



Racialized Frames of Value in U.S. University Responses to the Travel Ban

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Abstract

This article analyzes U.S. university presidents' public responses to the Trump administration's first travel ban in January 2017. Within these responses, most presidents voiced their support for international students, staff, and faculty. However, it remains necessary to consider the discursive frames through which this support is articulated. I found that support for international members of the campus community was largely expressed in ways that implicitly naturalized the regulation of immigration according to racialized assessments of human value. This article considers the role of universities in reproducing and/or interrupting the logics and practices of white supremacy, racial capitalism, and nationalism, and the ethical limits of responses to the ban that are framed through discourses of conditional inclusion and perceived contributions to the campus and country.

Keywords

Anti-Muslim racism; nationalism; immigration; internationalization; higher education; racial capitalism

Introduction

In January 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump issued an executive order that prohibited the entry of citizens from seven predominantly Muslim nations for



at least three months, and temporarily barred the entry of all refugees, amongst other things. “Executive Order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” also commonly referred to as “the Muslim travel ban” or simply “the travel ban,” was eventually struck down in court, as was a second travel ban designed to replace the original. In June 2017, the second ban was partially reinstated by the Supreme Court, which ruled that those with a “bona fide relationship” to a person or entity in the U.S. were exempt from the ban, including international students, employees, and scholarly visitors to universities. When the second ban expired, a third ban issued in September 2017 outlined yet another set of travel restrictions for eight countries: six Muslim majority countries, as well as Venezuela and North Korea; the precise restrictions vary by country. The September 2017 ban was accompanied by a statement from the White House that it was “a critical step toward establishing an immigration system that protects Americans’ safety and security in an era of dangerous terrorism and transnational crime” (as cited in Redden, 2018b). In June 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the third version of the ban, citing the President’s authority to make decisions about immigration regarding questions of national security

The Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) estimated that the original travel ban directly affected 17,000 students enrolled in U.S. universities, but it has also heightened the existing anxieties of many other students, faculty, and staff, in particular Muslims, and non-Muslims who might be “read” as Muslim according to racialized, Orientalist stereotypes (Volpp, 2002). Indeed, the ban, along with various other policies and positions of the Trump administration, have negatively affected racialized students, faculty, staff, and campus visitors, both citizens and not, who are perpetually “othered” and subject to an underlying threat of violence on predominantly white campuses (Gusa, 2010). Although racial violence is not new to higher education, there was a reported increase in racist incidents and white nationalist fliers and recruitment efforts on university campuses in the months leading up to, and following, the 2016 election (Quintana, 2017; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017a, 2017b).¹

The full effects of the travel bans, as well as other recent immigration policies, on higher education are still unfolding, and new restrictions against and regulations of international student visas may be on the horizon (Redden, 2018a). The travel ban has already been linked to the declining number of visas issued to international students and visiting academics from countries affected by different

¹ The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) (2017a) reports, “Since the day after the 2016 presidential election through March 31, the Southern Poverty Law Center has documented 1,863 bias incidents. Of these, 292, or 15.67%, were anti-black motivated incidents” Many of these incidents have taken place on university campuses. The SPLC also reported more than 150 incidents of white nationalist fliers and recruitment materials on such campuses (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017b).

iterations of the ban (Redden, 2018b). There are also concerns that it had impacts beyond directly affected countries, playing a role in declining overall international student enrollments in the U.S. (Redden, 2018b). However, rather than emphasize the enrollment impact of the travel bans on U.S. higher education, this paper examines the frames and discourses that were utilized in articulations of institutional support for international students, staff, and faculty. I suggest that these frames and discourses have implications beyond the immediate context of the ban, and prompt larger questions about how racialized measures of value shape U.S. immigration policy and indeed the U.S. political landscape more generally.

In response to the first travel ban in January 2017, many U.S. university presidents quickly issued official statements to position themselves not necessarily in direct opposition to the ban, but in public support of their international students, faculty, and staff. In this paper, I analyze these initial statements, oriented by two primary questions: How did U.S. university presidents position their institutions in response to the travel ban? And how did U.S. university presidents position their institutions in relation to international students, staff, and faculty? In answering these questions, I specifically attend to whether university presidents' institutional positioning reproduced and/or interrupted the white supremacist, racial capitalist, and nationalist logics that have historically shaped immigration policy within what is currently the U.S. While most university presidents framed their institutional interests and ideals as at least somewhat misaligned with the Trump administration's vision of immigration, they nevertheless tended to reproduce an approach to international student, staff, and faculty mobility that is inflected by racialized economic logics (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Rhee & Sagaria, 2004; Stein & Andreotti, 2016). Indeed, in my analysis of the statements of over 100 university presidents, I found that some defenses of international students, staff, and faculty naturalized racialized calculations of human un/worthiness, and failed to challenge the nation-state's authority to regulate immigration based on these calculations.

This article does not offer a comprehensive review of all U.S. university presidents' public institutional responses to the travel bans; nor does it seek to assess the adequacy of these institutions' overall response and practical support for international students, staff, and faculty. Ultimately, my intention is to neither praise nor condemn any particular president or institution. Rather, I examine how international students, staff, and faculty across several universities are framed within institutional discourse.

I begin by reviewing the white supremacist, racial capitalist, and nationalist logics that have historically shaped U.S. immigration policy in general, as well as international student and faculty recruitment in higher education specifically. I then review the findings of my analysis of university presidents' statements, specifically how they positioned their universities in relation to the travel ban, and how they positioned the institution of the university in relation to international students, staff, and faculty. Next, I discuss how these statements frame the presumed worthiness of international members of the campus community, the relationship between the

university and the state, and presidents' reluctance to explicitly name the role of racism in the ban. I conclude the article by arguing for the need to imagine and enact more expansive horizons of justice, horizons that are not circumscribed by the imperatives of racial capitalism and white supremacist nationalism.

