Bruna Bandeira Soares

"Build the wall!":

Policymaking through affect in the Trump era

Dissertação de Mestrado

Dissertation presented to the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Relações Internacionais of the Instituto de Relações Internacionais, PUC-Rio, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Mestre em Relações Internacionais.

Advisor: Profa. Paula Orrico Sandrin

Rio de Janeiro,
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Acknowledgements

Abstract

Soares, Bruna Bandeira; Sandrin, Paula Orrico (advisor): **"Build the wall!":** **Policymaking through affect in the Trump era**. Rio de Janeiro, 2023, 107p. Dissertação de Mestrado – Instituto de Relações Internacionais, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

This Master's dissertation seeks to explore former US president Donald J. Trump's proposal to build a physical barrier along the entire Southern border throughout the years of his campaign and presidency (2015 - 2020). More specifically, it seeks to question the role played by the border wall, built only partially in physical terms but extensively fortified in discursive and symbolic ones, considering Trump's affectively charged rhetoric which narrated a scenario of existential crisis in America, appealing to feelings of ontological insecurity among his constituency. While the project to construct the physical border wall itself was filled with inconsistencies and technical challenges, the symbolic wall evoked by Trump repeatedly through discourse seemed to play an overarching role which went beyond the physical barrier, and was a core element in Trump's political agenda throughout his entire presidency wherever immigration policy was concerned. What, then, are the possible pathways for understanding how and why the wall withstands discursively and politically even as it seems to fail practically? For this task, this work of research employs a two-fold approach by first suggesting thinking about Trump's discursive framings of the border wall critically through a Lacanian approach to ontological security and, secondly, by arguing for a more attentive look towards the social and economic contexts to which the symbolic wall responds and which enables it to resonate so widely through discourse, exploring the lived experiences of impoverished and often angrily resentful Trump supporters under decades of progressive-neoliberal hegemony.

Keywords

Resumo

Soares, Bruna Bandeira; Sandrin, Paula Orrico (orientadora): **"Construa o muro!": formulação de políticas através do afeto na era Trump.** 2023, 107p. Dissertação de Mestrado – Instituto de Relações Internacionais, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

A dissertação de mestrado busca explorar a proposta do ex-presidente dos Estados Unidos Donald J. Trump de construir uma barreira física ao longo de toda a fronteira sul durante os anos de sua campanha eleitoral e posterior presidência (2015 - 2020). Mais especificamente, busca-se questionar o papel desempenhado pelo muro fronteiriço, construído apenas parcialmente em termos físicos, mas amplamente fortificado em termos discursivos e simbólicos, considerando a retórica afetivamente carregada de Trump que narrou um cenário de crise existencial nos Estados Unidos, apelando para sentimentos de insegurança ontológica entre seu eleitorado. Enquanto o projeto para construir o muro físico na fronteira encontrava-se cheio de inconsistências e desafios técnicos, o muro simbólico evocado por Trump repetidamente através do discurso parecia desempenhar um papel mais abrangente que ia além da barreira física, tornando-se elemento central na agenda política de Trump ao longo toda a sua presidência no que diz respeito à política de imigração. Quais são, então, os caminhos possíveis para entender como e por que o muro resiste discursiva e politicamente, mesmo quando parece falhar na prática? Para esta tarefa, o trabalho de pesquisa emprega uma abordagem dupla, primeiro sugerindo pensar criticamente sobre os enquadramentos discursivos de Trump sobre o muro de fronteira por meio de uma abordagem lacaniana à segurança ontológica e, em segundo lugar, adotando um olhar mais atento ao contexto sócio-econômico ao qual o muro responde, e que permite que este ressoe tão amplamente através do discurso, explorando as experiências vividas pela parcela dos apoiadores de Trump que encontravam-se empobrecidos e muitas vezes raivosamente ressentidos sob décadas de hegemonia neoliberal progressista.

Palavras-chave

Estados Unidos da América; segurança ontológica; fronteira; afetos.

Summary

1.
Introduction

On January 25th, 2017, five days after taking the presidential oath of office and delivering his inaugural address, former president Donald J. Trump issued Executive Order 13767, directing the construction of a wall at the southern border of the United States. The promise to build said wall was an integral part of his presidential campaign, which came to be known worldwide by the unofficial slogan "build the wall!", chanted by Trump himself as well as by his numerous supporters in the various rallies and public appearances which preceded his election. The topic of the border wall was introduced very early in Trump's campaign, being mentioned as soon as he announced his candidacy in 2015, when the former candidate stated: "I would build a great wall, and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me, and I'll build them very inexpensively, I will build a great, great wall on our southern border. And I will have Mexico pay for that wall" (Trump, 2015). This would be the first in a long series of speeches in which Trump highlighted the building of a physical barrier at the border as a simple, straight-forward solution to issues surrounding illegal immigration in the United States; according to Trump himself, "simply put, walls work and walls save lives" (Trump, 2019b).

This wasn't the first time in US history where the Southern border was presented as a site of vulnerability, and a good example of this is the Secure Fence Act of 2006, an act of the United States Congress which authorized and partially funded the construction of 700 miles (or 1,125 km) of fencing along the US - Mexico border during the George W. Bush administration, which was then viewed as an important step toward immigration reform. The southern border itself is significant in the sense that it's the entryway for most of the country's illegal immigrants, a stretch of land of 1,954 miles (3,145 km) which traverses a variety of terrains, including urban areas, deserts, mountains, federally protected wilderness areas and Native American reservations, as well as privately owned land. During the four years of the Trump administration (2017 - 2020) and the two years leading up to it, however, the site of the Southern border received renewed attention through the 45th president's affectively charged rhetoric and concrete efforts to reform the country's immigration system, primarily aimed at stopping

illegal crossings as the logical solution for aiding a nation in an alleged state of crisis due to illegal immigration and the failure of the US political establishment to protect its citizens. In Trump's own words, "sadly, the American dream is dead. [...] But if I get elected president, I will bring it back bigger and better and stronger than ever before, and we will make America great again." (Trump, 2015).

Trump's call for building a "big, fat, beautiful wall" (cited in Finnegan, 2016) at the border with Mexico is initially presented as part of a larger political agenda aimed at decreasing illegal immigration, a matter which earned him widespread support during his campaign. The wall itself, however, went much further than being simply a small part of a wider policy proposal: apart from being repeatedly mentioned in many of Trump's official discourses through a specific rhetoric which the research seeks to explore further on, the Trump administration also made concrete efforts to actually build the physical barrier at the border, which in 2019 led to intense political debate culminating in the longest partial US government shutdown in history. The shutdown, which lasted 35 days, was motivated by political dissent between former president Trump and Congress over the federal budget for the 2019 fiscal year, when Trump's demand for $5.7 billion in federal funds for a US–Mexico border wall was denied by the Senate. The internal political dispute surrounding the building of the physical wall itself is relevant here inasmuch as it begins to raise the main issues surrounding Trump's most ambitious and well-known project, which will ultimately lead us to the research problem I seek to develop.

According to an internal report by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) from 2017, Trump's border wall was initially estimated to cost $21.6 billion, and take more than three years to construct, a number much higher than the $12 billion figure cited by Trump during his campaign (Ainsley, 2017). However, the numbers varied throughout his administration as the project for the wall itself changed many times, ranging from Trump's initial idea of a concrete wall to a steel barrier, a solar-paneled fence, among others:

> A review of Trump's public statements about the wall dating back to his June 2015 presidential campaign announcement reveals an expansive and ever-shifting list of architectural features, eco-friendly add-ons, aesthetically pleasing designs, and height and width requirements. The former real estate mogul went from an original vision of precast concrete slabs — like those used "for parking garages," Trump told a campaign crowd in August 2015 — to a "digital wall" touted by his campaign

surrogates in mid-2016, then to a transparent structure made of rebar and steel (Orr, 2019).

This is because, in practical terms, Trump's original promise to construct a concrete wall, built by Americans but paid by Mexicans, along the entire length of the US border with Mexico, eventually proved to be a much more difficult, if not impossible task.

In 2017, the first year of the Trump administration, the US federal government contracted six companies to build eight prototypes of the president's idea for the border wall, four using concrete and four using other materials, all of which were intended to be study models to be tested in relation to five criteria: breaching, scaling, constructability, engineering design and aesthetics (see Morley, 2018 and GAO, 2018). The prototypes, which were estimated to have cost $20 million, including design, construction and later demolition, all went through various penetrability tests and were displayed near the border in San Diego, where they were visited by the former president in 2018.

Figure 1: the eight assembled prototypes on the California-Mexico border. Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection

However, the prototypes themselves, which were expected to be the first step in finding the best fencing structure for the border wall, were also flawed. According to a US Government Accountability Office (GAO) 2018 report on the

project, tests made by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) found that all of the prototypes presented varying degrees of construction challenges, along with other issues:

> The GAO report also said that CBP tests found that all of the concrete prototypes presented "extensive" construction challenges and that the other prototypes presented "moderate" to "substantial" construction challenges. The report also found that CBP's cost estimates were off because they hadn't factored in the difficulty of building the wall in some of the border's most inhospitable locations. Much of the U.S.–Mexico border runs through rough terrain that is difficult for construction equipment to access and would present significant engineering challenges. (Morley 2018).

Besides such technical difficulties and impossibilities, it is also interesting to note how Trump's original proposal to build a wall across the nearly 2,000 mile border might also not make sense in areas of the border where deserts and mountains provide natural deterrents for crossing, and whereas "a wall in the right places is an important component of immigration policy, [...] putting a fence in the mountains where nobody is trying to cross, for example, is somewhat pointless" (Loiaconi, 2015). The issues, however, don't stop there, as research shows that the very land where the physical barrier was supposed to be built is not available for the US government's own free use:

> Some of the land a wall would need to traverse is privately owned and the government would need to get permission to build there, buy the land, or seize it via controversial methods like eminent domain. Buying border land has proven expensive for the government in the past. Other sections of the border pass through federally protected wilderness and Native American reservations where the Department of Homeland Security's authority to build may be limited. There is also potential environmental damage the wall could cause. (Loiaconi, 2015)

Through this brief overview of the attempts and setbacks to building the wall, then, we may begin to see it not as a stoic construction for the definitive interdiction of illegal flows, but rather as an impactful proposal which stands in stark contrast to its many inconsistencies and impossibilities, as it seems to suggest an overly simplified solution for a complex border enforcement situation.

Another point I wish to elaborate before moving on is that of walls themselves, and not necessarily only Trump's. Here, an attentive reader might suggest that whereas the former president's very specific proposal for building a border wall might have been flawed and costly, surely there must be alternative ways for physically fortifying the border in order to better control the transnational

flows of immigrants which happen by land. In this sense, I wish to draw attention to the limits of what border walls are able to do in general, considering that even in less geographically challenging locations, a wall still might not be able to completely obstruct the border. In other words, walling and fencing are tactical tools, but certainly not solutions in and of themselves as they are mostly effective in redirecting illegal immigration away from urban areas but often cannot do much to actually stop it (Loiaconi, 2015). In this respect, Brown (2010, p. 26) holds that "walls thus bear the irony of being mute, material, and prosaic, yet potentially generative of theological awe largely unrelated to their quotidian functions or failures". Consequently, one of the preliminary conclusions we may draw from the ever-shifting designs and proposals for the wall, as well as experts' arguments about its ineffectiveness, high costs and the need to understand the wall as part of a greater security apparatus, is that the idea for the border wall itself was filled with inconsistencies and technical impossibilities which render the proposal to build a physical barrier along the entire length of the Southern border not only impossible but, even if it were to be built differently (in only a few sections of the border, using different materials and relying more on surveillance technology than simply physical structures of interdiction), it would still remain only partially effective, an arguably poor outcome for a multi-billion dollar federal project which was estimated to involve years of construction. Hence, Trump's argument that "simply put, walls work and walls save lives" (Trump, 2019b) begins to prove itself reductive and questionable, in spite of how well it seems to have resonated with his intended audience.

As former Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff explains about the US-Mexico border wall built after 2006, "A fence is part of a whole strategy. A fence by itself is not going to work, but in conjunction with other tools, it can help." (Cited in Vallet 2014, p. 278). Thus, assuming that the wall is "not meant to provide a hermetic seal, but to be part of a multidimensional strategy that includes patrols, drones, remote sensors, and other forms of surveillance" (Callahan 2018, p. 466), this Master's thesis seeks to investigate how and why the wall itself received such intense focus during Trump's four years in office and entire presidential campaign, to the point where it became known worldwide by the unofficial slogan of "build the wall!" which was chanted by supporters at rallies all over the United States, generated political dissent about funding which ultimately led to the longest federal

government shutdown in US history and, finally, led to the spending of $20 million in prototypes. In other words, considering that Trump's ideal border wall is flawed, impractical and would not necessarily deliver its promises of interdiction on its own, it is important to question Trump's discursive and political insistence upon building it regardless. What, then, are the possible pathways for understanding how the wall withstands discursively and politically even as it fails practically? In seeking to question the framing of the border wall within a narrative of (in)security, this work of research is structured around the initial hypothesis that the wall's endurance in Trump's speeches and political agenda may be better explained by investigating its' symbolic and intersubjective value within that context, as I contend that it may have played a more complex, overarching role within political discourse and public sentiment by appealing to a collective national identity and possibly relating to Trump supporters' feelings of displacement and ontological insecurity. In order to do this, I draw from the literature on ontological security theory, which presupposes an attentive approach to how political discourse may respond to, as well as constitute, feelings of insecurity among an audience.

Accordingly, the thesis has been structured along five chapters which together aim to develop and further investigate this initial hypothesis, pursuing the objective of better understanding how Trump's Southern border wall withstands as a national security project throughout the period of his campaign and administration in spite of its' apparent ineffectiveness in hindering the flow of illegal immigrants who seek enter the US. In order to pursue this objective, my second chapter is dedicated to reviewing the literature on ontological security theory (OST) in International Relations, starting with its origins in psychoanalysis and further development in the field of Sociology through the work of Giddens (1991), which served as an inspiration for a significant amount of researchers in IR who have employed the concept of ontological security since then. With those contributions in mind, I present and develop the body of literature in IR interested in critiquing the Giddens-based approach to OST by approaching it through a perspective inspired by the work of Lacan in psychoanalysis, which is the theoretical approach that I aim to employ in order to consider how the border wall is framed discursively as a national security project by Trump and how that framing is related to feelings of ontological (in)security.

Drawing from that critique and from a position of curiosity towards the wide resonance of Donald Trump's speeches among his audience, the third chapter is dedicated to exploring the social and economic circumstances which precede his election, based on the argument that the feelings of ontological insecurity among his constituency were not created spontaneously by Trump himself, and thus must be a part of a wider context and of common experiences among a significant portion of his supporters. Seeking to elucidate that context of pre-existing feelings of ontological insecurity, the third chapter explores the economic, political and social implications of decades of neoliberalism, understanding it not only as an economic doctrine but also as a political rationality affecting everyday life as subjects are constituted under its inner logic. Here, Nancy Fraser's 2019 work sheds light on the intricacies of progressive-neoliberal hegemony over the last few decades, while Hochschild (2016) and Brown (2019) help elucidate how that context may affect subjects profoundly, and the processes of identification which stem from the perception of a lost way of life among many Americans from states which would later elect Trump with a staggering majority of votes.

Finally, the fourth and final chapter is committed to a closer examination of former president Trump's discursive approach of the Southern border wall, as the research seeks to comprehend the ways in which the project to build the physical barrier at the border remained relevant all throughout the campaign and administration years by looking at how it was framed discursively and how it may have evoked and echoed many of Trump supporters' feelings of resentment and insecurity, particularly in relation to open-border policies. In order to do this, a total of eight public addresses were analyzed, dating from the period of Trump's electoral campaign and the years of his presidency, all of which were selected based on their focus on the interconnected issues of national (in)security and the Southern border wall. Seeking to investigate how those public speeches framed insecurity *through* the border wall, I draw from the insights of my chosen theoretical approach in order to think the wall critically in both its physical and symbolic dimensions, aspiring to discern the ways in which it fails as a structure of containment and, perhaps most importantly, the ways in which it may be effective as it is evoked discursively.

2.
Literature review and methodology

2.1.
On the Giddens-based approach to Ontological Security Theory

The concept of ontological security had its own history before joining the theoretical frameworks of critical security studies in International Relations, as well as its own trajectory afterwards, through critique and advancing debates surrounding the concept within IR. With that in mind, I begin this section by contextualizing ontological security theory (OST) within the discipline, leading up to the gaps and debates which provide a basis for my proposed theoretical approach to the research question presented in the introductory chapter. In order to do this, I first present the more mainstream understanding of Ontological Security in IR, which draws mostly from Giddens (1991) and carries some of the assumptions which I seek to criticize, as I will elaborate in Section II.

In the field of security studies, the debates surrounding statecentrism, rationality, objectivity and the differing referent objects of security have been many, which has led to the consolidation of the field of critical security studies, seeking to question the most commonly held assumptions of mainstream IR concerning security in theory as well as in practice. In this sense, OST can be understood as one of many streams of critical security scholarship in International Relations. The concept of ontological security itself initially stems from R. D. Laing's 1960 book, "The Divided Self", in which he seeks to formulate an existentialist approach to psychoanalysis, attentive to the political aspects of subjects' experiences in the world: "Laing advocated a form of psychiatry that involved the psychiatrist genuinely seeking to see the patient as a person, and to ask how her behavior is expressive of her existence rather than merely signs of a disease" (Rossdale 2015, p. 371). Laing states that an individual with a firm core of ontological security would "[...] experience his own being as real, alive, whole; as differentiated from the rest of the world in ordinary circumstances so clearly that his identity and autonomy are never in question; as a continuum in time; as having an inner consistency, substantiality, genuineness, and worth [...]" (Laing 2010, p. 41 - 42), whereas an ontologically insecure individual would lack these factors, experiencing

the world as existentially threatening, unable to cognitively organize the changes and challenges around her and feeling constantly overwhelmed and petrified by them, perpetually faced with the "dread of losing the self" (2010, p. 43 - 49).

Later, the concept was brought from psychiatry into the field of sociology through Giddens (1991), who reflects upon modernity's constant rapid changes and contingency, as well as the effects of this phenomena on subjects' perceptions of the world around them and their own identities, thus offering a sociological reading of Laing's original theory. According to Giddens (1991, p. 36), all social actors have an intrinsic understanding that, beyond the routines of their daily lives, there lies chaos, and "in order to be themselves and to act, therefore, individuals need to bring uncertainty within tolerable limits, to feel confident that their environment will be predictably reproduced"[1] (Mitzen 2006, p. 346). Ontological security-seeking, then, is understood as "the drive to minimize hard uncertainty by imposing cognitive order on the environment" (ibid p. 346), and that order is imposed through the mechanism of routinization, which generates trust and regularity in social life by making it knowable, as well as making the self knowable (ibid p. 346).

Joining the studies of security in International Relations, ontological security theory initially drew most of its assumptions from Giddens while simultaneously attempting to transpose the idea of ontological security-seeking to actors beyond the individual, such as political groups, communities, nations and even states. These understandings of OST in IR generally understand the following:

> Ontological security is security not of the body but of the self, the subjective sense of who one is, which enables and motivates action and choice. To say that individuals need security of this self is to say that their understandings of it must be relatively stable. [...] individuals value their sense of personal continuity because it underwrites their capacity for agency. (Mitzen 2006, p. 344)

Hence, in theory, individuals would become attached to their routines as these play a key role in sustaining their identities and pacifying their cognitive environments in the face of uncertainty, which is understood here as a threat to identity and agency. In this sense, Mitzen (2006, p. 349) argues that "attachment to routines and the social order they implicate is thus connected to, indeed a precondition for, identity and therefore the capacity for rational action". In other

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[1] Here, I cite Mitzen's 2006 work to explain Giddens's, as the context of the citation is that she herself is discussing Giddens's approach and summarizing it.

words, this approach implies that any capacity for agency is underwritten by a stable cognitive environment among individuals within a given group or collective.

As we seek to comprehend this relationship between security and identity, we must first ask ourselves what does this sense of security of "the self" mean. According to Kinnvall and Mitzen (2017, p. 2), "actors are viewed as ontologically secure when they feel they have a sense of biographical continuity and wholeness that is supported and recognised in and through their relations with others", which implies that this sense of security lies in the management of anxieties as individuals seek to maintain a stable sense of self and, through it, to maintain their capacity for agency. This theory is based on the premise that political subjectivity is socially constituted in ways that have reverberating effects at many levels (p. 3), such as local, national and international politics. This theoretical move also has relevant consequences for the field of security studies in general, as it breaks with mainstream understandings of security as something necessarily related to the survival of physical threats, as it argues in favour of

> [...] a focus on states' ontological security in addition to or instead of their physical security. In doing this, they challenge the exclusive association between security and survival, physical threat and defence made in conventional theories of IR, as well as the link between security and specific referent objects and the survival or threat-based conception of security defined by the Copenhagen School (Mitzen 2017, p. 5)

However, it is noteworthy that while ontological security scholarship aims to shift some of our understandings of security and redirect focus away from physical threats, other interesting considerations on physical safety will arise from this shift. In this sense, Mitzen (2006) presents us with a new dilemma in international politics, referring to situations where ontological security may actually come into conflict with physical security, meaning that even harmful and self-defeating relationships can provide ontological security for states and that, as a consequence, states can become attached to conflict. This is a very interesting point for thinking about political subjectivities and their relationship to conflict, as it begins to open a range of possibilities for discussing how violence may be constitutive of political identities, especially in contexts where those identities are based on domination[2], as I will elaborate further throughout the research.

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[2] For a more in-depth analysis on the subject, see Kotef (2019).

