

REDEMPTIVE EXCLUSION: A CASE STUDY OF NIKKI HALEY'S RHETORIC ON SYRIAN REFUGEES

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This essay identifies and explicates a key rhetorical form—"redemptive exclusion"—underlying former United States Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley's efforts to defend barring Syrian refugees from American soil. Through a reliance on ethotic prolepsis, the rhetorical form of redemptive exclusion enables the creation of a transcendent perspective that reconciles seemingly opposite contemporary cultural and political rhetorics: xenophobic discourses of exclusion become coarticulated with the mythic promise of an America open to all. We show how Haley's rhetoric combines antithetical gestures of inclusion and exclusion by interweaving synecdochic narratives of her own immigrant history; hyperbolic narratives of American benevolence toward immigrants; and stereotypical narratives of terrorist identity that preempt the acceptance of Syrian refugees as even potentially American. We argue that Haley converts the rejection of Syrian refugees from American soil into an opportunity for constraining and qualifying the mythic ideal of the United States as an historical beacon for immigrants around the globe. In the conclusion, we suggest that a close study of how redemptive exclusion takes life in Haley's discourse offers more general lessons about the rhetorical and ideological character of controversies over U.S. immigration policy.

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THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND THE UNITED STATES CONTEXT

Since the start of the Syrian revolution in 2011, Syrians have fled their country en masse and sought asylum elsewhere. While some escape indiscriminate violence and state brutality, others abandon their homes because of a scarcity of necessities such as water and electricity. At the climax of the crisis in 2013, approximately 6,000 refugees departed daily, many with no personal belongings or plan of action, as refugee agencies quickly filled their quotas.¹ With over half the Syrian population now living in exile (more than 11 million within and beyond the country's border),² the Syrian refugee crisis is the most substantial forced displacement of individuals since World War II.³

The majority of Syrian refugees settled in the first-asylum countries of Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Although these countries remain the primary absorbers of refugees, as of 2017, almost a million Syrian refugees filed asylum claims in Europe.⁴ Germany alone accepted around 10,000 refugees daily in 2015.⁵ By contrast, Hungary, Spain, Bulgaria, and Macedonia succumbed to the "keep-them-out-syndrome," building fences and deploying armored vehicles to keep Syrian refugees out.⁶ Likewise, the United States only admitted 36 Syrian refugees in 2013.⁷ In 2016, under pressure from the United Nations, the Obama administration resolved to grant asylum to 10,000 Syrian refugees via the Refugee Resettlement Program. As of 2017, the United States had accepted around 15,000 Syrian refugees who resettled in states such as California, Michigan, Texas, and Tennessee,⁸ although this remains a paltry number in comparison to the American response to other conflicts.

As the Syrian refugee crisis escalates and masses of Syrians remain displaced and homeless,⁹ political leaders continue to debate the most appropriate response to the conflict amid deep anxiety among host-country citizens. For instance, a World Economic Forum survey found that Americans perceive climate change and the influx of refugees to be the main threats facing the United States and frequently imagine Syrian refugees as being connected to various terrorist attacks, such as the November 2015 attacks in Paris.¹⁰ Despite refugees undergoing extremely rigorous screening measures, the Pew Research Center reported that 53 percent of

Americans did not want to accept Syrian refugees, while 11 percent would accept Syrian refugees only if they adhered to the Christian faith.¹¹

When President Trump took office, he signed an executive order temporarily halting all refugee admissions and slashing the annual rate of refugee admissions to a record low. The order was delayed by legal action but was ultimately implemented for any Syrian refugee who could not demonstrate “bona fide” family relations in the United States.¹² President Trump’s actions on immigration were predictable. His presidential campaign announcement speech, for instance, infamously said Mexico was intentionally sending to the United States, “people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us (sic). They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.”¹³ And a few months later, turning his attention beyond the southern border, he announced his wish for a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country’s representatives can figure out what is going on.”¹⁴

These statements made resisting immigration one of the cornerstones of Trump’s campaign for president, and yet although strident in their tone, were not unprecedented in their substance.¹⁵ Such statements reflect how population influxes, such as those created by immigration and refugee crises, have typically engendered highly contentious debates in Western liberal democracies.¹⁶ America’s collectivity was founded on the sustained exclusion of certain groups of people and hierarchies of belonging among citizens.¹⁷ Furthermore, whether real or threatened, migration crises have had the tendency to split societies into mutually exclusive pro- and anti-immigrant groupings.¹⁸

The Republican Party’s (GOP’s) 2016 platform was notable for reinvigorating exclusionary anti-Islamic discourses, directly appealing to voters’ racial and ethnic prejudices against Arabs and Muslims during the presidential election.¹⁹ And although several articles examine the construction of Syrian refugees in the press and in social media,²⁰ fewer have addressed how national political figures use rhetoric to depict the Syrian refugee crisis.²¹ Further, although Syrians themselves come from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds,²² and certainly are not all of the Muslim faith or of Arab descent, political rhetoric has often lumped these immigrant communities into the same bucket and categorized them as such.²³ In a sense, the tacit conflation of people from various religious and ethnic identities into a single discursive object—the Syrian refugee—sets the stage for its

more explicit dialectical counterpart: The mythic figure of an American nation that secures and unites itself—both literally and figuratively—by marking the borders of what threatens its very existence.

