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False Cures of U.S. Nationalism

The Border Wall – A Raucous Call from the Silent Center

by

Tatiana Browne-Kai

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2020

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

False Cures of U.S. Nationalism

The Border Wall – A Raucous Call from a Silent Center

Tatiana N. Browne-Kai

Advisor: Susan Buck-Morss

In trying to grasp the authoritarian surge in the U.S. since 2016, political theorists have increasingly turned their focus back to the Studies of the Authoritarian Personality. In response to the risk of these contemporary studies' use of psychoanalysis in a de-historicized and individualized way, this paper opts for a double historicization of modern mass-formations. In analyzing the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, the Minuteman Border Fence and We Build the Wall - civil initiatives that aim at fortifying the U.S.-Mexican border wall (D. Trumps central campaign theme), the current surge to the right is shown to be based on and made possible through long grown and widely prevalent institutionalized formations of U.S. nationalism. The unity that the fortification of a border promises calls for the externalization of ambivalence, by which continuous crises of capitalism, class and social contradictions are falsely cured with the illusion of a strong, united America enclosed by an 'impenetrable' wall.

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1. Introduction

At the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak in March of 2020, the US Government responded not by mandating physical distance measures (a move recommended by its own disease control agencies) but rather by closing its borders. A threat that was obviously capable of traveling through air, that did not stop in awe of a 40-foot-high physical border, and that had already made its way into the US, was imagined to be confineable by closing the borders. The call to build a wall between Mexico and the U.S. (and even have the Mexican state pay for it) was from the start a claim that did not care so much about being realistically viable, but rather a claim that drew its power from the values it invoked – a strong, secured nation state. Now, to everyone’s surprise the most improbable seeming candidate inhabits the White House, having run on the urgency of the construction of the “impenetrable and handsome” wall.

This surge to the right, while an international phenomenon, is in Donald Trump’s case claimed to be a reaction to the presidency of Barack Obama. Correspondingly, Trump is thought of as a new phenomenon, or a product of his own narcissism. He is analyzed via his unique performance and manipulative tactics, which are themselves imagined as having the force to draw the crowds by their power alone. Both perspectives however, that Trump is either representative of a recent republican backlash to the first black president or that his presidency is an individual phenomenon entirely reducible to Trump’s idiosyncratic personality, are too short sighted.

Neither contextualize his propaganda against its long history in the U.S., nor the social dynamics that led to his person and campaign having such a strong appeal in the first place. In response to these analyses, it will have to be shown then, that the popularity of the physical border and the illusions tied to it are not outcome of his person, but rather are based in long-standing political dynamics, ideologies and social structures embedded in the center of U.S. nationalism. The

central question then would have to focus on what the social and psychological preconditions are that create people, whose subjectivity are taken by the phantasma of the border wall.

To circumvent the repetition of the continuous focus on the central figure in U.S. politics, I want to turn to civil initiatives that have been focusing on financing, protecting and building parts of the border on their own in the past and present: *The Minuteman*, *The Minuteman Civil Defense Corps* and *We Build the Wall*. These groups, while relatively marginal in the numbers of (mostly male) supporters, still are representative of that what has gained massive support in mainstream politics today. The turn toward civil initiatives is therefore, not intended to ‘prove’ their political impact, (because that is to be doubted), nor is it intended as an analysis of far-right or right-extreme groups, or individuals that are high F-scale scorers. Their initiatives will be shown to be a lingering account of the constructions that have become raucously loud since 2016.

My leading question then is this: What is the wide appeal of the U.S. - Mexican Border Wall? What is its phantasmatic pull? And (how) is it based in a history of American nationalist constructions and in a society producing subjects in longing desire for such measures? These questions will organize the following material and hopefully lead us to understand what functions the initiatives ascribe to the measurement and what ideals of American nationalism and masculinity are coined in their self-descriptions and their self-proclaimed task.

2. Studies on the Authoritarian Personality in the U.S. Context

Since 2016, there has been a vast amount of literature that turns to the “Authoritarian Personality” and the Frankfurt School’s psychoanalytic writings on fascism to understand the surge in right extremism coming to power worldwide, and specifically in the U.S. today. One

intent of this discussion is to show how the surprise at the outcome of the 2016 presidential election is based in a political theory that did not anticipate the election's outcome due to insufficiencies in this theory. (i.e. Abromeit 2018) In mainstream political discourse, it was not foreseen that right extremism would enter the governing politics—Britain was not expected to vote to exit the EU, and Donald Trump was not taken seriously as a candidate right up to the final ballot count. (Abromeit 2018: 3) The Frankfurt School's Studies are taken to show how Donald Trump and his supporters have to be coined as authoritarian, as fascist or neo-fascist, but are also referenced for rethinking political theory, and showing the necessity for including psychoanalytic theory to understand the gap between voters' expected rational economic interest and their improbable, irrational choice for President.

The *Studies in the Authoritarian Personality* (AP study) go back to the work of the Institute for Social Research of the 40s and 50s under Max Horkheimer. In exile from Nazi Germany and following an invitation from the American Jewish Committee, the researchers were trying to find out the U.S. population's potential to turn fascist. Particularly, as the U.S.' official politics had been anti-fascist, it was not to be expected that people were to express their fascist ideologies openly. Hence a methodology had to be developed that would expose subliminal psychic structures that were not expressed in open political opinion (Schwandt 2010: 76). Accordingly, questionnaires were developed and distributed to over 2,000 subjects in the U.S., measuring the latent readiness to turn anti-Semitic, ethnocentric, and to hold reactionary social-Darwinist perspectives on economics. These ideas formed the base of the potentiality for fascism, the so-called F-scale, which was primarily developed by Theodor W. Adorno, based on his previous work in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, with its chapter *Elements of Anti-Semitism*. The F-scale was meant to measure a personality structure susceptible to authoritarianism, for which nine characteristics were determined: conventionalism, authoritarian submission, authoritarian

aggression, anti-introspection, superstition and stereotypy, power and toughness, destructiveness and cynicism, projectivity, and sex. (Adorno 2017 [1950]) The participants scoring particularly high on the scale were prone to have an Authoritarian Personality structure, while those with a low score were thought to be more autonomous individuals. (Gordon 2017: 37)

The research's hypothesis was that "the political, economic, and social convictions of an individual often form[ed] a broad and coherent pattern, as if bound together by a 'mentality'." (Adorno 2017 [1950]: 149) This "mentality" was an indicator of the individual's potential fascist inclination—their deep-seated personality structure "render[ed] him particularly susceptible to antidemocratic propaganda." (Adorno 1917 [1950]: 149) This was to show the population's "readiness level" to turn fascist if society and the context gave occasion to *let it out*.

In the post-2016 context, one does not require a covert study to determine the U.S. population's "readiness level"; the readiness to vote for and stand behind a far-right candidate has proven to be an actual reality. Moreover, the moment of circumventing the election of Donald Trump has passed. While it remains a legitimate hope to avoid his re-election, the preconditions thereof have not changed. Instead, the task must be to demonstrate that Trump's election was not anomalous, an accidental slip that can be explained by his particular brand of charismatic narcissism, but rather the outgrowth of an ingrained ideology and psychology with deep historical roots, which to defeat must be grasped by these same roots.

The problem of not contextualizing the Authoritarian Personality has previously been critiqued by Peter Gordon in *The Authoritarian Personality Revisited: Reading Adorno in the Age of Trump*. In his essay, Gordon takes MacWilliams' study, *The Rise of Trump: America's Authoritarian Spring*, as a representative example of post-2016 political theory, identifying the central problem that the authoritarian character is contextualized as a transhistorical trait, rather than as an expression of a society that produces people prone to become authoritarian. (Gordon

2017: 33) To underline his argument, Gordon references Adorno's contradictory relation toward the empirical methods used in American social sciences and his emphasis on individual psychology as outcome of (and at the same time in contradiction to) the social sphere.

The AP study itself notes the importance of framing individual psychology as part of the social sphere. Gordon agrees with this notion, yet finds few traces of it in the actual publication. Furthermore, he opposes the idea of the Authoritarian Personality, since it was working "against sociological explanation, discouraging an account of individual human psychology as a social artifact". (Gordon 2017: 37) Gordon problematizes the emphasis on the purely individual psychological level in MacWilliams' study. In the study, psychology had become the central explanatory basis. Authoritarianism is isolated from other sociological factors and taken to be an independent factor. This approach, he points out, has been the emphasis of many studies relating to the Authoritarian Personality. (Gordon 2017: 37)

In his skepticism of the Authoritarian Personality, Peter E. Gordon claims that the AP study was self-referential, and consequently the legitimacy of identifying a "personality" would have to be questioned. A "given person may be either 'standardized' and 'think' in a standardized way or may instead 'oppose' standardization" is how Gordon describes Adorno's conception of the F-scale. (Gordon 2017: 40) While the standardized thinker is the high scorer on the F-scale, the low scorer is "immune to typological thinking" (Gordon 2017: 40). Gordon is skeptical of this conception. In his opinion the scale looks at its subjects and at reality from the perspective of the high scorer, therefore only finding what it seeks to find. Instead of taking the position of the "true individual," the F-scale and the study had a standardized or typologized system of social research. This typologized system, Gordon fears, could potentially reproduce itself. "This opens up the possibility of a vicious circle or self-referential paradox where the principle that animates the study becomes trapped in its diagnostic" (Gordon 2017: 40). He further questions the

methodology of the study: it potentially perpetuates what the study tries to critique. The need to identify psychological characters was, in his conception, the same need as typological thinking itself. (Gordon 2017: 41) “The distinction risks measuring the high-scoring subject on the F-scale against a triumphalist image of the true individual who is apparently immune to typological thinking. Only the ‘high-scoring’ individual is prone to stereotypical thinking. [...] If stereotypical thinking involves the reduction of differentiated persons to quasi-natural kinds, one cannot help but wonder if the social-psychological method of the study itself has not deployed the very technique it marks as pathology.” (Gordon 2017: 40)

However, Gordon is not definite in his critique, citing Adorno’s justification he does see a point in framing psychological types: “There is a reason to look for psychological types, because the world in which we live is typed and ‘produces’ different ‘types’ of persons”. (Adorno as cited in Gordon 2017: 41) What Gordon identifies in Adorno’s argument is his situating of individual psychology within the realm of the social, thereby claiming that authoritarianism was not just an individual’s problem, but one of modern society. But this critical perspective has hardly found its way into the AP publication. (Gordon 2017: 41)

Independently of the question of whether Adorno’s stance was sufficiently included in the AP study or not, I would argue that the unease that Gordon has with the study is relevant; describing and trying to explain society and psychological mechanisms as they are to be found is always accompanied by the possibility of naturalizing the results. Placing subjects on a scale does potentially produce the idea of inevitability, ignoring the study’s historicity and political context. Empirical research lacked this social and historical contextualization. Gordon points towards Adorno’s *Remarks on the Authoritarian Personality*, in which he pronounced the findings not to be limited to individuals but to the “entire cultural climate.” (Gordon 2017: 43) If social

psychology remained in the realm of the individual, it did not have any legitimacy as a research method.

