louie Gohmert (R-TX)*

In the following section, I will address a scenic component of the Republican narrative which privileges not the potentiality of child migrants' movement, and therefore the possibility of prevention or reversal, but rather the possibility that children may

remain for an extended period of time within American borders, having reached the endpoint of immoral migration north. The statements of many Republicans exhibit great concern that the presence of UACs at this pole of the directional dichotomy between Central America and the U.S. will be semi-permanent, given the Obama administration's supposed leniency toward undocumented immigrants and the extensive length of time necessary to process immigration cases due to the current backlog in the system. This concern is symptomatic of a narrative shift in the attribution of the immorality of migration from the dangerous and even deadly effects it has on children within the journey space to the ascribed immoral effects such movement has for receiving communities and American citizens when the scenic lens of the Republican narrative crosses the southern border. I thus echo the findings of Antony and Thomas in their analysis of public discourse on the "crisis" of unaccompanied minors. They argue, much as I do, that within such discourses,

"The unaccompanied child's inherent vulnerability and helplessness are overcome and discursively pivoted toward the disadvantages her presence poses for the host nation ... Instead, it is the *domestic population* that become the subjects of concern and susceptibility" (Antony and Thomas 18).

However, my analysis illuminates the spatial underpinnings of this discursive pivot, demonstrating the way shifts in narrative scene condition disparate understandings of migrant children's agency and vulnerability. In the following section, I will first argue that the Republican narrative constructs unaccompanied migrant children within the American scene as an amorphous, collective agency, threatening in its uncertainty, through which the concrete actions of fully agential individuals such as gang members, drug traffickers, and human smugglers may submit the territorial and cultural sovereignty

of the United States to great danger. Secondly, I will discuss how much of the Republican rhetoric within the hearings I analyze shifts to a construction of UACs as full agents capable of acting not merely under the control of the aforementioned individuals, but in purposeful collusion with them to create a moment of crisis for the United States.

Within the American scene, then, the various characterizations of UACs represent a decisively contradictory departure from their construction as innocent, vulnerable objects of actions undertaken by others within the journey scene. In contrast, within this scene, UACs are variously imagined as potentially diseased, invasive, criminal aliens carrying along with them the negative traits associated in some dominant American imaginaries with their home region of Central America, and thus their rhetorical construction closely aligns with many of the common tropes associated with the quintessential adult <illegal immigrant>. Such discourse contributes to a second manifestation of rhetorically entrenched spatial difference advanced within the Republican narrative, this time between the Northern Triangle and the United States and implicating a divisive ascription of associative belonging tied to territorialized homelands. Republican discourse thus closely illustrates Flores' (2003) claim that anti-immigrant discourses often "bolster imperialist fantasies of so-called Third-world turmoil, of racialized 'differences between primitive and civilized peoples'" (Flores 381, quoted in Antony and Thomas 18).

"This Humanitarian Crisis That We Are Experiencing"

A necessary condition in Republican discourse for the instantiation of the overwhelmingly negative, disparaging discursive construction of unaccompanied

immigrant children that emerges within the American scene is the location where Republican speakers place the “crisis” involving UACs. For many Republicans, the genuine crisis is explicitly located at or within the national borders of the United States. Representative Ron Barber, a Democrat from Arizona whose rhetoric closely associates him with Congressional Republicans, exhibits such a positioning in his statement of gratitude to the Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, stating, “I want to thank you for convening this hearing on this very important issue, this crisis that we are facing on our borders, particularly in Texas and Arizona” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 72). Representative Renee Ellmers (R-NC) parallels Barber’s sentiments later in the same hearing, voicing her intent in participating in the hearing as stemming from a desire to “find solutions on immigration in general, but especially because of this humanitarian crisis that we are experiencing” (121). Ellmers’ usage of subjectivity through her statements about the crisis belies her assertion that the crisis is of a humanitarian nature, as her phrasing supposes that “we,” the American people inhabiting American territory, are the individuals experiencing crisis rather than migrant children, many of whom likely meet the international humanitarian standards to be admitted as asylum seekers. While Ellmers may not intend to frame solely American citizens, and potentially legal permanent residents, as the victims of the “humanitarian” crisis, her use of the word “we” insinuates at least a minimal level of victimhood.

This rhetorical location of crisis is intimately wrapped up with Republicans’ assertions of the failure of immigration policy to fully securitize the border, thus drawing causal connection between the porousness of the border and the occurrence of the crisis. Exhibiting this causal logic, Representative Michael Rogers of Alabama argues, “Well, I

have been down there. I know what I am talking about. We don't have a fence down there, and, if we did, we wouldn't have 5-year-old children coming across" (28). Here, Rogers implies that the federal government's apathy in securing the border is directly responsible for the mass migration of children across the border, and as a result, "This is what we get for it" (28). Rogers thus casts the United States as the victim of its own failure of self-protection and the arrival of significant numbers of migrant children as proof of this failure. Representative Candice Miller (R-MI), implicitly asserting the inadequacy of America's enforcement responses to UACs' countries of origin, states,

"We need to whack the, our neighbors, to understand that they are just not going to keep taking our money and we are just going to be sitting here like this—we are not the ATM machine—while this humanitarian crisis is happening with these innocent, innocent children" (51).

Here, Miller constructs an image of the Northern Triangle nations willfully allowing their citizens to travel northward and subvert the territorial integrity of the United States. By painting the children as passive, victimized objects of the failings of the Mexican and Northern Triangle governments, Miller's comments heighten the sense within the Republican narrative in which moving children across national borders is used as a method for those opposed to the best interests of the United States to threaten the nation's sovereignty.

Representative Gohmert similarly implies that the Obama administration's lack of initiative and toughness in securing the southern border is at least partially responsible for subjecting the nation to crisis. Gohmert complains, "I mean, a child, a 5 year old getting an order to show up in immigration court, you know, are you going to actually deport that child? You know, to me, that's a free pass, from their [parents'] perspective" ("An

Administration Made” 226). Gohmert’s comments exhibit a fear that unaccompanied immigrant children will be able to safely remain within American territory, as their young age and the sympathy it engenders may inhibit a dispassionate judgment of the merits of their case in immigration court. In this way, children, more so than adult undocumented immigrants, may be especially capable of inflicting a prolonged immigration crisis upon the United States.

“Are They Being Used as A Distraction?”

At the most abstract level, the discursive characterization of child migrants manifest in the Republican narrative is one in which children compose an uncertain, invasive threat to the American nation. Representative Lou Barletta’s (R-PA) testimony in the House Judiciary Committee hearing “Impact on Local Communities of the Release of Unaccompanied Minors and the Need for Consultation and Notification” exemplifies this characterization. Barletta, taking issue with the Obama administration’s release of minors to sponsors and the placement in detention of UACs in several Pennsylvania towns, argues that the Department of Health and Human Services “must . . . certify that the unaccompanied alien minors have undergone health screenings, including vaccinations, as well as undergo a criminal background check and pose no public health or safety threat” (“Impact on Local” 12). Through his claim that local community members have the right to know when UACs enter their city limits and just what sort of individuals these children are signals a fundamental suspicion of UACs, as these children, unknown in character and person, have the potential to be carriers of disease, criminals, and threats to public order and safety. Here, Barletta figures the quality of one’s status of

being unknown to others before interpersonal introduction not as entailing a neutral unknown, but rather a threatening unknown when UACs are the particular class of unknown individuals in question.

Echoing Barletta, Representative Paul Broun (R-GA) similarly contributes to the rhetorical construction of unaccompanied migrant children as an amorphous collective threat through the employment of a poignant metaphor of illness. Broun declares,

“In January, the Department understood that there were going to be up to 65,000 unaccompanied children coming to the United States, as a medical doctor I try to prevent disease. I try to prevent problems with my patients. The administration should be doing the same thing” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 31).

Through this metaphor, Broun configures the “disease” afflicting the United States as the “influx” of an immense group of unaccompanied children that must either be mitigated or prevented entirely. It is clear that, for Broun, the “problem” presented by unaccompanied minors is completely disassociated from their personal experiences or plight. Rather, the problem is the disease-like emergence of UACs within American territory, a construction through which UACs’ individual existences are merged as subservient to the collective threat of crisis they pose to the United States. The comments of Barletta and Broun illustrate a link between Congressional and public discourse concerning unaccompanied minors, as the study performed by Antony and Thomas similarly finds that public rhetoric metaphorically “cast the child migrant as an unclean and dangerous threat who risks infecting the larger populace if left unchecked” (13). Both public and Congressional discourses on UACs, then, buy into dominant American tropes figuring Latin American, especially Mexican, immigrants as diseased and as metaphorical elements of disease (Potter 235).

Two areas in which the collectivized, threatening body of unaccompanied immigrant children is partially qualified are the age and gender traits Members of Congress attribute to UACs. For example, Representative Barletta asserts, “Roughly three-fourths of them are males aged 14 to 17” (“Impact on Local” 13). Similarly, Representative Steve King (R-IA) claims, “80 percent are male; and 83 percent are over 14 but unaccompanied minors, that means 15, 16, or 17 years old” (“An Administration Made” 150). Thus, while the ages of child migrants often cited by Republicans while addressing the migratory journey aspect of their narrative scene are largely in the single digits, the emphasis on age within the U.S. scene shifts toward teenagers. As a result, the construction of UACs as a collectivized group of individuals fluctuates in average age based on the position of this collective and its proximity to American communities. While neither Barletta nor King definitively assert their rationale behind choosing to highlight the age and gender of child migrants, yet still feel it is essential information to include in their testimony, the conscientious focus both men give to the supposed harm UACs will cause local communities points toward an association between one’s status as a teenage male and one’s lack of innocence and personal likelihood to inflict harm on these communities. Thus, the Republican narrative’s construction of unaccompanied child migrants implies a spectrum of disappearing innocence correlated with increasing age and masculine gender identity, laid out along a northward spatial trajectory.

The comments of Representative Pete Olson of Texas are singularly demonstrative of this trend in rhetorical characterization. Olson first speaks of three very young female child migrants he met in immigration detention in the U.S., stating that their grandmother had paid smugglers \$20,000 to guide her grandchildren to the border.

As their boat had flipped while crossing the Rio Grande, Olson describes the girls as “crying, crying, crying because they got here and they didn’t know why they almost died and what their future is” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 171). Olson’s characterization of these three girls as incredibly helpless, vulnerable, and clueless, and his narrative inclusion of their grandmother, set up a causal link between the grandmother’s agency and their dangerous experiences while crossing into the United States. Olson then turns to discuss the older teenage migrants he encountered at the detention center, noting explicitly that he is drawing a sharp distinction between the two groups. Olson explains, “But kind of perversely, in stark contrast, walking through these big detention centers with the teenagers, man, smiling at us, waving, happy, like they are proud, ‘I came here illegally I am going to stay here.’ We are sending mixed messages across the border” (171). With these comments, Olson, “represent[ing] and enact[ing] the values inherent in the dominant discourse” on immigration, employs a rhetorical strategy discussed by Karma Chávez (2009) in which such a rhetor reads characteristics from the body of an immigrant or supposed immigrant and “translates” them, often without exchanging a single word, to achieve a meaning that meshes with their preconceived understandings of migrant subjectivity (19). Here, Olson explicitly associates his reading of UACs’ increase in age with a loss of innocence correlated with a knowing criminality and a sense of full agency in having bested American immigration enforcement.

Even the very youngest unaccompanied immigrant children, however, are implicated in criminal acts as a collective mode of agency criminal individuals utilize in their attempts to infiltrate American territory, thus affixing to the UAC “a shadow signifier that aligns him with a discourse of terror and violence” (Antony and Thomas

19). In this way, Representative Jeff Duncan of South Carolina exhibits doubt that UACs are truly unaccompanied throughout their journey north. Duncan questions his colleague Representative Duffy, “Sean, could your 3-year-old travel 1,000 miles without you, without your adult children, your older children accompanying them? I don’t think so” (“Children Migrating” 27). By selectively focusing attention on the youngest of possible UACs, Duncan’s claim that such children could not possibly brave the journey alone seems highly plausible. His insinuated characterization of the individuals accompanying them is one of potentially criminal older teenage or adult migrants. This is evident in his worry that, “If children can come across because CBP agents are changing diapers or warming formula or doing other things other than securing the border, then I am sure that elements that want to do harm to this country can exploit our Southern Border also” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 57). Representative Blake Farenthold (R-TX) echoes Duncan’s concerns in his inquiry whether UACs “are being used as a distraction to flood, say, the Border Patrol and bring in drugs or maybe more high-risk folks?” (174).¹⁷ Through these statements, Duncan and Farenthold characterize UACs as the agency through which dangerous, criminal migrants distract Border Patrol agents from their primary task of ensuring tight border security. Thus, while extremely young migrant children may be innocent themselves of criminal behavior, their very existence within U.S. territory is both a result of and an instigating factor for illegal activity, implying a possibility of guilt by association. In this way, even the youth of a migrant baby or

¹⁷ This was a theme evident in the analysis of Antony and Thomas as well, who found that commentators on the news articles they analyzed cast child migrants as “conduits whereby malicious agents could infiltrate the U.S. ... The migrants were accomplices in a sophisticated ruse to distract the Border Patrol while gangs and terrorists slipped across the border” (Antony and Thomas 15).

toddler cannot guarantee their rhetorical construction as totally helpless and innocent within the Republican narrative, as the translocation of migrant children may be manipulated by criminal agents as a method of engendering the ominous border crisis and threat to local communities that Republican discourse manufactures. Duncan's comments thus create a picture of mutually exclusive choice between caring for young children and caring for the American border—Border Patrol must choose one option but not the other.

Similarly, within Republican discourse, the de-individualized class of unaccompanied immigrant children is analogously constructed as detrimental to the well-being of “local” American communities and citizens, thereby conditioning a dichotomy of duty between ensuring migrant children's needs are met and protecting American resources and well-being. For example, Representative Labrador, pronouncing his worry that the current extreme backlog in immigration cases will allow UACs to live and consume resources within local communities for years, states that “Local officials are concerned about the health and welfare of communities in their jurisdiction” (“Impact on Local” 2-3). Representative Bob Goodlatte (R-VA) mirrors Labrador's concern in his claim that “the States have arguably been impacted the most by the Administration's disastrous policies” (7). Labrador's use of the amorphous term “welfare” engenders an image of widely dispersed uncertainty and harm caused by the presence of UACs within local boundaries. Here, the threat to local communities is not solely measured with discrete metrics of specific aspects of community existence, but is rather ubiquitous in its potential for harm to Americans.

Several Members of Congress, however, do invoke specific areas in which the presence of UACs with substantial needs for care and resources is a liability for local

communities. For example, Representative Barletta argues UACs must undergo criminal background and health checks, as “such steps are vital to ensuring the welfare of our communities” (12). Here, Barletta posits that the “problem” of unaccompanied immigrant children encompasses a potentially drastic threat to the health and safety of American citizens and communities. While the specific effects the presence of UACs will have on local communities is purely speculative within the narrative and thus eminently uncertain, the comments of Barletta and Labrador do not admit the possibility that this presence may be a boon to individual communities, but rather implies that any such presence will result in a grievous drain of local resources. The narrative thus once again necessitates an image of confrontation between the needs of migrant children and the needs of local communities. An implicit connotation of the narrative is thus that the provision of any healthcare or educational resources to migrant children necessarily diminishes in a non-inconsequential manner the local pool of resources that could be employed to the benefit of American citizen children and adults. This suggests that the characterization of UACs within dominant immigration discourse falls under the purview of the discursive imagination investigated by Mary Romero, in which the children of immigrants “receiving benefits has negative impacts on the children of mothers who are U.S. citizens” (49). This aura of conflict is reinforced by an absence of concrete numbers of the average number of UACs reuniting with family members or sponsors in cities and towns across the country. The lack of numbers allows the discursively constructed threat of the presence of UACs to reach beyond proportional bounds and avoid questions of quantifying the supposed resulting drain on public resources, which could potentially reveal that the constructed threat is in no way reflected in reality.