Finally, another relevant element of this preliminary approach is that it is able to highlight the role of narrative, discourse and language in understandings of security; in the words of Steele and Homolar (2019, p. 216): "Narrative, from the perspective of ontological security, is seen as a sense-making device that allows conceptions of stable selfhood to be projected, even protected, across time and space". This point is especially helpful when analyzing political outcomes and behaviour in contexts shaped by populist rhetoric, where affective appeals to ontological security may play a key role in establishing ideational and emotive connection between the populist speaker and the audience by emphasizing sentiments of anti-elite resentment, the fear of alien Others, as well as socio-economic and socio-cultural anxiety (Lofflmann 2021, p. 3). Accordingly, Kinnvall and Mitzen (2018, p. 4) offer the insight that the narration of ontological insecurity is both a spatial and a psychological process in which subjectivity and mobility are demarcated and controlled through the powerful mobilization of reconstructed memories and symbols.

In this sense, studies within the field of security in IR have been particularly helpful in expanding the dialogue between ontological security and populism (and/or nationalism), specifically when analyzing Donald Trump's unique rhetoric. Homolar and Scholz (2019, p. 346), for example, argue that political agents may actively target individuals' drive towards the security-of-Being for political purposes, and that their efforts may include discursively constructing crises for electoral gain. Through their analysis of Trump's discourse on national security, the authors conclude that the former US president organized his messages along a firm rhetorical line between 'us' and 'them', driving a discursive wedge between the "real American people" and their enemies, those who did not and could not belong (2019, p. 353). Consequently, "through his imaginary 'Crisis America', Trump created a critical situation in the socio-cognitive sense—that is, 'a set of circumstances which—for whatever reason—radically disrupts accustomed routines of daily life" (2019, p. 355-356), thus working at the level of ontological security. Finally, this particular article also argues that by rhetorically emphasizing and augmenting existing grievances and a prospect of crisis and defeat, Trump *generated* ontological insecurity, manifested in a sense of loss and a desire for belonging among his audience (Steele, Homolar 2019, p. 219), a point to which I

will return in the following sections as it requires some critique before we can move on.

This line of argument is echoed by Homolar (2021, p. 4) when she argues that narratives are more than a means for communicating something, and instead may often act as a wider societal tool for sense-making and an instrument for creating self-identity as these narratives are constituted through the interaction between the text, the narrator and the audience's interpretative activity. Here, the work of Lofflman (2021) is also insightful in exploring the relationship between narratives of ontological (in)security and national identity through the analytical framework of a "populist security imaginary":

> [...] the analytical framework of a populist security imaginary reveals how the ontological reassurance of voters and their rhetorical validation has elevated the working class and non-college-educated core constituencies of Donald Trump in the American heartland to the status of sole relevant representatives of 'real America' and American democracy. The fears and anxieties prevalent among these constituencies about foreign economic competition, violent crime, mass migration, terrorism, cultural displacement, and political marginalisation, were thereby framed as the ontological insecurities of the nation itself [...]. (Lofflmann 2021, p. 545).

Thus, one conclusion we can draw from the work of these authors is that ontological security may be helpful in explaining the affective pull of populist and/or nationalist narratives, especially among the far-right of the 21st century.

If we were to analyze the present research topic in light of this theoretical approach and the authors cited above, it could be said that Trump's supporters feel their ontological security threatened by increasing immigration levels and decreasing socioeconomic status in American society, thus feeling constantly overwhelmed and petrified by the changes and challenges around them, unable to cognitively organize them and to establish a coherent, stable sense of self. Without a sense of biographical continuity to underwrite their capacity for agency due to these challenges, this group of individuals might find themselves unable to articulate themselves socially and politically, faced with the perpetual dread of "losing the self". In part, this would explain the movement of these individuals converging around a leader with populist rhetoric aimed at providing certainties and simplified solutions in the face of an uncertain and complex world, resorting to new mechanisms of routinization as *change* continues to be seen as destabilizing and threatening to their ontological security, which would in turn lead these individuals to favour securitizing practices and politics in an attempt to regain their sense of

self and of agency; in Mitzen's (2006, p. 346) own words, "in order to be themselves and to act, therefore, individuals need to bring uncertainty within tolerable limits, to feel confident that their environment will be predictably reproduced". Going even further in this exercise, if we were to agree with some of the works cited in the previous paragraphs, we might even argue that Donald Trump discursively constructed crises for electoral gain[3] or that he generated ontological insecurity, manifested in a sense of loss and a desire for belonging among his audience[4].

I present this very brief exercise of thinking about my research topic in light of a Giddens-oriented ontological security theory so that we may begin considering the questions which are answered by this approach, and those which are not. Here, issues such as the political nature of identities and of the search for ontological security itself are left untouched, and individuals are understood as prone to manipulation[5] through political discourses, which underestimates their capacity for agency and critical thinking, as well as elides their struggles and motives for seeking Trump as a source of identification and representation in politics while simultaneously greatly overestimating a single politician's ability to influence his audience through discourse alone. For these and other reasons, this approach to the concept of ontological security has been faced with critique within the discipline, leading to a debate which I seek to engage with as well as contribute to. In order to do this, in the following section of this chapter I elaborate this critique and the Lacanian approach to ontological security which will be used as the main theoretical reference for engaging with the research problem, hoping to fill the gaps left by this first attempt at thinking OST and to rethink the concept itself in a critical light.

2.2.
Introducing critique through a Lacanian approach

In order to explore a critical approach to ontological security theory as we know so far, a few shifts in focus must be made in how we approach the concept of

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[3] See Homolar and Scholz (2019, p. 346)
[4] See Steele and Homolar (2019, p. 219)
[5] Arlie Hochschild (2019) reflects upon this issue as well, questioning the common assumption that people in the far-right are being misled. In her own words, "purchased political influence is real, powerful, and at play, I think, but as an explanation for why any of us believe what we do, duping – and the presumption of gullibility – is too simple an idea." (p. 14)

the subject and of what it means to be ontologically (in)secure. Among the many scholars who have pursued similar critical approaches, I have selected four main texts which I will draw from in order to conduct this theoretical analysis and the research project in general. Thus, the objective of this second section is to review and analyze those articles, considering their contributions to the discipline and the theoretical arguments they present for rethinking the notion of a security "of Being". Here, while the final objective is to discuss the Lacanian approach to the concept, it is worth noting that not all of the four texts necessarily engage with Lacan, but were selected nevertheless due to the relevant points of critique they make, which can be useful not only for this research project but also for IR scholars in general to consider the many possible approaches which may be pursued when discussing ontological security.

The first article I analyze in this section is Chris Rossdale's "Enclosing Critique: The Limits of Ontological Security", where the author proposes "a critique of ordering political subjectivity within an ontological security/insecurity framework" (Rossdale 2015, p. 370) by arguing that the aspirations to stable narratives of selfhood which characterize the search for ontological security can often violently obscure the ways in which such narratives are implicated in power relations (p. 369). This is a very relevant point for the research I propose, and will be explored further throughout it, as it emphasizes the political aspect of ontological security; in the author's own words: "the aspiration to ontological security tends to depoliticize the subject, to close down the (political) question of being" (p. 373). In this sense, Rossdale contends that "aspirations toward (or claims of) ontological security enact significant limitations on political critique and possibility, insofar as they close down the question of the subject precisely at the point where it might more productively be kept open" (p. 369), arguing that radical political change comes precisely through deconstructing the terms of ontological security and insecurity, keeping the question of the subject and its identity open to reflexivity (p. 370) and therefore keeping the subject itself at the very heart of critical analysis. Here, one of the main concerns is recognizing that "the process of achieving (or seeking to achieve) ontological security frequently involves forms of exclusion and othering which may be both violent and counter-productive" (p. 370).

Thus, one of the main arguments of the article and one that is helpful for my research is the notion that the narratives upon which ontological security rests are

political discourses with their own political effects, and therefore must be approached critically as we distance ourselves from the notion that ontological security is in any way a neutral or universal pursuit. This line of reasoning brings us to conclude the following:

> [...] ontological security and insecurity stand not as markers of stability and instability within a timeless and non-political episteme, but as political coordinates within a given framework, wherein particular narratives are established, particular exclusions necessitated, the logic and boundaries of subjectivity drawn. This does not mean that the insecurities caused by neoliberal globalization (for instance) are not real or in serious need of redress. Rather, it places attention on the politics of ontological security-seeking strategies, both insofar as some may, in their response to insecurity, be violent and/or counter-productive, and insofar as others may signal complicity or privilege within a violent social and political order. (2015, p. 374)

Rossdale's argument here is particularly useful for thinking about feelings of belonging and being "at home" within the nation, as private and seemingly stable places are not insulated from the politics of identity and subjectivity; much to the contrary, "the pragmatism that reserves a privileged safe space often masks precisely that point from which boundaries flow" (p. 375).

Finally, one last interesting consideration on the subject of ontological security is that of its incompleteness and instability (or *lack*, in a Lacanian framework), which Rossdale explores by counterposing R. D. Laing's original psychoanalytic conception of the ontologically (in)secure subject with Judith Butler's approach. According to this analysis, Butler celebrates precisely that which Laing seems to reject: the acknowledgement of the subject's instability, incoherence, non-autonomy, and biographical incompleteness as a potent source of ethical reflection, thus suggesting that it is precisely *from* this incompleteness that the analysis should proceed (p. 376). Here, although I will not further engage with Butler's work beyond this brief revision of the literature, it is relevant to mention her argument in this matter as it is a first step at destabilizing our conceptions of the security-seeking subject by shedding light upon her instability, her lack of a stable sense of self and, finally, on the role of processes of identification in her pursuit of stability. In Rossdale's (p. 376. Emphasis in original) own words, "political critique cannot be held at a safe distance, nor grounded in a knowing and coherent subject; it must hold the subject in existential contingency, as a problem *for* politics."

Another helpful text for exploring the critique of OST is C. S. Browning and P. Joenniemi's "Ontological security, self-articulation and the securitization of identity", in which the authors also call for more open understandings of the

concepts in question. Here, it is argued that the use of ontological security in IR theory has been excessively focused on questions of identity-related stability, with change being viewed as a disturbing and anxiety-inducing process (Browning, Joenniemi 2016, p. 1). The authors make two main points which are worth exploring here, as they build on previous insights and contribute to our critical understanding of OST. The first point concerns, once again, the question of the subject: while Rossdale (2015) previously called for keeping the question of the subject open to reflexivity and emphasized her instability, incoherence and biographical incompleteness as productive sites of reflection, Browning and Joenniemi approach the subject through a complementary lens, by understanding identity and the self as separate categories, which need to be kept analytically apart. This is because they argue that established IR accounts of ontological security have tended to conflate the self with identity, and thus have reduced ontological security to a question of identity preservation[6] (2016, p. 2); instead of doing so, the authors suggest *understanding identity not as the essence of ontological security, but as crucial elements in the self's attempts at achieving it* (p. 2). As a consequence of this key affirmation, the article thus suggests that "instead of conflating self and identity, ontological security analysis would therefore benefit from analyzing how subjects become connected to particular identities and why they articulate identity claims in the way they do" (p. 2). In order to elaborate on this argument, the authors draw from a Lacanian perspective, where the idea of a unified self with a single coherent identity is understood as an imaginary construct, a fantasy the individual may engage with in order to compensate for the constitutive lack and incompleteness which lies at the very core of her identity. In other words, subjects *lack* singular identities, but that doesn't stop them from engaging in ongoing practices of identification as they attempt to understand themselves in the world and to capture a stable sense of self; this makes a Lacanian approach particularly helpful for this

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[6] Browning and Joenniemi elaborate this point further on their 2016 article, explaining that if the self and identity are understood as one thing and the terms are used interchangeably, ontological security ultimately becomes redundant as a concept as it can easily be replaced by "identity", a concept around which there is already plenty of literature. Thus, keeping the self and identity analytically apart serves many purposes here, mainly emphasizing that identity is not a given and stable thing which is inherent to the individual, and also shedding light on how processes of identification are precisely that which individuals seek in order to feel ontologically secure, and so identity is not an intrinsic quality of the self, but something it seeks and engages with, becomes attached to, etc.

research, as it emphasizes how identity is not at all inherent, but is nevertheless sought after as a means to achieve some form of ontological security.

Browning and Joenniemi's second point stems from the first: as they criticize how in existing analyses there is often a conflation of ontological security-seeking and identity preservation, they also note how this often leads to a focus on "securitization processes designed to solidify and close down an identity, with the stability brought about by securitization's 'freezing' of identities seen as enhancing ontological security" (2016, p. 2). As a consequence,

> [...] identity transformation and opening up identities for change through adaptation and engagement in reflexive processes is viewed as threatening ontological security by generating unwarranted stress, uncertainty and anxiety. This has resulted in a problematic association whereby securitization – the construction of identities on the basis of the negative difference provided by radical otherness and enmity – is seen to enhance identity-related stability and therefore also ontological security, whereas desecuritization processes promoting change are viewed as fundamentally destabilizing. (2016, p. 2)

In this sense, the article sheds a light on the common association of securitization with stability and desecuritization with change and instability, and how these associations can be problematic when we consider that the promises of stability in securitization practices are often illusory and prevent actors from being more reflexive and open towards the identities they seek. In the authors' own words, "securitizing practices have just as much potential to generate ontological anxieties as desecuritizing practices. [...] There is, hence, no a priori reason for assuming that processes of opening up are any more destabilizing than processes of closing down" (2016, p. 9), on the contrary, "[...] both potentially can be a source of ontological security or ontological insecurity. There is no a priori analytical reason to prefer one to the other" (p. 15). Taken together, these arguments lead us to conclude that the question of the subject warrants closer attention if we are to conduct research where our main focus is on discourses of (in)security and securitization of identities. What the literature I have reviewed so far seems to suggest, in other words, is that the subject must be approached critically and, in Rossdale's (2015, p. 376) words, as a problem *for* politics.

As we begin to explore the use of a Lacanian approach in critical discussions of ontological security theory, there are two final articles which I seek to analyze, as they provide a direct dialogue between these two approaches, bridging the gaps between them, and which also build on the insights of the works I have analyzed on

the previous pages of this section. First, I turn to Catarina Kinnvall's 2018 article, "Ontological Insecurities and Postcolonial Imaginaries: The Emotional Appeal of Populism", where she seeks to understand how power works *through* emotional narratives and discourses that engage with the search for ontological security or, in other words, the search for complete and stable identities. This article is of particular interest to me in this first step of the research, as Kinnvall asks the question of why and *how* certain discourses and narratives appeal and resonate with an audience, and how can discourses and narratives grip and take an emotional hold of a subject; in addition, the author also explores the question of why their attractions and bearings ultimately come together in the imagined object of the other - in this case, the immigrant and/or the refugee (Kinnvall 2018, p. 3).

In order to begin answering these questions, the article proposes a move away from Giddens's original focus on ontological security as a security "of being" (something individuals may possess) toward a focus on ontological security as a process that is constantly in progress, a temporal process of always wanting: "Such a shift in focus implies that there is no core or autonomous self to return to in order to feel ontologically secure, rather what we are witnessing is an *antifoundational notion of self*, expressed through images, fantasies, and desires"[7] (2018, p. 8, emphasis added); in other words, while most Giddens-based OST scholarship accepts the possibility of a subject achieving ontological security through various security practices, here that argument shifts as we move towards understanding the subject as fundamentally unstable, or lacking, and unable to achieve a cohesive, ontologically secure identity. This is a key point for understanding the approach being pursued here, and thus it warrants closer examination.

What gives these authors a theoretical basis for conceiving of the subject as this incomplete, hopelessly lacking individual in search of elusive identifications is their reading of Lacan's conception of subjectivity, which sees the subject as "radically social and fundamentally incomplete" (Eberle 2017, p. 5). This approach introduces the notion that subjects will identify with signifiers in their search for a social identity, as these denote particular roles, scripts and practices that define what

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[7] Here, Kinnvall makes the relevant observation that "Giddens's account of ontological security as a "security of being" relies on a particular notion of subjectivity that rests on individual reflexivity and broad assumptions that social agents are in command of some implicit knowledge and self-understanding regardless of their social and political context" (2018, p. 8)

it means within a given society for someone to be a "woman" or a "man", a "wife" or, in the case of my research, an "American" (2017, p. 5). Still in Eberle's words, "adopting them [signifiers] as our own guarantees recognition by others and provides a place for us within the social order". Interestingly though, the theoretical approach also contends that this is a fundamentally incomplete movement, as these processes of identification with signifiers also come to represent the subject's entering of the social world through language, which is always connected with a sense of "primordial loss" (Zizek 1997, p. 14):

> This is because the resources upon which we rely for our constitution as subjects—signifiers, scripts, practices—are literally foreign to us; they are properties of orders that long predate us (Epstein 2011: 336). Thousands of other people have the very same given name— which they had no say in choosing—or enact the very same social scripts and practices. With the unavoidable step into the social world, we appear to lose something that is only our own [...]. (Eberle 2017, p. 5)

In other words, what this theory contends is that as subjects become social actors, they constitute themselves around this primordial loss, this lack of an essence or a foundation that might anchor their identities beyond the fundamentally unstable and foreign dynamics of signifiers (2017, p. 5) and the roles and practices attached to them in each given social context.

Finally, there is still something to be said about the consequences of subjects being aware of this lack: this awareness generates anxiety, and is typically experienced in situations in which a social order is shaken by a crisis (2017, p. 5). Thus, we are brought once again to the topic of subjects being overcome with anxiety when faced with instability, and the accompanying movement of them seeking to feel (ontologically) secure. In the previous, Giddens-based approach, anxiety was also a core element for understanding the search for ontological security, and in that approach subjects often relied on routines which worked to pacify their cognitive environments by providing them with certainty and predictability in an uncertain, unpredictable world. Here, as we move towards a Lacan-oriented approach, the subject's anxiety (when faced with ontological lack) is understood differently, but not entirely so: whereas Giddens-based analyses emphasize the role of routinization as way of coping, a Lacanian approach contends that the inescapable ontological lack may be temporarily covered by fantasies, which function as protecting mechanisms. This leads us to one last key concept for

engaging with a Lacanian approach to ontological security, which is that of fantasy. In Eberle's terms,

> In our fantasising, the ontological lack within the subject is transformed into an empirical lack, a lack of particular 'objects', whose recapturing promises the restoration of an imaginary full identity. Thereby, the basic ontological desire for a whole and complete identity (Stavrakakis 1999: 42) is translated into particular desires for certain 'objects', which can take the form of consumer goods, sexual partners or political goals (e.g. expressed by concepts like freedom, security or justice). (2017, p. 5-6)

This process set into motion by out fantasizing is of particular importance here: as these empirical objects of desire cannot provide subjects with the whole, stable identities which they lack, this desire is bound to remain unfulfilled, as the subject is bound to remain frustrated, which in turn will eventually lead them to fantasize novel ways to explain why the object of desire remains unattainable. In simpler terms, "the relationship between desire and lack is thus a dialectical one: lack stimulates desire, which only leads us to rediscover the lack and to desire new objects that promise to fill it" (Stavrakakis 2008, p. 1042; Muller 2013, p.280, cited in Eberle 2017, p. 6). Thus, fantasies promise explanations and resolutions, and it is through these scenarios that subjects attempt to make sense of their ontological incompleteness (2017, p. 6).

Accordingly, I come back to Kinnvall (2018, p. 10) as she provides us with the insight that reading Lacan from an ontological security perspective thus puts "becoming" over "being" by recognizing the impossibility of any stable subjectivity even when this is the desired outcome. Hence, it becomes more productive to understand ontological security not as an uncomplicated, depoliticized goal which can be achieved, but as a powerful story which can never be fulfilled, but which continues to play a crucial part in the narratives that people and groups construct to make sense of themselves nonetheless (2018, p. 10). For Kinnvall, the narratives developed by far-right parties and politicians over the last few years are a good example of how fantasies play important roles in politics, furthering the argument that understanding the play of concepts such as desire, subjectivity, lack and fantasizing may help researchers make sense of political movements and the discourses they rely on in order to reach their audiences. This is illustrated by how recent far-right movements, especially those employing a populist discursive strategy, are commonly known for conjuring up images of nation-states that were

once free from immigration and untouched by global forces, a nostalgic sort of fantasy which "entails a *fantasmatic* narrative of past greatness that is transmitted to new generations in search of answers to their own anxieties, while it simultaneously points to those who have taken this "greatness" away (the establishment/immigrants)" (2018, p. 11). The role of memory and nostalgia in these narratives is especially interesting, as I aim to show in the following chapters of the research, but for now it suffices to say that the longing for past greatness and stolen enjoyment which we often see in populist and/or nationalist discourse often refers to the past not in a "real" sense, but to fantasies of an imagined or desired past, which often represents something secure and homogenous that can be performed in the present (2018, p. 13).

Hence, Kinnvall's research returns to her primary questions of why and *how* certain discourses and narratives in politics appeal and resonate with an audience, bringing us to the conclusion that,

> From a Lacanian perspective these narratives become successful through their ability to create a homogenous fantasy space in response to a situation of failed identity by invoking a desire to restore lost pride and, in the case of some men, lost masculinity—to deal with the disappointments, anger, frustration, and anxiety (ontological insecurities) [...] (Kinnvall 2018, p. 15)

What this theoretical perspective implies is that these feelings are not an issue confined to psychology studies only, as they may play various important roles in politics; concepts like ontological insecurity and anxiety should also be understood as "political and social practices embodying and enabling a specific form of security" (2018, p. 15), one which can be better understood by an approach which emphasizes the dimension of ontological security "as becoming" (as opposed to Giddens's "security of Being"), putting "emphasis on the desires involved in any attempts to heal a fractured self through the imaginaries of a complete selfhood" (2018, p. 15). Thinking about ontological security in these terms also represents another call for openness, as it requires leaving the question of the subject and its identity open to uncertainty and ambivalence as we attempt to acknowledge the fantasies and desires underpinning these processes of identification.