While it is central to place the individual's psychology in the realm of the social, at the same time the social needs to be placed in the realm of the individual. As Fromm explains the formation of the super-ego in *Authority and the Family*, this dialectical relation becomes clear. In describing how the super-ego is formed, Fromm sees the role of authority as central. Because external violence (represented by authorities, such as parents) provokes constant unbearable conflict, the external violence is internalized. The individual "solves" the external problem through internalization. One adapts to the outside surrounding, obeying the rules less out of fear of external punishment than out of fear of one's own scrutiny and scolding through the internalized super-ego.¹ (Fromm 1936: 84) In the bourgeois patriarchal family, the super-ego is set up through the identification with the father. Once this structure is set up, it then projects the qualities of the super-ego onto other authorities in society.² These authorities, though, are not subjected to critique when not identical to one's own super-ego, but instead are idealized. Through this process of idealization, new authorities can be internalized, thus influencing and changing the super-ego anew. Consequently, the super-ego must be seen not as a static formation, but as one that continuously projects and reforms itself. (Fromm 1936: 85) Additionally, the family itself – particularly in Fromm's example of the working father – is adapted to authorities of society. "The authority which the father possesses in the family, is not coincidence, which is later supplemented by those of society, but the authority of the father is already itself based on

¹ "Durch das Über-Ich wird die äussere Gewalt transformiert und zwar, indem sie aus seiner äusseren in eine innere Gewalt verwandelt wird. Die Autoritäten als die Vertreter der äusseren Gewalt werden verinnerlicht, und das Individuum handelt ihren Geboten und Verboten entsprechend nun nicht mehr allein aus Furcht vor äusseren Strafen, sondern aus Furcht vor der psychischen Instanz, die es in sich selbst aufgerichtet hat." (Fromm 1936: 84)

² For a feminist debate on the relevance of the mother in the formation of the super-ego, see Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, from 1974. A debate that urgently needs to confront the Studies on the *Authoritarian Personality* in its foundational categories, though would lead too far in this work.

the authoritarian structure of society.”³ (Fromm 1936: 88) Accordingly, the super-ego of the parents would become the super-ego of the children.

The legitimacy of the studies of the Authoritarian Personality, I would consequently suggest, is based on situating individual psychology as both informed by and inherent to society. If we dismiss psychology as merely individualistic, we cannot understand how society functions. To include a psychological typology of the authoritarian character does not necessarily perpetuate it, so long as it tries to understand it in its formation.

For this sake, I will be placing the following study in the realm of social psychology, which, as Markus Brunner has shown in his social-psychological study on anti-Semitism, calls for a double historicization. First, the ideology behind the border wall and the racism tied to it has to be understood as historically grown, as a product of a modern-capitalist society. Secondly, the psychological “necessity” behind the call for border wall security and anti-immigration resentment also needs to be understood as one that has historical roots and is socially constructed. A capitalist society that is necessarily imbued with repeated crises and economic insecurity, not only brings nationalism and its ideology to the fore, but also “(specifically gendered) modern individuals with typical inner psychic conflicts” that are prone to anti-Semitic, nationalist and racial-exclusionist ideals. (Brunner 2016: 14).

Apart from studies on the Authoritarian Personality, the Border Wall itself has been discussed in political theory. Several scholars and many journalists have pointed to the contradiction of the physical border—the huge financial “investment” of building a wall that does not actually fulfill its promise of keeping out criminalized migrants. Greg Grandin, in *The End of*

³ “Die Autorität nämlich, die der Vater in der Familie hat, ist keine zufällige, die später durch die gesellschaftlichen Autoritäten ‘ergänzt’ wird, sondern die Autorität des Familienvaters selbst gründet zuletzt in der Autoritätsstruktur der Gesamtgesellschaft.“ (Fromm 1936: 88)

the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America, argues that the wall's lack of functionality points to its symbolic value. As such, it creates a backdrop for nativist politics and signifies restrictive immigration reforms, while holding a dual meaning in place, creating "its own illusion, a mystification that simultaneously recognizes and refuses limits." (Grandin 2019: 270)

One publication, in fact, tries to grasp the contradiction of its wide appeal and lack of functionality through the lens of social psychology. In *Waning Sovereignty, Walled Democracy*, Wendy Brown places the contradictions of borders in the context of globalization. Nation-states' borders were on the one hand liberalized, while at the same time more investment went toward their fortification. Further tensions arose between local nationalism and a global market, and between the "security of the subject and the movement of capital." (Brown 2010: 8) The border is both a barricade on the one hand, and a passageway for travelers, workers, and merchandise on the other. What is new about these types of walls is that they are not built against other nation states, their armies, or as shields against weapons, but against individuals and groups. (Brown 2010: 21)

Nation-states have historically claimed sovereignty (as in supremacy, permanence, territoriality), though over the last fifty years sovereignty has decreased through international treaties and global capital. While states persist, they have been losing their sovereignty to "political economy and religiously legitimated violence," which both trespass legality. (Brown 2010: 23) The border walls that gained traction over the last fifty years were expressions of this shift, of the waning sovereignty of nation-states. As a response, the walls represented "sovereign jurisdictional power" and security. These walls staged power, while they were not physically able to protect against "modern technology and paths of infiltration." (Brown 2010: 25) New walls

can therefore be understood as outcomes of the processes of globalization. At the same time, these walls were not actual solutions to the “problems” they purported to address, and they came with enormous cost.

According to “conventional logic,” border walls are for purpose of “security,” but at the cost of being a hindrance to economic flows. This logic, however, does not hold up under scrutiny. (Brown 2010: 95) While domestic labor, whether organized or not, strives to keep foreign labor out in order to hold its labor at a higher value, the competitive forces of the global market strive to lower the costs of labor and production, which necessitates open borders. Capital itself seeks cheap labor; hence, open borders. Consequently, borders cannot be seen as solely on the security side of this tension. Walls are not only a measure against the pressing factors of migration to the U.S., but also a means of regulating the pull factors of the U.S. economy, such as the demand for cheap labor, drugs, and weapons.

That the wall’s materiality seems to be from a pre-modern time is one further expression of its contradictory position. Their physicality is iron, concrete, and brick, and their construction is slow. This is in stark contrast to the era in which they are situated, a time in which “power is networked, virtual, microphysical, even liquid.” (Brown 2010: 80) The virtuality of the current era brought with it virtual protections, such as firewalls, alarm systems, and finger print passports. And the physical borders have no effect against the immanent dangers of modern times: climate change and viruses. (Brown 2010: 80)

They are, moreover, not only a backdrop phenomenon as many journalists have framed them, but primarily functioning as a spectacle and an outcome of desires. Brown introduces her final chapter with the key question, “Why do late modern subjects desire nation-state walls, and what do walls promise to secure, protect, rehabilitate, contain, or keep at bay?” (Brown 2012:

107) Her claim is twofold: Since modern subjects identify with states, and states' sovereignty is in decline, modern subjects are feeling this loss of state sovereignty as their own loss.

Additionally, the actual inability of states to protect their citizens from abstract threats such as terrorism is another contemporary development. Both of these developments lead to anxiety, the need for reassurance, and consequently to the desire for border walls. (Brown 2012: 107) Brown undergirds these anticipations with Sigmund and Anna Freud's theory of defense mechanisms. In order to transfer them to the political realm, she suggests de-literalizing their theory and detaching it from sexuality. (Brown 2012: 124) By detaching sexuality from psychoanalysis, though, the logic of her argument becomes a tautology: The desire for sovereignty comes out of the loss of sovereignty. While Brown's social-psychological analysis of the border's function is a good starting point, I would argue that only a psychoanalysis that takes psychosexuality seriously is able to grasp the correlation between individual conflictual desires and collective constructs. The de-sexualization of Freudian theory takes away its critical potential (see Adorno 2018 [1952], Whitebook 2019), because it cannot account for libidinal ties created within a group identified with a nation, leader, or idea. (Freud 1980 [1921]) These libidinal ties between followers of nationalism are crucial to understanding what lies behind the "mere" support of borders. I would hence want to hold onto the contradiction laid bare in Brown's work, as well as hold onto the move towards using psychoanalysis to discover the underlying appeal of border wall politics. Working with moments of contradiction is one of psychoanalysis' methodological starting points, which I will want to take up in my work as well.

Methodology

Psychoanalytic social psychology has been developed in the German-speaking world. Through Critical Theory's focus on the preconditions and aftermath of the Shoah, it has strongly

developed its theoretical approaches on the basis of trying to understand the wide appeal of anti-Semitism and its destructive potential. A particularly helpful contribution in this field is Markus Brunner's *Vom Ressentiment zum Massenwahn – Eine Einführung in die Sozialpsychologie des Antisemitismus und die Grenzen psychoanalytischer Erkenntnis* (Ressentiment to Mass-Psychosis – An Introduction to the Social-Psychology of Anti-Semitism and the Limits to Psychoanalytic Thought) from 2016, which draws upon the theory of anti-Semitism and shows how anti-Semitism needs to be contextualized in a double historicization. While the material at hand has no explicit anti-Semitic figures (or none that seemed apparent to me), it's clear that the same structure of exclusion permeates this discourse, and it's not hard for us to see that this structure bears roots in the history of American antisemitism and racism. Therefore, I want to work out Markus Brunner's development of a double historicization, in order to apply it to the U.S. context.

Psychoanalytic social psychology that deals with anti-Semitism mainly focuses on the psychological functions thereof, coining it as a “symptom” that emerges out of internal conflicts. Anti-Semitism, then, is shown to be a (psychological) compromise between an internal wish and an internalized defense mechanism. This conceptualization, though, has two problems: it reduces a social phenomenon to a purely psychological and individual one; and it pathologizes anti-Semitism, and therefore cannot grasp that it is also a “normality,” in the sense of being socially pervasive. Anti-Semites are not insane; on the contrary, they are well-integrated and aligned individuals and hence “normal” to the existing society. In response to the two named problems that are inherent to this conceptualization, Brunner suggests a double historicization, which I want to take up, but would suggest is, in fact, threefold. First of all, the ideology of the phenomenon is to be embedded in its historical development—its emergence with the rise of the modern bourgeois-capitalist society. Secondly, the psychological role that anti-Semitism played

for the individual needs to be grasped as historically grown as well—that what allegedly seems to be a natural outcome of a person’s inner psychic conflict is, in fact, an outcome of a specific time. “The bourgeois-capitalist society creates with its contradictions and dynamics of crisis not only anti-Semitism as a modern ideology, but also the (specifically gendered) modern individual with its typical inner-psychic conflicts, which is attracted to antisemitic myths.”⁴ (Brunner 2016: 14)

Thirdly, the patterns of perception that the modern individual has developed in a specific socio-historical context do still need to be understood as a “symptom.” The individual’s biographical development (in relation to society) and actual psychic inner conflict leading up to the formation of an anti-Semitic belief system, or in the case at hand, believing the border wall to be the safeguard against external threat, needs to be unraveled as well. (Brunner 2016: 15) The idea of a “false cure,” which Sigmund Freud developed in his *Group-Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, will be drawn upon as well.

In an attempt to transfer this threefold historicization onto the Minuteman Project, the Civil Defense Corps, and the We Build the Wall initiative, I will, in the first step of my analysis, give a brief outline of the first assemblies of the physical border and the initiatives’ respective histories, and then turn to their online appearances and self-descriptions. In this first analysis I will merely follow its manifest content. Therein, I will be looking out for irritations, contradictions, distinct repetitions. This first reading will then lead to the second step of my analysis, in which I will take up themes that repeatedly appear on their website’s presentation (the Revolutionary War, the Constitution and the Founding Fathers) and follow their historical development. How have these historical figures played out in the past as unifiers of the nation?