“Lawbreakers Already”

The speech of a significant number of Republican Members of Congress transitions the discursive construction of unaccompanied immigrant children from a collectivized agency through which criminal groups invade the U.S. to a group of knowing criminal agents themselves whose foreignness “[signifies] a threat of corruption” to the identity and sovereignty of the nation (Honig 1-2). This particular construction comes to the fore when the illegality of child migrants’ journey is emphasized as the primary characteristic defining their mode of movement and the rationale behind this movement. The Republicans’ focus on the illegality of migration illuminates the rhetorical force within American immigration discourse of the concept scholars of geography term “landscape,” which, according to Daniel Trudeau (2006), acts as a representation of a particular polity such that “particular arrangements of values, aesthetics and behaviour are considered normal or natural” (422). In the popular American imaginary, the “illegal” immigrant subjects American citizens and their rightful ownership of the land to a transgressive impasse by denying citizens the right to consent to their presence within the bounds of the American landscape in which the contractualist concept of consent functions as a normal and necessary mode of political behavior (Honig 73-74). The “illegal” immigrant, whose first steps upon American soil are seen as a flagrant subversion of consent, is thus discursively positioned as a threatening figure who “takes” from the nation rather than gives to it from the very beginning. Republican Members of Congress attribute this construction to child migrants just as their adult counterparts have historically been subject to. In the following section, I will discuss the ways in which Republican discourse characterizes UACs’ identity and

actions as transgressive of the “community relations and identity of the polity” traditionally associated with the American landscape (Trudeau 422).

In addition to age and gender traits, undocumented status is one of the few other identifying characteristics Republican representatives attribute with any frequency to unaccompanied migrant children. Following this trend, Representative Goodlatte claims,

“There is a tsunami hitting our Nation’s southern border ... Central American minors, largely teenagers, are making a perilous journey through Mexico and then walking miles across a hostile border environment, assisted by smugglers, and coming to the United States in violation of the law” (“An Administration Made” 1).

In addition to calling forth a natural disaster metaphor used to depict large groups of migrants common in dominant discursive constructions of undocumented immigrants, Goodlatte highlights that UACs’ act of crossing the Mexican-American border is illegal (Potter 235). Goodlatte’s phrasing attributes primary agency in committing this illegal act to unaccompanied minors themselves, as the word “assistance” functions to describe the role of smugglers during the journey northward as one of a guiding hand only to individuals who understand what they are undertaking, yet require supplemental help. This rhetorical construction of the role of smuggler contrasts deeply with the suggested characterization of smugglers and traffickers as likely to abuse, rape, and kill the minors they actively *transport* as objects, rather than assist, across Central America and Mexico, when the scenic lens of the Republican narrative is placed on the journey scene. By obscuring this potential manipulative role, Goodlatte’s comments thus place responsibility for the act of illegal immigration solely within the purview of child migrants’ agential choice to move across the border.

Representative Broun corroborates Goodlatte's construction in his comment that "These kids have come here illegally. They have been lawbreakers already" ("Unaccompanied Minors" 32). Through his focus on illegality, Broun defines the fact that child migrants did not have permission from the U.S. government to journey northward and cross the southern border as the primary determinative factor characterizing their modality of movement. Such a construction implicitly serves to limit Congressional, executive, and local responses to the presence of child migrants within American territory, as these children and their future presence within the nation must be confronted, first and foremost, in reaction to their *mode* of movement—transgressive entry upon a bounded landscape—rather than in reaction to their personal *rationales* behind such movement. Due to this circumscription of potential responses, any official reaction to UACs must confront them as child law-breakers rather than mere children.

The comments of Representative Darrell Issa (R-CA) during the hearing "An Administration Made Disaster: The South Texas Border Surge of Unaccompanied Alien Minors" are indicative of the Republican narrative's rhetorical characterization of child migrants that imbues their character with a fixed potential for agential criminal behavior even following their unauthorized border crossing. Issa's comments imply a fundamental distrust of the legitimacy of UACs' reasons for migrating and their overall potential for trustworthy, non-deceitful behavior. In this way, Issa presents a concern that it is impossible for Border Patrol agents to verify the ages and identities of unaccompanied minors. He asserts, "You really don't know if they are victims of trafficking. Now, if they don't have tattoos and they have never been identified with fingerprints, you don't know if they are gang members coming to this country or in some other way coming here to

commit crimes; is that correct?” (“An Administration Made” 142). Here, for Issa, even children who exhibit no outward signs of criminal engagement constantly retain the possibility of criminal agency. Issa relies heavily on essentialist logics through which the supposed criminal activity of a small minority of UACs is extrapolated as likely applicable for all migrant children, and thus the nebulousness and uncertainty surrounding the true identity of child migrants is coded as a reason for great distrust of all such children. Thus, the Republican narrative’s rhetorical characterization of child migrants as fully-developed agents includes a character trait of an ever-present possibility and propensity for criminal behavior. In this way, the actions of child migrants are coded in such a way that not only their mode of entry into American territory is characterized as deeply transgressive, but the transgressiveness of this initial moment is affixed to their potential future actions and behavior, constituting the essentialized child migrant as eternally out of place within the American landscape.

Representative Issa’s further statements during the same hearing provide a consummate example of the rhetorical shift in cashing out the agency of unaccompanied immigrant children as the narrative moves across the transitional locus of the Mexican-American border. Issuing a statement blaming President Obama for subjecting children to great harm, Issa argues that he sees a strong link between “the President’s not enforcing the law, not living up to his responsibility ... and this carnage that can occur when children are pushed over the border, in some cases left in the desert” (143). Here, Issa both assigns agency to President Obama in knowingly inflicting harm upon children, and characterizes these children as being forced with no culpability of their own by manipulative others to submit to the certain danger of the journey. However, when Issa’s

narrative soon after shifts in scene to the American border and interior, he claims, “What you are seeing is a flood of illegals coming here prepped to say whatever they need to say to get to stay here, because the President of the United States has told them in no uncertain terms if they get here, he won’t enforce the law” (143). In this second set of comments, Issa first introduces the concept of “illegality,” rhetorically conflating children’s very personhood with their particular subversive mode of immigration through the use of the term “illegals.” He thus prevents any interpretation of their lives, futures, and very humanity that does not necessarily confront them as categorical criminals whose illegality supersedes even their status as a child. Issa’s emphasis on illegality, combined with his characterization of unaccompanied minors as performing a knowing act of fraud, signals an almost diametric shift from his prior construction of UACs as vulnerable beings manipulated by others. Issa’s rhetorical shift is conditioned by UACs’ spatial scenic position, demonstrating the significant relevance of movement across narrative scene and scenic boundaries to the specificities of rhetorical constructions of the agency and motives of the one who moves.

Representative Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) espouses a similar fear of unaccompanied children committing knowing immigration fraud. Chaffetz argues that “these minors can and will apply for and will likely receive asylum because it’s just as easy to game the system” (6). Chaffetz’s language presents all cases in which UACs receive asylum as the result not of their demonstration of a sincere and wholehearted fear of persecution, but of their willful trickery in presenting false claims of legitimate need and thereby taking advantage of the generosity of American immigration law. Chaffetz’s attribution of manipulative agency to unaccompanied immigrant children figures them as doubly

destructive of American social fabric and legal institutions, as not only do they commit an illegal act through their unauthorized border crossing, but they additionally attempt to cheat their way to gaining legal immigration status. Chaffetz's implication that any appearance of a sincere presentation of asylum claims by UACs should be immediately suspect eliminates any rationale for UACs' presence on American territory that does not condone illegal, deceitful behavior. Overall, Chaffetz's implicit suggestion minimizes the importance of individual migrants' personal rationales for claiming asylum. He thus rhetorically shifts the proper focus of judgments of legitimacy from a claimant's individualized, personal experiences to their membership in a particular social group, once again echoing the rhetorical strategies of bodily translation discussed by Karma Chávez. In this way, UACs' belonging to a particular visible social group should justifiably provoke a negative response universalized to apply to the entire group by eliminating the relevance of individual differences.¹⁸

Overall, the Republican narrative's characterization of unaccompanied child migrants as beings with developed agency comes to the fore when criminality is emphasized as the primary characteristic defining their mode of movement. This framing is inherently oriented in a northward perspective, as it were, as the act of migration is thus constituted by how child migrants' presence impacts the space they move through and into as well as by how the dominant culture of the destination locale envisions the mode through which they move. The act of migration is thus rhetorically constituted by its effect on individuals and entities other than the migrant, obscuring the possibility of

¹⁸ Ironically, categorical prejudice toward members of distinct social groups is contrary to the spirit of asylum law.

perceiving migration through the lens of migrants' motives and lived experiences, through which migration may be seen as an act of seeking refuge and protection from pervasive societal violence and threat of abuse. Instead, because migration is considered in conjunction with its effects on the destination country when (il)legality acts as the dominant metric of movement, the migrant is already set at a discursive disadvantage due to the connotations of their mode of movement as abrogative of the destination country's culture and legal principles. An "illegal" immigrant by necessity can never be seen as wholly innocent, a trend which is evident in the above representatives' constructions of migrant children, directly opposing traditional conceptions of children in crisis as the purest of innocent victims.

With the case of unaccompanied immigrant children, this initial discursive disadvantage not only stems from a deep association within Republican discourse between border crossing and criminality, but also from the symmetry between Republicans' rhetorical characterization of unaccompanied minors *after* border crossing and their characterization of Central America as the starting point of northward migration. Through their characterization of UACs as agential, likely criminals following border crossing, Republican representatives map the characteristics of widespread gang violence and instability they attribute to the Northern Triangle onto the body and behavior of all children who originate in this region, establishing an entrenched discursive relationship between people and place. This rhetorical relationship indicates Republican speakers' usage of metonymic constructions of spatial and personal identity, discursive devices through which "people are embodied by descriptions of the place in which they live" (Dickerson 407). Through the establishment of this metonymic

framework, Representative Issa's implicit recommendation for the reading of bodily appearance as indicative of UACs' character becomes understandable as an attempt to categorize UACs based upon assumptions about their homeland.

The all-encompassing skepticism the above Republicans exhibit through their advancement of this metonymic relationship toward the existence of any legitimate reason for UACs' presence on American soil, I argue, represents a racialization of the American landscape. The American landscape, as a "spatially bounded [scene] that visually [communicates] what belongs and what does not," appears to have no room for Latino children, who within Republican discourse assume a transgressiveness in their very nature, necessarily calling up an image of threatening foreignness through their bodily presentation, identity, and mode of movement into the American landscape (Trudeau 422). Republican discourse on unaccompanied child migrants, then, exposes dominant theoretical accounts of the political identity of the child, such as that advanced by Edelman, as to a certain extent narrowly concerning the identity of white citizen children only. The UAC, for Republican Members of Congress, does not act as an embodiment of the virtuous future or the "telos of the social order," but rather as the embodiment of a threat to or corruption of the virtuous future (Edelman 9). This particular conceptualization of "future" however, is decidedly not universal. The future, in Republican discourse, is categorically "our" future; that is, the future of (white) American citizens. This conception of the future is privileged within the Republican narrative as soon as the child migrant crosses the border, above and beyond any consideration of the child's future beyond its use as instrumental in reversing the threat *their* future presents to *us*.

“We Can Save Children” (And Ourselves)

In the previous sections, I have indicated that the Republicans’ array of spatial and identity characterizations mapped out along a northward trajectory induces a Congressional response oriented toward deportation and the prevention of further cases of migration. Within Republican discourse, deportation is framed as a compassionate policy response reversing an immoral trajectory of movement by implementing a corrective moral relocation of child migrants. In this way, the Republicans’ endorsement of deportation assumes a traditional paternalistic character, in the sense that deportation makes up for the supposed neglect and oversight of Central American parents by assisting children who “need looking after, they need protecting (even from themselves),” as Roche argues children are imagined in American political discourse (477). This framing of deportation implicates a discursive characterization of Central America as a space dominated by loving family relationships, diametrically opposed to the one that functions in the Republican narrative as the starting point of migration. I will argue that, while Republicans frame expedited deportation as a compassionate policy response, urging deportation also emerges from the concern discussed above that UACs will negatively affect local U.S. communities. In this way, deportation acts as a method of reasserting spatial orthodoxy and the sanctity of the American landscape and the imagined identity of the populace tied to it.

“They Can Return Back to a Normal Way of Life”

The selective dichotomy of violence I posit Republicans construct between the narrative scenes of the home nation and the journey serves to legitimize certain

constrained interpretations of responsible Congressional action. Firstly, the dichotomy acts as a justificatory factor for Republican claims of the need to eliminate cases of unaccompanied child migration altogether—that is, to assume a paternalistic position and prevent the possibility that parents will continue to, as Representative McCaul claims, “[hand] over their young children by the thousands to cartels who are profiting from by smuggling these kids to the United States” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 1). This paternalistic attitude is exhibited strikingly in Representative Labrador’s argument for increased immigration enforcement in the hopes of deterring parents from making this choice. Labrador states,

“If we start enforcing the law today, I will submit to you that we can save children. You won’t see these dead bodies, you won’t see these girls that are getting raped, and you won’t see these children that are getting abused by these criminal gangs” (“An Administration Made” 231).

Representative Salmon echoes Labrador’s logic in his appeal that the “untold carnage” facing children during the journey north will continue “if we don’t create a deterrent to stop that from happening” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 117). The claim that future Congressional action to initiate strict enforcement of immigration law and deterrence of migration will result in saving children’s lives is made argumentatively viable due to its embeddedness within the Republican narrative’s selective framing of violence that both minimizes and naturalizes the existence of pervasive social strife in the Northern Triangle nations. Such a claim moralizes translocating children in one direction only—northward to southward—and Congress is granted the portentous moral responsibility to incur this movement of children. The depth of this moral claim results from Salmon’s and Labrador’s implicit suggestion that the alternatives to this decision—weakening

enforcement, or simply inaction—will result in potentially deadly massive harm to children. Thus, the Republican narrative’s various characterizations of scene condition an understanding of strict immigration enforcement as the *only* moral course of action Congress may take to ensure the safety of vulnerable children in need of salvation.

In addition to denying the legitimacy of migration in the first place, the scenic characterization of the Republican narrative justifies elevated deportation of UACs who successfully reach the U.S. Representative McCaul contends that, “This administration should send an unambiguous message that those arriving will be promptly sent home. I, for one, do not want to see another child harmed because we have not clearly articulated the realities on the ground consistent with current law” (2). In order to set up a justifiable moral claim to Congressional action, McCaul’s statements rely on the same narrative feature of selective framing of violence that Labrador’s do. Because McCaul asserts an explicit causal connection between expanding deportations and saving children from perverse harm, expanded deportations constitute the second prong of the only possible moral path of action Congress may pursue in the narrative’s extension into the future.

The Republicans’ assertion of the grave morality and necessity of deportation relies on a specific spatial construction of the Northern Triangle as the endpoint of a counterbalancing path of moral movement in reversal of the immorality of immigration by unaccompanied children. When the Northern Triangle functions in this particular iteration within the Republican narrative, as an *endpoint*, it is cast as an idealized antithesis to the migratory journey scene in which former unaccompanied migrant children may reassume the natural position of the child and experience the benefits of a loving family environment. In this way, references to violence in the Republicans’

construction of the home scene are downplayed to the extent that violence is often exchanged for love as the primary force characterizing the scene.