White Supremacy, Racial Capitalism, and Nationalism

Contextualizing the Trump travel bans requires identifying how anti-Muslim racist discourses and practices shape U.S. domestic and foreign policy (Burke, 2017; #Islamphobias Racism Syllabus, 2017), and how these affect U.S. universities. This includes, for instance: the recently dismantled National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), which tracked and regulated the movements of select non-U.S. citizens who were disproportionately Muslim, including many international students and faculty; domestic surveillance of mosques and Muslim student groups; anti-Muslim racism on campus (Ramarajan & Runell, 2007; Zaal, 2012); and university involvements in ongoing wars and proxy wars in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia, by way of federal research contracts and more (Campbell & Murrey, 2014; Chatterjee & Maira, 2014).

In 2003, the Student and Exchange Visitor Information system (SEVIS) program was established, although an international student tracking system was already established in 1996 and precedents had been in place since at least the 1970s (Boggs, 2013). According to Boggs, SEVIS is “a massive, real-time internet database for all international students in the US maintained by international student advisors” (p. 222), which is maintained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and comes with mandatory federal reporting requirements for host institutions, including reporting violations of the student's visa conditions (e.g. conviction of a crime). Although SEVIS is not overtly anti-Muslim, it was established alongside the post-September 11th *PATRIOT Act* and thus is arguably a product of post-9/11 racist anxieties over threatening Muslim ‘others’.

Anti-Muslim racism does not operate in isolation; rather, it is linked to a larger system of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and white supremacy in the U.S. For instance, many contemporary discourses of national security and the War on Terror are rooted in tropes of Indigenous peoples as terrorist threats to white citizens' security and capital, which were (and still are) used to justify colonial state violence. This is evident in the US military's decision to use “Geronimo” as a code name for Osama Bin Laden (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014), and their designation of “hostile, unpacified territories in active war zones” as “Indian Country” (Silliman, 2008, p. 237). Connections between distinct but interlinked struggles against racial/colonial state violence were recognized in some Indigenous peoples' statement of solidarity with those affected by the travel ban: “No ban on stolen land.” Indeed, ever since European colonial forces arrived in what is currently known as the United States, the freedom of mobility, forced mobility, or foreclosed mobility both at and within the country's borders have been unevenly distributed in highly racialized ways (Byrd, 2011; Stein & Andreotti, 2017).

Further, as Moser, Hendricks, and Vives (2017) note, the travel ban was only “the first line of an attack orchestrated by the Trump administration on racialized migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees” (p. 176). This has also included the proposed wall on the U.S.-Mexico border, the rescission of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program, the separation of undocumented parents and children at the border, the removal of Temporary Protected Status for hundreds of thousands of people (from El Salvador, Honduras, Haiti, Nepal, Nicaragua, and Sudan), the revocation of asylum eligibility for victims of domestic or gang violence, and Trump’s comments that the U.S. should not have to accept people immigrating from “shithole countries” (Redden, 2018a). Therefore, I situate my analysis of university presidents’ responses to the initial travel ban in conversation with scholarship that addresses: the historical and ongoing role of white supremacy, settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and nationalism in shaping U.S. immigration policy; the politics of international student, staff, and faculty mobility; and university discourses of diversity and inclusion. I briefly review each body of scholarship below.

Race, the U.S. State, and Immigration

Within efforts to resist the travel ban and other elements of the Trump administration’s immigration policy, a common response has been to assert variations of “We are all immigrants,” or, “America was built by immigrants.” It is not only activists that deploy this language; it also appears in the opening paragraphs of the amicus brief signed by nearly 100 technology and other companies in support of the *Washington and Minnesota v. Trump* (2017) case that successfully challenged the constitutionality of the first travel ban. Such statements invite new im/migrants² into the American Dream, framing the U.S. as an inclusive land of freedom and opportunity.

However, as Patel (2015b) points out, the “nation of immigrants” narrative relies on a white-washed national origin story that obscures how the occupation of Indigenous lands was and remains an underlying condition for the nation’s existence. It also leaves out the forced trans-Atlantic migration of enslaved Africans to the U.S., the central role of slavery in the creation of much (predominantly white) U.S. wealth, and the ongoing structures of anti-Blackness in the contemporary “afterlife of slavery” (Hartman, 2008). Enslaved peoples were not im/migrants, but rather were victims of kidnapping. In fact, the first Muslims in the U.S. were enslaved Black Muslims (Burke, 2017). The “nation of immigrants” narrative also reduces white colonizers to im/migrants, which erases how acquisitive violence shaped their structural position. It further papers over white efforts, both historical and ongoing, to govern U.S. citizenship and immigration

² I borrow the term “im/migrant” from Abu El-Haj and Skilton (2017), who in turn borrow it from Arzubriga, Nogueuron, and Sullivan, to “denote the variety of people included in the category of immigrant (for example, immigrant, transnational migrant, and refugee)” (p. 77).

policy through racialized, hetero- and gender-normative, and capitalist logics that have consistently granted uneven and conditional access to the American Dream (Patel, 2017), including through various efforts to bar or limit immigration from certain regions and populations, and prevent various non-European im/migrants from becoming citizens.

As Ngai (2014) points out, U.S. immigration and border policies in the late 19th/early 20th centuries “both encoded and generated racial ideas and practices that, in turn, produced different racialized spaces internal to the nation” (pp. 63-64). Racial logics order and govern populations through the production and policing of different categories of humanity and personhood that have morphed but persisted throughout U.S. history, in particular through the enduring division of *deserving* versus *undeserving*. Patel (2015a) notes that while discourses of un/deservingness have become prevalent and contested within im/migrant justice struggles, “deservingness is itself a centuries-old discursive frame to delineate humanness and worth” (p. 11), assessed in relation to one’s perceived innocence and worthiness within the white supremacist imaginary (Hartman & Wilderson, 2003), and the value measures of racial capitalism. According to Melamed (2015), “Capital can only be capital when it is accumulating, and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups... racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires” (p. 77).