⁴ “Die bürgerlich-kapitalistische Gesellschaft bringt mit ihren Widersprüchen und Krisendynamiken nicht nur den Antisemitismus als moderne Ideologie hervor, sondern auch das (spezifisch vergeschlechtlichte) moderne Individuum mit seinen typischen innerpsychischen Konflikten, für das die antisemitischen Mythen attraktiv erscheinen.“ (Brunner 2016: 14)

How have they passed on a mythology of unification? In the third step of my analysis, I will use Sigmund Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* to examine what holds a group together, and to ask what is the glue of identification. And in a final step I will turn back to Markus Brunner, as well as to Werner Bohleber's *Nationalismus, Fremdenhaß und Antisemitismus. Psychoanalytische Überlegungen*, for an understanding of the intertwinement of an individual's formations of "symptoms" as socially determined, and ask how group-identifications lead to their compensation and normalization.

3. The U.S. - Mexican Border Wall and Civil Initiatives

Outline

The first part of the fence was erected in 1990 by the U.S. Border Patrol in San Diego, starting in the Pacific Ocean and going inland for fourteen miles. In 1994, during the Clinton Administration, the wall was further fortified. In the mid-1990s, sentiment against illegal immigrants rose, which in turn led politicians to reinforce protection. This was also due to processes of neo-liberalization. While U.S. producers lost protections, cheap production from the global market flourished. Particularly, the agriculture and construction sectors of the U.S. economy became more dependent on cheap, illegalized immigrant labor. The wall, though, was not a clear outcome of capitalist necessity, since North American capital strove toward cheap labor prone to open borders, while American workers and popular opinion was affected by the decline of wages. (Brown 2010: 35)

The 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act was passed by Congress, which authorized the reinforcement of the existing border. This was not implemented

without complications, due to private property owners' refusal and the California Coastal Commission that could insist on environmental restrictions.

Nine years later, and as a consequence of the 9/11 attacks, the Real ID Act and the Secure Fence Act⁵ were passed, which overruled existing laws (incl. limitation of judicial review to constitutional claims) and saw the construction of 850 miles of border fence, overriding provisions such as the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and the Native American Sacred Lands Act 2003-2004.⁶ During the "state of emergency" declared after the 9/11 attacks, the Bush Administration could continue building the wall. (Brown 2010: 36)

The border is not only a political tool for the Republican Party, but also for the Democrats, as the Operation Gatekeeper, which initiated the wall in San Diego and was driven by the Clinton Administration, has shown. It was used by Democrats to demonstrate that they too could be "tough" on the issue of immigration. Dianne Feinstein, the then Democratic Senator, used to hold press conferences with the wall as a backdrop. George W. Bush responded with a "tripled" wall, showing his greater toughness (Brown 2010: 92). A rancher from the Arizona-Mexico border cited in Brown's book captures this political landscape in a nutshell: "The

⁵ Secure Fence Act of 2006: "Directs the Secretary of Homeland Security, within 18 months of enactment of this Act, to take appropriate actions to achieve operational control over U.S. international land and maritime borders, including: (1) systematic border surveillance through more effective use of personnel and technology, such as unmanned aerial vehicles, ground-based sensors, satellites, radar coverage, and cameras; and (2) physical infrastructure enhancements to prevent unlawful border entry and facilitate border access by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, such as additional checkpoints, all weather access roads, and vehicle barriers. Defines "operational control" as the prevention of all unlawful U.S. entries, including entries by terrorists, other unlawful aliens, instruments of terrorism, narcotics, and other contraband." (Secure Fence Act 2006)

⁶ Native American Sacred Lands Act (2003-2004): "Requires managers of Federal land to: (1) accommodate meaningful access and use by Indian religious practitioners; (2) prevent significant damage to Indian sacred lands; and (3) consult with Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations before taking significant actions concerning such lands. Prohibits undertakings likely to cause significant damage to Indian sacred lands." (Native American Sacred Lands Act: 2003)

government isn't controlling the border it's controlling what Americans *think* about the border.”

(Brown 2010: 92)

Civil Initiatives - Minuteman Border Fence

The Minuteman Border Fence is a private vigilante group that was founded in 2004 by Chris Simcox and Jim Gilchrist, with the intention to watch for immigrants planning to cross the U.S.-Mexican border illegally. The name is derived from the Minutemen, a self-organized and -trained militia that fought during the Revolutionary War. In situations of immediate threat to the colonies, they were the first to respond – within a minute. The members organized to build a wall, and have additional patrolmen and military support stationed at the border. Their project has gained media attention. Then-Governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger expressed his support for the Minuteman group in 2005. In the same year the founders brought 1,200 volunteers—half of whom were armed, they proudly announced—together to patrol the border between Arizona and Mexico. (Hoffman 2016)

During the presidential election of 2016, when the building of the wall and mass deportations became a central campaign issues, the group's agenda became the subject of mainstream political debate. In the candidates' debates, the Minuteman stood in symbolically for both parties' positions on immigration. The Minuteman were the icon for anti-immigrant right extremism for the Democrats, while the Republicans embraced their project wholeheartedly. (Hoffmann 2016)

The movement dissolved in 2009, when central members were charged with murder and sexual abuse. Further reasons named for their dissolution were members' alienation by Simcox and Gilchrist running for political office, since their followers understood the initiative to be anti-governmental. Additionally, with most of its goals being taken up by the government's own

agenda, they didn't see the necessity to push further. Nevertheless, new groups have formed, such as Arizona Border Recon.

In this first step, I will give a rough analysis of their website, in which I will focus solely on the manifest content. From their explicit description, I will outline the group's main concerns, the threat that they describe, the people or the entity that they see as being in danger and the action that they propose in response.

The urgency of their project was that American territory was under the threat of "incursion, invasion and terrorism." (Minuteman 2020) It was "under siege by forces and interests that have the capacity, over time, to destroy our great experiment of responsible self-government." (Minuteman 2020) The nation was moreover under "wholesale attack" and in danger of sedition (conduct or speech inciting people to rebel against the authority of a state and violence). Further down in their description the borders are described as broken, and chaos as prevailing.

The entity or the force that was the threat to the nation is not directly named throughout the description, it is merely addressed as "those who do not love America and wish to see her destroyed." (Minuteman 2020) There is only a hint at illegal immigration being the dangerous entity, in a sentence that mentions America as welcoming legal migration but rejecting "colonization and Balkanization." (Minuteman 2020) Moreover, in a message by Chris Simcox added beneath the general introduction, he names "international criminal cartels" and an "unending flood of slave-wage labor."

The government was not doing its duty of securing the borders, and they could not trust then-President Bush in fulfilling this necessity. Bush's take on immigration was a spin, which was not to be bought. This was where the need for the *Minuteman Border Fence* initiative came

in. They describe themselves in line with the Minutemen from the *American Revolution*, which they name the “Colonial Revolution”. They were patriots who lived by the “philosophy of America’s Founding—including respect for the God-given natural rights to life, liberty, and property” (Minuteman 2020). Their maxim for the nation was “From many, One”—that “free, decent people of many origins [would] unify and become one nation.” (Minuteman 2020) Likewise, America was a “nation of liberty, equality and justice, and a bastion of western civilization,” and as such it bestowed upon the American the “ordered liberty” for which they “solemnly accept the duties attendant to that liberty essential to preserving a regime of, by and for the people.” (Minuteman 2020) The duty that they proclaimed to be their liberty was the protection of the border in a more sustainable and secure way. The fence had holes and could be circumvented by digging below. Security cameras and a better design would make for a more secure measurement for which they were trying to find further volunteers.

Their description holds a few noteworthy peculiarities that I will want to follow up on in a further enquiry.

1. There is a strong discrepancy between the vagueness of the penetrating threat encroaching upon *America* and the concreteness of the measurements that are to be taken against that abstract danger—namely, the building of the border. The abstract forces, the “foreign enemy invasion,” are described as having insurmountable powers that would have the strength to undermine and destroy “our great experiment of responsible self-government.” (Minuteman 2020)
2. They see America as a nation, that bestowed upon them liberty, though this liberty is coined at the same time as a duty that must be defended. This liberty is solely described through constraint.

3. They feel threatened by colonization, while themselves identifying the American Revolution as a “Colonial Revolution.” They do not want to be colonized; yet, they define their unity and their fight for freedom as a war of colonization.

4. Violence is described to come from beyond the border, from outside of America, though the very dissolving of their own group was the result of severe forms of violence: sexual abuse and murder.⁷

5. “From many, One.” (Minuteman 2020) They stress their own identity as being one of many heritages, while excluding new immigration. In addition, their repeated call for unity is salient.

6. They saw a flood of “slave-wage labor,” though do not propose labor rights, a minimum wage, or other political measures, which would seem to be a more evident solution than the effort of building a wall.

Minuteman Civil Defense Corps

The Minuteman Civil Defense Corps is part of, but nevertheless a separate group from, the Minuteman Border Fence. The self-declared aim of Minuteman Civil Defense Corps Project from the *About Us* section of their webpage is, the “protection of the borders and coastal boundaries of the United States” against illegalized immigrants, “unauthorized entry of individuals, contraband, and foreign military.” (Civil Defense 2020)

The United States was in danger of “invasion by enemies foreign and domestic,” by “drug dealers, criminals and potential terrorists.” There was a “flow of crime across our borders” and people that were trying to “take advantage of a free society” and would not get in “queue of entry

⁷ This contradiction can also be found in myriad variants of Trump’s speeches. He himself being accused of sexual abuse and rape, while accusing Mexican immigrants of being rapists.

into our country.” A human flood was “penetrating our Homeland Defense.” (Civil Defense 2020) At the same time, they emphasized that they were not discriminatory. This “human flood” was not to be considered the enemy, per se, and it was also not the goal to be biased toward people from other countries.

The government is characterized as dysfunctional, as one that has utterly failed to fulfill its task in protecting its citizens and protecting its territory. Instead, it was more concerned with protecting borders of other countries. This absence of action was a failure to fulfill a responsibility that was mandated by the Constitution. Public servants were not keeping the oath they swore with taking office. That the stated problem was unsolvable was merely an excuse.

