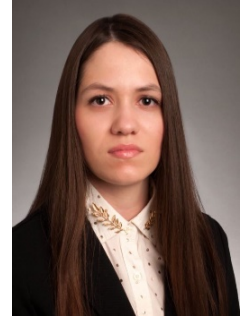


# The Burden of Liveness: DACA Recipients and the Crime of Rhetoric

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## Abstract

*This article serves to explore the burden placed on recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) since the program's conception in 2012. The rhetoric of DACA has consistently expected recipients to move away from their native countries and identities in order to assimilate. Following the rhetoric of the 2016 election and current Trump administration, rhetoric has been used to criminalize several immigrant groups. I contend that DACA recipients carry what Jose Munoz refers to as the "burden of liveness," in which they "perform" nationality in response to the majoritarian group. DACA recipients are expected to perform perfection, in order to obtain DACA and keep basic human rights. Drawing upon Munoz's theories, and Kenneth Burke's identification theory, I analyze the DREAM Act: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees and Border Security, the bills S. 1615 and H.R. 1468, and former Attorney General Jeff Sessions' remarks on rescinding DACA. Finally, I discuss the ways that DACA recipients use the "burden of liveness" as a means of resistance, in order to change the culture from within.*

The rhetorical reality that DACA recipients must navigate has changed since the 2016 presidential elections. The Trump campaign produced a significant amount of disquieting rhetoric on DACA recipients; during a campaign speech in Arizona on August 31, 2016, Trump promised to "immediately terminate President Obama's two illegal executive amnesties" (Qtd. in Pierce et al. 14). On September 5, 2017, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced the cancellation of DACA, and DACA activism resumed pre-Trump patterns, (most notably the use of the term "DREAMer") despite the changes in the rhetorical landscape. As the nature of identification changes for immigrants in today's political climate, so must the rhetoric of DACA activism.

In the pages that follow, I draw on José Muñoz' theories of "disidentification" and the "burden of liveness" and Kenneth Burke's "identification" to explain how capitalism and the concept of nationhood have policed the undocumented body. I analyze Attorney General Jeff Sessions' remarks on rescinding DACA, the 2011 hearing before the subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees and Border Security on the DREAM Act, and two bills, S. 1615 and H.R. 1468, to argue that there is an ongoing pattern of expecting DACA recipients to carry the "burden of liveness" in order to fulfill their capitalist potential and assimilate into the American nation state. Finally, I call for the necessary changes in DACA rhetoric that will achieve a secular conversion (Burke *Permanence and Change*) that acknowledges the personhood of the DACA recipient it affects.

Today, DREAMers continue to engage in what Jose Muñoz refers to as "disidentification." Muñoz defines disidentification as the "survival strategy" of a minority subject in order to navigate a majoritarian public sphere that does not respect their existence. It is a "response to state and global power apparatuses that employ systems of racial, sexual, and national subjugation" (Muñoz 161). It is an active movement away from a stereotype or forced identity marker. As the DREAMer is presented as being blameless for their undocumented status, the blame shifts onto their immigrant parents, and a disidentification occurs. The DACA recipient is a hybrid subject, occupying the identity of their native country, and the American identity. Thus, identifying oneself as a "DREAMer" may involve a painful rejection of the self. Rhetoric does not just affect the language used to identify DACA recipients, as traditional theories of rhetoric would suggest, but it has also affected the DACA recipients' body and person.

This is because DACA recipients are forced to carry what Muñoz refers to as the "burden of liveness." This is the "need for a minoritarian subject to 'be live' for the purpose of entertaining elites" (Muñoz 182). In this case, the elite are those with political power that govern immigrant bodies. The "burden of liveness" is a performance of disidentification—a forced performance of Otherness. This performance dominates the body; the "liveness" consists

of being “live” during all moments in life. The “burden of liveness” stems from the tension of hybridity. DACA recipients are forced to disidentify from their native identities to perform nationalism. For these reasons, I follow the push from Dr. Ana Milena Ribero, activist Karla Aguirre, and others to discontinue the use of the term DREAMer, and will refer to DACA recipients as such in this paper.