Within the broad category of im/migrant, assessments of deservingness produce distinctions that rationalize differential legal status, rights, and relative freedom of mobility; as a result, only certain im/migrants are deemed worthy of defending. According to Nopper (2011a), the 1875 Page Act was “the first U.S. immigration policy to prohibit the category of ‘undesirable immigrants,’” (p. 106), while Ngai (2014) traces assessments of im/migrants’ deservingness to the Immigration Act of 1924, which “gave rise to an oppositional political and legal discourse, which imagined deserving and undeserving illegal immigrants, and concomitantly, just and unjust deportations” (p. 57).

The contingent nature of the designation of deservingness within racial capitalism means it can be rescinded any time a non-white person appears to threaten or violate the norms of whiteness and capitalist productivity, and thus ceases to be perceived as a proper object of empathy and instead starts to be perceived as a problem or a burden (Ahenakew & Naepi, 2015; Ahmed, 2012). Conversely, contingent deservingness may be rescinded if non-white people are perceived to be “taking” educational and employment opportunities that are thought to rightfully belong to white U.S. students (Coloma, 2013).

Within the umbrella logics of white supremacy, racial capitalism, and nationalism, positions on immigration will vary depending in part on who is perceived to be benefitting from im/migrants’ economic contributions, or suffering from their competition. The travel ban itself can be understood as an articulation of *white racial resentment*. Because this racial resentment is rooted in a presumption

of white entitlement, it tends to intensify in moments when white populations feel that their economic and social advantages are under threat (Stein, Hunt, Susa, & Andreotti 2017). Meanwhile, many mainstream critical responses to the travel ban defended im/migrants by mobilizing discourses of deservingness and white-washed histories of U.S. immigration, which can be understood as articulations of *conditional racial inclusion*. If examples of racial resentment are more easily spotted, conditional inclusion is a more insidious strategy to reproduce racial divisions toward capitalist ends. Indeed, as Melamed (2015) writes, in contrast to the overtly racist exclusions advocated through discourses and policies of racial resentment, contemporary racial capitalism often “deploys liberal and multicultural terms of inclusion to value and devalue forms of humanity differentially to fit the needs of reigning state-capital orders” (p. 77). Effectively, these terms of inclusion do not so much eradicate white supremacist or racial capitalist logics as reorganize and reframe them (Ahmed, 2012).

As Patel (2015a) notes, “Deservingness is deployed differentially relative to different peoples in a settler society” (p. 11). For instance, discourses of conditional inclusion about racialized im/migrants have been weaponized against racialized non-im/migrants, when the former’s hard work, productivity, and economic contributions are framed in implicit (or sometimes, explicit) contrast to the latter’s presumed lack thereof. In particular, Nopper (2011b) finds that defenses of non-Black racialized im/migrants often reproduce “anti-Black rhetoric regarding African Americans as lacking a work ethic, militant, xenophobic, and costly to society” (p. 2). In this way, the perceived worthiness of one group is weaponized against another (Samudzi, 2017). Others note that Black people are seen as always already guilty in the eyes of the U.S. state and society (Samudzi, 2017; Wang, 2017), and thus are deemed ineligible for the kind of public empathy that is conditionally granted to “deserving” non-Black im/migrants.

Critical Approaches to Higher Education, International Mobility, and Race

International students are irreducible to the category of “immigrant,” yet they are subject to U.S. border and immigration policies, and their position is highly determined by assessments of their perceived deservingness. These assessments begin well before students arrive, namely at the point of admission (as assessed by the university), and at the point of seeking a visa (as assessed by the U.S. State Department). This deservingness is then continuously monitored through SEVIS and other mechanisms, and their ability to stay in the U.S. as international students remains dependent upon the goodwill and the continued legality of their presence, which remains within the power of the U.S. state to revoke. In all of this, international students are positioned ambivalently within U.S. structures of racially uneven belonging. This positioning has a long history – for instance, students were exempt from the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, but were nonetheless ineligible for citizenship through naturalization (Nopper, 2011a). Students were also exempt from the Immigration Act of 1924 (Boggs, 2013).

Today, the very fact that an international student is present in the U.S. reflects a combination of their individual choice *and* structural ability to adhere to immigration requirements – choices and abilities that are not equally available to everyone. For instance, students must have access to educational institutions and other resources that would enable them to meet institutional admission requirements, as well as financial funds (whether through personal/family monies, government monies from their home country, private loans, or the rare scholarship) in order to meet the requirements of the F1 or M1 visa (unless they are in the U.S. under some other visa classification). At the same time, their significant diversity (of nationality, class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, dis/ability) produces yet another set of uneven opportunities and vulnerabilities within the category of “international student.” While shifts in perception of an international student from “model student” to “potential terrorist” can happen quickly (Boggs, 2013), it is more likely for some than others – namely, non-white / non-European descended students. This is clearly evident when one considers which international students were directly affected by the travel ban. Thus, while international students have some agency as to how they navigate international education opportunities and institutions, their choices are also circumscribed by a larger set of political and economic interests, racial ascriptions, and global histories.