Finally, I arrive at the last article to be analyzed in this section, Eberle's "Narrative, desire, ontological security, transgression: fantasy as a factor in international politics". This work is also of particular importance here and builds upon our previous insights as it employs a Lacanian approach in order to make the

case for "taking fantasy seriously in IR". Here, the author makes some especially useful arguments which I seek to draw from in my research as he contends that a fantasy-informed framework may allow us to trace the ways in which desire is channelled into discourse, which provides researchers with tools to investigate how ontological security is sought through narratives (Eberle 2017, p. 1). Here, we begin with the core assumption that the subject is always incomplete and that ontological security is an ultimately unattainable goal, which allows the analysis to provide a more critical and *politicized* view of (in)security: instead of promoting ontological security as an ideal, understanding it in these terms means resisting the closure brought by the concept, and calls for a closer examination of the exclusionary and oppressive effects that one group's ontological security may have on others (2017, p. 2), allowing us to capture not only the subjective search for ontological security, but also the power dynamics behind it (2017, p. 10).

In so doing, Eberle's research draws from Glynos' (2008) argument that fantasies have three core features: (I) they have the form of a narrative, (II) they offer foundational guarantees to those who fantasize, and (III) they carry a transgressive element which works to arouse desire. In order to structure and make clear the theoretical insights which I will be drawing from when further discussing fantasy, these three core points warrant a moment of closer examination before we move on. Discussing the first of the three features above, Eberle clarifies how, conceptually, narratives and fantasies hold similar structures with significant overlap: fantasy can be understood as

> [...] a story that confronts subjects with an ideal (covering over the lack in reaching a whole identity) and an obstacle to it (separation from the 'object' of our desire). Fantasy is thus 'a narrative structure involving some reference to an idealised scenario promising an imaginary fullness or wholeness (the beatific side of fantasy) and, by implication, a disaster scenario (the horrific side of fantasy)' (Glynos 2008, p. 283).

Meanwhile, narratives can be understood as entailing "an initial situation or order, a problem that disrupts that order, and a resolution that reestablishes order […] Narrative therefore is distinguished by a particular structure through which sense is achieved" (Miskimmon et al. 2013, p. 5). Thus, Eberle (2017, p. 6) argues that there is significant overlap between narrative and fantasy, as both present notions of a problem or obstacle and the future promise of reestablishing order or a sense of wholeness. I clarify all of this in order to make clear the author's

conceptualisation of *fantasy as narrative*, which aims to open a trading zone between these two theoretical frameworks. In essence, the relevance of this discussion here is that it sheds light on the interactions and overlaps between two concepts which I aim to use in my own discussion over the next chapters; for now, it suffices to elucidate the following:

> Fantasies are those types of narratives, which shelter us from anxiety by denying any ambiguity or complexity of the given situation. They feed our 'hunger for certainty' by offering us the false safety of a clear-cut choice between two—and only two—options, which are constructed as excessively beatific and horrific respectively. (Eberle 2017, p. 7)

The second core feature of fantasy to be briefly discussed here is related to the first: as it elides ambiguity and doubt in order to reduce the anxiety caused by them, fantasies tend to provide precisely that security "of Being" or a sense of biographical continuity and wholeness which is so often discussed in the literature on ontological security theory based on Giddens. In other words, while the content of fantasies may vary greatly, all of them perform the same funcion of imposing closure on the ambiguities and complexities of the social world (2017, p. 10) in an attempt to make that world more bearable. In this sense, the added value of Eberle's fantasy approach is that it "[...] rejects the (illusory) comfort zone of a stable identity and invites the perpetual exercise of doubt as an ethical imperative" (2017, p. 11) by understanding that while we cannot escape those fantasies, it might be possible to find different ways of relating to them by acknowledging fantasies *as fantasies*, thus revealing the very contingency which fantasies seek to omit (Eberle 2017, p. 10) as we aim to comprehend their structure and inner workings.

The third and last core feature which warrants close attention when discussing the concept is that of transgression, especially when dealing with the political uses of fantasy narratives: while within the confines of official language it may be difficult to arouse desire in audiences, fantasies offer the possibility of articulating things which are considered irrational, inappropriate, indecent or politically incorrect, and which consequently are typically unacknowledged or peripheral in official language (2017, p. 11); thus, fantasy may work as an "obscene supplement" (Zizek, 1997) to that official form of discourse in which social rules typically prohibit politicians from doing anything more than occasional flirting with such transgressive language in the form of hints, code words or silences (2017, p. 12). This characteristic of fantasy narratives becomes especially interesting within

my research, as Donald Trump's discursive strategy often blurred those lines between a polite official language and a transgressive, borderline inappropriate one, shocking and arousing desire in similar measure. Hence, I conclude this brief revision of the text by bringing forth Eberle's (2017, p. 12) final definition of fantasy as "a particular type of narrative which provides subjects with ontological security by offering 'objects' which arouse and reproduce desire more successfully than other narratives due to their reliance on the transgressive aspect", which summarizes and interrelates the main points of his research and offers a useful theoretical and methodological tool for mine.

In the second section of this chapter I have sought to review the critical literature on ontological security theory through a lacanian approach in order to elaborate and clarify the main theoretical references my research will engage with and utilize. Summarizing the contributions of the articles above, there are 4 core elements of my chosen theoretical approach that I wish to reiterate in a more condensed form before we move on: the first element is that it is my understanding that a move away from Giddens's (and other Giddens-based works such as the ones I referenced in section I) is relevant for this research, which motivates me to move toward a Lacan-inspired approach that allows the project to analyze the search for ontological security critically and in a more politicized manner, informed by a different conception of subjectivity. The second element, stemming from the first, is precisely this alternate understanding of subjectivity which leaves the question of the subject open to reflexivity and emphasizes incompleteness, instability and lack while also keeping the self and identity analytically apart instead of conflating the two. While Giddens-informed authors like Mitzen argued that "armed with ontological security, the individual will know how to act and therefore how to be herself." (Mitzen 2006, p. 345), what a Lacanian approach suggests is that there is no core autonomous self to which the subject can return when she is finally ontologically secure. On the contrary, she is fundamentally lacking and incomplete, and the very idea that a form of security "of Being" can be fully achieved is itself a fantasy; in Eberle's terms (2017, p. 6), fantasies promise explanations and resolutions, and it is through these scenarios that subjects attempt to make sense of their ontological incompleteness. Mitzen's brief phrase is also a good example of how OST often conflates the concepts of self and identity, thus offering a worldview in which identities seem much more closed and definitive, something an individual

may achieve fully by becoming ontologically secure. On this topic, I recall Browning and Joenniemi's argument that

> In contrast, we argued the self should be viewed as analytically distinct from the identities it reaches for in order to secure a sense of being in the world. 'Thrown into the world' subjects necessarily engage in processes of identification, but since the world constantly evolves, dislocatory events will challenge existing identifications, potentially generating anxiety. (Browning, Joenniemi 2016, p. 14)

This brings us to one key argument which has permeated each of the articles I have analyzed throughout this section, which is that of *openness*. All of the authors I have engaged with here have made some sort of call for openness in their critical discussions of ontological security, starting with Rossdale's (2015, p. 370) argument that radical political change comes precisely through deconstructing the terms of ontological security and insecurity, keeping the question of the subject and its identity open to reflexivity and therefore keeping the subject itself at the very heart of critical analysis. Similarly, Browning and Joenniemi (2016, p. 2) have critized how OST literature commonly focuses on "securitization processes designed to solidify and close down an identity, with the stability brought about by securitization's 'freezing' of identities seen as enhancing ontological security", and Kinnvall and Eberle likewise have advocated in favor of leaving the question of the subject and its identity open to uncertainty and ambivalence as we acknowledge subjects as fundamentally lacking and, in accordance with Lacan's approach to subjectivity, move toward understanding emotions as social, cultural and political constructs that bind subjects to identities, collectives and particular narratives (Kinnvall 2018, p. 9). With that in mind, one core feature of a Lacan-oriented approach to ontological security is keeping subjectivity open to reflexivity and, in Kinnvall's (2018, p. 8) words, accepting the fragile nature of a constant becoming, learning to live with a constitutive lack.

The third core element of this approach is that it aims to *politicize* the search for ontological security. In other words, this means a shift from understanding ontological security as an ideal (universal, unproblematic) to a critical reflection on how the search for ontological security may be implicated in power dynamics, as well as reinforce them. In Eberle's terms,

> This presents a fundamental paradox where our apparently benign and decent desires, including that for a stable identity, may contribute to the perpetuation of the oppression and exclusion of others. [...] In other words, the quest for ontological security has political consequences, which is why it should always be thought together with questions of power and exclusion. (2017, p. 10)

Naturally, this element stems from the second: as seek to keep the question of the subject open to reflexivity as we come to understand identities as unstable and as something not innate to subjects, it makes sense to argue that, in those approaches which consider ontological security as an achievable goal, the aspiration to ontological security tends to depoliticize the subject and to close down the (political) question of being (Rossdale 2015, p. 373). In order to avoid that depolitization, it's helpful to recognize that "the process of achieving (or seeking to achieve) ontological security frequently involves forms of exclusion and othering which may be both violent and counter-productive" (2015 p. 370).

Finally, I conclude with the fourth core element, which is the emphasis on the added value of a fantasy approach. While approaches like Kinnvall[8] and Mitzen's (2017, p. 2) have argued that "actors are viewed as ontologically secure when they feel they have a sense of biographical continuity and wholeness that is supported and recognised in and through their relations with others", a fantasy-informed approach recognizes this ideal state of ontological security and a stable sense of identity as precisely that: an ideal, albeit one with political consequences. In Eberle's words,

> [...] while ontological security envisages a secure and stable subject (if only as an ideal), the Lacanian subject is irreducibly unstable and incomplete. Consequently, the Lacanian aim is not to find a (necessarily temporary and illusory) harmonious state or a secure self, but rather to learn to accept and live with the constitutive lack. (2017, p. 8-9)

All of these elements are naturally interrelated, but I recall and enumerate them in an attempt to make them more clear and distinguishable in their attributes and consequences. With that in mind, I move to the third and final section of this chapter, which elucidates the objectives and methodological considerations for the research.

2.3.
Studying emotions through discourse in IR

The objectives of the research I propose are threefold. My first objective stems from the argument that in order to understand the border wall's protagonism

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[8] While Kinnvall's 2018 article is inspired by Lacan and used as a reference for section II, her previous works such as the 2017 article written in collaboration with Mitzen are not so, and rely much more on Giddens's notion of a "security of Being" which the articles in section II criticize.

and resilience in Trump's discursive apparatus, we must first comprehend the context to which the border wall responds to. This means focusing on exploring the argument that the ontological insecurities mobilized by Trump's discourse were pre-existing, and not created entirely between the former president and his intended audience. Finally, this also implies studying the phenomenon of the global rise of the far-right as a response to a crisis within/of neoliberalism, albeit emphasizing the specificities of the American context which I seek to shed light on, where "[...] liberal political agendas, neoliberal economic agendas, and cosmopolitan cultural agendas generated a growing experience of abandonment, betrayal, and ultimately rage on the part of the new dispossessed, the white working-class and middle-class populations [...] (Brown 2019, p. 3)", who Trump often addressed as "forgotten men and women of our country" (Trump, 2016a).

Secondly, it is my aim to analyze how ontological (in)security is framed discursively through the border wall, as I contend that whereas we may verify that the wall is brimming with practical inconsistencies and construction challenges, the reason for the wall's resilience in Trump's speeches and political agenda is due to the hypothesis that it plays a more complex, overarching role within political discourse and public sentiment by appealing to collective American identities. Thus, my second objective is to analyze these framings of (in)security by asking what it is that the wall "does" within Trump's discourses, and what are its promises of stability within the aforementioned context of resentment and fear of the outsider, where political wishes for potency, protection, containment, and even innocence may be projected onto walls (Brown 2010, p. 114). The American context pre-Trump, then, is a condition of possibility for the wall, but the discursive border wall also holds relevant specificities which may tell us more about the national ideals it represents and the intersubjective desires it reflects.

My last objective for the research is to contribute to the ongoing debates among ontological security theory and Lacan in IR by further exploring the ways in which the Lacanian approaches to ontological security may help researchers to think critically about the concept. This can be done by rethinking the Giddens-oriented conception of ontological security as a universal ideal, as we pay closer attention to the exclusionary and oppressive effects that the ontological security of certain groups may have on others (Erbele 2017, p. 3), taking into account how intertwined some identities (such as that of the "real American" or the Trump

supporter) are with relations of power and domination, such as whiteness, class, masculinity, Christianity and heterosexuality. Hence, this approach allows us to see ontological security and insecurity not as timeless and non-political markers of stability and instability, but as political coordinates within a framework where particular narratives are established, particular exclusions necessitated and the logic and boundaries of subjectivity drawn (Rossdale 2015, p. 374).

Finally, I now move on to the methodological considerations of the research at hand. In terms of methodology, my proposed approach may be divided in two stages according to the first and second objectives I have described above: first, in seeking to outline the context of Trump's election and, consequently, the resonance of the border wall within his public narrative of an America under existential threat due to open borders and an "invasion" of immigrants, I propose a third chapter where I review some of the literature within and outside IR concerning Donald Trump's ascent in the US, as well as the far-right's ascent in general for further insights, and the affective context of resentment and aversion towards immigrants among his constituency, in order to explore the socioeconomic conditions which Trump both reflects and responds to. This step is particularly relevant for an analysis focused on ontological security, as I do not seek to argue that Trump supporters' were entirely vulnerable to manipulative political discourses, or that Trump simply created ontological insecurity through his framing of open borders as an existential threat to the US, as some of the literature often suggests[9]. Rather, it is my understanding that Trump's narrative both constitutes and responds to feelings of insecurity and resentment towards immigrants and a perception of lost supremacy in economic, social and racial terms. In this sense, it may be helpful to understand the (in)security imaginary narrated by Trump not as the origin of ontological insecurity, but as reflective and constitutive of it, which in turn justifies the need to question the conditions which make such a discursive strategy possible and, ultimately, so profoundly resonant.

Finally, considering the objectives proposed above, it is possible to conclude that the project aims to offer ways to think or make sense of how emotions work within discourses of ontological (in)security. To this end, I intend to base the investigation of former president Donald J. Trump's public speeches, before and

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[9] See, for example, Homolar & Scholz (2019) or Lofflman (2021).

after his election, on the literature on discourse analysis based on emotions and affects in IR, as I contend that "textual and verbal utterances provide us with a promising way to make emotions empirically accessible to researchers" (Koschut et al 2017, p. 1). Thus, while the first stage of the research consists of contextualizing the discursive border wall by analyzing the conditions that allowed it to resonate and to endure within Trump's political agenda and public discourse, the second stage, which corresponds to the fourth chapter, seeks to shed light on the discourse itself and how it frames public (in)security through the border wall as an element of containment and State/nation congruency-making, reflective of fantasies and ideals surrounding the nation and a specific security imaginary. Consequently, I aim to do this by analyzing some of Trump's speeches encompassing both his electoral campaign and moments of his presidency where the fantasy-infused figure of the wall was particularly emphasized in his speech or particularly striking for his administration's political agenda.

Accordingly, Koschut et al (2017) propose three criteria to think about the methodological dimensions of the study of emotions through discourse: the first criterion is that of theory, which means specifying what is understood by affects and emotions, while the second criterion concerns the expression of these emotions or how they are communicated in discourse, enabling stages of interpretation (through the mapping of emotional terms, metaphors, comparisons, analogies and connotations, for example, as well as their meaning within the narrative) and contextualization of them, looking at the ways in which they are directed and resonate with certain audiences (Hansen 2006, p. 30, cited in Koschut et al, 2017) through their contents, mechanisms and performativity when we look at themes such as aversion to the "other" and love for the nation, for example[10]. Finally, the third methodological criterion concerns the effects emotional utterances may have, as "researchers need to answer the question of what the emotion potential of texts essentially helps us to explain or understand" (Koschut et al 2017, p. 6). This point does not, however, imply a direct relationship of cause and effect, but concerns the ways in which:

> Emotional expressions arguably represent an important link between the discursively constructed identities of subjects, on the one hand, and the power exerted through discourses, on the other hand. Beyond this very general assumption, however, researchers need to show what the emotions built into

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[10] See Ahmed, 2014

discourse actually do in terms of revelation of speaker motives and attitudes, recognition of audience reception and responses, construction of power relationships and hierarchies, or stimulation of certain performances and behavior. (Koschut et al 2017, p. 6)

In this sense, the analysis of the public discourses serves the purpose of demonstrating how discursive framings of (in)security may involve an array of emotional elements, highlighting the ways in which emotions work through discourse and, more specifically, through the former president's public discourses concerning the border wall as a prerequisite for "making America great again" and supposedly preventing existential threats to the nation.

Lastly, another useful methodological tool I aim to employ here is that of Eberle's Lacan-oriented "fantasy framework", elucidated in the previous section. The article is especially helpful in the terms it establishes for identifying fantasy in discourse according to:

[...] (1) the particular structure of an ideal, an obstacle and excessively beatific/horrific futures, as well as by (2) the presence of a certain 'object' whose recapturing (portrayed as removing the obstacle and/or reaching the ideal) promises the foundational guarantee of a 'whole' identity. Additionally, the 'obscene' aspect is often translated into (3) the narrative trope of 'excessive enjoyment' or 'theft of enjoyment', in which someone is painted as enjoying themselves beyond measure and at our expense [...] (2017, p. 13)

In conclusion, my proposed approach focuses the study of emotions through discourse in IR and builds on a Lacanian reading of ontological security theory, emphasizing the role of language, narratives and discourse in political claims and political processes of identification. With these tools, it is the goal of the research to critically interrogate how ontological (in)security is framed through the narrative surrounding the Southern border wall, questioning the defining role often played by subjectivity within politics.

3.
Contextualizing the narrative

3.1.
On Neoliberalism and crisis

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this second stage of the research following the theoretical and methodological considerations consists of contextualizing the narrative surrounding the border wall by analyzing the conditions that allowed it to resonate and to endure within Trump's political agenda and public discourse. In order to do this, I propose this first section as a way of taking a chronological step back so that we may consider the context in which Trump's constituency finds itself prior to the 2016 US elections. This step is required in order to avoid the common argument that Trump supporters were prone to manipulation through political discourses, which underestimates their capacity for agency and critical thinking, as well as elides their struggles and motives for seeking Trump as a source of identification and representation in politics while simultaneously greatly overestimating a politician's ability to influence his audience through discourse alone. In order to avoid this view, I begin this chapter with an exploration of the socioeconomic backdrop which surrounds Trump's election more broadly (before we go back to questioning his discursive approach of the Southern border wall), considering the effects of a complex economic crisis and reactions to changing politics of recognition within the larger context of a crisis of neoliberalism, as I will explain. More specifically, the aim of this section is to first explore neoliberalism as an economic doctrine and as a political rationality, and then to begin approaching its many contradictions and sites of instability which may account for citizen-subjects' feelings of ontological insecurity and frustration with politics, and therefore render them more open to seemingly radical alternatives and divisive political narratives. This is not to say that neoliberalism by itself caused the far-right's insurgency at all, but I draw from Wendy Brown's argument that "nothing is untouched by a neoliberal mode of reason and valuation and that neoliberalism's attack on democracy has everywhere inflected law, political culture, and political subjectivity" (2019, p. 8). Hence, let us begin by taking a further step back and clarifying what is *meant* by neoliberalism as, in Brown's

(2003, p. 39) words, "[...] given the contemporary phenomena of both neoconservatism and neoliberalism, and the association of both with the political right, ours is a time of often bewildering political nomenclature". What, then, is neoliberalism and how does this seemingly economic term help us comprehend the appeal of Trump's divisive narratives surrounding Southern border politics in the US?

Neoliberalism as a primarily economic doctrine is typically equated with a call for a radically free market, which means maximized competition and free trade achieved through economic deregulation, elimination of tariffs, and a range of monetary and social policies favorable to business (Brown 2003, p. 38), with the ultimate goal of maintaining a good business or investment climate for capitalistic endeavours. Neoliberal state policy generally operates based on the core assumption that privatization and deregulation, combined with competition, will eliminate bureaucratic red tape, increase efficiency and productivity, improve quality, and reduce costs, both directly to the consumer through cheaper commodities and services and indirectly through the reduction of taxes (Harvey 2005, p. 65). In this sense, it is interesting to note that the neoliberal state diverges radically from that classic *laissez-faire* tenet of liberalism in which state intervention should be kept to a minimum in order to allow the market to naturally regulate itself: "neoliberalism does not conceive of either the market itself or rational economic behavior as purely natural. Both are constructed—organized by law and political institutions, and requiring political intervention and orchestration" (Brown 2003, p. 41).