The term DREAMer arose in response to the identification that was taking place far before the rhetoric of the 2016 election. Kenneth Burke contends that the naming of something is to identify it, thus giving it a rhetorical meaning that it didn’t have before. In an oft quoted statement from *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke writes, “You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his” (55). The DREAMer identity is a response to the dehumanization of DACA recipients. A large part of DACA activism and the DREAMer identity lies in the fulfilling of capitalist potential through extraordinary achievements, (such as being high school valedictorians and/or entrepreneurs), which can be seen as a live performance for the American elite. This can also be seen as a performance of race, unique to the DACA recipients’ undocumented status.

Performances of race and ethnicity are complicated by diaspora, or the leaving of one’s native country. In order to not allow identification of DACA recipients, the anti-immigrant public have sought to convince others of their viewpoints by dehumanizing DACA recipients. The immigrant population is made to embody illegality by being referred to as “illegals” or “illegal aliens.” These terms create an antithesis between immigrants and U.S. citizens. Burke goes on to state that, “...the killing of something is the changing of it, and the statement of the thing’s nature before and after the change is an identifying of it” (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 20). Dialectically, identification is also used to “kill” the immigrant, “changing” them into model minorities that have earned their place at America’s table. Across DACA narratives, DACA recipients are shown to be valedictorians of their classes, entrepreneurs, and general assets to society (Schwab 117). In the classic DACA narrative, DREAMers are blameless immigrants with exceptional achievements, fully assimilated and ripe for capitalist potential.

## **The Historical Context of DACA**

### **A brief history of the politicized immigrant body**

A conversation on DACA must first begin with a conversation on immigration, and the body of the Latinx immigrant. Historically, the U.S./Mexico border has always been politicized. In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed and Mexico ceded about half of its republic to the U.S. thus creating the first hybrid subjects. In 1853, the border once again crossed Mexican citizens with the completion of the Gadsden Purchase. For years, the border remained relatively unpoliced, and Latinx immigrants moved back and forth to pursue migrant labor. Aviva Chomsky contends that “US immigration law treated Mexicans as...temporary migrants who entered the country to work, rather than as immigrants who intended to stay” (10). This allowed immigration policy to create an exploited labor force (Chomsky 11). The border remained unpoliced until 1924, which didn’t “limit immigration from the Western hemisphere” but did create the Border Patrol. I mention this because a politicized border, and the expectation that the immigrant body provide labor and capitalist advantage for the U.S. is not new. The performance of race looks different within each context, but the “burden of liveness” remains.

Chomsky asserts that by the 1960s, “overt racism had fallen out of fashion” (2). Because discrimination historically based solely upon race began to enfold illegality and crime, the immigrant was made to embody illegality. In 1965, the U.S. began to restrict the movement of Mexican and Latinx bodies by placing quotas on “Western hemisphere migrants,” and “illegality as we know it today [came into] existence” (Chomsky 2). According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Mexico’s quote decreased the amount of Mexicans able to seek permanent residence by an estimated 30,000.

### **A brief history of DACA**

In 2001 and across 2002, the federal Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors, also known as the DREAM Act, was introduced. Known in the House of Representatives as H.R. 1918 and in the Senate as S. 1291, these bills were intended to provide a pathway for undocumented youth to become citizens. These bills were never passed, and, between 2003 to 2008, were revised into multiple versions. This list is not inclusive, but includes the DREAM Act of 2005 (S. 2075), the American Dream Act (H.R. 5131), the DREAM Act of 2007 (S. 774), and the Security through Regularized Immigration and a Vibrant Economy Act of 2007 (H.R. 1645), amongst others. None of these passed, but a new DREAM Act was introduced in 2010. This bill also failed to pass. But 2011

through 2012 finally proved fruitful. California enacted the California Dream Act, and President Obama enacted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) via executive order on June 15, 2012.

## How DACA works: eligibility requirements

While some of the rhetoric surrounding DACA has made it appear to the anti-immigrant public and casual observer alike as encompassing all undocumented youth, this policy does not include some of the more vulnerable undocumented population. This can be seen in DACA's implementation. DACA is not an "automatic" status; potential recipients need to apply. A DACA recipient must have arrived in the United States before age 16, have been born on or after June 15, 1981, and have lived in the US since June 15, 2007. They must have been students at the time of application. If they weren't currently in school, they must have a high school diploma or GED, or have served in the US military.