Representative Duncan does not explicitly mention familial love in his statement of concern for unaccompanied children that, “We want to make sure they are reunited with their parents, hopefully in their home country, so they can return back to a normal way of life in their country and don’t put a strain on the American resources” (“Children Migrating” 37). However, his association of the “normal” way of life for children with their engagement within a familial context privileges the ability to experience traditional family life as the factor determining the ideal location of the child, superseding any question of societal violence and instability. Framing his policy proposal as a gesture of compassion, Representative Salmon reaches beyond normalcy, stating that Congress must pass immigration reform and “make sure that these children are back with their families in that loving environment” (38). Through his emphasis on deportation as a compassionate response, Salmon constructs the family environment within the home nation as only place where it is moral and right for child migrants to reside, as this is the only local within which children may experience loving family relationships. Such claims to the morality of experiencing loving, nurturing relationships and family life trump any detriment societal violence may cause child migrants, a trope the strength of which is reinforced by the dominance of a particular construction of childhood in which children are seen not as isolated individuals or components of an amorphous mass of migrants, but as members of a family unit, the unity of which is sacrosanct in Salmon’s comments. Figuring the family unit as such is telling in its ignorance of the significant numbers of unaccompanied minors who choose to migrate to the U.S. to escape intra-familial

violence, as I discuss in Chapter One, and the exclusion of these statistics from the Republican narrative further contributes to the construction of the family environment as the ideal location for former child migrants.¹⁹

“My Country’s Sovereignty Violated Over and Over”

Republican Members of Congress, within the five hearings I analyze, argue for the necessity of pursuing an aggressive, expedited deportation program not only as a method to ensure children’s safety, but additionally as a way to eradicate the threat they argue UACs present to American citizens and communities, either as guilty of direct harm through self-directed, agential action, or as guilty by association due to their role as pawns of other actors who attempt to infiltrate the United States. Deportation is thus asserted as a means to reverse UACs’ initial transgression of unauthorized border crossing by removing the threatening agents of this transgression—both the tattooed “obvious” gang members and the “pure” Latino bodies that are all the more suspicious for their purity (Comments of Rep. Issa, “An Administration Made” 142). In this way, Republican dialogue advances the need to re-stabilize the United States as an identity-based space by eliminating the “problem” of UACs, whose presence within American borders unsettles orthodox conceptions of this space and the individuals who inhabit it. While the American landscape is always in flux, Congressional Republican immigration discourse is a forceful demonstration of how “dominant groups exert social control through the purification—and regulation—of space” in order to reassert spatial orthodoxy

¹⁹ A study performed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees found that 21% of the 404 Central American child migrants they interviewed had experienced domestic abuse (*Children on the Run* 6-28).

following a perceived transgression by outsiders—in this case, unaccompanied minors (Trudeau 436). In such moments, Daniel Trudeau argues, “alternative meanings become subordinated,” in this case evident in how Republican constructions of UACs obscure the possibility that the presence of undocumented immigrant children within American territory may have net positive effects for communities, let alone the possibility that residence in the U.S. may greatly improve the material, psychological, and emotional well-being of some UACs and their family members.

Many Republican representatives embrace the viewpoint that unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant children should be treated, in legal terms, just as their adult counterparts are. Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI), arguing that diminishing the sheer number of UACs flowing into the country is the only achievable goal legislative action may be able to affect, states that, “I think what we are really trying to do, if we are to speed up the process, is to get more returns, as opposed to removals, which may take a whole adjudication process, removals are taking years and creating even more incentive to come” (“Dangerous Passage” 61). Johnson’s comments introduce an aura of emergency confronting those with the ability to respond to the crisis, as the sheer numbers of child arrivals he emphasizes necessitates a rapid response. Johnson posits that the languid pace of immigration processing in the U.S. is directly responsible for incentivizing Central Americans to migrate northward, presumably under the mistaken impression that they will be able to remain undisturbed in the United States for years. His solution to eliminating this incentive—expedited deportation and fortified immigration enforcement—would theoretically result both in a halt of child migrants coming to the U.S. and a forced exodus of children already in the U.S. through deportation. Such a plan

would finesse the volatile social tension UACs provoke by their presence within American borders by eradicating the “problem” of UACs entirely. Johnson’s stance can only be perceived as working toward the wellbeing of *both* the American nation and child migrants due to the Republican spatially selective framing of violence, a framing through which the act of expedited deportation may be figured as resulting in both the quicker elimination of a great resource strain on the host nation and a faster reunification between migrant children and their parents in a loving and protective familial environment.

Representative Rogers similarly unequivocally advocates for the federal government’s treatment of UACs in exactly the same way as adult undocumented migrants are treated. After asking a hearing witness why unaccompanied children are not placed on buses and shipped back to Central America just as their adult counterparts are, Rogers states, “This is a humanitarian crisis. It is a National security crisis for our country. I don’t know why these children are being treated any differently” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 29). Rogers’ comments, by conflating the presence of huge numbers of child migrants on American territory with a national crisis situation, necessitate a particular understanding of ideal Congressional action in which the peril these children supposedly present to U.S. territorial sovereignty and security is great enough to totally override the clear-cut distinction in legal precedent between undocumented adults and unaccompanied minors. Once again, whether an individual possesses authorized immigration documents, and thus has the legal right to exist within American borders, is characterized as wholly determinative of their right to inhabit American space, and all other characteristics and personal experiences must be considered secondary or completely irrelevant.

Representative Duncan's similar insistence on categorically deporting unaccompanied child migrants is granted urgency through his use of analogy in the following argument:

“I think about and am reminded of John Adams, who, regardless of the mood in Boston, defended the British soldiers in the Boston massacre. Regardless of how we feel about immigration reform in this country, how can we sit by and watch our country's National sovereignty, my country's National sovereignty violated over and over and over on our Southern Border?” (56-57).

Notwithstanding the great irony of John Adams' defense of “foreigners,” Duncan views John Adams as a man who refused to let the opinions of others sway his commitment to enacting his sincerely held ideals, thus drawing a comparison to his own refusal to back down on the issue of immigration enforcement and to continue fighting for protecting his country through securing its borders. The height of patriotism, for Duncan, is working to protect the American polity from invasion by outsiders, no matter their ages, vulnerabilities, or personal experiences. Duncan thus constructs deporting unaccompanied immigrant children as an activity not only compatible with, but constitutive of ideal American behavior. For Duncan, then, opposing strict immigration enforcement and increased deportation is akin to espousing anti-American ideals and Congress, as one of the most important players in American democratic process, must follow Duncan's example and refuse to back down on immigration enforcement.

Outcomes of Republican Discourse

Jacqueline Bhabha argues that “an unresolved ambivalence about the legitimacy of according protection to migrant children” inheres in Western political debate due to a clash between traditional views of the state “as having a protective obligation toward

vulnerable children” and society’s expectation that the state “protect us from threatening, unruly, and uncontrolled outsiders, even if they are children” (11). My analysis of Congressional Republican discourse concerning Central American unaccompanied minors demonstrates that in some cases, this fundamental contradiction can be finessed to some extent through rhetorical means. In this case, these means include advancing diverse constructions of both child migrants and the various spaces they inhabit that condition an understanding of children’s removal from the national space of the receiving country as an essential method of protection for *both* UACs and American citizens. The comments of Representative Issa I analyze above are indicative of this strategy, as his construction of UACs as vulnerable innocents within one scene, yet cunning criminals within another, allows him to advance a stronger justification for escalated deportation than he could if he were to employ a more static construction of identity that did not vary with scene.

These diverse constructions of identity and space that all ultimately culminate in a justification of expedited deportation illuminate the primacy of spatial orthodoxy within Republican thought. Desforges et al. (2005) argue that undocumented immigrants highlight the “disruptive potential of mobility,” as their mode of migration disturbs the way in which “traditionally, citizenship has functioned as a means by which the state sought to control mobilities” and thereby ensure the sanctity of national space (442). Deportation and border control provide a way to re-fix mobilities in an orthodox spatial orientation, denying and reversing the transgressive mobility of those migrants deemed “illegal,” dangerous, or unassimilable. For the Republicans, not only does deportation function as a method of returning the American border region and the U.S. in general to

an orthodox landscape inhabited only by those persons deemed acceptable by the dominant imaginary, but it also works to return the countries of the Northern Triangle to orthodoxy by re-positioning child migrants in their “natural” place within the family. Overall, then, Republican discourse advances a justification against the attempts of globalizing discourses to sublimate boundaries and assert an inherent connection between all persons. Instead, arguing against the dislocation of individuals from their “proper” place, Republicans figure “proper” place as the territorialized nation state whose landscape matches one’s particular cultural identity.

Ultimately, the Republicans’ focus on advocating for the unconditional deportation of unaccompanied minors, drawing from their privileging of spatial orthodoxy, serves to deny wholesale the potential legitimacy of children’s claims to asylum. In this way, Republican representatives presuppose in a procedurally bankrupt manner an outcome of rejection for any and all immigration hearings UACs are subject to—the decision is written before the hearing even begins. This result is most strikingly illustrated by Representative Duncan’s question addressed to a witness, “So, would you agree with me, and are you willing to say that if you enter the United States illegally, you will be deported back to your home country?” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 58). Such a stringent enforcement policy involves no element of impartial deliberation concerning the merits of individual child migrants’ claims to remain in the United States. This wholesale rejection of due process rights for undocumented individuals refuses to treat these immigrants as discrete human beings who deserve personalized, justified reasons for their treatment. As I have shown, the deep Republican commitment to spatial orthodoxy and the primacy of identity intertwined with the characteristics of one’s nation serves to

eliminate this need, as the construction of Central America advanced by Republican representatives as a region dominated by perpetual discord and innate violence metonymically inscribes these characteristics upon the body of child migrants originating within this region. As child migrants carry this ascription with them into the United States in the Republican narrative, Republican discourse suggests that any claim to credible fear advance by UACs must necessarily be fraudulent, as no child migrant can truly have a credible fear of persecution if they provoke fear and uncertainty themselves. Ultimately, the presence of the “foreigner” must be barred if they come from a land characterized by dominant American discourse as anathema to the practice of American values and behavior, no matter their age and real personal characteristics, and no matter the extent of their experiences of violence and deprivation at home.

Chapter Three: Democratic Discourse

Introduction

The discourse of Congressional Democrats on the “problem” of Central American unaccompanied minors exhibits a contrasting array of spatial and identity characterizations, compared with Republican discourse. In the following chapter, I will follow a similar path as I employed in my exposition of Republican rhetoric, beginning by discussing Democrats’ interrelated discursive constructions of Central America and those children who migrate from this region. I will explore how Democratic discourse relies on a locational framing of crisis distinct from that of Republican discourse, casting the Northern Triangle as the true location of crisis due to the recent regional explosion in societal violence, corruption, and instability. The image of the child migrant that emerges from this spatial construction is one of profound innocence, vulnerability, and lack of agency, allowing Democrats to grant UACs a legitimate rationale and motivation for migration centered on escaping certain peril. The child migrant of Democratic speech, then, through their overwhelming innocence, avoids the classic response of American immigration discourse of “[judging] the immigrant in terms of what she will do for—or to—us as a nation,” and instead is confronted by Democrats on the basis of their experiences with deprivation and uncertainty within their nation of origin (Honig 46).

Next, I will discuss how, as the child migrant moves across the narrative journey scene and subsequently crosses the Mexican-American border, Democrats figure the UAC as deeply innocent and extremely vulnerable all the way north, rejecting the narrative shift in age, gender, and capacity to submit the United States to harm. Republican speakers map onto children as they traverse the spatial trajectory of the

journey. The ineradicable innocence Democratic speakers ascribe to unaccompanied minors serves to condition a paternalist policy response just as the Republicans advocate, albeit in this iteration oriented toward providing UACs with immediate, compassionate assistance *within* American borders. The supreme innocence of Central American child migrants does not perform the entirety of the justificatory work for this moral imperative, however. Elucidating the rhetorical strategies Democrats employ to justify this imperative will form the bulk of this section of the chapter. I will argue that the Democratic imperative extensively relies on a discursive characterization of the child migrant as exhibiting a mythical American immigrant identity and thus as appearing acceptable to an American observer—that is, to some extent, “like us” in terms of their needs, behavior, personal history, and identity. In this way, even the immigrant child, who in their profound innocence and helplessness cannot cunningly “take from” or materially “give to” us, the metrics Bonnie Honig has argued dominate the rhetoric of American immigration, must still reach a bar of acceptability and assimilability beyond what their personal experiences in their nation of origin may justify alone.

Lastly, I will discuss how, within Democratic discourse, migrant children act as quintessential examples of the figure of the immigrant who within the American political imaginary functions as “a supplement to the nation, an agent of national reenchantment that might rescue the regime from corruption and return it to its first principles” (Honig 74). Because of this construction, the deontological nature of the Democratic moral imperative is exposed as illusory, as care for children becomes an instrumental strategy through which we as Americans can further expand our mythologized traditional welcoming stance toward immigrants, figured as a foundational principle of the nation. In

this way, the child migrant of the Democratic narrative is cast as *giving* after all—not materially or through their own agency, but through their capacity to revitalize our national myths. The Central American child migrant, then, assumes the role of a character within *our* national historical narrative. A primary effect of this narrative construction is that Democratic rhetors cannot escape the constrictions of the current immigration enforcement regime, ignoring that while unaccompanied minors may have a place within our national narrative, procedurally and politically, their belonging has always been precariously in question.

“The Real Humanitarian Crisis”

As I argued in Chapter Two, the scenic construction of the Republican narrative exhibits a spatially selective distribution of violence, a construction the Democratic narrative rejects through its attribution of violence, instability, and psychological hazards confronting unaccompanied migrant children in every scene they traverse throughout their journey. The three primary nations of origin, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, are characterized as locales of particularly pervasive violence where the threat of imminent disaster is ever-present, a spatial construction which closely informs the assignment of migratory motives to unaccompanied minors. While, as I discuss in the preceding chapter, the particular scenic construction of the Northern Triangle within the Republican narrative serves as a rhetorical strategy to reject any possible legitimacy of migration, the strong role played by pervasive societal violence in this region within the Democratic narrative allows for the possibility that such violence may play into or even wholly constitute UACs’ motivation for migrating. The scenic construction of the

Democratic narrative and the framing of children's motives it engenders are influential in the overwhelming rhetorical characterization of UACs as young innocents who have little say in their journey northward, as the widespread instability in their homeland has made this decision for them.

“A Constant Barrage of Violence”

While Republican rhetors cast the U.S. border and interior as the true scene of crisis, the Democratic narrative contradicts this framing by explicitly figuring the Northern Triangle as the true scene of crisis. Along these lines, Representative John Conyers (D-MI) states that, “The dramatic flow of children across our southwest borders is a symptom of the real humanitarian crisis that’s going on every day in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, where most of these children are coming from” (“An Administration Made” 4). Here, Conyers suggests that the increased northward migration of Central American children cannot be separated as unrelated from the violence and unrest confronting those nations. His use of the “symptom” metaphor allows an understanding of this instance of mass migration as the visible, result of a crisis afflicting Central America, as it would be incoherent to discuss a symptom without a causal disease. Representative Beto O’Rourke of Texas closely echoes Conyers’s sentiments in his claim that, “The dramatic flow of children and families across the Southwest Border is a symptom of a humanitarian crisis, not a security crisis” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 87). With these words, O’Rourke both assents to Conyers’s spatial location of crisis in the Northern Triangle and implicitly rejects the idea that the children crossing the border should be treated as a national security concern for the people and territory of the

receiving nation rather than as a group of individuals experiencing massive deprivation and uncertainty due to the crisis developing in their homeland.

While some Democrats do not go as far as Conyers and O'Rourke in rhetorically locating the primary scene of crisis within Central America, their frequent use of the word "refugee" to describe migrant children insinuates adherence to this spatial location. For example, Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ), detailing the purpose of the hearing for which he acts as chairman, asserts, "We are here today because we have a humanitarian crisis on our southern border—now a refugee crisis" ("Dangerous Passage" 1). While Menendez's statements may appear to locate the crisis confronting unaccompanied minors solely at the southern border, his use of the term "refugee" implicates other actors as influential in causing the crisis—the nation or nations from which refugees flee and the agents of terror and violence within these nations (34). The word "crisis" used in conjunction with the term "refugees" signals the employment of a rhetorical lens through which crisis is viewed as the set of particular harmful circumstances confronting these characters and the personal damages they thereby incur, rather than as the result of these characters' own agency. Thus, Menendez's claim to crisis occurring on southern border likely has more to do with the perilous circumstances UACs must navigate even following their entrance into American territory than with the supposed uncertain threat their presence forces on the host nation, as the Republicans argue.