For this very reason, these state policies are frequently inscribed with what Harvey terms neoliberalism's systemic biases:

> The biases arise in particular out of the treatment of labour and the environment as mere commodities. In the event of a conflict, the typical neoliberal state will tend to side with a good business climate as opposed to either the collective rights (and quality of life) of labour or the capacity of the environment to regenerate itself. The second arena of bias arises because, in the event of a conflict, neoliberal states typically favour the integrity of the financial system and the solvency of financial institutions over the well-being of the population or environmental quality. (Harvey 2005, p. 69-70)

Hence, the adoption of neoliberal policy, although it may vary significantly depending on locality, seems to mean that while personal and individual freedom in the marketplace is guaranteed, each individual is held responsible and accountable for their own actions and well-being, with individual success or failure

being often interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings rather than being attributed to any systemic property (Harvey 2005, p. 65 - 66), thus carrying a logic which all too often depoliticizes impoverishment and class exclusions under capitalism. This is important here because I aim to draw from Brown's (2003, p. 38) core argument that neoliberalism is not just a bundle of economic policies with inadvertent political and social consequences but that, on the contrary, there is a specific *political rationality* to neoliberalism which both organizes these policies and reaches well beyond the market. In other words, while neoliberal rationality foregrounds the market, it is important to note that it is not only or primarily focused on the economy at all: it involves extending market values and a market rationality to all institutions and dimensions of human life (Brown 2003, p. 39 - 40). In practice, this means a reduction of the social safety net to the bare minimum in favour of a system that emphasizes personal responsibility, as Harvey elucidates:

> As the state withdraws from welfare provision and diminishes its role in arenas such as health care, public education, and social services, which were once so fundamental to embedded liberalism, it leaves larger and larger segments of the population exposed to impoverishment. [...] Personal failure is generally attributed to personal failings, and the victim is all too often blamed. (Harvey 2005, p. 76)

Hence, a closer look at neoliberal political rationality may be useful before we can move on to analyzing its effects upon subjects; in order to do this, I draw from Brown's (2003) synthesis of that rationality in four central elements. The first of these is that it submits all aspects of contemporary existence and human life, including the political sphere, to an economic rationality (2003, p. 40), which

> [...] entails submitting every action and policy to considerations of profitability, equally important is the production of all human and institutional action as rational entrepreneurial action, conducted according to a calculus of utility, benefit, or satisfaction against a microeconomic grid of scarcity, supply and demand, and moral value-neutrality (Brown 2003, p. 40)

This leads to the development of a wide range of practices aiming to disseminate and institutionalize this logic, as previously mentioned. The second element thus concerns precisely those institutional practices which must be constantly reproduced: in contrast with classical "*laissez-faire*" liberalism, neoliberalism does not rely or conceive of the market and rational economic behavior as natural and capable of sustaining themselves, on the contrary, it constantly seeks to construct and maintain them through political intervention:

> Far from flourishing when left alone, the economy must be directed, buttressed, and protected by law and policy as well as by the dissemination of social norms designed to facilitate competition, free trade, and rational economic action on the part of every member and institution of society (Brown 2003, p. 41)

Through these mechanisms, the market becomes an organizing principle for both state and society, and state legitimacy comes to rely progressively on its ability to guarantee economic growth.

Finally, Brown's third and fourth elements pivot around citizen-subjects more specifically, as economic rationality under a neoliberal order continues to expand toward all aspects of social life and pervade individual conduct. Thus, element number three concerns the ways in which neoliberalism constructs individuals as entrepreneurial actors in all spheres of contemporary life, taking them as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity to provide for their own needs and work towards their own ambitions (Brown 2003, p. 42). As the state withdraws from welfare provision and diminishes its role in arenas such as health care, public education, and social services, individuals must bear full responsibility for the consequences of their actions and for the many possible constraints of their socioeconomic context as well, such as lack of skill, education or unemployment. As subjects are progressively left to their own devices and each individual is held responsible and accountable for their own actions and well-being, failure to navigate these circumstances is often interpreted in terms of personal failure instead of being attributed to a systemic property (Harvey 2005, p. 65 - 66), a logic which works to depoliticize the impoverishment suffered by those most affected by the changing neoliberal order. In this sense, it can be argued that even the body politic ceases to be a *body* as sociopolitical life becomes progressively oriented towards individuality, with citizens figuring more as a group of individual entrepreneurs and consumers than as a recognizable public (Brown 2003, p. 42 - 43, emphasis added), leading to a new mode of governmentality centered around free, rational and wholly responsible subjects who are led by a state which isn't held accountable or responsible for them (2003, p. 43). Brown expands upon this particular aspect in another of her works, arguing that neoliberal rationality can be characterized as productive and world-making as it economizes every sphere and human endeavor and replaces a model of society based on the justice-producing social contract with society conceived and organized as markets and with states oriented by market requirements (Brown 2018, p. 61 -

62). In this sense, Brown contends that market liberty is expanded towards all aspects of social life as if it were an ontological and normative principle, under the assumption that all society is like a market and best organized as a market and all liberty (be it personal, political, social or civic) has a market form; in other words, this logic assumes that the same kind of (market) freedom ought to prevail everywhere, thus building an economic theory into a cosmological one (Brown 2018, p. 64).

Stemming from this point, the fourth and final element concerns the way in which this infusion of state and subject with economic rationality works to radically transform social policy under a neoliberal order, which now must meet profitability tests, incite and unblock competition and produce rational subjects (Brown 2003, p. 44) oriented toward an entrepreneurial logic. In this sense, we are led to conclude that the neoliberal governmentalization of the state, of the social and of the subject are intimately connected, and thus the drive towards market freedoms and the commodification of everything, along with the destruction of forms of social solidarity and the very idea of society, can easily produce social incoherence and anomie (Harvey 2005, p. 80), along with mass disengagement from politics. Moreover, perhaps the most relevant feature of the neoliberal state for the purposes of this research is not its economic structure, but its *instability* as a political form. With that in mind, my aim for the rest of this first section is to further explore that instability, how it seems to function and the socioeconomic conditions it allows for subjects, particularly US citizens prior to the 2016 elections.

I have begun this chapter with a discussion of neoliberalism's main features, instabilities and consequences as a way to set the socioeconomic background for better understanding Trumpism; this choice stems from the assumption that Trump, as a political phenomenon, cannot be understood apart from the context to which he responds, and I contend that this context is that of a multifaceted crisis consisting of many levels: economic, ecological, social and, most importantly for the present stage of this research, political. So, how can we make sense of the political level of this crisis and how does it relate to the instabilities of the neoliberal order I have discussed in the previous paragraphs? In order to answer these questions, I draw mainly from Fraser (2019) in her understanding of our political crisis as a crisis of

hegemony[11] largely characterized by a dramatic weakening, if not a simple breakdown, of the authority of the established political classes, along with a search for new ideologies, organizations, and leadership (2019, p. 6) which, under Trump, took the shape of a novel form of hyperreactionary neoliberalism (2019, p. 15). However, in order to make use of this terminology, a few clarifications must be made about Fraser's work and the assumptions it carries and develops, as I explain in the following paragraphs.

Nancy Fraser's 2019 book is useful in elucidating how hegemonies are built around two essential normative components, which are termed as the "distribution" and "recognition" aspects of a hegemonic bloc:

> The distributive aspect conveys a view about how society should allocate divisible goods, especially income. This aspect speaks to the economic structure of society and, however obliquely, to its class divisions. The recognition aspect expresses a sense of how society should apportion respect and esteem, the moral marks of membership and belonging. Focused on the status order of society, this aspect refers to its status hierarchies. (2019, p. 7 - 8)

In this sense, it is argued that, prior to Trump, American politics was ruled by a *progressive-neoliberal bloc* composed of an interesting combination of an essentially neoliberal distributive aspect on one side and a progressive politics of recognition on the other. The distributive politics of this bloc is most commonly associated with the Reagan administration (January 20, 1981 – January 20, 1989) and was strongly consolidated during Clinton's (January 20, 1993 – January 20, 2001), and it was intent on releasing market forces from state regulation, liberalizing and globalizing capitalist economy and implementing a process of financialization which, in Fraser's terms, meant "dismantling barriers to, and protections from, the free movement of capital; deregulating banking and ballooning predatory debt; deindustrializing; weakening unions; and spreading precarious, badly paid work" (2019, p. 8). These policies have increased the concentration of wealth for the 1 percent wealthiest while simultaneously lowering working-class and middle-class living standards across the US, with the proliferation of precarious service-sector lower-wage jobs, increasing consumer

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[11] Here, the term "hegemony" is understood in Antonio Gramsci's conception, following Nancy Fraser's (2019) use of it. In her work, she clarifies hegemony as "the process by which a ruling class makes its domination appear natural by installing the presuppositions of its own worldview as the common sense of society as a whole" (p. 7)

debt and lengthening working hours along with diminished social support (2019, p. 7 - 8).

In order to function, Fraser contends that this neoliberal project had to be repackaged as progressive and given broader appeal through the adoption of a *progressive politics of recognition*:

> Drawing on progressive forces from civil society, they diffused a recognition ethos that was superficially egalitarian and emancipatory. At the core of this ethos were ideals of "diversity," women's "empowerment," LGBTQ+ rights, post-racialism, multiculturalism, and environmentalism. These ideals were interpreted in a specific, limited way [...]. (2019, p. 9)

This is a fundamentally meritocratic order which did not mean to abolish social hierarchies but to "diversify" them (p. 9), claiming to "empower" and "represent" social minorities such as women, immigrants, people of color and LGBT+ individuals, although rarely unsettling the systemic conditions which rendered them disempowered and under-represented in the first place. However riddled with inconsistencies, this politics of recognition was effective to a certain extent as it gathered the support of some major currents of progressive social movements for the progressive-neoliberal cause, giving it a novel semblance:

> Now associated with the forward-thinking and the liberatory, the cosmopolitan and the morally advanced, the dismal suddenly became thrilling. Thanks in large part to this ethos, policies that fostered a vast upward redistribution of wealth and income acquired the patina of legitimacy. (2019, p. 10)

However, the American electorate at this point still fundamentally lacked options when it came to the distribution aspect of the neoliberal order, and while progressive neoliberalism did find a competitor in the reactionary neoliberalism mainly housed in the Republican Party since the 90's, this rival held a very similar neoliberal politics of distribution, only differing in the sense that it carried a reactionary politics of recognition which leaned towards ethnonational, anti-immigrant and pro-Christian sentiments. In other words, even reactionary neoliberalism did not differ too much from its progressive neoliberal rival as both were, fundamentally, neoliberal:

> Both blocs supported "free trade," low corporate taxes, curtailed labor rights, the primacy of shareholder interest, winner-takes-all compensation, and financial deregulation. Both blocs elected leaders who sought "grand bargains" aimed at cutting entitlements. *The key differences between them turned on recognition, not distribution.* (2019, p. 11. Emphasis added)

Thus, progressive neoliberalism essentially succeeded as a hegemonic bloc, but what interests my research the most are the effects of that hegemony upon US citizens, especially those shares of the population who would come to vote for Trump over a decade later. Perhaps the most important point here for now, however, is that what Fraser so eloquently describes is a highly restrictive political universe built around the opposition between two versions of neoliberalism, distinguished chiefly on the axis of recognition (2019, p. 11 - 12), which fundamentally leaves open a gap which Trump would eventually come to fill.

This is because neoliberal policy left in its wake the impoverishment of many, and particularly those communities which relied on manufacturing in the so-called Rust Belt[12] and in the Deep South; throughout two decades of progressive-neoliberal hegemony, those communities were left mostly unsupported by the government and experienced a sharp economic decline as they faced deindustrialization:

> To the neoliberals, their economies were uncompetitive and should be subject to "market correction." To the progressives, their cultures were stuck in the past, tied to obsolete, parochial values that would soon disappear in a new cosmopolitan dispensation. On neither ground— distribution or recognition—could progressive neoliberals find any reason to defend Rust Belt and Southern manufacturing communities. (Fraser 2019, p. 11)

This limited political nexus thus leaves this large segment of the US electorate devoid of political representation and support, as none of the major blocs seem to advocate for them; that is, until the 2015 - 2016 election season. Here, Donald Trump's campaign adopted a form of hyperreactionary politics of recognition (Fraser, 2019), relying discursively on longstanding exclusionary tropes within the American political universe to gather a "working-class" base that was mostly white, straight, male, and Christian, based in mining, drilling, construction, and heavy industry (2019, p. 13 - 14), while simultaneously advocating for a politics of distribution which denounced a "rigged economy" and proposed nationalist and protectionist solutions for the struggles, ontological insecurities and overall social vulnerability of those "forgotten men and women".

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[12] The term "Rust Belt" refers to a geographic region in the US broadly ranging from New York and through the Midwest, composed by states such as Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. The area is home to thousands of blue-collar jobs in manufacturing, such as steel, automotive and weapons production and is now known for facing a drastic economic decline due to deindustrialization. Other states in the US which are not part of the Rust Belt have also faced sharp declines in manufacturing, mostly in the Deep South. For more, see Chen, 2022.

Further on, it may be relevant to discuss how Trump's attempt at a novel hegemonic bloc was fundamentally unstable and fragile, as well as unable to fulfill most of its promises (including those of interdicted borders), but for now it suffices to say that at least throughout the campaigning period his rhetoric was effective in capturing the feelings of social vulnerability of these so-called "losers" and their anger at the dysfunctionality of the political system and ultimately mobilizing those against social groups (immigrants, minorities) at the very bottom of society for the daily social anxieties they felt (Boffo et al. 2019, p. 262).

The process I have outlined in this section goes by many names throughout the literature on neoliberalism and the ascent of the far-right in the 21st century: Fraser (2019) terms it "hyperreactionary neoliberalism", Boffo et al (2019) understand it as a form of "authoritarian neoliberalism" and even Harvey's (2005) earlier work points to the emergence of a "neoconservative answer" to the many social and economic struggles stemming from the neoliberal state as an inherently contradictory and unstable political form. Here, I have chosen to draw mostly from Fraser's analysis but, however we chose to term this process, the main conclusion that can be drawn from this body of literature is that an original political phenomenon has emerged from "the ruins of neoliberalism"[13]. In the United States, Donald Trump and his supporters were the most evident reflection of that phenomenon, and a key element of the dynamics between them was precisely Trump's rhetoric and the narratives he constructed about America's state of "crisis" and his proposed solutions for it which, more often that not, pivoted around divisive worldviews of "us" versus "them", "inside(rs)" versus "outside(rs)". In other words, the political phenomenon of which Trump is a reflection is strongly grounded on the far-right's capturing the vulnerability of these "forgotten men and women", caused by the erosion of a sense of collectivity and potential agency based on shared material circumstances, and a degradation of working-class culture and organized political capacities (Boffo et al. 2019, p. 262). With that in mind, in the following section I aim to take a closer look into that audience which received Trump's speeches so well and was often left feeling elated and enraptured by them.

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[13] This is a reference to Brown's 2019 book title "In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: the rise of antidemocratic politics in the West", which I will engage with in the following section.

3.2.
"The forgotten men and women" as conditions of possibility for Trumpism

To continue with my exploration of Trump's constituency, I would like to focus on two particular works surrounding his (and the far-right's more generally) ascent in the US and the pathways they lay out for researchers to consider the living experiences and intense feelings of displacement, resentment and even hatred which were expressed by those people and reflected in Trump's own speeches. The first is Arlie Hochschild's 2016 book "Strangers In Their Own Land" in which the author develops her research on the members of the Tea Party, a far-right group based in the Southern state of Louisiana, an area struck by environmental issues and economic decline, hoping to understand the right's view on those issues and the logic behind their continuous demand for a smaller government and policies which often hurt their own interests such as less environmental regulation. Walking into the heart of what she calls "the Great Paradox", Hochschild conducts a fascinating work of research by interviewing subjects and trying to make sense of the contradictions within and all around them; in her own words: "I ask myself, again, how people in a poor state with the worst health in the nation can look askance at a federal government that provides 44% of its state budget, and how such a polluted state can take a dim view of government regulation of polluters." (Hochschild 2016, p. 56). I selected this work as a useful reference for this stage of my research because it offered an opportunity to access, as much as possible, these people's views from up close, but also because Hochschild's perspective seemed to humanize them in a way most literature didn't, and thus provided a work of research that was attentive and tasked with understanding the ways in which those people made sense of the world around them and the insecurities they felt as "strangers in their own land".

In her study, *feeling* is a central element for understanding the right, and although she doesn't employ the Lacan-inspired approach I have discussed in the previous chapter, I believe that a Lacanian reading of Hochschild's work is not only possible here, but also very helpful in extracting some relevant conclusions which will serve the research further on, when I move to the last stage of discourse analysis in the next chapter. With that in mind, one of her core arguments in this work is that "the right seeks release from liberal notions of what they *should feel* – happy for

the gay newlywed, sad at the plight of the Syrian refugee, unresentful about paying taxes" (2016, p. 15). She identifies a rift between the values of this Southern community that is mostly white, working-class and religious, and those of the so-called liberals, a category reminiscent of what Fraser (2019) identified as the progressive-neoliberal bloc and its supporters. In trying to make sense of what the 2015 - 2016 domestic social and political climate *felt* like for this Southern community, Hochschild conveys:

> Liberals are saying your ideas are outmoded, sexist, homophobic, but it's not clear what *their* values are. And given a climate of secular tolerance, you remember better times, when as a child you said morning prayer and the flag salute – before "under God" had to come out – in public school. (2016, p. 137. Emphasis in original)

This is a particularly interesting passage, especially when considering that most of the author's exercise of trying to understand how the right-leaning subjects of that community *felt* was later read back to the interviewees themselves, and most agreed that it painted an accurate picture of how they saw their predicament at that time. The mention of religion along with national pride doesn't go unnoticed, and neither does the nostalgic sense of a yearning for better, simpler times which always lie in the past, and are often seen through the prism of fantasy, as I will elaborate.

Throughout numerous interviews with the people of Louisiana, Hochschild's work paints a picture of what I interpret here as a profound sense of material and ontological insecurity (the two being intimately related), leading to (often angry) resentment and the search for new forms of identification. In this sense, liberal values are felt as something unclear and foreign, presented in condescending and accusing language. As one interviewee states about a particular liberal news reporter:

> She'll be kneeling by a sick African child, or a bedraggled Indian, looking into the camera, and her voice is saying, 'Something's wrong. We have to fix it.' Or worse, we caused the problem. She's using that child to say, 'Do something, America.' But that child's problems aren't our fault. (Cited in Hochschild 2016, p. 128)

In an earlier chapter, another interviewee from the "Republican Women of Southwest Louisiana" group says: "Oh, liberals think that Bible-believing Southerners are ignorant, backward, rednecks, losers. They think we're racist, sexist, homophobic, and maybe fat." (Cited in Hochschild 2016, p. 23), and others state similar perceptions. Here, it is worth noting that although this specific Louisiana community cannot possibly speak for the entirety of the far-right and

Trump supporters in the United States in all their diversity of backgrounds and sentiments, it is interesting to note what these statements convey and how Trump's own discourse would come to echo many of them in the years to come, especially when it came to drawing from the symbolic element of the nation as a site of identification and meaning amidst the chaos of unstable/conflicting narratives of what it meant to be American, as well as references to a profound resentment towards a progressive politics of recognition (in Fraser's terms). In this sense, the nation, religion and community become particularly attractive signifiers upon which subjects may fantasize the achievement of ontological security, of a stable and continuous autobiographical narrative.

Seeking to make sense of precisely that insecure autobiographical narrative, Hochschild and the subjects of her research thus paint a metaphorical picture of a long line of Americans, waiting patiently for their turn to reach the "American dream" after years of hard work and patriotism, only to find themselves having to grapple with the notion that black people, women, immigrants, refugees and environmental concerns seem to be cutting in line ahead of them (2016, p. 136 - 139), benefiting from federal government programs such as affirmative action or, in the case of immigrants, weak border policies that allow them to "sneak in" and work for less, lowering white American pay (p. 138). Here, the federal government itself becomes a strong site of resentment and opposition, seen as complicit in the struggles of those bible-believing Southerners by prioritizing the so-called "line cutters". What they seem to convey, in other words, is that the national government is at odds with their national identity. A good example of this deadlock is stated by Hochschild in relation to former President Barack Obama, who was still in office when her research was conducted: not the most popular candidate among the Deep Southern[14] states (which would later vote for Donald Trump unanimously[15]), Hochschild observes that Obama came to be viewed by many as a "line cutter" too, and as someone through whom they could not convey their pride in being American. Hence, in the author's (2016, p. 140) own words, "If you can no longer feel pride

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[14] The term "Deep South" refers to the southernmost group of states in the South of the United States, namely South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana.
[15] For more data on the 2016 US election results, see <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/president>

in the United States through its president, you'll have to feel American in some new way—by banding with others who feel as strangers in their own land."

Within this complex context, much of the literature in IR surrounding Donald Trump's ascent seems to agree that he provided a catalyst for a wide array of social issues and frustrations which had been in development for a few decades, as I have outlined in the previous pages. Among the central elements which contributed to his significant rise and eventual election, Hochschild (2016) emphasizes three: first is the unstable economic ground upon which his constituency found itself for the last few decades of what I have discussed in the previous section as the dominance of a progressive-neoliberal hegemonic bloc. The second element is that of a perception of cultural marginalization: "their views about abortion, gay marriage, gender roles, race, guns, and the Confederate flag all were help up to ridicule in the national media as backward" (2016, p. 221), which illustrates the pervasive feeling among Trump supporters of being part of a threatened identity with typically conservative (or Neoconservative, in Harvey's terms) characteristics like moral values centered on cultural nationalism, moral righteousness, Christianity (of a certain evangelical sort), family values, and right-to-life issues, and on antagonism to social movements such as feminism, gay rights, affirmative action, and environmentalism (Harvey 2005, p. 84). The third and final contextual element, intimately related to the second, is the feeling of being part of a demographic decline, a besieged minority; in the words of one of Hochschild's interviewees, "there are fewer and fewer white Christians like us" (Cited in 2016, p. 221).