DACA recipients who serve in the military used to serve in the Military Accessions Vital to National Interest (MAVINI) a Pentagon pilot project, before the project's discontinuation in 2016. The project waived citizenship requirements for DACA recipients, refugees, and green card holders with "skills considered to be vital to national interest," including health care professionals and proficiency in a MAVINI eligible language ("United States"). MAVINI's existence may create the impression that DACA is accessible for many applicants, but this is not the case. Because of the focus on Middle Eastern and Asian languages, Spanish is not a MAVINI eligible language. This is indicative of the exploitation of Latinx immigrant bodies. Nationalism is performed through military service, but it is kept performative by attaching it to a DACA requirement. Consequently, the "burden of liveness" is present before the application process for DACA even begins. Potential DACA recipients must earn their "Americanness" by offering something to the nation state, such as an education that can lead to a skill set that can be utilized by the American economy, or military service that serves to further American interests. There is a burden placed on DACA recipients, as they must have demonstrated that they can perform for the elite before applying.

## How DACA works: the application process

DACA continues to be made less accessible in the application process. To begin with, applicants must pay a fee of \$495. Furthermore, because undocumented individuals are expected to "be live" during day to day life, disruptions in the performance may lead to contact with the police or U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). For example, some DACA recipients have narrowly avoided deportation after coming into contact with police for jaywalking or minor traffic violations (Schwartz 103). If applicants have departed the US, had police or ICE contact, or have other potential setbacks to eligibility, the need for attorneys may lead to additional costs. These fees render DACA inaccessible to certain groups. However, some legislation, including S.1615 (which I analyze later) waive the application fee for individuals who are younger than 18, fall below the poverty line, are in foster care or lack familial support, are younger than 18 and homeless, or have a disability that prevents them from seeking employment. Applicants may also find monetary assistance with advocacy groups, and many lawyers waive fees.

Potential recipients also need to apply at least 120 days before expiration of DACA status. Within advocacy communities, stories have circulated of applications being lost in the mail, or of having been thrown out or left on a front desk, unread. Because of this, applicants have also been encouraged to deliver their applications in person. If an application needs to be re-sent, another application fee is charged.

DACA is not a path to citizenship, and no other such paths or lines exist. DACA status provides a renewable 2 year deferment from deportation. Recipients are made eligible to have work permits, apply for student loans and a driver's license, and be provided with a social security number. Thus, as soon as the capitalist potential of the DACA recipient has been further exploited, they may be deported from the country.

## DACA under Trump

As previously mentioned, the cancellation of DACA was announced by Attorney General Jeff Sessions on September 5, 2017. On January 9, 2018, a federal judge ordered the administration to resume DACA renewals after a bipartisan White House meeting. The administration appealed to the US Supreme Court on January 16, 2018, and the federal government entered shutdown on January 20<sup>th</sup>. On February 27, the US Supreme Court declined the request, and the Administration was ordered to hold off on changes to DACA on March 5, 2018. While this seemed like a victory, the solution was temporary, since a window was left open for the Administration to justify the

cancellation of DACA. On November 8, 2018, the Court of Appeals for the Ninth circuit ruled against Trump's DACA cancellation.

In light of the current political attitudes towards DACA, it is easy to forget that the fight has been ongoing. DACA's roots in the DREAM Act provide opportunity for rhetorical study—an analysis of a 2011 Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees and Border Security follows.

## Analysis

### The DREAM Act: hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees and Border Security

While the current Administration has provided multiple instances of rhetorical value that can be analyzed to showcase Muñoz' theories of disidentification and "burden of liveness," and Burke's identification theory, the "burden of liveness" has been present since the Obama administration. The rhetoric of the Obama administration used different tactics than the current administration's, but still had negative effects on human lives.

In 2011, a subcommittee of the United States Senate committee on the judiciary met to discuss the DREAM Act. Presided over by U.S. Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois, a Democrat, the hearing used the standard rhetoric for defending DACA, and included a testimony from Ola Kaso, a high school graduate from Michigan.