As the Democratic narrative locates the primary crisis confronting unaccompanied immigrant children within the bounds of the Northern Triangle, the specific content of the crisis is delineated as the exceptional violence and far-reaching criminal enterprises exploding within this region. The Democratic narrative attributes

moral culpability for causing great harm to potential and actual Central American child migrants to a wide range of actors, including gang members within the home nation who have recently reinforced their campaigns of terror specifically targeting children.

Representative Albio Sires (D-NJ), arguing for the status of the Northern Triangle as one of the most violent regions in the world, states that “child advocates [have] reported increasing accounts of children being forcibly recruited to participate in gang activities” (“Children Migrating” 6). Thus, Sires implies a strong rejection of the Republican narrative’s static characterization of societal violence in the Northern Triangle, as not only has indiscriminate, generalized violence inflated across the region, but violent actors have specifically narrowed in on children as targets of their abuse. Representative Joseph Crowley (D-NY) deepens this sense of discriminate violence in his claim that Central American children “face a constant barrage of violence and murders. And gang activity becomes not just a possibility, but a near certainty. These gangs are increasingly targeting children—who are put in harm’s way not just if they join, but even if they resist” (“Impact on Local” 28). Here, Crowley implies that recent shifts in gang strategy are leaving children with fewer viable options to escape persecution. The comments of Sires and Crowley thus demonstrate the disproportionate impact acts of violence and gang activity have on children in this region, characterizing the nations of the Northern Triangle as wholly bankrupt of all opportunity for child residents.

As a significant narrative-building rhetorical strategy, wholly absent from Republican discourse, many Democrats contribute individualized examples of Central American children’s experiences with societal violence, highlighting the sheer terror of societal violence in the Northern Triangle through the affective particularities of lived

experiences. For example, Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) tells the story of a recent Central American news report detailing the discovery of a “mass grave containing the remains of people, including children, who were killed and dismembered elsewhere” (“An Administration Made” 8). Other Members of Congress similarly discuss personal anecdotes of individual, named children. In this way, Senator Menendez includes the story of Cristian Omar Reyes, a sixth-grader whose

“father was murdered by gangs while working as a security guard. Three people he knows were murdered this year ... A girl his age was beaten, had a hole cut in her throat, her body left in a ravine across from his house. Cristian said, ‘It is time to leave’” (“Dangerous Passage” 1).

The Democrats’ employment of vivid, horrific examples of gratuitous violence enacted against young children and those close to them provides a graphic counterpoint to the Republican narrative’s characterization of violence as a *diffuse* trait of the Central American landscape. The Republican narrative’s lack of specific instances of violence and abuse suffered by specific persons allows societal violence to be characterized as a constant presence, but as one that never affects knowable, relatable, and humanized individuals. The Democrats’ narrative use of personal stories, in contrast, conditions a wholly different understanding of the horrors of societal violence. To experience the death of one’s father and the brutal murder of one’s peers is not so easily explained away as a natural, expected result of one’s inhabiting a particular nation.

In addition to this more atomistic usage of personal stories, Democratic representatives also promote a universalizing discourse of regional crisis, allowing the affective horror of these personal examples to constitute the entire Northern Triangle region, further casting El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras as unequivocally bankrupt

of positive opportunity for child residents. In this way, Representative Jackson Lee explicitly characterizes Central America as experiencing massive crisis in her statement that, “It is a humanitarian crisis of huge proportions, and we have to deal with it. It is also a question of ... the need for diplomatic interaction, as we have done with the crisis and the leaders of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. They are in crisis. They are violent” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 27). Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) echoes Jackson Lee’s attribution of monumental crisis to the Northern Triangle in her argument that children are leaving in droves “because they are coming from some of the most violent places in the world” characterized by “complete lawlessness” (“Dangerous Passage” 23-25). Neither Jackson Lee nor Boxer ascribe the cause of this crisis to specific persons or groups, thus imagining the root causes of child migrants’ journey north as beyond the purview of identifiable, discrete agents. Rather, Jackson Lee’s use of personification in ascribing violent behavior to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras casts violence and danger as innate features of the land itself—to be Central American is necessarily and inescapably to live under the constant threat of danger and abuse. Interestingly, the comments of Jackson Lee and Boxer, through this attribution of violence as a feature of the very territory of Central America, parallel how the Republican narrative’s scenic framing imagines violence as a natural feature of the Central American landscape. For the Democrats, however, this trope serves to eliminate any possibility for children to thrive and even continue to survive in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras due to the primacy of the crisis image and the emotive affectivity of the narrative.

I argue that the combination of Democratic rhetors’ regional universalization of violence and instability with their spatial framing of crisis as indubitably located in

Central America has significant implications for how they both implicitly and explicitly accept the legitimacy of children's northward migration as necessary to escape certain harm or even death.²⁰ Crisis narratives often implicate a unique temporality that elides questions of a nation's or region's history by conditioning primary focus on the immediate presence of violence, instability, and corruption. As Craig Calhoun argues, such crisis images, forming what he terms the "emergency imaginary," "represent as sudden, unpredictable, and short term what are commonly gradually developing, predictable, and enduring clusters of events and interactions" (86). In adhering to such a discourse, Democratic representatives present the Central American security crisis as an exceptional aberration of normalcy rather than a long-term development with deep root causes. As Calhoun succinctly summarizes similar presentations of crisis, "Things usually worked well, it was implied, but occasionally went wrong" (85). It is the Democratic claim to aberration and exception through their use of a crisis imaginary, as well as the metaphors of disease employed by Conyers and O'Rourke, that allows them to cast extreme societal violence as a universal feature of the entire Central American territory, without simultaneously presenting it as a feature of the Central American *landscape*, and as such a *normal*, unsurprising component of typical societal relations within this region. For this reason, Democrats may conclude that children being subjected to the vagaries of the Central American security crisis is profoundly wrong, and escaping this situation thus constitutes a singularly justifiable rationale for migration to the United States.

²⁰ The Democrats' usage of the term "refugee," as I discuss above, is an illuminating example of this acceptance.

“Chased Off by the Violence”

In the following section, I will discuss how the Democrats’ particular rhetorical construction of Central America as in the throes of violent crisis conditions a particular understanding of the children who emigrate from this region as motivated by the desire to escape danger, and additionally as forced wholesale by the danger of societal circumstances to leave the region. While the Democratic narrative grants a modicum of agency to child migrants, this agency is allowed to initiate concrete action in the limited scope of the initial decision to emigrate. However, this characterization of agency is highly constrained, as it takes the form of rationally calculating mental abilities, but does not grant child migrants any true power to control the movement of their own bodies across space and nation, as it is wrapped up with a great emphasis on the extreme vulnerability and youth of child migrants.

While migration is yet a mere potentiality within the narrative, and thus requires an exercise of agency by some individual(s) to spark the undertaking of this northward journey, the Democratic narrative places this exercise of agency within the minds of potential child migrants themselves. Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) details the dangerous travails of the migratory journey, such as murder, rape, abuse, trafficking, and extortion, and asserts that Central American children are able to perceive and understand the great threat of these dangers should they make the decision to leave home and migrate to the United States. In this way, she states,

“Many of them know the dangers that they’ll face. So we need to understand what it is, knowing what they face that is causing them to come anyway. What is so horrible that is going on in those countries that you would face potentially being trafficked or raped in order to get here?” (“An Administration Made” 7).

Here, Lofgren imagines migrant children as retaining full knowledge of the potential dangers of the journey and exercising a concrete, agential choice to migrate notwithstanding through the conscious weighing of costs and benefits. Through this exercise of mental agency and a deeply understandable desire to rescue themselves, migrant children rationally determine that migration northward is the path of action likely to result in the best possible end outcome overall, even given the hardships that will adhere between starting point and ending point.

Despite Lofgren's construction of migrant children as possessors of rational mental agency, the impact of this agency on their ability to control the movement of their own bodies is minimal. This dilution of child migrants' mental agency results from the Democratic narrative's alternative construction of migration as a coerced necessity, rather than as conditional on self-determined choice. In this way, one potential course of action—choosing to remain within the home nation despite pervasive societal violence—necessarily signals the possibility of impending death, casting northward migration as purely necessary for children's very survival. Thus, while children may rationally *understand* that the benefits of migration outweigh the costs, it is not this rational understanding that effects the act of migration, but rather the pervasive, never-ending threat of danger in their home nation and the individuals responsible for this danger that are, in reality, the direct cause of migration.

This logic is evident in the statements of Democratic representatives who describe unaccompanied minors as having been displaced rather than having willfully initiated the movement of their body across national borders. Representative Jackson Lee exemplifies this logic in her description of unaccompanied minors as “children who ... are desperate

and maybe internally displaced and chased off by the violence of their countries,” and includes statistics provided by the United Nations indicating that 58% of UACs may be deemed forcibly displaced (“Unaccompanied Minors” 26). Displaying nearly identical language, Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA), discussing the city of El Progreso, Honduras, describes child migrants from this city as “being largely chased out of their neighborhoods by violence” (“Dangerous Passage” 34). Both Jackson Lee and Kaine, through their usage of the verb “chase,” imply that the violent actions of Central American criminals force children to flee north to escape danger. Thus, while these children may come to a conscious, rationally-determined decision that migration is the best course of action given the potential for experiencing great harm should they stay at home, the action of others constitutes the real cause of migration.

Several Democrats, in a further intensified rhetorical elimination of UACs’ control over the movement of their bodies across space, argue explicitly that UACs have no choice whatsoever when it comes to the necessity of migration. Representative Joe Garcia of Florida exemplifies this logic in his statements that unaccompanied minors “aren’t here because they’re trying to game the immigration system. They are here out of desperation ... They feel they have no other choice; in fact, in many cases, they have no other choice” (“An Administration Made” 239). Representative Crowley echoes Representative Garcia’s claims, arguing that migration constitutes a chance “not just at a better life but a chance at life at all” (“Impact on Local” 26). With these statements, Garcia and Crowley imply that remaining at home is wholly off limits should unaccompanied minors wish to survive at all. With Garcia’s words, migrant children are simultaneously pushed away from the Northern Triangle and pulled toward the United

States, and their ability to exercise agential choice over the movement of their own body is outweighed by the need to ensure their very survival.

The discursive causal relationship between UACs' act of migration and the criminal endeavors of others win their home nations is evident in Democrats' use of synonymous descriptors for unaccompanied minors. The phrase "unaccompanied minor," while introducing a secondary character or characters whose absence is partially determinative of the identity of the subject, does not necessarily imply movement within the isolated phrase itself. Other terms that are variously used within the Democratic narrative, such as "migrant" and those who are "internally displaced," signal an aspect of the subject's movement within the isolated term. The phrase "migrant" places the causal burden of initiating movement with the subject herself, as it refers to no outside actors, although it implies the existence of some motivation for migration. In contrast, the phrase "internally displaced" signals the existence of individual(s) beyond the subject of movement who are responsible for inducing this movement. As such, the movement of one deemed internally displaced cannot, by definition, be self-determined. In this way, the Democrats' employment of this term further heightens the narrative sense in which unaccompanied minors have little control over the movement of their own bodies.

"Still Clutching their Dolls and Teddy Bears"

In the following section I will discuss the characterization of migrant children advanced by Democratic representatives when the focus of their narrative shifts to the scene of the journey and the United States, where American observers come into contact with child migrants for the first time. I will argue that the trope of tremendous

vulnerability and innocence discussed in the previous section continues to inhere across the journey scene and across the Mexican-American border. Within the initial scene of the migratory trajectory, many Democrats employ personalized examples of named children who experience appalling violence during their journey, reinforcing the narrative's characterization of UACs as eminently helpless beings. For example, Representative Rubén Hinojosa (D-TX) introduces multiple tropes of childlike innocence in his statement of despair in

“[hearing] that the body of a young boy from Guatemala was found in the desert, just a few miles from our Southern Border. According to news accounts, this boy was found with the rosary still around his neck and his brother's Chicago phone number scribbled on the inside of his belt buckle. This child had hoped to reunite with his brother in Chicago” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 88).

Hinojosa's choice of this particular example instantiates the Democratic narrative with an image of a young child vulnerable and solitary in his journey and death, without the assistance of others who could have prevented his death. The boy is symbolized as a victim of the destruction of yearning, childlike hopefulness dashed through his untimely death. His possession of two talismans of hope—his rosary and the phone number of the brother with whom he desired to be reunited—demonstrates an idealistic, childlike faith in the possibility of surmounting the incredible obstacles of navigating hundreds of miles of land, crossing a national border, and reaching his brother in Chicago despite the vagaries of the U.S. immigration system and the distance between the border and Illinois. Such a characterization of the great innocence of child migrants and their motives of hope serves to direct attention away from any oppositional claims to UACs' knowing criminality in migration and desire to deceive American immigration enforcement.

Several Democrats include specific examples of their experiences with migrant children in immigration detention centers near the southern border that heighten the affective power of UACs' characterization as having experienced great adversity during their journey north. For example, Representative Joaquin Castro (D-TX) tells the story of meeting "a 6-year-old boy who traveled from I think it was Honduras with his 2-year-old sister, and during the journey they were separated and this kid was torn up because he thought his sister had died" ("Children Migrating" 8). Here, Castro characterizes this boy as still traumatized by having been forced to experience the devastating realization that his sister may be dead. Such a construction brings the plight of unaccompanied minors and the specific, detailed harms they face across all narrative scenes to the fore, and conditions an understanding of child migrants as loving individuals focused on being close to their family members above all. As such, Castro's story similarly provides a counterexample to the Republican claim of child migrants' desire to abrogate and take advantage of American immigration law.

As Democrat Senators and Representatives describe their meetings with unaccompanied minors in the border region in general, they advance a construction of identity characterized by staticity in age, gender, and exceptional vulnerability, in sharp contrast to the dynamism of identity Republicans ascribe to child migrants, mapped along the trajectory of movement from Central America to the United States. In this way, several Democrats describe unaccompanied minors in terms that highlight their extreme youth, continuing to reinforce the image of child migrants' absence of criminal intent to subvert American immigration law. In this way, discussing the immigrant detention centers charged with housing unaccompanied minors, Representative Jackson Lee states,

“These are lollipops. I took lollipops, along with my colleagues, into these detention centers where children were. I wasn’t armed. I wasn’t fearful for my life. This is not a National security crisis. This is a humanitarian crisis” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 85).

With these statements, Jackson Lee constructs an image of unaccompanied minors as still inhabiting a state of youthful innocence, in need of adult figures to care for them and demonstrate affection to them. Such a construction eliminates any logic in confronting the “crisis on the Texas border” as a crisis of national security instigated by wholly autonomous individuals intent on infiltrating the U.S. in willful violation of the law, as these individuals are too young to care for themselves, let alone to understand and threaten the intricacies of the convoluted American immigration system. Echoing Jackson Lee, Representative Bennie Thompson (D-MS) argues, “we seem to be barraged on a daily basis by troubling images of vulnerable children, many still clutching their dolls and teddy bears, crossing the border into the United States and being immediately apprehended by Border Patrol” (5). Thompson explicitly invokes the vulnerability of unaccompanied minors and additionally characterizes them as fearful and apprehensive in their clinging to the simple comfort of a doll or teddy bear as a substitute for the protection of caring human agents. Such a discursive construction, detailing the height of artless, unknowing vulnerability, paints as incoherent the Republican claims to the criminal agency of unaccompanied minors’ act of migration.

Another node of direct opposition between the disparate rhetorical characterizations of unaccompanied minors in the Republican and Democratic narratives involves the gender and age balance of the population of UACs as a whole. While the Republican narrative, within the American scene, emphasizes that the majority of

unaccompanied minors are male teenagers over the age of fourteen, the Democratic narrative introduces a temporal comparison of the current population with past migrations by large numbers of children into the U.S. In this way, Representative Lofgren claims, “In the past, the majority of kids coming alone came from Mexico, and they tended to be older children, 16-, 17-year-old boys. That is no longer the case ... It contains a lot more girls, lots more younger children than have come in the past” (“An Administration Made” 7). It seems unlikely that Lofgren would introduce a distinction between the various ages and genders of unaccompanied minors unless this distinction had some narrative bearing on the characterization of the motives and actions of unaccompanied minors. In this way, Lofgren’s statements exhibit a similar implicit willingness as the Republicans to demonize older, male teenagers by implying their lesser innocence and thus the corresponding potential that their motive for crossing into the U.S. may involve harmful or criminal intent. However, Lofgren’s introduction of these previous characters, and thus her expansion of the Democratic narrative’s temporal depth, allows her to indicate the great average vulnerability and youth of the current population of child migrants. Thus, while the Republican narrative’s discursive characterization of child migrants involves a diminishing innocence across space, the Democratic characterization suggests an increasing innocence across time and a static innocence across space.