There is, in other words, a context of profound ontological insecurity here; not in a non-political and individualistic sense, but precisely the opposite: this is an ontological insecurity which exists within a given social and political framework, and which crosses and overlaps with existing social and political coordinates such as race, class, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and nationality, for example. Hence, it is a form of insecurity which may call for certain exclusions which are also necessarily political. In drawing attention to the political nature and implications of ontological insecurity, it is important to note that this does not mean that the insecurities caused by decades of neoliberalism are not real or in dire need of redress, as the previous pages have shown, but rather that closer attention must be paid to the politics of ontological security-seeking strategies, as some of them

may be violent and/or counter-productive, and may signal complicity or privilege within a violent social and political order (Rossdale 2015, p. 374). This observation is especially relevant for researchers in light of the white supremacist and extreme-right[16] groups which have repeatedly endorsed Trump and his policies, particularly his calls for interdicting the Southern border permanently. Thus, if our goal is to critically analyze Trump's narratives and his constituency, this is an instance in which it may not be enough to simply identify that ontological insecurity exists without considering how power dynamics work *through* those emotional narratives and discourses which engage so strongly with the search for ontological security, something that Hochschild's work is not necessarily focused on doing.

Hence, my objective for the remaining pages of this section is to engage with another work concerning the far-right and Trump's ascent, seeking to introduce a critical and more clearly politicized approach to that ontological insecurity I have outlined and to complement the insights provided by Hochschild through the work of Wendy Brown in her 2019 book, "In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: the rise of antidemocratic politics in the West". I have selected this as my second main reference for discussing Trump supporters as a condition of possibility for the wide resonance of Trump's discourse because it includes very interesting considerations on affects within the far-right in the US which can be helpful for understanding the sense of collectivity and cohesion inspired by leaders like Trump and, most importantly for my purposes, the notion of "otherness" and enmity upon which that cohesion often rests. In that sense, it is my understanding that Brown's work may complement and enrich our understanding of the subject as both authors provide different objectives and approaches, which does not make them mutually exclusive. With that in mind, a good place to start looking at Brown's contribution may be her own observation of a recurring debate within the left surrounding the far-right, about "whether right-wing populism today is born of class or other kinds of resentment, *whether it is the rage of the economically left behinds or the rage of dethroned white masculinism*" (Brown 2019, p. 177, emphasis added): in light of that debate, her argument is that the neoliberalization of everyday

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[16] The most well-known examples of this phenomenon were the Proud Boys, a far-right group involved in the storming of the US Capitol on the 6th of January of 2021, and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), both of which Trump often refused to explicitly condemn.

life strongly amalgamates the two. Having discussed the former, I now move on to focus on the latter.

Brown's argument here begins at a place similar to the one we have seen in the previous pages, agreeing that liberal political agendas, neoliberal economic agendas and cosmopolitan cultural agendas generated a growing experience of abandonment, betrayal and ultimately rage on the part of those white working-class and middle-class populations (2019, p. 3), but she emphasizes that what seems to aggravate those grievances for this particular demographic is the perception of a "lost pride of place in America or the West" (ibid), often paired with enduring racism which rose as "new immigrants transformed suburban neighborhoods and policies of "equity and inclusion" appeared to the uneducated white male to favor everyone over him" (ibid). Hence, the author contends that this novel configuration of the far-right stems from something akin to what Hochschild calls a mourning for a lost way of life (2016, p. 225), and which Brown refers to as a "wound of dethroned privilege that whiteness, Christianity and maleness granted to those who were otherwise nothing and no one" (2019, p. 5), a dethronement often blamed on "job-stealing immigrants and minorities, along with other imagined undeserving beneficiaries of liberal inclusion" (ibid), particularly through populist rhetoric such as Trump's. Brown describes this process of othering and blaming of minorities elsewhere, arguing that

> The hyperbolized figure of the immigrant is especially potent, becoming a site where the terrorist fuses with the job-stealer, criminal, and neighborhood malingerer, and where, conversely, false promises of restored economic potency mix with false promises of restored racial and gender supremacy. (Brown 2018, p. 69)

Furthermore, Brown also initially recalls the nostalgic aspect of that far-right populist narrative, particularly its yearning for the restoration of the characteristics of a past that is fantasized in typical Lacanian fashion, a mythical time when

> [...] families were happy, whole, and heterosexual, when women and racial minorities knew their place, when neighborhoods were orderly, secure, and homogenous, when heroin was a black problem and terrorism was not inside the homeland, and when a hegemonic Christianity and whiteness constituted the manifest identity, power and pride of the nation and the West. (Brown 2019, p. 5)

Trump is especially illustrative of this notion, proposing to make America *great again* for his supporters, promising to recuperate what was lost: "sadly, the

American dream is dead. [...] But if I get elected president, I will bring it back bigger and better and stronger than ever before, and we will make America great again." (Trump, 2015). In this sense, Eberle's (2017) Lacan-inspired fantasy framework for analyzing discourse is especially helpful for making sense of this idealized past which Trump's narrative presents us with. Following the three points outlined by the author, we have (1) the structure of an ideal, an obstacle and excessively beatific/horrific futures, as well as (2) the presence of a certain "object" whose recapturing (portrayed as removing the obstacle and/or reaching the ideal) promises the foundational guarantee of a "whole" and secure identity. And additionally, there is an "obscene" aspect which is often translated into (3) the narrative trope of excessive enjoyment or theft of enjoyment, in which someone is painted as enjoying themselves beyond measure and at "our" expense (2017, p. 13). Hence, the fantasy is structured by the ideal of the "great America" recaptured, which promises the ontological security of restored supremacy for the dethroned after it had been taken unduly by "job-stealing immigrants and minorities, along with other imagined undeserving beneficiaries of liberal inclusion" (Brown 2019, p. 5), the final obstacle towards complete enjoyment, a stable identity. Looking through this prism, we are pointed to a possible pathway for explaining how Trump's Southern border wall acquired such wide resonance through his public discourse, as a physical but also very much symbolic structure for the definitive interdiction of American borders, a (supposedly) simple and objective way to shut out the outside from the nation within. In this sense, we are reminded of Inayatullah and Blaney's 2004 work, in which they contend that "the bounded political community constructs (and is constructed by) the other. Beyond its boundaries, the other lurks as a perpetual threat in the form of other states, antagonistic groups, imported goods, and alien ideas." (2004, p. 6).

Figure 2 - A section of border fencing, constructed by homeland security, on private property in Naco, Arizona. Source: The New York Times[17]

Another core argument within Brown's 2019 work is that in order to understand the current situation, it is necessary to interrogate neoliberal political culture and subject production. For her, this means

> [...] appreciating the rise of white nationalist authoritarian political formations as animated by the mobilized anger of the economically abandoned and racially resentful, but as contoured by more than three decades of neoliberal assaults on democracy, equality, and society. White working-class and middle-class economic suffering and racialized rancor, far from distinct from these assaults, acquire voice and shape from them. (2019, p. 8)

According to her, these assaults fuel a Christian nationalist ambition to (re)conquer the West, and also intermix with an intensifying nihilism which manifests as broken faith in truth, facticity, and foundational values (ibid); this is a particularly fascinating argument of hers, and warrants closer examination before we can move on. In order to elaborate on the notion of nihilism within the far-right, Brown draws from Carl Schmitt's argument that with modernity, human power loses its human face and takes novel forms that diffuse and multiply its effects, meaning that power comes to be set against everyone, even those who hold it,

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[17] Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/31/us/politics/border-wall-types.html>. Last accessed on May 31st, 2023.

becoming an intensifying force without respect for its creators and exceeding the will to power and any institution or individual (Brown 2019, p. 162). To this, she adds other issues which came after Schmitt's time and which, in her view, intensify the problem he identified: the undirected powers of capital, along with relentless financialization and digitalization. For Brown, this association of elements comes to generate a "paradox of humanly created powers that diminish the human and especially its capacity to shape its world [...] – this breeds new quantities and subjects of *ressentiment*, and a nihilism beyond Nietzsche's vivid dreams" (2019, p. 163). As nothing is left untouched by the economizing side of neoliberalism, Brown's work contends that a new formation of power is produced, one that not only trivializes but openly defiles and defies moral values (ibid).

This leads us to another aspect of Brown's contribution that I wish to bring into my research: the intersection of nihilism and resentment with neoliberalism. Here, she establishes a dialogue with Hochschild's work, making the argument that looking at this politics of indifference through the prism of a nihilistic disintegration of a social compact and through lost faith in capacities to control human powers and arrangements takes us beyond Hochschild's inclination to root this sentiment in her subjects' experiences of social and political neglect (Brown 2019, p. 169 - 170). For Brown, this explains the far-right's attraction to leaders calling for the aggressive expulsion of outsiders, and why such policies are celebrated with "gleeful, vengeful, rallying cries". Furthermore, the author argues that the aggression and viciousness emanating from right-wing discourse is fed by neoliberal valorization of libertarian freedom and deprecation of the political and the social, by wounded, angry white maleness, and by nihilism's radical depression of conscience and social obligation. Together, these generate what Brown calls a "disinhibited freedom, one symptomizing ethical destitution even as it often dresses in religious righteousness or conservative melancholy for a phantasmatic past" (2019, p. 170 - 171). In this sense, Brown expands on Hochschild's contribution by veering towards an approach more attentive to intersubjectivity, considering the role of affects such as resentment and nostalgia for political processes of identification, and how these may be contoured by nihilism and a loss of privilege.

In this second section, it has been my aim to elaborate on the context (social, economic, political) out of which Trumpism evolves, and which allows Trump's often very emotional discourse (particularly on the Southern border wall and,

consequently, on immigration) to resonate so widely and to evoke equally (if not more) emotional responses from his intended audience. Additionally, I sought to illustrate how the search for ontological security and stable identities is much more complex and essentially political than what my initial Giddens-based OST approach in the previous chapter would allow, and to begin exploring the role played by intersubjectivity within the context I seek to analyze. With that in mind, there is still much to be said about precisely those emotional discourses and the bond they created between Trump and his intended audience, which is the topic that I now turn to in my third and final section of this chapter.

3.3.
Making sense of a "politics of resentment" and the resonance of discourse

If many of his supporters seemed to be mourning a lost way of life and struggling with a wide array of insecurities pertaining to social vulnerability and the perception of threatened identities, Trump's approach to his audience was equally infused with emotion: focused more on eliciting and praising emotional responses from his supporters than on giving detailed policy prescriptions, his speeches evoked dominance, bravado, national pride and personal uplift and hopefulness (Hochschild 2016, p. 225), along with a collective sense of finally being joined with others like yourself, no longer a besieged minority or a "silent majority"[18], but a loud one, joyous and elated. The following extract from Hochschild's book reflects the phenomenon well, featuring her own observations while attending a Trump rally in Louisiana during the course of her research:

> Trump lingers to sign posters, hats, shirts, and boots. A small distressed boy with Trump-like moussed blond hair is handed to the candidate by proud parents to be photographed. A short woman in a red hat struggles frantically to see over the heads of taller fans, finally standing on a chair, her arms on the shoulders of a stranger who steadies her. I see a middle-aged man, arms uplifted, as in the rapture, saying to those around him and no one in particular, "To be in the *presence* of *such a man!*"
> The next day, Donald Trump wins 41 percent of Louisiana's Republican primary vote, beating his evangelical rival, Ted Cruz. (2016, p. 224. Emphasis in original)

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[18] The phrase "silent majority" was often used by Trump supporters to describe themselves during his campaign, and the former president himself often used the term to address them publicly.

What is most interesting to me here is the sense of collectivity and unity that seems to pervade the public *through* the discourse or, in other words, what the discourse *does*.

In order to delve into this, I recur to the Lacanian concept of *jouissance*/enjoyment and its relation to fantasy, drawing mostly from Derek Hook's (2017) psychoanalytic exploration of how forms of libidinal enjoyment play an indispensible part in the domain of the political as, in the author's own words, "we fail to grasp something essential about the interplay of power and subjectivity if we do not attend to the libidinal rewards and investments that bind subjects to particular ideologies" (2017, p. 2). As I begin to trace this line of argument which I aim to juxtapose with my object of research, a fundamental first step is to clarify what *is* this enjoyment, and how it can be employed analytically in a way that avoids depoliticization and the risk of transforming social and political issues into psychological ones. Hook's work is a helpful guide for this preliminary task, providing us with a Lacanian conceptualization of *jouissance* as a form of enjoyment that is intermingled with suffering; it is understood as "less an affect than *an excess of affect*, a mode of intensity produced by pursuing drive impulses" (2017, p. 8, emphasis in original) and generally subliminal, in the sense that one is not fully conscious of it (p. 3-4). For the purposes of my research, two core elements of *jouissance* stand out: first, its transgressive quality and second, its relation to otherness and to the concept of fantasy, as I explain in the following pages.

Drawing from Lacan's (1992, p. 177) suggestion that "without a transgression there is no access to *jouissance*", Hook (2017, p. 5) elucidates that this form of enjoyment, far from being merely individual, is always linked to a social context of existing moral and legal laws, its illicit/transgressive nature always contingent precisely on the limits it transgresses. Hence, this enjoyment "is always 'social' in a default sense – always, indeed, 'discursive' – inasmuch as it oversteps the bounds that define what is acceptable in a given discourse or social sphere" (ibid). With that notion of a necessarily social *jouissance* in mind, Hook's work presents us with a methodological guideline for locating this *excess of affect* within a social or discursive field: "[we might locate jouissance] on the underside of a set of symbolic ideals. Enjoyment, we might say, is always to be found in close proximity to the symbolic laws and ideals that define a society" (2017, p. 6). When we consider the image described by Hochschild of the man attending a Trump rally

in Louisiana with "arms uplifted, as in the rapture, saying to those around him and no one in particular, *"To be in the presence of such a man!""* (2016, p. 224, emphasis in original), for example, or the many interviewees who felt resentful and angry at progressive liberals and their "feeling rules" which demanded they felt sorry for refugees and immigrants, the Lacanian argument on the social and transgressive nature of enjoyment quickly comes to mind, as Trump's discourse seems to resonate by achieving *jouissance* by continuously exploring that element of transgression, overstepping the bounds that define what is acceptable within progressive liberal thought and breaking the "feeling rules" that they feel the liberals have set for American society. In fact, it is in this very sense that Brown affirms:

> [F]or constituencies anxious about their ebbing place and privilege, nothing is more reassuring than Trump's crass sexual entitlement to all women, the crude contractualism of his marriage, and for that matter, all of his crude conduct and flaunting of law and the protocols of the presidency… none of which a female or nonwhite politician could emit and survive for a nanosecond— which is precisely the point. Trump's boorishness and rule breaking, far from being at odds with traditional values, consecrates the white male supremacism at their heart, whose waning is a crucial spur to his support (Brown 2019, p. 173 - 174)

In other words, while Trump's crass and often outright disrespectful rhetoric may often seem at odds with the conservative values he claims to uphold, an approach attentive to the mechanisms of affectivity sheds light on the notion that transgression is necessary for certain modes of enjoyment. Moreover, this line of argument is also helpful in explaining how many Americans, many of whom were women or who claimed not to hate immigrants or not to be racist came to support Trump so ardently, in spite of his prejudiced remarks towards minorities, as Hook elucidates that "the libidinal component of ideology—that which is most enjoyed in an ideology—occurs in spite of what the subject claims to know or believe, in ways that contradict what he or she would ordinarily assert as a rational or morally defensive position" (2017, p. 1).

Figure 3 - A demonstrator in California shows support for Mr Trump's proposed border wall.
Source: Sky News[19]

The second core element of enjoyment I aim to discuss is its relation to otherness and, consequently, to fantasy. This is because *jouissance* "[...] entails an elementary narrative component. The most rudimentary experience of jouissance implies already the role—the *fantasy*—of a culprit, someone who enjoys more than I, or who is poised to steal the little enjoyment that I do possess" (Hook 2017, p. 9, emphasis added). This narrative component of enjoyment which implies the existence of an "other" who is to blame for the unfulfilled promise of *jouissance* is very pertinent for discussing populist and/or nationalist discourse such as Trump's, as his rhetoric seems to echo much of what Lacanian theory proposes:

> The psychoanalytic postulate, as we have seen, is that the enjoyment of others is often troubling to me. This is particularly the case when the *jouissance* in question is different to my own; when it occurs outside of acceptable bounds (the suspicion thus that others are enjoying illicitly, enjoying what is not rightfully theirs to enjoy); or when—as is so often the case—this enjoyment is seen as happening at my own expense. (Hook 2017, p. 11)

This passage is very elucidative in terms of Trump's discourse about borders, as I aim to show in the following chapter, and also in light of Hochschild's work where she often describes a sense among her Southern interviewees of a rift

between deserving taxpayers and undeserving taxpayers, as people recounted a fear of having their jobs, their tax money and their honor given away to non-working, non-deserving people who they believed to be cheating the federal government (Hochschild 2016, p. 60-61). Hook argues that these attributions of illicit "other" enjoyment are especially exaggerated when they occur across lines of social/cultural division, and they play an important role in constructing lines of otherness within a collective (2017, p. 11) as "these modes of enjoyment bring with them a tacit set of rules concerning who can enjoy, how they might do so, under what circumstances and, as importantly, who *may not*" (2017, p. 12, emphasis in original). In this sense, there is much researchers may learn from considering where a given society draws its lines of otherness, both symbolically and physically, as *jouissance*, far from floating free of symbolic norms, in fact reiterates, extends, and drives social structure (2017, p. 13).

Finally, we return to the concept of *fantasy* as that which structures these social modes of *jouissance*. Hook gives us the example of racist or xenophobic *jouissance* as a phenomenon which is never simply an individual psychological reaction, but instead one conditioned by precise historical and symbolic conditions, and which may play a part in consolidating a community and its identity (2017, p. 10). Hence, it follows that as groups share fantasies about themselves, they have shared modes of jouissance; this act of fantasizing can extend to many things, such as a community's conception of their innate values and virtues or the greatest threats they face, from a conception of who are the "real Americans" to the threat of the racial other who comes to breach the border and benefit from federal government programs, enjoying themselves illicitly and taking what is not theirs. In this sense, Hook argues that there would be no cohesive viable group sensibility without such shared fantasies and modes of *jouissance*, but only a disaggregated set of individuals, meaning that fantasies are constitutive of a collectivity, as are the modes of *jouissance* those fantasies frame and organize (2017, p. 10).

In this chapter, I conducted an exploration of the economic, political and social contexts which Trumpism both evolved from and essentially reflected, seeking to make the argument that the wide resonance of Donald Trump's discourse (in general, but on the Southern border more specifically) was neither the product of exceptionally manipulative rhetoric on his part which created ontological insecurity among his audience, and nor was it a product of a gullible mass of people

who couldn't think critically and therefore voted for him out of anger and resentment. On the contrary, as is often the case, the context of Trump's ascent is much more complex, and strongly marked by affectivity. In this sense, I drew from Nancy Fraser's work to make the argument that the last few decades of progressive neoliberalism served to leave a considerable part of his constituency impoverished and with a distinct feeling of being left behind, both in terms of recognition and distribution, as those Rust Belt and Southern manufacturing communities were deemed obsolete both economically and culturally (Fraser 2019, p. 11). Employing the works of Hochschild (2016) and Brown (2019), I proposed to explore that constituency more closely, both in terms of their perceptions of themselves and the United States and in terms of how those feelings of anger and resentment often translated into xenophobic, racist or otherwise prejudiced beliefs toward those "others" who they felt were being unduly benefitted by the federal government and "cutting in line" ahead of them. Ontological insecurity then, far from being a neutral concept and a universal goal, presents new intricacies as it merges with the chants of white supremacist groups and acquires a new voice through Trump's discourse of an America in crisis and under existential threat due to open borders.

Finally, my last step in this chapter has been to try and present a Lacanian approach for making sense of that narrative and the sense of collectivity (and otherness) inspired by Trumpism, thinking about the ways in which people *enjoy* the discourse even as it contradicts their previous beliefs, their ontological insecurities temporarily suspended by the collective act of fantasizing and consolidating a sense of community in a way akin to Harvey's argument that nationalist sentiment can be seen as an antidote to the dissolution of former bonds of social solidarity under the impact of neoliberalism (Harvey 2005, p. 85). On that account, it is interesting to note how whereas in my introductory chapter I have argued that Trump's wall "fails" in its objective of interdicting the Southern border, the present chapter's analysis seems to reveal that the wall (perhaps not the physical and as yet unfinished wall, but the discursive one) actually succeeds in other ways, by capturing so much of what affects Trump's constituency and intended audience, allowing them to *enjoy* and to find a sense of collectivity and *pride* in being American, joined with others who also felt as "strangers in their own land". With that in mind, I now turn to the third and last stage of my research, which concerns the discourses regarding the Southern border wall more specifically, seeking to

employ the theoretical and methodological approaches I have introduced and elaborated so far in order to look more closely at what that discourse does and *how* does it do so.

4.
Considering the discursive framings of the border wall

In the previous chapter, one of my main lines of argument was that the progressive-neoliberal politics of distribution and recognition played an important part in shaping the context which would eventually allow Trumpism to happen as a response to it. Hence, I engaged with Hochschild's and Brown's works to probe further on the topic of those "forgotten men and women" (Trump, 2016a) and "bible-believing Southerners" (Hochschild, 2016), that large majority among Trump supporters who sustained the "wound of dethroned privilege that whiteness, Christianity and maleness granted to those who were otherwise nothing and no one" (Brown 2019, p. 5), developing my argument that the lived experiences of those people under decades of progressive-neoliberal policy were of primary importance for understanding the wide resonance of Trump's discourse surrounding the Southern border wall and the security imaginary it evokes of fortified borders and cast out otherness, constructing fantasy narratives of stolen "other" enjoyment placed in harsh contrast with descriptions of struggling "forgotten men and women" left behind by the hegemony of a progressive neoliberal bloc. In essence, the third chapter developed around this argument surrounding the conditions of possibility for Trumpism and their many implications. Now, in order to begin the third, I wish to briefly discuss another.