In the beginning of his prepared statement, Senator Durbin invited a few DREAMers to stand up as he presented their narratives. Tereza Lee was a high school graduate that was accepted to the Juilliard School of Music and the Manhattan School of Music, who discovered her undocumented status upon filling out college applications. Five other DREAMers were presented, all having either served in the military or obtained college degrees with outstanding accomplishments. As he explains the plight of the DREAMers, he stated that they "find themselves in a legal twilight zone through no fault of their own," and that they would, "happily go to the back of any line and wait their turn for citizenship, but there is no line for them to get into" (Qtd. in United States "The DREAM Act").

Senator Durbin's prepared statement, while meaning well, presented DACA recipients as blameless victims, disidentified from their parents. The immigrant body was presented as just that—a body—and was objectified into providing labor and capitalist potential. Throughout each senator's statement, it was never argued that their states wanted to keep DACA recipients because they are human, but rather because it was cost effective, because the United States was losing its ground in STEM fields, and because they had already proved their economic value to American society by being entrepreneurs, valedictorians, and so forth.

Furthermore, DACA recipients were argued to have "no attachment to their country of birth" (Qtd. in United States, "The Dream Act"). This last point, especially, showed the assumption that Americanness must be earned by refusing relation to another nation. It is easy to see why the DACA recipient has been forced into disidentifying from their country of origin, from their "illegal immigrant" parents, and other members of their communities. This is also present in legislation: in S. 1615 it is stated that "the alien" cannot "have departed from the United States for any period exceeding 90 days or for any periods, in the aggregate, exceeding 180 days." (See further analysis in the next section.)

A disidentification from one's country of origin can be seen in Ola Kaso's testimony, performed towards the end of the hearing. She opened her statement by describing herself at 5 years old, newly immigrated and struggling in the American classroom because she couldn't speak English. She then moved forward, stating, "I have come a long way since that day 13 years ago," and described her accomplishments (Qtd. in United States, "DREAM Act"). Kaso graduated high school with a 4.4 GPA, had high ACT scores, dedicated "countless hours" to charity and community, and enrolled in the University of Michigan to "ultimately...become a surgical oncologist," with the intention of helping Americans who couldn't afford healthcare. She ended her testimony by describing being told that she would be deported, and her community's support that led to a year of deferment. She stated, "America is my home, not Albania" (Qtd. in United States, "DREAM Act"). This performance of nationalism is meant to earn her "Americanness." Kaso disidentifies from her "native" identity to navigate the majoritarian public sphere and advocate for her place in the U.S.

In all the presented narratives of the DACA recipients, they are shown to be carrying the "burden of liveness." The roles that these students have played (the valedictorian, the outstanding STEM student, and so forth) are no longer personal achievements but performances meant to please the elite and majoritarian public sphere that govern their bodies and movement. Kaso's testimony is an especially powerful example of the "burden of liveness," because her words existed for the consumption of the spectator—the political elite. Her identity was disfigured into

a dehumanized model minority having to earn her spot, *and* she carried the weight of advocating for the other DREAMers. Her full story, her history, was denied, and her future hanged in the balance.

This is why Muñoz argues that to carry the “burden of liveness” is to exist in a temporary state. He writes, “To be only in ‘the live’ means that one is denied history and futurity. If the minoritarian subject can only exist in *the moment*, she or he does not have the privilege or the pleasure of being a historical subject. If that subject needs to focus solely on the present, it can never afford the luxury of thinking about the future” (Muñoz 189). This is why carrying the “burden of liveness” affects the DACA recipients’ personhood. How they see themselves, how they act, their goals—all of these must be built around the relationship between themselves and the majoritarian public sphere.

DACA recipients, whether they are physically present for these testimonies and protests, or in the shadows, cannot exist in peace. Their history has been erased, and their future is unstable. The idea that DACA recipients are over-exceptional contributions to the U.S. would converge downward with time. This can be especially dangerous when written into legislation, as we see with bills S. 1615 and H.R. 1468. Legislation presents the same idea, in a different rhetorical package.