In response they call for the re-establishment of Americanism. The government under Obama was un-American, because it was framing the given problem as unsolvable. Instead, the American ideal was a “can-do nation.” This was then the role of the Minutemen to take up. It was they who were “truly patriotic nationalists,” who were to take up the responsibility that the government was not. For the sake of this goal they call for civil protest and political lobbying. Their website description is a call to join their undertaking, if one believes in their mission of a peaceful movement, if one has had enough of “talking, debating and pleading with government officials” and would rather take matters into their own hands. (Civil Defense 2020) Their legitimation was the government’s lack of action, and the claim that they as citizens of the United States *were* the government and were “acting within the social contract of our right to freedom.” (Civil Defense 2020) As such, they were asserting themselves “as citizen representatives of the government,” setting “the example, of the people for the people and by the people.” (Civil Defense 2020) Moreover, it was their mission to support the already existing patriotic U.S. Border Patrol. Joining them would make the addressed “American” a “force-multiplier” and

allow them to become part of an active majority. These efforts are seen to be able to “change the course of history.” (Civil Defense 2020)

While the group claims to have been misunderstood in the past, they emphasize their undertaking as being a legal one, as merely an execution of a patriotic duty and a fulfillment of the Constitution. They call for a peaceful movement for justice that does not accuse foreigners of being criminal, and moreover that calls to remain within the law. Further at the bottom of the webpage is a short description of the Minuteman alliance (Civil Defense Corps Project and MinutemanHQ.com) in which they describe themselves as an alliance that “aggressively addresses the intensifying assault that the American Republic continues to endure – at home, and abroad.” (Civil Defense 2020)

The following contradictory points are noteworthy:

1. They claim the government to be dysfunctional, while at the same time purporting that they, the citizens, *were* the government.
2. They claim to be on a peaceful mission, though assert to aggressively address that which they call an “assault on the nation.” They stress to remain within the law, though act independently of government.
3. They avow to be non-discriminatory and not to accuse foreigners of being criminal. Though at the same time, they declare illegal migrants to be criminals and purport them to be drug dealers flooding the country.
4. They declare themselves to be a misunderstood minority, though at the same time purport to be citizen representatives of government and therewith in the majority.

We Build the Wall

The organization was founded by Brian Kolfage, a veteran of the U.S. Air Force, in order to raise donations for building sections of the U.S. - Mexican border wall on U.S. private property. The chairman of the board is former White House Chief Strategist and co-founder of the alt-right Breitbart News Stephen K. Bannon. President Donald Trump endorsed the project. The initial campaign *WeFundTheWall* started in December 2018 and managed to raise \$9 million within the first three days and \$17 million in the first week. As I am writing this paper (August 2020), Bannon has been charged with fraud for privately using approximately one million dollars of the \$25 million fund for private expenses, and Brian Kolfrage has been charged for funneling a further \$350,000. The project promised all donations would go into building the wall (Feuer et al: 2020).

The presentation and layout of the webpage is professional. It hardly has a description of their project in written format—instead, it works with videos and pictures, of which some show merely visual material of the border wall construction underlined by music, while other clips introduce individual members of the *We Build The Wall* project. For the description of their self-understanding, I will include an analysis of two of their videos, that were most representative of their presentation. Again, in a first approach to the material I want to merely outline the manifest content.

The text of the *About Us* section consists of two lines, addressing the reader as one who was “sick and tired” of nothing moving forward at the southern border. (We Build 2018) Again, it was the government that was not doing its job of securing the U.S. - Mexico border, but in this case, it was not President Trump’s wrongdoing, but politicians from both parties who were obstructing his plan. Consequently, it was “We the people” that would have to unite as private

citizens to stop illegal entry into the U.S. by building portions of the wall and managing the construction and upkeep of it.

The main site features pictures of the construction site of parts of the wall. Men with helmets and security vests scattered around desert hills, and tractors placing segments of the wall in place. On the same page a prominently placed video introduces the relevance of the project.

Entering the two-and-a-half-minute film is a white woman holding up two pictures, one of a male officer and one of a gravestone, seemingly his. The first sequence is underscored by slow, tragic music. Switching abruptly to the next scene, Kris Kobach, a white man in overalls, stands in front of segments of the built wall, explaining how the wall was stopping illegal immigration. All the while the gloomy music continues playing in the background. His voice continues explaining the necessity of the project, while a map of America comes into view. Mexico is underlined in red, and red arrows move outward into central America, while Kobach explains drugs being smuggled in. These holes and shortages are what *We Build the Wall* sees as its duty to take care of. “And we the people build it and get it done.” (We Build 2018) While the screen turns black, the music changes from tragic piano to rock. And a white driver comes into view describing the project in technical detail. “If you are trying to come illegally and you see this wall, you’re going to say wait a second, let me go to the check point. And when you go to the checkpoint, there are people there to help you and protect you on both sides of the border. We wanna make sure that everyone stays safe on both sides of this. This is no affront to anyone who wants to come here. We are a nation of immigrants. We have to work together on both sides. With this deterrent, our local communities are safer because the officers can do their job, that they were hired to do. Which is to protect their own community.” (We Build 2018)

The second video consists solely of shots of the construction of parts of the border wall. The song “Uprising” by Muse plays over switching scenes of a handful of tractors and moving images of the construction site, and scenes with seemingly infinite numbers of military tanks driving in a tight row through the countryside. The last scene shows Brian Kolfrage cutting open a bow, the opening to the closure of the border. The lyrics are intelligible: “Interchanging mind control / Come let the revolution take its toll // if you could / Flick a switch and open your third eye, you'd see that / We should never be afraid to die / (So come on) // Rise up and take the power back, it's time that / The fat cats had a heart attack, you know that / Their time is coming to an end / We have to unify and watch our flag ascend / (So come on) // They will not force us / They will stop degrading us / They will not control us / We will be victorious” (We Build 2018) (Muse 2009).

Repetitive and contradictory themes of the material:

1. The declaration to be a nation of immigrants, though being all white and instituting the border wall against immigration. “We wanna make sure that everyone stays safe on both sides of this. This is no affront to anyone who wants to come here. We are a nation of immigrants” (We Build 2018).
2. They claim to want everyone on both sides of the wall to be safe, though the U.S. officers are there to “protect their own communities” (We Build 2018).
3. Brian Kolfrage takes up a prominent position in the campaign. His head is on the front cover of the webpage. His military service is a heroic act, showing he is prepared to die for the nation. This theme is taken up by the lyrics as well: “We should never be afraid to die.” (Muse 2009)

4. The tanks running through the video seem bizarre and unrelated. Again, the threat is not concretized, but the measurements against it are drawn in clear pictures: tanks and walls.
5. All prominent people appearing in the videos and on the website are male, apart from the grieving wife.
6. The project is endorsed by the President; nevertheless, the government was insufficient.
7. References to the Constitution are repeated; “We the People” are called upon and its notion of unification. “We have to unify and watch our flag ascend.” (Muse 2009)

The notion of unification, merging into one, the continuous reference to the Constitution, the evocation of military power and the Revolutionary War point towards the necessity to look at their initiatives in their latent content, from both – a group-dynamical and a historical perspective. What does the Constitution and the Revolutionary War stand in for? In what way are they related to the call for unification? And how are these conjured images related to the necessity for border ‘protection’?

4. The Making of American National Unity

In the following section, I will give a brief outline of U.S. nationalism with particular emphasis on certain aspects relevant to an analysis along the lines of the method examined in the previous chapter. Specifically, I want to pick out the most prominent nationalist ideals, those that repeat themselves throughout the different groups. As I will show, these moments are not unique to these groups but based in a historically grown myth building of U.S. history. The ideas and ideals aimed at show certain aspects of national myth building as well as ideas of what America and an American is to be, in contrast to an outside that was foreign and dangerous. These ideals come

together with an appeal towards unification, which hint towards the necessity to look at group dynamics thereof.

The most prominent topics that I will focus on are the Constitution and the Founding Fathers as giving legitimacy to their projects, as well as the Revolutionary War and military service in general as ‘unifying’ moment of ‘America’. The groups’ primarily male volunteers will furthermore be contextualized in the framework of male camaraderie. In a further step, I will outline how these myths help function as group-dynamical processes.

Overview U.S. Nationalism

The U.S.’s ideology is not considered primarily as proclaiming strong nationalism. Though following Dick Meyer it does, however not in the same terms as known from modern European nation-states.⁸ The formation of nation states in Europe was the result of breaking up empires along with discarding of religion as monarchies’ legitimacy. This new arrangement came along with the ideology of one homogenous people belonging to one nation, bound together by specific territory, history, blood line. These formations were considered as natural, pre-historic and timeless. (Meyer 2016) In contrast to the European (and particularly German) construction of a pre-historic essence, American nationalism was built on colonization and immigration. The binding moment was less the actual territory, but much more that what allegedly held ‘everyone’ together: the Constitution. But that which held everyone together was based on exclusionism; U.S. Native Americans and blacks were not included in the rights of the created law, nor were women. (Meyer 2016) Moreover, theories of nationalism often focus on the context of Europe,

⁸ Therefore, it was hard to recognize Trump’s campaign and presidency as an outcome of a specific nationalist history and ideology of the U.S. (Meyer 2016) The nationalism that Trump has been gaining ground with though, is based not only on that what Michael Billig coined as banal nationalism, everyday, invisible nationalisms, but on a nationalism that has taken profane nationalism to an extreme.

while the U.S. is mostly classified as an example of civic nationalism. The history of its ethnocultural nationalism is often ignored. Instead the difference between a patriotic nation and a nationalist nation is stressed, and the U.S. is classified as the former. Being patriotic was less a delineation from an outside 'evil' and more the focus on self-pride. (DiMaggio 2008: i)

Similar to Dick Meyer, Bart Bonikowsky summarizes American nationalism in his literature review *Research on American Nationalism: Review of the Literature, Annotated Bibliography, and Directory of Publicly Available Data Sets* from 2008, in which he pledges to understand U.S. nationalism as a central feature that was relevant to the social, political and economic sphere. The U.S. was an example of the “emergence and development of national attachment, the use of nationalist ideology in state-building, changing symbolic racial and ethnic boundaries of the nation, and the interplay between religion and the sense of national purpose.” (Bonikowsky 2008: 2) Bonikowsky follows Zelensky’s outline of nationalism as an “intense devotion to the nation, that real or supposed community of individuals who are convinced they share a common set of traditions, beliefs, and cultural characteristics.” (Zelensky quoted in Bonikowsky 2008: 3) Bonikowsky distinguishes between three approaches within theories of nationalism: the political, the psychological and cultural. While political theory focused on elites and the political formations of the nation, the psychological research focused on the individual. Finally the cultural approach focused on “the level of individuals embedded in structures of social relations that pattern the cultural resources to which the individuals have access.” (Bonikowsky 2008: 4)

On the political level, nationalism functions as an ideology that can be used intentionally to further political goals, and frame people’s understanding of the world. The question leading the political research is how “the national idea gained prominence among the population of the

colonies and the early Republic and how its meaning has subsequently evolved over the course of American history.” (Bonikowski 2008: 5)

The psychological research is further concerned with the relation of the individual and its identity to the image of the nation. Bonikowski cites Lieven in that it was a “devotion to an ideal, abstract, unrealized notion of one’s country.” (Lieven in Bonikowski 2008: 5) The psychological research differentiates between nationalism and patriotism, of which the former was tied to the idea of national superiority and dominance and attached to in-group / out-group formation, while the latter was more focused inward on the strong affective attachment toward the own nation. (Bonikowski 2008: 5-6) As I will later show, both moments, the love and idealization of ‘one’s nation’, is generally tied to the projection of the dangerous and the ambivalent towards an outside.

Cultural definitions are concerned with symbols, idioms, practices, customs, traditions, rituals that are “continuously available or endemic in modern cultural and political life,” (Bonikowski 2008: 6) as well as individuals’ use of these to make sense of the world.

All three theoretical approaches defined nationalism via exclusions, such as xenophobia, nativism, chauvinism and found both civic and ethnic differentiations to play a role. Civic nationalism is defined by the devotion to common ideals, whereas ethnic nationalism restricts its membership to ethnic / racial groups. As will be shown in this paper, each field taken for itself cannot account for nationalism’s strong appeal. The psychological, political and cultural intertwinement is its strength.