Trump's restrictive Southern border policy constituted one of four pillars within his proposal to reform the country's immigration system, which he considered "broken" and "outdated" (Trump, 2018a). In that way, the former president's administration sought to "reframe the political debate over immigration reform from what they view as a misplaced emphasis on the well-being of the nation's estimated 11 million illegal immigrants to the negative impacts their presence can have on local communities" (Nakamura, 2017). The point here is that Trump gathered a large following through his use of nationalist and populist rhetoric, particularly on the issue of immigration and restrictive border politics, but it is interesting to note that this strategy is only effective because restrictive approaches to immigration and border surveillance have been relevant topics in US politics for a very long time, which is to say that Trump did not create that kind of policy, but rather drew from its existence and wide resonance in order to construct

his approach on the subject. Restrictive border enforcement policy as a recurring topic in US history, in other words, also stands out as one condition of possibility for the resonance and wide acceptance of Trump's narrative surrounding the border wall.

This process is well documented in US history, and Doty (2014) provides us with an illustrative synthesis on those policies throughout the 1990's, starting with the bombing of New York's World Trade Center in 1993 by suspected unauthorized immigrants, which contributed to the framing of undocumented immigration as a national security issue and to the propagation of notions of the US being "invaded" by "illegal aliens" (2014, p. 204 - 205). At the time, Operation Hold the Line was launched by the border patrol chief in El Paso, Texas, an operation which is described by Doty (2014, p. 205) as a highly visible show of force and which marked a shift in border enforcement strategy in the region: whereas the previous strategy consisted of pursuing and apprehending migrants *after* the border had been crossed, a new border strategy was developed in 1994 which was based on "prevention through deterrence", which meant attempting to deter migrants from ever crossing the border at all. Other operations followed from this, such as Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego, California and Operation Safeguard in Nogales, Arizona, along with legislation such as the "Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act" in 1996 and the progressive authorisation of funds for the construction of additional layers of border fencing. According to Doty (2014, p. 206), "the overall effect of these border enforcement policies has been to push migrants to increasingly remote and dangerous crossing routes and to engage the services of human smugglers or *coyotes*", meaning that whereas border apprehensions did fall dramatically at the time, a "funnel effect" was created in which the remaining migrants continuously sought out dangerous and often deadly ways of crossing US borders.

Figure 4 - "Day of the Dead, 2 November 2004, Anapra, Mexico. Mass celebrated at the border in memory of undocumented migrants who died while crossing the US–Mexico border." Source: AP/PA Photos

With that in mind, we arrive at the physical and symbolic border wall as a particularly complex object and historical site of social tension, one that is saturated with affect (Ahmed, 2014). In this third and final step of the research, my goal is to look more closely at how the border wall is approached by Trump in his public speeches, seeking to shed light on the (often emotional) discourse itself and on how it frames public (in)security *through* the border wall as an element of containment and State/nation congruency-making (see Mandelbaum, 2020), reflective of fantasies and ideals surrounding the nation and a specific security imaginary in which the outside and otherness constitute existential threats to the American people. In order to do this, I refer back to the methodological considerations of the second chapter, in which I discussed some of the literature on studying emotions through discourse in IR, particularly the considerations of Koschut et al (2017) on the subject and the three criteria the authors propose for the task of interrogating the emotional dimension of political discourse.

To briefly recapitulate the topic before moving on, Koschut et al (2017) propose three criteria to think about the methodological dimensions of the study of emotions through discourse: the first criterion is that of theory, which means specifying what is understood by affects and emotions, a theme I have elaborated

on throughout the second chapter of the research in which I introduced the Lacan-inspired framework I aim to employ. The second criterion concerns the expression of these emotions or how they are communicated in discourse, enabling stages of interpretation (through the *mapping of emotional terms, metaphors, comparisons, analogies and connotations, for example, as well as their meaning within the narrative*) and contextualization of them, looking at the ways in which they are directed and resonate with certain audiences (Hansen 2006, p. 30, cited in Koschut et al, 2017) through their contents, mechanisms and performativity when we look at themes such as aversion to the "other" and love for the nation, for example. Finally, the third methodological criterion concerns the effects emotional utterances may have, as "researchers need to answer the question of what the emotion potential of texts essentially helps us to explain or understand" (Koschut et al 2017, p. 6). Here, the authors emphasize that this point does not imply a direct relationship of cause and effect, but concerns the ways in which:

> Emotional expressions arguably represent an important link between the discursively constructed identities of subjects, on the one hand, and the power exerted through discourses, on the other hand. Beyond this very general assumption, however, researchers need to show what the emotions built into discourse actually do in terms of revelation of speaker motives and attitudes, recognition of audience reception and responses, construction of power relationships and hierarchies, or stimulation of certain performances and behavior. (Koschut et al 2017, p. 6)

In this sense, the analysis of the public discourses serves the purpose of demonstrating how discursive framings of (in)security may involve an array of emotional elements, highlighting the ways in which emotions work through Trump's discourses concerning the border wall as a prerequisite for "making America great again" and supposedly preventing existential threats to the nation. Lastly, and in order to make sense of those emotions and how they might function, I also engage with Eberle's (2017) proposed "fantasy framework" as a guide to analyze how the discourse is structured in many ways as a "fantasy narrative", and how that might relate to feelings of aversion to otherness through a narrative of stolen enjoyment, transgressive discourse and the recapturing of a lost object.

Taking that into account, the following sections of this final chapter are dedicated to analyzing Trump's rhetorical approach to the border wall more specifically and attempting to make sense of the ways in which ontological insecurity is framed within those speeches. For that purpose, I have chosen to divide

this chapter in two parts which correspond to two different moments within what I call the "Trump era", spanning from the beginning of the electoral campaign in 2015 to the last year of the 45th US President's administration in 2020. Divided and analyzed chronologically, these two moments are the electoral campaign (2015 - 2016) and the administration (2017 - 2020), and the selection of the public discourses was made based on the emphasis given to the Southern border wall in each of them. Because of that, the analysis will not place the same emphasis on all years of the Trump era, and naturally not all public speeches mentioning the border wall could be analyzed for lack of time and space, but the overall aim is to shed light on the discursive framings of ontological insecurity relating to the border wall over time and to show *how* the issue was continuously foregrounded by the former US President, and why that might be. To that end, the selection criteria for choosing the presidential speeches of Section I was based on how often the key words "border" and "wall" featured on them, which led to the reviewing of a total of five speeches (Trump 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d) within the electoral campaign period, three of which (Trump 2015, 2016a, 2016d) were chosen for closer analysis in the following pages.

The selection criteria changes slightly for Section II, due to the large amount of presidential speeches available as the time period of the presidency (2017 - 2020) is much larger than that of the campaign (2015 - 2016). Hence, I chose to divide this period in two different moments, reflecting the earlier and the later moments of Trump's presidency and discursive approach of the Southern border wall: first, we have the first couple of years of the presidency, where I reviewed four speeches (Trump 2017a, 2017b, 2018a, 2018b) and selected two of them (Trump 2017b, 2018a) which emphasized the administration's new national security policies, as they heavily emphasized the topics of illegal immigration and the southern border wall. The last couple of years of Donald Trump's presidency, on the other hand, are marked by a more urgent insistence on the construction of the wall, and I chose to focus on the period in which the issue of the wall and the necessary funding for it were repeatedly addressed, generating intense political debate and disagreement in 2019.This is the period surrounding the federal government shutdown of 2019, which lasted 35 days and was motivated by political dissent between former president and Congress over the federal budget for the 2019 fiscal year, when Trump's demand for US$5.7 billion in federal funds for a Southern border wall was

denied by the Senate. Seeking to analyze this moment of the presidency, I reviewed and further analyzed three presidential speeches (Trump 2019a, 2019b, 2019c) in which the topic of the border wall was prioritized by the administration, which went so far as to declare it a national emergency situation.

4.1.
The electoral campaign

With that in mind, the starting point of my analysis is Donald J. Trump's speech of June 16, 2005, containing his first remarks after announcing his candidacy for president in New York City[20]. This speech is particularly elucidative of his rhetoric as a whole, especially in terms of defining what the former candidate perceived as threats to the American nation at the time, both externally and internally, beginning with an observation on the allegedly dire state of things for the United States:

> Our country is in serious trouble. We don't have victories anymore. We used to have victories, but we don't have them. When was the last time anybody saw us beating, let's say, China in a trade deal? They kill us. I beat China all the time. All the time. *[applause]*
> [...]
> When do we beat Mexico at the border? They're laughing at us, at our stupidity. And now they are beating us economically. They are not our friend, believe me. But they're killing us economically.
> The U.S. has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems. *[applause]*. (Trump, 2015)

Trump's speech begins by setting him apart from other candidates, a point that is reflective of the strategy followed throughout most of his campaign which relied on defining the political establishment as the main cause for the US' state of disarray which he claims to be able to fix by presenting himself as a way out of the crisis. This becomes evident in phrases such as "Well, you need somebody, because politicians are all talk, no action. Nothing's gonna get done. They will not bring us — believe me — to the promised land. They will not." and, on the topic of US national debt, "How stupid are our leaders? How stupid are these politicians to

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[20] All of the public speeches cited in this section were accessed through University of California, Santa Barbara's "The American Presidency Project", which makes both the videos and transcripts available for the period of Trump's presidential campaign where he spoke publicly in various states. In the following section focused on the Trump administration itself, the speeches were accessed through the University of Virginia's Millner Center website, which provides videos and transcripts of all presidential speeches. Without their thorough work, it is likely that the present stage of my research would not have been possible.

allow this to happen? How stupid are they?" (Trump, 2015). This point is also interesting as the establishment is often blamed by Trump for allowing immigrants to enter the United States ilegally due to weak and outdated border policies, which shows how the external and internal threats seem to be framed as intimately related. In this sense, Trump argues for example that "Most of the politicians, almost all of them don't even know where they [illegal immigrants] are, where they are being put, they know nothing about these people. This could be the great Trojan Horse of all time. And Hillary wants thousands more to come in over and above Obama." (Trump, 2016b).

In this sense, Homolar and Scholz's work may be interesting for interrogating this (although we differ in our respective understandings and use of Ontological Security Theory), as they argue that Trump's rhetorical strategy relies on what they call a "politics of reassurance" which

> [...] tells audiences what is wrong with the current state of affairs; it identifies the political agents that are responsible for putting individuals and the country in a state of loss and crisis; and it offers an abstract pathway through which people can restore past greatness by opting for a high-risk outsider candidate. (Homolar, Scholz 2019, p. 360)

However, whereas both authors seek to make the argument that Trump's discursive approach relies on "creating the very ontological insecurity that it promises to eradicate for political gain" (Homolar, Scholz 2019, p. 360), my thesis on the subject argues that those feelings of ontological insecurity could not possibly have been created by a single politician, as that line of argument seems to ignore the pre-existing conditions which I have explored on the third chapter concerning Trump supporters' experiences of impoverishment, loss of pride and privilege and overall sense of resentment towards progressive-neoliberal policy and growing multiculturalism throughout the last few decades. In that sense, when Trump argues that "we don't have victories anymore" and that Mexico is laughing at their stupidity and killing them economically, the discourse works precisely *upon* that resentment and the existing sense of loss and insecurity among his constituency.

The speech also works interestingly and closely with feelings of fear, in ways that warrant closer examination as they are closely related to the fantasy framework (see Eberle, 2017) approach which I aim to work with. This point is felt most acutely when Trump states, for example, that

> When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.
>
> But I speak to border guards and they tell us what we're getting. And it only makes common sense. It only makes common sense. They're sending us not the right people.
>
> It's coming from more than Mexico. It's coming from all over South and Latin America, and it's coming probably — probably — from the Middle East. But we don't know. Because we have no protection and we have no competence, we don't know what's happening. And it's got to stop and it's got to stop fast. *[applause]* (Trump, 2015)

In this excerpt, the narrative of insecurity concerning the dichotomy of inside *versus* outside becomes clearer, as border crossings are directly associated with drugs, criminality and sexual violence, painting an image of a nation that cannot protect itself: "we have no protection" and "we have no competence, we don't know what's happening". Sara Ahmed's 2014 work "The Cultural Politics of Emotion" is helpful in its exploration of affects such as fear and aversion to otherness, as well as love for the nation; when discussing the affective politics of fear, she contends that "fear works by establishing others as fearsome insofar as they *threaten to take the self in*" (2014, p. 64. Emphasis in original). Here, the adored yet vulnerable nation seems to be placed in stark contrast to that which threatens to force its way inside through the unprotected border. By promising to interdict the border through new legislation and the material construction of a "big, fat, beautiful wall" (cited in Finnegan, 2016), Trump presents himself as the only alternative able to deal definitely with the threat at hand, and whereas his tone and choice of words may not be characterized as emotional by most, it expresses an emotional orientation[21] towards the issue of border crossings and a sense of urgency when faced with injustice: "it's got to stop and it's got to stop fast".

In addition, I want to focus on another aspect of the discourse which stands out in this first speech, which is that of a narrative structure based on contraposition/polarization, presenting audiences on one side with an idealised scenario of fullnes/wholeness which works at the level of their search for ontological security and, on the other, with a disaster scenario where America is left at the hands of the weak, self-serving political establishment and its open-border policies. This is important for the purposes of my research as it relates directly to

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[21] Ahmed makes my point here more clear when she makes the argument that "Hardness is not the absence of emotion, but a different emotional orientation towards others" (2014, p. 4).

my argument about Trump's discourse on the border wall being constructed largely as a *fantasy* narrative which works to stabilize meaning and identity for its audience and, implicitly, promises the (impossible) recapture of ontological security. In Glynos' words, fantasy can be understood as "[...] a story that confronts subjects with an ideal (covering over the lack in reaching a whole identity) and an obstacle to it (separation from the 'object' of our desire)" (Glynos 2008, p. 283); in that way, the concept of fantasy implies a narrative structure that involves references to an idealised scenario (what the author terms "the beatific side of fantasy") and conversely, a catastrophic scenario, "the horrific side of fantasy".

Within this first speech, we see this structure repeated often and in many topics ranging from the alleged threats of China[22] to Obamacare[23] and politicians in general, who Trump often distinguishes himself from by deeming them incompetent with phrases such as "They will never make America great again. They don't even have a chance. They're controlled fully — they're controlled fully by the lobbyists, by the donors, and by the special interests, fully." (Trump, 2015), which are often paired with statements about America's urgent need for a "truly great leader". In this manner, Trump's rhetoric often relies on presenting those catastrophic scenarios in which he and his political measures are the sole alternative, and this discursive structure as a whole could be an engaging subject for future works of research to question, but for now it suffices to say that this structure is present often and, most importantly for my purposes here, it is also present on the divisive topic of the border and the border wall from the very beginning. Here, the speech presents the horrific scenario of Mexico sending people who have "lots of problems" and who are "bringing drugs", "bringing crime" and who are "rapists", and also the notion that Mexico has stolen jobs from the United States as large companies are "[they're] going to build in Mexico. They're going to take away thousands of jobs. It's very bad for us." (Trump, 2015). This scenario of obstacles towards full enjoyment and security is paired with another, where

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[22] Trump emphasizes China as a threat often on this occasion, arguing that "A lot of people up there can't get jobs. They can't get jobs, because there are no jobs, because China has our jobs and Mexico has our jobs. They all have jobs." and thrice using phrases such as "they're killing us" or "they kill us" to describe China's conduct in trade deals and overall economic matters.

[23] Obamacare is mentioned six times in this address, and is referred to as a "disaster" and "the big lie" which is going to be "amazingly destructive" and has to be repealed urgently. Here, Trump describes a catastrophic scenario, saying doctors will begin quitting their jobs and "it's going to get worse" for Americans while Obama "is going to be out playing golf".

Trump's bold political savvy and restrictive border policies are presented as the only pathway towards the beatific scenario of the great America, recaptured. This point relates to Eberle's fantasy framework, which presents us with the notion of an "object" whose recapturing (portrayed as removing the obstacle and/or reaching the ideal) promises the foundational guarantee of a "whole" and secure identity (Eberle 2017, p. 13). Hence, the former candidate proposes: "I would build a great wall, and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me, and I'll build them very inexpensively, I will build a great, great wall on our Southern border. And I will have Mexico pay for that wall." (Trump, 2015) and, at the very end: "Sadly, the American dream is dead. [...] But if I get elected president I will bring it back bigger and better and stronger than ever before, and we will make America great again." (Trump, 2015).

Thus, I contend that this first speech and the narrative it conveys illustrate well the main points of the Lacanian conception of fantasy presented here. Referring back to Eberle's fantasy framework, it is possible to identify the structure of an ideal, an obstacle to it and excessively beatific/horrific possible futures juxtaposed and portrayed as an unambiguous choice between two options (Eberle 2017, p. 13). In this manner, the narrative seems to locate audiences in a fantasy scenario where they find a choice between recapturing the object of the "great America" and remaining at the hands of the establishment and its open border policies as illegal immigrants, portrayed as criminals of all kinds, continue to pour in. This simplified way of approaching illegal immigration is another element that stands out, as it elides much of the complexity of that issue and presents those immigrants as a homogenous group which will undoubtedly bring crime, unemployment, terrorism and violence in general, threatening to Americans for simply existing. It is worth noting that this persistent simplification of issues by Trump is another aspect of his rhetoric which makes sense within this theoretical approach, as it is argued that while the content of fantasies may vary greatly, all of them perform the same funcion of imposing closure on the ambiguities and complexities of the social world (Eberle 2017, p. 10). In this way, the American-self and the immigrant-other come to be perceived as essentialized bodies reduced to a number of characteristics which, although constructed and fabricated, come to be seen as natural, unified features for describing each group (Kinnvall 2004, p. 755), and multiculturalism itself is framed as a security threat in a manner

reminiscent of Ahmed's commentary on otherness, as "those who come into the nation 'could be' terrorists, a 'could-be-ness' that extends the demand for surveillance of others who are already recognisable as strangers" (Ahmed 2014, p. 134). Being recognisable as strangers, in this sense, seems to lead to a clear association with criminality in Trump's discursive approach and, consequently, to ontological insecurity among his constituency.

Considering this context of sharp divisions and discriminations, walls become particularly interesting objects of analysis when understood as physical and symbolic sites of inclusion and exclusion, marking the distinction between inside and outside (Callahan 2018, p. 461). When Donald Trump argues, for example, that a wall must be built along the Southern border of the United States because "when Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists." (Trump, 2015), it can be argued that the physical wall itself is secondary, a product of deeply embedded social contradictions (Callahan 2018, p. 474) which stand out at the physical and symbolic site of the border, where inside supposedly comes to meet the outside.

Here, I draw from Brown's (2010) argument that walls often function theatrically and are less material barriers than they are symbolic performances addressing popular anxieties about the state's waning sovereign power, and whereas the source of that anxiety and ontological insecurity here may not be concerning the state's waning sovereign power, it does relate to a lack of trust in the federal government and the political establishment, as I have shown in the previous chapter. As political wishes for potency, protection, containment, and even innocence may be projected onto walls (Brown, 2010, p. 114), the physical structure at the border comes to stand as a symbolic marker for the division between "real Americans" and those dangerous and unwanted outsiders, a clear step towards recapturing the lost object and fulfilling a promise of ontological security. The Trump supporter's identity and sense of ontological security, then, are stabilized by the idea of a "big powerful wall" (Trump, 2016b) at the border, regardless of whether or not the wall was ever actually a feasible border security project in the first place. In this respect Brown contends that "walls thus bear the irony of being mute, material, and prosaic, yet potentially generative of theological awe largely unrelated to their quotidian functions or failures" (Brown, 2010, p. 26).

Although this first speech is a particularly illustrative example of how ontological insecurity is framed within Trump's discourse and how it can be analyzed through the lens of a Lacan-informed framework, in the remaining pages of this section I aim to demonstrate how those same features are present in other speeches given by the former candidate during his electoral campaign before we move on to the period of his presidency. In order to do this, I have selected two other speeches dating back to this period, chosen based on how often the key words "border" and "wall" featured on them through UC Santa Barbara "The American Presidency Project" website's advanced search engine. The second speech, delivered in July 21st of 2016, is titled "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio", and it stands out once more by presenting a clear-cut narrative of extremes, a horrific scenario of violence which will only become worse unless Trump's measures are adopted soon:

> Americans watching this address tonight have seen the recent images of violence in our streets and the chaos in our communities. Many have witnessed this violence personally, some have even been its victims.
> I have a message for all of you: the crime and violence that today afflicts our nation will soon – and I mean very soon – come to an end.
> Beginning on January 20th of 2017, safety will be restored. (Trump, 2016a)

In this particular instance, the discourse focuses heavily on the issue of violence and overall public insecurity, which are often directly related to open border policies and illegal immigrants. When presenting the catastrophic scenario which Trump associated with the Obama administration, this association is emphasized as he puts that "Nearly 180,000 illegal immigrants with criminal records, ordered deported from our country, are tonight roaming free to threaten peaceful citizens" (2016a) and goes on to describe the death of a young American woman, Sarah Root, who was killed by a drunk driver who was an illegal immigrant in the United States at the time. Among chants of "build that wall" coming from the audience, Trump declares: "I've met Sarah's beautiful family. But to this Administration, their amazing daughter was just one more American life that wasn't worth protecting. No more. One more child to sacrifice on the order and on the altar of open borders" (2016a).