Indeed, one finds in President Trump's rhetoric on the campaign trail (and since his election) core elements of what Ironside and Corrigan have deemed the "exclusionary nationalism" that has undergirded much of U.S. immigration rhetoric historically. In their words, "policymakers have established a hegemonic national identity for the purpose of creating unity and maintaining their position of power via narratives that are both instrumental and constitutive."²⁴ They identify assimilationism, racism, xenophobia, and classism as the central *topoi* on which exclusionary nationalism is based.²⁵ Given their standing as articulators of national identity, an analysis of the rhetoric of those in the political arena sheds light on the forms of persuasion that mediate and situate broader ideological discourses in the country, including those that affirm the benevolence of the nation amid the simultaneity of exclusion and hostility.²⁶

And yet, part of the impetus for the current essay starts with the observation that leaders have also sustained exclusion using rhetorics that seek to maintain and even celebrate the exceptionalist ideal of the United States as a universal beacon for immigrants from around the world, and specifically those fleeing persecution. That is, alongside enduring, jingoistic modes that align the exclusion of certain groups—such as Syrians seeking refuge in the United States—with the literal and figurative borders of national identity, distinct rhetorical forms have also emerged that weave together inclusionary languages of national identity for the purpose of restricting who is allowed to enter. Likewise, Beasley provides an historical account of the dialectic in presidential rhetoric between the immigrant as a symbol of national hope and as one of national fear.²⁷ Cisneros reinterprets the perceived tension in presidential rhetorics of immigration between explicitly nativist languages—like President Trump's—that foreground a racialized sense of national identity with universalist discourses of civic belonging which appeal to an American Dream open to all. Thus, in a theoretical insight that our essay extends, Cisneros turns what is commonly seen as an *opposition* into an *apposition*: "Rather than see them as in tension, there are reasons to believe that these dimensions work together and, in fact, are two sides of the same coin."²⁸

In what follows, we complicate these notions of apposition as they function in the rhetoric of Nikki Haley, a former South Carolina Governor and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations under President Trump. We focus on Haley's rhetoric both in the broader context of U.S. discourse on immigration and in the specific context of rhetoric on Syrian refugees. Our choice assumes importance in light of two related claims we develop throughout the essay: First, we argue that Haley uses a paradoxical rhetorical form—what we name “redemptive exclusion”—that converts the rejection of Syrian refugees from American soil into an opportunity for constraining and qualifying the mythic ideal of the United States as an historical beacon for immigrants around the globe. Second, we suggest that this redemptive exclusion is empowered by an ethotic grounding which differentially and crucially enables Haley to make iterative constructions of a “certain point of view” which preempt the acceptance of Syrian refugees as ever American. Finally, we advocate a close study of redemptive exclusion to shed light on the rhetorical and ideological character of controversies over U.S. immigration policy in a post-9/11 world—and, in particular, about challenges facing rhetorics that appeal to idealized notions of the United States as a “nation of immigrants” in response to restrictions on immigration. While our essay centers on Haley, we contend that as a rhetorical form, redemptive exclusion has a wider and more varied relevance in the rhetoric of immigration. Indeed, we close by defining a point of stasis for the future of immigration politics and policy in the United States, and thus for the study of immigration rhetoric in Communication Studies.

In the next section, we elaborate a working definition of “redemptive exclusion” by starting with key passages from Haley's rhetoric during her time as governor. In the subsequent sections, we delve into four narratives Haley employs at integral moments during the Syrian refugee crisis. We then bring together the points revealed through that analysis to explore how redemptive exclusion enables rhetors to govern, *in situ*, a core stasis point to advance immigration restrictions.

REDEMPTIVE EXCLUSION AS RHETORICAL FORM

Haley's rhetoric on Syrian refugees relies on discursive maneuvers to justify exclusion that resemble, in form, those Bonilla-Silva charts in *Racism without Racists*.²⁹ For Bonilla-Silva, performative disavowals of racism—“I'm