As international mobility in higher education has grown, particularly for students, there has been increased critical attention given to the underlying economic motivations for this mobility on the part of host nations and institutions (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Cantwell, 2015; Rhee & Sagaria, 2004; Stein & Andreotti, 2016), as well as to the effects of mobility on sending countries and the experiences of mobile students and faculty (Adnett, 2010; Johnstone & Lee, 2014; Waters, 2012). As Boggs (2013) suggests, “US universities, corporations, and especially the US state have vested interests in the recruitment and education of international students as agents of diplomacy, tools for enhancing US human capital and campus diversity, or simply as sources of revenue” (p. 6). Many institutions view international tuition as an important source of revenue, whether actually or aspirationally (Cantwell, 2015; Lee, Maldonado-Maldonado, & Rhoades, 2006). In addition to direct funds, international students are further valued for the diversity that they are presumed to bring to a campus. This diversity is often framed in extractive, commodified ways that emphasize the experiential cultural capital that it produces for white, U.S. students. Diversity is celebrated as something that “diverse” (i.e. non-white, non-US) people embody, and is not necessarily matched by substantive engagements with their political perspectives or a commitment to develop truly respectful and equitable institutional environments (Ahmed, 2007, 2012).

Most international students in the U.S. do not come from European countries. Various studies have documented non-European international students’ experiences of racism (Brown & Jones, 2013; Lee & Opio, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007), as well as the reproduction of racist discourses about international students

in the education-focused media (Coloma, 2013; Rhee & Sagaria, 2004; Suspitsyna, 2015). For instance, Lee and Rice (2007) found that, “in a range of contexts, both in and outside the classroom, by peers, faculty, and members of the local community” (p. 405), international students from non-Western countries reported being ignored and subject to verbal abuse, and in some cases, physical abuse. Beyond targeted incidents, international students are situated within the larger racialized environments of U.S. universities (Ahenakew & Naepi, 2015; Cole & Harper, 2017; Davis & Harris, 2015; Gusa, 2010).

Ahmed (2007) unpacks how “diversity” has become depoliticized and commodified toward improving an institution’s public image, as commitments to diversity are understood as less threatening than framings like “anti-racism” or “racial equity.” By describing themselves as diverse, universities “create fantasy images of the organizations they apparently represent” (p. 124), without actually doing the work to align that image with reality. Beyond ‘diversity talk,’ direct discussions of race and racism by university administrators are rare. For example, in their analysis of university presidents’ responses to “racial incidents” on campus, Cole and Harper (2017) found that in most cases the incident that gave rise to the response was either not addressed at all, or only indirectly addressed. They also found that university presidents “rarely situate racial incidents within larger issues of systematic and institutional oppression” (p. 9). In other words, racism on campus is relegated to exceptional moments and individual “bad actors,” rather than identified as an ongoing, systemic problem. This framing, in turn, sets the stage for acute incidents of racism to recur, while more mundane white supremacy and racial violence continues largely unabated and unacknowledged by the institution. Davis and Harris (2015) found in their study of campus responses to racist incidents that the responses were framed in “image-protective” (p. 70) ways that positioned the incidents as products of ignorance, rather than intentional racism, thereby emphasizing intent over impact and absolving those who committed acts of racism from substantive accountability. Further, despite framing the racist incidents as learning opportunities, these statements were rarely accompanied by concrete steps for action.

Method of Analysis

In my analysis of the university presidents’ statements in response to the first travel ban in January 2017, I was less interested in revealing “hidden truths” than in understanding how truths about international students, staff, and faculty were discursively produced (Foucault, 1977). As Allan (2003) notes, “[m]ore than simply a group of statements or a stretch of text on paper, discourse can be characterized as dynamic constellations of words and images that legitimate and produce a given reality” (p. 47). Any individual text is therefore embedded within a larger institutional and social context (Smith, 2013). Discourses of and about the university are rooted in material and symbolic architectures that (re)produce and govern social life within and beyond the university. Thus, analyzing official university discourses can offer insight into the larger contexts in which the

university is operating, and how institutions frame themselves in relation to those contexts by either interrupting or reproducing dominant social relations.

Linking my analysis to the conceptual frameworks reviewed above, racial discourses in particular classify and produce distinct populations according to a particular metric of white supremacist value that determines their relative worthiness. This can be the case even when race is never explicitly named. As Cole and Harper (2017) note, “The choice of what is or is not said in presidential rhetoric determines what, or in this case who, is valuable” (p. 327). The discourses present and prominent in university presidents’ responses to the travel ban, as well as the discourses that were absent, affect and reflect processes of subjectification through which non-white people are ascribed to racialized positions of either proper or deviant subjects (e.g. deserving or undeserving im/migrants).

I analyzed the statements by university presidents in direct response to the first executive order travel ban (signed January 27, 2017). Specifically, I reviewed the responses from APLU member institutions that were collected by the APLU as of March 5, 2017. From the APLU’s compiled list, I excluded Canadian institutions (of which there were five), as well as statements made by chancellors of state university systems; I only analyzed statements made by presidents of individual U.S. university campuses (of which there were 118 total). This represented about half of the APLU’s total member institutions. I also reference other responses to the ban, from scholarly associations and other organizations, but these were not part of the analysis itself. Particular attention was paid to how the presidents’ statements positioned their university in relation to the ban, and in relation to international students, faculty, and staff. Because I seek to emphasize larger discursive patterns rather than particular institutions, I have removed the identifying institutional information from the illustrative examples that I cite, but all of these statements are publicly available and can be readily found online.

Positioning the University in Relation to the Travel Ban

University presidents’ responses generally positioned their institution in one of four ways in relation to the travel ban: 1) no critique of the ban (in 48 responses); 2) implicit/indirect critique of the ban, through recognition of how university staff, faculty, and students perceived its impact (in 34 responses); 3) implicit/indirect critique of the ban, by registering the concerns of the president and/or the president on behalf of the university as a whole (in 32 responses); and 4) explicit critique of the ban (in 26 responses). Note that while I indicate how many of the statements contained each position, several contained some combination of positions 2, 3, and 4.