The issue of open borders is emphasized yet again in the same speech, both by mentioning that "Decades of record immigration have produced lower wages

and higher unemployment for our citizens [...]" (2016a) and by turning back to the topic of parents whose children were killed by illegal immigrants, on which he states grievously "Of all my travels in this country, nothing has affected me more deeply than the time I have spent with the mothers and fathers who have lost their children to violence spilling across our border, which we can solve. We have to solve it". Here, the discourse evokes a sense of collectivity and union in times of hardship, but it also expresses grief in a way Trump did not often do:

> My opponent will never meet with them, or share in their pain, believe me. Instead, my opponent wants Sanctuary Cities. But where was sanctuary for Kate Steinle? Where was Sanctuary for the children of Mary Ann, and Sabine, and Jamiel?[24] Where was sanctuary for all the other -- oh, it is so sad to even be talking about it because we can fix this problem so quickly -- Americans who have been so brutally murdered, and who have suffered so so horribly?
> These wounded American families have been alone. But they are alone no longer. Tonight, this candidate and the whole nation stand in their corner to support them, to send them our love, and to pledge in their honor that we will save countless more families from suffering and the same awful fate. (Trump, 2016a)

Seeming outraged and bereaved, Trump vows to honor and share the pain of those families while his opponent at the time, Hillary Clinton, is described as only wanting open borders, sanctuary cities and "proposing mass amnesty, mass immigration, and mass lawlessness" (2016a); as the former candidate argues in another speech in that same year, "This election will decide whether or not we have a border" (Trump, 2016c). As a solution for saving countless families from suffering the same awful fate, he immediately adds: "We are going to build a great border wall to stop illegal immigration, to stop the gangs and the violence, and to stop the drugs from pouring into our communities". In this sense, *strict border security policies are framed as a prerequisite for recapturing ontological security*, and reaching this ideal seems to provide a foundational guarantee for "real Americans": "We will make America safe again. And we will make America great again".

The third and final speech of this section is titled "Remarks on Immigration at the Phoenix Convention Center in Phoenix, Arizona" and was given on August 31st, 2016. In it, Trump focuses entirely on the issue of illegal immigration, arguing that "Sadly, sadly there is no other way. The truth is our immigration system is worse than anybody ever realized" (Trump, 2016d), describing an outdated system

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[24] Here, Trump recalls the names of other American citizens who were attacked and killed by illegal immigrants during the previous years.

which "serves the needs of wealthy donors, political activists and powerful, powerful politicians" while directly threatening "our forgotten working people" and discussing the record pace at which immigration has impacted their jobs, wages, housing, schools, tax bills and general living conditions (Trump, 2016d). This criticism is particularly compelling in light of Fraser's (2019) work which I have explored in the previous chapter in the sense that Trump's counter-hegemonic efforts of denouncing the progressive-neoliberal political establishment seem to protest mostly its "progressive" politics of recognition, but not its neoliberal politics of distribution which so harmed a large portion of his constituency, particularly those affected by deindustrialization, weaker unions, the spreading of precarious and lower-wage jobs, lengthening working hours, diminished social support and increasing concentration of wealth (Fraser 2019, p. 7 - 8). In other words, it is interesting to note how many issues and sources of insecurity related to neoliberalism, both as an economic doctrine and as a political rationality, are framed in Trump's (often simplistic) narrative as the result of open-border policies, thus failing to address a fundamental aspect of the provenance of those issues.

On this occasion, Trump recounts Sarah Root's story, and that of four other American citizens who were murdered by illegal immigrants, describing them as "victims of the Obama-Clinton open borders policy" (Trump, 2016d). Here, it is worth noting that the discourse does not associate all illegal immigrants with violence, as Trump once mentions that there are many of them who are "good people". However, even that affirmation is framed negatively for his audience as he goes on to explain that even though they might be "good people", this doesn't change the fact that most of them are workers with lowers skills and education who inevitably compete directly against vulnerable American workers and ultimately "[...] draw much more out from the system than they can ever possibly pay back. And they're hurting a lot of our people that cannot get jobs under any circumstances" (Trump, 2016d). Hence, whether or not they are perceived as "good", illegal immigrants in general are understood here as a threat, and Trump even goes so far as to compare the Obama and Clinton open border policies to a "Trojan horse" situation as border crossers continue to spread and to live in the US illegally. On this topic, a particular passage stands out: "In many cases, by the way, they're treated better than our vets" (Trump, 2016d); here, Trump's description of illegal immigration is reminiscent of some of Hochschild's interviewees' concerns

as they recounted their fears of having their jobs, their tax money and their honor given away to non-working, non-deserving people who they believed to be cheating the federal government (Hochschild 2016, p. 60-61). Moreover, the attribution of illicit "other" enjoyment also becomes clear as the figure of the illegal, undeserving immigrant who is treated better than US war veterans is conjured by the discourse, addressing precisely those fears and offering solutions to them while simultaneously emphasizing collectivity among the "real Americans". In this sense, Hook sheds light on the issue as he contends that these attributions of illicit "other" enjoyment are especially exaggerated when they occur across lines of social/cultural division, and they play an important role in constructing lines of otherness within a collective (Hook 2017, p. 11) as "these modes of enjoyment bring with them a tacit set of rules concerning who can enjoy, how they might do so, under what circumstances and, as importantly, who *may not*" (2017, p. 12, emphasis in original).

After describing this catastrophic scenario which must be avoided at all costs, the former candidate moves on to his solutions, the first one of which is presented excitedly: "Number one, are you ready? Are you ready? We will build a great wall along the Southern border." (Trump, 2016d). Described here as an "intangible, physical, tall, power, beautiful southern border wall", the material construction at the border is presented among cheers with a wide array of promises of fine technology, above and below ground sensors, towers, aerial surveillance and manpower, most of which would not be delivered in the future. The other 10 border security proposals include the end of "catch and release" at the border, a policy of "zero tolerance for criminal aliens" which implies issuing "[...] detainers for illegal immigrants who are arrested for any crime whatsoever, and they will be placed into immediate removal proceedings [...]" (Trump, 2016d), a blockage of funding for sanctuary cities and finally, the cancelling of "unconstitutional executive orders" and the enforcement of "all immigration laws", among others.

When comparing his new proposed policies to the ones enforced by the Obama administration, Trump makes the following observation:

> Since 2013 alone, the Obama administration has allowed 300,000 criminal aliens to return back into United States communities. These are individuals encountered or identified by ICE, but who were not detained or processed for deportation *because it wouldn't have been politically correct*. (Trump, 2016d. Emphasis added)

The italicized portion of this quote is a familiar line of his, also present in one of the previous speeches I have analyzed in this section when Trump begins his public address by affirming "I will present the facts plainly and honestly. We cannot afford to be so politically correct anymore" (Trump, 2016a). Joined with his overall irreverent and often crass manner of speaking and openly accusing his adversaries, this observation on political correctness resonates significantly with both Hochschild's (2016) and Hook's (2017) works which I have discussed in the previous chapter on the topic of enjoyment and transgression. Many of Hochschild's interviewees felt resentful and angry at progressive liberals and their "feeling rules" which demanded they felt sorry for refugees and immigrants, leaving them with a sense of being culturally marginalized as "their views about abortion, gay marriage, gender roles, race, guns, and the Confederate flag all were help up to ridicule in the national media as backward" (Hochschild 2016, p. 221). Here, Trump's discourse seems to resonate by achieving enjoyment by continuously exploring the element of transgression, overstepping the bounds that define what is acceptable within progressive liberal thought and breaking the "feeling rules" that they feel the liberals have set for American society. Political correctness, in other words, is framed as part of the set of progressive ideals which brought the catastrophic scenario of violence and open borders; a set of ideals which Trump seeks to oppose radically.

Emphasizing the need to ensure the assimilation of the immigrants who enter the country lawfully, the speech often enforces the idea that these measures are necessary in order for the United States' continued existance, in terms which make sense through the lens of ontological insecurity as they imply the presence of an existential threat which, whether it truly exists or not, seems to be felt acutely by the audience, and thus *exists* for them. This is implied in phrases such as "Anyone who has entered the United States illegally is subject to deportation. That is what it means to have laws and to have a country. Otherwise we don't have a country" and "If people around the world believe they can just come on a temporary visa and never, ever leave, the Obama-Clinton policy, that's what it is, then we have a completely open border, and we no longer have a country" (2016d). Hence, Trump finishes his address on immigration with the remark "Together we can save American lives, American jobs, and American futures. Together we can save America itself. Join me in this mission, we're going to make America great again"

(2016d), a final reference to what is at stake and the object which must be recaptured; the saving of America and the reclaiming of its former glory, thus, seem to necessarily imply a fundamental step of walling and fencing.

4.2.
The administration

During the administration, the wall appears to endure as a part of Trump's national security strategy, and remains a recurring and divisive topic as the former president sought continuously to have more funds approved for its construction, a search which would eventually culminate in the longest partial US federal government shutdown in history due to internal political disputes about funding for the border wall in 2019. Before diving into that period, however, I start this section by analyzing the earlier stage of the Trump administration with an address given on December 18, 2017 titled "Remarks on National Security Strategy", in which the former president reiterated his campaigning argument on the subject, affirming once more that "A nation without borders is not a nation" (Trump, 2017b) as he discussed his "America First" approach to national security and unveiled his administration's new strategy which relied on four pillars, the first of which was:

> First, we must protect the American people, the homeland, and our great American way of life. This strategy recognizes that *we cannot secure our nation if we do not secure our borders*. So for the first time ever, American strategy now includes a serious plan to defend our homeland. It calls for the construction of a wall on our Southern border; ending chain migration and the horrible visa and lottery programs; closing loopholes that undermine enforcement; and strongly supporting our Border Patrol agents, ICE officers, and Homeland Security personnel. *(Applause.)* (Trump, 2017b. Emphasis added)

Whereas the previous campaign speeches seemed to rely strongly on the polarized scenarios (the catastrophic versus the ideal) of a fantasy narrative, a few things seem to change as Trump begins his administration: the political establishment and adversaries such as Hillary Clinton are mentioned less, much like the horrific scenarios which he often evoked to describe the threat of "Obama-Clinton open border policies"; however, the border wall withstands as a national security project to combat the existential threat of border crossings: "We must love and defend it [America]. We must guard it with vigilance and spirit, and, if necessary, like so many before us, with our very lives." (Trump, 2017b).

Another instance in which the border wall was highlighted in the context of national (in)security was the State of the Union Address[25] of 2018, in which the former president presented his administration's proposal to reform the country's immigration system. On this occasion, Donald Trump presents a speech that intertwines a celebration of the achievements of the first year of his administration and of individuals considered "American heroes" with an urgent call for new measures to deal with the issue of immigration, outlining a new immigration reform package. Here, the former president introduced the topic by sharing the story of the Cuevas and Mickens families from Long Island, whose two teenage daughters Kayla Cuevas and Nisa Mickens were murdered by members of the MS-13 gang, many of whom, according to Trump, "[...] took advantage of glaring loopholes in our laws to enter the country as unaccompanied alien minors—and wound up in Kayla and Nisa's high school" (Trump, 2018a). Trump dedicates part of the speech to address the girls' parents, who were present among the audience, lamenting their losses: "Tonight, everyone in this chamber is praying for you. Everyone in America is grieving for you. And 320 million hearts are breaking for you. We cannot imagine the depth of your sorrow, but we can make sure that other families never have to endure this pain." (2018a). This phrase is followed directly by a forthright call for Congress to "[...] finally close the deadly loopholes that have allowed MS-13, and other criminals, to break into our country", expressing that even though the United States is a "compassionate nation", his highest loyalty and greatest compassion as president remain with "America's children, America's struggling workers, and America's forgotten communities" (2018a). In this manner, Trump also echoes the sentiments described by most of Hochschild's (2016) interviewees of being part of a threatened cultural identity and a marginalized community forgotten by federal institutions, reiterating his support for them and once more seeming to place the possibility of achieving security for them as directly opposed to open borders, which are repeatedly associated with criminality, unemployment for Americans and the murder of innocent young American people. Hence, the structure of a

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[25] The State of the Union Address is a communication between the President and Congress in which the Chief Executive reports on current conditions in the United States and presents proposals for the next legislative year, outlining the political agenda of his administration. In addition, it is common for presidents to use this speech to increase media attention to specific issues according to their interests (See Shogan, 2016).

dichotomy of radically opposed scenarios remains an imperative within Trump's discursive framing of the border wall.

Presenting the security of American citizens and less restrictive border policies as mutually exclusive through this framing of events, Trump presents his administration's immigration reform package as the "critical reform" which the US needed, and outlines its four pillars, the second of which is aimed at "fully securing the border" by building a wall on the Southern border, hiring more ICE (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement) agents to "keep our communities safe". The proposal also involves other ways of restricting immigration, including the end of the Diversity Immigrant Visa (DV) Program, also known as the "visa lottery" program, as Trump argues that a "merit-based" immigration system should be put into place instead, "one that admits people who are skilled, who want to work, who will contribute to our society, and who will love and respect our country" (2018a). The two remaining pillars consist of ending chain migration and offering "a path to citizenship for 1.8 million illegal immigrants who were brought here by their parents at a young age", as Trump contends that "those who meet education and work requirements, and show good moral character, will be able to become full citizens of the United States", although the speech does not clarify what those requirements and "good moral character" might entail. Calling for members of both parties to work together towards the goal of securing the border and protecting American citizens' "right to the American dream" (2018a), the speech presents open-border policies as "outdated" and dangerous, fundamentally related to public insecurity, drug addiction and unemployment, putting in no uncertain terms that

> For decades, open borders have allowed drugs and gangs to pour into our most vulnerable communities. They have allowed millions of low-wage workers to compete for jobs and wages against the poorest Americans. Most tragically, they have caused the loss of many innocent lives. (Trump, 2018a)

Furthermore, whereas this speech emphasizes immigration reform and restrictive border enforcement policies more generally instead of focusing on the border wall more specifically, it stands as an example of how the security of American citizens was often conflated with border security in Donald Trump's public addresses, drawing heavily from the concerns and sources of ontological insecurity presented by his audience of "America's forgotten communities" in the previous chapter. Furthermore, the mention of a commitment to protecting American citizens' "right to the American dream" is another phrase that stands out

among the rest, echoing much of Hochschild's research on the lived experiences of the Southern community of her research, where people described an overall sense of being "in line" waiting patiently for their turn to reach the so-called "American dream" and feeling like black people, women, immigrants, refugees and environmental concerns seemed to be cutting in line ahead of them (Hochschild 2016, p. 136 - 139), benefiting from federal government programs such as affirmative action or, in the case of illegal immigrants, weak border policies that allow them to "sneak in" and work for less, lowering white American pay (2016 p. 138). In that sense, Trump's discursive approach to the issue seems to reflect and to respond to those feelings of resentment, of loss of privilege and of being under threat which seem to be so pervasive among his audience, as described by both Brown (2019) and Hochschild (2016).

In the second and final part of this section, I turn to three key speeches delivered by the 45th US President in the months of January and February of 2019, in which the issue of the wall and the necessary funding for it were repeatedly addressed, generating intense domestic political debate and disagreement. These public addresses were given in the context of the longest partial US federal government shutdown, which lasted 35 days and was motivated by political dissent between former president Trump and Congress over the federal budget for the 2019 fiscal year, when Trump's demand for $5.7 billion in federal funds for a Southern border wall was denied by the Senate. I seek to analyze these speeches as part of a context and continuity, which together work to reify the wall as a key element in Trump's political agenda, even in the later stages of his presidency. For this part of the analysis, the speeches were chosen based on their focus on the wall, as well as their interconnectedness within a larger context which shows the physical barrier's persistent relevance in the administration's agenda. Here, it is also interesting to note that the wall remained relevant in 2019 despite the fact that southwest border apprehensions had already increased at the time, as well as the number of arrests made by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the removals of unauthorized immigrants in US territory, also made by ICE (Gramlich, 2020). With all of that in mind, along with the wide array of new national security and border enforcement policies proposed by the Trump administration[26], it is

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[26] For more, see Gramlich, 2020.

remarkable that the construction of a multi-billion dollar border wall (which by itself would have been incapable of hindering the flow of illegal immigrants) still remained a central issue and topic of political dispute by the year of 2019.

Figure 5 - President Donald Trump speaks during a rally at the El Paso County Coliseum on Feb. 11, 2019 in El Paso, Texas. Source: NBC News[27]

The first out of three public speeches I seek to investigate in the following pages was given on January 19th, 2019, and is titled "Remarks about the US Southern Border". On this occasion, Donald Trump spoke about what he saw as "a humanitarian and security crisis on our Southern border that requires urgent action" (Trump, 2019a), and outlined his proposal for ending the partial federal government shutdown which had taken place after an agreement couldn't be reached on the issue during the previous year, which included, among other funding requests for further restricting immigration, a sum of "$5.7 billion for a strategic deployment of physical barriers, or a wall" (Trump 2019a). The proposal differs from Trump's original campaign plans for the physical structure, suggesting instead that

> This is not a 2,000-mile concrete structure from sea to sea. These are steel barriers in high-priority locations. Much of the border is already protected by natural

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[27] Available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/trump-asked-wall-he-s-forcing-constitutional-crisis-n971911> Last accessed on May 28th, 2023.

barriers such as mountains and water. We already have many miles of barrier, including 115 miles that we are currently building or under contract. It will be done quickly. Our request will add another 230 miles this year in the areas our border agents most urgently need. It will have an unbelievable impact. (Trump, 2019a)

This proposal leaves the idealized image of a concrete border wall along the entire length of the US - Mexico border behind, suggesting instead a more feasible project considering the fact that all border wall prototypes constructed in 2017 presented construction challenges which ranged from "moderate" to "extensive", especially when it came to the models made out of concrete[28].

Much like in the previous speeches, this public address reiterates the notion of an unambiguous connection between immigrants and drug traffic, reduced wages, and public insecurity, threatening American citizens' lives and well-being, and this connection serves as a justification for building a physical barrier at the border:

If we build a powerful and fully designed see-through steel barrier on our southern border, the crime rate and drug problem in our country would be quickly and greatly reduced. Some say it could be cut in half. [...] A steel barrier will help us stop illegal immigration while safely directing commerce to our lawful ports of entry (Trump 2019a)

In this instance, when the former president argues that "it is time to reclaim our future from the extreme voices who fear compromise and demand open borders, which means drugs pouring in, human trafficking, and a lot of crime" (2019a), and that building the wall will save many lives and stop drugs from entering the US, the physical barrier is understood as an element capable of separating the threatened domestic realm from an "invasion" (Trump 2019c) of others who are seen as a homogenous group which will undoubtedly bring insecurity in the form of crime, unemployment and violence. In this sense, it can be argued that the projection of danger onto the alien both draws on and fuels a fantasy of containment for which walls are the ultimate icon (Brown 2010, p. 117). Furthermore, the speech also works at the level of emphasizing national identity, as the nation is often described as a "national family" and "one team, and one people, proudly saluting one great American flag", and even the construction of the border wall is framed as a collective endeavor with phrasing such as "If *we* are successful in this effort, then we can start the border [broader] project of remaking our immigration system for

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[28] For more on the prototypes, see the introductory chapter, Morley, 2018 and GAO, 2018.

the 21st century" and "I plan to convene weekly bipartisan meetings at the White House so we can do a finished product, a great product—*a product that we can all be proud of*, having to do with that elusive immigration problem." (Trump, 2019a. Emphasis added).

In the beginning of this section, I have shown how Donald Trump used his first State of the Union Address in 2018 to outline a reform proposal for the country's immigration system containing four pillars, one of which consisted of securing the Southern border by building a wall. Now, I turn to his second State of the Union Address in 2019, where the former president encouraged both parties to work together on the issue once again, reiterating the need to continue building the border wall and arguing that "we must be united at home to defeat our adversaries abroad" (Trump 2019b). Among other issues discussed on this occasion, Trump discussed border crossings and illegal immigration once more, frequently associating those with "reduced jobs, lower wages, overburdened schools and hospitals, increased crime, and a depleted social safety net" (Trump 2019b), as well as human and sex trafficking, illegal drugs, gang violence, among others, arguing that "year after year, countless Americans are murdered by criminal illegal aliens" (2019b). In the face of such insurmountable security issues which would seem to have been brought exclusively by illegal immigration, the border wall is presented as a logical and uncomplicated solution: "Simply put, walls work and walls save lives. So let's work together, compromise, and reach a deal that will truly make America safe." (2019b).

Thus, restrictive border enforcement policies are framed unambiguously as a national security issue, and a moral one too:

> This is a moral issue. The lawless state of our Southern border is a threat to the safety, security, and financial well-being of all Americans. We have a moral duty to create an immigration system that protects the lives and jobs of our citizens. Tonight, I am asking you to defend our very dangerous southern border out of love and devotion to our fellow citizens and to our country. (Trump, 2019b)

As border-crossing foreigners are framed as the culprits behind America's economic deterioration, as well as its loss of individual security and social cohesion, anxieties about difference among Trump's audience are fueled (Homolar, Scholz 2019, p. 353), and so is the desire for walling, which comes to be perceived as an emergency measure during a time of crisis where "our country", "home" or, as we have seen in the previous speech, "our national family" (Trump, 2019a) becomes

disputed territory. In this sense, Brown (2019, p. 143) argues that as the nation is privatized and familialized in this way, walling and securitization are not only authorized, but required. In this regard, Lofflman elucidates the issue well when he argues that this narrative on (in)security works to elevate the working class and non-college-educated core constituencies of Donald Trump in the American heartland to the status of the sole relevant representatives of the 'real America' and American democracy, to the point where the fears and anxieties prevalent among these constituencies about foreign economic competition, violent crime, mass migration, terrorism, cultural displacement, and political marginalisation thereby came to be framed as the ontological insecurities of the nation itself (Lofflman 2021, p. 3). On that account, Brown (2010, p. 129) makes the fascinating argument that the desire for walling is translated into national identity, which is restored to potency and virtue through walls, while simultaneously being cleansed of both its identification and its imbrication with what it is walling out, whether it is extreme global inequalities or the demand for cheap illegal labor.