not a racist, but . . .”—serve not simply to disguise materially racist practices, but in fact to sustain them via contrast with more explicit (and less acceptable in the post-Civil Rights era) expressions of racist rhetoric. Following Bonilla-Silva’s insight that liberal rhetoric can serve to reproduce white supremacy through appeals to the ideal of a postracial society, we argue that Haley’s rhetoric behaves likewise. It draws inventional capital from languages of universal tolerance and American benevolence to advance policies firmly based in post-9/11 racialized and securitized anti-immigrant discourses. We draw attention to how, in anticipating the charge that refusing to accept refugees was cruel and unfounded, and thus could be analogized to efforts to bar Syrians from entry *tout court*, Haley’s use of the general figure of *prolepsis*—the term for the figure of speech aimed at “foreseeing and forestalling objections in various ways”³⁰—finds a particular rhetorical habitus in the crux of controversies over immigration as more than just a figure of speech, but as a figure of thought, too. This *prolepsis* has an ethotic grounding which enables Haley to make iterative constructions of a “certain point of view” which preempt the acceptance of Syrian refugees as ever American. We locate in Haley’s rhetoric the construction of a perspective that denies Syrians refuge via the move to “forestall” any notion that such an act challenges the core notion of the United States as a tolerant and welcoming nation of immigrants.

At a press conference on November 16, 2015, while still serving as governor of South Carolina, Haley initially expressed no opposition to Syrian refugees entering the United States and resettling in the Palmetto state. Nonetheless, later that day, and in line with a chorus of other Republican governors, she altered her public statement in a letter to United States Secretary of State John Kerry:

As Governor, it is my first and primary duty to ensure the safety of the citizens of South Carolina. We are a state that has proudly welcomed refugees from around the world as part of the United States Refugee Resettlement Program. While I agree that the United States should try to assist individuals in such dire situations, it is precisely because of the situation in Syria that makes their admission into the United States a potential threat to our national security. For that reason, I ask that you honor my request and not resettle any Syrian refugees in South Carolina.³¹

Displayed in this passage are the rudiments of redemptive exclusion, a rhetorical form that arranges the primary elements in the text into a specific kind of relation: Those displaced by the Syrian revolution are juxtaposed with a “we” and the “I” in the text that become identifiable in terms of a national identity whose survival becomes contingent on “national security,” thus edging toward a blanket judgment of all Syrians as future terrorists. In turn, Syrian refugees become a threat to national identity because they are a “potential threat to national security.” Unspoken in the passage’s pride in South Carolina’s having “welcomed refugees from around the world” is an ironic suggestion: Syrian refugees themselves could menace the prospect of settling other refugees in the future, because they threaten the very possibility of a refuge to begin with. The threat posed by Syrians to the “safety of the citizens of South Carolina” was one matter. But Haley also appears concerned by the threat posed by their exclusion to a national self-understanding predicated on an openness to “your tired, your poor,/Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,/The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.”

Similarly, more than two years later, at her confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for the position of United States Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), Haley defended her position on Syrian refugees this way: “This is not about not wanting people in. This is about keeping the terrorists out.”³² In this formulation, the line between “people” and “terrorists” appears self evident. And Syrian refugees find themselves on the wrong side of the line—barred from United States territory via a rationale that strives to keep the celebratory narrative of American benevolence intact. For even as it labeled them potential terrorists, Haley’s rhetoric would also humanize refugees as victims of war, and in particular, of Russian aggression.

In an attempt to affirm the United States’ humanitarian response to the ongoing refugee crisis, Haley’s first trip as UN ambassador was to Syrian refugee camps in Turkey and Jordan to see firsthand “how refugees are coping, day in and day out.”³³ In an interview after her trip, Haley would insist “these aren’t just casualties. This is somebody’s mom; this is somebody’s daughter.”³⁴ At one moment, she dramatically held pictures of dead Syrian children (the victims of a chemical weapons attack) during an emergency session at the UN Security Council, questioning Russia’s “false narrative” and enquiring “how many more children have to die before Russia

cares?”³⁵ Haley’s move to humanize Syrians, nevertheless, went hand in glove with her case for their exclusion. She commented after her visit that “not one of [the refugees] said, ‘I want to go to the United States.’ They all said they wanted to go *home*.”³⁶

Taking the seemingly contradictory nature of her discourse of empathy toward, and protection from, the Syrian refugee as its point of departure, we find in Haley’s rhetoric the rhetorical production of a transcendent perspective striving to negotiate seemingly contradictory ends: Uphold the “nation of immigrants” ideal in the midst of a justification for exclusion. It is because of our attention to transcendence as a political and rhetorical production grounded in such contradiction that we turn to the work of Kenneth Burke for ballast in defining the qualities of redemptive exclusion as an enduring rhetorical form.

Burke defines transcendence as a process of transforming opposites: “When approached from a certain point of view, A and B are ‘opposites.’ We mean by ‘transcendence’ the adoption of another point of view from which they cease to be opposites.”³⁷ We identify Haley’s iterative construction of a “certain point of view” in line with Burke’s pairing of identification and division “so that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins” as the “characteristic invitation to rhetoric.”³⁸ We propose, in turn, treating redemptive exclusion as the name for the rhetorical form that manages how immigration rhetoric proclaims the nation’s exceptional succor for immigrants while parsing out who will remain, nevertheless, barred from entry into the country.