Statements aligned with position 1 are very matter of fact, simply stating that the ban has been put into place, and describing some of its provisions and potential effects:

We are working closely with the University System of [the state] and federal authorities as we seek a fuller understanding of the ramifications of the executive order and its implementation.

President Trump on Friday issued an Executive Order regarding immigration that impacts our campus community.

In these statements, the university presidents take no normative position on the ban, but rather indicate that they are “assessing the impact” and “working to understand the implications” of the ban. Many of these statements also offer practical recommendations to students potentially affected by the ban. While this may be perceived as the most politically neutral of the four positions, in offering no critique of the ban, the responses can also be read as granting tacit institutional acceptance or approval of it.

Statements of position 2 generally took the form of noting and seeking to calm the anxieties, concerns, and uncertainties that the ban created amongst students, staff, and faculty who were directly or indirectly affected by it, as well as other concerned constituencies. In these statements, there is little reference to the underlying reasons for their concern about the ban, and details about its contents, rationalities, and material effects are not examined. The decision to not directly identify problems with the ban itself is also reflected in the university presidents’ choice of words in this position, as it is commonly noted that people on campus *feel* concerned, uncertain, or worried, rather than suggesting that they indeed have something to be reasonably concerned, uncertain, or worried about, and/or specifying precisely how or why the ban produces those feelings:

As a community, we must come together to support those among us who may be feeling particularly vulnerable during this uncertain time.

I recognize that as we await developments from Congress and the new administration, the uncertainty and rhetoric may cause disruption, anxiety and fear among our students and the greater campus community.

Sadly, while it may not have been the intent of the executive order, many students, faculty and staff are feeling fearful, threatened, unwelcome, and cut off from their nations and their families who reside in the seven countries identified in the order.

This position signals some support for concerned/affected students, faculty, and staff but is characterized by a reluctance to assert an overtly critical stance toward the ban.

Statements aligned with position 3 indicate that the university and/or the university president are “concerned about” or “troubled by” the ban and its effects or potential effects. This response echoes the recognition of concerns held by

others, as in position 2, but reduces the distancing effect by directly sharing those concerns:

I share the increasing concerns from many members of the [university] community who are reaching out to me regarding the executive order...and its potential impact on our fellow students, faculty and staff.

[The university] is concerned about the recent executive order restricting re-entry into the United States for citizens of certain countries. The order has created confusion as well as anxiety throughout our country and on our campus.

Several position 3 responses directly also reference and voice their agreement with the positions and advocacy work of academic member organizations, such as the APLU and the Association of American Universities, as well as “peer institutions” and “the higher education community.” Signaling alignment with these larger, mainstream organizations and scholarly communities may be an effort to shield the institution from backlash for taking a somewhat firmer stance against the ban.

The most direct critique of the ban, position 4, indicates that the ban conflicts with the universities’ core values, harms the institution and individuals in it, and/or negatively affects higher education in the U.S. more generally:

We must continue as a campus community to stand together and stay strong as we navigate the most incredible threat to our core values I have ever witnessed.

[The ban] is deeply troubling and has serious and chilling implications for a number of our students and scholars. It is deeply antithetical to [the university’s] principles.

This approach violates the principles on which international university communities of thought, learning, and research are based and will jeopardize the very mission and purpose of the university.

The fact that some presidents took this more direct stance contesting the ban suggests that, despite universities’ legal responsibilities and other entanglements with the federal government, there is not a universal perception that this requires deference to politicians in power or particular policies. In one notable contrast in perceived legal requirements, two presidents reiterated that their institutions were sanctuary campuses, while one explicitly indicated, “we legally cannot declare [our university] a ‘sanctuary campus.’”

Even for those presidents who were more directly critical of the ban, several asserted their intention to comply fully with the law, while others made a point of indicating that international students, faculty, and staff at their institutions have already been carefully screened through existing immigration policies and practice.

By doing so, these presidents implicitly condone existing immigration procedures, and voice approval for how these procedures are used to identify those deemed deserving not only of entry to the U.S. but also of empathy, value, and respect:

...our international students, faculty, staff, postdocs and visiting scholars are highly valued members of our community who have already been thoroughly vetted through the visa and immigration process.

...we will continue to work with leading national higher education organizations to advocate for immigration policies that protect national security, but also promote and safeguard the international relationships and people who are core to our success as an institution of higher education and as a nation.

Reaffirmation of the intention to follow legal requirements, even in the midst of offering a critique about some of those requirements, might suggest that universities' deference to the state is more procedural than ideological. However, many statements – both critical and not – did engage in various forms of ideological positioning. Particularly notable were some responses articulated from positions 3 and 4 that rationalized their stronger critiques of the ban in part as an effort to defend American values and protect the American Dream. These defenses tend to rehearse the promises of U.S. exceptionalism, and celebrate the role of higher education in fostering that exceptionalism:

American universities have for centuries attracted talent from around the world. Many of our leading scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs came to the United States as students or at the early stages of their careers. The openness of our society provided them with the environment to flourish.

The Executive Order on Friday appeared to me a stunning violation of our deepest American values, the values of a nation of immigrants: fairness, equality, openness, generosity, courage.

...we believe the intent of the executive order is unjust and should be overturned. We must be vigilant in our efforts to protect the rights not only of our citizens, but also of the visitors we have always welcomed here. These are the fundamental tenets of our society, a foundation which truly makes us great.

...we are concerned about the larger effect this and related actions may have on American universities, including [the university], as we seek to expose students to international experiences...Our University continues to enunciate values that support the bedrock principles of individual freedom, including freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

In contrasting the values that underpin the travel ban to “American values,” these statements suggest that the ban is an anomaly and out of sync with the tenets of justice that otherwise govern U.S. immigration policy. This approach forecloses a deeper examination of the ban’s historical precedents, the ongoing racialized dimensions of U.S. immigration policy and practice, and universities’ role in relation to these precedents and practices. Reiterating this abiding nationalism, several statements articulated from position 4 also affirmed concern for national security, perhaps pre-empting the potential response that a critique of the ban indicated a lack of concern about such issues:

We join others in the worldwide higher education community who are deeply critical of this executive order and are calling for a sensible immigration policy that protects national security without discriminating against those who seek to live, learn, discover and make a positive impact in our world.