Early research on nationalism is based on official documents and national elites as sources and formulates a coherent national identity. These documents framed the U.S. as a civic nation based on liberal and democratic ideals. This view has been challenged to include actual political

actions and institutional practices. These challenges revealed that ideologies were not always coherent but could be in contradiction to other expressions of nationalism. Schemes of the nation are understood as ones that can be activated by social cues and are not one's that are per se ingrained in the individual. (Bonikowski 2008: 7) Bonikowski proposes the following working-definition of nationalism "as the self-understanding of individuals and groups framed in terms of their membership in a broader collectivity coterminous with the territorial, social, and legal boundaries of an actual or potential nation-state. This self-understanding is produced through the interaction of individual cognitive schemata, shared cultural understandings contained in various forms of public discourse, and institutional rules and conventions. The cognitive categories and affective orientations that constitute nationalism may inform individual and collective action, [...] and vary in content and potency with individuals' sociodemographic characteristics. The widespread identification with and loyalty toward the nation has been the result of a historical process of nation-state development, understood both as a conscious project of nationalist elites and an emergent consequence of economic and political transformations constitutive of modernity." (Bonikowski 2008: 10)

History of National Identification with 'America'

The rise of civic and modern national identification in the U.S. was not a linear process. Initially people from the colonies were loyal to Britain. Only a few years before the Revolution did identification shift, though less toward the entire new nation, and more toward localities and political allegiances. A quantitative content analysis from 1965 by Richard L. Merritt assesses articles in colonial newspapers throughout five states between the years 1735-1739 and 1771-1775, and asks how and when colonists started to refer to themselves as 'American', instead of 'His Majesty's subjects' or 'British colonists' and when they started to refer to the colonies as

‘America’ in place of ‘British America’ or the ‘colonies’. (Merritt 1965: 321) The term ‘Americans’ was first used in 1764 and by 1770 over 50 percent of the articles that were self-referencing the colonial states used the term ‘American’. The study also showed the colonies as a reference point and the people within as a collective entity to increase intensely in the years leading up to the Revolution. (Bonikowski 2008: 13) (Merritt 1965)

This increase Bonikowski interprets as one that was outcome of a “prolonged fight against a common enemy, increased intercolonial contact through military service and commerce, institutions called into being by the Articles of Confederation and a lively public debate about the expansion of the Western frontier.” (Bonikowski 2008: 13) The moment of identification is also seen as outcome of state-building processes, such as the creation of federal state structure and a national economy in the second half of the 18th century. The creation of the national bank set the precondition for accumulation of capital and “shifted people’s perception of everyday consumption and production activities from the local to the national context.” (Bonikowski 2008: 15) Moreover the set-up of a national network of transportation (railroads) and communication (postal services) could overcome far distances that previously remained abstractly impossible to reach. The increase of literacy and the subsidization of news together with the guarantee of freedom of the press allowed for a vast amount of people from different states to read the same news at the same time. These actual policies and institutions played a central role in developing the nation. The abstract wide-ranging space of the U.S. could be overcome. The economy could be framed as one of shared national interest. (Bonikowsky 2008: 15-16)

The American Revolution as Forced Unification

That the revolutionary war against the British was successful, was primarily due to almost all white men already having been armed and proficient with arms before the start of the war. While

the Revolutionary leaders did not trust the poor to remain on their side, they had little choice but to convince the white armed men to participate. Very few people were convinced of the need for war, and while most did fight in the war at some point, not many stayed in military service. It is estimated that a fifth of the people were 'treasonous'. South Carolina hardly could set up people for military service due to the slave uprising of Stono 1739. The militia was instead employed to fight the uprising. Initially those that did join the military had full citizenship and were commonly of good standing and generally were owners of a stable home. (Zinn 2005: 77)

Though with time poorer white men from the lowest social status had to be considered for recruitment and hence vagrants were drafted as well. Out of necessity then the military with time became a promise for poor, to potentially rise in rank, acquire a higher income and a better social status. Hence, even if they did not see the revolution as their own cause, these rewards and the promise of an adventure proved successful in recruiting people in need. (Zinn 2005: 78)

Therewith the War of Independence became a dominating event, which could override internal discrepancies and make people take the side of the revolution. "The mechanism for their political conversion was the militia.' What looks like the democratization of the military forces in modern times shows up as something different: a way of forcing large numbers of reluctant people to associate themselves with the national cause, and by the end of the process believe in it." (Zinn 2005: 79) During the turmoil of the war the conflict between the wealthy and poor remained, though suppressed. The wealthy were seeing immense profits while others were suffering from the great inflation. Civil conflicts kept erupting. Lower classes particularly in the South wouldn't let themselves be subordinated under the political elite. Moreover, the enslaved population grew substantially, with eventually accounting for 25% to up to 50% of the inhabitants, increasing the white people's fear of their revolt. (Zinn 2005: 83)

With approximately 80,000 Loyalists fleeing the country after the War of which many were wealthy, a large amount of land was confiscated and re-distributed. While the Revolutionary leaders received privileged access, the farmers received parceled out lands. Therewith “a broad base of support for the new government” was created, which “became characteristic of the new nation: finding itself possessed of enormous wealth, it could create the richest ruling class in history, and still have enough for the middle classes to act as a buffer between the rich and the dispossessed.” (Zinn 2005: 84)

Just because the lower classes were involved in the Revolution did not mean that it was in their interest. It was most of all a struggle for political positions and power between the upper-class members. The time after the Revolution was also indicative thereof. “He [Richard Morris] finds ‘the people’ of ‘We the people of the United States’ (a phrase coined by the very rich Gouverneur Morris) did not mean Indians or blacks or women or white servants. In fact, there were more indentured servants than ever, and the Revolution ‘did nothing to end and little to ameliorate white bondage.’” (Zinn 2005: 84)

Those that were driven to support the revolution were for the most part from the colonial upper class, such as George Washington, John Hancock, Benjamin Franklin. While smaller merchants, farmers and laborers were pulled into the Revolution by other means, such as comradeship within the military service or the acquisition of land. “Thus was created a substantial body of support, a national consensus, something that, even with the exclusion of ignored and oppressed people, could be called ‘America’.” (Zinn 2005: 85)

After the revolution, internal partisan tensions between the Federalists and Republicans over the future of the country grew based on the political philosophies of the respective groups and on each of their contending outlooks on the nation. Though these battles over the nature of

the nation, instead of splitting the nation, brought the population closer together, through limiting the rise of local factions. Partisan identity could be fused together with the identification with America, which could override potential tensions between local interests and national ones. Military conflict was also influential in creating a feeling of shared nationalism, through military service in the War of 1812, which created a united front against Britain.

Though differences in the North and the South were not easily overcome. Southerners were invested more in British traditions and had a much stronger interest in preserving slavery. The South constructed both regions at times as two distinct nations, in which people of different heritages lived. The South would construct themselves as descendants of Normans in demarcation of the North as Saxons and saw themselves to be the actual heirs of the Revolution.

In contrast to the War of 1812, the tensions leading up to the Civil War threatened to divide the nation. The fought-over compromise between the North and the South leading to the apparent unity of the nation and the freeing of blacks, went hand in hand with their further exclusion. Instead of racial justice, an ostensible healing of the figure of the nation was attempted, “the focus on commonalities between the North and the South and the dismissal of the war as a momentary rupture in the unity of (white) America allowed the South to institute a legal system of racial domination that ensured the continued exclusion of blacks from citizenship.”

(Bonikowski 2008: 21)

Founding Father's Sacred Words

To understand the central relevance of the Constitution as a legitimating document to the border wall initiatives and why it is drawn upon in repeated references, John McNamara analysis of the *U.S. Constitution as a Sacred Text* is helpful. Therein the author looks at how constitutional law is a form of civil religion in that it preserves a form of national myth in which the nation's

founders held full authority. Through the institutionalization of law and its interpretation, the Founding Fathers are called upon as legitimizing ideals.

The Second Amendment right to bear arms is taken as a key example. Dating back to the 18th century the law was employed in fear of “a frontier society, of invasion from abroad or ‘insurrection’ by Native Americans or the enslaved African-American populace as well as the very real and present danger of wild animals.” (McNamara 2017: 2) It was also implemented as the population’s insurance against tyranny. Through having the right to bear arms each citizen had the sovereignty to a violent uprising against the federal government if it was misusing its power. The federal government in consequence could not hold a monopoly of weapons, and the populous would always be able to second check their government. The revolutionary war against the British and the won independence set the foundational relevance for the legitimacy of a “revolution in extraordinary circumstances of oppression or injustice”. (McNamara 2017: 2) And the Second Amendment was representative of that ‘freedom’. The law though dates back to the 18th century and hence its logic is a remnant of that time, remaining in place in a new political reality of an established democracy in the twenty-first century. Though the critique of the law is often dismissed with the logic of its implementation, as a “direct attack on the sovereignty of the individual and an effort to subjugate or neutralize the masses”. (McNamara 2017: 2) Moreover, the Founding Fathers are pulled in as legitimizing force.

The Founding Fathers are set as heroes of a sacred past. Their legacy is positioned as setting a standard for the nation and used to legitimize and mobilize for political causes in the present. While the law is advanced and adapted to the present day, it is characteristically checked for its constitutionality. Hence its validity is measured in relation to the standards set by the founders. (McNamara 2017: 7) Unlike a German nationalism which is based on the myth of a

Germanic Wesenskern (essential Germanic core), the U.S.'s nationalism is based on the narrative of its founding and the worship for the institutions and figures dating back to the formative era. The “foundation of the United States exists for *Americans* as a permanent template for nationhood. It exists as the ideal moment in time and space.” (McNamara 2017: 8) As a template the Founders typify all the positive visions of the nation. Though this perfect moment in time and space and the founders as its representative heroes are turned into the super-historical and essential expression of Americanism, they are its *Volksggeist*. They are the template that typifies all the incarnation of a positive vision and the highest national moral to strive for. Moreover, the state's institutions, the Supreme Court harbor a deep respect for these figures, in “the adoption and maintenance of their ideological departures” (McNamara 2017: 8), which lends further weight to their positioning as divine.

This McNamara describes as a key expression of banal nationalism. A term coined by Michael Billig to name the nationalism of the everyday, that existed in the mundane, in institutionalized and personal practices. A form of nationalism that was existent in established western nations, in which forms of national myth were unflagged, ordinary and uncontested and therewith invisible and seemingly natural. A form of lingering nationalism. “The US Supreme Court's routine deference to the authors of the US Constitution and Bill of Rights conforms to what Billig would conceive of as an ‘unflagged’ habitual expression of the nation's core ideology and communal values.” (McNamara 2017: 7) “This represents a communal acceptance of a given fact, a largely indisputable historical precedent that the nation is expected to remain faithful to.” (McNamara 2017: 8)

The Constitution “A Sacred Text”

The Constitution of the U.S. and its semantic interpretation and reevaluation in new contexts was not unique to this nation, though the form that it took was. The form of interpretation was fundamentally focused on the framers of the law, their philosophy, political intent, motivations. Parallel to the idealization of the framers, the Constitution is held as a template to guide correct action that the text through hermeneutical reading would reveal. It is perceived as “an infallible guide” to how a society is to be organized, how it was “a sort of projected utopian perfection.” (McNamara 2017: 9) Through legal exegesis the better society is to be extracted. This devotion to the institutionalized ideals of the founders is comparable to religious adherence. The hermeneutical reading is one that went back to readings and scholarly interpretation of the Bible, the ‘word of God’.