Keeping in mind the significant role political leaders have in shaping public opinion and policy toward refugees,³⁹ we approach Haley’s political discourse synecdochally as a “representative anecdote” that illustrates how various ways of representing the Syrian refugee as incompatible with acceptance into the country, and thus justifying their exclusion, speaks to the meta-discourses of America as a country of immigrants. As Syrian refugees are constructed at the intersection of Haley’s immigration story and her arguments to exclude them from the United States, we discern at points the ambiguity at the heart of what Burke called the “wavering line” between identification and division—in this case, between Haley’s rhetorical labor to display personal ethos and national identification with the plight of such refugees *and* her simultaneous work on various fronts to place them outside the realm of acceptability.

Our argument throughout joins the conversations of scholars who have in recent years studied the hegemonic production of social knowledge about immigrants, specifically how political rhetoric contributes to the (de) legitimization of migrants within traditional dominant discourses.⁴⁰ As put by Clarke Rountree and Jouni Tilli, much of this rhetoric on immigrants and refugees has “eclipsed (indeed, *ignored*) all moral and humanitarian concerns.”⁴¹ Our analysis complicates the singular focus on these explicitly exclusionary narratives, however, by showing how discourses of exclusion can rely on varied and more subtle rhetorical strategies to achieve the same aim. Haley’s apparent disaffiliation from the nativist anti-immigrant rhetoric emblematic of President Trump falls in line nevertheless with logics of exclusion that can apply to a host of “Others” seeking refuge.

An analysis of the macro-structure of Haley’s rhetoric on Syrian refugees reveals how Haley’s redemptive exclusion serves to coalesce a set of narrative strategies. These narrative strategies, in various combinations, fund Haley’s linguistic ambivalence toward the Syrian refugee. They operate to redeem the practice of excluding Syrians in search of a safety so that the light of the ideal of America as a nation of immigrants can still shine. We therefore apply terms such as “redeem” and “redemptive” to immigration rhetoric to name the process through which the costs to national ideals posed by immigration control practices can nevertheless become metabolized into rhetorical material for expressions of a benevolent national identity. Redemption, in this context, becomes synonymous with the reconciling of the apparent tension that Cisneros reimagines as an interplay of “two sides of the same coin.”⁴² The rhetorical function of this mode of redemption allows one to don a transcendent perspective while presiding over the continuous toggling of frames that once humanize and cast out the refugee as an object of discourse.

The overarching framework of this rhetoric is perhaps most aptly illustrated in Haley’s response during a question and answer session at the Council on Foreign Relations. When asked by a journalist whether she was critical of the Trump administration’s policies of excluding Syrian refugees from the United States, she replied in the following manner:

I am the proud daughter of Indian immigrants who reminded my brothers and my sister and me every day how blessed we were to be in this country

[*narrative 1*]. I do believe that the fabric of America is legal immigration. That is what makes the United States so fantastic [*narrative 2*]. So, from that standpoint, that is something that is near and dear to my heart and I very much support. As Governor of South Carolina, when the refugee situation started, it was one that we had been accepting refugees for years. The United States has, but South Carolina has. And my involvement with that was knowing that we took in people who were persecuted, people that really were in need . . . So, the refugee program itself is a good one. The difference is they were able to vet those interpreters [refugees] . . . I called Director Comey, and I said, okay, we have done this for a long time, when we take refugees from Syria, *is this the same thing we have always done?* He said . . . *we didn't know who was coming in . . .* For now what he (President Trump) is *trying to do is make sure no danger is coming into the country* [*narrative 3*] (emphasis added).⁴³

We argue that Haley typically enacts redemptive exclusion through the interweaving of four narratives, namely 1) synecdochic narratives of her own immigrant history, 2) hyperbolic narratives of American exceptionalism, 3) a (counter) narrative of the Syrian refugee as a pre-emptive suspect who exists outside these norms, and 4) a narrative of international burden sharing (not displayed above but nevertheless recurring) that shifts the onus of accepting refugees to other countries. In what follows, we expand on each of these narrative strands in greater depth.

SYNECDOCHIC NARRATIVES OF PERSONAL IMMIGRANT HISTORY

In her campaign for Governor of South Carolina, Haley would always open speeches with the statement “I am the proud daughter of Indian parents who reminded us every day how blessed we are to live in this country.”⁴⁴ She stresses her immigrant lineage and marginalized immigrant identity, expanding on the struggles her parents endured as immigrants to the United States, leaving India with only eight dollars in their pockets which pushed her mother to work three jobs to support the family. In the time since then, Haley has consistently oriented her discourse concerning Syrian refugees in an analogous fashion, utilizing her personal narrative as the child of immigrants as a text from which to initiate an epistemology of rejection. In doing so, Haley emphasizes the authenticity and the ethotic

grounding of her policy claims by reconstructing it within the notion of America as a “nation of immigrants.” This strategy of ethotic prolepsis anticipates possible counter-arguments by alluding to one’s own immigrant positionality as a source of authority from which to forestall objections.

