

BEYOND FAMILY SEPARATION:

The (Anti)Politics of Care & Pathways of Resistance within U.S. Immigration Detention

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ABSTRACT

- This thesis critically examines the centralization of “family separation” within critiques of the Trump administration’s immigration policies.
- The purpose of this examination is to answer a seemingly simple question; why does a child separated from their parents engender greater public attention—and sympathy—than people in immigration detention on hunger strike?
- I adapt Miriam Ticktin’s conceptualization of the (anti)politics of care to argue that the moral imperative to end family separation produces hierarchies of suffering while reinforcing immigration detention’s necropolitical ends
- These hierarchies delegitimize the overtly political suffering of people in immigration detention engaged in hunger strikes.
- The figure of a child separated from their parents can be understood as a foil to the hunger striker
- I conclude by examining the emergence of a new form of ‘morally legitimate suffering’: those who are highly susceptible to COVID-19, and the forms of ongoing resistance taking place in immigration detention facilities

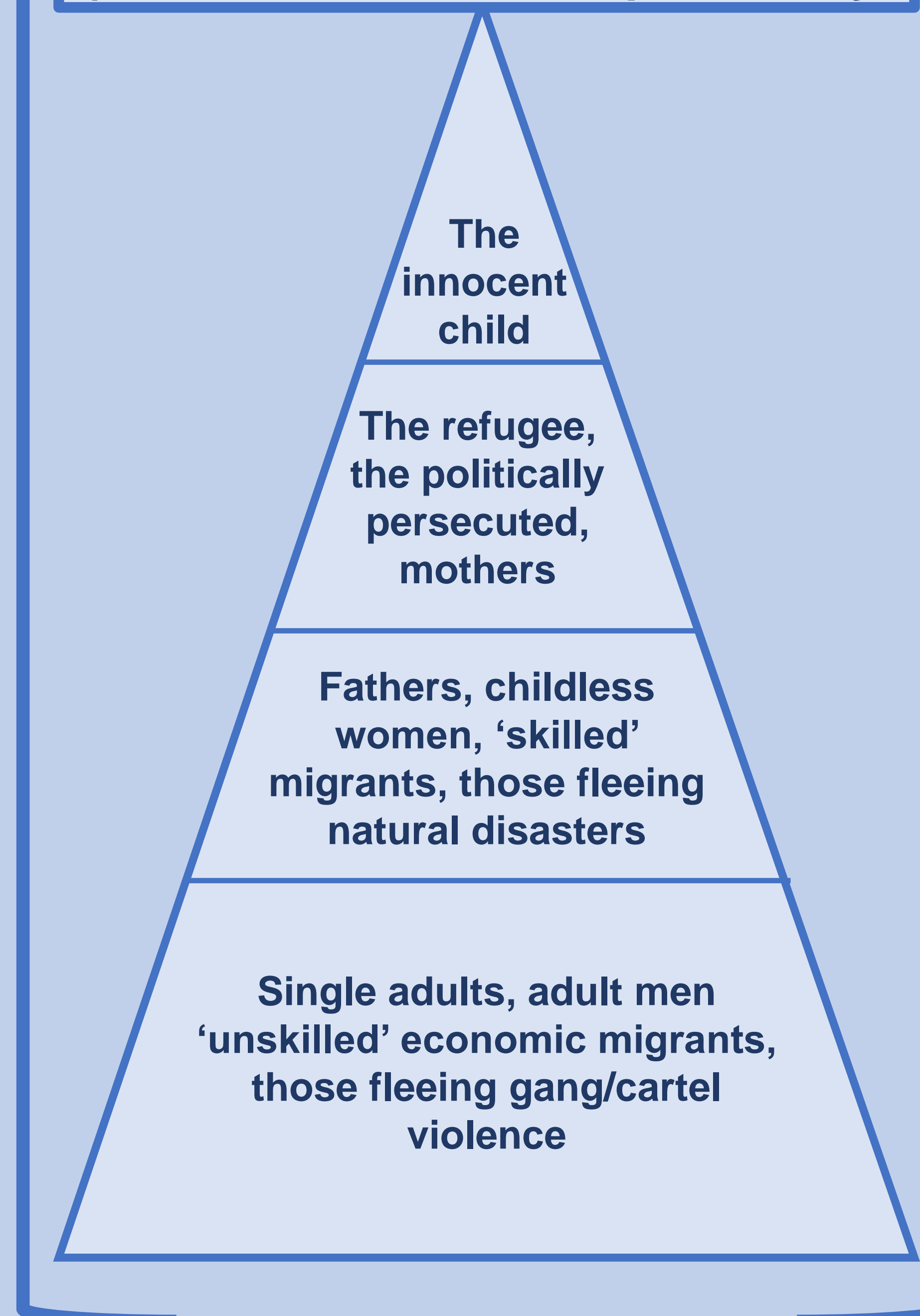
ANTIPOLITICS OF ‘NO MORE KIDS IN CAGES’

- Former Obama administration officials, including those who were involved in the maintenance of the U.S. immigration detention apparatus have been vocal critics of Trump immigration policies
- These critiques lack introspection or contrition for the harms they perpetuated when they held power, including forms of family separation
- Biden’s 2020 campaign antipolitics is overt, they make moralist appeals to restore “soul” of the nation and return to era of decency while doing little to address Biden’s 40+ year policy record on immigration
- Fundamentally, critiques by Trump’s primary political opposition are not revolutionary but instead reinforce the border as a necropolitical project

RESISTANCE IN IMMIGRATION DETENTION

- Contrasting the depolitized life of children and the overtly politized life (and bodies) of hunger strikers
- Two ends of a hierarchy of suffering: the crying child vs hunger striker
- Universal, recognizable vs subversive & foreign
- Emphasis on innocence of children casts guilt on other migrants, especially childless adults, adult men, and ‘economic migrants’
- Though children occupy the apex of this hierarchy of suffering, they still exist within a racialized space of expendability; they are still vulnerable to the necropolitical functions of U.S. sovereignty and white supremacy

Hierarchy of Suffering (within racial state of expendability)



THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- Ticktin’s Antipolitics of Care (2011)
- Moralism is often framed as apolitical, even when those claiming to act in pursuit of a moral imperative are themselves political actors
- Rather than being apolitical, this work reinforces the status quo, reproducing inequalities and obfuscating the social and political roots of the harms they seek to address
- Mbembe’s Necropolitics (2003)
- “The ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die”
- Mbembe focuses on the ways in which the sovereign exercises control over death and destroys the other
- Agamben’s Bare Life and State of Exception (1998)
- Bare life: biological life, life that is separate from the political and social world. Agamben writes that those excluded from political order of the modern nation-state have been reduced to bare life
- State of Exception: zones outside the law—where the sovereign suspends the legal order, the means by which states reduce people to bare life
- Marquez’s “Racial State of Expendability” (2012)
- The biopolitics and necropolitics of modern states and the U.S. form of settler-colonial white supremacy both act in the U.S. borderlands to produce a space of racialized expendability—Latinos as “living dead”

COVID-19 & ‘MORALLY LEGITIMATE’ SUFFERING

- Emergence of a new form of universal suffering body, some detainees have been released
- COVID-19 exceptions ground the biological, medicalizing harm—incarceration makes everyone more susceptible to illness, what happens to those who don’t fit into a predefined vulnerable category?
- People detained are organizing, engaging in hunger strikes

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