The President's order related to immigration is a bad idea, poorly implemented, and I hope that he will promptly revoke and rethink it. If the idea is to strengthen the protection of Americans against terrorism, there are many far better ways to achieve it.

We must protect our borders, but we also must ensure we do not stem the flow of people of goodwill who come and work to make this nation better. Our students and scholars come from around the world to become [members of our university], and then return to the world to make it better.

These statements contest the ban, while at the same time they decline to offer a more critical and nuanced reading of already-racialized discourses of national security, particularly in the context of the ongoing “War on Terror.” Of all the presidents’ statements, only one referenced an historical act of U.S. immigration exclusion, the turning away of Jews seeking refuge from Nazi Germany during World War II.

Positioning the University in Relation to International Students, Staff, and Faculty

Regarding the university presidents’ positioning in relation to international students, staff, and faculty, the most common themes were: 1) stated appreciation for their contributions to the university; and 2) a firm affirmation of institutional commitment to uphold diversity. The majority of all statements offered some affirmation of institutional commitments to inclusion, diversity, non-discrimination, and respect. These pledges were made regardless of how the president positioned the university in relation to the ban, meaning that even when the ban was neither implicitly nor explicitly identified as a threat to these values, there was often a perceived necessity to reaffirm them:

...diversity and inclusion are foundational values of our university and necessary for [the university] to fulfill its mission.

Inclusion is one of our six shared values as a campus, and we believe that fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment enriches and strengthens our campus community. It has in the past, it does so today and it shall do so in the future.

More general statements affirming inclusion and related values were also accompanied by specific pledges of support for international staff, students, and faculty:

The university remains committed to the safety and success of our international students, scholars and employees.

I want to assure the [university] community that I, along with our shared governance leaders, remain deeply committed to providing a safe, secure and inclusive environment for all students and scholars, including international and undocumented students and scholars.

These statements of support are notable in that in some cases they are the only indication that the institution recognized a harmful dimension of the ban, even as, paradoxically, they offer assurances that the ban will not conflict with their commitment to inclusion.

Many of these statements of support echo Ahmed's (2012) findings in that they are framed as if making the statement itself creates the promised safe, supportive environment that they pledge to create. Numerous logistical details were provided for affected students, such as which offices to contact for questions about immigration or mental health resources. However, apart from a handful presidents who indicated that they were advocating on behalf of these communities to relevant congress members in their states, most offered little elaboration of the practical actions that were, or had already been, taken on behalf of "diverse" communities at the university. In general the statements offer blanket pledges of support without guaranteeing much in particular, although there might have been follow-up communications detailing further actions.

Beyond simply offering support for international members of the university community, many of the statements specifically outline the *benefits* that these individuals bring to the institution, highlighting that they are people worth defending:

Faculty, staff and students from outside the United States provide meaningful and valuable perspectives to our educational community, the state, and the nation. Indeed, the depth of our diversity is a prized asset that strengthens and enriches us all, and their contributions to it are invaluable.

...we know the value of having fellow citizens of the world beside us in our classroom and in our labs and clinics. They are an essential part of our campus, and our university is enriched by having them here.

Some of these testaments to international student, staff, and faculty value and deservingness specifically emphasize their cultural and economic contributions not only to their host institutions, but to the U.S. as a nation as well:

the ability to attract and engage scientists, scholars and students from around the world is one of the reasons American universities are leaders in innovation. Cultural and intellectual exchange bring significant economic and diplomatic benefits. Faculty and staff from around the world have become part of our university, with many using their unique talents to solve our state's challenges.

Our international faculty, students and researchers provide quantifiable value to all of us through their respective fields, impacting our lives in countless ways – from health care and technology invention, to culture and the arts, and to our economy.

In these statements, support for international students, staff, and faculty is articulated in ways that reflect a racialized economic calculation of their perceived contribution. In other words, these international individuals are not welcomed unconditionally, but rather their inclusion is rationalized according to assessments of their instrumental value.

Discussion

The findings from this study indicate a general reluctance on the part of university presidents to take a firm stance against the travel ban, or to explicitly name its racial dimensions. At same time, there were strong assertions of institutional support for international staff, faculty, and students. This support was in many cases linked to framing those staff, faculty, and students as valued and deserving im/migrant subjects, because of their measurable contributions to the institution and nation.

'Deserving' and 'contributing' international subjects

Framings and defenses of international students, faculty, and staff in the presidents' statements tended to reify their position as "deserving" subjects – in implicit contrast to "undeserving" others. While on the one hand it can be appreciated that institutions are publicly defending and recognizing the contributions of the international members of the university community, it remains necessary to consider the discursive frames through which these affirmations are articulated. In particular, certain populations are welcomed because of their perceived (quantifiable) contributions to the success and prosperity of the institution, the state, and the nation, not because of an unconditional freedom of mobility, critique of racialized technologies of immigration control, or

consideration of the various geopolitical and economic factors that shape international mobility. As Adorno suggested, framing the knowledge production of international staff and students as a “contribution” suggests “the merit of the order to which one is supposed to contribute something. It is precisely the merit of the order that is to be questioned” (as cited in Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2015, p. 687). Indeed, the affirmation of international staff and students’ contributions in the presidents’ statements tended to affirm the “merit” of the host institution and nation, and the underlying legitimacy or benevolence of the university or the U.S. does not come under question in the presidents’ statements.