Like all synecdochic representations, Haley’s immigration story reduces the complexity inherent in the immigration system and allows Haley to summon the “possibilities of perfection” toward which “all sorts of stories might gravitate.”⁴⁵ She explicates her “consubstantiality” by underlining her overlapping situational positionality with Syrian refugees. The consubstantial bond linking the parties in this rhetorical transaction stands out as another instance of prolepsis which will manage the inherent tension of her discourse between empathy toward, and protection from, the refugee. In this instance, the strategy of ethotic prolepsis allows for all these narratives to coalesce and transcend historical sedimentation. After engaging in this bonding discourse, she nevertheless externalizes the refugee as somehow incompatible with receiving the “blessing” of American benevolence.

HYPERBOLE AND THE PARSING OF MORAL DESERVINGNESS

As she establishes her personal synecdochic narrative and immigrant history, Haley repeatedly situates her discourse concerning Syrian refugees in the sociocultural milieu of the United States as a place of belonging for all immigrants and refugees. A synecdochic pair is formed, in which Haley’s personal ethos and faith in American exceptionalism are invoked into a relationship which “like a road, extends in either direction.”⁴⁶ Just as immigration is the foundation of her American story, Haley explains it as foundational to “the dream that is America.”⁴⁷

With lexical terms such as “for generations,” “for centuries,” “always,” and “regardless,” Haley’s rhetoric on Syrian refugees in the context of American exceptionalism falls into normatively hyperbolic utterances which describe entities and events in an extreme manner.⁴⁸ For instance, in her autobiography, Haley praises America’s “boundless capacity for acceptance.”⁴⁹ In her GOP response to the State of the Union Address, Haley explains that “immigrants have been coming to our shores for generations,” “the dream of all of us,” and that “no one who is willing to work hard, abide by our laws, and love our traditions should ever feel

unwelcome in this country.” Later in the same speech, Haley laments the broken immigration system, and insists that albeit we live in dangerous times, we must resist the temptation “to follow the siren call of the angriest voices” and instead welcome “properly vetted legal immigrants, regardless of their race or religion. Just like we have for centuries.”⁵⁰ These narratives depict the United States as a place inclusive of anyone willing to make a better life for themselves.

Her confirmation hearing at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee displayed more of this pattern. When probed regarding her position regarding Syrian refugees, she recounts that “when it comes to refugees, we have to remember those that we have always tried to help, those that have been persecuted for any reason . . . we always welcomed the refugee program. It changed when it came time to the Syrian refugees.”⁵¹ In her op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, “What about the refugees? The U.S. is doing more than anyone,” she writes, “no country has invested more in protecting, housing, feeding and caring for refugees than the U.S..”⁵² On World Refugee Day, she similarly reiterated that “the United States gives more humanitarian aid than any other country.”⁵³ The rhetorical appeal of discourse elevating the United States as a utopian benefactor for all humankind thus weaves its way through a political stance against the acceptance of Syrian refugees into the country. The national lexicon of acceptance underwrites modes of selectivity which qualify the United States as a land of succor to only certain people, and certainly not Syrian refugees, displacing this segment of society through discourses of division and dis-identification. As put by Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak, “[if] the state binds in the name of the nation, conjuring a certain vision of the nation forcibly, if not powerfully, then it also unbinds, releases, expels, banishes.”⁵⁴ As may be anticipated, despite the absolute nature of her statements, Haley promptly parses out moral deservingness from her all-encompassing statements. She states, “we must not let in refugees whose intentions cannot be determined.”⁵⁵ Such discourse travels diachronically, to an extent emptied of its historical content,⁵⁶ allowing it to function as depoliticized “innocent” speech in spite of its political implications.

The crux of our argument is that Haley’s hyperbolic rhetoric not only communicates her pathos toward America’s *modus operandi*; it more importantly serves, like her immigrant narrative, a proleptical function in anticipation of her rejection of the Syrian refugee. Hyperbolic discourse

that depicts the national fantasy of an America for all provides an avenue from which to apolitically affirm the imperative to both accept *and* reject the refugee, rationalizing her approach as an objective response to the exigences at hand. This rhetorical strategy tempers the tension inherent in her discourse between the self-protective and egalitarian aspects of the American Dream, “allow(ing) us to believe, however temporarily, that the conflict has been reconciled.”⁵⁷ By situating herself within contingent debates on the issue and within historical context, Haley opens herself to alternative dialectical possibilities and communicates an ideological amalgam of positions. The sublime nature of American exceptionalism in Haley’s rhetoric is superseded only by the “unprecedented” nature of the Syrian refugee. In a sense, she reconciles these opposing arguments through the notion of derogation. As put by Giorgio Agamben, the state of exception allows one, due to a perceived public emergency which threatens the nation, to suspend or concede the protection of basic human rights.⁵⁸ Though the refugee may have bare (biological) life, he is not a ‘qualified life.’ He is a ‘homo sacer,’ a figure in Roman law whom anyone could kill without necessarily committing murder. Life becomes not a universal right but is absorbed into the nation-state as the right of citizens.⁵⁹