## Two bills: H.R. 1468 and S. 1615

The use of this rhetoric and language doesn’t just exist in Senate floors. Because human beings are symbol-using creatures, rhetoric creates the reality we operate in. We can see this as particular rhetorics chain out into the legislation that governs immigrant bodies. H.R. 1468, or the “Recognizing America’s Children Act,” was presented as a more conservative response to Obama’s executive order, and was introduced during the 1<sup>st</sup> session of the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress. The name “Recognizing America’s Children Act” can serve to either recognize DACA recipients, or to utilize the argument that DACA harms American citizens. S. 1615, or the “Dream Act of 2017,” was introduced on the Senate floor on July 20, 2017, during the first session of the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress by the Republican Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, Democrat Dick Durbin of Illinois, Republican Jeff Flake of Arizona, and Democrat Chuck Schumer of New York. S. 1615 more closely resembles Obama’s original legislation, but still contains rhetoric that represents the ongoing antithesis between immigrants and the anti-immigrant public.

Most notable in both bills is the use of the term, “alien,” instead of “undocumented” or “unauthorized.” The rhetorical situation being that the creation of the nation state led to legislation governing the movement of bodies, the naming of those bodies as “alien” is a rhetorical choice that delivers the message that those bodies don’t belong—they aren’t even human. In H.R. 1468, the purpose statement at the top of the bill utilizes, “aliens.” The reset of the bill adds qualifiers, using “alien enlistee,” and “alien postsecondary student.” Once an “alien” is “granted conditional permanent resident status under this Act,” the name becomes, “conditional permanent resident.” In S. 1615, the purpose statement uses “individuals,” but then utilizes “alien.” In S. 1615 “alien” makes an appearance 186 times.

The term “alien” has become such a norm within the majoritarian public sphere that it has affected how the personhood of the DACA recipient is perceived. When DACA recipients are stripped of their humanity, it becomes easier to commodify them, to force them to perform, and to police their movements.

In H.R. 1468, this is seen in the requirement that the potential recipient must have “the intention to permanently reside in the United States,” and must not “have a foreign residence which the alien has no intention of abandonin.” Recipients are required to have registered under the Military Selective Service Act, and cannot have departed from the US for “any period in excess of 90 days or for any periods in the aggregate exceeding 180 days.”

The bill is introduced by ten Representatives<sup>1</sup>, five of which identify as Latinx. It is worth speculating that in an attempt to move away from Latinx stereotypes, these Representatives adapted a more conservative political stance on DACA. Further research is needed to indicate whether these Representatives are disidentifying, but it can be contended that the DACA recipients must perform nationalism to meet their expectations and earn their “American-ness.”

S. 1615 doesn’t carry this potential, but it is worth noting that it is a bi-partisan bill. S. 1615 also requires registration under the Military Selective Service Act, with a qualification for deferred action only being an option if

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<sup>1</sup> Republican Carlos Curbelo of Florida, Republican Mike Coffman of Colorado, Republicans Jeff Denham and David Valadao of California, Republican Mario Díaz-Balart, and Lleana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida, Republican Mark Amodei of Nevada, Republican Fred Upton of Michigan, Republican Dave Reichert of Washington, and Republican Jenniffer González-Colón, Puerto Rico’s Resident Commissioner.

the potential recipient has served for two years and received honorable discharge. In this way, their service can be used for national interest. The recipient must also have been employed for “at least 3 years and at least 75 percent of the time that the alien has had a valid employment authorization.” Like H.R. 1468, they cannot have left the U.S. for more than 180 days.

The “burden of liveness” manifests itself in the requirements for military service and presence in the U.S. Because recipients cannot be in their native countries for long periods of time, they are forced to disidentify from them. In order to avoid deportation, they must serve in the military. The U.S. utilizes these requirements to exploit their service for national interests, but it does not provide a permanent place for DACA recipients. The dehumanization of recipients, through the use of the term “alien,” goes so far that these exploitations appear mercenary or noble.