Beyond affirming “the order to which one is supposed to contribute something,” celebrations of international staff and students tend to frame their mobility as a conditional gift for which they as recipients must perform gratitude (Ahenakew & Naepi, 2015; Ahmed, 2012). Celebrations of their contributions therefore reproduce what Patel (2015b) describes as the “political economy of contingent merit,” within which one’s worth is assessed according to often-implicitly racialized categories of value. This discursive framing signals that one’s continued inclusion is premised upon furthering existing institutional values and interests, and thus implies the potential risks to those who might challenge or interrupt those values and interests (Ahmed, 2007, 2012; Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2015). The language in most presidents’ statements is also narrowly tailored to address international staff, faculty, and students, meaning that no clear defense is made of the many others who are affected by the ban. It may be argued that universities have no ethical obligation or proper role to offer a critique beyond how something affects their own campus, yet this contrasts with many universities’ vigorous positioning as defenders of the public interest in relation to other issues.

Universities have a strong economic interest in attracting international students, faculty, and staff whom it is perceived will benefit the institution through their labor and/or student fees. This interest is highly racialized, as international faculty and staff (especially women) are often subject to more onerous working conditions and expectations, and have considerably less power to contest those conditions out of fear of losing their position and thus losing their legal status in the U.S. (Cantwell & Lee, 2010; Lawless & Chen, 2016). Meanwhile, international students are welcomed enthusiastically by many U.S. public institutions at least in part because they pay out-of-state higher tuition. Highly qualified international graduate students and post-doctoral researchers are not only viewed as cheap labor for the institution, but also as catalysts of economic growth through the creation of intellectual property (Cantwell & Lee, 2010). Like faculty and staff, international students depend on their continued designation as ‘worthy’ in order to legally remain in the U.S., which may also limit the critiques they might offer regarding their own, or others’, treatment. Finally, universities instrumentalize their international communities to strategically position themselves as diverse institutions in the global higher education landscape as a form of competitive

advantage (De Haan, 2016), and to prepare domestic students to be ‘interculturally competent’ workers (Leask, 2009).

Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that many university presidents were quick to respond to the travel ban: they have a lot to lose not only in relation to individuals currently affected, but also around potential future reluctance to apply to work or study at U.S. institutions. This is not to say that university presidents or other administrators lack genuine concern about their international students, staff, and faculty, but rather to emphasize that contribution-based considerations were most clearly evident in their statements. Several critics, such as the companies that signed the amicus brief in support of the *Washington and Minnesota v. Trump* (2017) lawsuit, framed the ban not just as a threat to institutional prosperity, but also national prosperity. The brief argues the ban “is inflicting substantial harm on U.S. companies...increases costs imposed on business; makes it more difficult for American firms to compete in the international marketplace; and gives global enterprises a new, significant incentive to build operations – and hire new employees – outside the United States” (p. 3). Many university presidents also underscored the national economic contributions of students beyond their own campus, with one president warning, “Make no mistake, other nations with competitive systems of higher education stand ready to welcome the best and brightest if the United States is unwilling to do so.”

The relationships between immigration, white supremacy, racial capitalism, and nationalism are not always straightforward. In the case of the ban, they operate in complex and contradictory ways. The ban was underscored by anti-Muslim racism articulated as a form of white racial resentment, but it was likely not economically beneficial for many U.S. institutions and companies – including universities. Conversely, discourses of conditional racial inclusion already governed U.S. immigration policy prior to the ban. Indeed, the conditionality of racial inclusion in contemporary immigration policy is precisely what allows more acute moments of racial resentment to be made manifest. Not only do immigration policies rationalize the exclusion of many potential im/migrants whom are deemed unworthy of inclusion, but even those people whom are granted inclusion remain ever-vulnerable to being re-categorized from worthy subjects to not. Thus, mobilizing racialized discourses of value in defense of im/migrants may reproduce an inherently exclusionary, conditional, and capitalist horizon of justice.

Negotiating political obligations and economic interests

Even as the presidents’ statements generally positioned the university on the side of international students, staff, and faculty, they were cautious about the extent to which they questioned the U.S. nation-state’s authority in relation to issues of immigration and national security. Indeed, there is an overall deference to this authority, and a rhetorical recourse to nationalist tropes that help ensure that the statements are not read as critiquing the state itself. To a certain extent, these responses may reflect U.S. universities’ ambivalent positioning in relation to policy

and legal obligations, as well as the possible conflict between their political and economic interests and their stated missions and values. That is, even as policies like the travel ban threaten to negatively affect international student enrollments and faculty recruitment efforts, universities depend on the state to issue visas and other immigration documents to international students, staff, and faculty, and have significant legal requirements in relation to these populations.

The overall presumption of many presidents' statements is that institutional ethics can cleanly align with legal requirements, as in one statement that also references institutional planning in response to concerns of undocumented students: "That planning is ongoing and is consistent with [the university's] commitment to inclusion and diversity, while also complying with all applicable immigration laws." Yet, while many agree that universities should not act outside of the realm of legality, questions nonetheless arise when what is legal is not ethical. Indeed, there have been several examples of legal but unethical actions from higher education's own history that illustrate the pertinence of these questions, including the use of enslaved laborers to build early colleges, complicity in the colonization of Indigenous lands, Jim Crow segregation policies, and participation in implementing the 1942 executive order that required the relocation and incarceration of those with Japanese ancestry living in the designated Exclusion Zone (Lee, 2007; Patton, 2016; Stein, 2017; Wilder, 2013).