Although in essence dismantling her previous statements and bringing their aberrancy into the open, Haley’s rhetoric strengthens her eventual exclusion of refugees by indicating her faithfulness to the values she has just circumscribed, if not betrayed. Strategically using hyperbole to magnify *both* the threat posed by refugees *and* the ideal of America open to all allows refugees to become scapegoats of a sort, despite being neither “powerful enough nor dangerous enough to serve as a victim in this sacrificial drama.”⁶⁰ The imagined terroristic tendencies of the Syrian refugee serve to place an asterisk alongside the notion of the United States as the world’s haven for those escaping tyranny.

AMBIVALENT HUMANITY: TURNING SYRIANS INTO PRE-EMPTIVE SUSPECTS

Although traditionally dominant norms prohibit overt expressions of prejudice, the 2016 election resulted in an increased acceptability of discriminatory rhetoric toward certain groups, specifically those targeted in immigration policies.⁶¹ As such, it may not be surprising that Haley’s

rhetoric during this period frequently assembled an explicit rhetorical narrative of the terrorist potential and alleged threat Syrian refugees form to the host society. While the “imminent threat of immigrants” is a well-known argumentative stratagem,⁶² by emphasizing the collective identity of Americans, Haley employs the concept of security as a necessity to ensure life at the level of the body. By intermingling her totalizing conceptualization of Syrian refugees within the context of *national* security, Haley presents an America which must isolate itself to protect an *ontological* security maintained through exclusion of certain peoples. Haley’s depiction of Syrian refugees as pre-emptive suspects enacts a politics of security awash with discourses of eventualities as opposed to actual events.⁶³

In several instances, Haley specifically links Syrian refugees to recent terrorist attacks, such as the Paris 2015 or London Bridge 2017 terrorist attacks. Although Syrian refugees were not the culprits of either of these attacks, she indirectly ascribes blame to Syrian refugees. Refugees become detainees of a sort, held without charge and without trial. Whether they represent a true threat is immaterial: it is the perception of their fundamental danger to the nation which suffices to mobilize against their acceptance.⁶⁴ Haley assigns terroristic potential either by directly presenting Syrian refugees as terrorists or through adjacent textual positioning in which Syrian refugees are seen to suspiciously carry terrorists in their midst:

And in this age of terrorism, we must not let in *refugees* whose intentions cannot be determined.⁶⁵

So this is not about not wanting people in. This is about keeping the terrorists out. And when you look at situations like what just happened in London, that was devastating.⁶⁶

Can we vet *these people* [Syrian refugees] properly before we allow them into the United States? And as Governor, I saw that in many cases we couldn’t. If you see my record, we stopped them from coming in, or attempted to stop them from coming in . . . *we know the terror in the world, we know the threats in the world, we want to make sure we are doing everything we can to protect people in this country . . . In every way, they have said we have to protect the American people. How do we know for sure we are not allowing any terrorists or threats in?* (emphasis added).⁶⁷

Such essentialist rhetoric strategically collapses the identity of Syrian refugees by imposing a monolithic terroristic group-identity upon them. It contributes to stereotyped representations of these social groups often used in the praxis of everyday discourses. Moreover, Haley's construction of a binary "us" ("the American people," or "the people in this country") versus "them" (the "terrorists," "refugees," or "these people") determinedly positions Syrian refugees as marginalized "Others" endowed with the ignoble traits of fanaticism. Tropes of refugees as terrorists in contexts of displacement imply they are inherently excludable, always and already untrustworthy.⁶⁸ No amount of screening will ever be enough to "know" them. The Syrian Other is de-contextualized and then detached both from Haley's personal and family immigration history and from ritualistic tropes of American benevolence. Though anti-refugee narratives are by their very nature homogenizing of the refugee, this narrative is further troubled by the ambivalent manner in which immigration as an umbrella term is treated in the discourse.