## Jeff Sessions’ remarks on rescinding DACA

The dehumanization of DACA recipients also allows for the Trump Administration to build public argument against them. As with many arguments made in opposition to immigration, Sessions’ comments on September 5, 2017 utilized antithesis between the dominant hegemony and immigrants in order to justify the cancellation of DACA. Chomsky writes, “...the law is never neutral, but rather reflects power relationships in society” (24). By discriminating on the basis of citizenship instead of race, those deemed legally superior have their interests protected. Sessions’ remarks used the law to criminalize the immigrant body and the Obama administration, and they justified the Trump administration’s argument. The implications of this racially charged argument are that the DACA recipients are then forced to disidentify from their native identities, in order to fit within the protection of the majoritarian public sphere. That is to say, in order to continue to live in the U.S., DACA recipients must respond to Sessions’ remarks by overtly rejecting the parts of themselves that the majoritarian public sphere has also rejected to appear to assimilate.

In his speech, Sessions first announced that DACA had been rescinded, and then named DACA recipients as “mostly-adult illegal aliens.” It is not solely the naming that does the damage, but the conversion downward by means of an “unfit incongruous terminology” (Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 128). Sessions effectively “killed” the immigrant child or youth that is the DACA recipient, and perpetuated the image of an adult criminal<sup>2</sup> (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 20). Not only is this how Sessions used antithesis to meet Trump supporters in the argument that DACA recipients have harmed American society, but it is one of the ways in which the undocumented body is denied a childhood. The “burden of liveness” is tied to how DACA recipients are forced to embody illegality. No matter how old the DACA recipient is, their existence is reduced into that of a de-humanized criminal.

The DACA recipient thus identified, Sessions then vilified the Obama administration. He called DACA an illegal “executive amnesty policy,” and named the Obama administration with illegality (Qtd. in Beckwith). He stated, “Such an open-ended circumvention of immigration laws was an unconstitutional exercise of authority by the Executive Branch,” and went on to state that the Obama administration had a “disrespect for the legislative process” (Qtd. in Beckwith).

This enabled Sessions to align the Trump administration with “compassion” and justice. He stated, “We inherited from our Founders—and have advanced—an unsurpassed legal heritage, which is the foundation of our freedom, safety, and prosperity” (Qtd. in Beckwith). He argued that the Trump administration does not “disrespect or [demean]” immigrants; simply that they were “...properly enforcing our laws as Congress has passed them” (Qtd. in Beckwith). Words such as the “Founders” and “heritage” contain a meaning that pertains to the American narrative, but they are also arbitrary in meaning. Utilizing the strategic ambiguity of the Trump administration, in which supporters are called to action but the rhetoric can argue they had no negative intentions, Sessions’ use of the American narrative does not textually exclude all immigrants. He states, “This does not mean [immigrants] are bad people or that our nation disrespects or demeans them in any way” (Qtd. in Beckwith). Consequently, his rhetoric can move communities against each other. DACA recipients, who need to perform perfection in order to keep their DACA benefits, may have to disidentify from some parts of the immigrant community, such as their parents, or immigrants that entered the country differently than they did. Sessions’ misnaming of bodies of color has a real effect on human lives.

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth speculating how the embodiment of criminality has also justified the current holding of children due to “zero tolerance policy.”

## Discussion

Like disidentification, identification is never an uncomplicated affair. The anti-immigrant majoritarian public sphere is not a single body with a single set of beliefs. As Burke pointed out, an individual locus of motives remains unique despite being identified to others. On both sides of the political spectrum, arguments have been made that dehumanize DACA recipients and inflict damage upon their personhood and perceptions of self. The rhetoric of the majoritarian public sphere forces a misidentification from DACA recipients and their parents, from their peers, and from their native countries and identities. Disidentification is a response to the State, a survival strategy. But though I've been critiquing how DACA recipients are forced to disidentify and carry the "burden of liveness," it would be discrediting to say that the focus of DACA recipients lies only in survival. Disidentification is also a means of resistance. This is because disidentification, while employing strategies for survival in the present, envisions a future of equality and strives for it. Muñoz explains:

Disidentification...neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification) this...attempts to transform a cultural logic from within. (11-12).