“It is through this [hermeneutical exegesis of the Bible] that the secrets of a good and righteous life will be unlocked. The method of the Supreme Court is hermeneutical in the sense that it dissects the text of the document in the traditional manner of hermeneutical inquiry that sought to decode ‘truth’ and meaning from a secular equivalent in a civil setting with the goal of administering and preserving justice. It seeks to identify the manner in which the essential American nationalist philosophy was conceived and ensures that it continues to be propagated through this hallowed document and contemporary interpretations of it. It remains faithful to the archetypical model of America that was constitutionally cast in the wake of its successful revolution.” (McNamara 2017: 9)

The U.S. Constitution is interpreted by McNamara as a collision of the sacred and profane. It was the moral base of American society and the Supreme Court derived its legitimacy from it. “This ‘sacred’ document acts practically and symbolically as the epistle of the fabric of

American nationalistic sentiment and is the essence of the civil religion of state.” (McNamara 2017: 9)

The system of precedent and the search for the pure and original intent of the Framers is developed on and closely linked to Christian belief in the inerrancy of the bible. The aim behind extracting the exact meaning of the words, was the attempt at accessing the infallible words of God. Similarly, the Constitution as the words of the framers, convey the essence of the American founding and hence requires a similar hermeneutical interpretation. Moreover, while there is hardly a place in the U.S. where TV cameras were forbidden, the Supreme Court retained their immunity to TV. Their sacrosanct character is therewith further established. “The justices that preside over constitutional law, masterfully interpret its intrinsic meaning and bestow precedent upon subsequent generations as they deem warranted and are seen to be engaged in the holiest of acts within the framework of the civil religion of the state.” (McNamara 2017: 9) The Supreme Court as interpreter of the Constitution is an embodiment by the state of the national ideology. (McNamara 2017: 11)

Referencing Phillip E. Hammond McNamara follows his differentiation between patriotism and religion. The former was one that was chosen, while the latter was encountered. The former is created, the latter exists. Patriotism was willed, while religion was independent of will. This ‘definition’ of religion was also relevant to civil religion and additionally relevant to the civil religion of the Constitution. The Constitution is not understood as one that individuals can choose, but one that exists. The Constitution was one that was encountered, not chosen, which was the essence of constitutional faith. Accordingly, it is “the ideological and institutional facilitator of the national communion. It is a critical *reality* of the nation and a tangible continuance of the perennial national ideal. It exists beyond the individual; it is the communal

social fact and through that – it elicits devotion of the individual.” (McNamara 2017: 12) This held a relevant contradictory moment of the nation, one where the Constitution is drawn upon as national unifier, while being at the same time and in its nature a document of wide contestation. It was unifying not in its content but unifying in being the authority over that what divides, the unity over a shared reverence for the same “secular sacred text”. (McNamara 2017: 13)

Both historical references now show striking facets. During the Revolutionary War the military was produced as an institution of unification, particularly of men of all social and economic classes. A unity, that turns men, alienated from each other through capitalist competition, into comrades, who can imagine themselves as one, fighting for the same cause, even if it was not their personal one. Independence itself, is not the appeal for joining the war, but the shared striving for a better social status and the outlook for a better income. The Revolutionary War and further wars to come, managed to push back internal conflicts (of economic and social content) and instead focus on the ‘external enemy’ or at least create the image of one.

The legitimacy of owning weapons furthermore was derived from the fear of potential uprisings of African-Americans and Native Americans and seen as insurance against a potential tyranny of the newly formed government; the fear of tyranny being a remnant of the British King’s misuse of power. For the border wall groups to so vividly identify the War as their predecessor, as legitimating force and as name-giver, is relevant as well as multifaceted. According to all three initiatives, their respective government, was not doing enough for the protection of its people; it was also not to be trusted and therefore took a similar role as the British. The Minutemen and the We Build the Wall volunteers are taking up their ‘rifles’, or in this case the shovel and tanks as a civil project deriving its validity through the founding story.

Their enemy though was not Great Britain, nor their own government, but a new enemy, the illegalized immigrant.

The Constitution as the sacred word of the Founding Fathers is expressive in several points. It promises a clear distinction of right and wrong, through the 'right' interpretation of its text. It validates the groups actions through having their 'Gods' blessing. And it backs the groups' entitlement to being 'citizen representatives', and therewith in the majority, through basing their actions on a document that is rooted in the center of American statehood.

This historic construction of unity, based on military camaraderie and institutionalized religious blessing, shows continuities to the present, not only in current institutions and present ideologies, but also in their creation of individual's subjectivities and group-identifications. Thus, I will turn to Sigmund Freud's analysis of group-processes, of which the two central examples for the creation of libidinal ties, are not by chance the church and the military.

5. Groups, Masses, Nations – The Libidinal Ties in 'Silent and 'Raucous Masses'

Freud's *Group-psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* was published in 1921 and while not explicitly concerned with the wake of Nazism, his turn towards mass-processes can be seen as an outcome thereof. Because his concern for individual psychology was always also informed by the social, his analysis of group processes is strongly tied to his elaborations of the individual as influenced and dependent on others. An exact distinction between the two is therefore not easily made. Teachers and parents influence the individual as objects of love and are at the same time social beings themselves.

Nevertheless, group- or mass-psychology⁹, while hard to distinguish from individual psychology, was distinct in a few points. Freud would theorize group-psychology as a large number of people that hardly knew each other. “Die Massenpsychologie behandelt also den einzelnen Menschen als Mitglied eines Stammes, eines Volkes, einer Kaste, eines Standes [...], der sich zu einer gewissen Zeit für einen bestimmten Zweck zur Masse organisiert.“ (Freud 1980: 10) There was a distinct moment in group-formations, that only these formations brought out in the individual. Characteristics that otherwise stayed unrevealed or inexistent. The question to him then was what the bonding moment of a group was. What made people strive for and behave differently in masses, what made certain emotions appear and others disappear, and what made people have and act out ideas that they otherwise did not show.

Citing Gustave Le Bon's *Psychologie des Foules*, Freud describes the mass as: 1. A formation in which the psychical superstructure of the individual declined and was rebutted, therewith letting the unconscious drives and wishes take hold. 2. As giving the individual the feeling of insurmountable power; the impossible was not impossible anymore. “Sie hat das Gefühl der Allmacht, für das Individuum in der Masse schwindet der Begriff des Unmöglichen.“ (Freud 1980: 16) This too, allowed the group-individual to delve into drives with pleasure that they otherwise did not allow themselves to live out, or would have kept to themselves out of fear of social reprimand. 3. Likewise, the anonymity within the mass allowed the individual to put down responsibility for their own actions, contrasted to the guilty conscious and the sense of responsibility as social anxiety (the fear of social admonishment). Once the fear was replaced by a different set of standards, the drive could be lived out, without restraint. (Freud 1980: 13) 4.

⁹ While Freud in the German essay uses the word masses, the translation uses the word group. Freud contemplating the word choice himself, knowing its disparaging connotation, decided to stick with masses, as that was what they were closer to. Since both terms have their validity, I will be using them interchangeably from here on.

The group was guided by the unconscious; it was impulsive and easily irritable. And, what the mass desired was not long-lived but wanted to be realized immediately. „Sie verträgt keinen Aufschub zwischen ihrem Begehren und der Verwirklichung des Begehrten.“ (Freud 1980: 16)

The otherwise suppressed wishes can now find their relief, without inhibition. The group-individual can follow its spontaneous enthusiasm with full vigor. It let itself be driven by the mass, which is easy to manipulate and which takes myriad directions--drawn in by associations, pictures and repeated language. Furthermore, the content of these associations is not measured by reality, truth or justice, but rather by a certainty and unambiguousness of emotions, ideas and fantasy. (Freud 1980: 17) This fantastic life of illusions driven by unfulfilled wishes is not concerned with the objective, but only with its psychological world. An evil intent or a tabooed wish, which cannot be lived out, finds its way to the surface as illusion. Similar to the function of dreams as wish-fulfillment, reality check rescinds, letting the affective impulse of wishes take hold. (Freud 1980: 17, 19) Accordingly, masses were strongly emotional, knew no ambivalence, but only certainty and extremes, were not convinced by rational arguments. „Sie geht sofort zum Äußersten, der ausgesprochene Verdacht wandelt sich bei ihr sogleich in unumstößliche Gewißheit, ein Keim von Antipathie wird zum wilden Haß.“ (Le Bon cited in Freud 1980: 17) Furthermore, the mass was easily taken by authorities and driven by intolerance. Their ideal was strength, even violence while kindness was understood to be a weakness. The new is depreciated, while the old, the traditional is met with 'unending reverence', a moment which I've shown to be central in the initiative's relation to the Framers as 'god-like' creators of the U.S. (Freud 1980: 17)

The moment that brought the short-lived masses together was moreover a dynamic, that could lead to the exaltation of affect. The stronger the effect of the individual in the group

showed, the more it would show in other people of the group as well. All critique that the individual might hold came to silence. Thus, the emotions of the group self-intensified by the dynamic of induction. Feelings and actions in a mass were contagious and could make the individual place their private interests and wishes behind those of the group. (Freud 1980: 14) Through that a high amount of renouncement of individual profit, as well as self-sacrifice for 'a higher cause' could be found within group processes as well.

The experience of being part of a group and merging into the group was moreover a pleasurable one. It was the experience of delving into limitless lust and losing all boundaries of the self to the group. "The mass impressed each individual with the illusion of having limitless power and being dangerously indestructible."¹⁰ (Freud 1980: 24)

If the individual was prepared to give up his individual being and let itself be pulled into the mass, and this not by force, but by the mere longing for the group – for the sake of the group ("ihnen zuliebe"), (Freud 1980: 31) then it was strongly indicative of their libidinal ties to the group. Libido or the sex drive was that what Freud saw perfectly summed up with all the meanings and connotations that the word love was capable of designating. Love was the word used for making love, but was also used for self-love, love of parents and their children, the word for friendship, and even the love for objects and abstract ideas. "Wir meinen also, dass die Sprache mit dem Wort 'Liebe' in seinen vielfältigen Anwendungen eine durchaus berechtigte Zusammenfassung geschaffen hat, und dass wir nichts Besseres tun können, als dieselbe auch

¹⁰ "Die Masse macht den Einzelnen den Eindruck einer unbeschränkten Macht und einer unbesiegbaren Gefahr."

unseren wissenschaftlichen Erörterungen und Darstellungen zugrunde zu legen.“ (Freud 1980: 30) This love-drive, was what Freud would further refer to as sex-drive or libido.¹¹

With individuals identifying with a certain ideal or leader the members of the group consequently identified with each other. The own super-ego¹² found ideals that were close to their own, though instead of questioning them in their potential difference, would idealize them. This idealization would lead to the replacement of the own super-ego with the newly found external one. The own super-ego replaced with the idealized leader's, made others that did the same, their equal. Sharing the same super-ego, led to the identification with each other.