The Syrian refugee is not only a deviant from American society, but from Haley's own immigrant story and that of other refugees, implying a baseline social condition which would typically tolerate the entry of "conventional" immigrants, but not the Syrian refugee. Such discourse cultivates a rhetorical buffer which explicates her circumstance as an immigrant worthy of citizenship against those who attempt to subvert the system. By placing herself in contrast to the Syrian refugee, she entrenches herself in a value-laden social hierarchy of immigrants demarcating the "deserving" legal immigrant from the "undeserving" refugee. Furthermore, Haley contrasts "legal immigration" to the "refugee situation." For instance, in her GOP response to the State of the Union, she states "we cannot continue to allow immigrants to come here *illegally*. And in this age of terrorism, we must not let in *refugees* whose intentions cannot be determined."⁶⁹ The linguistic marker of "legal" is contrasted with the term, "refugee," indexing negative connotations of lawbreakers, abusers, and cheaters of the legal system. By questioning the legal status of refugees, and insinuating notions of illegality, she at once strips refugees of their legal moniker and more importantly, camouflages this exclusion as legitimate and as an infringement of American sovereignty. The rhetorical connection through which the slippage from "refugee" to "illegal immigrant" occurs allows for a natural, almost undetectable, switch in meanings to occur. As surmised by Oliver

Cromwell Cox, it is immaterial whether refugees represent a genuine threat, all that matters is that “the dominant group believes in the menace of the cultural tenets and practices of the other group; whether or not they are actually harmful or not is not the crucial circumstance.”⁷⁰

In summary, metaphoric clusters of Syrian refugees as unknowns, victims, threats, terrorists, and illegals, often in repetitive instances, reveal the symbolic direction of Haley’s rhetoric and the unspoken “dancing of attitudes” in her discourse.⁷¹ Though Haley’s rhetoric complements these terroristic narratives with those of the vulnerability of Syrian refugees, as these discourses coagulate they create an apologetic narrative within what is already a highly polarized discourse surrounding refugees. Thus, discourses that appear sympathetic to Syrian refugees ultimately undermine them and buttress dynamics of exclusion, or differential inclusion. Syrian refugees are of an equivocal humanity, suspended between defenselessness and lethality.

DO AS I SAY, NOT AS I DO: SYMBOLIC BORDERS AND SYRIAN REFUGEES AS A THIRD-WORLD PROBLEM

In the trauma after World War II and the forcible displacement of millions of people, the United Nations decided an international approach to refugees would be necessary to achieve the successful repatriation to their home countries, and later, the resettlement of refugees away from their countries of origin.⁷² In the time since then, normative principles of international solidarity and burden-sharing toward refugees, though not legally binding, have been one of the foundational solutions to the refugee predicament.⁷³ Nevertheless, in 2017, the United States informed the UN it would withdraw from the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, a nonbinding political declaration to uphold the rights of refugees when resettling them in a host country.⁷⁴ In announcing this decision, Haley stated, “we will decide how best to control our borders and who will be allowed to enter our country. The global approach in the New York Declaration is simply not compatible with United States sovereignty.”⁷⁵ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has stated that burden sharing is “key to the protection of refugees and the resolution of the refugee problem,”⁷⁶ with the UNHCR’s High Commissioner highlighting his fear that the UN system “shifts responsibility to states located on the external border.”⁷⁷

Haley's rhetoric categorically opposes the provision of resettlement opportunities to refugees in the United States, rejecting a more direct role in ameliorating a humanitarian burden of global proportions.⁷⁸ Instead, America's commitment to Syrian refugees becomes chiefly through its "support(ing) of the countries that host them."⁷⁹ In her remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing, Haley reiterated that "in addition to the political solution, we must start to focus on the development needs of host countries, as well as the transition for Syrians to go home."⁸⁰ Even in her validation of the mythos of the United States as a nation of immigrants, Haley's rhetoric delineates the responsibility to the Syrian refugee as strictly through financial aid to first-asylum countries. This is concerning, considering that due to the scope and protracted nature of the Syrian refugee crisis, many first-asylum countries (or so-called frontier zones) are now functioning beyond their reception capacity and under tremendous strain. According to UNHCR, over 70 percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and more than 85 percent of those in Jordan are living below the poverty line.⁸¹ Though the United States is admittedly among the top single-state bilateral donors in humanitarian aid for the Syrian crisis,⁸² financial transfers alone will not ensure an equitable distribution of the costs of receiving asylum seekers.⁸³ The economic, social, and human costs of caring for refugees will require enhanced solidarity and refugee resettlement by industrialized countries such as the United States.⁸⁴

To an extent, Haley's qualified commitment is indicative of conceptions of the international community's obligations to the refugee crisis as a non-core function to be extra-territorialized to neighboring countries.⁸⁵ The incongruity of hegemonic human rights discourses proclaiming the moral imperative of refugee emancipation and applauding Syria's neighboring countries for hosting refugees, while refusing to do so oneself, is reminiscent of strategies of outsourcing services to structures outside the normal framework of rule (refugee camps or detention centers). This symbolic bordering allows for a linguistic strategy of separation in which American sovereignty not only excludes the refugee, but also diminishes the work and value of host countries saddled with the lion's share of the collective responsibility (or as it has been termed in other contexts, "rational buck-passing" or "beggar thy neighbor policies").⁸⁶ In essence, the Syrian refugee is excommunicated as a *margizen* (to the margins or "beyond the camp walls,"⁸⁷ far from the sight of the American citizen and with no access to

the collective goods and services of American society. The refugee camp becomes paradigmatic beyond the geographical space of internment, though refugees remain under “disciplinary power, control and surveillance.”⁸⁸ In fact, refugees are often excluded from rights while still being subject to various laws.⁸⁹ In this sense, redemptive exclusion replicates and reproduces a zone of indistinction which exists for Syrian refugees between the licit and the illicit, the exception and the rule.