“This is a Test That We Must Not Fail”

The rhetorical strategies through which Democrats cast Central America as experiencing explosive societal violence specifically targeting children, figured as archetypes of extreme vulnerability and innocence, condition a particular understanding

of ideal Congressional response. Democratic policy proposals conspicuously come down on one side of Roche's dichotomy of the negative imagery proliferating in Western politics concerning the child, who must be either "better protected (better policed from the evils of the adult world) or better controlled (because of the failure of certain families to police properly their children)" (477). The Democratic narrative focuses on Congress as the institutional body with the power to eliminate or reverse the effects of "evils of the adult world" upon Central American migrant children, instantiating a duty to resolve a deep moral deficit. Although both the Democratic and Republican narratives attribute substantial power to Congress to counteract crisis, the two narratives' divergent characterizations of the particular content of this crisis condition different understandings of the appropriate solution. The bipolarity of the solutions presented by the two narratives, at base, turns on a distinction between characterizing unaccompanied minors *as* the crisis in question, given their positioning within the American scene, and characterizing child migrants as the individuals *experiencing* the crisis in question. It is this second characterization that allows the Democratic narrative to justify how and why Congress, and the American people by extension, must come to the immediate aid of child migrants and thereby mitigate a pressing moral problem by correcting a collective act of immorality against innocent children at the hands of violent actors.

"This is Who We Are, and This is What We Do"

In the following section, I will cover how Democratic rhetors advance a particular justification for the moral imperative dominating their policy proposals concerning the predicament of unaccompanied minors. Within this justification, the Democrats cast the

fulfillment of this imperative both as an indispensable response if Members of Congress are to exhibit any sense of extra-political humanity at all, and as a response cutting to the essence of idealized American politics and history. Through this method of justification, the Democrats, in manifest contrast to the Republicans, exemplify Edelman's thesis that the "Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention" (3). For the Democrats, then, coming to the aid of needy children, no matter their national origin or immigration status, represents an iteration of American political activity in its purest form free from any taint of corruption or instrumental, callous use of children's very lives.

The Democratic narrative's particular discursive characterization of Central American migrant children as incontrovertibly vulnerable induces a narrative absence of characters who are able to protect and assist these vulnerable minors. For many Democrats, this narrative absence must be fulfilled by Members of Congress, who must exercise their autonomous agency on behalf of those who cannot do so themselves. Exhibiting such logic, Senator Boxer argues that the indubitable vulnerability of child migrants necessitates a policy response that recognizes and attempts to offset this great vulnerability. She argues that the presence of huge numbers of unaccompanied minors crossing the southern border indicates

"a challenge for each of us, because we can do something about this, regardless of party. And if ever we were able to be brought together, I pray that our sense of humanity will bring us together. Because, in my long lifetime, I have noticed that innocent children bring us together. And they are standing right in front of us" ("Dangerous Passage" 23).

Here, Boxer argues that the innocence and vulnerability of young children must necessitate a response from adults that transcends individual differences such as political

persuasion—no matter the depth of the political, ideological differences in the Senate, the inability of innocent migrant children to help themselves signals their undeniable desert of assistance. Boxer additionally attributes a cogent element of morality to this imperative through her claim that her colleagues' very "sense of humanity" is implicated in their response to the crisis. Boxer implies that to consider Central American child migrants as anything other than innocent, defenseless victims in great need of protection is to assume a position altogether contrary to acting as a moral human agent. Thus, any policy response that does not align with treating UACs as totally innocent beings in need of adult care cannot constitute a viable response consistent with the tradition of American politics exhibiting a supra-ideological convergence around the innocence of the child.

Boxer's rhetorical elimination of the *spatial* gap between child migrants and American citizens and Member of Congress acts as an additional persuasive device to convince her peers of UACs' prodigious need for assistance and care. Her statement that "they are standing right in front of us" is not meant to engender fear and a negative policy response as the same phrase would if it were employed in relation to the Republican narrative's rhetorical construction of child migrants (23). Rather, Boxer likely invokes this phrase as a method of motivating her colleagues to action by implying that should they fail to respond compassionately to unaccompanied minors, they have committed an indelible trespass on the very foundations of moral behavior. The close spatial proximity between Members of Congress and unaccompanied minors instantiated by this phrase serves to only deepen this sense of moral import and responsibility.

The speech of Representative Gregory Meeks (D-NY), wholly unique in its explicit support for a pro-globalization position, represents a further example of the

discursive elimination of difference between child migrants and Congress through the use of spatial rhetoric eliding borders in favor of a common human community across space. Meeks calls on the effects of globalization, arguing that, in order to understand the Northern Triangle crisis and our ideal future role in enacting a solution to this crisis, “we must also understand the inherent interconnectedness of the Americas and indeed of the global village at large” (“Children Migrating” 30). Here, Meeks implies that, because the discrete boundaries between nations have become blurred in such a way that the very idea of “domestic problems” is nearing incoherence, the United States has, and should have, a significant role in solving the problems confronting all regions of the Americas. Meeks’ usage of the “global village” metaphor subordinates distinct national identities to a shared human identity, removing mitigating boundaries from the rhetorical relationship he constructs between child migrants and the American government.

Meeks harnesses the fact of globalization to construct a parent-child metaphor for the relationship between the government and unaccompanied minors, stating that Congress must work to “rid Latin America and the Caribbean of the violence and gangs which are leaving our children with no option but to flee their homes in pursuit of a brighter future” (30). For Meeks, the ability of children to mirror the effects of globalization and transcend national boundaries stems not from their youthful innocence, but from the crumbling of these very boundaries. The web of interdependence in the Western hemisphere fostered by globalization, for Meeks, necessarily and logically results in the increasing importance of moral obligations to those who are experiencing great suffering that do not depend on shared national or cultural identity. Recognizing the distinction of childhood, Meeks qualifies the moral obligation his words place on the

American government to aid unaccompanied minors as one parents owe to their children. In this way, Congress is assigned a parental duty of care to child migrants no matter their national origin, as the care of their biological parents is unable to protect them from the effects of a humanitarian crisis, and Congress retains a powerful role in the global village.

The fact that Meeks constructs Congress' moral duty to aid unaccompanied minors with compassion as akin to the obligation of care parents owe to their children has several meaningful constitutive effects. The metaphor calls to mind a type of relationship where the duty of care is, in the general social imaginary, supposed to be overwhelmingly transcendent, continuing to adhere even in situations of great familial and personal crisis barring overtly immoral conduct on the part of one or more parties. Thus, the narrative employment of a parent-child metaphor necessitating care for child migrants diverts attention from the considerations of national security, financial and cultural cost, and the potential impacts on the well-being of host communities that have great force in the Republican narrative. Meeks' comments additionally instantiate a strong claim that American citizens should be, on the grounds of common humanity, highly sympathetic to those children who migrate northward to the United States as well as their parents. In this way, Meeks posits, "it is almost just human nature if you see something that is better you try to get what is better and you want your child to have a better life than you have had" (29). Implying that all loving parents would consider having their children migrate to another nation without documents as a live option for bettering their children's lives, Meeks constitutes choosing this path primarily as an expression of love intelligible to all caring parents, no matter the national boundaries that lie along this path.

For some Democrats, fulfilling the moral imperative to aid child migrants functions as an act of political purity transcending the divisive politics of ideology and partisan machination. In this way, the Democrats characterize assisting children as a categorical good rightfully transcending the particularities of the humanitarian crisis and consequentialist considerations of how undertaking this program of assistance will impact the U.S. In this way, Representative Lofgren characterizes the ideal American stance toward child migrants as one that refuses to consider their plight through the lens of politics. She states, “Unfortunately, some have tried to politicize the situation ... I hope we will not play partisan games with this very dangerous situation” (“An Administration Made” 8-9). With these statements, Lofgren implies that egocentric partisan political maneuverings are antithetical to assisting child migrants with a clarity of moral obligation. Representative Thompson echoes Lofgren in his imploring statement that, “At this time, Mr. Chairman, we can use our platforms to rise to the occasion and be helpful or we can engage in political grandstanding at the peril of young lives” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 7). Drawing a distinction between words and action, Thompson argues that not only is engaging in divisive politics antithetical to helping unaccompanied minors, but it would likely result in the further hardship and loss of life. Given this possibility, the moral obligation imposed by the Democratic narrative is characterized as transcending any iteration of partisanship and should thus be fulfilled while eschewing inward-oriented considerations of the personal political or factional impacts of fulfillment.

In addition to justifying assisting child migrants based on strong appeals to human morality, many Democrats characterize fulfilling this moral imperative as a natural, deontological response flowing from the very essence of American politics. In this way,

many Democratic members of the House and Senate argue that this duty is consubstantial with long-held American values, such as the rule of law and respect for immigrants. For example, implicating the fundamental founding values of our nation, Representative Conyers asserts, “We call on our residents and leaders across the country to respond with compassion and concern for the welfare of all children, and to join us in doing all we can to live up to our values as a just and welcoming nation” (“Impact on Local” 8). Through his statements, Conyers characterizes moral, welcoming behavior toward children in need as an indicative criterion of one’s very Americanness, implying that it is one’s moral duty *as an American*, not just as a person in the world, to be welcoming and helpful to unaccompanied minors, no matter their national origin or immigration status. Implicit in this characterization is a discursive branding of behavior ignorant of children’s needs and experiences as categorically off-limits within legitimate American politics. Conyers’s moral call to action, then, suggests that the Republicans’ privileging of national security concerns over concerns about the safety and well-being of child migrants is thoroughly un-American and in reality detrimental to American culture rather than redeeming.

A further rhetorical strategy exhibited by Democrats responsible for invoking the characterization of aiding children as a prime exemplification of an ideal American politics expressive of our deepest values is the rhetorical instantiation of a universalized American subject exhibiting personal belief in the Democratic moral imperative. Representative Crowley exemplifies this universalization of subject in his claims to the history of the United States as exhibiting a continually welcoming posture toward refugees, arguing, “The United States has long stood with those who are fleeing persecution and violence. We have stood alongside them so they were not alone ... This

is who we are, and that is what we do” (26). Here, Crowley figures exhibiting American identity as naturally dependent on embodying a welcoming stance toward immigrants and refugees fleeing persecution through his employment of a rhetorically universalized American subject. Such a universalized stance is evident in his earlier comment that, “As Americans, we will not turn our backs on children,” thereby implicitly suggesting that his Republican colleagues will assume an intrinsically anti-American position should they continue to advocate mass deportations and expedited removals by considering child migrants not *qua* children, but as threatening, likely-criminals (8).

Representative Jackson Lee reinforces the specifically American character of the Democratic narrative’s moral imperative by rhetorically constructing the act of caring for child migrants in a compassionate and humane way as concordant with a particular fundamental American value—the rule of law. Specifically rejecting the Republicans’ claim to the necessity of undertaking a sweeping campaign of expedited deportation against unaccompanied minors, Jackson Lee argues,

“It is very important to know that a massive deportation policy for children and a mandatory detaining for children is not a humane thing to do. We must find a way to follow the law. Republicans voted for the law in 2008, and that is the law that transfers these children to Health and Human Services” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 85).²¹

Not only does Jackson Lee dismiss the Republicans’ proposed policy solutions for the “problem” of unaccompanied minors as explicitly abrogative of current law, but she casts the prescriptions of current law as necessitating a humane, benevolent response to child migrants oriented primarily around providing care rather than bolstering immigration enforcement. This conflation of moral humanity with the sanctity of American law thus

²¹ Here, Jackson Lee refers to the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2008.

further the Democratic narrative's moral imperative, as assuming a posture of care and protection toward unaccompanied minors is characterized as a mode of respecting the American rule of law. Representative Conyers expands on Jackson Lee's arguments, and characterizes the humane treatment of Central American child migrants as a necessary component of adherence to the rule of law. Conyers contends, "The number of children we are seeing is sure to test our resolve with respect to the rule of law and our obligation to protect people fleeing persecution, and this is a test that we must not fail" ("An Administration Made" 4). Here, Conyers contends that to reject complying with the rule of law in this particular case is synonymous with rejecting the very spirit of the rule of law itself, thereby deepening the rhetorical force of the Democrats' moral imperative.

"Our Residents"

Another major strand of argument Democratic speakers employ to justify their moral imperative to aid unaccompanied minors stems from the narrative's unique characterization of these children as embodying a mythical identity traditionally associated with the idealized, historicized American immigrant.²² As such, justifying assistance to child migrants depends on the employment of several rhetorical strategies, whether used consciously or unconsciously, aimed at discursively characterizing

²² Such strategies are not the only ones employed by Democrats to justify a deontological moral imperative to assist unaccompanied minors. For example, many Democrats, including Senator Menendez, Representative Conyers, and Representative Chu (D-CA), charge the U.S. Congress and its policies with moral responsibility for submitting Central American children to harm through failure to pass comprehensive immigration reform. Other sources of ascribed moral responsibility include the U.S. role in the burgeoning scope of drug-related violence in the Northern Triangle, a viewpoint espoused by Representative Gutiérrez and Representative Sanchez (D-CA). Due to length concerns, I will not discuss these strategies here.

unaccompanied minors as “like us” in their needs and behaviors. Children are thus cast as individuals whose histories and identities are congruous with the valued qualities of the American immigrant, rather than as unassimilable persons, alien to the American community in terms of both their juridical characterization and their very being. In this way, the Democrats produce a corresponding characterization of the UAC in which the anti-metonymic identity vacuum engendered by their construction of Central America is filled with the characteristics traditionally associated with the path of the idealized immigrant dominant in nationalistic cultural “celebration[s] of America’s ‘almost universal’ immigrant experience” (Honig 84). The use of such rhetorical strategies by Democrats suggests that their acceptance of a primordial belonging for migrant children is conditional on imagining them as “American enough” to warrant this belonging (97).

Several Democratic representatives employ rhetorical strategies in which unaccompanied minors implicitly come to appear *acceptable* or relatable to an American observer. For example, during her discussion of her experiences with both Border Patrol agents and migrant children, Representative Jackson Lee states,

“Anyone ... that has spent time loving and hugging and seeing these children, listening to the Border Patrol Agents, as I have done, going from McAllen and Brownsville, going out on the Rio Grande and going up and down, seeing the hard work the Border Patrol is doing, but they will tell you these are the most orderly, behaved children who simply want to be free from the murderous conditions from which they flee” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 84).

Here, Jackson Lee argues for the sheer difficulty of Border Patrol’s duty to traverse the southern American border and intercept those who cross the border from Mexico, especially during these times of increased migration. However, she qualifies this hard work by implicitly specifying that the children Border Control Agents must apprehend

are not hardened criminals or individuals abrogative of American standards of how children should ideally behave. Such a construction of unaccompanied minors implies that, from the exemplary behavior they embody, we can be sure of the purity of their motives in migration that stem solely from the looming threat of death in their home nations. Jackson Lee, then, exemplifies one rhetorical strategy through which the moral imperative the Democrats construct is dependent on a qualified image of Central American child migrants—in this case not merely *qua* child migrants, but *qua* orderly, well-behaved child migrants.

Exhibiting a similar strategy, Representative Hinojosa describes a recent visit to migrant detention centers in southern Texas, stating,

“Touring the facilities, however, was not easy. There were young children without mothers and fathers and young boys and girls with just the clothes on their backs. As a father and grandfather, I can’t begin to imagine the pain and emotional toll that these children have experienced in the past several weeks” (88).