The replacement of the super-ego, moreover, had a relieving benefit. “The leader will take over those functions that were – much earlier in the development of the individual – fulfilled by the caretaker.” (Brunner 2018: 168) The leader or the leading idea was given the full responsibility to watch over the members' egos and ids and make sure it obeyed the collective norm. “The leader takes over psychological functions such as reality testing or normative decision making.” (Brunner 2018: 168) Being relieved of the strenuous effort of self-restraint, the structure within the group revealed an enormous benefit. The internal conflict between the super-ego and id, that the ego constantly must manage, was externalized. (Brunner 2018: 168) The group allowed the individual to dispose of ‘repressive’ social norms, such as the conscious and handed over the

¹¹ In response to the massive furor that he stirred with the use of this terminology, he replied with nonchalance: “Wer die Sexualität für etwas die menschliche Natur Beschämendes und Erniedrigendes hält, dem steht es ja frei, sich der vornehmeren Ausdrücke Eros und Erotik zu bedienen.“ (Freud 1980: 31)

¹² The super-ego, the internalized version of the reprimanding society, the internalized authority, represented the entity that suppressed the id. (Adorno 1982 [1951]: 123) The super-ego was the internalized social constraints and norms, which was pressing down on the ego to obey these norms. The feeling of guilt to Freud was hence the super-ego's punishment for crossing internalized constraints. Conscience was nothing but internalized social fear. (Freud 1980: 13-14)

constraining responsibility to the leader. The leader was placed in the position to demand and allow release.

Moreover, the uplift of felt restraining norms of *civilization* were replaced. Censured behavior, such as physical violence could then be acted out – the new social constellation had given its approval. In replacing the previous authority, with the newly found group’s authority, one’s own consciousness could be switched off. Now with the ease of having someone else, the new group, take over one’s super-ego, all earlier inhibition dropped, with the group allowing to fully indulge in what remained previously forbidden. (Freud 1980: 24)

The most expressive and informative masses were the church and its believers and the military and its soldiers. Both were in fact masses that (at a certain point in time) were held together also by external force and saw the punishment for those that withdrew. Generally, people were and are not asked if they are willing to join.¹³ These masses though, were interesting to look at because in them the force and ties of the people was more readily visible and stronger than in other forms of society. In both masses, in the church as well as in the army, the illusion of a leader was created. The head of the Church was Christ, while the commander was the head of the army. Both loved each and every member with the same love. The Church made this love explicit. Christ is to his followers a loving older brother, a place holder for their father. “A democratic breeze went through the church, precisely because everyone was equal before Christ, everyone possessed the same amount of his love.”¹⁴ (Freud 1980: 33) It was no coincidence that the Church evoked the impression of being a family and their believers called themselves “brothers in Christo, which meant to say, brothers through the love that Christ had for them.”

¹⁴ “Ein demokratischer Zug geht durch die Kirche, eben weil vor Christus alle gleich sind, all den gleichen Anteil Liebe haben.“ (Freud 1980: 33)

(Freud 1980: 33) The relation of the commander to its troops was a similar one. The soldier's camaraderie was based on the submission towards their shared commander. The commander as their father, loving and reprimanding everyone one equally, made each a comrade to the other.¹⁵
(Freud 1980: 33)

Within each mass, the individual is libidinally tied to both, to the leader as well as to the other individuals of the group. This dual libidinal tie then, explained why it was easy for the individual to give up its individual freedom. Though the love for Christ and their believers, was limited to their own. Those that did not belong to their faith community, those that did not believe, did not love and consequently did not deserve Christ's love either. Therefore, even "if it called itself the religion of love, it had to be tough and loveless toward those that did not believe." (Freud 1980: 38)

In that sense the 'head' of the mass did not necessarily have to be a leader, but a leading idea or an abstract figure could take its place. As will be shown, the nation and the mythology surrounding it and its institutions, takes the form of a leading idea, that serves as a similar binding force. These leading ideas then could find their personification in individual persons. (Brunner 2019: 11) The border is one such concretization of an abstract idea, which will find further elaboration in the conclusion.

According to Freud, the reason for religious wars' decline was that other forms of libidinal masses had arisen. The mass that took the place of religious ties, I would claim, was the nation. Ironically, as will be shown, the new mass declared itself to be free of religion, and placed

¹⁵ Freud himself mentions in a side note, that the reason for him to not elaborate on the relevance of the idea of the nation, was that it was too complicated. Though admits that it played a major role in holding the army together. (Freud 1980: 33)

rationality, Enlightenment, freedom in its place, while at the same time remaining religious in its structure.

A helpful distinction that Markus Brunner introduces is between ‘silent masses’ and ‘raucous’ ones. The masses that Freud initially described in reference to le Bon were masses that formed in a short period of time, coming together over a specific cause or interest. However Brunner instead stresses short moments of raucous mass formations, which in turn were based on those forms of masses of long duration, “like the short, but high waves, caused by the long groundswell of the sea.”¹⁶ (Freud 1980: 22) These silent masses were created identifications, through active processes, of socialization, within certain institutions, classes, religious communities, etc. The raucous mass-movements were not a new formation, but a more explicit expression and escalation of the silent and normalized ones. I will show that the raucous mass movement (the urgent appeal to close the border) can gain such strength, because it is “structurally embedded in our society” (Brunner 2019: 12), is made possible by the silent mass-processes.

Focusing primarily on the role of the leader and his role in manipulation tactics of leading the masses “where he wants to go” (Adorno 1982 [1951]), is not a move that Freud himself made, but rather an outcome of the Frankfurt Schools’ work. Theodor W. Adorno’s essay *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda* is just one such example. But, as I have tried to outline so far, it is not primarily the clever tactics of a strong personality that manipulates masses to their interest, but a distinct social structure, making people search for and long for such lead. Here Critical Theory needs to critically reflect upon itself.

¹⁶ „[...] wie die kurzen, aber hohen Wellen, den langen Dünungen der See.“ (Freud 1980: 22)

In the following section, I will show how the intertwining of banal nationalisms and silent masses are the base and the determining factor for the raucous mass 'movements'. Before circling back to the described material, the border wall initiatives' repeated reference to national institutions such as the Constitution, to founding myths and their urgent appeal to build a wall, I want to turn to the silent mass formation of nationalism, of that what Michael Billig termed 'banal nationalism'.

Nationalism as Mass-formation and Individual False Cure

Brunner locates in Vamik Volkan's term 'Großgruppenidentität', 'large group identity', the 'silent' mass-formation of nationalism: specific shared objects, myths and figures (such as sports, food, children's books), typical of a region, that create a feeling of unity -- a feeling of 'Us'. These objects of identification were also a screen for projection and functioned as creators of a shared collectivity. In differentiation from Volkan, Brunner stresses the moment of retroactivity. These objects of identification were for the subject at the time of individual acquisition, not ones that held a national connotation. Only through internalizing the concept of the nation are they implemented into the horizon of being part of that construct. (Brunner 2019: 12) Common characteristics then are stressed over those that divide. Nationalism preferences often unrealistic, less important facets over reality, if it fit into its own nationalist ideology. With the construction of the national unity then, all those objects of acquisition, that were different from each other, such as class, social strata or food preferences are pushed to the side. Furthermore, Brunner pledges to add to Volkan's 'large group identity' that the moments of positive identification and idealization went together with the process of delineation and inner-psycho splitting. Negative and disturbing feelings and desires were split and projected toward the non-identical. This was another central element to the division of the world in nations.

Here Brunner suggests turning to Mario Erdheim's "Fremdenrepräsentanz", what Erdheim derives from Freud's understanding of the "inner foreign country" or the "inner foreigner". (Erdheim 1990: 21) Seemingly dangerous, disturbing and tabooed wishes that could not be integrated into the own ego were placed into that "inner foreigner" and abandoned to the unconscious. But by being tied to hidden wishes and longings it was a place of ambivalence, that also held a moment of fascination. (Brunner 2019: 13) „At the same time the foreignness that is created through projective splitting is primarily a space of fear and a threatening object.”¹⁷ (Brunner 2019: 14) As Melanie Klein has shown, the undesirable, scary and distressing is split off from the self and externalized. These were, in gendered bourgeois families, in the first instance the mother's 'bad breast'¹⁸, moved on to include the father, which then turned into fearing anyone outside of the closest family circle.¹⁹ The 'inner foreigner' only in retrospect turned into an external construction of foreigners. "Only retrospectively, in the course of internalizing the socially created ideas of the nation and ethnicity, some people are perceived as not belonging to one's own, identified as 'foreign' and inner-psychically linked to the 'inner foreigner'. Who gets perceived as foreign – and therewith as potentially dangerous – is closely tied to social discourse." (Brunner 2019: 14) This retrospect linkage of the inner foreigner with the socially constructed foreigner is one aspect of racism's strength. Consequently, it is accompanied with perceiving some people's suffering as not 'their own', leading to lack of solidarity or to more severe forms of discrimination and persecution. (Brunner 2019: 14)

¹⁷ "Zugleich ist das über projektive Abspaltung produzierte Fremde natürlich v.a. auch ein Ort der Angst, ein bedrohliches Objekt." (Brunner 2019: 14)

¹⁸ The 'bad breast' is the split off breast that denies milk, while the 'good breast' was the bountiful and limitless one. (Klein 1987)"

¹⁹ "Erst nachträglich, nämlich im Zuge der Internalisierung der gesellschaftlich geschaffenen Ideen von Nation und Ethnizität, werden Personen, die als nicht zur eigenen Gruppe zugehörig wahrgenommen werden, als „Fremde“ identifiziert und innerpsychisch mit der Fremdenrepräsentanz verknüpft. Wer dabei als fremd – und dabei auch potentiell bedrohlich – wahrgenommen wird, hängt mit gesellschaftlichen Diskursen zusammen [...]" (Brunner 2019: 14)

The projective distortion of the other, is a form of consolidation of the self. The desire to belong and become one with the group, did not allow for difference within, it had to be free of 'foreignness'. "Das Fremde, als das projizierte heterogene Eigene, muß draußen bleiben, damit es Zugehörigkeitsgefühle und grenzenloses Einssein nicht bedroht." (Bohleber 1992: 698) The outside-enemy, stabilizes the inner unity" and suspends all ambivalence within. As a phantasy it brought the collective together and gave the individuals a strengthened sense of unity and national identity. This construct could canalize emotions. As a collective it functioned as creator of community and could produce the feeling of belonging and a sense of safety. (Bohleber 1992: 702)

Nationalism as a Mechanism of Defense and Integration

This development of the 'inner foreigner' to forms of explicit racism, is not only an individual's life-process, but one that is part of a group-forming process of nationalism and its ideology. Therein diffuse and complex social relations, that were hard to grasp, find easier explanations. Societies abstract social structure creating massive inequality and precarity, could be concretized and personalized into a specific dangerous outside. These pseudo-explanations were at the same time decreasing people's fears, while feeding them clearer ones.