Racial evasiveness

The reviewed presidential statements were notably silent about the specifically racial dimensions of the travel ban, or its effects either on or off campus. None of the responses directly addressed the role of racialization and racism in the ban. This was even true of the responses that offered a direct critique, many of which offered some variation of the idea that the ban contradicted the institutions' "core values," but did not articulate precisely how or why. Not one response used the words "racism", "racist", "anti-Muslim" "Islamophobic," or "Islamophobia." Thirteen responses used the word "Muslim," primarily in their basic descriptions of the ban as targeting "predominantly Muslim countries," or some variation of this. If presidents cannot articulate the precise threat that is directed at their international staff, faculty, and students, then their stated commitments of support appear relatively insubstantial.

This analysis confirms the findings of previous studies about the reluctance of university officials and other campus representatives to directly identify and address systemic racism even in the context of racist incidents (Cole & Harper, 2017; Davis & Harris, 2015). Of all the university presidents' responses reviewed, only one makes any reference to such events on their own campus. Most statements deflect critical attention away from how racism operates (and has historically operated) within their institutions. In fact, many statements describe commitments to *continue* affirming diversity, valuing inclusion, and creating a safe campus for all students and staff, as if these are and have been uniformly practiced across the

campus across time, and things should simply continue along this smooth path. When academic leaders fail to proactively address racism, and treat acute racist events as exceptional, this effectively sanctions the reproduction of everyday institutional racism to continue unabated.

Universities are not monoliths, and many different people and groups on and beyond campuses offered more incisive and unconditionally affirming messaging in their responses to the travel ban. It is important to attend to those responses as well. Yet, not all responses hold equal weight in terms of setting the agenda for an institution, and the symbolic weight of university presidents' statements should not be understated. As Cole and Harper (2017) suggest, "college presidents' statements set the tone for how racist behavior will be tolerated and addressed" on their campuses (p. 330). While some might argue that it is not appropriate for universities to take overtly critical positions on governmental actions like the travel ban, if support for international staff, faculty, and students fails to identify and denaturalize the state racism that targets those populations, then the sincerity and impact of that support may be limited.

Future research might not only look in more detail at varied responses to the ban, but also examine and compare these with institutional responses to other racialized policy shifts affecting higher education, such as changes to DACA. It would also be instructive to consider Canadian universities' responses to the ban, along with their subsequent efforts to attract potential applicants who were excluded or otherwise discouraged by the ban (Nehme, 2017). Indeed, several Canadian institutions reported a rise in international applications following the ban (Kane, 2017). Meanwhile, the president of the Canadian university membership organization, Universities Canada, framed the impact of both the U.S. travel ban and UK Brexit as a "great opportunity here for Canada and we all have to work together to seize it" (as cited by Nemhe, 2017). This analysis would be particularly instructive given that Canada has frequently compared itself favorably to the US, and in the process, disavowed its own legacies of racial-colonial capitalism (Thobani, 2007).

Conclusion

The findings from this study support existing scholarship that argues for the ongoing need to deepen and complicate existing conversations about white supremacy, nationalism, colonialism, and racial capitalism on U.S. university campuses (Cole & Harper, 2016; Patton, 2016). Cole and Harper's (2016) work suggests that even when formal conversations happen in response to racist events on campus, they generally avoid direct discussions of systemic racism, and fail to indicate robust support for substantive institutional transformation. This study suggests that similar patterns emerge in institutional responses to racist events that affect the campus but originate from outside it, as in the case of the travel ban.

The travel ban and other emergent immigration policies create openings for institutions to educate their campuses and the public about the history of

immigration in the U.S., along with broader legacies of white nationalism, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism. This could also include more honest conversations about institutions' own past and present entanglements with these legacies. While some individual scholars and students have engaged these educational efforts, the university president responses examined here failed to do so. The calibration of a response that avoided direct critique of the ban and direct identification of racism, while offering an assertive commitment of support for international students, may have involved a political calculus in relation to direct and indirect institutional dependency on the federal government, as well as an economic calculus attributable to financial dependency on international mobility. Institutions have much to lose from laws and policies that stymie their ability to recruit and retain international scholars and students, and it is highly likely that this shaped the presidents' responses, in particular their framing of international students, staff, and faculty.

Approaches to immigration oriented by white racial resentment *and* conditional racial inclusion both rationalize the racialized and capital-oriented assessment and classification of im/migrants' un/worthiness, albeit in two different registers. While, as might be expected, none of the reviewed presidents' responses reproduced discourses of white racial resentment, many did articulate support for international students, staff, and faculty through discourses of conditional racial inclusion. This framing negatively affects those im/migrants who are deemed (conditionally) worthy, but it also implicitly naturalizes the devaluation and degradation of those deemed *unworthy* within the white supremacist capitalist economy of value. When racism occurs on campus, responses often emphasize that the intent of those who committed the acts was not racist, thereby deemphasizing the racist impact (Davis & Harris, 2015). It is impossible for me to assess the intent behind the responses from university presidents reviewed here, but regardless of their intentions, the impact is clear: the responses failed to interrupt, and in some cases reproduced, logics and structures of racial capitalism and white nationalism.

Nopper (2011b) suggests the need to "articulat[e] the value and rights of the immigrant without relying on pro-white, anti-Black, and pro-capitalist tropes" (p. 23). Doing so would require more expansive conceptualizations of justice, as well as a commitment to attend to both the connections across and incommensurabilities between different justice projects (Tuck & Yang, 2018). For instance, groups organizing under the banner of "No one is illegal" seek justice for undocumented migrants while refusing state-sanctioned logics of conditional worthiness (Walia, 2013); sayings like "We are here because you were there" draw critical connections between histories of imperialism and contemporary migration patterns (Coloma, 2017); and statements like "No ban on stolen land" explicitly link racialized immigration policies to ongoing settler colonialism. While it is highly unlikely that university administrators will take up these alternative frameworks, attending to the foreclosures within dominant discourses and gesturing toward other horizons of justice is a necessary part of ongoing efforts to enact shared futures that do not

presume the continuation of colonial borders and racial capitalist regimes of human value.

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