Only ten days after giving the 2019 State of the Union Address, the former president gave yet another public address on the 15th of February, titled "Speech Declaring a National Emergency", in which Trump declared a national emergency aimed at confronting the "national security crisis" (Trump 2019c) at the US - Mexico border, where "an invasion of our country with drugs, with human traffickers, with all types of criminals and gangs" (Trump 2019c) was allegedly taking place. This securitizing move was controversial among both Democrats and Republicans, and divided media and public opinions as well, especially as the statistic data used by the former president to justify the project was also widely disputed and, when asked by reporters about them after the speech, he refused to present the sources for the data he had cited in his pro-wall and anti-immigration arguments (See Trump, 2019c). Here, the former president staked his claim about the need for a border wall on the allegation that the vulnerable Southern border was the main entryway for illegal drugs in the country, arguing simply that "They say walls don't work. Walls work 100 percent." (Trump 2019c), using the El Paso (Texas, USA) and Israel border walls as examples to maintain his argument of border walls as uncomplicated, infallible security measures:

> They [illegal immigrants] go through areas where you have no wall. Everybody knows that. [...] You don't have to be very smart to know: You put up a barrier, the

people come in, and that's it. They can't do anything unless they walk left or right, and they find an area where there's no barrier, and they come into the United States. Welcome. (Trump 2019c)

Among contested statistics and simplistic solutions which fantasize the notion of a clear-cut choice between two radically opposed scenarios, Trump's speech declaring a national emergency works to create a narrative on ontological insecurity which draws an unambiguous line between the ingroup and the outgroup, (re)creating what a community imagines as admirable and desirable as much as it reflects its fears and conceptions of deviance (Homolar 2021, p. 11). Hereof, by cleansing the nation from what it seeks to wall out and its imbrication with it, Brown holds that walls contribute to the imaginary of intact nationhood:

Walls, "solid, strong, and tall," redress faltering distinctions between us and them, inside and outside, law and non law, with a singularly striking visual icon of these distinctions. Walls are unrivaled means of signifying a divide between us and them, between our space and theirs, between inside and outside, the domestic and the exterior. (Brown 2010, p. 104)

Furthermore, considering that the wall is "not meant to provide a hermetic seal, but to be part of a multidimensional strategy that includes patrols, drones, remote sensors, and other forms of surveillance" (Callahan 2018, p. 466), it is interesting to note how the physical barrier in Trump's speeches is presented in much simpler terms as a border security project. This brings us back to the overarching, very much affective role the border wall seems to play and its effectiveness in political discourse, as mute and solid constructions come to express power that is material, visible, centralized and exerted corporeally through overt force and policing (Brown 2010, p. 81). Recognizing border walls as questionable and flawed in terms of security, it is important to note that while they "sometimes effectively interdict the foreign bodies deemed dangerous to what they limn, they are often nothing more than spectacularly expensive political gestures" (Brown 2010, p. 91), useful for the affective responses they evoke from the public in order to validate politicians' desired maneuvers.

As the border wall is consistently framed discursively as a central part of the Trump administration's efforts at border enforcement measures and as a fundamental step towards recapturing the object of American greatness and the sense of security it stands for, Kinnvall's work helps elucidate this process of conjuring up images of nation-states that were once free from immigration and untouched by global forces, a nostalgic sort of fantasy which "entails a *fantasmatic*

narrative of past greatness that is transmitted to new generations in search of answers to their own anxieties, while it simultaneously points to those who have taken this "greatness" away (the establishment/immigrants)" (Kinnvall 2018, p. 11). Looking at this process through a Lacanian perspective, she argues that these narratives become successful through "[...] their ability to create a homogenous fantasy space in response to a situation of failed identity by invoking a desire to restore lost pride and, in the case of some men, lost masculinity—to deal with the disappointments, anger, frustration, and anxiety (ontological insecurities) [...]" (Kinnvall 2018, p. 15). In that sense, the basic ontological desire for a whole and complete identity (Stavrakakis 1999, p. 42) may be translated into particular desires for certain 'objects', which can take the form of political goals (e.g. expressed by concepts like freedom, security or justice) as, through the process of fantasizing, the ontological lack within the subject is transformed into an empirical lack, a lack of particular 'objects', whose recapturing promises the restoration of an imaginary full identity (Eberle 2017, p. 5-6).

Moreover, it is interesting to note how Trump's proposals of restrictive (and at times securitizing) border enforcement policies also echo one of Browning and Joenniemi's (2016) main points of critique towards the Giddens-oriented approach to ontological security theory, which is the common conflation of ontological security-seeking and identity preservation, which often leads to a focus on "securitization processes designed to solidify and close down an identity, with the stability brought about by securitization's 'freezing' of identities seen as enhancing ontological security" (2016, p. 2). As a consequence,

> [...] identity transformation and opening up identities for change through adaptation and engagement in reflexive processes is viewed as threatening ontological security by generating unwarranted stress, uncertainty and anxiety. This has resulted in a problematic association whereby securitization – the construction of identities on the basis of the negative difference provided by radical otherness and enmity – is seen to enhance identity-related stability and therefore also ontological security, whereas desecuritization processes promoting change are viewed as fundamentally destabilizing. (Browning, Joenniemi 2016, p. 2)

Although the authors cited are discussing a common issue in OST analyses, the critique applies here as the border wall is continuously framed as an element of containment reflective of the ways in which Trump's narrative fantasizes the achievement of ontological security for its audience, which seems to lead to that very association whereby securitization and the "closing-down" of identities is

thought to enhance stability and ontological security, whereas reflexivity and desecuritizing bordering practices are viewed as destabilizing and dangerous, as the speech repeatedly presents open-border policies as "outdated" (Trump, 2018a) and dangerous, fundamentally related to public insecurity, drug addiction and unemployment, as the analysis within this chapter has repeatedly shown. The fencing and definitive restriction of the Southern border, in this sense, seems to be reflective of a restrictive approach to American national identity, preventing actors from being more reflexive and open towards the identities they seek.

In this sense, Browning and Joenniemi's 2016 article sheds a light on the common association of securitization with stability and desecuritization with change and instability, and how these associations can be problematic when we consider that the promises of stability in securitization practices are often illusory and prevent actors from being more reflexive and open towards the identities they seek. In the authors' own words, "securitizing practices have just as much potential to generate ontological anxieties as desecuritizing practices. [...] There is, hence, no a priori reason for assuming that processes of opening up are any more destabilizing than processes of closing down" (2016, p. 9), on the contrary, "[...] both potentially can be a source of ontological security or ontological insecurity. There is no a priori analytical reason to prefer one to the other" (p. 15). In this manner, we return once again to the question of the subject and, consequently, to the contribution of my chosen theoretical approach in the sense that it proposes a move away from Giddens's original focus on ontological security as a security "of being" (something individuals may possess) toward a focus on ontological security as a process that is constantly in progress.

As previously elaborated in the second section of the second chapter, this shift in focus implies moving towards an *antifoundational* notion of the subject, which means that there is no core or autonomous self to return to in order to feel ontologically secure (Kinnvall 2018, p. 8), and subjects must not be conflated with the identities they seek. Here, that line of argument can be used to critically approach Trump's very framing of insecurity, as he often places the possibility of achieving security for "America's children, America's struggling workers, and America's forgotten communities" (2018a) as directly opposed to open border policies, which are repeatedly associated with criminality, unemployment for Americans and the murder of innocent young American people. Through such a

harsh dichotomy of radically opposing sides, American identities remain closed to reflexivity and ontological security remains as an ideal in the search of American greatness. As we move towards understanding the subject as fundamentally unstable, or lacking, and unable to achieve a cohesive, ontologically secure identity, the role of fantasy within the discourse surrounding the border wall becomes more evident, as it echoes Eberle's understanding of fantasy narratives as containing the presence of a certain "object" whose recapturing (portrayed as removing the obstacle and/or reaching the ideal) promises the foundational guarantee of a "whole" and secure identity (Eberle 2017, p. 13).

How, then, do the public speeches presented in this chapter aid the research in its task of investigating the ways in which the Southern border wall withstood throughout the Trump era as a central element of his plea for strict border enforcement and the recapturing of America's past greatness? In exploring the former president's discursive approach to the subject, it becomes evident how the Southern border wall is framed as a national security project, along with other policies aimed at restricting immigration into the US, to the point where Trump declared a state of national emergency in 2019 in order to access more funds for the construction of the physical structure. In the public addresses the former president gave on the subject, his framing of the border wall is structured in conformity with Eberle's understanding of fantasy within discourse, focusing on the recapturing of an "object" (portrayed as removing the obstacle and reaching the ideal) which promises the foundational guarantee of a 'whole' identity, along with a polarized scenario of possibilities containing excessively "beatific/horrific futures" (Eberle 2017, p. 13). Hence, we have horrific scenarios associated with open borders repeatedly, with phrases such as: "Open borders, which means drugs pouring in, human trafficking, and a lot of crime" (Trump 2019a), "Anyone who has entered the United States illegally is subject to deportation. That is what it means to have laws and to have a country. Otherwise we don't have a country" and "If people around the world believe they can just come on a temporary visa and never, ever leave, the Obama-Clinton policy, that's what it is, then we have a completely open border, and we no longer have a country" (Trump, 2016d) while, on the other hand, the promise of pristine American greatness is constantly reiterated, particularly through the ideal of an "intangible, physical, tall, power, beautiful Southern border

wall" (Trump, 2016d) as, according to Trump himself, "Simply put, walls work and walls save lives" (Trump, 2019b).

Finally, the another element of Eberle's fantasy narrative approach is present through the narrative trope of 'excessive enjoyment' or 'theft of enjoyment', in which someone is portrayed as enjoying themselves beyond measure and at "our" expense (Eberle, 2017, p. 13) as Trump emphasizes the existance of "glaring loopholes" (Trump, 2018) in what he calls the "Obama-Clinton open border policies", calling for Congress to "[...] finally close the deadly loopholes that have allowed MS-13, and other criminals, to break into our country", and also that "Nearly 180,000 illegal immigrants with criminal records, ordered deported from our country, are tonight roaming free to threaten peaceful citizens" (Trump, 2016a). Moreover, the former president often expressed that even though the United States is a "compassionate nation", his highest loyalty and greatest compassion as president must remain with "America's children, America's struggling workers, and America's forgotten communities" (2018a), for whom the speeches seem to always be directed, in a manner of framing events with echoes Kinnvalls argument that the American-self and the immigrant-other come to be perceived as essentialized bodies reduced to a number of characteristics which, although constructed and fabricated, come to be seen as natural, unified features for describing each group (Kinnvall 2004, p. 755).

Finally, there remains the aspect of transgression. Recalling Eberle's definition of fantasy as "a particular type of narrative which provides subjects with ontological security by offering 'objects' which arouse and reproduce desire more successfully than other narratives due to their reliance on the transgressive aspect" (2017, p. 12). While within the confines of official language it may be difficult to arouse desire in audiences, fantasies offer the possibility of articulating things which are considered irrational, inappropriate, indecent or politically incorrect, and which consequently are typically unacknowledged or peripheral in official language (2017, p. 11); thus, fantasy may work as an "obscene supplement" (Zizek, 1997) to that official form of discourse in which social rules typically prohibit politicians from doing anything more than occasional flirting with such transgressive language in the form of hints, code words or silences (2017, p. 12). This point is particularly interesting when discussing Donald Trump's discursive approach to a wide array of topics, as he frequently gave controversial statements considered crude and

"politically incorrect", blurring the lines between polite official language and a transgressive, borderline inappropriate one, shocking and arousing desire in similar measure. When it comes to the particular case of the border wall, this can be demonstrated with controversial affirmations such as "I will build a great, great wall on our southern border. And I will have Mexico pay for that wall" (Trump, 2015) or "when Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists." (Trump, 2015).

While this side of Trump's rhetoric may seem at odds with his success among his audience, a theoretical approach attentive to the mechanisms of affectivity may shed some light on the notion that transgression is necessary for certain modes of enjoyment, and it is in this very sense that Brown argues that

> [F]or constituencies anxious about their ebbing place and privilege, nothing is more reassuring than Trump's crass sexual entitlement to all women, the crude contractualism of his marriage, and for that matter, all of his crude conduct and flaunting of law and the protocols of the presidency… none of which a female or nonwhite politician could emit and survive for a nanosecond— which is precisely the point. Trump's boorishness and rule breaking, far from being at odds with traditional values, consecrates the white male supremacism at their heart, whose waning is a crucial spur to his support (Brown 2019, p. 173 - 174)

Thus, the public speeches help the research illuminate the ways in which the fantasy narrative surrounding the Southern border wall worked by echoing and responding to the complex sense of insecurity (ontological and otherwise) and resentment (towards the federal government and towards those considered "outsiders") which were already in development among Donald Trump's constituency long before he started campaigning, evoking a lost sense of collectivity through national identity and new ways of enjoyment. In Hochschild's words, "If you can no longer feel pride in the United States through its president, you'll have to feel American in some new way—by banding with others who feel as strangers in their own land." (2016, p. 140). In this manner, while it is clear from the beginning that Donald Trump's ideal border wall is flawed, impractical and would not necessarily deliver its promises of interdiction on its own, the final steps of the research show that while the border wall cannot deliver the promise of hermetically closed borders, it *is* able to deliver other things for Trump's intended audience in an affective sense, validating and giving a loud voice to common sentiments of resentment, anger, marginalization and insecurity, while

simultaneously allowing new sites and ways of identification and enjoyment for those to whom Trump's discourse was directed.

5.
Conclusions

This work of research began with a feeling of curiosity upon the realization that Trump still spoke publicly about and fought politically for the construction of a wall at the Southern border of the United States, even at the later stages of his presidency. Far from being a mere theatrical show of bravado aimed at winning the presidential elections of 2016 only to be forgotten right after, the border wall repeated itself continuously throughout the years of the administration as it came to stand as a symbol for that which Trump seemed to represent; a nightmare for some, but a fantasy for others as well. As the research reached some of the existing literature in IR on border walls more generally[29], one feature of those material constructions which always stood out was their lack of success in preventing border crossings all on their own, as walls are generally "not meant to provide a hermetic seal, but to be part of a multidimensional strategy that includes patrols, drones, remote sensors, and other forms of surveillance" (Callahan 2018, p. 466). This made Trump's multi-million dollar, ever-changing and ever-failing border wall more intriguing, as the former president continued to publicly insist and negotiate new ways to build it, even when a wide array of (seemingly more effective) other border security measures had already been put into place. Hence, drawing from Brown's understanding that "Walls thus bear the irony of being mute, material, and prosaic, yet potentially generative of theological awe largely unrelated to their quotidian functions or failures" (Brown, 2010, p. 26), the initial project for this thesis began with a curiosity towards that failure, and the question of how researchers in IR might find new pathways to explain the border wall's resilience within Trump's political agenda despite it.

Arriving at the final stage of the research, my best attempt at an answer for this question is that a strict categorization of failure/success may not be the best lens for looking at an object such as this, and whereas a border wall may be incapable of achieving fully interdicted borders as promised by Trump, it may, on the other hand, be effective in other ways which might not seem very obvious at first, as I came to discover. By engaging with the literature interested in thinking ontological

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[29] Particularly Brown (2010) and Callahan (2018).

security theory through Lacan, the question of the *subject* presented itself as a central issue, along with notions of insecurity, identity, enjoyment, language and fantasy, which came together to provide a theoretical pathway for the exploration of the border wall as it existed in Trump's public utterances of it, and how it was repeatedly framed in terms of national (in)security. Based on the assumption that "[...] the Lacanian subject is ontologically in a state of lack, void of cohesive and fixed identity and thus in a continuous search of filling this void, of overcoming the impossibility of identity" (Stavrakakis 1999, p. 13-47), this literature provided the insight that it becomes more productive to understand ontological security not as an uncomplicated, depoliticized goal which can be achieved, but as a powerful story which can never be fulfilled, but which continues to play a crucial part in the narratives that people and groups construct to make sense of themselves nonetheless (Kinnvall 2018, p. 10).

Along these lines, I drew from the argument that

[...] ontological security and insecurity stand not as markers of stability and instability within a timeless and non-political episteme, but as political coordinates within a given framework, wherein particular narratives are established, particular exclusions necessitated, the logic and boundaries of subjectivity drawn. This does not mean that the insecurities caused by neoliberal globalization (for instance) are not real or in serious need of redress. Rather, it places attention on *the politics of ontological security-seeking strategies*, both insofar as some may, in their response to insecurity, be violent and/or counter-productive, and insofar as others may signal complicity or privilege within a violent social and political order (Rossdale 2015, p. 374. Emphasis added).

With that in mind, the research sought to comprehend precisely those narratives and the logic and boundaries of subjectivity which were established or reflected through the politics of ontological security-seeking strategies, particularly the one represented by Trump's border wall.

Considering Trump supporters more closely on the third chapter and Trump's public speeches on the border wall on the fourth, a few conclusions can be drawn from this work of research. First, I contend that Trump's discursive approach of the border wall is effective in the sense that it evoked and inspired enjoyment and a sense of collectivity and community among Trump supporters, in a way akin to Harvey's argument that nationalist sentiment can be seen as an antidote to the dissolution of former bonds of social solidarity under the impact of neoliberalism (Harvey 2005, p. 85). Beyond that, the particular discursive framing of the border wall echoed much of what Eberle's (2017, p. 13) Lacan-oriented fantasy framework

proposed, with the structure of an ideal, an obstacle and excessively beatific/horrific futures, as well as the presence of a certain "object" whose recapturing (portrayed as removing the obstacle and/or reaching the ideal) promises the foundational guarantee of a "whole" and secure identity. Additionally, there is also the presence of the "obscene" aspect which is often translated into the narrative trope of excessive enjoyment or theft of enjoyment, in which illegal immigrants are painted as enjoying themselves beyond measure and at the expense of honest, hard-working Americans. Hence, Trump's public speeches on the border wall seem to structure a fantasy around the ideal of the "great America" which must be recaptured in order to achieve the ontological security of restored supremacy for those who supported him after it had been taken unduly by "job-stealing immigrants and minorities, along with other imagined undeserving beneficiaries of liberal inclusion" (Brown 2019, p. 5), the final obstacle towards complete enjoyment, a stable identity.

The research also concludes that the discourse on the border wall captured much of what affected Trump's constituency and intended audience, allowing them to *enjoy* and to find a sense of collectivity and pride in being American, joined with others who also felt as "strangers in their own land". Furthermore, the analysis conducted throughout the fourth chapter also demonstrated how the public speeches repeatedly framed the Southern border wall as a (often urgent) national security measure, relying on transgressive, "politically incorrect" language and controversial statements such as promising that Mexico would pay for the construction of the border wall, refusing to share the sources for the statistic data he cited on the subject (See Trump, 2019c) or speaking of immigrants as invaders (See Trump 2019c) and generally problematic people bringing crime, drugs and rape (Trump, 2015). Taken together, these elements evidence the ways in which Trump's public speeches on the subject of the border wall worked affectively, along the lines of enjoyment, fantasizing and identification, resonating by continuously exploring that element of transgression, overstepping the bounds that define what is acceptable within progressive liberal thought and breaking the "feeling rules" (See Hochschild, 2016) that many Trump supporters felt the liberals had set for American society. In this context, this form of transgression was not at odds with the conservative values Trump claimed to uphold, but rather was fundamental for the mode of enjoyment he came to inspire among those who identified with the particular form of "Americaness" he represented and claimed to defend.

Finally, it is worth noting that while the present thesis has its many limitations, it might be helpful for thinking about future avenues of research to critically investigate the many roles played by socio-material constructions such as border walls in terms of security in IR and international politics. Here, perhaps the biggest challenge faced by the research was the lack of a more precise methodological approach to the selection and analysis of the public speeches, and the same process may be done differently in future research projects through other methodological avenues. In this sense, it may be productive to take other source materials into account which might go beyond what presidential and campaign speeches have to offer, as political narratives can be traced through more informal utterances and different speakers, such as news vehicles, politicians and even the voices of Trump supporters themselves, as it might also be interesting to explore the ways in which they approached or described their own grievances and frustrations on issues pertaining to progressive-neoliberalism, open-border policies or otherwise. Another possible pathway for future research might be to employ the theoretical approach of a Lacanian reading of OST to the exploration of other far-right politicians' political agendas and public discourses by focusing on topics other than border enforcement, as this approach can be particularly useful when it comes to populist and/or nationalist narratives in general and the ways in which they may work affectively.

Accordingly, I conclude with a final reference to Rossdale's early argument that "aspirations toward (or claims of) ontological security enact significant limitations on political critique and possibility, insofar as they close down the question of the subject precisely at the point where it might more productively be kept open" (2015, p. 369), given when the author emphasized the need to recognize that "the process of achieving (or seeking to achieve) ontological security frequently involves forms of exclusion and othering which may be both violent and counter-productive" (p. 370). When speaking of the closing-down of identities and of forms of exclusion which seek to guarantee the (always elusive) capturing of ontological security, perhaps there is no example more clear than a border wall, standing at the dividing line between two countries, physical and symbolic in simultaneity. For all it came to stand for within Donald Trump's narrative, the ideal Southern border wall conjures up the image of a nation that was once free from immigration, referring to the past not in a "real" sense but to fantasies of an

imagined or desired past, which represented something secure and homogenous that could be performed in the present (Kinnvall 2018, p. 13), an imaginary of complete (national) selfhood. In recognizing this, my chosen research pathway for investigating the border wall presents an endeavor of leaving the question of the subject open to uncertainty and ambivalence by not conflating it with the identities it seeks, and instead attempting to acknowledge the fantasies and desires underpinning those very processes of identification.

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