What the individual would 'gain' from nationalist ideology, was furthermore, an apparent gratification of drives, which Freud would call "Schiefheilung" – a false cure. The dissatisfaction with existing social structures - with the reality as it revealed itself to be, would for an instance feel cured, though in reality be prolonged. Ideologies of national grandiosity, imagined race-superiority, lent such a false relief of an individual's inner conflicts and psychical instability (that lead to potential neurosis). Though these inner conflicts were also socially grown and, in that sense, not that individual after all. Society produced a certain lack of gratifications, social

instability and the impossibility of achieving the ideals that the same society produced. The promised compensation of an ideology and society driven by a capitalist drive for surplus value, rather than human's needs, remained eternally unrealized. Externalizing dissatisfaction granted at least a small compensation (Adorno 2018 [1952]: 33) (Brunner 2019:17) - of momentary grandness, in a world that made the individual small and powerless.

Nationalism is one such readily available construction of discharge, lending a pseudo-solution to the powerless individual. The ideology of nationalism, the love towards one's nation, and towards all members of that nation, let the vulnerable individual fuse into a larger mass, belong to a larger cause, have a sense of belonging and at last be granted the significance one 'deserves'. The feeling of being one with the group though is an ambivalent one, one of longing for self-aggrandizement and one of self-disavowal. This wish and the imagination of becoming one (to the point of 'not afraid to die' - Muse) is also one of giving up one's personal needs for the sake of the group. Which could lead to both, self-abandonment and -annihilation, and to the feeling of fully being one with the group. The individual, particularly when feeling powerless, insecure and degraded by not being able to fulfill the ideals that society produced (i.e. for men a secure income that would feed a household) has the chance to be aggrandized, while at the same time being fully absorbed into an "oceanic feeling" of being one with the world. (Bohleber 1992)²⁰ Nationalist unity then is the false cure of the modern capitalist subject.

This feeling of being one with the universe, "a feeling of infinity, boundlessness, so to speak, an oceanic feeling" (Freud 1974: 197) is also a description found in Freud's *Civilization and It's Discontents*, however, his description is not related to nationalism, but his friend's claim

²⁰ „Idealisierung der Nation aus der unbewußten Phantasie einer vorambivalenten narzißtischen Verschmelzung mit der Mutter speist und wie der dabei abgespaltene Haß sich auf Fremde und Ausländer richtet.“ (Bohleber 1992)

of being the universally shared feeling of religion. The feeling of religion, Freud further elaborates his friends claim, was one of „indeterminable belonging, of togetherness with the entire outside world“²¹ (Freud 1974: 198) Freud - in his critique of religion close to Marx - identifies the longing that the described feeling revealed, as a remnant and nostalgia of an imagined undifferentiated stage in pre-oedipal childhood.²² In this stage the infant has no sense of the self, and thinks itself to be one with the care-giver. Only after experiences of differentiation, through inevitable feelings of pain and displeasure, was externality created. Though the experience of differentiation and displeasure also leads to the attempt to dis-identify all pain and displeasure from the self, the ego, and to “throw it towards an outside, creating a pure pleasure-ego, in opposition to a foreign, threatening outside.” (Freud 1974: 200)

It is not a determined necessity to fall into a pre-oedipal stage, and not a determined necessity that this regression must take the form that nationalism granted. Though the pre-oedipal stage of imagined non-ambivalence lends itself as idealization, while nationalism is a socially readily available construct, that taps into that imaginary one-ness, where all ambivalence is thought to be external. The nationalist regression then allows the individual to falsely ‘cure’ inner conflicts, lending an ostensible way out of the misery of the present time.

Though this false cure, while on the one hand lending security, also never adds up. The fortresses of the imagined unity that the nation allows to regress into, always threatens to dissolve. In response, the unity not only has to be continuously re-enforced, but the imagined threat must be held-off at all costs.

²¹ “unauflösbarer Verbundenheit, der Zusammengehörigkeit mit dem Ganzen der Außenwelt.“ (Freud 1974: 198)

²² With Melanie Klein, this stage would have to be placed at an even earlier stage of pre-birth. The pre-oedipal phase and particularly the moment of birth were already first drastic experiences of difference.

6. Interpretations: U.S. Nationalism's False Cures

The development of an imagined unity is one with a long history that I have shown is not a natural relation, but one that has actively been created, with clear incentives for economic and political power. This history of actual and imagined unification, the creation of institutions and supporting mythologies, is largely based on two structuring elements, the military and religion. The key examples named by Freud for showing what masses were, is central not only to the time and society that he was writing in but has central relevance to U.S nationalism and to the figures referenced by the initiatives as well.

As Richard L. Merritt has shown with his content analysis of colonial newspapers from 1735-1739 and 1771-1775, the identificatory shift from “British Colonists” and “His Majesty’s subjects” to “American” is closely linked to the time leading up to the American Revolution - a historical reference that all three border wall initiatives make. The common fight against an outside enemy and the camaraderie created within military service are relevant factors in the creation of the imagination of a nationally unified people. It let significant factors of class, social status and internal political factions fall far behind a seemingly greater national cause. As shown by Howard Zinn, the war itself was hardly an incentive for the majority of the population to join the military. Rather than being an outcome of already existent common ideals, Zinn lays out the hesitance and mistrust of the revolutionary leaders to include the poor white population and the enslaved in the cause, though through necessity eventually had to find incentives for more men to join. Far away from being a predestined unity, it was in fact their economic difference and social status, that incentivized men to fight in the war and eventually believe in the cause. The war moreover, did not actually produce economic equality but instead institutionalized already

existent unequal property relations. Nevertheless, the idea of camaraderie and the founding myth persists.

All three groups, moreover, make references to the Constitution as giving legitimacy to their project, in delineation to a government that was not fulfilling what they claimed was its duty. On a manifest level this lets them call on the Revolutionary War as a war that found its legitimacy in the “failing” of the British to hold the colonist’s interests. But the Constitution, as analyzed by John McNamara has another key characteristic that points towards its latent relevance for the initiatives focus thereon - the Constitution as the sacred word of the Founding Fathers.

The validity of the Constitution is measured by the standard of the Framers, who in their role as the fathers of the nation are the epitome of what the nation was. The founding years of the U.S. as “the ideal moment in time and space” (McNamara 2017: 8) are turned into a timeless model for American nationhood, by which all further actions are to be measured. The Constitution as a document that was to be a legal measurement of the good and right life, by interpretation of the founding father’s intent, took on the form of biblical exegesis. The moment of creation is frozen in time, to become the moment by which to measure all further actions. It becomes the moral base of American society, and the Supreme Court’s legitimacy. As theories of nationalism have shown, the belonging to a nation and the adherence to the Constitution is understood to be one of birth, by territory or blood. As such it is a relation that *exists* and is not chosen, likewise to religion, as an entity that happened to one, and was not one of will. Here the theory of Freud’s Mass-psychology takes form. His theory is based not only on concrete leaders, but also on leading ideas or figures that took the form of idealized narrations. The Founding Fathers are not coincidentally given their name as fathers, and the Constitution held in sacred

respect, as their word. The father figure as representative of the authority over the family, is here the representative authority over the nation. The father-ideal is the creator of national unity, in its institutionalization, but also in the framework of the civil-religion believer's minds. Their placement of the Founders as their super-ego (the internalized authority) takes on the form of idealized identification. Through the shared idealization of the Founders, the members in consequence identified with each other, creating libidinal ties unifying the nation, beyond internal political differences and beyond individual (class-) interests. The Framers or the Constitution as their representative authority loved everyone 'equally' and subjected everyone 'equally' to their words. That the equality was a false one plays no role in the imagination of its members. The institutionalized Constitution functions as placeholder for the loving and reprimanding father, making everyone seem equal before the law. This now can explain the ambivalent moment of the Minuteman's description of the nation as both being the granter of liberty and this liberty 'granting' obligation. The "duties attendant to that liberty essential to preserving a regime of, by and for the people" was one that they "solemnly accepted", for being granted "ordered liberty" in return. The nation granted liberty and equality to its members but expected their somber adherence in return. Only in full submission to the nation, is the individual's liberty "secured". The somber devotion that did not expect compensation, but love and liberty is also inherent to the Minuteman's choice of name. The original Minutemen being vigilante and self-taught militia, did not wait to be called upon, nor ask for compensation, but took up their duty with unasked compliance. They were the true patriots of their time, their granted liberty, gave them no other will but to join the cause.

The full tie between the nation and its members' devotion finds its final consequence in giving ones lives for the nation. Brian Kolfage the founder and representative of We Build The Wall is the perfect choice of head then: With having merely one limb left, he is the living

example of having nearly died. Therewith, he has proven the full consequential devotion to his country. He is celebrated as a hero veteran, not because he survived, but because he almost died. This is corroborated by the lyrics' lines "We should never be afraid to die." (Muse 2009) The implication is that death is not to be feared, when it comes in unity. "*We* should never be afraid". Death (if in fight for the nation) is the full submergence of the self under a greater cause and the total annihilation of the self. The glorification finds its end.

The idea of the individual merging into one is (in less drastic pictures) to be found in all three initiatives. We Build the Wall calls for the unification of private individuals, again corroborated by Muse's lyrics "We have to unify and watch our flag ascend." The Minuteman Border Fence describe their maxim as "From many, One." And "free, decent people of many origins unify and become one nation." The Minuteman Civil Defense Corps call on Americans to join their initiative to become a "force multiplier", become part of an active majority and therewith have the ability to "change the course of history." Most explicitly in the latter two groups, the unity is reinforced by self-aggrandizement. The roughly 1,000 supporters are thought to have the power to make historical change.

Finally, the project of the border wall itself is a form of megalomania, to substantially close and sustain a stretch of nearly 2,000 miles of border wall is the most succinct expression thereof. The juxtaposition of the Civil Defense Corps' call to multiply forces and become part of a majority with their claim of being a misunderstood minority again hints towards its latent content. They were the misunderstood, they were the ones that the nation had left behind and had not taken care of. In their megalomaniac project they can shed off their own (imagined and actual) powerlessness; find relief and compensate their own felt insufficiency and degradation that society constantly creates.

The merging into one and the promise of self-aggrandizement through unification is not only ambivalent because it asks for self-denial, but also ambivalent because it constantly has to be reinforced against the potential dissolution of its illusionary power. The inside of the nation needs to be held free of all ambivalence. This imagined state of pre-oedipal pre-ambivalence then creates the outside as one of foreignness and danger. The far-reaching appeal of the proclaimed vital need for a border wall now falls further into place. It not only keeps the imagined ‘dangerous entity’ out, it also holds the imagined self-glorification in. It sets a physical and visible statement against a threat that all three initiatives grapple with naming. While they all hint towards “floods of” illegal immigration from Mexico to be the threat, actual people remain absent from the narrative. The abstractness of capitalist structures that create actual threats to people’s lives, find their false cure in the concreteness of the wall.

What I have tried to show here is that the ideologies that are taken to be those of the far right, or of fascist groupings, are the raucous masses of the silent center. They are the loud call that are only made possible by already prevalent U.S. nationalism. To not tackle nationalism by its roots then, but merely by the loud, ravaging waves, is to miss the deep underlying currents, that create them in the first place. The theory that has spurred up since 2016 turning to early Critical Theory, urgently wanting to grasp “the Trump phenomenon”, “Trumpism”, “Trumpology”, almost mirrors the urgency that the call for a border wall proclaims. While there is the pressing necessity to actively counter the devastating consequences of political reality, the theoretical reflection thereof has shown to respond to raucous demands with raucous counterdemands. If Critical Theory wants to stay critical it needs to reflect on itself, in order not to fall into the same currents, that it tries to critique.

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