Hinojosa’s comments construct an image of child migrants as experiencing great psychological distress even following their border crossing, in part by emphasizing their status as deeply needy. Not only do they not have the material resources one needs to survive on one’s own during a long journey, but they are explicitly lacking the company of their loved ones. Hinojosa accentuates his sympathy for these children by calling on his personal status as a father and grandfather with children and grandchildren of his own, whom he cannot even imagine enduring the hardship child migrants face daily, as the sheer magnitude of this hardship is difficult for him to conceptualize for one who has never experienced it. Hinojosa’s appeal qualifies the image of sympathy his comments construct, as this sympathy becomes dependent on his status as in close, familial

connection to children, and thus appears understandable to his fellow Americans with children. Thus, taken together, the statements of Jackson Lee and Hinojosa circumscribe the Democratic narrative's moral imperative, as Congress as the duty-bearer is characterized as intimately connected with familial ties to children, and child migrants as the rights-bearers are rhetorically qualified as comporting themselves in a manner compatible with American standards of ideal child behavior. Both strategies are representative of an overall trend in the Democratic narrative advancing a discursive construction of unaccompanied minors as relatable and comprehensible to the American observer on *her* terms only.

The comments of Representative Conyers exhibit a further strategy of justifying the Democrats' moral imperative to aid child migrants by characterizing these children as embodying tropes traditionally associated with the archetypal American immigrant. Conyers's words subordinate the metric of one's citizenship status to the metric of one's mode of movement undertaking a strenuous journey to eventually reside on American soil as indicative of one's belonging and membership in the American community. Conyers includes an article in the record, written by several mayors of cities across the U.S. asked to rehabilitate child migrants, which states, "We believe, and know, our local communities to be welcoming communities. Whether our residents were born here or traveled thousands of miles to join us, we all look out for one another and for our families" ("Impact on Local" 8). By implicating a common duty on the part of all community residents, no matter differences in citizenship status and national origin, to care for each other in the pursuit of shared well-being, Conyers, through his inclusion of the article, characterizes moral, welcoming behavior as a more accurately indicative

criterion of one's Americanness than one's particular citizenship status. Thus, unaccompanied minors, assuming membership in local communities through residency, may perform "Americanness" just as well as citizen residents. Additionally, Conyers's comments draw on a history of American immigration, in which "true" Americans are not only those born within our jurisdiction, but also those who make arduous journeys to assume residency within the United States, further casting unaccompanied minors and their experiences as concordant with a well-established trend of American history.

Another rhetorical trend through which Democrats characterize unaccompanied minors as exhibiting traditionally American behavior is the employment of the American dream myth. Representative Meeks draws on this myth in his general statement concerning Central American immigrants that, "If we create jobs there [in the Northern Triangle] they won't come here. You know, they come here for opportunity" ("Children Migrating" 31). With this statement, Meeks invokes the history of American immigration, as seen through the framework of the American dream myth, that figures immigrants to the United States as hard-working individuals seeking a better life for themselves and their families due to a lack of opportunity or outright threat of abuse and persecution in their nation of origin. Not only does Representative Meeks invoke a justification for assuming a posture of acceptance and respect toward Central American immigrants reliant on the power of the American dream myth, but he also employs a prodigiously powerful instance of comparison between the identity and history of child migrants and the identity and history of the initial founders of the American nation. In this way, Meeks asserts, "You know, it just seems to me when I think about the creation of our country it was from individuals that were fleeing bad situations to a better

situation” (29). By introducing a direct comparison between the experiences of UACs and the experiences of the very first American colonists, Meeks implies that to reject the rationale of child migrants for journeying northward to the U.S. is to hypocritically deny the history of one’s own nation as reliant on the settlement of individuals fleeing persecution for its very foundation.

Many Democrats additionally harness the affective power of the “nation of immigrants” myth in order to characterize Central American unaccompanied minors as acceptable and assimilable through their exhibiting of behavior congruous with both the performance of Americanness and with the historical constitution of the national community. The employment of this myth allows Democrats to figure the history of American immigration policy as overwhelmingly welcoming since the nation’s founding, characterizing the current situation of heightened immigration from Central America as simply another instance in a long chain of periods of increased migration reaching back to the nation’s very beginning. As a result, the American government must react to the current situation with the practiced attitude of welcoming behavior it has developed over time. Calling on such a claim, Representative Crowley argues,

“New York City has always been proud to welcome immigrants, whether through Ellis Island, JFK Airport, or the Port Authority Bus Terminal. We welcome immigrants who are coming here to make a better life for themselves and for their children, but we also welcome those who are fleeing danger and violence, like these children from Central America” (“Impact on Local” 26).

With these statements, Crowley attributes a historically welcoming posture toward immigrants and refugees to the United States, and likens Central American unaccompanied minors as representative of the same characteristics and lived experiences of the individuals partaking in historical immigration flows. This comparison suggests

that Congress must assume responsibility for following through with the Democratic moral imperative to assist unaccompanied minors, or risk abrogating a long-held national tradition responsible for shaping the very identity of the nation. Crowley's statements additionally suggest that, for a Member of Congress to refuse to welcome Central American child migrants would be not only to reject a national tradition of great foundational import, but would be to reject one's own identity as an American. This results from Crowley's attribution of a compassionate, xenophilic attitude to a universalized American subject, through the use of the first person plural grammatical structure. This subject is characterized as exhibiting a welcoming stance toward immigrants and refugees as a matter of long-standing personal commitment, implying that a true American by definition respects and aids those fleeing persecution in other nations, and would do the same under the current circumstances.

The comments of Representative Luis Gutiérrez (D-IL) mirrors Representative Crowley's construction of the United States' commitment to the safety and flourishing of immigrant residents as a long-standing American tradition. However, Gutiérrez qualifies this historical tradition as often threatened over time through attacks by insidious trends of xenophobia and codified exclusion of immigrants based on racial classifications. To this end, Gutiérrez invokes the prejudicial attitudes encountered by his Puerto Rican parents following their relocation to the American mainland, contending, "But it wasn't only my mom and dad. Let me tell you, the same assertions that have been made here today were made about Italian immigrants, were made about Irish immigrants, were made about Chinese immigrants to the point that we had a Chinese Exclusion Act" (115). Through the narrative prominence Gutiérrez grants to the unmistakably exclusionary

trends of American immigration policy, he disrupts the rhetoric espoused by Crowley and others that figures the history of this policy as unblemished in its welcoming posture.

However, Gutiérrez proceeds to finesse this disruption, imagining the affective political power of friendliness toward immigrants as intrinsically capable of superseding and overthrowing isolationist, xenophobic appeals within the American social imaginary. In this way, Gutiérrez contends, addressing his Republican colleagues who advocate for the exclusion of unaccompanied minors,

“Here is the good thing. Your arguments have been rejected in the past time and time again. They are not new. There is nothing novel that you are saying here today. They have been rejected in the past by America, they were rejected today by America, and they are going to be rejected, because that is the greatness of this Nation” (115).

Gutiérrez’s comments, in arguing for “America” as the agent responsible for overcoming the adversity presented by anti-immigrant thought, direct attention away from the existence of discrete individuals directly responsible for the ideological push and pull between xenophobia and xenophilia throughout American history. As a result, Gutiérrez’s comments figure the nation as a whole as having worked valiantly to overcome its internal weaknesses of xenophobic and exclusionism, reinforcing the Democratic narrative’s construction of a moral imperative to aid Central American unaccompanied minors as a fundamentally American duty. Gutiérrez’s explanation of American immigration history is one in which accepting and caring for UACs, whose identities and experiences are implicitly likened as composing a natural part of a distinctly American story, will constitute an integral part of the process of continuing to rail against xenophobic tendencies in the universalized American psyche.

As I discuss earlier in this chapter, in contrast with the Republican narrative, the Democratic narrative's employment of crisis imagery allows unaccompanied minors to escape a metonymic discursive association with the characteristics of violence and instability Democratic speakers attribute to the universalized territory, but not landscape, of Central America. As such, an identity vacuum persists within the Democratic narrative at the point of children's departure from the Northern Triangle that does not inhere within the Republican narrative, as Republican speakers advance a strong metonymic association between child migrants and the Central American landscape. For the Democrats, as I have discussed in the preceding paragraphs, this identity vacuum is filled, helped along by background cultural assumptions of the child as a largely blank slate in their innocence, by casting child migrants as coming to embody the mythical identity and trajectory of the idealized American immigrant who merely and wholesomely desires a better life afforded by the opportunities of their adopted nation (Malkki 61).

In this sense, the Democrats advance a semi-metonymic relationship between Central American child migrants and the American landscape characterized by a rich and long-standing history of immigration by those seeking to escape persecution and reach a better life in the United States. The child migrant, cast as purely vulnerable and helpless at their moment of departure from the Northern Triangle, comes to embody a quintessential Americanness through their act of traversing an abstract, idealized immigrant path between the diametric poles of the Old Country and the New. As Hector Amaya suggests in his discussion of the mythical repackaging of immigrant soldiers' histories and experiences into biographies of patriotism, such discursive constructions are profoundly nationalistic (242). For Central American migrant children, the primary

outcome of the reliance of the Democratic moral imperative on nationalist rhetorical strategies is that claims to the morality of protecting and assisting child migrants are dependent on these claims resonating with the requirements on the duty-bearers of “performing” American values and recognizing those values and related behavior as congruous with the characters and experiences of child migrants themselves. The inclusion of such rhetorical strategies in the Democratic narrative suggests that, even while this narrative repudiates the Republican narrative’s construction of UACs as inherently criminal and immoral, this rejection and the corresponding acceptance of child migrants’ right to exist within the United States is conditional on imagining them as “American enough” to warrant this acceptance.

Outcomes of Democratic Discourse

One significant outcome of the rhetorical strategies through which Democrats justify their moral imperative to come to the aid of Central American migrant children is the subversion of the proposed deontological nature of this imperative, meant to transcend the vagaries of politics and ideology by drawing on claims to common humanity. This subversion stems from the construction of child migrants as fundamentally characters in the *American* national narrative, as embodying a link in the American historical chain of immigration by dreamers who seek to escape persecution in their home nation and enjoy salvation in the United States. The risk of this mythologizing narrative is, first, that it necessitates casting a base level of personal compatibility of the immigrant(s) in question with American behavior and identity as a requirement for accepting one’s right to exist within the American nation. As such, the nationalist

discourse necessary to prove this compatibility does not escape Honig's summation of American immigration discourse as constantly judging immigrants based on metrics of affinity with and value to the U.S.—in a sense, what immigrants do *to* or *for* us (46).

Ironside and Corrigan argue that this sort of assimilationist discourse, while rejecting the associations of the <illegal> ideograph, often “establishes a cultural norm that is blind to difference” (175). This blindness, manifest in Democratic rhetoric, stems in large part from preventing child migrants from inhabiting their own narratives, history, and experiences by placing them within a deeply prescriptive narrative of American history.

According to Iris Marion Young,

“the real differences between oppressed groups and the dominant norm ... tend to put them at a disadvantage in measuring up to those standards, and for that reason assimilationist policies perpetuate their disadvantage” (Marion Young 164, quoted in Ironside and Corrigan 175-176).

As such, assimilationist rhetorics may have significant negative material consequences for immigrants, including Central American immigrant children, who may experience similar disadvantaging barriers.

The second major way Democratic representatives contradict their claims to the deontology of the imperative to aid unaccompanied minors is that it ultimately advances an instrumentality in moral behavior toward UACs after all.²³ In this way, the construction of unaccompanied minors advanced by Democrats closely mirrors the myth of the “foreigner as ... an agent of national reenchantment that might rescue the regime from corruption and return it to its first principles” (Honig 74). As the comments of

²³ For example, Representative Deutch (D-FL) argues, “It’s incumbent upon us to treat people fairly and humanely who are fleeing extreme violence in Central America and seeking safety in the United States, if we’re to be taken seriously at all when we speak out in support of human rights” (“An Administration Made” 229).

Representatives Conyers, Crowley, Jackson Lee, and Gutiérrez demonstrate, many Democrats see aiding unaccompanied minors as an exemplary way the nation can reach a purified version of American politics exhibiting once again our supposed heartfelt historical commitment to welcoming and assisting immigrants.

The instrumentality of the moral imperative is especially evident in the comments of Representative Gutiérrez, who casts aiding UACs as singularly necessary to make up for the internal inconsistencies of past American immigration policy. In this way, it is the acute struggles of unaccompanied minors in leaving their home nations and undertaking a perilous journey north that in effect allow us to re-enact our founding commitments and values intertwined within the “hegemonic myth of an immigrant America” (75). Exhibiting compassion for unaccompanied minors and repudiating claims as to their inherent deportability is constitutive not only of American morality, but also as a necessary step in the process of reaching a reinvigorated, compassionate state of American politics as an ultimate *telos*. Assisting UACs, then, will be of great benefit not only to the children themselves, but to their adoptive nation. The Democrats eschew consequentialist logics within their moral imperative to some extent, by rejecting considerations of personal or party political gain or cost-benefit analyses. However, in their refusal to fully treat child migrants as ends in themselves rather than as means to national advantage, they ultimately advance consequentialist logics nevertheless. The primary outcome of this logic for unaccompanied minors is that aiding unaccompanied minors is not solely ethically justified by their identity, experiences, and immutable human dignity, but by and large by the identity and experiences of the American political subject.

The second major outcome of Democratic discourse is that, through its overriding focus on casting unaccompanied minors as already *belonging* as characters in U.S. national history, Democratic representatives end up ignoring to a significant extent the extreme difficulties the federal immigration regime presents to unaccompanied minors. Although the moral, welcoming behavior toward immigrants Democrats attribute to the United States is highly commendable, their commentary, with the slight exception of Gutiérrez's statements, serves to elide a real history of legally codified exclusionism targeting groups of immigrants on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, political ideology, sexual orientation, and class. This historical revisionism results in a confusion concerning the concrete steps necessary to fulfill the moral imperative to aid UACs in a way that is accountable to their personal needs and histories. This is because the Democrats' recasting of historical immigration policy deterministically imagines a national trend of open-armed compassion toward unaccompanied minors as inevitable. This introduction of telic inevitability detracts from necessary discussions of how to prevent xenophobia from legal codification in this specific case of mass migration by minimizing the importance of the historical and contemporary social, legal, and discursive burdens facing those who struggle against widespread distrust of immigrants and refugees.

Due to this constructed inevitability and the characterization of UACs as fundamentally American in some way, the Democratic narrative, like the Republican narrative, to a great extent ignores the procedural reality of the immigration hearing, an event with critical consequences for the lives and safety of child migrants. The narrative repackaging of children's lives to fit within an imagined American history overlooks that, legally, the belonging of UACs within American territory is politically and procedurally

still in serious doubt. The asylum hearing, revealing the ultimately contingent, permission-dependent legitimacy of this belonging, does not revolve around child migrants' narrative compatibility with American history and values. Rather, it investigates whether their experiences solely within their home nation reach a standard of persecution necessitating humanitarian protection. The Democrats' ignorance of this contingency, in favor of drawing from criteria of belonging that do not matter to the law, largely forces them to work within the bounds of the current immigration regime. As a result, they merely advocate for ensuring that the current process of hearings, deportations, and limited options for legal admission, a system Susan Terrio argues exhibits a destructive "dominant paradigm" of detention and deportation, is as humanitarian as possible (*Whose Child* 11).

The discourse and policy proposals of Democratic representatives are further inhibited by the dominant political culture in the U.S. where one's citizenship status is often employed as metric to determine how others engage with one not only on a political or legal level, but on a moral level as well. Due to this constraint, many Democrats must continually confront Republican fears, and potentially the fears of their own constituency, by emphasizing how their plea to aid unaccompanied minors in no way involves a requirement of granting UACs wholesale amnesty. In an illuminating example, Representative Eric Swalwell (D-CA) accepts that the Democratic moral imperative does not signify, at base, an actual desire for the presence of unaccompanied minors on American soil. Questioned by Texas Governor Rick Perry during the "Unaccompanied Minors" hearing, "Do you not agree that they need to be sent back to where they came from?" Swalwell responds, "I do agree on a case-by-case basis. We do not want them to

come here” (“Unaccompanied Minors” 112). These comments are illustratively symptomatic of how the viability of the Democratic moral imperative is, at its foundation, rhetorically constrained within the limits of the current legal regime by almost wholly ignoring the questions of *documentation* and *citizenship status*, and instead advancing reality-obscuring claims to assist unaccompanied minors based on their primordial American belonging.