When DACA recipients disidentify from their parents and native identities, they acknowledge their present circumstances, including the looming danger of deportation. Recipients such as Ola Kaso are speaking to the majoritarian public sphere, after all. But they also advocate for themselves and work towards the passing of DACA legislation. They resist the forced identification that the majoritarian public sphere has given them. On May 16, 2018, Trump said of immigrants, "We have people coming into the country, or trying to come in—we're stopping a lot of them—but we're taking people out of the country, you wouldn't believe how bad these people are. These aren't people, these are animals" (Qtd. in Korte and Gomez). In some ways, the identity marker of the exceptional DACA recipient is the materialization of resistance; DACA recipients have demonstrated that they are everything Trump says they are not.

This is why the "burden of liveness" is a significant and daring gesture of disidentification. While it is a "live" performance for the elite, it is also a form of infiltration in which DACA recipients ask for an understanding of who they are based upon what they are not. By performing the embodiments expected of them by the majoritarian public sphere, they resist stereotypes. The "burden of liveness" is also the embodiment of temporality. This is especially true for DACA recipients, because DACA legislation does not include a path to citizenship. A DACA recipient may be deported after the State has made use of their exceptional performance; and because the government is aware of their status, other family members may also be deported. Though they are separated by disidentification, both DACA recipients and their family members are defined by temporality. While the lack of a path to citizenship is grave, it is important to remember that deferred action from deportation or even citizenship is not a permanent fix for the ideologies at work in the majoritarian public sphere.

Because the "burden of liveness" doesn't align or directly go against those dominant ideologies, but instead provides an opportunity for DACA recipients to use them for their own purposes, their resistance is often appropriated to exclude other communities. The parents of DACA recipients, those that weren't eligible for DACA, and other groups are set aside when the disidentification occurs. Because these groups may not perform the way DACA recipients do, recipients are then commodified for their performance. All of this is why an exorcism by misnomer is needed.

### A Path Forward: Exorcism by Misnomer

Burke contends that language is persuasive, and therefore culture is persuasive. This is why a "strategic resource of terminology" defines culture: war can be named as a "special kind of peace" if it is named a *perversion* of it (Burke *Permanence and Change*, 20). With this in mind, one of the ways in which disidentification can alleviate the "burden of liveness" is to create what Burke calls an "exorcism by misnomer." Essentially, an old self is changed through vocabulary to allow a new self to emerge. As Burke states, "It effects its cures by providing a new perspective that dissolves the system of pieties lying at the roots of the patient's sorrows...offering a fresh terminology of motives to replace the patient's painful terminology of motives" (*Permanence and Change*, 125). If DACA recipients are respected as the human beings that they are, if we begin to question why their movement is policed, then there may be less pressure on them to constantly perform.

“Exorcism by misnomer” is a redefining or renaming of the problem. It is not a permanent solution, but rather a beginning to the right conversation. I do not wish to pretend that by vocabulary alone we can achieve justice for immigrants and immigrant families. But language creates empathy. It allows us to have the emotional capacity to treat immigrants with respect, and to truly understand the problem at hand.

## Conclusion

Efforts to rescind and defend DACA have equally relied on the disidentification of DACA recipients. Across rhetorical situations, they have carried the “burden of liveness” in an effort to exist in between assimilation and direct opposition to the ideology of the majoritarian public sphere. Their performances draw attention to the fact that performance does not lead to the realization of citizenship, or even a sense of belonging in the nation state. As I hope I’ve made clear, these performances arise out of a need for survival while simultaneously being a means of resistance. Over time, disidentification can allow for change from within. But this resistance comes at the cost of painful disidentification from native identity—a change to how DACA recipients perceive themselves.

This is why it is important for citizens to question the rhetoric of DACA activism. It is not enough to defend DACA if it is being done by means of the “burden of liveness.” While the fight for DACA has been long, the current Administration and their rhetoric that cause DACA recipients and other immigrant groups to embody criminality provide opportunity to question what the resistance of DACA recipients can mean for the majoritarian public sphere. Disidentification and the “burden of liveness” exist because they imagine a future of equality. If we allow DACA recipients to move past earning their “Americanness” and into having control of their personhood and identity, then the rhetoric of DACA activism can potentially get closer to achieving true equality.

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