Haley’s public statements rejecting Syrian refugees from admission into the United States due to their risky nature as potential terrorists, while concurrently applauding other countries shouldering these duties (“do as I say, not as I do”) allows the United States to exempt itself from international human rights frameworks, while paradoxically commending compliance by others. Equally questionable is the automatic de-valuing of the lives of citizens of host countries who provide sanctuary to these refugees. While American lives are “grievable,” the latter are materially and perceptually outside of these considerations. As termed by Butler, the “precarity” of Syrian lives carries with it an unacknowledged but intrinsic assumption about the inferior nature of their lives as compared to those of Americans. This “precarity” refers to the politically induced condition where certain beings are deprived of the social and economic networks for survival and thereby exposed to injury or death. Moreover, discourse maximizing precariousness of others, while minimizing precariousness for the powerful,⁹⁰ inculcates within it postcolonial themes denying to subaltern peoples a humanity which is otherwise afforded to American citizens—their lives are deemed unworthy of protection in proportion to Haley’s depiction of the threat refugees pose to Americans.

CONCLUSION

After the forced expulsion of 800,000 Kosovar Albanians in 1999, Martha Minnow stated that “the nature of warfare has changed, now the refugees are the war.”⁹¹ More than two decades later, the Syrian refugee situation illustrates how, in many respects, Minnow’s judgment remains as relevant as ever. As displacement increases globally, domestic resistance to refugees—Syrian, as well as asylum seekers from around the world turning to the United States for refuge—makes it critical to examine the political rhetoric that names and defines such populations. This is particularly the case for

political figures such as Nikki Haley whose rhetoric has strayed from an exclusionary jingoistic bent toward a distinct rhetorical form which has weaved inclusionary languages of national identity for the purpose of restricting who is allowed to enter.

In the words of a 2018 report by the Anti-Defamation League, the Trump administration's rhetoric fomented "anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiment" by playing directly into the production and reproduction of prejudice toward this segment of society.⁹² Our goal in elaborating how redemptive exclusion as a rhetorical form has been circulated is to extend the insights of other scholars into how these anti-immigrant rhetorics have exhibited multiple, even contradictory, modes of articulation. Haley's tacit dis-affiliation from more overt appeals to voters' racial, ethnic, and nativist prejudices shows the urgency of continuing to broaden our understanding of how rhetoric calling for the restriction of the entry of refugees to the U.S. achieves rhetorical salience. We bring to the forefront "redemptive exclusion" as a rhetorical form empowered by ethotic prolepsis which works to create a transcendent perspective able to negotiate the seemingly contradictory ends of a perennially powerful American moral exceptionalism *alongside* a xenophobic discourse of exclusion. We posit that an ethotic grounding differentially and crucially enables Haley to make iterative constructions of a "certain point of view" that attempt to reconcile antithetical gestures of inclusion and exclusion that preempt the acceptance of Syrian refugees as ever American.

As Hartelius puts it, "the 'nation of immigrants' mythos constitutes the horizon for modern immigration, complicating efforts to address its challenges."⁹³ The broader outline of this rhetorical reality discloses a point of stasis that our study makes concrete *in situ*: Arguments suited to confronting the most recent surge of immigration restrictions can no longer rely on time-worn appeals to moral exceptionalism alone to make the case for greater acceptance of those most in need of refuge. This article offers one possibility for how these rhetorical maneuverings might take place, namely when grounded in ethotic prolepsis as a source of authority from which to forestall objections. This enables a transitioning past this point of stasis, summoning the "possibilities of perfection" toward which "all sorts of stories might gravitate"⁹⁴ and thereby transcending historical sedimentation.

This essay offers a glimpse into an alternative form of exclusionary nationalism enabled by a celebration of the exceptionalist ideal of the United States as a nation of immigrants. Our hope is that this will

complicate future applications of redemptive exclusion as it relates to dislodging a stasis that falsely pits anti-immigrant rhetoric against the “nation of immigrants” mythos as if they were untainted opposites. It applies to those who in the same breath state that the United States, in the words of Ronald Reagan, is the “last best hope of man on earth” only to realize that they, themselves, are barring others from that same hope. This article is a challenge to those who “play the Beautiful Soul, which feels superior to the corrupted world while secretly participating in it: they need this corrupted world as the only terrain where they can exert their moral superiority.”⁹⁵

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