Conclusion

From my analysis of Congressional hearings concerning Central American unaccompanied child migrants, I draw several conclusions concerning the characterization of UACs within these hearings. These conclusions probe how Members of Congress characterize migrant children in diverse ways that both conform to and challenge the ideographic determination of adult undocumented immigrants that has emerged within American political discourse over the past decades. Additionally, they implicate the broader ramifications the debates I analyze have for understanding the political identity of the child. Several conclusions to this end emerge as relatively obvious. First, Republican rhetoric often reiterates the associations inherent in the <illegal immigrant> ideograph by variously characterizing child migrants as threats to American citizens and culture, and as agents of a crisis of proportions portending national disaster. Secondly, in contrast, Democratic rhetors controvert the associations of this ideograph by characterizing child migrants as deeply innocent and compatible with the performance of behavior and values coded as traditionally American.

However, my analysis demonstrates that these conclusions, seeming to evenly split Republicans and Democrats along the fault line of accepting and rejecting the <illegal immigrant> ideograph, are not so simple or diametric as they may at first appear. To this end, my analysis shows how the ascribed identity of the unaccompanied minor does not remain static within either narrative. Rather, the identity of the child shifts dynamically over space within both narratives, mapped onto the trajectory of the real and imagined northward journey of migration. In the following concluding section, I will first discuss how this spatial mapping of identity represents a significant counterpoint to

dominant discourses on adult undocumented immigrants by drawing rhetorical force from a cultural understanding of the child as inhabiting a constant state of possibility, the effects of which I argue are amplified by the status of the children in question as *unaccompanied*. Secondly, I will discuss how both the Republican and Democratic narratives exhibit a deep similarity with common discourses on adult immigrants by advocating for solving the “problem” of undocumented immigration by either justifying the wholesale removal of the “transgressive” migrant from American territory, or by promoting assimilationist rhetorics. The more significant conclusion my thesis suggests to this end, however, is an understanding of how Congressional rhetoric confronting the child migrant justifies returning UACs to the “natural” state of invisibility Western cultural understandings of the child promote. Finally, I will argue that, while the rhetoric of the hearings I analyze thereby demonstrates significant departures from dominant characterizations of adult undocumented immigrants, these debates nevertheless exhibit primary concern not for the identity and experiences of Central American unaccompanied minors as such, but for the identity of American space and the polity that inhabits it.

The Spatial Mapping of Identity

A primary rhetorical phenomenon exhibited by both Republicans and Democrats that challenges the static nature of dominant characterizations of the adult immigrant is the narrative mapping of the trajectory of childhood, both in terms of the flux of temporality and identity, onto a spatial trajectory from the Northern Triangle to the United States. While this spatial trajectory is in reality traversed by child migrants, it is granted a moral or symbolic value by Congressional rhetoric that reaches far beyond its

material conditions and largely does not incorporate children's own views of the necessity or morality of the journey. Within these spatial logics, migrant children grow and transition in different manifestations as they cover space, with the spatial locus of the border between Mexico and the United States functioning both as a metaphorical and actual point of transition.

I argue that the emergence of such a mapping of identity onto space and space onto identity in Congressional discourse is due to the rhetorical possibilities opened up by the child migrant's status *as* unaccompanied. Without the guiding presence of parents or adult relatives during the journey and the grounding normalcy of the relationship between caregiver and the one cared for, the child migrant in these political narratives is left with a greater liberty to exceed the bounds of a childhood cast as wholly dependent on others. Such a temporal progression between dependency on one's parents and the eventual leaving of the presence and guidance of one's parents behind, long definitive of dominant American conceptions of childhood, is narratively reproduced within Congressional discourse. As such, the child migrant, in leaving their family behind in Central America, must necessarily grow and develop in some way along the path north, although not necessarily in line with their actual temporal growth. However, how the child exhibits growth, flux, and development is manipulable toward a particular rhetor's goals, as the uncertainty of the future and the necessity to resolve this uncertainty is called forth implicitly whenever the word "child" is invoked.

Provoked by the being-out-of-place of great numbers of children, the deep uncertainty and anxiety exhibited by Congressional rhetors about the contents of the future and the role of child migrants within it subvert Edelman's understanding of the

reliance of political discourse on “the pervasive invocation of the Child as the emblem of futurity’s unquestioned value” (4). The Democrats largely exhibit conformity with Edelman’s expectations, as they cast unaccompanied minors and our national moral imperative to come to their aid as explicitly performative and reinvigorative of long-standing American ideals and values. Still, children’s embodiment of this value remains conditional on conforming with this status through undertaking the movement of migration. In contrast, my analysis of Republican discourse demonstrates that children, especially those whose existence and persistence within a given territory is racialized and problematized, do not act merely as embodiments of the pure temporality of the future as the amorphous time ahead of the present. Rather, they additionally act as embodiments of a pure *potentiality* of the future that necessarily always contains a possibility of things going awry. Given the above, it is perhaps to be expected that the narrative identity of unaccompanied migrant children fluctuates in Congressional discourse along the spatial trajectory of UACs’ moving closer and closer to the American observer, as this movement causes the immanence of the future to become more and more apparent, both in terms of the children’s future and “our” future involving these children.

The flux in identity experienced by unaccompanied minors as they move north differs significantly between the Democratic and the Republican narratives. Within Republican discourse, the potentiality of the child is viewed as a pathway toward vice and crime—tropes associated with undocumented immigrants in the dominant imaginary—through a loss of childish innocence and vulnerability as they traverse the journey space and eventually enter the U.S. Following border crossing, they come to embody a disruptive element of futurity separated from and threatening to the

“unquestioned value” of the future of the nation coded implicitly as belonging to citizens alone (4). In this way, within the spatial trajectory of the Republican narrative, the Mexican-American border acts as a rhetorical place of transition from the vulnerability and instinctual innocence of pure childhood to the knowingness of the older child motivated by cunning, reasoned desire, or adult-like consciousness. The Republican narrative thus politicizes unaccompanied minors: their loss of innocence during the narrative journey north is attributed to motives behind the act of migration such as the intent to subvert U.S. immigration law and present false asylum claims to their own fraudulent benefit. The elided rhetorical strength of the childlike tropes of innocence and vulnerability as child migrants are characterized as growing older and older across the space of the journey, exhibits a striking similarity to the humanitarian discourse analyzed by Liisa Malkki, in which as children “grow older, gain knowledge and worldly understanding, ... they become more ‘tainted’ as less worthy of special treatment as children” (64). My case study, however, demonstrates how similar discourse may be applied to a group of children in a condensed period of time, as their narrative growth exponentially exceeds their growth in reality. It is the spatial framework of the Republican narrative upon which the prescriptive identity characteristics Malkki references are wrought and mapped, meshing spatial progression and flux with the necessary and inevitable flux of childhood.

While in the Democratic discourse I analyze children do not appear to shift in age, gender, and propensity for criminal behavior as they move across space, unaccompanied minors experience a politicization and transformation of identity within the Democratic narrative nevertheless. In this way, through their invocation of the American Dream and

Immigrant America myths, Democrats historicize UACs as merely the most contemporary group of characters in a traditional American story of atomized individuals desiring to access the benefits of a new American life through immigration. Through this narrative historicization, the Democrats implicitly propound an image of the futures of unaccompanied minors and the American nation as compatible *as one* as the narrative extends into the future, opposing the image of distinct, incompatible futures advanced by the Republicans.

Drawing from Hector Amaya, the mythical Democratic discourse thus produces a “metanarrative” of nationalism that constitutes “America as an immigrant nation where everyone has a chance at fulfilling the American dream,” belying an ugly history of stringent restrictionism only briefly invoked by Representative Gutiérrez (243). The Democrats thus situate Central American unaccompanied minors within this manifestation of ascriptive historicity. For the metanarrative to function and successfully provide grounding for the legitimacy of migrant children’s presence on American soil depends on the rhetorical production and maintenance of a spatial difference between the Northern Triangle and the United States. Within this difference, the Northern Triangle is cast as bankrupt of all opportunity for child migrants, and the U.S. is cast in a diametrically opposite way. As Honig argues, “the myth of an immigrant America is a nationalist narrative of choiceworthiness,” and through the Democrats’ employment of this myth, the details of child migrants’ rationales for migration and personal feelings toward their experiences in Central America and the U.S. are suppressed within Democratic discourse (84). The narrative of growth expounded by Democratic speakers, then, harnesses both this production of spatial difference and the ever-potentiality of the

child to cast unaccompanied minors as leaving behind their Central American identity that has presented them with nothing but danger, exchanging it as they move north for a primordial American identity indicative of a better future adopted through the choice to migrate. In this way, the hazardous path of the journey can be understood as a test of their commitment to this new identity and future.

Returning Children to Invisibility

Adult undocumented immigrants are often confronted with exclusionary rhetorics and assimilationist rhetorics both advocating for a sublimation of their identity cast both socially and legally as visibly transgressive. I argue that Congressional discourse on undocumented, unaccompanied minors demonstrates an *amplification* of this desire to make the immigrant invisible that specifically draws from dominant cultural understandings of the child and childhood. In this way, Congressional discourse presents an illuminating example of Roche's claim that, "despite being social actors ... including the taking on of considerable responsibility in a range of contexts, children are often rendered silent and invisible by the attitudes and practices of adult society" (476). Child migrants, especially grouped in such large numbers *as* unaccompanied, profoundly disturb this naturalized invisibility of the child, and in their disquieting visibility they are treated by adult policy-makers as merely "exhibits in a show of concern or fear" (487).

I argue that the rhetoric of both parties asserts a deep need to reverse the shocking visibility the journey of migration has afforded UACs. For the Republicans, this reversal may be achieved by the wholesale removal of children from the country, while protective legal distinctions between children and adult migrants should be ignored. Such a response

both eliminates the fear migrant children's disturbingly visible presence on American soil. Republicans argue causes American citizens, and supposedly enacts a duty of care for vulnerable children by sublimating them back within the protective circle of their family. For the Democrats, the reversal of migrant children's visibility involves not deportation, but assimilation within a history figured as profoundly American such that components of their experiences and identities that do not mesh with this story are concealed.

The discursive identity transformation of Central American child migrants, who within the Republican narrative emerge from sheltered family environments in the Northern Triangle to become unavoidably visible in their eventual spatial and cultural transgression of American territory and their prodigious numerical presence, exemplifies Roche's thesis that "'the child' appears for public consumption only as victim and a source of trouble" (478). In this way, the unaccompanied minor of the Republican narrative becomes visible first as a vulnerable victim of trouble in their displacement from their ascribed natural environment within the local family environment to the extraordinarily dangerous space between home and the United States. The spatialized nature of Roche's dichotomy of visibility, mapped along the trajectory between Central America and the U.S., becomes apparent when the child migrant rhetorically transforms to an ominous source of trouble at the divisive line of the border. The border, acting as such as both a material and rhetorical locus of division and conversion between naturalized and transgressive identities, throws the difference and uncertain potentiality of the child migrant into sharp relief for the Republican Congressional observer.

The visible, unnatural position of the migrant child is granted a negative moral value within Republican discourse because it is characterized as profoundly disruptive

and unnatural for both the child and the American citizen. It is a situation comprising an unavoidably glaring transgressive displacement of huge numbers of children from their natural environment, the position and experiences of whom were likely beforehand wholly invisible to many Americans. Such a situation, as theorized by Shome, acutely disturbs “commonplace assumptions about spaces being a stable and a coherent source for some coherent identity that can be distinguished from some ‘other’” (44). The Republican anxiety toward expedited deportation, then, becomes understandable, if not commendable, within the hearings I analyze as a solution to the problem outlined by Shome, through which the potentially long-standing presence of unaccompanied minors within American borders causes disquieting doubt. Additionally, expedited deportation simultaneously functions implicitly within Republican discourse as a reversal of the premature growing-up of the unaccompanied minor, a spatialized return to the innocence of childhood and the tempering protection and care of one’s family. The nominally humanitarian objective of deportation thereby serves to sublimate Central American children within the family sphere again, removing them from a visibility that necessarily engages the U.S. as either a forced protector of children in trouble or the victim of children themselves. Deportation, then, functions as an elimination of the Central American child migrant from view, and thus a re-settlement of spaces and their accordant identities, both in the United States and Central America.

Democratic speakers exhibit a different rhetorical strategy that nonetheless also effectively reestablishes the invisibility of migrant children. They do so by casting UACs’ personal histories and behavior as deeply comprehensible within American history itself, resulting in a sublimation rather than a reification of difference. The

journey path traversed by undocumented immigrants, for the Republicans, is always already a spatial aberration, as it presents a great threat to the receiving nation and forces children to come to embody a profoundly unnatural identity. In contrast, for the Democrats, the journey path functions as an idealized, historicized, representation of the spatial trajectory. Unaccompanied minors thus take on, within the narrative, the personal characteristics associated with the idealized immigrant figure in U.S. history. While this allows UACs to some extent to escape the charge of racial, cultural, and economic difference, the reductionism of the narrative suppresses the ever-present question of documentation. The way unaccompanied minors are addressed in supposedly progressive discourse as blank slates for the inscription of motives and identity reminiscent of dominant cultural conceptions of the child results in the regimentation and fragmentation of personal identity to present the child in a way understandable to the American observer, once again, primarily on *her* terms (Malkki 61). Such discourse privileges identity characterizations mirroring the intricacies of American social and legal relations. For one young man interviewed by the Vera Institute, this loss of control over independent self-definition was painfully apparent, encapsulated in the statement, “I am no longer Jose, but now I am a male, Latino, undocumented, person of color” (“Unaccompanied Immigrant Youth in New York” 22).

The Future of American Identity

What the above conclusions broadly demonstrate about American immigration discourse, I believe, is that these debates, rather than confronting Central American unaccompanied minors and other immigrants as they are, are profoundly debates about *us*

as Americans—the identity of those who are often seen as truly deserving to inhabit American space. These debates demonstrate that our current immigration regime cannot countenance the authorized admission to the United States of an immigrant who is not at least minimally congruous with a nebulous Americanism, conflicts over the definition of which have historically been adjudicated in debates over just *who* is capable of constituting an ideal, non-threatening American immigrant (Johnson 2004). To debate immigrant identity is necessarily to debate American identity.²⁴ It is to debate the characteristics of the American landscape, the behaviors and values that do and should dominate American territory, and the “community relations and identity of the polity associated with that territory” (Trudeau 422). As such, the political power in the hands of Members of Congress, exhibited by the debates I analyze, to decide whether child migrants are irrevocably Central American and thus tied to characteristics of the Central American landscape, or whether they exhibit a primordial Americanism, is profoundly nationalist. Additionally, it also encompasses a strand of imperialist spatial difference that “maps a primordial identity to ... fixed and bounded space and hierarchical world order, which distinguishes between spaces of order, wealth, and moral goodwill and of chaos, poverty and moral decay” (Witteborn 1155).

As the debates I analyze are in a fundamental way not wholly *about* Central American unaccompanied minors, they, as a damning consequence of such self-centeredness, largely ignore the massive suffering many unaccompanied minors experience in Central America, during the journey, and in the United States, despite their

²⁴ As Edmond Jabès presciently contemplates, ““What is a foreigner? A [wo]man who makes you think you are at home”” (Jabès quoted in Honig 1).

rhetorical gestures to the contrary. In large part, this ignorance of the undocumented immigrant's deeply precarious position results from the disregard for procedural reality exhibited by both parties through their assumption of moral authority in deciding upon the true identity of unaccompanied minors in denial of the fact that it is largely only the immigration hearing that will decide UACs' future in this nation. The Republicans demonstrate such a denial in their support for the wholesale deportation of child migrants no matter the extent of the suffering they have experienced or their potential to reach the legal standards of immigration relief. In turn, the Democrats demonstrate such a denial through the construction of their metanarrative of nationalism, a type of immigration discourse Amaya argues "limits our critical engagement with reality and history ... at the expense of publicly discussing the immigrant experience as one of destitution" (246). The appalling self-oriented nature of the discourse I analyze and the rejection it entails of seeing Central American unaccompanied minors as persons in themselves no matter their visibility or invisibility to the American observer, risks placing policy discourse on unaccompanied minors and their predicament as just another link in a chain of essentializing immigration discourse asking only what the immigrant can do *for* or *to* us.

Suggestions for Further Research

In the following paragraphs, I will suggest several possible routes for future research to build upon my preliminary findings in this paper. Throughout the above analysis, I have explored how the dynamism and mobility of the identities both Republican and Democratic speakers attribute to unaccompanied minors as they move across narrative spatial trajectories is made more possible by unaccompanied minors'

status *as children*. I believe further research can be done to investigate to what extent this dynamism is attributable to the tropes of childhood, and to what extent it is attributable to the tropes of Otherness in racial and cultural difference that come to bear on adult immigrants as well. For this reason, I suggest communication scholars could undertake further rhetorical analyses of speech about adult undocumented immigrants with the aim of investigating whether ascriptions of identity appear to shift across narrative space in this context as well, as the narrative distance between “us” and the “Other” alternately narrows and widens. If so, we can continue to ask, through analyzing other forms of discourse on Central American child migrants and other historical instances of mass migration of children, how dominant understandings of the Child intertwine with immigration rhetorics and in which discursive contexts these understandings have more or less rhetorical force.²⁵ We may also investigate how other identities inform this rhetorical relationship, such as gender, racial, and religious identity, as well as national or regional origin, expanding on my preliminary findings that gender may be associated within immigration discourse with different levels of child-like innocence. It is important to explore, thus, *which* children, and in what spatial contexts, are allowed by immigration discourses *to be children*. Likewise, we may ask, as Hector Amaya’s work indicates, how adult immigrants may alternatively *act as children* within immigration rhetorics to begin to gain a broader picture of the role of age identity in these rhetorics.

Building on this suggestion that the analysis of immigration rhetorics exposes how not all children are treated equally in political discourse, as the work of Romero and

²⁵ These other forms of discourse could include news coverage, the rhetoric of advocacy groups and protestors, and other forms of governmental discourse such as that produced by the local governments in jurisdictions where UACs have relocated.

Cisneros has illuminatingly shown, and building on my above critique of Edelman's thesis, I suggest that scholars of communication continue to research rhetorical connections between children and futurity. In this way, scholars may confront the rhetorical segmentation of futurity I briefly suggest in my discussion of Republican rhetoric by investigating how, for people who inhabit or come to inhabit the same territory, different futures tied to specific persons or classified identities are pitted against each other as mutually exclusive with implications for policy proposals. Similarly, drawing from my argument that Democratic rhetors subsume Central American child migrants into a narrative of American history, I propose further work could be performed in exploring the compatibility, exclusivity, and melding of *pasts* and *histories* within immigration discourse. In this way, I recommend an overall theme of future research confronting how prescriptive subdivisions of time and space interact with prescriptions of identity in immigration discourse.

Works Cited

- Amaya, Hector. "Latino Immigrants in the American Discourses of Citizenship and Nationalism During the Iraqi War." *Critical Discourse Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2007, pp. 237-256.
- A Guide to Children Arriving at the Border: Laws, Policies and Responses*. American Immigration Council, 26 June 2015.
- Antony, Mary Grace, and Ryan J. Thomas. "'Stop Sending Your Kids Across Our Border:' Discursively Constructing the Unaccompanied Youth Migrant." *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2017, pp. 4-24.
- Asen, Robert. "Reflections on the Role of Rhetoric in Public Policy." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2010, pp. 121-143.
- Beasley, Vanessa B. "Presidential Rhetoric and Immigration: Balancing Tensions Between Hope and Fear." *Who Belongs in America? Presidents, Rhetoric, and Immigration*, edited by Vanessa B. Beasley, Texas A&M University Press, 2006, pp. 3-18.
- Bhabha, Jacqueline. *Child Migration and Human Rights in a Global Age*. Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Calhoun, Craig. "The Imperative to Reduce Suffering: Charity, Progress, and Emergencies in the Field of Humanitarian Action." *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, edited by Michael N. Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, Cornell University Press, 2008, pp. 73-97.
- Carlson, Elizabeth, and Anna Marie Gallagher. "Humanitarian Protection for Children Fleeing Gang-Based Violence in the Americas." *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2015, pp. 129-158.
- Chávez, Karma R. "Embodied Translation: Dominant Discourse and Communication with Migrant Bodies-as-Text." *Howard Journal of Communications*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2009, pp. 18-36.
- Chávez, Karma R. "Protecting LGBT Migrants: The Rhetoric of Identity and the Expansion of the Prison-Industrial Complex." *The Rhetorics of US Immigration: Identity, Community, Otherness*, edited by Johanna Hartelius, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015, pp. 70-90.
- Check, Terence, and Christine Jasken. "Facing Ghosts, God, and Nature: Affect, Naturalization, and the 'No Más Cruces' Border Campaign." *The Rhetorics of US*

Immigration: Identity, Community, Otherness, edited by Johanna Hartelius, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015, pp. 25-49.

Children on the Run: Unaccompanied Children Leaving Central America and Mexico and the Need for International Protection. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Regional Office for the United States and the Caribbean, 12 Mar. 2014.

Chuang, Angie, and Robin Chin Roemer. "Beyond the Positive-Negative Paradigm of Latino/Latina News-Media Representations: DREAM Act Exemplars, Stereotypical Selection, and American Otherness." *Journalism*, vol. 16, no. 8, 2015, pp. 1045-1061.

Cisneros, Natalie. "'Alien' Sexuality: Race, Maternity, and Citizenship." *Hypatia*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2013, pp. 290-306.

"Current Population Survey - 2013 Detailed Tables." *United States Census Bureau*, 2013, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2013/demo/foreign-born/cps-2013.html>. Accessed 9 March 2017.

DeChaine, D. Robert. "Bordering the Civic Imaginary: Alienization, Fence Logic, and the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 95, no. 1, 2009, pp. 43-65.

Demo, Anne Teresa. "Faithful Sovereignty: Denationalizing Immigration Policy in the 2003 Pastoral Letter on Migration." *The Rhetorics of US Immigration: Identity, Community, Otherness*, edited by Johanna Hartelius, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015, pp. 50-69.

Desforges, Luke, Rhys Jones, and Mike Woods. "New Geographies of Citizenship." *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 9, no. 5, 2005, pp. 439-461.

Dickerson, Jacob. "Metonymy and Indexicality: People and Place in the Five Points." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2012, pp. 405-421.

Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke University Press, 2004.

Finlayson, Alan. "Political Science, Political Ideas and Rhetoric." *Economy and Society*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2004, pp. 528-549.

Fischer, Frank. *Reframing Public Policy: Discursive Politics and Deliberative Practices*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

- Fischer, Frank, and John Forester. *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*. Duke University Press, 1993.
- Flores, Lisa A. "Constructing Rhetorical Borders: Peons, Illegal Aliens, and Competing Narratives of Immigration." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2003, pp. 362-387.
- Foss, Sonja K. *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice*. 2nd ed., Waveland Press, Inc., 1996.
- Foss, Sonja K. *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*. 4th ed., Waveland Press, Inc., 2009.
- Goździak, Elzbieta M. *What Kind of Welcome? Integration of Central American Unaccompanied Children into Local Communities*. Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown University, Feb. 2015, https://www.gcir.org/sites/default/files/resources/What_Kind_of_Welcome_Report_Kaplan_2_2015.pdf.
- Haddal, Chad C. *Unaccompanied Alien Children: Policies and Issues*. Congressional Research Service, 19 June 2007.
- Hajer, Maarten. *Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Hartelius, Johanna. "Introduction." *The Rhetorics of US Immigration: Identity, Community, Otherness*, edited by Johanna Hartelius, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015, pp. 1-22.
- Hernandez, Romel. *Immigration from Central America*. Mason Crest Publishers, 2004.
- Ironside, Emily, and Lisa M. Corrigan. "Constituting Enemies Through Fear: The Rhetoric of Exclusionary Nationalism in the Control of 'Un-American' Immigrant Populations." *The Rhetorics of US Immigration: Identity, Community, Otherness*, edited by Johanna Hartelius, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015, pp. 157-182.
- Johnson, Kevin. *The "Huddled Masses" Myth: Immigration and Civil Rights*. Temple University Press, 2004.
- Jones, Jessica, and Jennifer Podkul. *Forced from Home: The Lost Boys and Girls of Central America*. Women's Refugee Commission, Oct. 2012, <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/uncategorized/2057-forced-from-home-the-lost-boys-and-girls-of-central-america-background-and-report>.

- Kandel, William A. *Unaccompanied Alien Children: An Overview*. Congressional Research Service, 11 May 2016. Congressional Record.
- Kandel, William A., et al. *Unaccompanied Alien Children: Potential Factors Contributing to Recent Immigration*. Congressional Research Service, 3 July 2014. ProQuest Congressional.
- Kelly, Susan, and Stephen Morton. "Annie Moore and the Archives of Displacement: Towards an Immigration History of the Present." *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2004, pp. 633-650.
- Kennedy, Elizabeth. *No Childhood Here: Why Central American Children Are Fleeing Their Homes*. Immigration Policy Center, 1 July 2014.
- Lapig, Merly. "Rep. Jeffries Introduces Bill to Appoint Counsel for Unaccompanied Alien Children and Aliens with Mental Disabilities." *Targeted News Services*, 27 June 2014. ProQuest Newsstand.
- Malkki, Liisa. "Children, Humanity, and the Infantilization of Peace." *In the Name of Humanity: The Government of Threat and Care*, edited by Ilana Feldman and Miriam Iris Ticktin, Duke University Press, 2010, pp. 58-85.
- Manuel, Kate M. *Unaccompanied Alien Children & Counsel at the Government's Expense, Part 2*. Congressional Research Service, 21 Aug. 2014.
- Manuel, Kate M., and Michael John Garcia. *Unaccompanied Alien Children—Legal Issues: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions*. Congressional Research Service, 27 Jan. 2016.
- Marion Young, Iris. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Martin Harlow, Rachel. "And the Reconciliation of Expertise: A Model for the Development of Rhetorical Commonplaces in Public Policy." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2015, pp. 57-75.
- McGee, Michael Calvin. "The 'Ideograph': A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology." *Landmark Essays on Contemporary Rhetoric*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1998, pp. 85–101.
- Meyer, Peter J., et al. *Unaccompanied Children from Central America: Foreign Policy Considerations*. Congressional Research Service, 28 Aug. 2014.
- Peralta, Eyder. "Why A Single Question Decides the Fates of Central American Migrants." *NPR.org*, 25 Feb. 2016,

<http://www.npr.org/2016/02/25/467020627/why-a-single-question-decides-the-fates-of-central-american-migrants>.

- Potter, Jennifer E. "Brown-Skinned Outlaws: An Ideographic Analysis of 'Illegal(s).'" *Communication, Culture & Critique*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2014, pp. 228-245.
- Raja, Tasneem. "Children Have Been Coming to America Alone since Ellis Island." *Mother Jones*, 18 July 2014, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/07/child-migrant-ellis-island-history>.
- Roche, Jeremy. "Children: Rights, Participation and Citizenship." *Childhood: A Global Journal of Child Research*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1999, pp. 475-493.
- Romero, Mary. "Constructing Mexican Immigrant Women as a Threat to American Families." *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2011, pp. 49-68.
- Rountree, Clarke, and John Rountree. "Burke's Pentad as a Guide for Symbol-Using Citizens." *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2015, pp. 349-362.
- Seghetti, Lisa, et al. *Unaccompanied Alien Children: An Overview*. Congressional Research Service, 28 July 2014.
- Shome, Raka. "Space Matters: The Power and Practice of Space." *Communication Theory*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2003, pp. 39-56.
- Smith, Debbie. "Rules, Laws and Remedies for Unaccompanied Immigrant Children." *Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.*, <https://cliniclegal.org/resources/protecting-vulnerable-unaccompanied-immigrant-children>. Accessed 17 Jan. 2017.
- Smolenyak, Megan. "They Say It's Your Birthday—But It's Not." *The Huffington Post*, 31 Dec. 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/megan-smolenyak-smolenyak/they-say-its-your-birthda_b_4523793.html. Accessed 20 April 2017.
- "Southwest Border Migration." *U.S. Customs and Border Protection*, 8 Mar. 2017, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration>. Accessed 9 March 2017.
- Stinchcomb, Dennis, and Eric Hershberg. *Unaccompanied Migrant Children from Central America: Context, Causes, and Responses*. Center for Latin American and Latino Studies, Nov. 2014.

- “Temporary Protected Status.” *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*, 17 Jan. 2017, <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status>. Accessed 25 Feb. 2017.
- Terrio, Susan. “Dispelling the Myths: Unaccompanied, Undocumented Minors in US Immigration Custody.” *Anthropology Today*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2015, pp. 15–18.
- Terrio, Susan. “Life Ended There.” *POLITICO Magazine*, 10 July 2014, <http://politi.co/1ztjMWj>.
- Terrio, Susan J. *Whose Child Am I?: Unaccompanied, Undocumented Children in U.S. Immigration Custody*. University of California Press, 2015.
- The Time Is Now: Understanding and Addressing the Protection of Immigrant Children Who Come Alone to the United States*. Kids in Need of Defense, Feb. 2013, <https://supportkind.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/TimeIsNow-KIND-Feb-2013.pdf>.
- Trudeau, Daniel. “Politics of Belonging in the Construction of Landscapes: Place-making, Boundary-drawing and Exclusion.” *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2006, pp. 421-443.
- Unaccompanied Immigrant Youth in New York: Struggle for Identity and Inclusion—A Participatory Action Research Study*. Fordham University School of Law and VERA Institute of Justice, Aug. 2015.
- United States. Cong. House. Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere. *Children Migrating from Central America: Solving a Humanitarian Crisis. Hearings, June 25, 2014*. 113th Cong. 2nd sess. Washington: GPO, 2014. Web. 2 September 2016.
- United States. Cong. House. Committee on Homeland Security. *Unaccompanied Minors. Hearings, June 24, July 3, 2014*. 113th Cong. 2nd sess. Washington: GPO, 2014. Web. 21 September 2016.
- United States. Cong. House. Committee on the Judiciary. *An Administration Made Disaster: The South Texas Border Surge of Unaccompanied Alien Minors. Hearing, June 25, 2014*. 113th Cong. 2nd. Sess. Washington: GPO, 2014. Web. 3 September 2016.
- United States. Cong. House. Committee on the Judiciary. *Impact on Local Communities of the Release of Unaccompanied Minors and the Need for Consultation and Notification. Hearing, Dec. 10, 2014*. 113th Cong. 2nd sess. Washington: GPO, 2014. Web. 4 September 2016.

- United States. Cong. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. *Dangerous Passage: Central America in Crisis and the Exodus of Unaccompanied Minors. Hearing, July 17, 2014*. 113th Cong. 2nd. Sess. Washington: GPO, 2014. Web. 10 August 2016.
- Welch, Michael, and Liza Schuster. "Detention of Asylum Seekers in the UK and USA." *Punishment & Society*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2005, pp. 397-417.
- Witteborn, Saskia. "Constructing the Forced Migrant and the Politics of Space and Place-making." *Journal of Communication*, vol. 61, 2011, pp. 1142-1160.
- Whitney, Justin G. "The 2012 Citizens Clean Elections Voter Education Guide: Constructing the 'Illegal Immigrant' in the Arizona Voter." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2013, pp. 437-455.
- Zamora, Lazaro. "Unaccompanied Alien Children: A Primer." *Bipartisan Policy Center*, 21 July 2014, <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/unaccompanied-alien-children-primer/>.